

Los Gatos Art Association Members Juried Show Spring 2012

Spring 2012 First Place Winners



(clockwise from top left)

Brigitte Curt, *Walls of the Ancient Cities* — Will Maller, *Davenport Friends*  
 June Crowe, *Almaden Quicksilver Park* — Ron Dell'Aquila, *I am One with the Trees*

Blue Ribbon Interviews

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Kevin Kasik conducted these insightful interviews with the Blue Ribbon winners following the Awards Reception.

## Brigitte Curt, *Walls of the Ancient Cities* - First Place, Oil Painting



Kevin: How did you decide on the title? This is a series of paintings "Walls of the Ancient Cities".

Brigitte: I started a new series of Provence ancient cities, from villages where I live in summer, and Roy Krinkel inspired me for the title of this series. His work, depicting the ancient world, is a wonderful play of the imagination, people riding dinosaurs etc...

To me, the title and your treatment of paint are very connected - like the textured impasto implies age and distress?

Totally. The treatment of this texture expresses the way very old stones look in the bright sunlight of Provence, layers of texture and color. It is typical of hilltop medieval villages in the high plateau of Provence, amongst the lavender fields, hilltop villages hidden in the countryside that we discover little by little. Some of these walls have stood the test of time since the 12th century.

The treatment of paint, big strokes with large brushes and then layers of palette knife, allows for a vibration of sensitive colors that translate physically into the strength, form, color and texture of the walls. I was also very mindful to preserve some transparencies together with the thick, juicy strokes of paint, as I am developing a personal style to express the excitement I feel when I am painting the ancient villages of my beloved Provence.

Painterly speaking, thick strokes are more beautiful in contact with transparent washes, just like intense sounds are more beautiful in relationship with silence. No more than you can imagine a piece of music made exclusively of loud sounds, neither can you conceive a painting with only thick flat strokes - though this is debatable in both accounts.

This new technique I am working on, and pushing more and more, is particularly fitted for this subject matter of ancient walls, but I am working on applying it to other subjects matters, such as plein air painting here in California, as well as larger studio work of local subject matters.

This technique is exhilarating to use, and after a year of intense practice I cannot imagine just ignoring it, so I have to adapt it to other subjects as well.

Was this a work you thought about for a long time, or something 'right off the cuff'? What is its origin and what inspired you to create this work - is it of a specific place?

It is both. I make a lot of sketches on location, lots of plein air paintings, some small - some larger. When I work in the studio on a larger piece, this is the way I do it: I make a careful and loose drawing - if that makes sense - where I specifically mass the values of the piece. In other words a composition and value study, made with transparent washes, sometimes monochromatic, most times multicolored, of dripping washes that will give me a good value support at the impasto level.

This is the most important part of the painting and it cannot be rushed. So it takes several hours for a painting of this size. Therefore the full impasto has to be done in an other session, as it takes many hours to do that, too.

The painting process is basically divided in two: the first layer addresses composition, values, edge qualities, everything that could be resolved in a charcoal drawing if you wish, although it is done with washes. The second part of the painting is medium specific and addresses color and paint application, a big subject in its own right. When the transparent wash is dry, and really, when I have another 7 hours minimum of painting time ahead of me, then I start the full body paint application.

So there is nothing "off the cuff" if you want, but still when painting the layering of colors and texture, each decision has to be adapted to the evolutionary circumstances, answering the development of the painting and to a great degree could be described as improvisational.

Painting always reminds me so much of music in so many aspects of it. It is a painting of a specific place, definitely. It is a village called Caseneuve, in the mountains of Luberon, about one hour south of where we live and we discovered it by pure luck, seeing these ramparts hidden in the green in the distance, and being curious by nature we traveled there to see this "new" village.

It was a fabulous discovery. We painted there several times, we took our workshop to paint there as well, right away, we were so excited about it! In the morning light creates a mysterious effect on this complex walls. really beautiful.

What was it about the piece specifically that made you want to enter it in this show? Is it a departure for you in some way?

Painting is a constant evolution. This year I have shown several pieces through LGAA and other shows, like the statewide competition at the Triton, where another "Ancient Cities" painting received an award, as well as a new gallery in Carmel.

My decision to enter this particular piece is because it was a large piece, demonstrating a painting style that is different than most artists, and frankly I am happy and proud of this work. For me the transparencies that have been respected on the canvas make it very special. The French calls this "surface disponible" which means "available surface."

