

# PleinAir™

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IN THIS ISSUE:

**Zenaida Mott**



CALIFORNIA

# Zenaida 'Zee Zee' Mott

## *A World of Colorful Adventures*

ZENNAIDA MOTT'S PASSION for painting is matched by her passion for travel. "How can you feel anything but fully alive when doing both?" she exclaims. The plein-air and studio oil painter has lived, painted and exhibited in Africa, Japan, New England and California. She and her husband, who shares her wanderlust, return to Europe, Hawaii, Mexico or Africa as often as they can. Next fall, they and several fellow artists plan a trip to Bhutan for an extensive three-week painting adventure.

Known as Zee Zee to her friends, Mott paints a wide range of subject matter, but she is primarily known for her landscapes and the light captured in them. Finding joy in painting a scene washed with dramatic morning or late-afternoon light, she says, "I hope that at least some of the love I feel for these special places comes across in my canvases."

"Zee Zee reveals her poetic spirit in everything she does," says Jean Stern, director of the Irvine Museum. "Her landscapes capture the majesty and scope of the scene, but more importantly, they transcend the ... visual and become more noble through her subtle sense of calm, serenity and awe. They are in many ways self-portraits."

Long-time collectors Anne and Bruce Blomstrom recognize the serenity in Mott's work and appreciate her style. "Her enthusiasm is infectious and carries over to her work," they comment. "She brings light into her paintings in such a way that familiar scenes seem special. We love the economy of brushwork and the vivid colors that she uses. Zee Zee's style is distinctive, and we are proud to have her in our collection."



ZENNAIDA MOTT

*MISTY TETON MORNING*  
OIL ON LINEN  
14 x 11 IN.







Rarely without her portable easel and daypack, Mott paints almost daily near her Marin County home north of San Francisco. Particularly interested in Mott's scenes of that area, collectors Joe and Gayle Brower reflect: "Perhaps it's her color sense, her palette, her sureness of composition that create the mood. The Mott interpretation of the mountain scene, the wine country, and the California coast lets us feel the freshness and joy of being a part of the natural scene and invites us into her landscapes."

Hiking and backpacking while growing up, Mott credits her family with planting adventure in her blood and teaching her not only a deep respect for the land and its wildlife, but also a sense of responsibility for helping preserve them. "To help give back a little of what the land has given me," she explains, "I helped found the BayWood Artists, a group of professional landscape plein-air artists dedicated to open-space preservation and habitat restoration through annual exhibits. I am grateful and lucky to be able to work and exhibit with

this incredibly talented group of artists."

In the summers, Mott and her family spend time in the Sierras they love. They own a rustic cabin on a small lake at 8,000 feet. After the snow melts, the cabin becomes her summer studio, which she loves to share with fellow artists.

"This is truly where my soul lives," says Mott, "There is no electricity and no road around the lake — you need to paddle a canoe to get here. This is a gift beyond measure. With wilderness outside our backdoor, we often have mule deer, martin, marmots, ospreys and eagles for neighbors [in] our piece of heaven." Once, a mountain lion briefly "kept her company" as she painted.

Mott's introduction to oils is firmly etched in her mind. Though she can't remember a time when she wasn't drawing, it wasn't until she and her husband were living in Africa that she became hooked for life on oil painting. By chance, she met Mexican artist Maria Sanchez, whose mentor had been Mexican artist David Siquieros.

CALIFORNIA COW, OIL ON LINEN, 9 x 12 IN.





**BEAR COUNTRY**

OIL ON LINEN

9 x 12 IN.

Sanchez wanted a riding companion to go with her on painting trips into the bush, which held such dangers as snakes, crocodiles and leopards. In return, she offered to teach Mott to paint. Mott, an experienced rider with an Arabian stallion, leapt at the chance. "It was an offer too good to refuse." Sanchez ordered from London a huge crate of art supplies — everything from clay to easel, canvases to paints — as a gift; and she became Mott's mentor in sculpting, watercolor and oil painting. Mott reminisces, "I was in heaven for the next three years."

