
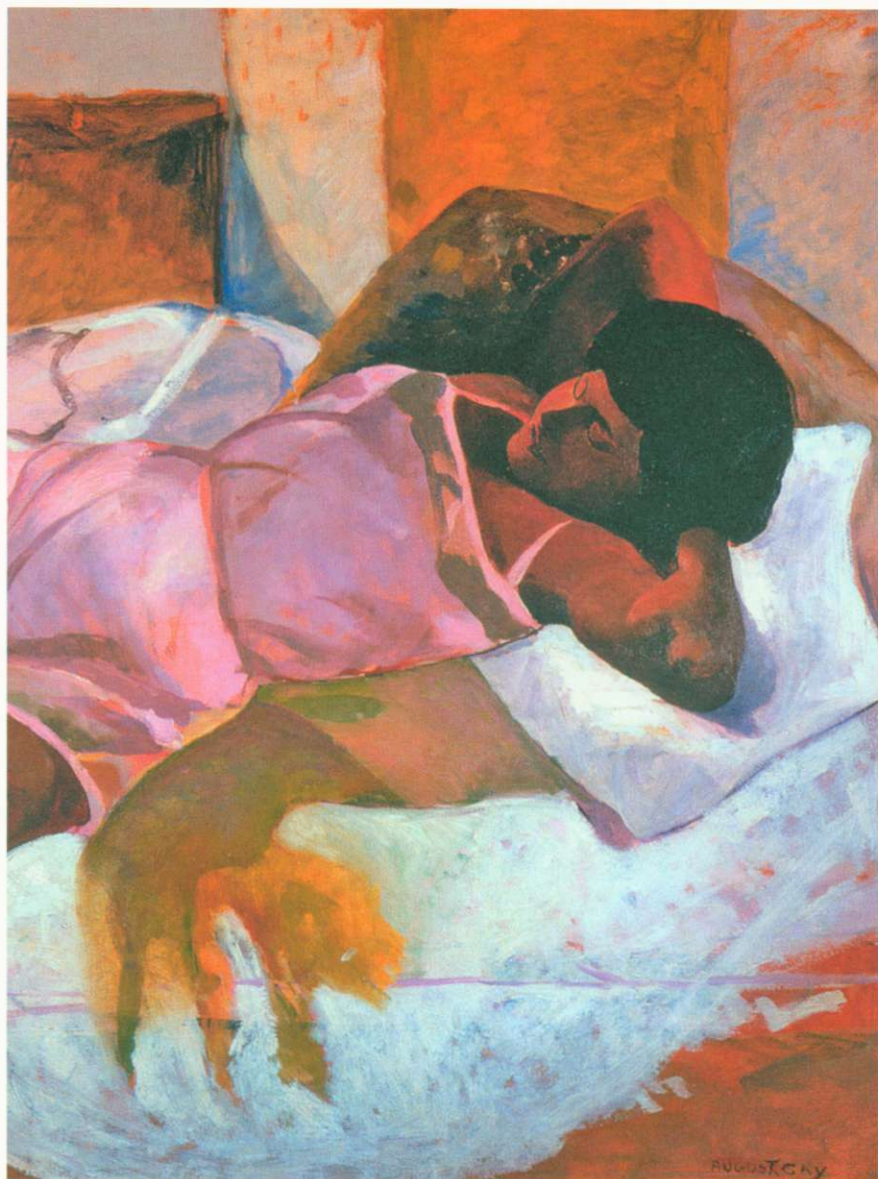


\$10

Our Monterey, 1920-1940
Artist August Gay and Friends



Noticias de Monterey
Monterey History and Art Association



*August Gay, "Vada," oil on canvas, circa 1928, detail.
Courtesy of George Stern Fine Arts, Carmel and Los Angeles.*

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Monterey History and Art Association Quarterly

Gus and the Gang:

Communities of Artists and the Career of August Gay

Julianne Burton-Carvajal, Guest Curator

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“My Monterey” in the Etchings of August Gay:

“Stylelessness” and Other Puzzles

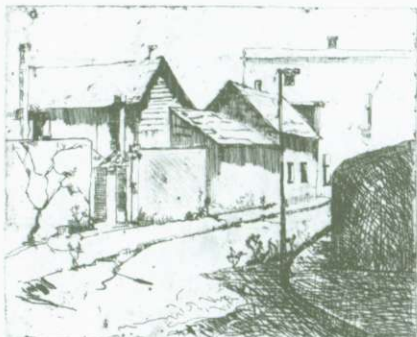
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Better than Beauty: The Life and Work of Jeanne d’Orge

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About the Exhibition

“Our Monterey: Prints and Paintings by August Gay and Friends, 1920-1940”

September 24, 2005-January 1, 2006

Art & History Gallery, Maritime Museum of Monterey

Since the 1980s, August Gay has been widely admired as a painter and colorist of the first order. During his lifetime, however, he never succeeded in making a living with his brush. Frame-making, furniture design, and publicly subsidized murals helped him put food on the table while remaining creatively engaged.

“Our Monterey” encompasses the multiple facets of Gus Gay’s career and sets it in context, evoking the fellowship he shared with other artists from the upbeat 1920s and Depression-dampened 1930s to the eve of World War II.

The exhibition showcases an important cache of etchings only recently come to light, combining them with another set rediscovered in the 1990s. It includes works by artists who stimulated and sustained Gus Gay’s efforts: the Oakland-based Society of Six, led by painter Selden Gile; the Monterey Liturgical Guild directed by E. Charlton Fortune; and in particular the Monterey Group that coalesced around painter-printmaker Armin Hansen.

Finally, the varied components of the exhibition enter into neighborly conversation with the Maritime Museum’s surrounding permanent displays—particularly those that focus on the cannery era and on Hotel Del Monte. Temporary and ongoing installations reciprocally reinforce the many ties between “their Monterey” of yesterday and “our Monterey” of today.

Julianne Burton-Carvajal, Guest Curator

“August Gay and Friends”

gratefully acknowledge
the following
very special friends,
whose generous support
has made both the exhibition
and this publication possible:

Hauk Fine Arts
George Stern Fine Arts
The Mazur Family



Uncaptioned Illustrations

Cover: August Gay, "Water, Sand and Patterns," oil on canvas, n.d. Courtesy of Michael Mazur.

Title page: August Gay etchings, views of Munras Street approaching Alvarado, n.d. The etching at left is "right-reading," and would have been drawn from the image at right, which is in "mirror reverse." Selleck Collection 32 and 33, courtesy of David Kelso.

Page 2: Pencil drawing of Gus Gay by Margaret Bruton, c. 1925. Private Collection.

Page 3: Gus Gay, "Fisherman Wharf" etching, n.d. Reproduced by permission of Clarice Pruitt.

Page 18-19: August Gay and Bruce Ariss, Pacific Grove High School mural, 1935-1937, detail of Pacific Grove portion on page 18, Monterey portion on page 19. From "Wonderful Colors!" catalogue, Monterey Museum of Art, 1993, with permission.

"Gus Gay, 1937"
pen and ink portrait
by Bruce Ariss.
Courtesy of the
Ariss family.



**Gus and the Gang:
Communities of Artists
and the Career of August Gay (1890-1948)**

Julianne Burton-Carvajal

Throughout a career that extended across four decades, August Gay was a “society artist”—although hardly in the sense that first comes to mind. Far too unassuming to seek or be sought out by “high society,” this gifted and gregarious painter required the ongoing companionship of other creative souls in order to exercise his talent.

Between 1910 and 1940, Gus Gay belonged to three notable communities of artists: a close-knit circle of outdoor painters eventually known as the Society of Six that formed in Oakland as he came of age; the Monterey Group, a coterie of painters and printmakers who welcomed Gay’s permanent move to the area in the early 1920s; and the Monterey Guild, a group of artisans organized in the late 1920s to produce high-quality liturgical art and furnishings.

Although he spent barely a decade in his native France, Gus Gay was perceived throughout his life as the quintessential Frenchman. Short and wiry,

*Portrait of Gus Gay
by Helen Bruton,
n.d. Reproduced from
Small Wonders
catalogue, Monterey
Museum of Art, 1997,
with permission.*



with curly dark hair that receded and grayed during his years in Monterey, he was often depicted with his “emblematic” Gallic attributes—beret, briar pipe, and glass of burgundy. A weak constitution slowed his pace and added years to his appearance, even as a young man. His late-life protégé Bruce Ariss described him, perhaps too candidly, as “an old shoe of a guy.”

Because he left behind no writings, letters, or other documents of historical significance, the little information known about Gus Gay's life comes from the comments and correspondence of friends and, consequently, can be inconsistent. This overview is particularly indebted to two Gay scholars: art historian Nancy Boas, author of a vibrant volume entitled *The Society of Six: California Colorists* and printmaker David Kelso, whose diligently uncovered facts amend previous accounts of the life of August Gay.

August François Pierre Gay was born on June 11, 1890, second child and first son of Auguste J. and Elise Corréard Gay. His birthplace was a farmhouse near Rabou, a village in the French Maritime Alps en route between Marseilles and Turin. The lad was barely eleven years old in October of 1901 when he departed France forever on the S.S. *Bretagne*. The ship's manifest, located by Kelso, lists father and son along with a younger sister, an uncle, and two other relatives.

Arriving in New York, the immigrants headed first to Uncle Ferdinand Gay's ranch in Redlands, then to Alameda, near Oakland, where they settled and the father remarried. Although other siblings—sisters Olympe and Emma, brother Kleber—emigrated later, Gus never again laid eyes on his mother, who remained in France. This loss would have left a lifelong scar.

At age sixteen, suffering from tuberculosis, Gus was sent back to Redlands. During his three years of convalescence on their Imperial Valley ranch, Uncle Ferdinand and Aunt Jeanne encouraged his artistic leanings. Back in Oakland in 1909, feeling more confined than ever in the overcrowded family quarters, Gus crossed paths with an older, more seasoned painter named Selden Gile, who generously offered to share his home.

The Society of Six

The two men lived together first on James Street, from about 1910, and then, from 1917, on Chabot Road, where aspiring painter Maurice Logan was their neighbor. This second cottage became the gathering place for a growing group of avid outdoor painters. Hiking the Oakland hills together on weekends in search of inviting spots to set up their easels, they would trek back to the “Chow House” in the waning light to share hearty helpings of food and drink, while debating the merits and shortcomings of the day's output.

Seldon Gile took the lead in a group that included Gay and Logan as well as the sedate William Clapp, the boisterous Bernard von Eichman, and Louis Siegriest, destined to enjoy the longest artistic evolution of all. Committed to depicting everyday scenes *en plein air*, the group infused their efforts with brilliant color and spontaneous brush work in a restless variety of styles.

Their exuberant approach constituted a marked departure from the subdued Tonalist palette and symbol-laden classicism that had dominated California landscape painting up to that time.

From their 1923 debut exhibition, "The Six" were perceived as modernizers bringing a much-needed breath of fresh air to the regional art scene. A reviewer for the *Oakland Tribune* wrote admiringly of the show, "Nothing like it for pure, clean color and verve..." For Terry St. John, who helped rediscover them decades later, they were a "closely-knit group of painters with a strong unifying sense of visual purpose." (1986) Nancy Boas described the group as "unruly outsiders on the margin of their local art establishment [who] found a way to join the vital kernel of Impressionism to California's landscape tradition." (1989:57)

Individually and collectively, the Six embraced transformation. In 1915, responding to works by both Impressionists and post-Impressionists at the huge art display that was a featured attraction of San Francisco's year-long Panama-Pacific International Exposition, they all became more boldly experimental. Subsequent exhibitions exposed them to other contemporary movements, and they devoured art publications that von Eichman brought back from his travels in the merchant marine. Some of the members studied (and later taught) in art schools around the Bay area; records show Gus enrolled in Commercial Art and Life Drawing at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco in 1919.

