

spotlight

Music Scene H3

TRAVEL

Art & Theater H5

H LIFE
ONLINE
SECTION www.fresnobee.com

MUSIC SCENE • 3
ART & THEATER • 5
CROSSWORD • 6
CALENDAR • 7
TRAVEL • 12

THE FRESNO BEE • SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1998



Artist Rollin Pickford, 86, says he doesn't tire of painting the same scene over and over because, "I'm a different artist every time."

THE PICKFORD PAINTINGS

The master watercolorist who captured the Valley's visual history for 60 years is honored in a book by his son, Joel.



Pickford spends several months each year in Pacific Grove, but his roots are still in the San Joaquin Valley.

BY DAVID HALE
THE FRESNO BEE

Think about where you are, so near yet so far from the beauty spots of California, the seashore and the Sierra. Perhaps, inevitably, you consider the San Joaquin Valley scenically deprived.

To anyone who knows the art of Rollin Pickford, that's a perception not easily held.

Pickford, 86, is the master of local painters who work at recording the natural beauty — often overlooked by the rest of us — to be found in the land. Of all those who plow that vein, none has done it so prolifically, or for so long, as Pickford.

Just how long was verbalized by a woman, perhaps of late middle age, as she walked through the recent Rollin Pickford retrospective in the Fresno Art Museum.

"I was just thinking," she mused, misty eyed. "I've gotten old admiring Rollin Pickford's paintings. Sometimes it seems he's been around forever."

Pickford was spinning off paintings of the land around his native Fresno before there were freeways and strip malls, and years before smog veiled the sky with a brownish-gray shroud.

"The thing that's wonderful," said collector Donald Larson, "especially to those of us who have spent our lives in this Valley, is that you can look at Rollin's paintings and see places you

Please see **Pickford**, Page H2



About 125 reproductions of the artist's work are in the book "California Light: The Paintings of Rollin Pickford," including "Del Monte Pines at Spanish Bay Dunes."

Herbie Hancock still setting trends

BY CALVIN WILSON
KNIGHT RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

Time sanctifies. Just ask Herbie Hancock.

Throughout a jazz career spanning more than 35 years, the pianist/composer has been hailed and chastised, imitated and dismissed. To some he's the straight-ahead player who sold out with "Chameleon," an electrified 1973 radio hit directed more at the feet than

every release has been scrutinized by jazz-pop aficionados hungry for groundbreaking grooves and by bebop die-hards hoping for acoustic artistry.

Lately Hancock seems to be leaning toward the latter. His bop-oriented output has increased in recent years, and on his new album, the ambitious "Gershwin's World" (Verve), he turns in some of his most impassioned playing ever.



MUSIC

Sounds of the season from Children's Choir

THE FRESNO BEE

It's a natural — children and Christmas. The Central California Children's Choir will be celebrating that fact all over town in the coming weeks.

The major event will be

Ave. Admission will be \$5 for adults, free for those under 18.

The busy schedule opens Dec. 5 with various ensembles going their separate ways. Beginning and Intermediate Choirs will be featured in the annual

Pickford: 'I just want to be quiet and paint'

Continued from Page H1

grew up with — places that are gone now. You'll also see the rural side of Fresno and the Valley as it is today."

Pickford's life-long connectedness to Fresno's visual history, 60 years' worth of paintings, was the subject of the museum show. Now the theme of the artist's life's work and times has been expanded upon in "California Light: The Paintings of Rollin Pickford," a book that is the fruit of a three-year effort driven by Joel Pickford, a free-lance photographer/filmmaker and the artist's son.

The handsome 287-page volume, published by The Press at California State University, Fresno, explores the full arc of Pickford's career, his life and its parallel to changing times.

About 125 reproductions of the artist's oeuvre capture, with remarkable fidelity, the originals. Additional illustrations of works by Pickford's peers, and essays by Joel Pickford and journalist Mark Arax provide a fulsome tribute to the artist and his work, significantly relating the artist's development to the history of the Valley's growth.

The book's release, originally intended to coincide with the exhibition, was delayed by hitches in the binding process. Its publication has been greeted with sighs of relief by Pickford family members, friends and sponsors of the project, not to mention those who placed orders months ago.

