



Above: Moon Rays, 20" X 30"

Below: Incoming Fog, 16" X 24"

# Her Day in the Sun

This month we celebrate artist Violet Parkhurst

By Adrienne Papp

**T**HIS NOVEMBER 3 IS VIOLET PARKHURST DAY IN LOS ANGELES. THE WORLD-RENOWNED PAINTER HAS MAINTAINED AN ART GALLERY IN THE CITY OF SAN PEDRO FOR THE PAST 40 YEARS, AND JUST LAST YEAR, THE CITY DECIDED TO NAME A SPECIAL DAY TO HONOR HER.

Eighty years old, Parkhurst may be best known for her groundbreaking work in China. In 2002, she was invited to China and honored as the first western artist to have paintings placed in the Great Hall of the People's Republic of China and the China National Museum of Fine Arts. Four U.S. presidents have owned her artwork, and she is listed in *Who's Who in International Art*. With a vivacious wit and twinkle in her eye, she is more than happy to discuss her storied career with whoever will listen.

Parkhurst knew she was different than most little girls when she started painting at the age of six. Her parents didn't encourage her art early on as it was the time of the impressionists, most of whom were seen as starving artists. Also, women were not

expected to become great artists, least of all in nude portraits and seascapes, her favorite subject matter. But, Parkhurst overcame these obstacles to become hugely successful. She credits author Norman Vincent Peale and his book, *The Power of Positive Thinking* as a major influence on her career.

"I discovered science of mind, and that's positive thinking," she says. "I would visualize what I wanted and I never had to really go out and get it. It would come to me."

Even today, Parkhurst believes strongly that spirituality drives her art. Though she doesn't consider herself highly religious, she does "say a small prayer" before she starts every painting. She also meditates to find the right state of mind before beginning a new work. This sense of spirituality can be seen in her vibrant seascapes that capture the power and beauty of the ocean. Those interested in perusing her works can do so at her website, [www.parkhurstartgalleries.com](http://www.parkhurstartgalleries.com).

Giving to others has also been a cornerstone of Parkhurst's career. She's active in the local community, and regularly donates paintings to local charity fundraisers. She's also



Above from left: Violet with President Ronald Reagan; with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; with President George Bush Sr., and First Lady Barbara Bush; with Clark Gable

helped mentor and launch the careers of many of today's top artists. Two world-renowned artists, Thomas Kinkade and Cao Yong, hung their early artwork in Parkhurst's galleries. She currently offers one print on her website for only \$12.95 (her costs for shipping and handling) because she believes art should be accessible to everyone.

"Because I'm so grateful to all these people who keep coming to the website, I'm now giving a free print," she says. "I just feel there are a lot of people who can't afford artwork."

While content to stay in Southern California these days, early in her career, Parkhurst was an avid traveler. After studying at an art school in Boston, she traveled to all 50 states, Canada, and Mexico. Soon after, a scholarship to study at the Museum of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro spurred Parkhurst to set sail for South America. However, when her ship was commandeered to fight in a local revolution, she found herself stuck in Natal, Brazil.

"I got stranded there for three months and of course fell madly in love with a Brazilian boy," she says. "We went up the Amazon, and we went on a Jaguar hunt." Parkhurst's journals were soon translated and published in South America under the title, *Jaguar by the Tale*.

By the time she made it to Rio, Parkhurst had learned to speak Portuguese and her book on South America elicited attention from some Hollywood magazines that were in need of a foreign correspondent. The next seven years of her life found her in a mutual love affair with Hollywood. She traveled in celebrity circles, and became very close with a handsome leading man of the time, Clark Gable.

"The reason he thought so highly of me was because I never tried to get in a movie," she explains. "Every girl he went with wanted a part in a movie, and I didn't. He liked me because I never demanded anything of him."

In fact, Gable liked her so much that after visiting her at her tiny house in Topanga Canyon, he went out and bought her a larger house in Malibu. While demure about the exact nature of her relationship with Gable, Parkhurst admits to being a passionate person in general. She speaks openly about her former marriages and many love affairs and says love has always had a substantial effect on her art.

"I find that whoever I'm having an affair with, it changes my paintings," she says. "When I'm having one with someone who is very vibrant and full of life, I find my seascapes become very wild. If I'm not really involved with somebody, I get bored and my paintings get bored."

Her creative passion sometimes drives her too hard she says. At one time, she owned 11 art galleries and would paint 8 to 12 hours a day. "Sometimes I wish I didn't feel this intensity," she explains. "It's almost like a burning in my stomach...I look at a blank canvas, and I can hardly wait to finish it."

Today, Parkhurst's blood may not run quite so hot, but she still paints avidly and works with her thoroughbred horses, the other love of her life. She says it has been a "big, big thrill" to have a day named after her.

Those that would like to meet the artist in person and see her work up close can do so Saturday, November 4, at the Parkhurst Art Galleries in Ports O' Call Village, San Pedro. The free show runs from 6pm to 9pm and will include an artist demonstration, hors d'oeuvres and wine bar, and a free signed print for the first 100 guests. For those who can't make the show, the exhibit will run through December 2, 2006. Call (310) 832-1076 for more information.



Right: Violet at work