INTRODUCTION
A PLACE WHERE GREAT SOULS MINGLE

From the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century into the first years of the twentieth, depictions of the Monterey Peninsula epitomized California art. The towns of Monterey, Pacific Grove, and, eventually, Carmel, each interconnected yet distinct, were home to kindred souls who freely shared their lives, ideals, and respective arts with a spirit of association and collegiality. The influx began in earnest in 1875 when Jules Tavernier showed California artists what could be done with the Monterey Peninsula’s unique coastal scenery. The magnetism of the landscape was profound, and as word of its beauty made its way to the outside world, along with the notion that here was a quiet backwater area “undisturbed by the rush of the passing current,” the peninsula became a frequent destination for artists in all disciplines.¹

By the turn of the century, artists saw the Monterey Peninsula as the new spiritual heart of California. With its rich history—the Carmel Mission had been the headquarters of Father Junipero Serra—and strange awesome beauty, it displaced Yosemite in the artistic imagination as California’s holiest natural cathedral. California artists considered it a “sacred duty” to make a pilgrimage to this artistic “mecca,” where they worshiped at the “shrine of adobes, sand-dunes and cypress trees.”² “Dear, sleepy, picturesque old capital,” Harriett Quimby mused in 1901. “It is small wonder that every nook and corner, every rock and tree, is being reproduced, in black and white, in water color and in oil.”³

To date, most accounts of the Monterey Peninsula’s artistic legacy have cited the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire as the primary impetus for settlement there.⁴ Histories have also focused primarily on Carmel’s literati, marginalizing the pivotal role of Monterey and its visual artists from the last decades of the nineteenth century on.⁵ Indeed, by 1907, just a year after the earthquake, many of Monterey’s first- and second-generation painters had already reached artistic maturity, moved on to other locales, or died. In the same year, the Monterey region achieved a new level of professional-
ism and organization in the art scene. The most important development came in April 1907 with the opening of the Hotel Del Monte gallery in Monterey. The gallery was devoted solely to the work of California artists, especially local ones. That August, the Carmel Club of Arts and Crafts, formed in 1905, also opened its clubhouse with an exhibition of members’ paintings. Through these venues, artists publicly introduced the vitality and independence of Monterey Peninsula art.

Among those who lived or worked frequently on the peninsula, Jules Tavernier, William Keith, Arthur Mathews, and the photographer Arnold Genthe now rank among the major figures in California art and hold an important place in American art history generally. Others, such as Charles Rollo Peters, Francis McComas, and Gottardo Piazzoni, enjoyed national and even international repute in their day, making them deserving of renewed recognition. Still others, such as Carl von Heldt, Elizabeth Strong, Charles Dickman, and Charles Chapel Judson, consequential in California during their lifetimes, now claim places only in biographical dictionaries and are thus overdue for acknowledgment. Some artists’ significance remained local. They are included here as much for their social and professional roles as for their artistic skills. A few artists, notably Granville Redmond, Xavier Martinez, and Theodore Wores, are relegated to the biographies at the end of this volume. Although their abilities equaled and in some cases surpassed those of artists accorded their own chapters, their specific contributions to the art of the Monterey Peninsula were not as great.

To be sure, numerous local “Sunday painters” and hundreds of artist visitors fall outside the scope of this survey. Nearly every California artist of significance visited the peninsula during this period—most on several occasions—as did scores of art students. Even in the nineteenth century, well before Carmel-by-the-Sea became an artists’ community, artists visited frequently and in large numbers. “They stayed there all summer and found some of their most marvelous inspirations in the atmosphere of the old cypress tree,” the San Francisco Call reported in 1896. “It was a veritable heaven for them in every way. A painter was not recognized in society who had never been to Monterey.”