The Society of Six mounted a half a dozen annual exhibitions in the mid-20s at the trend-setting Oakland Art Gallery. Thanks to the effectiveness of William Clapp, gallery director and group member, these shows earned them recognition as pioneering modernists. Looking back years later, Louis Siegriest—the group's most renowned, longest-lived member—noted with wry humor and a tinge of envy:

Gus was the only one of the group who didn't paint much. He would always have an excuse. It was either too hot or too cold. If it was too hot, he would sit on the porch and drink Gile's beer. If it was too cold, he would sit next to the stove and drink Gile's red wine. When he did produce a picture, it would be very good. I believe he was the real artist of the group. (quoted in Boas, 1993)

The Move to Monterey

Like so many San Francisco Bay artists, the Six made periodic painting excursions to Monterey. Gus found the little seaside enclave so much to his liking that—in 1919, 1920, or 1922 (Kelso uses the latter date, based on information that Gus provided on his application for US citizenship)—he relocated permanently. Friends conjectured that he needed some distance from Gile, who could be domineering at times.

With fellow artist Clayton S. Price, who also moved to Monterey around 1920, Gus took rooms and studio space in the old French Hotel. The place was popularly known as Stevenson House in memory of the Scottish writer who may have lodged there briefly during his visit to Monterey in 1879. Gus remarked that he “would love someone to come along and prove [the building] falsely named, for visitors interrupt me at all hours, and tourists insist on snapping my picture as a son of RLS.” (*The Californian*, 1937)

Like Seldon Gile, C.S. Price was senior to Gus by more than a decade. Despite the marked contrast in personalities—Price was reclusive, Gus gregarious—the pair had much in common. Raised in the far west, they learned to love the vast undulating landscape. Poverty and displacements prevented them from acquiring more than minimal education and arts training. Their employment histories consisted of a string of menial jobs, and their lifestyle could be described as meager. Happily, they had acquired many useful skills, including carpentry and wood carving. For both men, art was a compelling quest for something that words could not define, a pursuit that relegated other concerns to second place.

After Gay's relocation, according to Siegriest, the Society of Six gathered in Monterey about once a month, staying overnight to paint and party at Stevenson House. The “cowboy [with the] big black Stetson hat never went out painting with us,” Siegriest recalled (and indeed Price was a studio rather than a plein air painter) “but we all ate together and at night we'd play cards.” (quoted in Boas, 1993)

Gay exhibited with his Oakland cohort for four consecutive years—1923 through 1926—but in 1927 he withdrew from the group's penultimate exhibition after a tiff with Seldon Gile that was rousinglly reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Meanwhile, participating in informal classes convened around the immensely talented painter-printmaker Armin Hansen, Gay and Price had become part of the loosely knit “Monterey Group” that included Lucy Valentine Pierce, the Bruton sisters (Margaret, Helen and Esther), Jeanette Maxfield Lewis, Paul Whitman, Myron Oliver, Ina C. Perham (Story), and the Canadian Robert V. Howard.

Several of these artists exhibited at the Hotel Del Monte Gallery, established after the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 to feature California artists exclusively. Members of the Monterey Group enjoyed cookouts and beach parties, as well as frequent get-togethers at Stevenson House. The latter ranged from spaghetti feeds and dance sessions to an elegant afternoon tea hosted by artist-owner Frederick Randall and builder J.C. Anthony. The Monterey arts community, out in force, were treated to an open studio exhibition by Gay and Price. Artist Margaret Bruton remembered the Stevenson House gatherings during this period:

Lots of people would come down from the city... Rooms could be opened into each other and to the outside. [The building] was lovely because it wasn't all titillated up the way it is now, with gardens and landscaping.

There was just lots of sun, lots of old nets, and five or ten dollars a month rent for rooms. Originally fishermen and artists had lived there side by side, but gradually the artists took over..." (quoted in Boas 1988:135 and 1993:10)

In his memoir of Cannery Row, Bruce Ariss recalls observing Gus's unusual easel painting technique while visiting him at Stevenson House:

One day John Steinbeck and I walked over to see Gus Gay in his studio in Monterey. Gus was one of our favorite characters, a lovable curmudgeon...who was a pleasure to be around, as much a natural painter as John was a natural storyteller. Perhaps more so because, unlike John, Gus didn't bother with any theories, either before or after he created a work of art. He'd simply start painting in the lower left hand corner of a canvas and keep working clockwise around the top until he came down to the bottom right-hand corner, where he'd sign "A.F. Gay." (Ariss, 27)

The same memoir includes an evocative description of how Gus's famous French nonchalance was upstaged by a descendant of the early Californios:

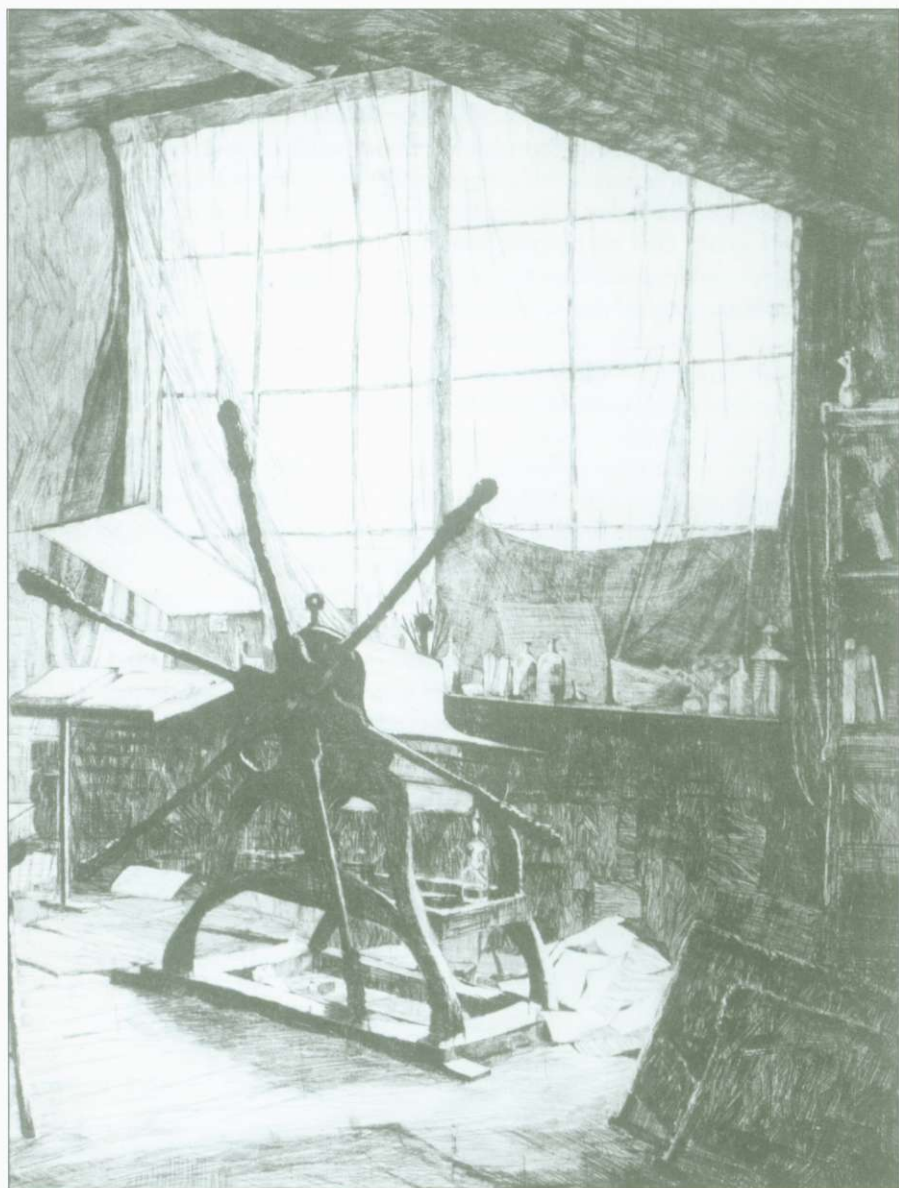
Shortly after John Steinbeck, Ed Ricketts, my wife Jean and I returned from our 1936 car trip to Baja California, Mrs. Hattie Gragg gave a banquet in our honor in her venerable Stokes-Gragg Adobe. The long table was covered with a priceless heirloom Spanish lace tablecloth and lit by half a dozen noble silver candelabras... In the midst of pleasant conversation over good food, someone yelled "Fire!" Gus Gay had laid his old briar pipe on the table, and a coal had fallen out and ignited the lace heirloom. Gus [doused the flames] with his glass of red wine and Mrs. Gragg, the perfect hostess, went right on talking as if nothing had happened. (Ariss, 77-79)

Branching Out

It was during his first decade in Monterey that Gus Gay tried his hand at etching. Like a number of others in the Monterey Group, he presumably learned from master-etcher Armin Hansen. His first efforts would have been printed on the etching press at Hansen's home-studio on El Dorado Street (a home built for him by J.C. Anthony, the same builder who hosted the Stevenson House tea). Gus was sufficiently intrigued by the etching process to purchase one of his own from William Gaskin, a San Francisco-based artist who lived for a time at Stevenson House. Two of the few known etchings by C.S. Price, "Plowing" and "Hauling Rock," date from this period and were probably printed on this same press, which figures prominently in a November 19, 1927 letter from Selden Gile to Louis Siegrist:

I am taking down some etchings to be printed on Gay's press. Clapp's press was always out of order, and he was never over-

anxious to have one use it: too much trouble. Gay's old press is the one Gaskin fixed up..., but it is still questionable... Nuts, bolts and screws in order when you start to use it, ... a regular machine shop when you want to do something. (quoted in Kelso, 1997:20)



*Armin Hansen's studio with etching press, where local artists pulled their first impressions.
Paul Whitman etching courtesy of Colden and Betsy Whitman.*

In the essay that follows, David Kelso speculates on the appeal that the costly, complicated, laborious (and, as Gile points out, frustratingly unreliable) etching process held for a highly accomplished painter like Gus Gay.

Gus had always lived frugally, but the economic slowdown that began in the mid-1920s made the struggle for survival more difficult. This was the period when he learned to carve and gild picture frames for artist-craftsman Myron Oliver, who enlisted Price as well. Some sources say that the pair also worked at Oliver's artists' supply store.

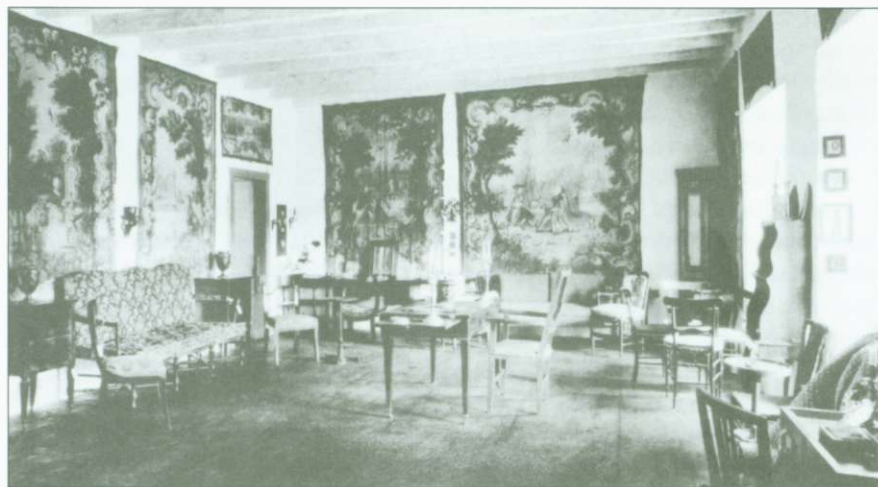
No one was left unscathed by the stock market crash of 1929. The banking crisis that followed reportedly wiped out Gus's modest life savings. The deepening Depression scattered members of both the Society of Six and the Monterey Group. C.S. Price moved back to Portland, Oregon in 1928. Gus stayed on at Stevenson House for what would turn out to be a second decade, longer than any other tenant. Hard times may have made it a less sociable place as artists economized by giving up their studio space.

