



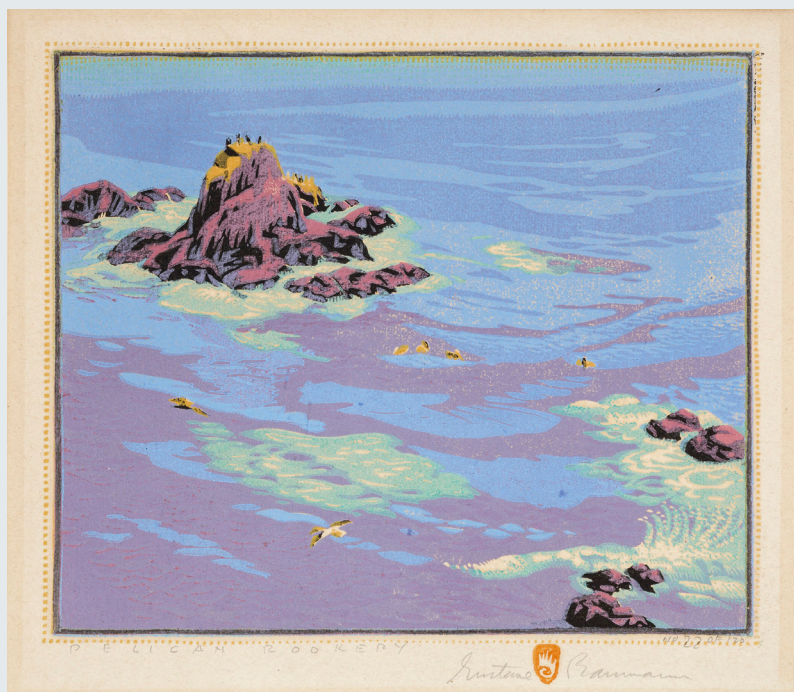
# Gustave Baumann in California

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PASADENA MUSEUM  
of CALIFORNIA ART

## Gustave Baumann in California



Over a seventy-year career Gustave Baumann (1881–1971) became one of the finest color woodblock artists of the twentieth century, creating nearly 200 multi-colored woodcuts. Undoubtedly the pioneering printmaker is best known for his work representing the American Southwest, in particular Santa Fe as well as Brown County, Indiana. Though not as well known, his depictions of California and his relationship to the state demonstrate his significant impact on the color printmaking movement and his unique printmaking style and process.

In 1915 Baumann won a gold medal for eight color woodcuts at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) in San Francisco. In April 1927—just six months after an exhibition of sixty-two of his color woodcuts hung in the Graphic Arts Department of the United States National Museum in Washington, D.C.—the artist departed Santa Fe on his first journey to the Golden State. Between 1927 and 1940, Baumann drove the California coastline seven times, resulting in numerous sketches and tempera paintings that inspired twelve picturesque and glowing color woodcuts of the California landscape.

In the years Baumann traveled to California, he was well represented at no fewer than nine prominent art galleries in the San Francisco Bay Area, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego. He was also an early artist member of the Print Makers Society of California and



**FROM TOP:** Gustave Baumann carving the block for *Taos Placita*, ca. 1960. Courtesy of the Ann Baumann Trust

*In the Hills of Brown*, 1910; printed in 1914. Color woodcut, from *In the Hills o' Brown* portfolio,  $9\frac{1}{8} \times 13\frac{3}{16}$  inches. From the Collection of the Two Red Roses Foundation



participated regularly in the group's annual International Print Makers Exhibition, starting with the first in 1920. Despite his involvement in the California art scene and the sale of his California woodcuts all over the country, until this exhibition, these prints and his connection to the state had not yet been examined in a major museum exhibition.