"It's taken so long; waiting has been a nightmare," said Glenna Pickford, the artist's wife. "Joel Fed-Exed the book to Melissa [daughter, education director at Monterey County Art Museum], and the three of us sat and opened it together. It was like Christmas. We wept, just seeing the dedication ['To Glenna'] and Rollin — he was Rollin. He just sat there, silent and meditative."

The artist's later reaction was characteristically modest and generous: "I was bowled over by the color reproduction," he said. "But it is Joel's project. I was amazed at the masterful job — all the work he had done and the research. It refreshed my memory."

"I just wish the art were better."

"I've lived so long with every page, there's nothing new for me in the book," said Joel Pickford. "The exciting and rewarding part is seeing the reaction of people, the messages people have left on my phone. People who aren't even related to the family have thanked me for having done it."

Larry Early, president of Dumont Printing, which produced "California Light" at much less than cost, summed up the book as "a wonderfully nostalgic piece of Fresno."

BOOK SIGNING

Signing parties for "California Light: The Watercolors of Rollin Pickford," featuring the artist, authors and other friends, are scheduled at the following venues:

■ **Today:** 1-3 p.m. Fig Garden Bookstore.

■ **Dec. 8:** 4-7 p.m., "The Three Painters," Contemporary Arts, 1900 N. Echo Ave. (includes demonstration by the artist and colleagues Robin Gay McCline and Ara "Corky" Normart).

■ **Dec. 11:** 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., NG Squared, Galleria, 2405 Capitol St.

■ **Dec. 19:** 2 p.m. Barnes & Noble Booksellers, Blackstone and Shaw avenues.

"I'm proud we were able to participate in the project," Early said. "The whole community can recognize him [Pickford] as a treasure."

Typically, Pickford Sr. has shielded himself from the creative excitement surrounding the so-called "Pickford Project," a community effort that drew scores of private sponsors, in addition to the Fresno State Press; Dr. Luis Costa, dean of the university's School of Arts and Humanities; and Duncan Enterprises.

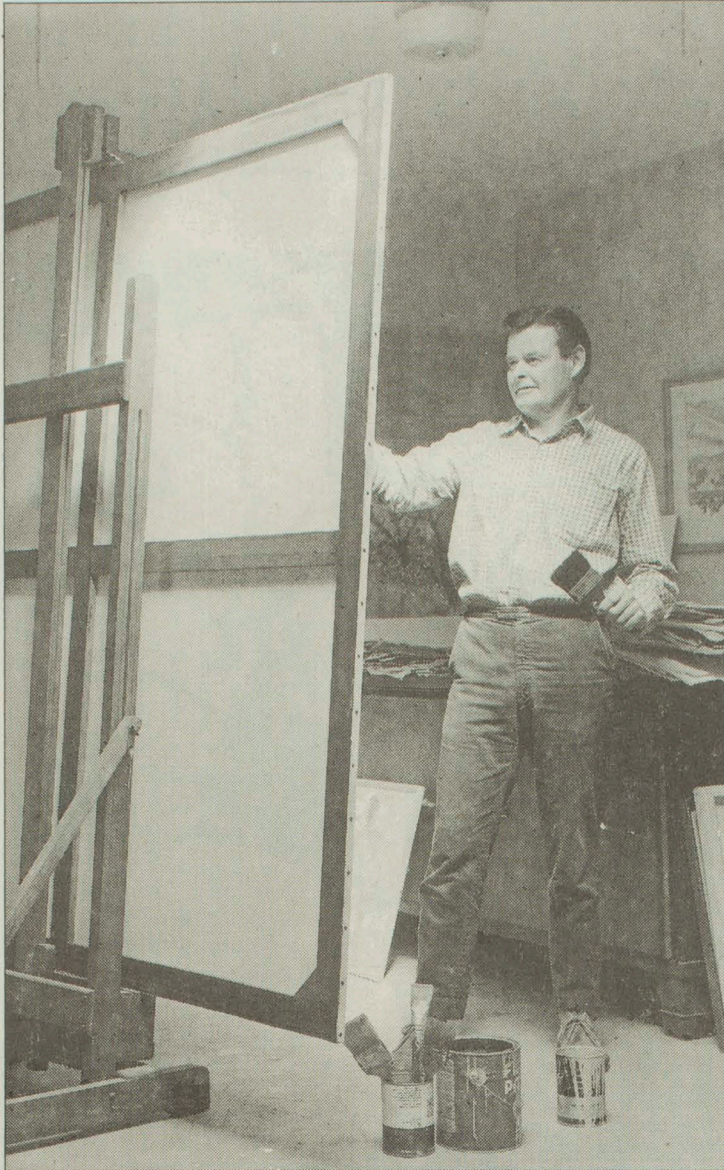
"I'm only the subject here," Pickford said. "I had no idea what was in the show until I saw it, and I couldn't have stood all the fuss that led up to it. It isn't in my nature. I just want to be quiet and paint."