The brilliant interior designer Frances Elkins, whose elegant Casa Blanca showroom was on the premises during the 1930s, did not seem to be a loss for clients who could afford her top-flight services, and she in turn employed several members of the Monterey Group and the Monterey Guild. Myron Oliver replicated a Venetian gondola chair and other fine European antiques for Elkins, classic furnishings that she might juxtapose with modernist, mosaic-covered tables decorated by the Bruton sisters. Marcelle Chaix, a long-term Elkins employee from southeastern France, was known for her elegant slipcovers and elaborately constructed draperies. Gus fashioned paneling and



*Hand-carved sign courtesy of
Suzanne Strid Fine Arts.*





Interior of Frances Elkins's Casa Blanca Showroom at Stevenson House; exterior on preceding page. Both courtesy of Pat Hathaway, California Views.

balustrades for some of the same Pebble Beach homes that Elkins festooned with Marcellé's handiwork.

Another positive development was the 1929 exhibition of etchings by Gus Gay in Pacific Grove. The show ran for two weeks in July at the Administration Building Bookshop at Asilomar, a seaside complex originally designed by Julia Morgan for the YWCA. This turned out to be the only one-man exhibition that Gus mounted in his lifetime. Unfortunately, no list of works has surfaced.

It was also during this period that Gus began working as a gilder and carver for the Monterey Guild, producers of fine, hand-made ecclesiastical art and furnishings. Organized by the painter E. Charlton Fortune around 1928, the group included Gus's associate Myron Oliver, sculptor Roy Zoellan, wrought iron smith Robert Petersen, Lloyd Hecht, and seamstresses Ethel Little and Mrs. Langford.

Gus worked on the association's first project, gilding the figures in the reredos at St. Angela's Catholic Church in Pacific Grove. He made some two dozen Spanish colonial replicas for Mission San Juan Bautista in time-honored fashion—without nails, screws or machinery. The Carmel Mission collection includes a number of Monterey Guild pieces, several reflecting Gay's multiple talents. The outbreak of World War II in 1939 constrained the venture by making essential materials impossible to import from Europe. In an attempt to keep the Guild alive, Fortune moved the base of operations first to Kansas City, then to Rhode Island, then back again to Kansas City before finally retiring to Carmel Valley in 1958.

A 1929 accident that resulted in the amputation of part of his right index finger may have made it more difficult for Gus to hold a paint brush—or, as Bruce Ariss suspected, provided cover for his sense of personal failure as a painter. The loss did not seem to impinge on his woodcarving, however,

because Gus continued to design and craft furniture for the rest of his life. Commissions included a dining room table and set of chairs for Templeton Crocker, son of Hotel del Monte founder Charles Crocker, and a carved oak bedroom set commissioned by S.F.B. Morse for one of the rooms at Hotel Del Monte. (Thanks to the conservatorship of Fred Stanley, son of the Hotel manager, and his wife Pauline, this suite is featured in "Our Monterey.")

In addition to providing an exhibition venue and source of commissions, Hotel Del Monte was a recreational mecca for locals and visitors alike. Even during the Depression, Gus and his fellow artists continued to enjoy high



Clockwise from top right: Bruce Ariss, August Gay, Armin Hansen and August Gay, and Armin Hansen in promotional photographs for the 1934 Bal Masque at Hotel Del Monte. Julian Graham photographs courtesy Logorio Archive, Pebble Beach Company.

times there, as witnessed by publicity photographs for the 1934 Bal Masque event. Gay, Hansen, Whitman and Ariss were all members of the Carmel Art Association, beneficiary of the event—unlike the artist in charge of party décor, Catalán surrealist Salvador Dalí, an occasional visitor to the area.

In the mid-1930s, under the auspices of the federal Works Progress Administration as well as state and local sponsors, Gus returned to painting, but this time as a muralist rather than an easel painter. He produced a mural called “Fishermen” for the Custom House Museum in 1934, and another the following year for Monterey Union High School. Both of these are reportedly still extant, unlike the murals he painted for Casa Munras Garden Hotel and Biff’s El Estero Restaurant, which seem to have disappeared. Working with younger assistants like Bruce Ariss and his studio-mate James Fitzgerald, Gus created a large mural for display at the Monterey County Fairgrounds. Watercolorist Phil Nesbitt, a one-time Disney employee who retired to Pacific Grove, also assisted on some of the murals.

Gus was the local artist chosen to undertake the most ambitious mural project on the Monterey Peninsula: a 150 foot long depiction of the area from Point Pinos east to Monterey’s Wharf #2 for Pacific Grove High School, now Pacific Grove Middle School. The product of this three-year collaboration with Bruce Ariss (see portions reproduced on pages 18 and 19) was tragically lost to fire within a decade of its completion.

The French Connection

In 1953, five year’s after Gay’s death, Armin Hansen admiringly recalled his colleague, friend and one-time student: “Gus was a real artist, right to the core... The first day he came into the class, I looked over his shoulder and saw all the French masters in one canvas.” Hansen, who had been sent to Europe to study art in 1906, knew how central the French example had been to the rise of modern trends in painting, but he may not have known the importance of the French contribution in the history of the arts in Monterey, and in California.

When he moved to Monterey, Gus himself may only have been dimly aware that he was joining a long line of French-born artists. He had probably heard of Jules Tavernier, the peripatetic party-lover credited with starting Monterey’s first art colony in the 1870s. Restaurateur Jules Simoneau—skilled in the complementary French arts of cookery and conviviality, benefactor to penurious sojourners like Tavernier and Robert Louis Stevenson—would still be fondly remembered as first local patron of the arts. But by the 1920s, few would have known of Gaspard Duché de Vancy and his naturalist colleague Jean-Louis-Robert Prévost, whose 1789 visit produced some of the earliest depictions of the Spanish mission settlements at Monterey and Carmel, or of painter François Edmond Paris, who visited Monterey fifty years later. In the early 1840s, as Alta California’s Mexican era was drawing to a close, French consul Jacques Antoine Morenhout and

round-the-world voyager Abel du Petit-Thouars recorded Monterey vistas that circulated widely. During the same period, local prefect Manuel Castro imported from Mexico Monterey's first art teacher—a Frenchman named Cambuston.

Gus Gay occupies a culminating place in this sequence, but this distinguished national "lineage" would hardly have been a consideration when he chose Monterey as his permanent home. Jobs for the asking in the sardine canneries would have been a more practical draw, balanced on the more sentimental side by the pictorial appeal of an environment that—as his sister Olympe reportedly observed—"looks a lot like home."

Gus reconfirmed his French heritage at the age of forty-four when he married compatriot Marcelle Chaix, whose family had known his in France. Armin Hansen acted as best man. Bruce Ariss and his wife Jean remembered Marcelle as "even-tempered and philosophical" (Boas 1993:19, 24). These traits must have stood her in good stead while undertaking to keep house in the artists' warren on Houston Street. After six years in those rented quarters, Marcelle may have been longing for a home of her own. In 1941, she probably applauded the official decision to turn the rooming house into a permanent memorial to Robert Louis Stevenson, because this gave her husband the nudge he needed. Gus's design for the house he built on Camino del Monte in Carmel Woods was an appealing echo of both Stevenson House and the farmhouse in Rabou where he was born.

Wartime restrictions reportedly forced the couple to wait until peace was won before occupying their new home, which was requisitioned for military families in the meantime. Once they took possession, Gus fashioned furniture, carved picture frames, and repaired antiques in his detached studio. In a "return to his agricultural roots," he also cultivated vegetables and planted a small orchard on their three adjacent lots. According to his sister-in-law Jayne Chaix, he lived in semi-retirement during his last decade, but continued to enjoy talking art with visitors and helping younger artists, "his devotion to art unquestioned by all who knew him." Jay Hannah, still an active painter on the Monterey Peninsula, was a tenant of Gus and Marcelle for many years.

On March 9, 1948, at fifty-seven years of age, Gus Gay died suddenly of a heart attack, predeceasing fellow members of the Society of Six and the Monterey Group. Monterey Guild founder "Effie" Fortune, five years his senior, outlived him by two decades. He left behind his elder sister, Olympe Allegretti of Oakland and his brother, Kleber Gay of Monterey, custodian at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History. His widow Marcelle later converted Gus's woodshop to drapery-making. She continued living in the Camino del Monte house until her own death, equally sudden, in 1963 while visiting Riverside County with Jean Ariss. August Gay spent half his life on the Monterey Peninsula, his chosen place; he and Marcelle now repose side by side under matching markers in the Monterey Cemetery.

Nancy Boas pays tribute to August Gay by calling him an "artist's artist." In the obituary published in the *Monterey Herald*, Armin Hansen spoke for

the broad fellowship of Peninsula artists when he remembered August Gay as "one of the most outstanding examples of pure devotion to art—in all he lived and thought—that we have ever known in this community." Because that devotion consistently included his fellow artists, male and female, it is not only fitting but fundamental to present August Gay's prints, paintings, mural designs and carvings "in the company of friends."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julianne Burton-Carvajal teaches Latin American and California studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, with an emphasis on literature and the visual arts. In addition to several books on Latin American film, she is the author-editor of *The Monterey Mesa: Oldest Neighborhood in California* (City of Monterey, 2002) and the editor of *Noticias de Monterey* since 2003.

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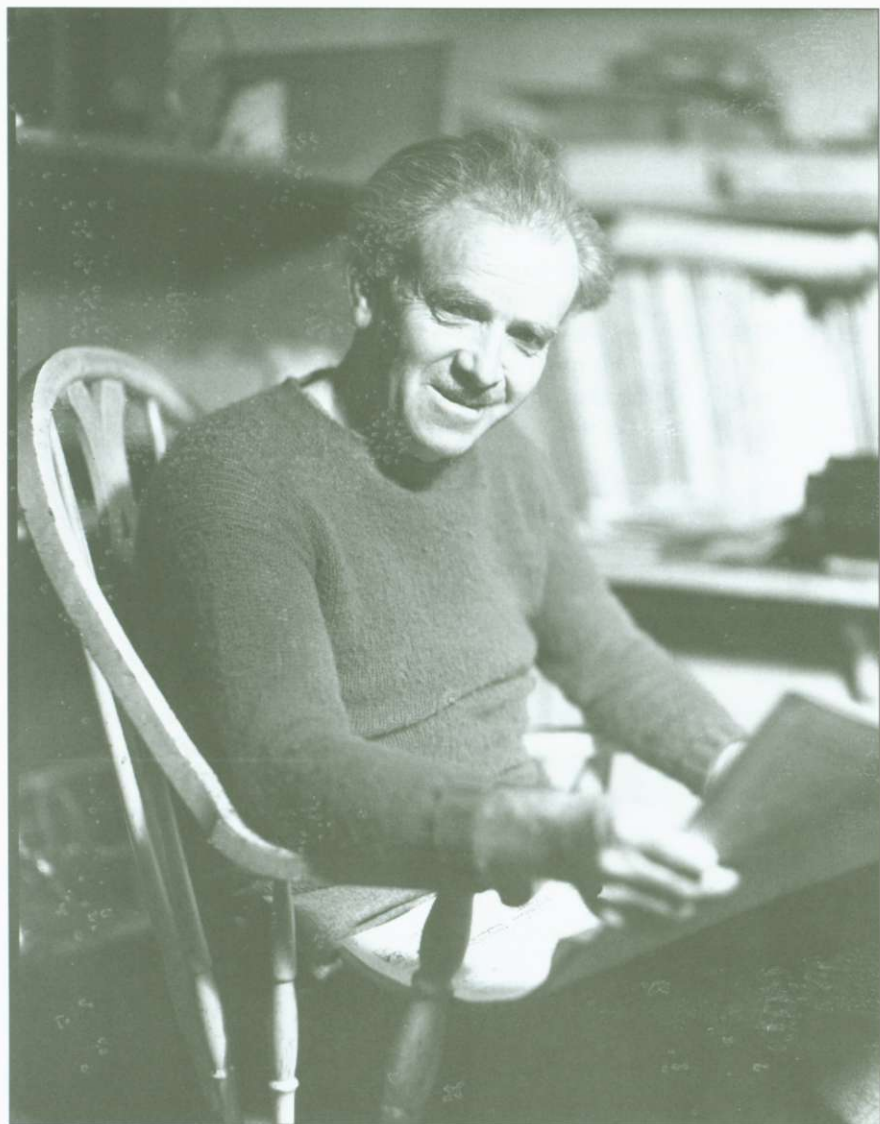
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August Gay in his Camino del Monte workshop in the late 1940s. Julian Graham photograph courtesy of the Logorio Archive, Pebble Beach Company.