Even in their own day, though they exhibited in New York, Chicago, Paris, London, and elsewhere, many California artists struggled for recognition and sales at home. The writer Gelett Burgess bemoaned this “scant recompense” and described existence as “unendurable in a place where genius has no field for action.” “The artist, writer or the musician,” he said, “must fly East to the great market-place, New York, or to the great forcing-bed, Paris, to bloom or fade, to live or die in competition with others in his field.” The critic Hanna Astrup Larsen also acknowledged that “in spite of this attitude of deep and passionate love, almost adoration, that the Californian feels for his birthplace, he has also an uneasy consciousness that it is after all provincial.” Many artists sent work to the East Coast or to Europe in the hope of finding a responsive art-buying public. Others spent months or years working outside California. Some never returned. In 1914 the East Coast impressionist Childe Hassam lamented the lack of recognition accorded California’s artists by residents of the state. “You have such good painters here in Californial” Hassam proclaimed. “My old friends, Peters, Matthews [sic], Dickman; and men I now know, McComas, Martinez, and I am sure others whom I don’t know. And what also strikes me is that you don’t know of these men and their work.” Hassam’s statement still rings true.

Artists and writers gathered on Monterey’s “bohemian” shores for a variety of reasons—beauty
of setting, inspiration in nature, simplicity of lifestyle, tranquillity, health, politics, and proximity of friends. Although cumulatively these creative persons have frequently been labeled a colony, the nature of their interactions makes the label imprecise. Their associations were in fact both social and professional but without a formally organized society, experimental commune, or specified “school” of painting. For the most part, artists who relocated to the peninsula arrived as professionals, their reputations already established in San Francisco. Once there, they continued to live life separate from colleagues, though they interacted frequently. Great friendships developed between them, and many were of like mind when it came to art and politics, but the cast of characters was in constant flux. It was the frequency of artists’ interactions, the close proximity in which they lived, and the fact that so many of them were concentrated into a small, sparsely populated geographic region that has made the term “colony” both popular and useful.

Certainly the region offered social and intellectual freedoms. “Untrammeled by rules and regulations that fetter[ed] the existence of the proletariat,” the peninsula drew freethinkers. It also offered a refuge for women, who in the city were more tightly bound by the constraints of Victorian respectability. Women played a vital role in the Monterey Peninsula’s art scene. Evelyn McCormick and Mary Brady, both of whom had worked in Monet’s Giverny, were among the first to bring impressionism to the region. Women founded the Carmel Club of Arts and Crafts and also served among the first advisors and jurors at the Hotel Del Monte gallery. Strong willed and independent, the majority of the peninsula’s best female artists before 1907—Mary Brady, Maren Froelich, Isabel Hunter, Evelyn McCormick, Mary DeNeale Morgan, and Elizabeth Strong—never married. Some signed their work using only a first initial and last name (or first initial and middle and last names), making it difficult for audiences to tell their sex.

Monterey’s artistic beginnings in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century were inextricably connected to San Francisco. Artists kept studios in both locales and traveled back and forth to show their work. Although a major urban metropolis and the state’s cultural hub, San Francisco was still the most remote of the nation’s art centers, isolated by the Sierra and the Rockies to the east and the vastness of the Pacific to the west. The New York publisher and furniture designer Gustav Stickley felt that California’s separation by land and sea kept it apart from the “demoralizing influence of the classic formula of the art successes of other nations.” Others agreed, finding the remoteness of California conducive to the development of individuality. However, some found the isolation detrimental. Even as late as 1915, the art writer Michael Williams described western art as “a very young plant indeed...cultivated at a great disadvantage in some respects...isolated from contact with sources of study [and]...cut off from the fertilizing influences of modern movements and ideas.”