"He's not an easy guy to get to know," conceded Loren Pickford, the artist's elder son and a jazz musician-composer living in New Orleans. "He's a gentle, humble and dedicated man. He doesn't say an awful lot; he wears sweaters with holes in them that he's had since college, and I'd guess he's spent more time outdoors [painting] than a park ranger." Well-known as he is, as rather a visual historian, Pickford said he never set out to document the Valley landscape.

He said, simply, he paints what is around him, often as indicated in a number of the paintings in the book, the natural beauty in his own yard.

"I'm intrigued with so many different things," he said.

"Everything I look at becomes a potential motif. ... So many things influence me. If somebody says blue to me, I'll paint something blue."



FRESNO BEE FILE/1966
Rollin Pickford, at 54, painted on a part-time basis at his old downtown studio in Fresno. His 8-5 job was as a commercial artist.

Still, as he said, "My roots are here," an allusion to a sense of caring behind his work so plain to the eye that years ago, Bette Tambling, then writing for The Fresno Bee, described Pickford as "painter laureate of the San Joaquin Valley."

"California Light" amply demonstrates the artist's numerous changes in style (including some exuberant abstracts) and medium, attesting to his zeal for experimentation, especially in the 1950s and 1960s.

Not so obvious, at least to those less acquainted with regional history and Pickford's work, is the documentation the book provides of how urban

development has steadily engulfed the homely rural beauties of the landscape.

The artist's concern for the fate of his hometown is one reason he retreats each year to the central coast for several months.

"Pacific Grove has become my spiritual home," Pickford said. "Over there, you're surrounded by the subject matter ... just walk out the front door. My heart is here, but it's become so polluted and crowded. It just breaks my heart; it's not the paradise it was as a small town."

Leitmotifs of the paradise-lost theme are the paintings "Dusk," a rural scene from

1970 in a format dominated by a towering sky, and "Last Ditch," a view of a meandering canal at Nees and Millbrook avenues. The first is from 1970, the second, from 1975. Besides their bucolic nature, the most striking commonality of the scenes is that both are flooded with the golden-brown light of the lowering evening sun.

"People love this painting," Pickford said of "Last Ditch." "Sunset is a very beautiful time in the Valley anyway ... see the way the water is lit up like gold."

Joel Pickford described "Last Ditch" as the most popular of the show's paintings. The title, he said, rather symbolizes the attitude of the property owner. Once a large landowner, she has held fast to a patch of rural acreage, defying encroaching suburbia.

"This is still the last uncovered ditch in the neighborhood, surrounded by tile roofs and satellite dishes," said Pickford, the younger.

"Dusk," said Pickford Sr., "is the essence of what I feel about the Valley. I think it all comes together when you see the new moon rising over it all."

Of another "moon shot" titled "Nocturne," a dramatic painting that focuses on a small leafless tree caught in the glare of an early-evening winter moon, he said, "I've seen three different ladies look at this and burst into tears. I never understood why ... People were always saying things about my paintings I don't understand."

Most people, Pickford said, consider the Valley an ugly place. They see it as flat, hot and dusty, dismissing such visual delights as the blooming orchards or the rhythms of the land.

"I see a certain beauty. The sky is so open and so huge. You stand out there, and you get this wonderful feeling of spaciousness and flooding light. And the rhythms [the repetitions of shapes such as furrows, rows of fruit trees and grapevines — even the fences and canals], I think they correspond to the rhythms of music."