THE LIFE OF AUGUST FRANÇOIS PIERRE GAY BY DECADE

1890-1900 Childhood in southeastern France interrupted by emigration to California. Father and siblings relocate in stages, but mother stays behind permanently.

1901-1910 Lives with father and siblings in Alameda and Oakland. As a teenager, he spends three years recuperating from tuberculosis at his uncle's ranch in the Imperial Valley, where his artistic inclinations are encouraged.

1911-1919 Invited to live with painter Selden Gile, thirteen years his senior; they share the "Chow House" on Chabot Road in Oakland. Supports himself through menial jobs in food distribution and fruit canning while studying intermittently at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, and elsewhere. Paints, critiques and socializes regularly with a circle of friends who will later be recognized as the Society of Six, pioneering modernists. The group's search for new artistic directions intensifies in response to the mammoth exhibition of contemporary art at San Francisco's year-long Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, in particular their the "discovery" of French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. In 1916, Gus shows a painting at the San Francisco Art Association Annual Exhibition.

1919-1929 Moves to Monterey by 1922, renting rooms and studio space in the old French Hotel (Stevenson House) alongside fellow painter Clayton S. Price. The pair host many parties for the Monterey Group of artists and visiting members of the Society of Six. From 1923-1926, Gus shows annually



with the Society of Six at the Oakland Art Gallery, and from 1921 with the Monterey Group at Hotel del Monte Gallery. Gus and C.S. Price learn frame-making from Myron Oliver and work in his store. In July of 1929, Gus exhibits his etchings at Asilomar, the only one-man show in his lifetime. (His etchings will not be publicly exhibited again for some 60 years.)

1930-1940 Gus virtually abandons easel painting when the Depression disperses both the Society of Six and the Monterey Group. Price moves back to Portland, Oregon while Gus turns to liturgical furniture-making for the Monterey Guild and to mural-painting under federal and state sponsorship. Gus loses top of his right index finger in a woodworking accident. Two signal events of 1934 are his receipt of his US citizenship and his marriage to Marcelle Chaix, from his home region of France. That same year, along with several fellow artists, Gus helps promote the Bal Masque at the Hotel Del Monte to benefit the Carmel Art Association. He dedicates much of the next three years (1935-37) to painting a 150-foot long historical mural at Pacific Grove High School, assisted by young artist-writer Bruce Ariss. In 1939, Gus contributes work to the Golden Gate International Exposition at San Francisco's Treasure Island.

1941-1948 E. Charlton Fortune moves the Monterey Guild to Kansas City in 1942. Stevenson House, where Gus had lodged and made art for some 20 years, is conveyed to the State of California in 1941. Gus builds a home in Carmel Woods for himself and Marcelle, modeling it after both Stevenson House and his Rabou birthplace. In his scant three years at the Camino del Monte address, he enjoys fashioning fine furniture and restoring antiques in the shop he built behind the house. He dies suddenly of a heart attack on March 9th at age 57. Having sold few paintings during his lifetime, he receives belated recognition beginning in the 1950s and especially since the 1980s.



“My Monterey” in the Etchings of August François Gay: “Stylelessness” and Other Puzzles

David Kelso

No one thinks to ask why a painter paints, yet we wonder with some justification why an artist would turn to etching. The need for specialized technical training and the expense of equipment and supplies would be disincentive enough, but the artist must also be willing to accept indirect, time-consuming working methods, the confusion of image reversal from plate to print, and that excruciating delay between drawing a plate image and the moment when its printed impression is finally pulled [from the press] and the results can be evaluated. Once the plate has been etched, corrections or revisions can only be accomplished through hours of painstaking scraping and burnishing. Although the techniques of etching and printing may first seem fascinating, once the novelty has worn off, what remains is exhausting, distinctly unglamorous work. Given all these obstacles to creative expression, August Gay should have been the least likely artist to ever have picked up an etching stylus.

From David Kelso, “August Gay, Printmaker,” *Small Wonders*, 1997



3929 Washington Hotel, Monterey, near Pacific Grove, Cal.

*The Washington Hotel, built in 1832 and demolished in 1913.
Period postcard courtesy of Pat Hathaway, California Views.*

“Etchings Found in Old Washington Hotel: The Puzzle of Provenance

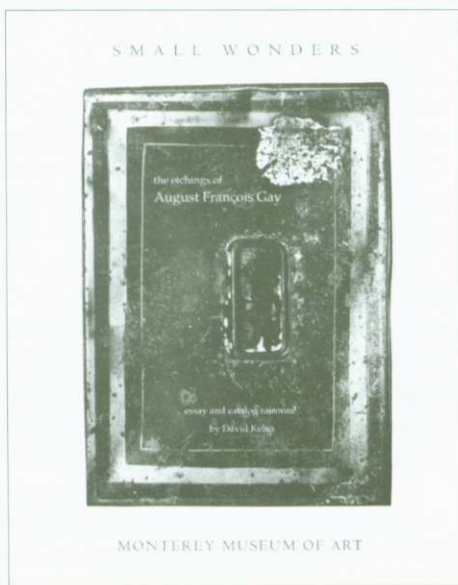
In the catalogue for their August 22, 2000 auction, Hambrook's Auction House in Pacific Grove listed anonymously consigned memorabilia from a private museum. The items had purportedly been housed at one time in Monterey's historic Washington Hotel. There was good reason for this detail to arouse interest. The Washington, California's first hotel, was built in 1832 and hosted delegates to the state's Constitutional Convention in 1849. “It was here that our first organic law, in its making, was discussed over rich and rare vintages, to be finally put into shape at Colton Hall,” wrote Anna Geil Andresen in 1914. As she noted, once the county seat was transferred to Salinas in the early 1870s and the queenly Hotel Del Monte resort made its debut in 1880, the Washington Hotel “rapidly took on evidences of decay, and degenerated into an ill-kept tenement...”

Among other memorabilia to be auctioned were a corn cob pipe and paint brush said to have belonged to artist William Keith, a number of drawings by Charles Hittel, and a box of twenty-one unsigned, unattributed etching plates. One of the plates was blank, but the rest had all been etched, some on both sides.

When Clint Selleck, successful (and sole) bidder on the plates, took them to Hauk Fine Arts in Pacific Grove, Nancy Hauk recognized three images that matched known lifetime impressions made by August Gay. The three had been exhibited at the Monterey Museum of Art in 1998, and were reproduced in *Small Wonders*, a catalog raisonné published in conjunction with that show. Based on stylistic evidence, Nancy was inclined to believe the remaining plates were the work of the same artist.

Before compiling the catalog raisonné, I had been enlisted to print Gay's etchings: first, the two plates that belong to his estate; then, intriguingly, a set of 22 that came to light in the mid-1990s.

In the 1950s, Gus Gay's widow Marcelle Chaix Gay had given her neighbors, James and Clarice Pruitt, 22 etching plates in a painted metal box. This box (its lid is reproduced on the cover of the catalog raisonné, opposite) had remained tucked away for decades. After a conversation with Nancy Boas, I contacted Clarice Pruitt, who invited me to view the plates



ETCHINGS FOUND
IN OLD
WASHINGTON HOTEL

and then to pull a new set of impressions from them.

I had naively assumed that the Pruitts' metal box had been hand-decorated by the artist himself, but it turned out to have been commercially produced and commonly available. While looking over the Hauks' copy of *Small Wonders*, Clint Selleck identified the metal

box pictured on its cover as a "will box." To house his own recently purchased set of plates, Selleck had even managed to locate a box that bore virtually identical detailing to the one that Marcelle Gay had given the Pruitts.

After Selleck contracted me to take impressions from his plates as well, I attempted to trace their origin. Included with the plates that he purchased from Hambrook's was a yellowed cardboard label inked in block capital letters (above). Despite assurances that my interest was strictly scholarly, the Hambrook's staff refused to relay my inquiries to the anonymous consignor. Consequently, how the plates came to be associated with the Washington Hotel remains a mystery. I came to learn, however, that no such association could have been possible.

The Washington Hotel was demolished in 1913, several years before August Gay settled in Monterey, and long before he is believed to have tried his hand at etching. But the most decisive evidence against this group of plates being produced prior to the hotel's demolition in 1913 comes from one plate that bears an image of Casa Buelna (opposite page). Home to one of Monterey's founding families from at least the early 1800s, this ancient Monterey Mesa adobe had fallen into ruin a century later, when builder J.C. Anthony expanded it into an elegant estate home. Historian Julianne Burton-Carvajal, who has researched Anthony's work extensively, confirms that the etching represents Casa Buelna after Anthony's remodel, begun in 1922 and completed in 1923, a full decade after the Washington Hotel was demolished.

One remaining piece of the puzzle suggests a possible explanation for the cardboard label. Selleck remembered that the plates and associated memorabilia were said to have come to auction from the collection of "a private museum." Anyone accepting the accompanying label at face value might have concluded, wrongly, that this private museum once occupied quarters in the Washington Hotel. However, Monterey did have a private museum within the appropriate time frame.

The Reverend Barkle's Museum was established in 1936 by retired Presbyterian minister Thomas J. Barkle. It was located at 503 Polk Street in 1944 when Paul Rink published his account in *What's Doing Magazine*: "No disciplined array of antiquity this, but rather a delightful conglomeration of

curiosities and relics of bygone days which can stimulate your mind to some pretty tall dreaming." Fremont's violin, Joaquin Miller's necktie, Tarpy's rifle, Robert Louis Stevenson's trunk, and a piece of wood from the *Mayflower* were some of the 3,000 items on view at Barkle's Mondays through Saturdays from 2:30 to 4pm.

Other items from the Hambrook auction, like William Keith's pipe and paint brush, would certainly have fit into the Reverend's collection of curiosities. If the plates that Selleck purchased had in fact once been part of his museum (its closing date has not been determined), we might easily imagine that the Reverend himself penned the hand-lettered label, either to inspire "tall dreaming" in others, or because his own wishful enthusiasm (mis)led him to accept someone else's fabrication. We can only guess how the good Reverend might have responded to the irony that these plates now gain far more importance as the work of August Gay than as satellite artifacts from an historic hotel.