At that time, Mott was teaching at the only college-prep girls school in the country, preparing the students for their Cambridge Exams, but in the afternoons and on weekends, the two and their horses would swim the nearby river and ride into the bush. There were no fences and few trails, but the two artists were surrounded by Africa's beautiful savannah, scattered herders, picturesque villages and, of course, ani-

mals. Her unique, often hilarious African experiences could fill a book. An army of safari ants once overran her easel; she was caught in the dark between a pride of lions and a charging herd of cape buffalo; and another time, a bull elephant walked up to her easel (Mott had long since departed) and gently inspected every inch with his trunk, apparently critiquing the painting, but he left everything unscathed.

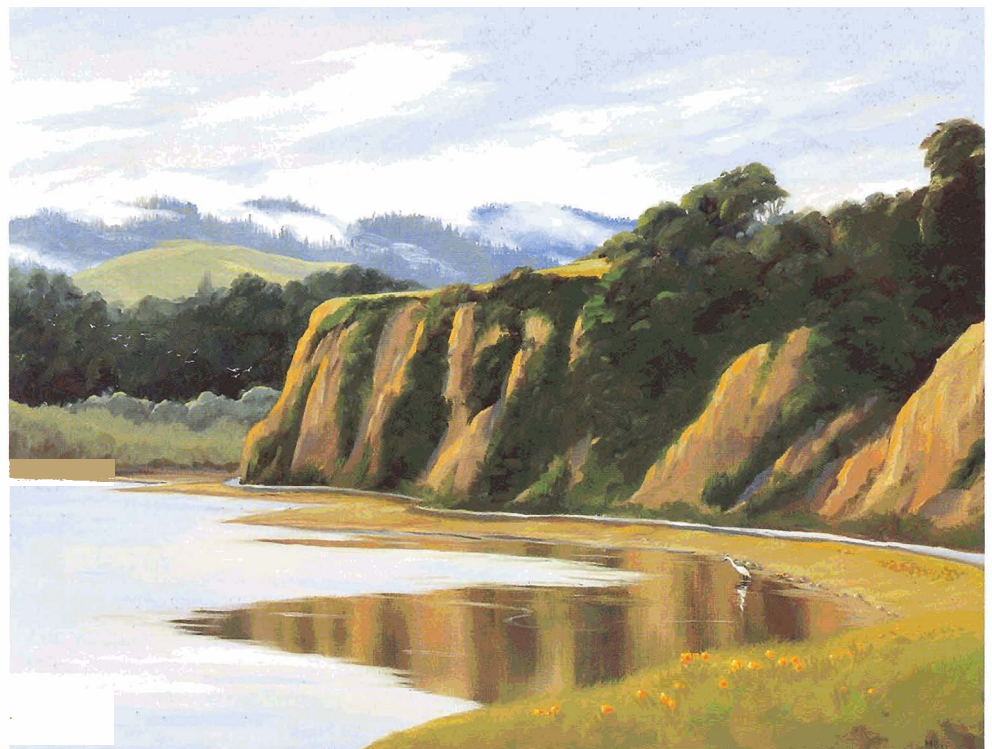
During the first six months of Mott's education, Sanchez insisted that she only mold her subjects, animals or people, in clay. The second six months were spent honing values — using only black, white and grays. Though color came next, it was only one color at a time, because Sanchez, an artist who could use vibrant color, knew that understanding true color harmony is essential to good painting. As a result, Mott today paints primarily with a limited palette, only occasionally adding colors.

An award-winning artist, Mott has participated in more





*VINTAGE VINEYARD*  
OIL ON LINEN  
9 x 12 IN.



*LAGOON LUNCHTIME*  
OIL ON CANVAS  
24 x 30 IN.





