

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

NATURE'S CANVAS

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A few years ago, I was strolling along the recreational trail, soaking in the afternoon serenity, when I came upon a plein air oil painter named Ethan Walsh, who occasionally sets up an easel and canvas next to the crashing waves in an effort to recreate a piece of Pacific Grove paradise. On this particular day, Point Cabrillo was posing for him. He's far from the only plein air practitioner that I've come across. On many pleasant days, you're likely to find an artist putting the finishing touches on a colorful canvas.

But Pacific Grove isn't only a place that artists draw. It's a place that draws artists - almost from the very beginning.

A photo exists from 1888 of a group of five women standing before canvases on Asilomar Beach and painting the vista. They were the Sketch Club, and this was a year before the city was even incorporated. At the beginning of the 20th century in particular, a number of prominent painters found their way to Pacific Grove. Among them were British-born William Constable Adam (whose oil seascapes hang in the Smithsonian), Charles Hudson (whose detailed illustration of sea life have been featured by the Smithsonian, too), Ernest Nelson (who was awarded a silver medal at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco), and the marvelously named Euphemia Fortune (who actually painted liturgical scenes inside the original St. Angela's Church in PG).

Today, the art scene in Pacific Grove is eclectic, exciting and ever-expanding. The heart of it has long been the 57-year-old **Pacific Grove Art Center**, a nonprofit founded with a simple but significant mission: enhance the arts. The PGAC does so not only through exhibits in four galleries, but also via forums, lectures, and classes on everything from figure drawing to needle felting. As part of the Art Center's mission to educate and encourage, it also hosts artist studio rentals where local artists can develop their craft and exhibit bi-annually.





But there is artistry on display in all corners of Pacific Grove. For the past several decades, **Hauk Fine Arts** on Fountain Avenue has specialized in California artists – both contemporary and pioneering painters (“Effie” Fortune among them). The **Pacific Grove Museum-Gallery** on Forest Avenue, curated by Terry and Paul Trotter of the Trotter Galleries, celebrates the Monterey Peninsula’s rich artistic heritage through early artworks. Also on Forest, **The Yellow Mustard Seed** displays and sells original paintings by co-owner Alexa Snyder and several other artists.

Ethan Walsh’s artistry (along with his wife Lauren’s floral designs) can be found at **Gallery Nila** on Lighthouse Avenue. A couple of blocks away, Adrienne Jonson’s **Artisana Gallery** was established in 2008 to promote local and independent artisans. And at 10,000 square feet, vast and bright **480 Lighthouse Gallery**, which opened in 2024, is simply the largest art gallery on the Monterey Peninsula.



You get the point. Monterey may have its Museum of Art. And Carmel boasts myriad high-end galleries. But there’s something about the Pacific Grove art scene that is so... PG. Local. Historical. Whimsical. Personal. The Pacific Grove Art Center likes to describe itself with a phrase that actually well describes the city’s art scene: it exists “to build community through creativity.”

So stroll through town and savor the talent on display, but don’t forget to keep a lookout for those plein air painters. Not only is it a pleasure to watch an artist in mid-artistry, the experience also generates gratitude. It’s nice to live in a setting worthy of a masterpiece.