The Problem of Attribution

Unfortunately, neither Gus Gay nor his widow Marcelle left behind any papers from which details of the artist's life and career can be gleaned. Even if it could be shown for certain that the newly discovered plates came from the Reverend Barkle's collection, we would still be left to wonder how almost half of the etching plates now attributed to Gus Gay spun off into such an obscure orbit.

Reclaiming these plates from obscurity requires certain leaps of faith. Only three of them are known beyond any doubt to be Gay's work. Attribution for the remaining plates relies either on their correspondence to known Gay paintings, or on stylistic similarities to plates from the Pruitt collection. Unfortunately, even those similarities preclude certainty, because the plates display an unusually broad range of styles. Finally, it has yet to be confirmed beyond doubt that all of the Pruitt plates were made by August Gay.

These various unknowns notwithstanding, any comprehensive assessment of August Gay's artistic career has to take into account a body of work that may now number as many as 54 examples of printmaking. As part of that effort, this essay undertakes a close examination of stylistic and other peculiarities in the newly discovered plates.

As subjects for his etchings, August Gay gravitated toward maritime and street scenes, rendering the same views with marked differences. We know that he was capable of broad stylistic shifts in his paintings, so it should hardly be surprising that drawing styles diverge radically among both the Pruitt and Selleck plates. The light, almost wispy line in the rendering of Stevenson House in *fig. 1*, for example, shares little in common with the much more solid and carefully controlled line in *fig. 2*. Indeed, the contrast is so dramatic that we might easily attribute these plates to different artists.

Still, characteristic elements in each suggest that Gay drew both. In another Stevenson House image known to be Gay's (*fig. 3*), he used the same hatching to render a shadowed wall surface and sharply defined eye shadow as in *fig. 2*. However, tree branches in *fig. 1* also correspond to the characteristic linear shorthand of *fig. 3*. Assuming that Gay made both of these plates, can we explain the differences as simply two points on a learning curve? There is no way of knowing for certain. Since Gay never dated any of his work, it is impossible to establish which was done first, or how much time separates them. Similarly, we have no way of knowing which variant he valued more highly.

Evidence suggests that he worked in etching for a relatively short period of time, probably less than a decade. This makes understanding his stylistic anomalies more troublesome, because there is little reason to believe he was working through different periods of style. Although we have no trouble reconciling Picasso's Blue and Rose periods, for example, we have difficulty accepting that Gay's mature style might vary so broadly within a contemporaneous body of work.

Yet such variations in an artist's oeuvre are not uncommon, and Picasso's example is pertinent. Although he and Gay were geographically and artistically worlds apart, they were also contemporaries who resolutely cast off narrow constraints of style. The wildly distinct stylistic explorations of Picasso's later figurative abstractions—particularly apparent among his prints—make Gay's seem tame by comparison. But because Picasso is one of art history's most thoroughly documented artists, we accept his stylistic variations unquestioningly. With Gay's life and work, in contrast, there is so little certainty that even small questions cast large shadows. The lack of provenance (a documented, unbroken line of ownership linking these plates back to Gay himself) demands that we approach the plates from the Selleck collection with heightened skepticism.

When these twenty-three previously unknown images surfaced, I knew I would have to revisit the question of attribution. None of them bear an in-plate signature, and only three—identified from lifetime impressions of "Monterey by the Cannery" and "China Town" variants *I* and *II* (*figs. 4-6*)—had been previously documented. In *Small Wonders*, I discuss one plate in the Pruitt Collection that turned out to be the work of C. S. Price, and acknowledge that another may have been made by Selden Gile. The precedent

(Text continues on p. 44)



1. Selleck cat. 10: Stevenson House variant from rear garden.



2. Selleck cat. 2a: Stevenson House variant from rear garden.



3. Small Wonders cat. 30: Stevenson House, south side.



4. *Small Wonders* cat. 15, Monterey [by the Cannery]. Note edges where protective varnish failed to stop the acid from marring the plate when verso was etched.



5. *Small Wonders* cat. 17: China Town variant.



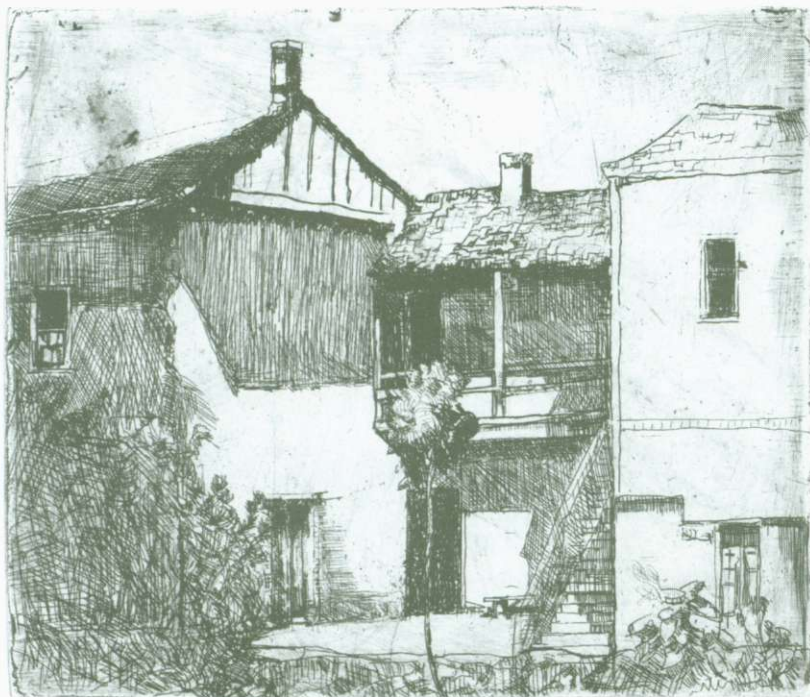
6. Small Wonders cat. 18: China Town variant.



7. Selleck cat. 16: Stevenson House variant from rear garden.



8. Selleck cat. 18: Stevenson House variant from rear garden.



9. Selleck cat. 20: Stevenson House variant from rear garden.

NOTICIAS DE MONTEREY



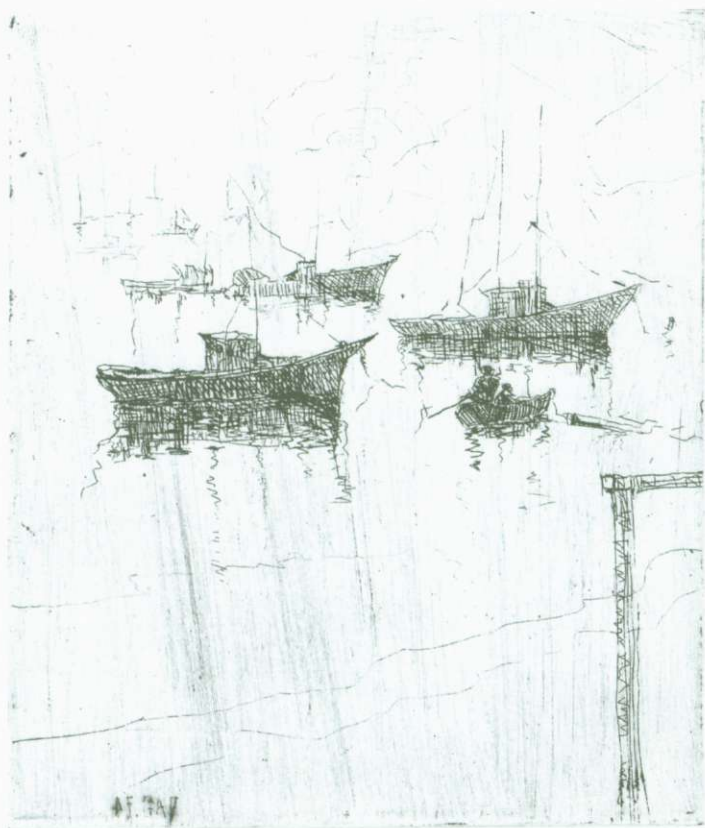
10. Small Wonders cat. 28: Sherman Headquarters Adobe.



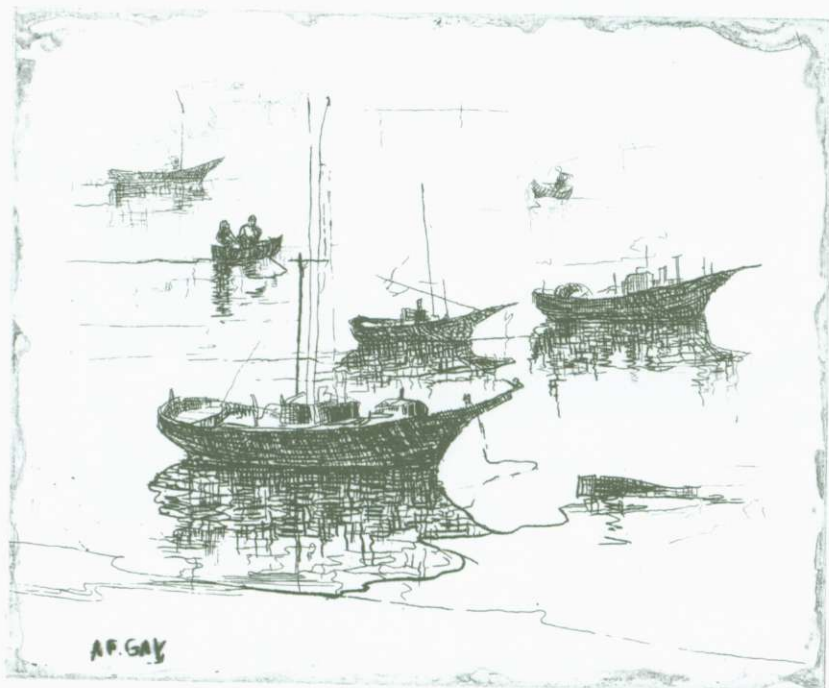
11. Selleck cat. 4: Sherman Headquarters Adobe.



12. Enlargements of full and abbreviated signature.



13. Small Wonders cat. 4: Morning [Pier's End].



14. Small Wonders cat. 6: *Half Ringers.*



15. Small Wonders cat. 16: *China Town variant.*



16. Selleck cat. 8a: Bay Rooftops variant.



17. Selleck cat. 14: Bay Rooftops variant.



18. Small Wonders cat. 13: Bay Rooftops.



19. Small Wonders cat. 14: Area near MacAbee China Town,



20. Small Wonders cat. 25: *Untitled (Casa Buelna)*.



21. Selleck cat. 9: *The restored eastern façade of Casa Buelna after J.C. Anthony's 1923 reconstruction.*



22. Selleck cat. 13: Custom House logo for Monterey Peninsula Rotary Club.



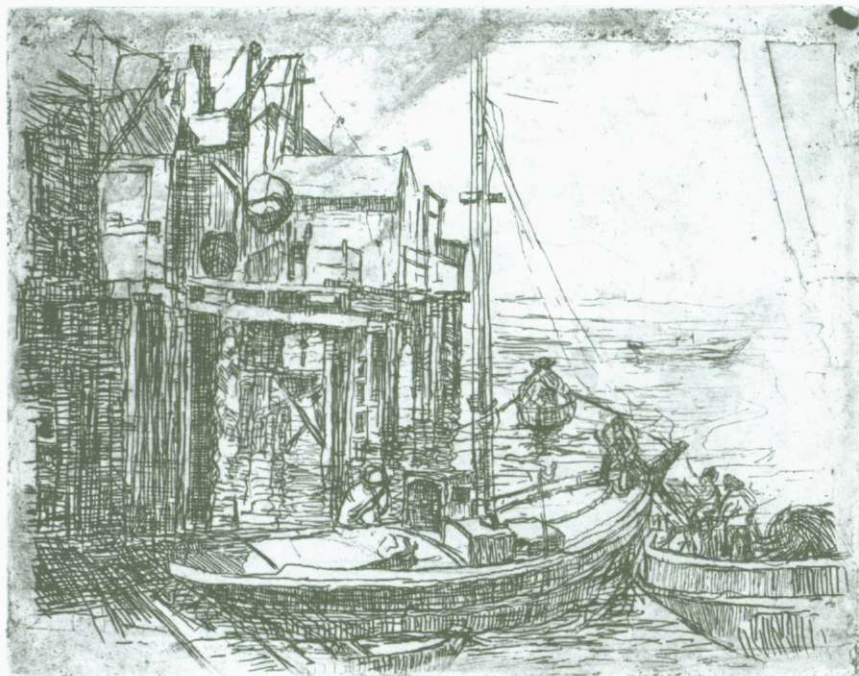
23. Small Wonders cat. 29: Custom House.