The book's dominant paintings are of the Valley's blossoming orchards, canals, clois-

tered country dwellings and fields open to the horizon. Pickford celebrates beauty of a different sort in his other world, at the shore.

As reminders of Pickford's "Japanese Period" of the 1970s, there are renditions of isolated beaches, empty dunes and fog-bound trees that demonstrate his facility for discovering and extracting, simply and with elegance, poetic images from the grandeur of nature.

Much as Pickford loves his adopted home on the coast, no artist extant has so exhaustively recorded the look, the feel and the bouquet of the Valley.

"I don't think there is a question that he [Pickford] is THE watercolorist of the Valley," said Ara "Corky" Normart, a retired advertising executive who was a college student when he first met Pickford in the late 1940s. "From the early '50s on, he was doing things — in sales and competitions out of state — there was nobody else doing what he was doing."

Along the way, Pickford has influenced several generations of Valley watercolorists and painters, among them August Madrigal of Reedley.

"I was just this kid from this little town when I first met him," said Madrigal, a retired Connecticut college professor who returned to his hometown of Reedley to resume his creative life. "Until Rollin, I never knew there were people with professional goals. He was a trailblazer; I thought he was the first professional artist in our area."

Pickford's generosity with artists is as legend as his modesty.

Watercolorist Adelia Shellenberger met Pickford 40 years ago and remembers him as a gentle mentor, first as a student in his watercolor class and later as a colleague in the Tuesday Group, a loose-knit band of artists so named because they took to the fields to paint on Tuesdays.

"I'd started as an oil painter, and he made me want to do watercolor," Shellenberger said. "He didn't put you down. He was so encouraging, always

Please see **Pickford**, Page H6

MANN
STEREO Digital Stereo

The Perfect Holiday Gift...
A MANN Theatres Gift Certificate!
Available at the box office.

Festival 6 5580 N. BLACKSTONE 209-431-7580
JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES (R) (12:00 2:45 5:00) 7:15 9:30
RINGMASTER (R) (12:00 2:15 4:30) 7:15 9:30
I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R) (12:30 3:00 5:15) 7:30 9:45
THE SIEGE (R) (1:00 4:00) 7:15 9:45
BELLY (R) (12:15 2:30 4:40) 7:00 9:10
BELOVED (R) (12:45 4:15) 8:00

Regency 6 1600 WILLOW AT SHAW 209-299-2517
BABE: PIG IN THE CITY (G) (12:15 2:30 4:50) 7:30 9:45
HOME FRIES (PG-13) (12:30 2:45 5:00) 7:15 9:30
VERY BAD THINGS (R) (12:15 2:40 5:00) 7:15 9:30
THE RUGRATS MOVIE (G) (12:00 2:15 4:30) 7:00 9:15
ENEMY OF THE STATE (R) (12:45 3:45) 7:00 10:00
THE WATERBOY (PG-13) (12:45 3:00 5:15) 7:30 9:50

Fig Garden 4 5196 N. PALM 209-224-1878
BABE: PIG IN THE CITY (G) (12:00 2:15 4:30) 7:00 9:15
HOME FRIES (PG-13) (12:30 2:45 5:00) 7:15 9:30
CELEBRITY (R) (12:00 2:30 5:00) 7:30 9:45
MEET JOE BLACK (PG-13) (12:15 4:00) 7:45

Friday, 11/27 Thru Sunday, 11/29 Only
Bargain Performances In Parenthesis
www.manntheatres.com

LEILANI
Restaurant & Lounge

Dim Sum Service
港式點心

ALL DAY \$4.99
BUFFET

FRI. • SAT. • SUN. ALL DAY BUFFET

- Lemon Chicken
- Beef Broccoli
- Chow Mein
- Sweet & Sour Pork
- Beef Stew
- Egg Roll
- Kung Pao Chicken
- Chicken Wings
- Crab
- Pot Stickers
- Shrimp
- Duck
- Ribs
- Tofu
- Salad
- Jello
- Fruit

THE ORIGINAL ROUNDUP BAR-B-Q
and ITALIAN KITCHEN
Formerly of Farmer's Market and Manchester