**VINEYARD WITH A VIEW**

OIL ON LINEN  
11 x 14 IN.

than 100 invitational and juried shows and has been featured in numerous solo and two- and three-person exhibits. She is an Artist Member of the California Art Club; a Signature Member of the National Academy of Professional Plein Air Painters (NAPPAP), the BayWood Artists, Laguna Plein Air Painters Association (LPAPA) and Oil Painters of America; and she is a Signature Artist Member of the American Impressionist Society. This year, she was the featured artist at the invitational *Marin/Scapes*. The premier San Francisco Bay Area landscape art exhibit has raised more than \$1,000,000 for mental health services of the Buckelew Programs.

“As a plein-air artist,” says Mott, “you are challenged to stretch yourself, as you are constantly exposed — by design or by accident — to experiences and scenes you might never have predicted or planned. The results can vary from scraped canvases to paintings that actually work, but either way you’ve learned something. I’ll never be able to even begin to know it

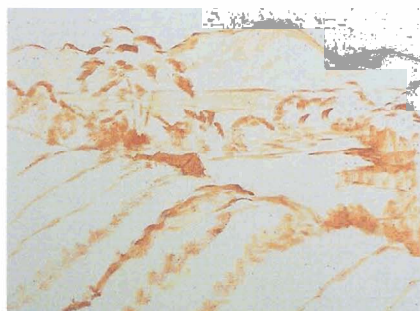
all, but I feel that to continue to learn like this for the rest of my life is a very special privilege.” ■

TA

**Name:** Zenaida Mott  
**Birthplace:** Berkeley, CA  
**Home:** Ross, CA  
**Influences:** Carl Rungius, John Singer Sargent, Richard Schmid, Edgar Payne, California Impressionists  
**Values:** \$1,000 - \$10,000  
**Galleries:** William Lester Gallery, Pt. Reyes, CA  
 The Germanton Gallery, Germanton, NC  
 Renee Fotouhi Fine Art, New York, NY  
 Larry Iwerks Fine Art Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA  
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# Painting in Progress: Zenaida Mott



## 1. "Puddles" and Sketching

Before beginning, I usually make up "puddles" of color that correspond to the major light and shadow areas of the painting. By taking the time to do this, I find that it's much easier to assure good color harmony, lay in color quickly and modify colors later on. Sketching-in takes a few minutes, just enough to place the center of interest and get a strong composition with a few simple strokes. I use a toned-down mix of Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine Blue.



## 2. Putting in Accents

I establish the darkest notes first so that all subsequent values will relate to those notes. Most of these will remain as part of the finished piece. But some will disappear, becoming part of the painting, or they will be modified. This takes but a few minutes.



## 3. Shadows and Light

I paint the shadow areas throughout the canvas right away, in order to establish the light and dark patterns before the sunlight changes. Once the shadows are in, I look to see whether the composition is working.



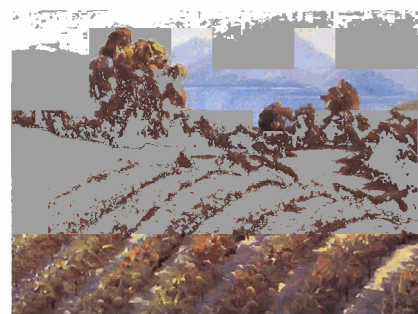
## 4. Setting the Values

At this point, I loosely lay in the values and color masses, still using a fairly large brush to cover most areas of the canvas. For this painting, I've left the sky until last. It is usually the lightest element of the painting, because the foreground, although light, will not be as light as the sky. This helps me to maintain more accurate values.



## 5. Adding Interest within Masses

Once I know that the value relationships are working, I begin to make adjustments by adding interest to the different areas. I try not to lose the "neutrals" that are helping to make the brighter appear colors more vibrant.



## 6. Refining

As needed, I continue refining by adding a few highlights near the center of interest to further direct the viewer's attention and to help the area "pop."

### Zenaida Mott's Palette

Titanium White	Classic
Ultramarine Blue	Gamblin
Cadmium Yellow Light	Gamblin
Cadmium Yellow Medium	Gamblin
Cadmium Red Light	Gamblin
Alizarin Crimson	Gamblin