

# Lasca Leaves



## Los Angeles County Department of Arboreta and Botanic Gardens

### Rotunda Mural

A NEW MURAL was added to the rotunda at the Arboretum entryway last May, the work of two dedicated members of Las Voluntarias, Grace Robinson and Ruth Brankey. Depicting a westerly view of Lasca Lagoon, the mural fills the east wall in the area and provides esthetic balance to an existing mural by the same two ladies.

Like their first work, the new mural is made entirely from natural materials gathered from the grounds

of the Arboretum. These include bark of the eucalyptus and melaleuca, bamboo strips, carob and paulownia pods, leaves of the brachychiton and harpullia, fruit of the liquidambar, cupressus and oak, and flower parts of the magnolia. An exception was the material used to create the sky. "We had tried all kinds of things," said Mrs. Robinson, "even rice with blueing, but this became infected with insects. I called Ruth one evening and told her 'I think I have the answer to our sky problem.' She said, 'I think I have, too. What's yours?'"

We both had thought of the same thing: corn husks. It's what we used for the sky on both murals."

Their latest effort is tailor-made to the space that needed to be filled: five-and-a-half feet by twelve feet. Work began by laying out the scene on a piece of butcher paper cut to scale, the scene itself based on a section of a photograph of the lagoon much admired by department director Francis Ching. The paper sketch was carbon-copied onto the final three-quarter-inch plywood board that later was framed with redwood. They worked in a small



*New 5½-by 10-foot mural in the Arboretum rotunda.*

Photo by William Aplin



area in one of the headhouses just north of the research building and kept a careful record of their time. From start to finish the job took a thousand three-and-a-half hours, or, looking at it from the perspective of the standard 40-hour work week, a little over twenty-five weeks. Asked if they had had any serious differences in that time, they said they hadn't. "Neither of us was so confident that we felt we could insist on our own idea," said Mrs. Brankey. "We just discussed design ideas as we went along. Besides, I can't imagine anyone easier to work with than Grace."

Initial impressions, whether of botanic gardens, hotels, or entire cities, tend to result in judgments that, accurate or not, remain with the viewer. Visitors entering the Arboretum these days get a most favorable impression from what they see in the rotunda — the orchid display, history display, a huge map of the grounds with cuttings of plants in bloom underneath, and the two murals, usually the first objects to be photographed.

Grace Robinson and Ruth Brankey take justifiable pride in their contribution which they invariably describe as "a labor of love." The murals are their major but not only contribution to the Arboretum and the California Arboretum Foundation, which they have been members of for approximately ten years. Grace served three years as a history docent, and both she and Ruth continue to make items for the Foundation gift shop. They are artist-craftsmen who have made a tangible impression on the Arboretum, one that has earned them the appreciation of all who see their work and recognition by, for one, the Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, which engaged them to present a workshop for teachers in Long Beach under a program called "Multiculture through the Arts."



*Ruth Brankey, left, and Grace Robinson worked the equivalent of 25 weeks to complete rotunda mural. One of the many problems was finding the right glue. They used white glue for the leaves, plastic glue for heavier pieces, and here and there a few nails.*

Photo by William Aplin





1978. "Rotunda mural." *Garden* 2(5), 1–2.

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