

Following in the Footsteps of the **IMPRESSIONISTS**



By Erin Hanson

THE IMPRESSIONISTS have been called the “painters of light.” Anyone who has stood in front of a Monet water lily painting knows what this means. The waving lines of color look loose and abstract up close, but when you step back, the whole painting goes into focus and you see where each ripple in the water changes color, reflecting the light from the sky or the rich colors of the surrounding trees.



(ABOVE) *Water Lilies*, Erin Hanson, 2016. Oil on canvas.

When I was a young artist of ten, first trying my hand at oils, my father repeatedly drew my attention to the haystacks that Monet painted. I was intrigued at how many different variations of light and color could be inspired by a simple stack of hay.

Going to art museums as a child led me to decide (like many others) that impressionism was my favorite style of painting. It amazed me that a painter could take so many different colors

that seemed to have nothing to do with each other and place them side by side with little brushstrokes, making a shadow glow with unexpected and vibrant color. I never saw any blacks or grays in an impressionist painting.

I began my own exploration of capturing light with paint and brush. Like most artists, I was drawn to the golden hours—early dawn and just before sundown.

I became more familiar with other pioneers of impressionism, pointillism, and post-impressionism: Renoir, Cézanne, Seurat, Signac, and the Group of Seven.

The impression I got from all these artists is that each one tried to capture the light and color of ordinary landscapes and make them extraordinary. They all experimented with the same paints and mediums, but they each developed their own unique and fearless method of capturing light.

I loved the way van Gogh seemed to see right to the heart of a natural object, to see its colors pure and wild, and put them down on the canvas as he saw them, not how tradition dictated they should be painted.

I loved the way each impressionist seemed to be fearless in his own right, breaking the rules and painting in his own style.

When I discovered the colorful red rock cliffs of Nevada and Utah, and I decided to become a landscape painter, I followed in the footsteps of the original impressionists and put down the colors as I interpreted them, not how they appeared in a photograph or how other artists had painted them before me.

I eventually developed my own method of painting in oils, Open



Meules, Claude Monet, 1890. Oil on canvas. Giverny, France.

Impressionism, in which, ironically, I paint the light at the very last.

Anyone who has watched me paint sees a lot of dark paint where the shadows and mid-tones are, skirting around whatever underpainting color I am using. It is hard to tell what the final shape of the painting will be until I finally place the light in the painting at the end. Since I work wet-on-wet in oil paints, I do not blend or layer my paints. I place my brushstrokes side by side, like placing pieces of a mosaic.

This “reverse engineering” method of painting in oils means I have to keep all the light of the painting in my head while I paint.

When the painting is completed, the brushstrokes are clean and pure, and the naturally thick and buttery texture of the oil paint is evident in the textured ridges left by the brushes.

My painting style has influences of the impressionists who came before

me, and I am drawn to the same subject matter they painted: water lilies, sunflowers, trees, moving water, and cultivated lands.

Impressionism has survived the past hundred and fifty years, influencing artists through every mode and vagary of popular art style. I hope to spearhead a revival of contemporary impressionism and inspire thousands of new artists to push the boundaries of what beauty can be created with simple oil, pigment, and brush.



Ode To SUNFLOWERS



Blooming Petals Oil on canvas, 2023. 60 x 40 in

WHILE I HAD ALWAYS admired the colorful sunflower paintings by van Gogh, it never occurred to me to try painting them myself until one day I saw a vase of sunflowers that had been allowed to dry out without any water for two months.

When I looked at the drooping, dried-out petals curving around the large heads, I knew instantly I had to paint them. Here was abstract color, bold contrast, classic theme... everything needed for the perfect painting.

I have been painting sunflowers ever since. In fact, last year I had

so many sunflower ideas to paint, I dedicated a whole show to the flower: *The Sunflower Show*.

When the season has been right, I have been buying armfuls of sunflowers and staging them against different fabric backdrops. The older and more dried out the sunflowers get, the more character they acquire!

After moving to Oregon, I was inspired for the first time to paint sunflowers still growing in the fields, and I began exploring cultivated farms of sunflowers.

I heard that Monet had built his own water lily pond to paint in the

comfort of his own garden, and this gave me an idea: this spring I planted a hundred of my own sunflowers on my forty-acre property in Oregon wine country. I searched around online until I found twenty different varieties of heirloom sunflowers, in different colors, shapes, and sizes. Many of them have bulbous, rounded heads, reminiscent of van Gogh's sunflowers.