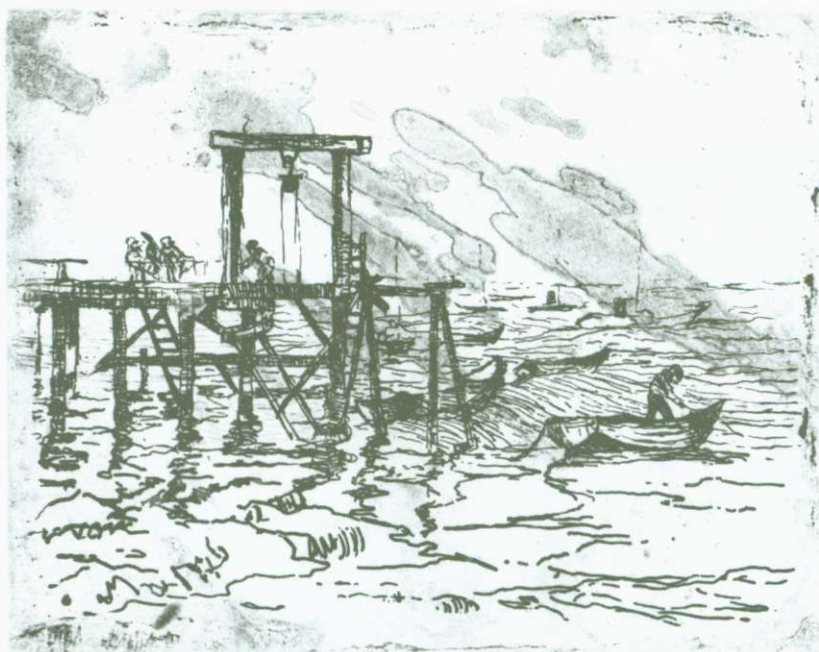
24. Selleck cat. 11: *Five Skiffs* variant (see also fig. 25).



25. *Small Wonders* cat. 2: *Five Skiffs*.



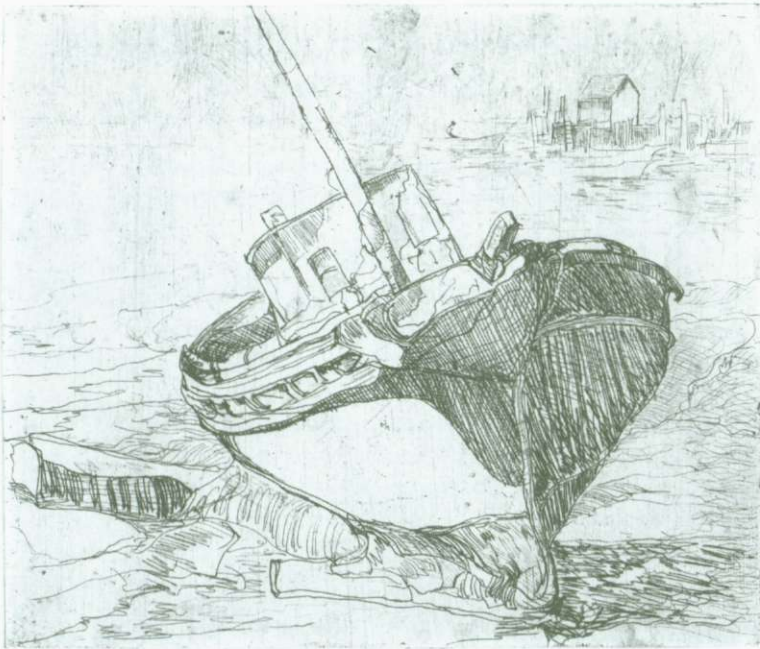
26. Selleck cat. 2b: Monterey Wharf.



27. Selleck cat. 6a: Monterey's Little Pier
(see also Fisherman Wharf, Small Wonders cat. 3, reproduced on page 3).



28. Selleck cat. 15a: Fishermen off-loading catch at Booth Cannery, Monterey Wharf.



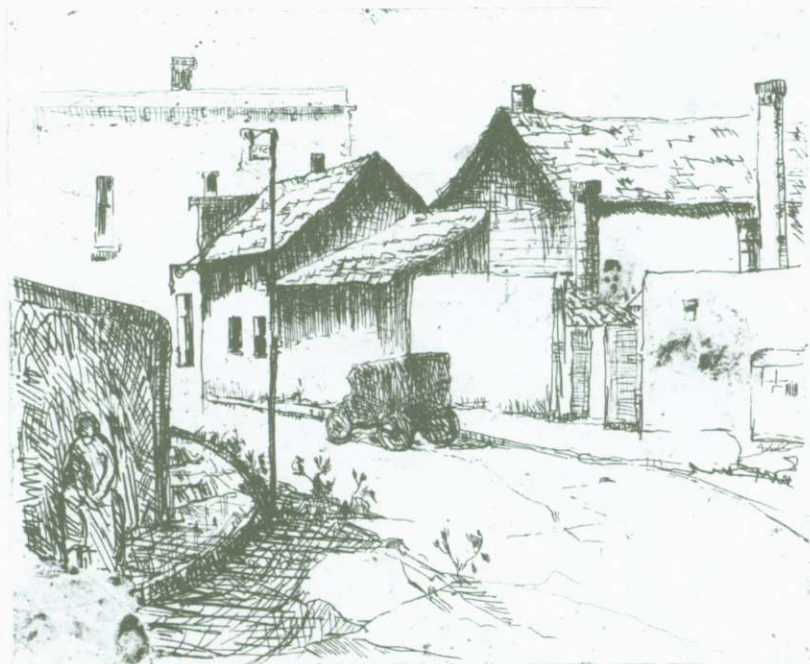
29. Selleck cat. 12: Boat pulled from the water for repair at the Monterey Boat Works (compare to painting reproduced on page 48).



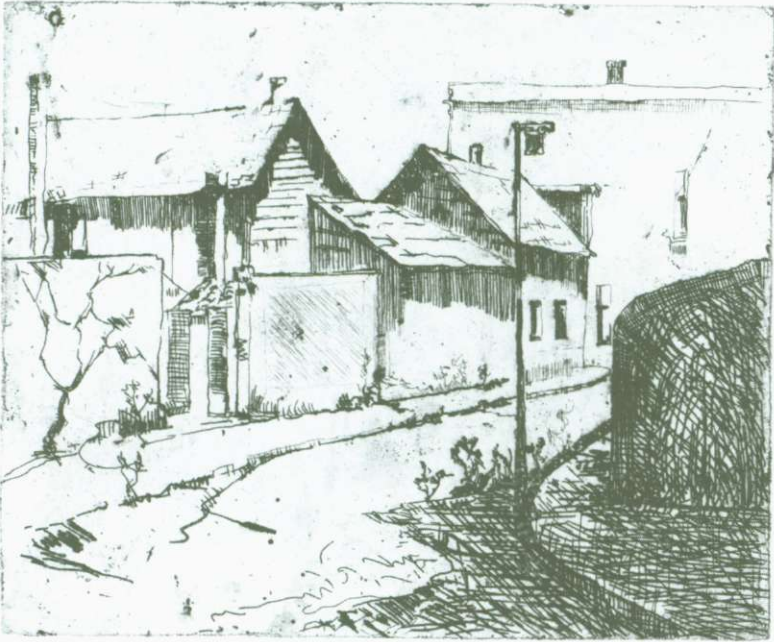
30. Selleck cat. A3: Seaside oak, without human figures.



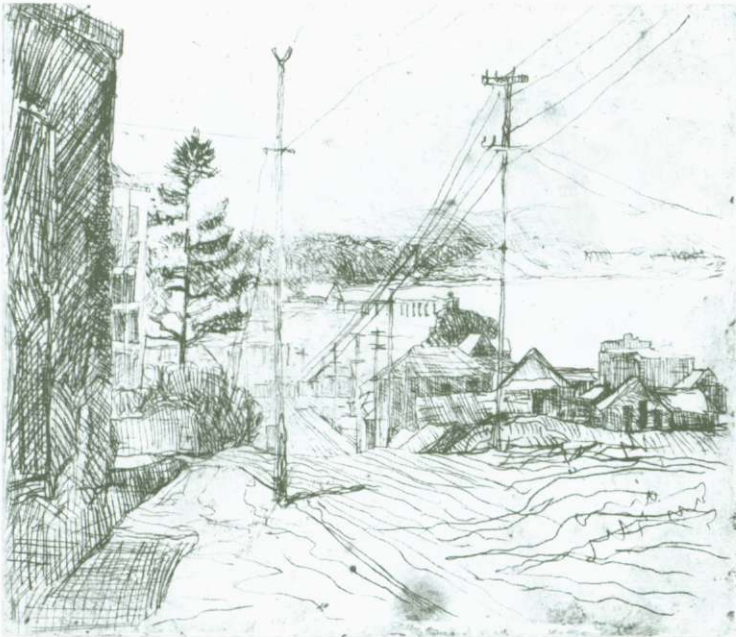
31. Selleck cat. 19: Community Oak tree, Seaside, near Roberts Lake, with figures.



32. Selleck cat. 8b: Corner of Munras and Alvarado, in mirror-reverse.



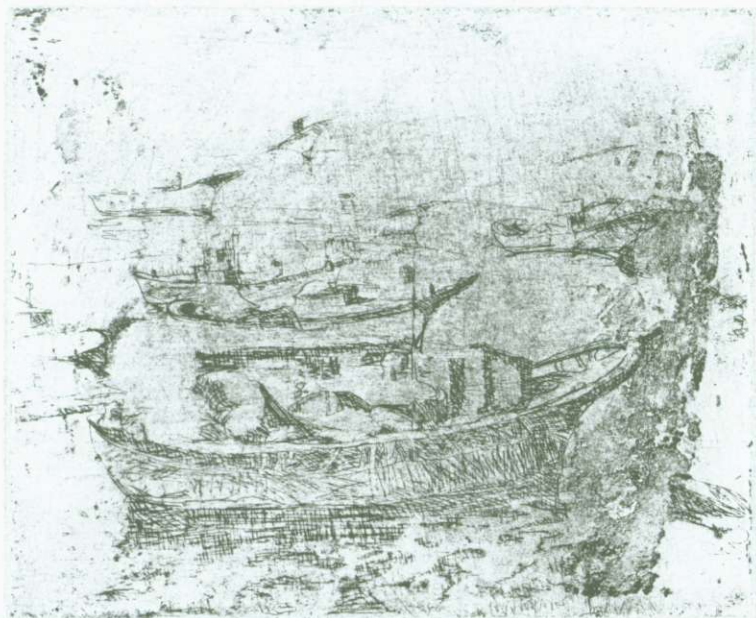
33. Selleck cat. 17: Corner of Munras and Alvarado Streets, right-reading; identified from design detail of background building, former home of Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, and closed court behind Spence portion of Cooper Molera adobe.