Born in Magdeburg, Germany, Baumann immigrated with his family to Chicago in 1891. After his father left the family, Baumann abandoned his education and found employment in one of Chicago's commercial engraving houses in 1897. At night he took classes for commercial artists at the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 1904, he returned to his native Germany for a year to study at the Königliche Kunstgewerbeschule München, the Royal School of Arts and Crafts in Munich. Baumann learned to carve and impress blocks using techniques based on the German manner, with broad, flat areas of color applied directly adjacent to one another and uninterrupted by black key-block outlines. He also learned to run blocks through a printing press, contrasting the Japanese style most American printmakers implemented in which artists would brush colors directly onto the blocks and then hand-rub rather than use a press to create the resulting print. In addition to furthering his artistic training in Germany, Baumann also gravitated toward the popular emphasis on living a quiet life close to nature. These significant lessons and values informed and influenced both his life and his work.



**ABOVE:** *Plum and Peach Bloom* [detail], 1912. Color woodcut, 19  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\times$  26  $\frac{5}{8}$  inches. From the Collection of the Two Red Roses Foundation

**LEFT:** *Pelican Rookery*, 1928. Color woodcut, no 22 of 120, 14  $\frac{1}{2}$   $\times$  11 inches. Collection of Richard and Brigitte Halvorsen

Baumann returned to Chicago in 1905, and for the next five years, resumed his work as a commercial graphic artist so he could support his mother and younger siblings. Reports from fellow Chicago artists on the picturesque, rural oasis of Nashville, Indiana, newly accessible by rail, encouraged him to vacation there in 1910. Amidst this peaceful environment, Baumann extended his summer vacation into a long-term residence, and he began his work as a woodblock artist, portraying not only the landscape of Brown County, but also the people who resided there. He made a portfolio of twelve color woodcuts entitled *In the Hills o' Brown* followed by a series of four large prints he hoped would hang in schoolrooms.

Encouraged by fellow Indiana artist T.C. Steele, Baumann entered eight prints—five from *In the Hills o' Brown* series and three of the large “schoolhouse” prints—in the 1915 San Francisco PPPIE, the largest assemblage of art to date in the Americas. Although Baumann was a virtually unknown artist, he won a gold medal in relief prints. Practically overnight he became a recognized and respected artist and a major influence on the California artists who switched to color woodblock printing after visiting the exposition, such as Frances Gearhart and William S. Rice.





**FROM TOP:** *San Francisco*, 1935.  
Tempera and graphite on paper,  
9 × 10 5/8 inches. Collection of Zach  
Nelson and Elizabeth Horn

Gustave Baumann in his Chevrolet  
with Mabel Dodge Stern's Saint  
Bernard, ca. 1920. Courtesy of The  
Ann Baumann Trust



**FROM TOP:** *Monterey Cypress*, 1935. Conte crayon on paper, 8 × 8 inches. The Ann Baumann Trust, courtesy of The Annex Galleries

*Song of the Sea*, 1936. Color woodcut with aluminum leaf, 120/125; 12 3/4 × 12 7/8. The Ann Baumann Trust, courtesy of The Annex Galleries

Though he met with dealers, friends, clients, and fellow artists, Baumann's California road trips were primarily solitary explorations of the landscape during which he could sketch and seek inspiration for new prints. He tended to hug the coast, which had a strong pull on his artistic vision, and visited coastal cities and surrounding areas, including San Francisco, Monterey, Laguna Beach, and San Diego. Upon returning to his Santa Fe studio, Baumann created prints based on his sketches, but he also saved his studies, sometimes returning to them many years later, as with *Point Lobos Rock Garden* (1946) and *Torrey Pine* (1961). After returning from California, he also revisited prints he had done years earlier, re-cutting some of the blocks to envision new interpretations.

Exemplary of his unceasing devotion to his craft, Baumann reworked *Monterey Cypress* (1936) in different color palettes and compositions, rendering the finished color woodcut in a tonal scheme distinct from the tempera studies. Another rendition, *Song of the Sea* (1936), is dramatically larger,

Beyond launching Baumann's career, the PPIE changed the landscape for color block printers in America. It underscored the artistic possibilities of the medium and firmly moved printmaking from the realm of craft to a fine art. In 1916, with the renewed interest in woodblock prints and the increase in the number of artists working in the medium, the Art Institute of Chicago invited Baumann to curate a show titled *Exhibition of American Block Prints and Wood Engravings Assembled by Gustave Baumann*.