When the earliest Monterey artists began to frequent the peninsula in 1875, California itself was still young. Barely a generation had passed since the gold rush, and only a few years had elapsed since the completion in 1869 of the transcontinental railroad. The art of California was fledgling in comparison with that of the East but “full of the vigor and promise of youth.” Although at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition local critics were not convinced that artists in California had yet produced “an art” that was both Californian and universal, easterners saw California art as distinct. Eloise J. Roorbach, writer for Stickley’s journal the Craftsman, explained, “The work of the
[California] landscape men is of native growth and inspiration, springing from the soil with that marvelous spontaneity that is seen only in young lands and with youthful genius."\(^{17}\)

The best San Francisco artists knew one another personally and were well aware of one another’s work. Social and professional organizations such as the Bohemian Club and the San Francisco Art Association increased familiarity and fostered friendships. Artists also enjoyed close associations with their creative brethren in literature, architecture, and music. The artist-designer Bruce Porter, recalling the late 1880s and early 1890s, explained: “Writers, painters, sculptors, architects, and musicians communicated their enthusiasms one to the other, in a communion closer and more stimulating than has ever happened locally, before or since.”\(^{18}\)

Many of these creative individuals cultivated an assiduous bohemianism in dress, lifestyle, and attitude, which they learned from friends or student days in Paris. Unlike the Bohemian Club itself, which since its founding in 1872 had become a haven for wealthy businessmen and local power brokers, in addition to its original core of artists and journalists, “true” bohemianism was something quite different. The term became a metaphor for the life led by artists and writers of the period, especially the many associated with Monterey. Some charter members of the Bohemian Club had in fact opposed the name “Bohemian” on grounds that it was not respectable and evoked notions of disheveled, disreputable, and impecunious artistic types. The poet George Sterling (1869–1926), the undisputed “King of Bohemia” in San Francisco and subsequently Carmel-by-the-Sea, identified two essential qualities of the bohemian: “The first is devotion or addiction to one or more of the Seven Arts; the other is poverty.”\(^{19}\) Ambrose Bierce, in his typically more acerbic fashion, defined the local bohemian as “a lazy, loaferish, gluttonous, crapulent and dishonest duffer, who...scandalizes society, disgraces literature, debauches art, and is an irreclaimable, inexpressible and incalculable nuisance.”\(^{20}\) Bohemians tended to be overly social—to the detriment of work—and susceptible to carousing and overimbibing. Other traits associated with them included youth, radicalism, and an unconventional outlook on art and life.

San Francisco's slatternly appearance at the time seemed to parallel that of its bohemian residents. The city’s growth had been rapid and haphazard. With a population of less than 1,000 in 1848, by the turn of the century it boasted nearly 350,000 residents. Analogous to the experience of the North Atlantic states in the early nineteenth century, rapid population growth and industrial expansion were accompanied by pollution and blight resulting from minimal attention to long-term planning. Although accounts of early San Francisco vary widely, many note its limited aesthetic appeal. In the mid-1890s, the writer Gertrude Atherton described it as “gray and ugly and depressing” and wondered if “anywhere [else] on earth...one [could] feel so isolated, so blue, so stranded.”\(^{21}\)

In addition to urban growth, industry, railroads, and even agriculture were radically and permanently transforming the state’s natural character. By the end of the nineteenth century, many began to feel victimized by modern culture.\(^{22}\) According to one California writer, the city induced “a continual stimulation of nerves already overwrought by the pressure of daily work.”\(^{23}\) Commentators across the country traced the rise of nervous illness to modern civilization’s industrialization, commercialization, monotonous labor, and noisy, cramped urban environments.\(^{24}\) The San Francisco
sculptor Arthur Putnam dreamed of building a soundproof underground studio with thick concrete walls, or living on a mountaintop or Pacific island. He told his roommate, Gottardo Piazzoni, “We should go to these places away from civilization and the bothering affectations of men, there to live a primitive life and work in peace.”

