

San Diego Bay

By Stone Riley

Acrylic paint on canvas © 2002

Three panels each 24 x 48 inches

= 69 x 122 cm

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Here is a vision of the elemental power of water. The triptych was commissioned by Ms. Barbara Phillips of San Diego for a corner of her living room. Her home was built to house an art collection and although this room contains family furnishings it is tall and square and painted gallery white. To accommodate a fireplace, the architect filled in one corner of the room with a diagonal wall five feet wide. A tailor-made artwork is therefore required to fit the unusual and prominent columnar space between fireplace and ceiling.

In daylight the painting will be mainly lit by rows of small windows which stretch out to left and right along the tops of both adjacent walls. With this in mind, I strove to offer the daytime viewer an impression that the entire room is a submarine chamber, the canvas panels being windows into the tide-washed coastal aquatic world which actually lies a few miles from the house. The powerful circulating motion of these biomorphic figures draws the viewer's eye up and up to where the actual windows seem to denote the water's surface.

At night there should be a few small soft spotlights adjusted for effect, but the painting will be largely in shadow. I expect the sensation of depth to be accentuated then by the graduated scale in which the figures are portrayed, especially the overarching dark shape that looms high above.

The style of execution, inspired by a movement in 11th Century China, honors San Diego's place on the Pacific rim. The kunfa (or cunfa) painting style, often done in ink on paper, favored pictures built of visible brushstrokes instead of shaded wash. In such a picture, the details of the world can seem to gain a sharpened focus even while the magical role of imagination is plainly demonstrated to a thoughtful viewer.

