

The California Vision of Joshua Meador 1911 - 1965





"Glacier" 24 x 34 # 1001

Front cover: "Beach at Morro" 18 x 24 # 621 Meador Family Collection
Back cover: "Forest Primeval" 22 x 30 # 122 Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery

The California Vision of Joshua Meador

1911 - 1965

November 24 - 26, 2006

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"Bodega Pier" 20 x 27 # 277 Meador Family Collection

INTRODUCTION

You have enjoyed Joshua Meador's work before. Josh was one of the core group of artists who worked for Walt Disney. An internet search of his name would turn up as many or more references to this filmography as for his works of fine art. Beginning in 1936, he participated in a long list of Disney productions, and worked with other notable Disney artists. He was most proud of the water effects in *Cinderella* (1950), and *Bambi* (1942), and the fire and bubbling-mud scenes in the "Rite of Spring" section of *Fantasia* (1940). He also was part of a team that won a special effects Oscar for *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1954). Josh's wife Libby Meador reports that Josh loved working for Disney. Josh was also "loaned" to MGM for *Forbidden Planet* (1956), where he was responsible for the firey monster and the electrical effects. Other Disney Studio credits include *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941), *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941), *Song of the South* (1946), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (1959), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and *The Absent Minded Professor* (1961).

But for Josh, Disney was his job, whereas painting was his passion. Today he is known primarily for his striking landscapes and seascapes, instantly recognizable as the works of Joshua Meador. When the work week at Disney Studio was done, weekends were often spent with the family station wagon pulling a teardrop trailer, and off the family would go. His unusual arrangements with Disney Studio gave him substantial time to pursue his painting even while actively participating in Studio projects.

Josh was a plein air painter. As the photographs show, he painted in the great out-of-doors, capturing California's great scenery as it was.

Joshua Meador was born in Greenwood, Mississippi in 1911. Josh and Libby were high school sweethearts in Columbus, Mississippi. Both were quite bright. Josh received a nomination to attend the Naval Academy at Annapolis, but turned it down. He wanted to follow his passion and paint. After visiting New York and Pittsburg trying to find the right art school for him, he arrived at the Chicago Art Institute in 1931. He studied illustration, painting, portraits, and etching. After graduation and a wedding in 1935, Josh and Libby came to California where Josh went to work for Walt Disney. Philip was born in 1939. Josh continued working for Disney until 1960, but still had an agreement thereafter with Disney Studio that Josh would return for special projects.

Josh and Libby lived in La Crescenta, California, and were good friends of other painters, among them Conrad and Mary Buff, and Stephen Seymour Thomas, who sent some commission work his way. After they left La Crescenta, they moved to Carmel where the family maintained a studio and gallery. Then they found property at Caspar, which is between Mendocino and Ft. Bragg on the Northern California Coast. They built a magnificent house overlooking the ocean. Many of Josh's paintings depict Mendocino and Sonoma Counties, including the Russian River and Bodega Bay areas. Joshua Meador died at age 54 in 1965 of a massive heart attack.

Sources: Conversations with Libby, Philip and Hilder Meador; AskArt; Edan Milton Hughes, *Artists in California 1786-1940*, 3d ed. www.laughingplace.com/News-ID10019010.asp

DANIEL A. ROHLFING



RECOLLECTIONS FROM THE ARTIST'S SON

I wasn't born until 1939. Josh had been working at the Disney Studio for 4 years by then. He and Walt worked out a deal in 1956 where he was on-call to the Studio so that he could have a couple of months a year to devote to his painting. He then more or less retired from the Studio in 1960 while still leaving the door open for any "special projects" that Walt might dream up. I don't believe that he did any other work for Walt following 1960. However, Walt offered him several projects, none of which were enticing enough to bring him out of retirement. Nevertheless Josh remained technically under contract with Disney Studio for the remainder of his life.

He also had several commissions: The paintings of Smoke Tree Ranch for Walt Disney; a painting of Vandenberg Air Force Base when the Space Race first started (and which still hangs at the base); a painting for LBJ when he was President; and just prior to his death he was commissioned to document and paint aboard the aircraft carrier that picked up the Apollo capsule that landed in the Pacific.



Josh's Philosophy

At El Capitan State Park a boy of ten or so watched the entire process of Josh's from setting up the easel, laying out the colors on the palette, putting down the base and then painting - probably a 2 to 3 hour process during which this boy sat quietly and watched. Some 7 or 8 years later a tall young man knocked on our door in La Crescenta. Having seen Josh paint at El Capitan and then in the Disney short *Four Artists Paint a Tree*, he had somehow tracked us down to our home. He wanted and received advice regarding art and painting - mainly to do with drawing and art classes, art schools and sketching. After a long visit he left and Josh mused, "Well you never know. I believe that we are put here to be an influence and that is how we should live our lives."