Numerous other Northern California artists became similarly “antimodernist” in their views. Indeed, city dwellers across the country sought physical and mental regeneration in nature and outdoor life, participating in a nationwide, back-to-nature movement. Certainly Californians, who delighted in their state’s beauty, variety, and temperate climate, enjoyed a special bond with nature. By the 1890s veneration of the wilderness in California was widely accepted and practiced, and residents of no other state spent more time in nature. Arts-and-crafts bungalows built between the late 1890s and the 1920s brought this desire to be close to nature inside the home: an abundance of wood and motifs drawn from nature helped to create soothing spaces. Personal gardens offered additional solace. Most urban-dwelling Californians had to be content with these, along with an occasional excursion to the wilderness. Others sought complete alternatives to life in the city. Smaller communities such as Monterey, Pacific Grove, and the fledgling Carmel-by-the-Sea attracted those seeking an escape from the constraints of the metropolis.

California artists had always sought refuge and inspiration in the wilderness—the Sierra, Yosemite, the coastal redwoods, and now the Monterey Peninsula—aiming to fructify their existences through it. Antony Anderson, art critic for the Los Angeles Times, explained the appeal of pure landscape paintings in a 1907 column: “The present appreciation is undoubtedly due, in great part, to the tremendous stress and strain of twentieth-century life—to the need of relaxation out of doors. . . . We seek to treasure mementos of our joy in mother nature and these mementos we call landscape pictures.” It is not surprising, then, that artists avoided urban and industrial scenes in their work. Until artists of the late 1920s began to regularly portray California’s cities, the realities and apprehensions of modern life failed to make their presence felt as artists recorded the beauties of landscape yet unspoiled by man.

Californians understood their communion with nature to be mystical and profound, and many held overtly transcendental beliefs, perceiving God in every leaf, mountain, and grain of sand. The transcendental naturalist John Muir was most responsible for the widespread acceptance of such beliefs in California. As founding president of the Sierra Club (in 1892), Muir inspired and guided preservationists to push for government protection of the state’s natural wonders. Key successes included preservation of the region around the Yosemite Valley (1890), Big Basin Redwoods State Park near Santa Cruz (1902), and Muir Woods in Marin County (1908). Other influential figures, such as Joseph Le Conte, professor of geology and natural history at Berkeley, and the Reverend Joseph Worcester, minister of the Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem in San Francisco, also found God’s immanence in nature. Painters made similar declarations of devotion. Arthur Atkins came to realize that “what makes a great painting is . . . the seizing and holding of some element of that divine beauty which all things possess in some degree.” William Keith believed simply that “divinity is all about us.” Gottardo Piazzoni decided that his religion was California itself.
Like the Sierra and Yosemite Valley, the Monterey Peninsula held its own transcendental appeal. Aged, wind-swept trees, luminous sky, dramatic coastline, and changing vistas of the vast Pacific all offered the possibility of sublime inspiration and reverie. The nineteenth-century writer Deejay Mackart described the scene:

But once at the spot, those grand old trees, with horizontal branches, grey-bearded, the green sward, velvety, and unpolluted by the picnicker, the glimpses of the blue sea beyond, and the roar of the beating surf all communicated a hallowed, out-of-the-world feeling to the visitor, and if reverence existed in his nature, it was certain to be developed by a sojourn at the point. 31

A harmonic synthesis of nature and humanity, an ideal for many artists, seemed everywhere apparent in Monterey, a place where the ennobling power of working with one's hands and living on the land could still be found in the Spanish- and Mexican-era adobes, Royal Presidio Chapel, and Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo. Even in the late 1870s, when Monterey first began to develop as a tourist destination, nature and civilization, past and present, still seemed reconciled. 32 The journalist Fred Somers wrote in 1878: “And it is just this spirit of resignation and Rip Van Winkleism that makes the sleepy hollow of a town so charming to the Bohemian, the artist, the literateur, the tourist of to-day. Nearly thirty years have passed [since the gold rush] and never a change since the marrow went out of its bones.” 33

By the late nineteenth century, California's Spanish heritage was romanticized as a noble period in the state's past. Embodying an imagined idealism of a simple, preindustrial society, the state's missions and adobes seemed to Charles Keeler, vocal proponent of site-sensitive architecture in Berkeley, “literally hewn out of the surrounding land by the pious zeal of their makers.” Keeler endorsed these pragmatically beautiful examples of architecture, finding in them “a softness and harmony about the lines which shows the work of hands instead of machines.” 34

As subjects for paintings, missions and adobe buildings became broadly popular, and many artists made their careers depicting these “acceptable” expressions of human presence in the landscape. Representing a larger statewide effort to preserve California's rich Spanish heritage and foster an identity with the past, the mission and adobe image proliferated not only in paintings but also in novels, history books, magazines, tourist guides, photographs, mission-style furniture, and neo-Spanish architectural styles.