It is always possible, with enough guts, to pile up paint over paint. Transparency is a totally different matter. This is a very delicate part of the painting. It is a matter of observation first, to see what is going on in this fragment and preserve it and manage to make it dialog with the thicker paint application.

This is where you can appreciate the mastery of painting, in the ability of the painter to preserve transparencies. Of all painting techniques, this one requires the most experience. When a transparency is gone, it is gone for good.

*The decorative concept is most appealing. The plasticity of the medium and the two-dimensionality of the image work together in some ways and are playfully incongruous (how can something without depth be created with paint that has so much volume?) in other ways. Was this intentional to this specific work; I know you work with impasto quite often? What can you tell other painters as a tip to have their expressive brushstrokes be as lively and 'al fresco' as yours?*

Thank you so much. I try to stay light and happy and engaged when I paint, because the emotions of the painter do translate in the expression of the strokes and the whole painting carries it. The main attitude is: take your time, try to visualize what will happen after this stroke, how is the painting going to look when this passage is developed, how will it impact the overall painting?

When applying paint, be brave, strong and deliberate...and leave it alone. Mix a lot of color variations and big pile of fresh paint. Typically it takes me 3 large palettes - 18 x 24 and 16 x 20 and 2 hours of preparation mixing paint, to paint a large piece like this one. There are several things that do not help painting: laziness, painting with bad material, old paint and not enough of it, pushing paint at random hoping for the best...and fixing stuff, staying in one spot for a long time until it is perfect. That will kill the freshness of a painting more quickly than anything else.

Layering has to be clear minded, deliberate and relative to everything else. Keep moving, keep moving. Do not judge yet. When the entire passage is completed, step back, take a look, move to the next. You will not know what is going on until one layer of colors is completed. Then second layer etc...

*Continuing on the design concept, you have a minimal amount of planes at work and this adds a contemporary abstract feel to the piece. Also you've minimized surface detail - windows, for instance.*

Behind every painting that is representational or impressionist, there is first and foremost a good abstract composition. Cannot escape that. I love the abstract quality of paint and it is emphasized by this technique.

Windows and doors should not be so prominent as to bring the eyes to themselves at the exclusion of other elements. They may very easily create an odd situation, looking like two eyes and a mouth. Openings in a wall need to be in harmony with the character of the wall, not a little story on its own. In addition to that, of all surfaces, windows and doors are more distressed and should appear mysterious, suggesting life behind them.

*You seem to have focused on blue and orange as key complimentary hues in this piece with secondary colors purple/lavender and green as accents. Explain your choice of palette for this work.*

This is a representational painting, these colors are the most vibrant translation of reality. You will notice it is also a play of high and low chroma, and there are subtle differences between the buildings as to create strong harmony and low contrast.

*The flatness of the image was noted before, but I also love the scalloped purple shadow left of center which introduces a very subtle, depth-inferring diagonal into the mix. Was this intended for this purpose? For that matter, you create another bit of depth by your use of less bright coloring and smaller scale for towers meant to be in the background- no?*

Your observation is very keen. The diagonal of course breaks the repetition of the vertical masses and also brings an element of depth by representing the cast shadow. The verticality of the work imparts a strong monumentality-

Yes, it make this piece very strong and a little bit severe, which is not so appealing to the larger public. In that sense it is more of a competition piece, to show and share with my peers rather than a gallery piece. It will take a special collector to understand the more profound quality of this painting beyond the story, but artists know what they are looking at.

*Paul Cezanne said lines parallel to the horizon imparts breadth; lines perpendicular to the horizon give depth. Do you know or follow this axiom?*

This statement is true, but even though Cezanne is a local boy where I live I am not following his lead. I have been educated in the Russian school of art, where academics are a strong base.

*You are not only a practicing fine artist but also take students and conduct workshops. Tell me a little about how you got started teaching others, and how these two pursuits might be mutually beneficial.*

I love teaching painting. It is a pursuit where we share passion, enthusiasm, thriving to better ourselves. The communication between instructor and student or master and apprentice can be very profound and touches many aspects of their lives and mine. I am very proud of my students, we have a good dialog and I pay attention to their personal needs. I put myself in their shoes and always do my best to help them. We have a very high success rate if we can put it this way.

