

Lucille Bainbridge, *THE BLACK BEAR MINE*, oil, 18 x 24

— LUCILLE BAINBRIDGE —

by David A. Bainbridge

*"Landscape has always been local in origin
Each artist laboring to express the
Aspects of nature she best knew and loved."*

*James Flexner,
The Wilder Image*

Lu Bainbridge lives near Cortez, Colorado on a gentle rise below the dramatic cliffs of Mesa Verde National Park. Her studio window faces east to the morning sun rising over the La Plata mountains and north to the mountains near Telluride. The morning air is crisp and clear here in the southwest corner of Colorado and as the sun rises it adds life to the stark landscape, to the buildings grouped together on the five acre homestead she now calls home. And the way she says "home" reveals the depth of her feeling for the house she built with her husband and son.

Her face is tan and leathery from many years in the sun, her eyes sparkle, and she looks very fit after three years of work on the land and house. At a time when many women feel lost and depressed, she feels new confidence in herself and in her art. In a wild and lovely land of sandstone, sagebrush and clean air, with the best studio she's ever had, and after plenty of hard physical labor, she is content.

It has been a long and winding trail from Lu Bainbridge's first oil painting in a New England high school. She still uses the same oil box and palette she used then, with a patina from a quarter of a century of service, but her skills and philosophy have been sharpened along the way.

After a brief stint studying fashion illustration at the School of Practical Arts in Boston, she moved to a small cabin in the mountains of upstate New York with her husband. Here she dabbled in portraits and birds before finding that landscapes gave her greater satisfaction. A move to California and the raising of two sons kept her from her easel for several years. Then Golden, Colorado and the return to a more beautiful land. More free time allowed her to start painting landscapes again, primarily pastels of both the old mines and the mountains of central Colorado.

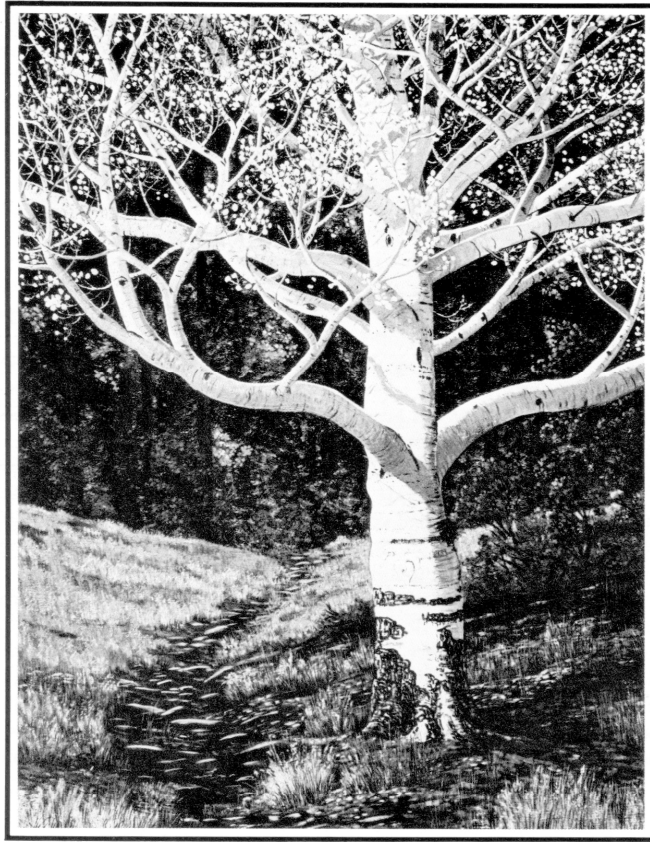
Another move to a wild valley in north central Washington provided the inspiration and time for more intensive work with pastels. Eventually Bainbridge returned to oils to provide greater detail in her portrayal of the land. She is self-taught but feels that Ansel Adams, Peter Hurd, and Andrew Wyeth all had a hand in her training. With the chance to paint consistently, she achieved control of the medium and the feeling of accomplishment that follows. She began to sell her paintings (often in barter for apples, corn, or flights over the Cascades) to residents of the area. Her feel for the land and its many moods captured many repeat customers whose comments would delight any artist: "When I come home from work in the dark of winter, I look at that painting and I feel a new day beginning up on the summer range."

A move to Sacramento, California followed and with the boys off to high school and college, Lu was free to concentrate on painting the oaks, foothills and old buildings of the Central Valley. She had very successful exhibits in Town and Country Village, the Golden Gallery in Folsom, and Crocker Bank. One of her paintings brought the highest price at a KVIE (public TV) art auction.

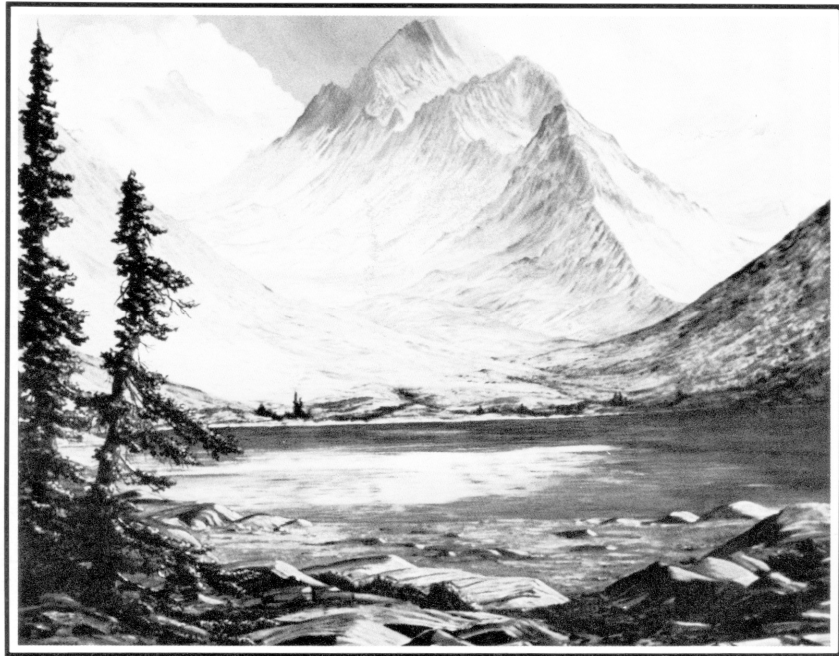
Another move - this time to Corvallis, Oregon, brought new and challenging vistas. New tree patterns, colors, the flow of fog and clouds lent excitement to recording a new land. With profits from her increasing sales Bainbridge was able to have her first studio built; with a real studio and the time to paint daily she was able to learn more, thus producing better paintings. At the Corvallis Art Center Lu had her first one person show and drew excellent reviews and sales from an exhibit that combined her landscapes with quotations drawn from her favorite writers: Aldo Leopold,