Josh was giving a demonstration of his painting techniques to a large crowd at a library in Southern California. He had put a base coat on the canvas and was waiting for it to dry, so he was answering questions and one lady asked, "How do you know where to put the paint?" Josh related the story of a recent surgery that my mother had gone through and then asked the woman, "How did the doctor know where to cut?" Answering his own question he told her, "Lots of knowledge and then practice, practice and more practice."

A doctor who purchased several of Josh's paintings once said of him, "There's never a vestige of psychosis in any of his works."

Art versus a Naval Career

There were no art classes or artists in his hometown, so Josh had actually sent away for one of those "matchbook" correspondence courses, and that was his initial exposure to drawing and painting.

His great aunt, Myra Thompson, had studied in Paris in the 1890's. She became a noted portraitist in Tennessee and was a close friend of George DeForest Brush. She gave Josh two wonderful gifts during his visit to her home: (1) she advised him to do as she had done - to follow his heart and do with his life what would give him the greatest amount of fulfillment; and (2) she gave him his first palette knife.

On the other hand he was a perfect nominee for the naval academy.

He was athletic - a track and field star in the 100 yard dash and the 110 yard high hurdles, holding the Mississippi high school records in both. He was the star guard on the basketball team. He was very intelligent and did quite well in both mathematics and physics.

His father, an influential man in the community, was one of the five founders of a very successful railroad in Mississippi. He believed that Josh's athletic and scholarship abilities would make him an ideal officer in the Navy, so he went to the trouble of writing the Senators and Congressmen of Mississippi and obtained an appointment to Annapolis for Josh.

Then one day Josh and his high school sweetheart, my mother, went to Josh's house and sat on the front porch swing while Josh informed his father that he had decided to become an artist rather than a naval officer. After some brief disappointment Josh's father supported his decision and he and Josh traveled North to look at various art schools, using my grandfather's railroad passes and railroad connections to hotels.

Commercial Art Versus Fine Art

Josh first started with commercial art in Chicago, while he was in school at the Chicago Art Institute. He first drew up the sales and price placards for a department store. From there he and his friends did several murals for the Post Office, various buildings, etc., around Chicago. Josh finally made enough money for the long trip westward to Los Angeles, where he went to work for Walt Disney Studios. Initially he was paid \$25.00 a week, but he quickly moved to the high rank of Director of Animated Effects.

Josh really enjoyed working for the Walt Disney Studio. Josh and Walt were very close and appreciated each other's talents very much, but only at the Studio - very rarely did they meet away from the Studio. Josh always kept his painting as a separate endeavor from the tight work at the Studio. It was when he was away from the Studio that he was able to free up his hand to paint. In the early 1950's he began to work under a unique (at that time) "on-call-contract." When the Studio work slowed he would take a month to four months off so that he could paint. This enabled him to study and for his painting to evolve into the flowing work that he wanted it to be.

While it is true that his artistic talents were used by Walt to further Walt's ideas and creative structures, nevertheless Josh painted in a fine art sense because he could and wanted to. He was able to separate the two disciplines by saying to himself that one is working to live and the other was living to paint.

Adventures in the Pursuit of Plein Air Painting

Our recollections of these painting trips are that they were vacation trips, mostly during the summer or school breaks. My mother and I would do the camping and household chores. We would go hiking,



"Red Barn" 8 x 10 unnumbered Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery

fishing, and tide pooling - while Josh would paint nearby. Occasionally we all piled into the car and would go to a harbor where he would paint while we shopped, crabbed, or just walked around.

Once while painting in the Newhall, California, area, his back was to a fence and he was deep into concentration on his painting when he suddenly felt a breath on his neck. He turned around and three horses were standing a couple of feet away watching him intently while he was painting. Needless to say, they offered no criticism.

At Pebble Beach while intensely concentrating on his painting of a seascape, a man silently walked up behind him and loudly exclaimed, "Gosh, you are an artist!" Scared the heck out of Josh.

He soon got a dog that would curl up under his easel, always facing through his feet. The dog would warn Josh if someone was coming. This relationship continued for several years. But then one day near Point Lobos south of Carmel the dog was under the easel and started to whine. Josh turned around to be challenged by a buck deer in full rut. He just stood there for several minutes until the deer realized that Josh wasn't a threat and the buck walked slowly into the forest.

In Biloxi, Mississippi, an old man was sitting on his porch, rocking back and forth in his rocking chair. Josh had set up across the street to paint the oak trees with their tendrils of Spanish moss. Josh applied a thin wash of oil paint and lighter fluid and then stood back to allow it to dry. The old man got up from his rocker, walked across the street and silently looked, then went back across the street to his rocker. Finally, Josh had completed the painting and was cleaning his palette when the old man returned, studied the painting and then said, "Nice. You had me worried for a while."