In other words they progress fast and far, and many of them have and are becoming professional artists in their own right. They bring a lot to me as well. They encourage me to paint better, push me to thrive and progress, ( I have to stay ahead of the pack), they indulge my weird sense of humor, create a world in which I always feel good, they encourage my experiments and appreciate my efforts, rejoice at my successes, in other words they do for me the same thing I do for them.

**Will Maller, Davenport Friends - First Place, Wet Media**



Kevin: I love the title. To me it speaks as a recording of an interrelated set of objects and conceptually, as ones serving as artistic symbols and as symbols of a seaside ecosystem, too. Very contemporary and with a bit of an Audubon or 'green' mindset or stewardship I feel. Even more so, by the title you could be saying that these objects are Your Davenport friends!

**Will:** I have loved the Davenport area for years and have gone there to paint and relax many, many times. After a while the unique things of the area really do become "familiar" and then become "friends".

Was this a work you thought about for a long time, or something 'right off the cuff'?

**Will:** It just sort of evolved after experiencing a number trips and experiences there.

What was it about the pieces specifically that made you want to enter it? It is a large size for a watercolor.

Size wise it's a full sheet and I had working in that size at the time and felt that this would do justice to the rocks and sands that are indigenous to the area.

The design juxtaposition between portraying the objects with a high realism and creating a 'negative space' field or platform for them with a spatter technique is really sophisticated. Please explain some of the graphics arts techniques and concepts you used here.

There was underpainting (stain) designed to support the character of the sand, a lot of spatter, too yet it still conforms to the "hard lined" watercolor standard of "no opaque" paint. This was done by spattering a strong bleach in very fine mist over the sand to acquire the realist look to the sand.

Continuing on the design concept, you have objects realistically rendered and yet the placement is quite fractal and random looking, with some objects touching all four edges. I love the sophistication of what you pulled off -

**Will:** Thank you for the compliment, I spend time with the arrangement of the pieces to compliment each other as well as a working composition overall.

Probably the most audacious element is the curvilinear driftwood, which you show in a lost-and-found manner coming out of the sand and going back in again multiple times. What inspired this almost surreal statement about a seen and an unseen object?

**Will:** It's not drift wood, rather a chunk of marine growth with bulbs that had washed up on shore and was raised as part of it was buried by the sand. I took all of the elements home and began laying out the pieces in a number of possible positions.

The patina or surface texture of the different objects are richly varied; was this intentional to include a variety? Also, did you take this as a secondary challenge of this work to display various textures in the same way a quilt maker enriches his work with different knot and stitch techniques?

As an exercise in texture and surface treatments, that was intentional as much of the charm and personality of the site is directly related to the opposites in color, in texture, in color and overall differences in the pieces. I tried to present these differences realistically as well as an abstraction.

Another surreal communication about scale/spacial reality is how you have the shadows indicate objects that are near to the ground as opposed to being some distance away from the ground - all shown on your two dimensional format by how you manipulate their shadow size. I suppose I'm complimenting the sophistication of your image working on so many levels.

The point I really enjoyed was the presentation of the location in the multiple "voices" that it has, all to people that have and have not been there; and do it in a painting.

This is the second Wet Media Blue Ribbon in a row you've won - last year's Stevens Creek took the same prize. How do you feel about this rare feat of recognition - from two different Jurors, mind you?

**Will:** I think I'm very fortunate I simply didn't expect that to happen...in the end I think it's validation of what I was trying to do.

## June Crowe, Almaden Quicksilver Park - First Place, Dry Media & Acrylic



Kevin: Was this a work you thought about for a long time, or something 'right off the cuff' ie. - what is its origin?

June: I had been thinking about doing a series of paintings about Quicksilver Park. It's close to home and I hike there every week.

How were you inspired specifically by Almaden Quicksilver Park?

The park is beautiful and especially glorious in spring. It's full of all kinds of 'life' and the views are inspiring.

What was it about the work made you want to enter it?

It's a new painting, and for me a further push toward abstraction.

The atmosphere and overall key of color are major aesthetic components – and in that way this work is quite similar to the majority of work you do, right?

The last couple of years I've been drawn to strong warm colors, and I seem to be able to handle them better when working in acrylic.

Some people may think the trees are the focal point, but I don't; it's the spatial mass just adjacent to the trees. Do you agree with this, and why did you emphasize the focal point you selected?

