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THE PREMIER MAGAZINE OF THE WEST

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FEBRUARY/MARCH 2013

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A Touch Of Blue

“WHY PAINT? WHY LIVE?” THAT’S THE PHILOSOPHY OF GREGORY KONDOS, A LEADING landscape painter of the American West, who at nearly 90 remains lively and dedicated to putting color on canvas. His landscapes, which recall abstract expressionism and are particularly noted for his use of the color blue, are collected in major museums from the United States to China.

His influences include the varied scenes of his adopted state of California, the stark imagery of O’Keeffe country, and the simple, sun-washed clarity of his ancestral Greece. And then there are the artists: Northern California tonalist Gottardo Piazzoni, Maynard Dixon (“one of my heroes”), Paul Gauguin (“my first contact with color”),



and Paul Cézanne ("to me, he put the modern world together").

Over the course of his long career, Kondos has traveled extensively and painted all sorts of locales: Greece, France, the American Southwest. But the manifold landscapes of California—particularly the Sacramento Delta, Yosemite Valley, and anywhere solitary communion with nature could help him feel and understand the land and reduce it to its elemental forms and colors—have provided enduring inspiration.

It was a life-changing trip to Greece in 1963 (and 46 subsequent trips) that changed Kondos' course as a painter and the way he saw the West. "I went to Greece to find my roots, and I did. I went with three trunks of art supplies, 13 suitcases, and my family. I took off with \$10,000 and I was going to paint my world. We stayed 10 months and I just observed—light and form. I even tried to be a real Greek by selling sheep with a shepherd, marched them all night long. I watched the sunsets and the sunlight. I came back with the three trunks unopened."

Kondos' eyes, unlike the trunks, were opened.

Where serial trips to Greece taught him about light and simplicity of form, buying a house in Santa Fe and venturing into O'Keeffe country and the canyon lands gave Kondos the opportunity to investigate open space.

"In his preference for nature's solitary, remote settings, he sees himself as one of the West's last painters, but readily admits that his are not depictions of the 'dirty West of dust and mud,'" writes Scott A. Shields, associate director and chief curator at Sacramento's Crocker Art Museum, which is mounting the exhibition *A Touch of Blue: Landscapes by Gregory Kondos*. "According to Kondos, the major difference between his art and that of earlier painters is that he came to the West after it had 'put on a shirt and combed its hair.'"

After seven decades at the easel in that more civilized West, Kondos still lives to paint. "I have an honorary doctorate, but I don't really care about that," Kondos says. "I'd rather be known as a student of painting. As a student I am still learning. With a doctorate, what do you do? Sit back, put your hands on your head, and smoke a pipe? I'm painting every day, with work coming out of my ears."

—Dana Joseph