2 Pasta Dinners \$12.00
Soup or salad, garlic bread

6242 N. Blackstone
Herb Bauer Shopping Center 448-8501

Veronica's Room
by Ira Levin
directed by D. Scott McQuiston
December 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12 at 7:30 p.m. and December 5 matinee at 2:00 p.m. in the Fresno City College Lab Theatre.
Call 442-8221 for tickets and information

Central California BALLET
Diane K. Mosler, Director

Nutcracker
The Mouse Queen's Revenge

Tower Theater - Wishon & Olive, Fresno

★ Friday at 7:30 pm Wine Reception Opening Nite
★ Saturday at 2:00 & 7:30
★ Sunday Matinee at 2:00
December 11, 12 & 13, 1998

All Seats Reserved

SELMA 6 CINEMAS
2705 Cinema Way 891-2000
Denotes Special Engagement
Show Times Valid Fri., Sat. & Sun. Only

Babe: Pig in the City (G) Daily (2:00, 4:15, 6:30, 8:45)
Fri., Sat. & Sun. (11:50, 2:00, 4:15, 6:30, 8:45)
A Bug's Life (G) Daily (2:15, 4:30, 6:50, 9:00)
Fri., Sat. & Sun. (12:00, 2:15, 4:30, 6:50, 9:00)
Enemy of the State (R) Daily (2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20)
Fri., Sat. & Sun. (1:00, 3:50, 6:40, 9:30)
The Rugrats Movie (G) Daily (1:45, 4:00, 6:15, 8:30)
Fri., Sat. & Sun. (11:30, 1:45, 4:00, 6:15, 8:30)
Waterboy (PG-13) Daily (1:40, 3:40, 5:40, 7:40, 9:40)
Fri., Sat. & Sun. (11:40, 1:40, 3:40, 5:40, 7:40, 9:40)
Meet Joe Black (PG-13) Daily (1:20) only
I Still Know What You Did Last Summer (R) Daily 6:45, 7:10, 9:30

BARGAIN MATINEES DAILY
All Shows \$4.50 Until 4:00 P.M.
Bargain Showtimes in Parenthesis
Thursday Night is Family Night All Seats \$4.00
Not Including Special Engagements

"SCARIER THAN THE FIRST!"
LILI HART, IAN TORRITO

Still I Know
WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER
mandalay R COLUMBIA PICTURES

UNITED/ARTISTS CLOVIS TOWNE CENTER
Villa at Shaw Ave. 487-2711
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00

UNITED/ARTISTS BROADWAY FAIRE 10
Shaw at Valentine 221-6471
OFF AT PWT AT N. BLACKSTONE AVE. PHONE 209-447-3140

Romantic Weekend
*Kit Give Away

- Great Prices
- Bridal Registry
- Large Variety
- Small to 4X
- Men Lingerie
- Clothes
- Shoes
- Swim Wear

***FREE With Purchase Must Bring AD**

Sierra Vista Mall 299-6921
French Desires Lingerie

"A BREATHTAKING FILM!"
Roger Ebert, SISKEL & EBERT
"TWO THUMBS UP!"
SISKEL & EBERT

ELIZABETH
"ABSOLUTELY POWER DEMANDS ABSOLUTE LOYALTY"

UNITED/ARTISTS SIERRA VISTA
Santa Ana Ave. at Clovis Ave. 348-1931
OFF AT PWT AT N. BLACKSTONE AVE. PHONE 209-447-3140

"TWO THUMBS UP!"
SISKEL & EBERT

"A WORLD-CLASS THRILLER."
JOEL SIEGEL, GOOD MORNING AMERICA

"THE BEST ACTION FILM OF THE YEAR."
PAT COLLINS, WNOV-TV

WILL SMITH GENE HACKMAN
ENEMY OF THE STATE

"ROUSING FUN...A DYNAMITE THRILLER."
PETER TRAVERS, ROLLING STONE

"STARTS WITH A BANG AND ENDS WITH A BOOM."
JEFF STRICKLER, MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE

TOUCHSTONE PICTURES PRESENTS
A TONY SCOTT FILM
WILL SMITH GENE HACKMAN
"ENEMY OF THE STATE"
JOHN VOIGHT REGINA KING GABRIEL BYRNE MASEY TREVOR RABIN
HARRY GREGSON-WILLIAMS MUSIC BY CHAD OMAN
JAMES W. SKOTCHDOPOLE & ANDREW Z. DAVIS EDITOR DAVID MARGOLIN
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JERRY BRUCKHEIMER TONY SCOTT
PRODUCED BY JERRY BRUCKHEIMER TONY SCOTT
WRITTEN BY JERRY BRUCKHEIMER TONY SCOTT
DIRECTED BY TONY SCOTT