34. Selleck cat. 1: Not Monterey; possibly Oakland, or Richmond, or artistic license.



35. Selleck cat. 5: Possibly a reversed image of Hotel Del Monte Bathing Pavilion as viewed from the Monterey train station.



36. Cutwater-style fishing vessels. This plate shows evidence of "foul bite" marring its surface along the right edge after Gay etched its verso image. Heavy tone over most of the surface demonstrates his attempt at sanding the etched lines down before finally deciding to abandon the effort.

of another artist's work mixed in with the group of plates given away by Gay's widow underscores the need to acknowledge the possibility that Gay's artist friends may also have contributed plates to the Selleck collection.

Among the five new Stevenson House images (*figs. 1, 2, 7-9*), for example, the crosshatched ground surface and left foreground wall in *fig. 7* seem uncharacteristically brisk. The fully modeled volumes describing a central foreground tree canopy in *fig. 9* are similarly atypical. Both images may still be Gay's work, but they raise red flags. On the other hand, the imagery in *figs. 1 and 2*, though differing vastly in their degrees of linear precision and control, share stylistic qualities that I would confidently attribute to Gay. And while the more rugged and tonally rich line of Gay's Sherman Adobe in *fig. 10* could scarcely be further removed from the linear refinement and tonal brightness of the same building in *fig. 11*, both could easily fall within Gay's known range of style.

If questions regarding authorship complicate our appreciation of Gay's breadth of stylistic expression in the previously discussed Stevenson House images, no such questions arise in his three stylistically distinct Chinatown image (*figs. 5, 6, 15*), each of which can be authenticated through pencil-signed lifetime impressions.

Unhindered by Style

"Stylessness" is a familiar issue to contemporary artists, but one that is generally addressed more self-consciously through image repetition within a single work. Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein, for example, explored this idea in a memorable four-panel canvas of a realistically rendered bull dissolving into progressively more abstract iterations. Neo-Expressionist Pat Steir carried out a more exhaustive exercise in grid paintings from her *Bruegel Series (A Vanitas of Styles)* by drawing a grid over poster reproductions of a Bruegel floral still life, then painting over each section in styles ranging from Renaissance masters to abstract expressionists. Steir took that idea in another direction when she wildly varied her signature on each impression of two etching suites, *Drawing Lesson I & II* (Crown Point Press, 1979). She was certainly commenting on the notion of signature as an instrument of authentication, but I think she may also have been using the graphology of her signature to register differing emotional responses to each image.

Gay's drypoint signatures also vary markedly among the few plates he did sign, but for more practical reasons. His "August F. Gay" longhand drypoint signatures would have been much more difficult to execute in reverse, encouraging him to settle on the more manageable block letters of a shorter "A.F. GAY" signature (see *fig. 12*). Although August Gay was anything but self-conscious in his stylistic or signature variations, I am inclined to believe that he, like Steir, viewed style more as a means to visibly shift mood than as a measure of virtuosity. If he indeed accepted such variations in his own

drawing style as equally compelling, his work demonstrates a distinctly contemporary sensibility.

“My Monterey:” The Struggling Artist as Lone Seafarer

Although Gay resided at the Stevenson House for many years, he cannot claim it, or any of the other widely recognized historic buildings of Monterey, as exclusively his own subject. But the collection of anonymous, unexceptional structures in **figs. 16-19** points to the idiosyncrasy of an individual observer who recognized something visually compelling in them. Based on their proximity to warehouses visible in **fig. 19**, Kent Seavy places these buildings near the post-1906 Chinatown at MacAbee Beach, below today's Cannery Row. **Fig. 19** also defines in especially stark contrast what appear to be mounds of sand piled up behind foreground drift fencing, and this singular feature may provide an important clue for future identification of the site. Despite differing linear and tonal approaches in each of these images, an overriding interest in the geometric interplay of rooftop planes unites all four. This same interest in abstracting geometry from architectural and landscape description appears in a number of Gay's paintings, asserting itself as an underlying subject in much of his art.

Gay was apparently fascinated by architecture, a frequent subject in both paintings and etchings. In the last decade of his life, he embraced the opportunity to design and build his own home and detached studio in Carmel Woods. In her book on the Monterey Mesa, Burton-Carvajal mentions a tea party hosted by Mesa builder J. C. Anthony and his wife Edna at Stevenson House in the early 1920s, with a number of prominent artists in attendance and Gay and Price opening their studio to all.

Gay devoted two plates to Casa Buelna, reconstructed as part of J.C. Anthony's Monterey Mesa revival for artist Marcy Woods and his wife. Archival photos and drawings of Casa Buelna as restored by Anthony feature the same open-stake fencing that Gay draws in the foreground of **figs. 20 and 21**. Burton-Carvajal agrees that **fig. 21** appears to be the restored eastern façade of Casa Buelna after Anthony's 1923 expansion, in “mirror reverse.” This would explain the Spanish Revival-style chimney cap that architectural historian Kent Seavey had cited in *Small Wonders* to rule out the sketchy **fig. 20** version as being an historic adobe.

In etching, image reversal is an unavoidable artifact of process. Since the plate impresses directly onto the printing sheet, its image on paper necessarily appears in reverse. Both of Gay's Casa Buelna images are done in mirror-reverse. People familiar with the structure recognize it unequivocally once they hold the print up to a mirror.

If we assume that Gay rendered the Custom House image in his Monterey Rotary Club logo (**fig. 22**) with the expectation of winning a commission, he might understandably have taken pains to reverse the plate drawing so that it would print right-reading. He may even have used a printed

impression of the more meticulously rendered Custom House image drawn from direct observation in *fig. 23* as his model, so that its reversed image would appear right-reading in the logo design.

One remaining detail in Gay's Rotary Club logo design bears mention. The lone skiff with its doll-like rower off in the upper left is the virtual twin of another rower in the upper right of *fig. 6*. Here the rower is part of a fantasy passage depicting maritime life on Monterey Bay. Gay drew this same grouping of Monterey Chinatown shacks in *figs. 5 and 15* with background trees and a telephone pole in both, but perhaps decided that the shacks' actual landscape features failed to capture this scene's spiritual center. These lowly structures, along with the maritime life they evoke, stand as Gay's private emblem of Monterey. He even inscribed one particular impression of *fig. 5*, "China Town: My Monterey."

Two virtually identical compositions of a lone skiff amid background rigged vessels in *figs. 24 and 25* focus our attention on the subtle but crucial differences between them. In *fig. 24* the central mid-ground skiff appears closer to shore, and stands apart from less densely hatched background vessels. The whorl from an oar-stroke seems more proportionate to the skiff, and the predominance of vertical arabesque reflections on the mid-ground water's surface suggests a glassy calm. All of these details lend *fig. 24* a mood of stillness and greater intimacy where Gay's rower, even though only sketched loosely and from afar, stands out more clearly as the human focus of the scene rather than simply another background detail.

Another lone rower appears in *fig. 26*, where deeply receding wharf pilings not only reinforce the illusion of three-dimensionality, but also form one side of a rough triangle where they meet the water, merging with oar and rower at its apex. Foreground skiffs nudge the eye away from the wharf's linear congestion toward this lone rower and a calm sea open to the horizon.

Gay must also have been fascinated by the casual mastery of a lone fisherman in *fig. 27*, standing in the foreground skiff after having just ridden out a small swell that now lifts the vessels behind him. Facing away from shore, the man's posture suggests immersion in an activity that isolates him from other figures engaged in their own separate activity on the pier. It is unlikely that the parallels between struggling artist and lone seafarer escaped August Gay.

More typically, however, people depicted in Gay's work serve only as necessary props. *Fig. 28* shows fishermen off-loading catch by bucket from a "lighter," a floating box designed to be filled with catch from the fleet. This method was succeeded by more technologically advanced floating boxes, known as "fish hoppers," with a suction hose that conveyed the catch directly to the cannery. The details of such historical fishing techniques may capture our interest, but Gay clearly pays greater attention to how the rhythm of diagonal pier bracing resonates with larger triangles formed by the crane suspended above. This triangular motif, along with the composition's shallower depth of field, tends to flatten space. A concentration of central

rounded elements, barely distinguishable as humans, provides additional focus that keeps the eye firmly anchored in a pervasive mid-ground, further reinforced by tonally uniform crosshatching throughout the image. Although figuration and realistic description are still important in this composition, an emerging abstraction betrays Gay's modernist inclinations.

A tall shed in the upper left of *fig. 28* reappears as background detail behind the beached boat of *fig. 29*. Nancy Boas, Adjunct Curator of American painting at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, recognized this particular boat, probably pulled from the water for repair at the Monterey Boat Works, as the subject of Gay's "Fishing Boat Aground," a 1930 oil on board painting (reproduced on page 48). In the etching, Gay revels in a linear freedom that melds description with abstraction, especially in the almost luminous passage of deeply etched lines converging at the boat's prow.

Typical and Atypical

As already indicated, Gay favored maritime and architectural subjects. Although he would not typically feature a tree as his primary subject, he probably appreciated the Community Oak near Robert's Lake in Seaside more as a local landmark than as an element of nature. The two plates he devotes to it (*figs. 30 and 31*) show the oak from differing perspectives, with the former plate etched more deeply than the latter. More importantly, *fig. 31* includes human and animal figures.

Gay occasionally painted individual portraits and group scenes, but he preferred unpopulated or at least distantly populated urban and maritime scenes, where the human presence was invariably non-specific. Would Gay have indulged in such an atypical pastorate simply to record an aspect of rural



The chimney-like "tall shed" etched by August Gay appears in this photograph of Booth's Cannery, located near Fishermen's Wharf. Courtesy of Pat Hathaway, California Views.

life in Monterey? More likely, he recognized that *fig. 31* required some human reference to establish the scale of this ancient tree. Without that reference, *fig. 30* might just as easily portray a scrub oak as one that dwarfs its human visitors.

Human presence also figures in a street scene at the corner of Alvarado and Munras Streets (*fig. 32*). Kent Seavey identified this location from the lightly etched background detail of Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado's (Victorianized) former residence, and from a closed court located behind the Cooper Molera adobe in the print's right foreground. A standing female figure, possibly with her arm around a child closely held to her side, is almost hidden in line work that describes the shadowed surface of an adobe wall. (Gay similarly invests figures in the line work of "Oliver [*sic.*, Olivier] Street," *fig. 12*).

More unusual than the appearance of people, however, is an automobile parked dead center in the composition. Despite its almost cartoonish contours, Gay's elegantly crosshatched tonalities demonstrate the same confident draftsmanship we see in the foreground fishing boat of "Morning" (*fig. 13*), one of his most accomplished etchings. We would expect to see such facility in an artist's oft-repeated imagery, yet cars do not appear in any of Gay's other etchings.

In fact, both figure and car are absent in the subsequent version of this same scene, *fig. 33*. How can we deduce that *fig. 32* is an earlier image? *Fig. 33* shows a printed impression of this scene just as the eye would have seen it; had Gay drawn it directly, his plate drawing would have reversed when printed. We can surmise that he used the reverse impression directly drawn in *fig. 32* as a reference when he redrew his *fig. 33* plate.



August Gay, "Fishing Boat Aground," oil on board, 1930. Estate of the artist.

Beyond Monterey

Since August Gay lived in Monterey during the years he was actively etching, most of his plates depict local imagery. But he also made frequent visits to family and friends scattered throughout the San Francisco Bay area, recording scenes from these excursions in a number of etchings. Nancy Hauk noticed that a building in the left mid-ground of *fig. 34* appears to have five stories of windows. Even if these windows were only individual panes of a multi-paned window, the building would still be unusually large for Monterey. Since the late State Historian Edna Kimbro, among others, stated categorically that the image was not Monterey, Gay probably brought this scene back from one of his excursions.