Following the Chicago exhibition, Baumann, again with recommendations from fellow artist friends, decided to travel west to the New Mexico artists' colony of Taos in the spring of 1918. The color, light, and landscape of the West spoke to him in a whole new way: "I...learned too late that a palette and theories regarding color east of the Mississippi should all be thrown into the river as you cross the bridge."<sup>1</sup> Still, at the end of the summer, he tired of the overcrowded village, and the quieter, tranquil Santa Fe appealed to his sensibilities. The artist established his home and studio in the capital for the rest of his life, but with his self-proclaimed "gypsy instinct," he continued to travel.

Not long after his move, Baumann bought his first car in which he took sketching trips that covered the vast terrains of the Southwest and, later, California. On these trips the artist brought stacks of paper cut the same size as his finished prints, graphite pencils, and handmade tempera paints. He painted tempera sketches *en plein air* and sometimes made color notes in the margins of his sketches, which would later help him determine the number of blocks required for an image.



with the image reversed to match the composition of the original temperas and three sea lions added to the rocks. This version is unusual in the artist's oeuvre because of its limited color palette and use of a strong black block, which details the contours of the cypress trees and rocks and leaves the un-inked color of the oatmeal paper exposed to complete the forms. The lack of color draws the viewer's eye to the bright spots of blue used for the sea lions as well as the aluminum leaf used for the sky and sea.

Baumann was as intrigued by the mercurial waters of the Pacific Ocean as he was by the surrounding landscape, flora, and fauna. *Point Lobos Rock Garden*, printed six years after his final visit to California, is a powerful portrayal of the intense yellow of Northern coast scrub that covers the rocky slope of Point Lobos as well as the Monterey Cypress that dot the coast. Even though the area is dry and windswept, Baumann created a garden of color, a testament to his observant eye and the longstanding impact these California vistas had on his artistic practice and output.

Although Baumann's body of California work is only a small portion of his oeuvre, as a group, it reveals his vision as a master craftsman and captures the quintessential qualities of the California landscape—the ocean swells, majestic redwoods, and weathered Monterey cypress. Acting as a devoted reporter on the serenity and beauty of the surrounding environment, he stayed true to his training of carving wood blocks and printing using a hand press. His personal chop—a hand within a heart—represents his gift to the viewer, one inspired by a simple life close to nature and an unwavering commitment to craft. 🖐️

Susan Futterman



**ABOVE:** *Point Lobos*, 1936; printed in 1949. Color woodcut, II 50/125 '49; 8 1/8 x 8 1/8 inches. The Ann Baumann Trust, courtesy of The Annex Galleries

<sup>1</sup>Gustave Baumann, *The Autobiography of Gustave Baumann*, ed. Martin Krause (Portland, OR: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2015), 115.



## Gustave Baumann's California Woodcuts

**1928**

*Coast Range*

*Pelican Rookery*

*Singing Trees* (Also known as  
*Singing Woods* and *Singing Wood*)

*Windswept Eucalyptus*

**1934**

*Redwood*

**1935**

*Sequoia Forest*

**1936**

*Monterey Cypress*

*Point Lobos*

*Song of the Sea*

**1946**

*Point Lobos Rock Garden*

**1948**

*Pacific Shore Line*

**1961**

*Torrey Pine*

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**ABOVE:** *Redwood*, 1934; printed in 1960. Color woodcut, 71/125; 12 7/8 × 12 7/8 inches. Courtesy Roger Genser, The Prints and the Pauper, Santa Monica, CA

**COVER:** *Coast Range* [detail], 1928. Color woodcut, no. 11 of 120, 9 1/2 × 11 3/8 inches. The Ann Baumann Trust, Courtesy of The Annex Galleries



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