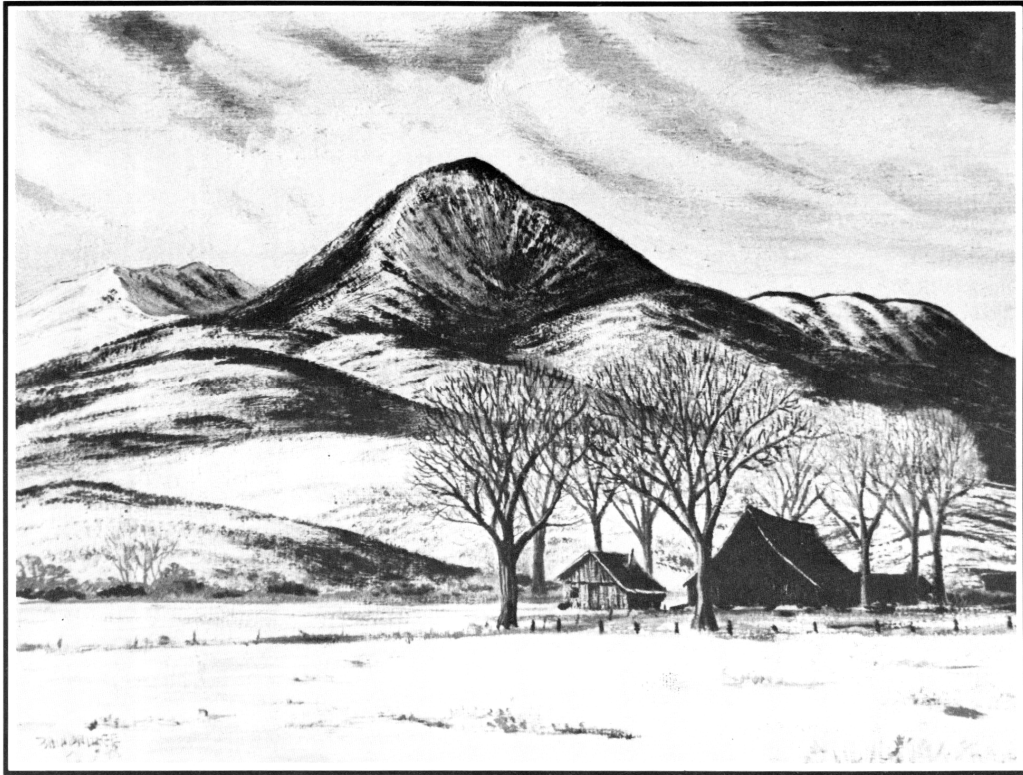
Lucille Bainbridge, VALLEY WINTER, oil, 12 x 20



Lucille Bainbridge, ASPEN SIGNPOST, oil, 16 x 20



Lucille Bainbridge, NAVAJO LAKE AND THE PASS, oil, 16 x 20



Lucille Bainbridge, *MOUNTAIN RANCH* 1978, oil, 6 x 8

John Muir, Edward Abbey, and Henry D. Thoreau. The writings and her landscapes complemented each other. Perhaps none of the quotes is more fitting than one from Thoreau, "I seek acquaintance with nature, ... to know her moods and manners."

Bainbridge then moved to Cortez and built the house where she now paints. "In part," she says, "I paint to encourage others to get outside and in touch with their environment. We only have one earth and we better start taking care of it if we hope to survive." She also does pen and ink sketches for conservation newsletters and channels much of her income into environmental causes.

Her technique has been worked out through trial and error over the years and is now settled. Tempered masonite boards are used with several layers of gesso sanded smooth. Besides sable brushes with thinner and oils, she uses needles to get the very fine details she feels are essential. Grumbacker matt varnish reduces glare and provides added protection. Bainbridge draws from field sketches and notes as well as from slides and advises, "Get outside and do it. I carry a sketch pad when backpacking, walking, or bicycling and record scenes or details that I would like to paint some day."

With her subject material at hand she begins by laying out the composition with a very thin color coat to indicate sky, foreground, and background. When that has dried she follows with a slightly thicker mix, lets that dry, and so on until the very fine detail is reached. She has found that a finger works best for blending skies and clouds.

Her joy and satisfaction from her painting are obvious but she says the comments she receives from her customers are also pleasing. People often remark that they use the paintings for escape through quiet viewing, "No matter how tired and harried I am, I can sit down and for a few moments go for a walk on the trail to Mt. Hood, and it's priceless. Thank you again."

Her works are now on exhibit at The Quality Book Store and Art Gallery in Cortez, Colorado and at the Corvallis Art Center in Corvallis, Oregon. ■