

**DESERT INSTITUTE**

Spring Session 2020

*at Joshua Tree National Park*

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## The Art History of the Coachella Valley

### Information

Date/ Time: Sunday, October 25, 9 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.  
Meet at: Chase Board Room, Living Desert  
47900 Portola Avenue, Palm Desert  
Instructor: Steven Biller, editor-in-chief, Palm Springs Life

### Overview

The opening of Southern Pacific Railroad service in the desert in the late 1800s brought with it a steady flow of artists from the East Coast who rode in exchange for their paintings and drawings of Western landscapes, which the railroad used to entice travelers to explore beyond the Mississippi River. By the 1920s, American and European impressionist painters were fixtures in Southern California's deserts, mountains, canyons, forests, and coastlines — and especially in artist colonies like the one that emerged in the Coachella Valley. The workshop begins in this early California period, surveying the painters who came through the valley — and in some cases remained and became influential in the area. Next, the trajectory leads to modern art and artists who pioneered the movement in the desert — as well as key events, such as the opening of Palm Springs Desert Museum. The contemporary art segment introduces artists whose work is inspired by the conditions and culture of the Coachella Valley and has gained an international audience. This segment also covers the proliferation and contributions of commercial art galleries, fairs/festivals, and studio/gallery districts as well as public art and events such as Desert X and the Bombay Beach Biennale.

### Itinerary

*Sunday, October 25*

*9 a.m. – noon*

*Living Desert, Palm Desert*

1. The Role of Coachella Valley Art — and How to Look
2. Early Desert Painters
  - How the Coachella Valley became a turn-of-the-century artist colony
  - The rise of California Impressionism
  - Key people and institutions of the “Smoke Tree School”
  - The legacy of the early desert painters

1 – 3:30 p.m.

*Phillip K. Smith Studio, Palm Desert*

3. Modernism (60 minutes)
  - Key artists and institutions
4. Contemporary (90 minutes)
  - Postwar California art movements
  - Key artists working in the Coachella Valley
  - Chicano/Latino/Latinx art
  - Non-desert-based artists and photographers interested in the region
  - Galleries, fairs, festivals/events (including Desert X, Coachella, and Bombay Beach Biennale)

4–5:30 p.m.

*Armando Lerma Studio, Coachella*

- Public and site-specific sculpture and murals
- Walking tour of Coachella Walls

#### **What to Bring**

- Notebook and pencil/pen
- Camera
- Comfortable walking shoes/sneakers
- Lunch and snacks

#### **Instructor Biography**

Steven Biller is the longtime editor-in-chief of *Palm Springs Life* and a board member of Desert X, the biennial exhibition of site-specific artwork in the Coachella Valley. He writes and lectures about California impressionism, especially the early desert painters, as well as contemporary art in the California desert.