

# Roadside Natural Splendor

EVERHØJ MUSEUM HOSTS 'ART FROM THE GROVES: SANTA INÉS MISSION MILLS'

By Josef Woodard,  
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## 'Art from the Groves: Santa Inés Mission Mills'

**When:** through September 28  
**Where:** Elverhøj Museum of History and Art, 1624 Elverhøj Way, Solvang  
**Gallery hours:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Wednesday through Sunday  
**Information:** 686-1211, elverhoj.org

To properly take in and get a fuller appreciation of the new exhibition at Solvang's Elverhøj Museum, take a moment to observe and absorb the inspiring sprawl of open, undeveloped space just off Highway 246 on the way into Solvang (arriving from the south). There, laid out like a blissful de-civilized agricultural zone just below the Santa Ynez Mission, is a 39-acre spread of trees, olive tree grove, and open ground — plus a Mission grist mill dating back to 1820.

Although many of us have been intrigued by the site but equipped only with casual drive-by acquaintance, the property is a somewhat miraculous scene hiding in plain sight in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It harkens back to simple, more spacious, pre-tourism era in the region.

Proceed then to the Elverhøj's "Art from the Groves: Santa Inés Mission Mills," a group show of paintings (and more) juried by painter Robert Burrige, bringing artists' sensitivities and visions of this enlightened, protected space. Currently, said space is preserved as part of California State Parks, and maintained by the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation. Among projects in the works for the site is a walking trail that would open it up to the public. But in a way, its presently more pristine and private status gives rise to the stuff of mystique — and to the expressive curiosities of artists like those in this show.

As if to serve as a stage-setting introduction, the wall by the gallery entrance features Peggy Brierton's "Santa Ynez Mountains from the Olive Grove," a long, horizontal vista taking in the grove property and the mountains above, and happily untrammelled by buildings, the highway, or other doings of humanity.

Nearby, Elizabeth Alvarez's "Light



'Light at the Grist Mill,' Elizabeth Alvarez



'Creek Crossing,' C. Wood

at the Grist Mill" draws on soft edges and a gentle palette to summon up an idyllic picturing of the meeting of mill and landscape, and Nina Warner's "Mission Mill" is a compact but warmly expressive "portrait" of the characterful old mill, surrounded by open space and clouded blue sky overhead. All appears right with the world, or at least this 39-acres slice of it.

The aesthetic approach to the show's subject is fairly straightforward, heeding the responsible dictates of landscape painting with landscape in the lead, over personal artistic reinventions. But there are some interesting variations on the theme here. Kit Boise-Cossart's "Inés Olive Grove #1" lends a more panoramic, elevated perspective on the olive grove and acreage, with hills beyond, awash in a slightly surreal orange-ish glow.

Anne Raleigh's "Morning at the

Mill" presents a hazy overlay and prismatic surface effect, with a balanced assembly of forms tucked into the pictorial scheme of the painting.

In Libby Smith's "Santa Inés Mission Mills and Water Basin," the emphasis is less on the landscape of the environs but the rhythmic diagonals of the historic mill structure itself, and the juncture of the mill's housing and the water basin element.

From another corner of the show, and the property, C. Wood's "Creek Crossing" projects an enigmatic, semi-impressionistic vision, in the shadowy creek area, a small-ish painting more striking in its way than Ms. Wood's much larger painting "Northern Grove," nearby.

Off to the side of the painting medium that prevails in this show, Karen Gearhart-Jensen's "Stick and Stones" fuses photography and printmaking, with visual elements conjoined and layered and nudging



'Ines Olive Grove #1,' Kit Boise-Cossart



'Rusty Latch,' Judy Villa

past strict realism. In another corner of the gallery, Kristen Stickland goes small and hands-on with her delicate pen and colored pencil drawings, "A Study of Mission Mills Flora in Spring," nestled cozily in a little handmade accordion-style book.

Judy Villa's warm-toned color photograph "Rusty Latch" conveys the earthy antiquity of the property through her editing eye, focusing on the rusty and weathered wooden goodness of a purposeful close-up.

Meanwhile, back in the realm of more traditional site-minded painting, Ron Guthrie's "Mission Olive Trees" is a tidy fine painting. Olive trees perch proudly in the foreground, with the horizontal spread of the Mission building forming an elevated flank — or contextual footnote — towards the top of the composition. Aside from the balance of light and elements in the painting, the features within touch on the

historical relationship of the grove property and its hosting Mission compound above.

In the end, we come away from this enticing, if largely conventional, painting exhibition with a deeper awareness and appreciation of a magical locale in our midst. The drive-by curiosity has given way to a desire to investigate further, and hopefully one day pay a personal visit to an inspired piece of property. Art can have that effect.

**WANTED:**

Paintings by

**Ray Strong**

(1905-2006)

**Sullivan Goss**

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