PHILIP L. MEADOR

"Andreas Canyon" 14 x 18 # 1829 Disney Collection



THE STORY OF THE DISNEY COLLECTION

Walt Disney asked my husband to do several paintings for the Smoke Tree Ranch located near Palm springs. Josh and I were his guests at the ranch. We stayed at one of the guesthouses with its own bowling green, 3-hole pitch and putt golf course, and restaurant.

Joshua, by then an accomplished and recognized landscape and seascape artist quite apart from his work for the Studio, painted at a variety of locations on and off the ranch properties in the Palm Springs area. He used a unique palette knife technique where he would sketch in his subject in the broadest sense using brush and thinner on stretched fine-linen canvas, then would switch to the palette knife to complete the painting. Then later on in his studio in La Crescenta he would finalize and sign his work.

After completing all of the canvases for the project Josh showed them to Walt at the Studio expecting that Walt would select maybe five to eight of them. Walt surprised him by taking all of the completed oil paintings - about 50. Then Walt asked, "What is your favorite whiskey?" Josh

replied, "Jack Daniels." (At that time Jack Daniels was very scarce on the West Coast.) About a week after the conversation Walt asked Josh to come up to his office and presented Josh with a letter thanking him for the paintings... and an entire case of Jack Daniels. Walt sure knew how to keep an artist happy.

Recently, and after the Disney family members had chosen their particular favorites of the Joshua Meador paintings to keep as their very own, other paintings were returned to the Meador heirs.

ELIZABETH MEADOR



Left: "Pow Wow" 18 x 14 # 1819 Disney Collection

Below: "Mood Indigo" 24 x 34 # 1805 Disney Collection





“Village in the Valley” 22 x 30 # 1342 Meador Family Collection

Below: “Duncans Mills” 28 x 27 # 317 Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery

Below left: “Bodega Dock” 18 x 24 # 807 Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery





**"Hill Village" 20 x 27 # 720
Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery**

**Below: "Sheep Ranch" 24 x 34 # 1575
Meador Family Collection**





**Above left: "Studio Still Life" 24 x 30
1545 Meador Family Collection**

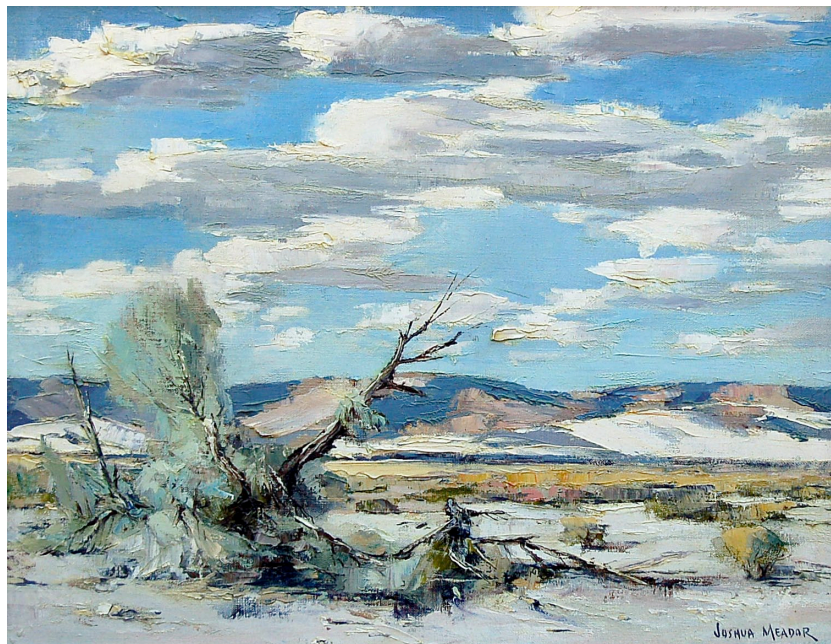
**Above right: "Quaking Aspens" 12 x 16
1631 Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery**

**Left: "Pier at Monterey" 18 x 24
184 Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery**

Right: "Cloud Patterns"
24 x 34 # 1862
Meador Family
Collection

Below left:
"Far Beyond"
14 x 18 # 1820
Disney Collection

Below right:
"A Clear Crispy Day"
20 x 27 # 798
Bodega Bay
Heritage Gallery



Right: "Homeward Bound"
26 x 36 # 341 Bodega Bay Heritage
Gallery

Below right: "Estuary Birds" 6 x 8
unnumbered Bodega Bay Heritage
Gallery

Below left: "Sousa's Cove"
20 x 27 # 606 Bodega Bay Heritage
Gallery





“Caspar Point” 22 x 34 # 1837 Meador Family Collection

Back cover: “Forest Primeval” 22 x 30 # 1226 Bodega Bay Heritage Gallery

