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The background of the cover is a painting of a night scene. A bright, circular moon is positioned in the upper-middle section of the frame. Below it, a body of water reflects the moon's light, creating a shimmering, vertical path of light that tapers towards the bottom. The water's surface is dark, with some lighter, textured areas suggesting ripples or reflections. The overall color palette is dominated by dark browns, blacks, and greys, with the golden-yellow of the moon and its reflection providing a focal point of light. The painting style is somewhat impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a soft, atmospheric quality.

**COLLECTING MOONLIGHT**  
The Night Paintings of Lockwood de Forest

**BY KAREN TELLEEN-LAWTON**

WHAT IF MONEY WERE NO OBJECT? Would you dedicate yourself to amusement or follow your inner voice? Lockwood de Forest listened, and painted. His muse led him around the world and then to Santa Barbara in the early 1900s. In the process, he developed a unique eye and artistic legacy that can now be viewed at Sullivan Goss—An American Gallery.

De Forest's kind eyes and luxuriant beard might have cinched him a St. Nicholas role at the grand turn-of-the-last-century Christmas parties of his day and class. "De Forest may have been the most prolific American painter of night sketches," says Frank Goss, co-owner of Sullivan Goss. He produced some 425 "moonlights" spanning five decades, a selection of which are featured in Goss's new book, *Collecting Moonlight—The Night Paintings of Lockwood de Forest*.

The life of Lockwood de Forest reveals a quixotic blend of traditional and idiosyncratic tendencies. He eschewed formal schooling, but trained for a time under the tutorage of a famous Hudson River School relative, Frederick Church. He traveled widely, particularly in the Middle East, but refrained from depicting its famous monuments. Setting up his easel in Egypt, he faced away from the pyramids and painted the view of the land.

De Forest was raised in New York, the center of the American art world. As an interior and building designer and importer as well as a luminist artist (a style of 19th-century American painting concerned especially with the precise, realistic rendering of atmospheric light and the perceived effects of that light on depicted objects), his partnerships included contemporaries such as Louis Comfort Tiffany and Candace Wheeler. Nevertheless, at the peak of his career, de Forest began to forgo the important New York gallery season,

October through March, choosing instead to winter in and eventually move to Santa Barbara, where he spent many nights mixing colors on his palette, packing supplies and donning a tailored suit to paint a scene with the moon in a precise phase and position.

His "sketches" are modest in scale, their size influenced by the challenges of working in plein-air. Printmaker Joseph Goldyne notes that they nonetheless "successfully convey monumentality and grandeur plus intimacy of vistas." De Forest's landscapes generally focus on just a few things—water, land, vegetation, cloud, moon and sun. Employing their interplay with the ephemeral



Left: *Moonrise York Harbor, Maine, 1908, oil on artists card stock.*

Above: *A portrait of Lockwood de Forest from 1900.*



changes in light, his brush transformed natural features into iconic images.

Goss believes de Forest's unique sense of solitude may have its roots in his midlife deafness. Perhaps his inability to parse the cacophonous conversations in New York galleries was particularly isolating. Interestingly, many of his vistas depict an indistinct foreground, while the background reveals precise details, as though de Forest seeks a mindful entry into the realm of nature.

The artist visited Santa Barbara first around 1902. His most productive years were 1905 to 1907, when he completed most of his nocturnes. The family wasn't fond of them. In later years, a close friend recalled the family sipping wine in a room displaying the "moonlights." Someone wondered aloud why he made so many "runny egg" paintings. When Lockwood's grandson Kellam offered a stack of ten sketches to Sullivan Goss Gallery in 1994, he told

Goss, "If you take any, you have to take them all." Buried beneath the traditional paintings was one nocturne, to which Goss was immediately attracted.

De Forest began designing a house on Laguna Street in 1913. Two years later, his family moved in, including son Lockwood de Forest (known as Junior, although he was actually the third) who became a noted landscape architect. The neighborhood became something of an artist colony of National Academy of Design members such as de Forest and Thomas Moran, famed for his Rocky Mountain portraits.

Kellam de Forest, who still resides in Santa Barbara, was a frequent visitor to the Laguna Street house when he was a child. Now, at age 92, he is an enthusiastic blue-eyed replica of his grandfather's black and white photographic portraits. Kellam recalls that after the 1925 earthquake, "about 6 a.m., grandfather had finished inspecting the house and found it okay. Then he set out to see if 'old man Moran' was still alive." He was, and they proceeded to sort through the wreckage of their art supplies.



**Left: The paintings reveal a compelling range of ways to approach the nocturne genre. Modest in size, each night painting is approximately 10 x 14 inches; 40 such works comprise the exhibit. This page from top: Portrait of de Forest painting by railroad tracks, 1900; the de Forest family enjoying a picnic, 1900.**

