

DATE ORCHARDS

This section shows date orchards from Morocco, Namibia, and California. Despite the cartoons and tourist photographs of palm trees arising from the desert sand dunes, date palms need water to survive. Merzouga and nearby villages can grow them because they lie on top of the largest underground aquifer in Morocco.

Villagers work together to maintain the water channel through the oasis. Each family has a scheduled day a couple of times a month to draw water from the channel to maintain their plots.



Date Palms Growing in the Sand Dunes, Merzouga, Morocco



Green Peas Among the Date Palms in Springtime, Hassilabied Oasis, Morocco

Amzrou and Zagora are in the Draa River Valley, the largest date-growing area in Morocco. Similar to a lot of Sacramento Valley agriculture, the oases along the Draa get fed by the snows and rains that fall in the High Atlas mountains. In spring, when water is plentiful, farmers grow vegetables under the palm trees, but these are harvested before the dates get ripe.

We were there at harvest-time, in October. The painting, "*Date Palms near Amzrou, Morocco*," and the drawing, "*Footpath Through the Oasis*," show some of the orchards from which the date merchants in the photo got their fruit.

NUT ORCHARDS

All the nut orchard paintings and drawings are from California. That's not surprising because California is the biggest almond producer in the world. Depending on the source and the year, California is estimated to produce 80-90% of the world's almonds.

If it is February in Yolo County, it is almond blossom time, and artists, including me, love to be out in the orchards painting the beautiful trees, even if the weather is a little cool. We're a dedicated bunch.



Walnut Orchard Along Tremont Road, Solano County



Artist Working en Plein Air at an Almond Orchard, Yolo County

California is also the country's biggest producer of walnuts, but only second world-wide. China grows about three times as many as we do. Because walnuts don't have stunning white blossoms, artists don't paint as many walnut orchard pictures. But their branching patterns and fissured white bark attract me. They also age beautifully.

One clear late winter day I was driving up to see the Sutter Buttes when I came across an orchard north of Knights Landing. The highway was lined with large, old walnut trees. Between the road and the Sacramento River levee was a carefully tended orchard with trees of many ages. To me, it spoke to the loving care generations of Yolo County farmers give to their farms. I hope my drawing, "*Many Generations*," conveys that feeling. I haven't yet painted a walnut orchard after the leaves turn golden yellow in the fall, but I will.

OLIVE ORCHARDS

Olives grow everywhere there is a Mediterranean climate; in this section, I include paintings from Morocco, South Africa, Spain, and California.

Spain is the leading olive producer in the world; Morocco is in the top five. My husband and I went to Ubeda, Spain, to see the Renaissance architecture, but spent most of our time ambling down dirt roads through the local olive orchards. It was a very relaxing afternoon--I remember the olive trees more than I do the buildings.



Olive Oil Press, Mission La Purisima Concepcion, Lompoc



Olive Orchards Outside the City Walls, Ubeda, Spain

Olives have a long history in California. In the late 18th century, Franciscan missionaries brought them from Spain to California. A couple of the orchards they planted still survive, including the one at Mission La Purisima Concepcion, near Lompoc. Note that the painting shows the old trees in the mission garden, not the orchard.

The olive orchard photos, all taken in Morocco, show the fruit being processed after harvest. The men pressing the olive oil are friends of my older son. Compare their olive press with that of the mission.

ROW CROPS

Most of my pictures here focus on tomatoes--after all, Yolo County is a major producer of processing tomatoes. But things change. When I took photos of the Olam tomato processing plant south of Colusa in August 2019, the plant was busy at work, with steam coming out all over. By the time I finished the painting in December, it had shut down. Olam's press release said that people were eating more fresh tomatoes and fewer processing tomatoes.

I first became interested in prickly pears as a crop rather than a decorative plant when I saw a prickly pear field from the Capitol Corridor train. A couple of days later, I took the car and zig-zagged



Olam Tomato Processing Plant at Full Steam, Colusa County



Prickly Pear Field, Near Mekelle, Ethiopia

back and forth across the tracks in Solano County until I found the field I had seen from the train. Since then, I have seen prickly pear fields in all sorts of places, most notably Sicily (see the painting, "*Prickly Pears and Fennel*"), Morocco, Ethiopia, and Namibia.

Many of the places I have visited still get their vegetables from family plots. In Morocco, Steve's Peace Corps family had a patch of lentils for home use. All the women came out to harvest them, including the girls, Iman and Miriam, their aunt Mina, and me. Since I hand-weed my garden at home, I had had a little practice pulling plants out by their roots. The drawing, "*Walking to Market*," shows Tanzanian women taking their surplus vegetables to their local farmer's market.

RICE

The paintings and photographs in this section draw from our travels in northern California, Indonesia--a typical rice-growing region, with plenty of rainfall--and Mali.

Indonesia is the third most productive rice-growing region in the world, after China and India. Most people go to the Indonesian island of Bali for the beaches and for yoga retreats. My husband, older son, and I spent most of our twenty days in Bali wandering through rice fields on footpaths, exploring how it was being cultivated, from planting to harvesting, threshing, and bundling off to market (see the photos in the glass case).



Pest Control in the Rice Fields, Bali



Flooded Terraces, near Munduk, Bali

I loved the way the farmers seemed to use every inch of the land. In the drawing, "*Rice Terraces Near Munduk*," you can see coconut palms, bananas, and clove trees on the edge of the paddies. Since the Balinese can grow rice year-round, we saw all stages of the process. Most of the labor is still being done by hand. My guess is that the narrow mountain terraces have something to do with it.

Also note the painting, "*Ripening Grain along the Niger River, Mali*." We spent three days in a *pinasse*, a longboat with an outboard motor, going from Mopti through the Niger Inland Delta to the port city of Timbuktu. Rice was growing everywhere, sometimes on land a few inches above the river, sometimes submerged in the water. The Malians often grow the native West African rice, *Oryza glaberrima*, instead of the Asian variety we cultivate in California. I kept wondering if this was what the Sacramento River would have looked like without its system of levees. Fascinating!

FIELD CROPS

The paintings are mostly from California. The photographs were taken in Morocco, central Ethiopia, and the upper reaches of the Ganges River in the Indian Himalayas.

What's special about field crops besides seeing them growing in densely seeded plots all over the county? First, field crops provide the wheat people eat; barley for their malt beers; alfalfa and irrigated and dry pasture for their cows, sheep, and horses; and straw to bed them down on. Second, they bring in a lot of money--in 2018, they contributed more to the Yolo County economy than tomatoes did.



Amaranth Fields Cascading Down the Mountainside, India



Maybe Milo, Yolo County

But best of all, I love painting them, especially haystacks and bales. I like to see how sunlight highlights the color of the grain stalks and how shadows fall over them.

Amaranth is not really a grain like wheat or barley, but many cultures use it as a cereal. When I went to Hovenweep National Monument in the American Southwest, I learned that an ancestral Pueblo people cultivated it hundreds if not thousands of years ago. But the most spectacular fields of amaranth I have seen were in the Indian Himalayas. For about three days of our seven-day hike over Kuari Pass, we woke up to views of red and yellow amaranth cascading down mountainsides. In the drawing, "*Mountain Village*," you can see how Indian farmers dry it on their rooftops and terraces.