

COVER ARTIST | DOLORES MITCHELL



Artist Dolores Mitchell

Dolores Mitchell, the artist responsible for this edition's cover, was working on her PhD in London when offered a position teaching art at Chico State University. The Chicago native and self-described city person had lived in New York, studied in Los Angeles and wondered if she could adapt to small-town life.

The answer was soon a resounding "yes." Chico has been her home for more than 30 years. "I've come to love everything about Chico, the landscape, the weather, the culture," she explained. "We're in the Sacramento River delta. The soil is so rich. It supports so much life. I love the orchards and the rice fields."

Almond orchards burst into bloom each February. Their blossoming is the subject of the cover painting *Radiant Fields*. "I was driving," she explained, "and was so struck by the green of the fields I had to pull to the side of the road and do a quick sketch. It was such a vibrant scene as if all those plants so wanted to live. I love the idea of nature being such a vital force with an urge to unfurl. That's the idea I'm trying to get across with this painting."

DOLORES MITCHELL: MARIA PHILLIPS

*Rice Silos*, oil on canvas

"Chico is just magical," she said, "friendly, progressive, rich in landscape and culture. I'm a part of Avenue 9 Gallery. We have 'paint-outs' all the time. The work is sold to help preserve the environment. Nature always gives us unexpected gifts. We try to give back."

Mitchell also commended Chico's performing arts community and noted that Chico is a great travel bargain. "The art here is far less expensive than it would be in larger markets. I'd like to encourage people to come visit, buy some artwork and enjoy one of our many performing arts groups."

The Avenue 9 Gallery exhibits *Dolores Mitchell: Rice Fields and Orchards* February 12 – March 20. For more information about the artist and her work visit www.avenue9gallery.com. ■

FEATURE ARTIST | WAIF MULLENS



Artist Waif Mullens

Ask Tennessee native Waif Mullens the best thing about being an artist in Chico and the response comes quickly. Bidwell Park and the weather.

The artist responsible for *Foothills Sunset* the oil painting illustrating the story on page eight explained that he has been drawing inspiration from the college town's diverse landscape for most of his adult life. "I spent two years in the Bay Area with the fog every morning and the wind and fog every evening. Most outdoor painting is done in the early morning or late evening when the sun is traveling through lots of atmosphere and picks up a lot of color. Light is of course very important to what I do. It gives you a sense of the season. Coming back to Chico made me really appreciate the benefits of the moderate climate and the opportunity to paint outdoors."

Mullens first arrived in Chico as an art student in 1967. He holds both bachelor and master's degrees from Chico State and has gained a national reputation for his work—especially his ability to paint water. Bidwell Park affords him ample opportunity to ply his craft. *Foothills Sunset* is derived from a scene in the upper portion of Bidwell Park. "The upper portion is quite primitive and undeveloped,"

*Sycamore Pool*, pastel, also depicts Bidwell Park in Chico, California.

Mullens said. "This is a view from the early part of a washboard road as you head north. The sun was setting and there were interesting cloud formations. The upper park has been described as a mini-Grand Canyon. That's pretty accurate. There's a lot of subject matter. You can paint canyon walls as seen from the road, or climb down where there's water and huge volcanic boulders. Very dramatic stuff."

The lower park, he noted, is tamer with paved pathways suitable for joggers and cyclists. Creeks attract swimmers. Mullens also paints the people of Chico enjoying the park's natural attributes. "Bidwell Park is a real treasure," he said. For more information visit www.waifmullens.com. ■