

An Ideal Spot to Paint: Cor de Gavere's Santa Cruz

By Geoffrey Dunn

It has become something of an historical aphorism that the birth of the plein air movement in California can be traced directly to the legendary Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 in San Francisco, where significant landscapes by Monet, Pissarro, Millet, Renoir and Corot were on display.

While the artistic zeitgeist in Northern California was centered in both the Bay Area and Monterey, the 1915 exposition invigorated the regional art scene, and four years later the Santa Cruz Art League was founded by two fine local painters, the aging Frank Heath and the irrepressible Margaret A. Rogers.

By general acclamation, the most talented artist in Santa Cruz during that era was Cornelia "Cor" de Gavere. Born to missionary parents in the then-Dutch colony of Java (Indonesia) in 1877, Cor was orphaned at the age of six and raised by a

stern uncle in the north of Holland. Trained as an assistant in pharmacy, on the eve of her 30th birthday she abandoned her career and took up formal study at the Royal Academy of Art at The Hague.

Santa Cruz has everything — ocean, hills, lagoons, open fields, blue skies, blue water, its wonderful redwood and eucalyptus groves...an ideal spot in which to live and paint. — Cor de Gavere

Cor was a star pupil. At the completion of her studies she was told by the dean: "Be yourself, see much, work much, and hear critics." She then moved to Paris, where she studied in the atelier of Charles Guérin, and her palette shifted from dull earth tones to brighter primary colors. During World War I, she served as a volunteer nurse for the

(Above) "Bonny Doon" by Cor de Gavere, oil on canvas, circa 1935.

Red Cross.

Cor relocated to Santa Cruz in 1920, along with a close friend, Wilhelmina Van Tonnigen, and the two became part of the city's vital Dutch community centered in the Seabright area. She quickly befriended Rogers, who also resided in Seabright, and the quiet and refined Cor and rough-and-tumble Rogers soon began weekly painting expeditions throughout the Monterey Bay Area, often riding double on Rogers' pony.

A few years later, another talented local artist, Leonora Naylor Penniman, entered the picture and the trio became known as the "Santa Cruz Three." Penniman not only drove but owned a car, which extended their expeditions to the far reaches of the state. Their works were exhibited throughout Northern California—from Berkeley to

Sacramento to Stockton—and all three were featured in a special edition of *The Western Woman*, published in Los Angeles.

It was Cor's work that stood out. She had far more extensive training than any of her local contemporaries (she also studied with Arthur Hill Gilbert in Monterey), and her palette reflected strong European influences that were perfectly suited to the light and varied landscapes of Northern California, particularly Santa Cruz.

"I realize it's possible [for] a place to inspire the artist," Cor declared, "and I have never wanted to leave."

Beginning in 1927, the trio served as the catalyst to the Art League hosting the annual California Statewide Exhibition, which brought in some of the state's most renowned painters—including Jade Fon, Selden Connor Gile, Armin Hansen, Mary DeNeale Morgan, Louis Siegrist,

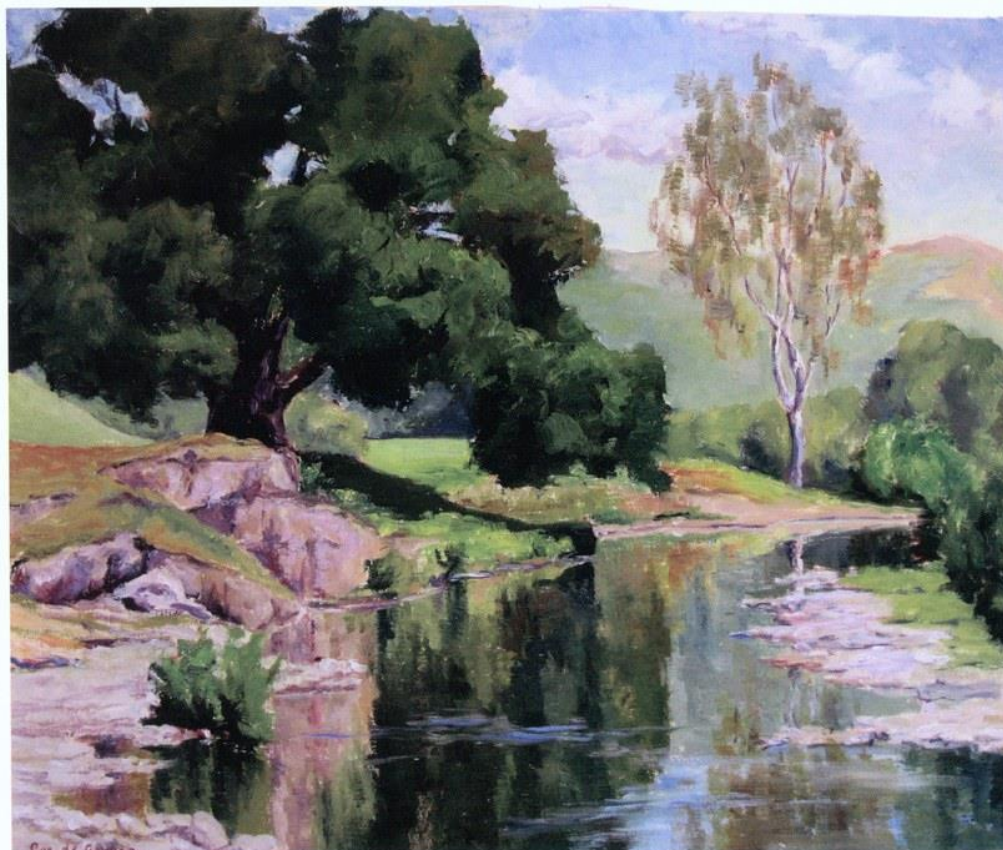


Santa Cruz plein air painter
Cornelia "Cor" de Gavere

Nell Walker Warner and Gunnar Widforss. Once, when a lack of enthusiasm on behalf of her colleagues threatened cancellation of the exhibition, Cor issued an ultimatum: "We put this exhibit on or I will move to another city where the artists are not so afraid to tackle a big job."

Cor supported her artistic endeavors by serving as a librarian at the Seabright branch for nearly thirty years. She donated several paintings to the local library system, many of which are still on display.

In 1955, Cor took a trip to her native Holland. She never returned. A short time into her sojourn, she died unexpectedly. She bequeathed \$120 to her friend Margaret Rogers, who purchased a silver tea set for the Art League with the endowment, a simple, quiet memorial to one of Santa Cruz's most gifted artists. ♣



"Pacheco Creek" (site of present-day De Laveaga Golf Course), by Cor de Gavere, oil on canvas, circa 1935.

All images from the Geoffrey Dunn Collection. Photographed by Ed Penniman.