The Monterey Peninsula's principal attraction for most artists, however, was its synthesis of natural beauty comprising time-seasoned rocks, white beaches, an ultramarine sea, and poetic trees sculpted by age and adversity—all brought into harmony by the foggy coastal atmosphere. “The field is inexhaustible,” Harriet Quimby observed, “from the fisher folk by the sea to the heart of the forest. . . . Nowhere will you find the iridescent lights now purple, now gray, that gleam through the mists in the soft tone so wonderfully beautiful as are found here.” 35 Some believed that the peninsula was perhaps too magnificent, spoiling rather than benefiting artists, an observation that also applied to California generally. 36 A San Francisco Chronicle reporter wrote, “In Monterey there are no difficulties of composition, pictures grow there ready made.” 37
For some, the natural advantages of California were aligned with an even grander legacy—that of ancient Greece and Rome. The state’s sublime landscape, Mediterranean climate, and proximity to the vast expanse of the Pacific epitomized a new Arcadia that offered the same inducements as the Mediterranean landscape of antiquity—“the same gladness, the same sadness, the same moods of laurel-wreathed Italy, the same sunshine, the same turquoise skies, the same purple hills, the same blue bosom of sea, studded with emeralds.”

Tangible reminders of California’s own rich history—in the form of adobes and missions in various stages of dissolution—reinforced associations of a classical landscape dotted with ruins.

Because of Jules Tavernier’s example, the first landscapes produced in Monterey bore the strong influence of France’s Barbizon painters. Noted for their simple, pastoral scenes painted directly from nature, these artists proved inspirational to California painters and fostered their attraction to the Monterey Peninsula. The Monterey landscape functioned as an alternative to the ubiquitous, often overwrought images of the Sierra and Yosemite and prompted a stylistic shift toward the intimate and meditative. Artists began representing only the most salient, mood-producing features of the landscape, eliminating superfluous detail. Major exhibitions of the French Barbizon school in San Francisco in 1889 and 1891, featuring work by Corot, Rousseau, Millet, Dupré, Daubigny, and others, affirmed the direction that many California artists were already taking.

In California as elsewhere, the Barbizon style flowed naturally into tonalism, a style dating from the 1890s through the 1910s that became the peninsula’s dominant art trend. Tonalism evolved from the Barbizon-inspired paintings of Tavernier and the darkly spiritual landscapes of Keith to the nocturnes of Peters, the Arcadian scenes of the Mathewses, and the reductive watercolors and oils of McComas, Martinez, and Piazzoni. Influences included the East Coast artist George Inness transmitted via Keith; the expatriate Thomas Alexander Harrison, who encouraged the development of Peters and McComas; and James McNeill Whistler. Whistler’s nocturnes, decorative paintings, and emphasis on “art for art’s sake” influenced Arthur Mathews, who in turn disseminated these ideals to his students.

The natural qualities of the Monterey Peninsula landscape, and the California landscape more broadly, seemed conducive to tonalist atmosphere and color. Stickley believed that the distinctive coloring of California’s landscape, specifically the “rich, golden bronze” that seemed to exist in no other place in the world, had a profound impact on the art produced there. However, within the confines of the state, there were important differences between north and south. The line of demarcation began midway up the coast, at the southern point of the Monterey Peninsula, which has more in common with the climatic conditions of San Francisco than of Santa Barbara or Los Angeles. “The northern color is cooler, purer, and, hence, thinner,” explained Everett C. Maxwell in a 1916 essay. “More imagination and less devotion to nature characterize the work of the northern painters.”