When my flowers bloom this autumn, keep your eyes peeled for a new wave of sunflower paintings! (Who knows, maybe there will even be *The Sunflower Show: The Sequel*.)

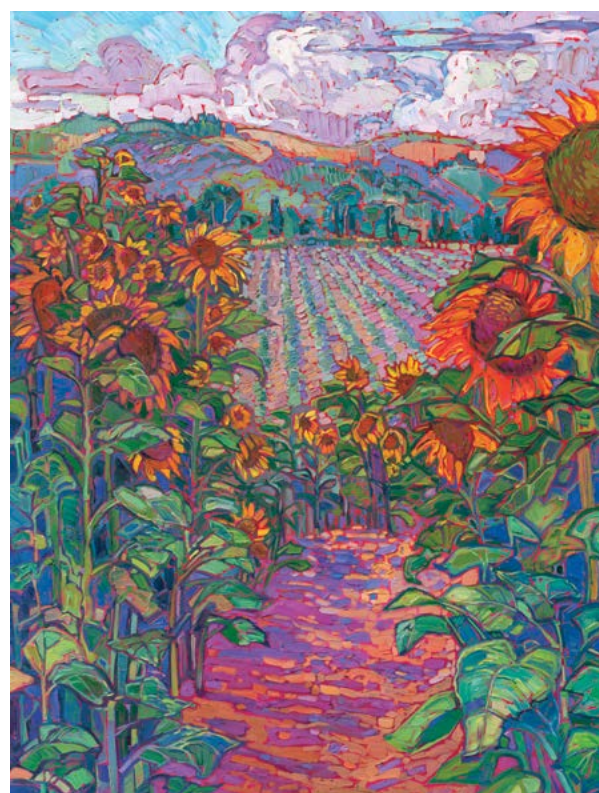
—Erin Hanson



Blooms on Blue II Oil on canvas, 2023. 14 x 11 in

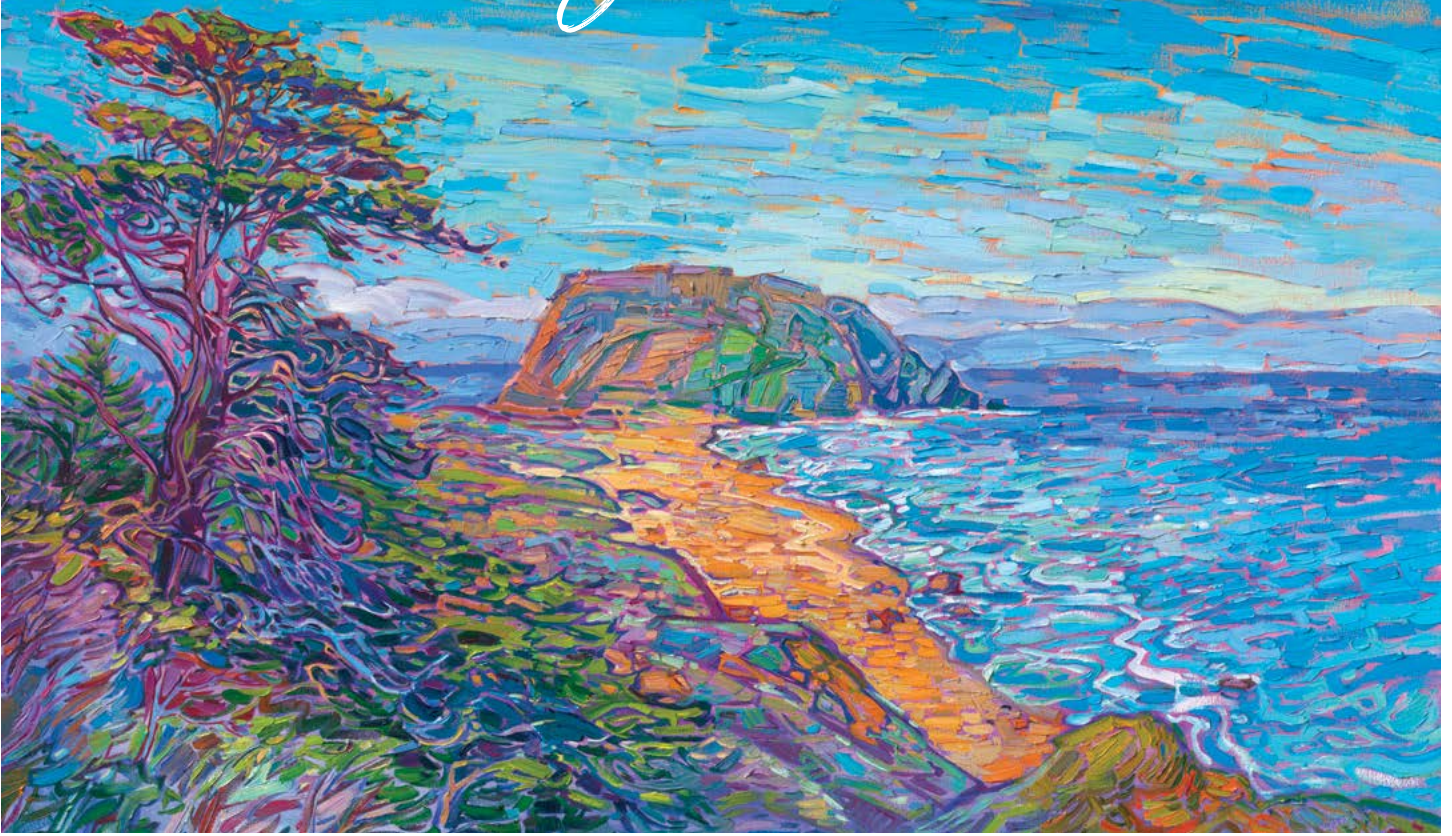


Sunflowers II Oil on canvas, 2019. 30 x 40 in



Fields of Sunflowers Oil on canvas, 2022. 36 x 48 in

Painting Stories



Point Sur Vista Oil on canvas, 2023. 48 x 30 in

Following in the Footsteps of Early California Painters | by Erin Hanson

THE EARLY California Painters, William Wendt, Edgar Payne, Granville Redmond, Carl Oscar Borg, and others, carried forward the tradition of the impressionists into California scenery and landscapes of the Wild West.

I have loved every painting I have ever seen of Edgar Payne, and his works make me want to jump in my van and head back out to the Colorado Plateau to explore Arches, Monument Valley, and Canyon de Chelly just one more time. When I first saw with my own eyes the twisted cypress trees and aquamarine waters of Monterey and Carmel, I understood why the Early California painters loved this landscape so much. The softly rising mists, abstract trees, colorful

