

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Brantingham on Brantingham: The Art of Ann Brantingham

John Brantingham · Wednesday, December 2nd, 2020

When I met Ann in our early twenties, she was studying architecture, doing good work in the estimation of my young eyes, and I asked her what it was about architecture that moved her. She told me that it didn't move her. She told me that she had said to the people in her life that she wanted to study art, and they had manipulated that into architecture, and that now she was changing her major to fine art, and soon after she did.

When she started to study fine art, she had many professors who were skillful artists, but couldn't see into her. They wanted her to be an abstract expressionist because a person could make interesting statements about the unconscious with broad strokes of acrylic paint. A person could look inside of herself that way, and she told them that was not the way she wanted to look inside herself. There was as much of the unconscious and the real to be found in the minutia as a blade of grass someone called a weed or the eucalyptus leaf that was raked up and thrown away as there was in a boldly rendered study of color. She liked those paintings and what those artists were saying, but that's not how she spoke.

I watched as mentor after mentor spoke without once listening to her, and it did not surprise me when she didn't pursue an MFA in fine arts but did an MA in art history instead. Here she studied the way artists of the past dealt with the issues that she was interested in and she formed an artistic voice and eye.

When Ann speaks, to you or through her art, it's valuable to listen to her. She has been engaged in the long process of looking for the last twenty years or so. I have watched her stare at a leaf for half an hour before saying what she has to say with a pencil, and what she draws out of leaves and branches are truths beyond words. The abstract expressionists have much to say about the unconscious truths of this world, and that is fine, but so does Ann, and I prefer what she has to say and the way she says it to anyone I know.

My advice to anyone viewing this is to do what her non-mentors did not do. Be silent for a moment and listen.



[Eucalyptus 1]

Eucalyptus species have become so common that we tend not to really look at them unless they are in an amazing state, like when some of them lose their bark and show off their new, bare skin. I

wanted to look at a few less-showy Eucalyptus varieties and let the branches speak for me. The branch and leaves are exactly as I found them, without staging or adding or subtracting anything. I can still smell the leaves.



[Eucalyptus 2]

For me, graphite goes straight to emotion. I work in color sometimes, but graphite will always be my love. I found this branch in a gutter in Pomona. I'm drawn to things that other people pass by.



[Eucalyptus 3]

This image dances for me. The leaves are torn and drying, but that's the state of any vegetation in Southern California once it has broken off its plant. When I found it, it was dusty and had been sitting in direct sunlight on the lawn of someone's yard near the Claremont Colleges.



[Three Manzanita Leaves]

These three Manzanita leaves capture the small moments in the Giant Forest of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. People are often entranced by the giant sequoia trees, and I am too, but at their base are the thick, waxy leaves of Manzanita bushes. They resist fire and the deer that nibble on them and the people who crash through them carelessly. They are amazing plants.



[Wuksachi Leaf]

Sometimes I just see a leaf and I'm drawn to it. I found this in the parking lot in the High Sierra. I love the metaphor of this leaf. It's a California native, so it is strong, thick, and waxy. It is falling apart, but it was still a leaf because of the integrity forced upon it by the California heat and fire.

Ann's work was showing throughout the Los Angeles area before the pandemic began, and now you can find it online on her website, <https://www.annbrantingham.com/> and [her shop](#). When the pandemic is finally controlled, she will be showing at our gallery, [The California Imagism Gallery](#), and in museums and galleries all over the state. I hope you can join us soon and talk about art. You can be sure that when Ann says something then, I will listen.

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