Whatever location it describes, the plate is clearly Gay's work: his handling of conifer foliage is typical (see *fig. 10*), and although crosshatched passages throughout the composition differ distinctly from one another, they all correspond to his known line work. Gay indulges in one of his more typical mannerisms in the lower right corner, where lines describing street and roadside contours suddenly break into jagged scribbling.

This same mannerism appears in the foreground of *fig. 35*, which Kent Seavey speculates may be a reversed image of the Hotel Del Monte Bathing Pavilion, as viewed from the train station. Gay's hand is additionally evident in the swirling atmospheric line work describing the sky here and in *fig. 18*. Even though his naïvely drawn, two-dimensional street-front buildings share little in common with the more convincingly rendered architecture of *fig. 34*, I would confidently attribute this work to Gay.

Visual contradictions such as those in *fig. 35* between the roof line of a shack at the extreme right and a set of four windows below it also appear in incongruities of scale among mid-ground fishing boats and a skiff in *fig. 14*. Certainly, Gay would have placed greater value on the abstract cohesiveness of his composition than on minor imperfections in descriptive accuracy, but such flawed draftsmanship may also reveal that he struggled with drawing.

What are we to make of the evidence of that struggle in a number of the prints—evidence seen not only in those few instances where visual inconsistencies were allowed to stand, but also in several plates where Gay scraped, burnished, and redrew significant passages? Why would anyone who hadn't thoroughly mastered their own draftsmanship demons in pencil and ink even attempt a medium like intaglio, where each mistake requires laborious effort to correct? (*fig. 36*)

We know from Gay's contemporaries and from the evidence of his paintings that he was universally admired as a colorist and for his intuitive grasp of composition—strengths that he could continue to build upon in painting. Perhaps, in order to develop his art, he sought a medium where he would have to rely exclusively on line to sharpen draftsmanship skills that he found elusive. What better teacher than a medium where the stylus must

overcome an often unpredictable resistance from the metal's grain, a medium where every false move is amplified by the acid, and every correction leaves its own indelible mark?

What August Gay may not have appreciated was how bold and contemporary such an experimental approach to etching was then—as it indeed continues to be even today. In the end, we can only guess at what August Gay found so fascinating about etching, but we can appreciate his successes even more knowing that they did not always come easily. Like his paintings, the etchings confirm that he was not so much interested in producing a predictably masterful product as he was in unselfconsciously pursuing the often unpredictable path of each individual work to its own visual truth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Kelso, a professional printer since 1972, founded his own fine art press in 1980. Clients of “made in California Intaglio Editions” comprise a veritable “who’s who” of contemporary printmakers. David’s interest in the etchings of August Gay dates from 1993, when he was asked to pull posthumous impressions from two etching plates in the artist’s estate, for which no matching lifetime impressions had ever been located. Separate caches of plates believed to have been etched by August Gay came unexpectedly to light in 1994 and 2000. In the process of scrutinizing, printing, and researching these plates, David has significantly expanded existing knowledge about Gay’s artistic methods and concerns.

Sources by Date

Anna Geil Andresen, *The Grizzly Bear*, September, 1914

“Artist quits Bay exhibits,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oakland edition, March 8, 1927.

Paul Rink, “Points of Interest. . . Rev. Barkle’s Museum,” *What’s Doing Magazine*, 2:4, October, 1944, p 4. (Local history sleuths Connie Pearlstein and Gretchen Leffler shared this article with Steve Hauk, who shared it with me.)

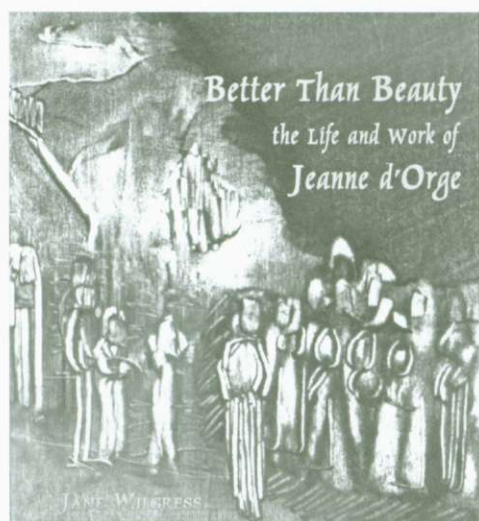
“Wonderful Colors!” *The Paintings of August François Gay*. Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art, 1993. Essay by Nancy Boas.

Small Wonders: The Etchings of August François Gay. Monterey Museum of Art, 1997. Essay and Catalog Raisonné by David Kelso.

Selleck Collection Catalog Raisonné Categories:

- (ag) architectural groupings
 - (cd) commercial design (new category)
 - (ha) historic architecture
 - (ms) maritime scenes
 - (nl) natural landmarks (new category)

 - (ag) A1 Not Monterey; may be Oakland, Richmond, or artistic license.
 - (ha) A2a Stevenson House variant, perspective from rear garden.
 - (ms) A2b Monterey Wharf.
 - (nl) A3 Community Oak tree in Seaside near Robert's Lake.
 - (ha) A4 Sherman Headquarters Adobe.
 - (ag) A5 May be a reversed image of Hotel Del Monte Bath House as viewed from train station.
 - (ms) A6a Monterey's Little Pier (see also *Fisherman Wharf SW cat. 3*).
 - (ag) A6b See My Monterey, also China Town var. II (*SW cat. 18*).
 - (ag) A7a See Old China Town, also China Town variant I (*SW cat. 17*).
 - (ms) A7b See Monterey by the Cannery (*SW cat. 15*).
 - (ag) A8a Area near the MacAbee Beach China Town, identified from adjacent warehouses of Off Cannery Row (*SW cat. 14*).
 - (ag) A8b Corner of Munras at Alvarado Streets, identified from design detail of background building (currently with plaque reading "Home of Juan Bautista Alvarado") and closed court behind Spence portion of Cooper Molera Adobe.
 - (ha) A9 Casa Buelna. Identification from archival photos and drawings of Casa Buelna as reconfigured by J. C. Anthony in 1922-23.
 - (ha) A10 Stevenson House var., perspective from rear garden.
 - (ms) A11 Five Skiffs (*SW cat. 2*).
 - (ms) A12 Boat beached for repair, perhaps at the Monterey Boat Works. Nancy Boas noted that the etched image is identical to "Fishing Boat Aground" (reproduced on page 48).
 - (cd) A13 Custom House logo for Monterey Peninsula Rotary Club.
 - (ag) A14 Area near the MacAbee Beach China Town, identified from adjacent warehouses of Off Cannery Row (*SW cat. 14*).
 - (ms) A15a Fishermen offloading catch at Booth Cannery, near Monterey wharf.
 - (ms) A15b Cutwater-style fishing vessels.
 - (ha) A16 Stevenson House variant, perspective from rear garden.
 - (ag) A17 Corner of Munras and Alvarado Streets.
 - (ha) A18 Stevenson House variant, perspective from rear garden.
 - (nl) A19 Community Oak tree in Seaside near Robert's Lake.
 - (ha) A20 Stevenson House variant, perspective from rear garden.
- Plate A21 is unetched.



Jane Wilgress, *Better than Beauty: The Life and Work of Jeanne d'Orge*. Pacific Grove: Park Place Publications, 112 pages.

The elegant, at-times reverential prose of Jane Wilgress's *Better than Beauty: The Life and Work of Jeanne d'Orge* makes it clear that the author knew her subject well and respected her deeply. If the text sometimes seems like the warm remembrances of a close friend, that is because the book is indeed written in this spirit. To the author's credit, few visual artists and poets—and Jeanne d'Orge excelled at both these art forms—have had their lives recounted with such genuine intimacy, honesty and charm.

Born Lena Yates in England in 1879, Jeanne d'Orge lived a life worthy of study, not only for her roles as poet and painter, but as a mother, wife to two very different individuals, provocateur, and all-around enigma. The author traces this life from start to finish, beginning with her youth in England, her move to the United States in 1906 (after marrying American professor Dr. Alfred Burton), and her many years spent in and near Carmel, California, where she remarried the inventor Carl Cherry and resided until her death. More than the poetry and handsomely reproduced visual art, it is the colorful personage of Jeanne d'Orge herself that is the true subject of the book.

Jeanne d'Orge's poetry, quoted throughout the text, is both profoundly beautiful and at times shockingly raw. The highly respected poet William Carlos Williams, a personal friend, called her writing "a unique example of poetry from a female viewpoint . . . of outstanding and disarming technical skill." So honest are her musings about love and physical passion—recurrent themes throughout her work—that it is sometimes difficult to believe that she dared to write so frankly so early in the 20th century. Although her poems

about love and sex can be rapturous, many more remain earthbound, linked to the details of her daily experiences and relationships.

In marked contrast to the subject matter of these poems is the ethereality found in the artist's paintings. Little is revealed about these paintings until chapter three, perhaps in part because they are impossible to categorize given their acknowledged dichotomies: conscious and unconscious, earthy and visionary, ugly and beautiful. Some of Jeanne d'Orge's paintings are hauntingly lovely in their reductive, Asian-inspired sensibility. Others teem convincingly with the life of the city. Still others, unsuccessful as paintings, are experiments in meditation, meant only for the artist herself.

The paintings appear subtractive rather than additive—more like sculpture than two-dimensional work. In making them, the artist started with a ground and then removed pigment to reveal the inherent image, freeing the painting from the medium rather than composing the painting through it. The result is something that looks much like a monoprint, with nebulous edges that appear to have been composed on a plate and then printed. Her nontraditional materials, particularly in paintings rendered on aluminum, play a major role in the overall effect. By using aluminum panels, Jeanne d'Orge anticipated many contemporary artists who have since turned to this lustrous surface to inform their paintings with a luminosity impossible to achieve on coarser canvas.

For Jeanne d'Orge, such industrial materials were personally relevant, linked to and provided by her second husband, Carl Cherry, inventor of the Cherry Blind River (patented in 1939 and indispensable during World War II and after). The invention secured a sound financial future for the couple, enabling Jeanne to produce art and poetry at her leisure without needing to be concerned about exhibition and sales. The income not only allowed her the freedom to refuse the sale of her paintings—"ecstasies" as she called them—but enabled these paintings to be preserved and left "to the world" through her foundation, now the Carl Cherry Center for the Arts in Carmel.

In the end, one comes away from this book with a greater understanding of Jeanne d'Orge's personality, her enigmatic nature notwithstanding, than of her accomplishments in verse or paint. Perhaps this is as it should be, since the author is the first to concede that Jeanne d'Orge may never hold a preeminent place in the art world. "In the immense world of art [the paintings] are, in my estimation, minor," Wilgress states, "though they have major psychological implications."

Even though Jeanne d'Orge worked outside the mainstream and now holds only a small place in art history, her career and life deserve the consideration and attention that Jane Wilgress has provided. I, for one, would like to have been able to make the acquaintance of such a remarkable creative force and, failing this possibility, am grateful for the opportunity to discover the art and poetry that she left behind.

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Noticias de Monterey Editor

c/o Kimberly Vasallo

Monterey History and Art Association

5 Custom House Plaza

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kimberly@montereyhistory.org (831) 372-2608 x13

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August Gay, "Stevenson House," oil on board, 1929. After extensive renovations, Stevenson House, where August Gay lived and painted for over twenty years, reopened to the public in August of 2005 with new displays acknowledging the residence of many important artists. Private collection; image courtesy of California Parks and Recreation website.



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