boulders, and buttery soft light make this landscape irresistible. I have since painted a hundred fifty paintings of this region. I even had a gallery in Carmel-by-the-Sea for a few years (until I consolidated back to my home base in Oregon).

I have explored the nooks and crannies of the rugged coastline between Big Sur and Monterey many times. Once I waited an entire week for the fog to clear, so I could get some good photos of the cypress trees during the golden hour. However, even these foggy days yielded their own beauty. (And I learned that when it is 120 degrees inland, the heat sucks the fog over the shore, so the coastline never sees blue sky.)

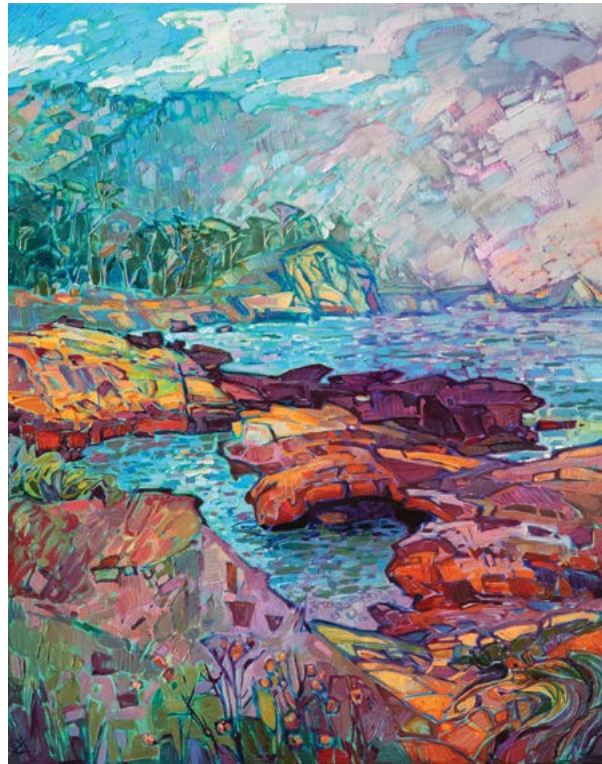
What brings me back to this region

over and over, year after year, to capture the beauty of this particular stretch of coastline? It is the same reason I might ever paint a subject more than once: there is something in the landscape, some fleeting hue of color, some transient combination of light and shadow, the sun suddenly coming out between the clouds and illuminating just one rock on the distant shore, that gets my heart pumping and gets me excited all over again to paint, to make my paints recreate that fleeting beauty, like I had never painted it before.