You are absolutely right! When I stepped back, and really looked at the painting, I realized I had unintentionally painted Quicksilver Park. The trees say park, but the big open space is the focal point because it represents what the park is - open space.

The minimalist simplicity of the work, its airiness and abstract ambiguity are components which are at the fore. Does working with these aesthetics please you most?

The simplicity of the composition pleases me. I think it works because the complex textures make the painting interesting. The eye is never bored.

The texture is a key aesthetic as well – how did you achieve the active surface? Also, was this an intentional surface you wanted to start with or was it experimental?

The surface was intentionally covered with torn pieces of paper. When paint is applied, the edges become visible, creating an interesting texture which can be enhanced with pencils, crayons, pastel sticks, etc.

Did you also use bubble wrap to get some transfer texture on the piece? I recall you using 'texture tools' in some of your other prize winning art -

No, bubble wrap was not used on this painting. I did use other "texture tools" to transfer paint onto the dry surface to create dark or light dots, etc. of color.

The image touches spiritual and iconic chords in me, an effect you achieved by having most of the perimeter darker and the center of the work lighter – as if light was coming from the center

Although I never intended this impression, I love what you are saying!

In some ways the title is a red herring-like you're playing a joke of calling an abstracted image by a specific name, when in reality there is nothing specific in the generalized forms you've created. Was this intentional?

To me, my painting is the reality of the actual place. It is the way I feel about the park, and therefore, is as visually clear to me as a photograph would be.

This is my third interview with you – and it's a good thing because you have had three first places in recent years, but at the same time a bit unfortunate because I recall you remarking you're not necessarily comfortable talking about your work. Is my recollection correct?

Yes, I was uncomfortable about talking about my work, but I have moved past that. I am very thrilled to win an award for my art, and especially when it comes from LGAA where the quality of the artists is so amazing.

The 'throw away', carefree quality you achieved with the aqua pastel is marvelous, and for me evokes some of Edgar Degas' work. Is his work a favorite of yours? If not Degas, who's work do you admire – either past or present-time?

Yes, I love Degas' dancers and I saw Emile Bernard's The Harvest last year in San Francisco - a favorite. However I am equally impressed with our present day California artists, especially here in the Bay Area. And no one can combine paint on paper more beautifully than our own member, Terri Hill. I just did a 3 day workshop with her, and the influence on her students' work was amazing.

Ron Dell'Aquila, *One with the Trees* - First Place, Photography & Sculpture



Kevin: Was this a posed shot – what is its origin? Was it intentional for you to create a statement about man the ‘treehugger’ and nature?

Ron: My 'One With the Trees' image was photographed at Rancho San Antonio park in Cupertino, CA. I've always been enchanted with Rancho's Bay Tree forest. The trees in this shot are located along a section where two trails join up. The trees here remind me of a group of old men casually standing on a corner admiring the passers by. The bark reminds me of weathered skin. The Bay forest produces a delightful fragrance which reminds me of my mom's Sunday pasta sauce.

I stopped hiking to photograph this grove because light was looking good on the trees. I decided to unload the camera and set up for a few shots. I set my back pack on the trail. Extended the monopod and attached the camera to its head. Other hikers in our group were nearby examining the foliage. After a few minutes I captured a few satisfying shots of the old trunks with their dark bark and moss decorations. Good solid landscape photography, I thought.

I was looking through the viewfinder composing for this shot, when I heard footsteps rapidly approaching from the left. I was about to step backwards off the trail to make room for the hiker's progress, when the hiker suddenly walked right into my shot and insert herself directly between the two branches.

The woman's posture was unique; it was a deep plunge between the two trunks, almost as if she was sharing an intimate moment with a lover. Her chest was pressed up against the trunks. Her arms were pushed back so the elbows were almost touching behind her. There she was, one with the trees! I quickly got a shot of her while thinking she was going to pull out. After a few long moments, she extracted herself and continued walking along the trail. I got another shot of her passing in front of the trees with some motion blur because of my slow shutter. Not as good as the first image. Thank goodness I was set up and ready to make the first and decisive exposure.

Who is the person – do you know the person or did you find out later?

By the time I checked my shot, and repacked the camera gear, the mysterious woman was long gone. Another wonderful mystery to enjoy.

What was it about the shot made you want to enter it?