Pickford: He's a 'pure spirit' in everything that he does

Continued from Page H2

finding one little thing about what you did that was good and remarking upon it. Everybody who studied with him said the same thing."

Doug Walla, a former curator of the Fresno Art Museum who went on to become a gallery owner in New York, worked with Pickford on exhibitions 20 years ago. Barely out of his teens, himself, at the time, Walla recalled the experience as "like working with a kid."

"Rollin is just a pure spirit," Walla said. "He does what he enjoys and does it as well as he can."

Walla's viewpoint is reinforced by Loren Pickford's experience with his father.

"I came back to Fresno for a while, just to spend time with him," Pickford the younger said. "If you want to know what he's about, you have to go painting with him."

"The fascinating thing about him is that he lives in a world of perception. Sometimes I don't think anything else registers."

"He wouldn't say much to me. I'd see him paint blossoms and wonder at the poetic beauty he got just by going bump, bump, bump with this old sponge he's had since the 1930s."

"I ask him how he does it, and he says painting isn't about technique, it's about seeing something. If it makes a strong enough impact, you'll figure out how to paint it."

Glenna, who handles the business of sales, believes the artist's lifelong determination and focus is a major factor in

his success.

"He doesn't paint to sell," she said. "He has never been preoccupied with that or whether people like his work. Of course, he likes it when they do; it gives him a little boost."

Business, however, is business. Pickford, the shy, gentle patriarch of Valley painters, is rather nervously anticipating a raft of social-commercial events related to the new book: Scheduled thus far are appearances Thursday (at noon and ARThop time) at N.G. Squared in Civic Center Square.

He admitted, alluding to his advanced years, that even now he'd rather be painting a pine tree in the surroundings of his beloved Pacific Grove, or searching out unusual "motifs" in the foggy bottom land at the San Joaquin River.

"People say to me, 'Don't you get tired of being on the coast and painting the same old rocks?'" he said. "No, I tell them, because I'm a different artist every time."

"I'm afraid to stop; I'm afraid everything will stop. I'd like to paint one good watercolor, just once."

"I feel very inadequate, but I'm still trying to push the medium as far as possible."

Son Loren has an existentialist's answer for how far Pickford Sr. will push his sense of perception.

"He isn't going to die," Loren said. "He's just going to walk into one of those landscapes he's working on and disappear."



THEATRE

Showcase

City Dances in the
io — 8 p.m. Th.
and 2 p.m. next
program of origi
choreography b
and students. Fr
City College, Gy
Room 101, 1101
University Ave. \$
vance, \$7 at the
\$4 students and
iors. 442-8221.

STOMP — 7:30
Fri.-Sat., 3 p.m.
Sun., a theatra
ience event. San
Theatre, 700 M
\$25, \$29. 498-4
226-2277.

Community

"Sugar, Some L
Hot" — 1:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m. Sun.
Wed.-Thurs., 8:3
Fri.-Sat. Dinner
two hours before
formance, follow
pre-show entert
Good Company
production. Reg
performances W
Sun. through Ja
Roger Rocka's
Theater, 1226 N
on Ave. Show o
\$22; dinner-sho
\$32. 266-9494.

"A Christmas C
2 p.m. Sun., 8 p
Thurs., 8:30 p.m.
Sat., Good Com
Players product
Performances th
Dec. 20. Second
Theatre, 928 E.
Ave. \$10, \$12. S
and senior disc
available. 266-0
266-9494.

"Chess" — 2 p.
8 p.m. Fri.-Sat.,
Dec. 6. Merced
for the Perform
Theatre-on-the-
452 W. Main St.
ced. \$15. 209-7

"The Elves and
Shoemaker" —

r. Some sounds of the season