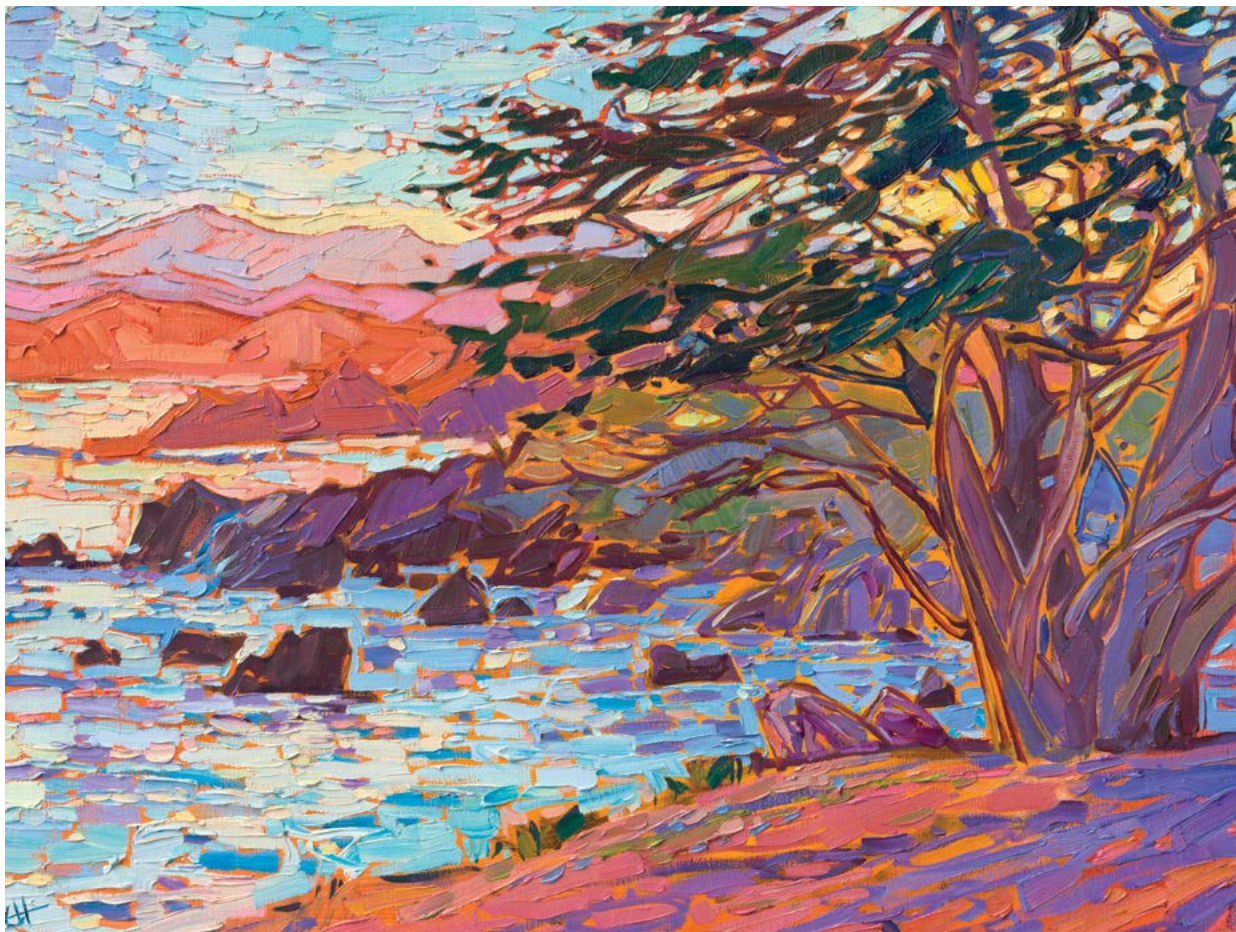
Who knows, maybe this is why Monet painted lily ponds and haystacks over and over, and why van Gogh painted irises and sunflowers again and again. —Erin Hanson



Reflections of Color Oil on canvas, 2023. 36 x 50 in



Point Lobos Fog Oil on canvas, 2019. 24 x 30 in



Cypress at Carmel Oil on canvas, 2023. 20 x 16 in