Thanks to Nature, most landscapes lend themselves to beautifully composed images, requiring the photographer to create an interpretation of what they experienced at the time of exposure. I felt that the inclusion of the woman in *One With the Trees*, provided the human element to contrast the maleness of the dark, stoic, tree trunks. The viewer is left to interpret the woman's interaction with the trunks as innocent to the erotic.

Tonally the photograph explores a rich deeper midtone, pushing value as a major aesthetic as opposed to color. How did this rich tone add to the work in your opinion?

The dark mid tones give power and solidity to the image. I spent time interpreting the shot in post production to preserve the bark's zone 3 darkness in order to bring attention to the highlights of the woman's clothing. Dark on dark always presents a problem, and the woman hiker's hi-lights solved that problem nicely.

The accent on midtone value helps the focal point come through – the glint of white on the person's hat and socks.

The Bay tree's dark texture and vertical orientation remind me of a group of salty, goodnatured men who appreciate seeing a woman pass by. If these trees had eyes, they'd twinkle with appreciation when people stop to admire the grove.

The vertical openings offer a nice pattern effect between the trees. The trees, too, form a radiating pattern in an almost symmetrical display across the image. Did you see these aesthetics as key ones that you would compose the picture with?

The three pairs of trunks are both a design pattern as well as a social grouping. I feel fortunate the woman in the shot chose to interact with one of them in such a unique way. It was very satisfying for me to capture this exact moment in time.

The verticality is a key aesthetic there is almost a totem spiritual quality to the trees and one can imagine the person hugging the trees acting as well, in a spiritual or prayerful manner.

I agree, there is indeed a spiritual component woven throughout this image. The woman's hands are freely pressed onto the bark without reservation. The hands do remind me of prayer. The way she has surrendered her body onto the trees may be interpreted as a spiritual release. Perhaps a union with nature. I do see the trees as male counterparts to her womanhood. She is intriguingly interacting with these male-tree figures in both spiritual and physical ways.

*Also through the slits one sees a very slender trunk - a nice contrast to the larger trunks.*

In post production, I was very concerned that the background would be too distracting for the image. I wanted the foreground trees to be dark, so I made sure to print down the distracting background elements accordingly. Interestingly, the woman's gaze seems to be directed at the slender tree trunk in the background. The slender background tree gives the viewer a destination after following the line of her sight. Finding that slender tree amongst the older, bigger trees provides a reward for the viewer's curiosity.

*The photograph has an inviting informality to it. Whether the scene was staged or not, it doesn't appear to be - do you see this as a distinguishing characteristic?*

I feel fortunate that I was able to capture the woman in this shot. I was preparing up to capture the three pairs of trunks when the woman hiker entered into the shot. My ongoing 'Organic Landscapes' portfolio explores the lines of figurative and landscape designs. I have a desire to rephotograph this scene with an unclothed model at a later date. Perhaps for the 2013 LGAA Member's exhibit?

*Did you compose through the lens, or were cropping and other enhancements made after the fact? What is your usual preference?*

I love the clarity and precision of the optical viewfinder. I normally compose a scene through a DSLR's viewfinder in order to exclude any off frame distractions and concentrate on the image. Today's portable DSLR's with their high resolution sensors are quite convenient to carry in the field when compared to the 4 x 5 of yesteryear.

*Color is a minor factor with this image, yet there are two beguiling notes of color - a blue reflection in the hair and a purple reflection on the arms of the person that give a note of poetry. Were these planned and do you agree that indeed, they add a touch of grace?*

I made sure I didn't lose those deep blues in the hair and sleeves when printing 'One With the Trees'. The majority of photograph is monochromatic, so any color pops and adds meaning to where it is attached. I'm thankful that the woman was dressed as darkly as she was. I did pay particular attention to retaining detail in the hat and socks, while separating the hair and sleeves from the dark background. However, I still am interested in a more 'exposed' model in another version of this image.

*Please add any final comments about your Blue ribbon award-winning entry-*

I am so honored to have my photograph 'One With the Trees' selected as a Blue Ribbon Winner at the 2012 Los Gatos Art Association Member's show. Receiving recognition for producing personal Art is a very encouraging and humbling gesture. Additionally, the fact that two of my photographs, 'Goodwill, Santa Clara, CA' and 'Pastel Diners: Tea' are currently being shown in the Triton Museum's Statewide Photography Competition concurrent to the LGAA Members exhibit is quite thrilling.