The pronounced color harmony of the Monterey region was everything that a tonalist could ask for. Cool, foggy seaside conditions offered diffused coastal light and caused painters to lean toward atmospheric tones of silver and gray. The landscape contributed rich greens, golden browns, and the subtle ecru of pallid tree trunks and sandy beaches. The night sky, still uninterrupted by the electric
lights that had become so omnipresent in the city, was noted for its cobalt blueness and became a favored subject for artists.

Relying on memory rather than direct observation, most tonalists on the peninsula painted from sketches and color notes, which distanced their work from objective reality. The natural hues of the peninsula nevertheless had much to do with artists’ color choices, and in their own minds these choices were literal rather than subjective. When these artists left to paint in other locales, their chromatic decisions often changed accordingly. In the 1910s, as more artists responded to impressionism, Monterey Peninsula artists had to reevaluate their perceptions of the region. Many simply chose to paint the landscape on sunny days rather than on prevalent foggy ones. Others, however, found that the natural character of the environment proved contradictory to their new, high-keyed vision. In 1924 William H. Clapp, a Society of Six colorist, wrote in a letter to August Gay, “That Monterey climate seems to have a bad effect on every painter’s color who stays there and the first thing you know you will be as muddy as others have become who remained too long in the place.”

Monterey subject matter also seemed in keeping with the melancholic qualities inherent in tonalism, conveying a feeling for the passage of time and denying the realities of modern life. Adobes and mission churches communicated a sense of age, mystery, and disenchantment with Western mores and civilization, and so did the Monterey cypress. Revered by artists for their picturesque lines and clumps of foliage, and with their ability to survive in the face of harsh conditions, the trees seemed to mirror sympathetically the lives of those who painted them. Other arboreal subjects, such as live oaks, coastal pines, and eucalyptus, conveyed a similar lesson and mystery. Tree paintings, along with an abundance of doleful nocturnal landscapes, suggest the profound psychological alienation that many artists of the period felt. When the tonalist Giuseppe Cadenasso was asked why his paintings were melancholy, he explained, “Because my life was written in a minor key and its story is translated there in those subdued canvases which you see; the story of struggle, privation, and heartaches, which are the average artist’s daily portion.”

On the Monterey Peninsula amenities were few, but the beauty and freedom it offered seemed worth any inconveniences. Life was also inexpensive. In newly developing Carmel-by-the-Sea, residential lots were extremely affordable, homes could be built at nominal cost, and rentals were moderately priced. Food could be obtained from local farmers and vendors or grown, caught, and picked. Alma and Paul Ellerbe declared in the New York Tribune:

No wonder Carmel makes such a strong appeal to the artist! Who would not exchange soot-filled city air for the fragrant odor of pines, backyard lines and endless dingy roofs for purple hills and green forests, the nervous strain of metropolitan life with the discomforts of piercing cold and wilting heat for simple living in comfortable surroundings? And why spend so much money merely to exist? Why not spend a third of it, and live?"

The presence of so many other bohemians made artistic life in the coastal communities of the Monterey Peninsula enjoyable and unique. Transferring their subcultural alienation down the coast—first to Monterey and Pacific Grove and then to Carmel-by-the-Sea—San Francisco bohemians fled what the historian Lewis Mumford called the “paleotechnic city” in search of an Edenic ru-
ral dream.\textsuperscript{45} The slower pace of this coastal life, in a locale where time seemed of little consequence, proved an appealing alternative to the “unwholesome hectic city.”\textsuperscript{46} Artists chose the Monterey Peninsula as “a place where great souls [could] mingle in a reality like life minus the stress and strain . . . of rent collectors and taxes.”\textsuperscript{47} It was this ingenuous atmosphere of breathtaking beauty, noble history, and unhurried, unconventional lifestyles that stimulated intellects, sparked imaginations, and inspired some of the most unforgettable images of California.