



Moon Rising over Tiburon
1916
Oakland Museum of California

Granville Redmond

Frank Sinatra sings of a lady who considers California cold and damp. Apparently, she wasn't alone in that opinion. At the turn of the 20th century, many NorCal painters embraced a style called Tonalism, restricting themselves to the many shades of grey. Clearly Tonalism reflects one aspect of the NorCal landscape, especially in San Francisco, the "cool grey city of love." But why did so many French-trained local painters disdain the luminosity of French Impressionism to focus on the fog? Still, the Tonalists' restricted palette is anything but dull. It includes taupe, slate, olive, heliotrope, pewter, amethyst, and other misty, pearlescent hues.

One example of the quiet power of the style can be found in *Moon Rising over Tiburon* by Granville Redmond, one of its masters. After a childhood bout of scarlet fever, Redmond's family moved from Philadelphia to Berkeley so the boy could attend the California School for the Deaf. Here, he had his first art instruction—training in the arts was considered ideal for the deaf—and he completed his first oil painting at 11. He studied at the California School of Design, where Tonalism was in full flower, and received a grant to study in Paris, at the Académie Julian. After returning to Los Angeles in 1899, he married and established a career as a painter. Impressionism was widespread in SoCal but Redmond's early works there were resoundingly Tonalist. These works would remain his favorites, possibly because they expressed his own inner world. He later commented that he liked works of "solitude and silence."

He moved back north, where his *plein-air* paintings of the California countryside and coast lightened in palette, reflecting the brighter moments of this still very rural landscape. Believing in what photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson called "the decisive moment," he advised painting outdoors for no more than 15 minutes at a time: "by that time everything has changed." Poppy fields became a frequent subject—so much that he could barely paint enough to keep up with demand.

In 1917, Redmond met the young Charlie Chaplin and helped him refine his pantomime techniques. Redmond appeared in seven Chaplin films over a dozen years, most notably as "the Sculptor" in Chaplin's masterpiece, *City Lights*. Chaplin appreciated and supported Redmond's art, setting him up in a studio on his film complex, and commissioning many works from him. As a final tribute to his friend, Chaplin sent an enormous wreath, in the shape of an artist's palette, to Redmond's funeral.



To Learn More:

Artists in California, 1786-1940, Edan Hughes, Crocker Museum, 2002

Facing Eden: 100 Years of Landscape Art in the Bay Area, Steven Nash, University of California Press, 1995

Granville Redmond, a triumph of talent and temperament, Mary Jean Haley, Oakland Museum of California, 1988

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