



**Pageant Director** Glen Eytchison rehearses young cast members, all volunteers, posing in Winslow Homer's autumnal "Crack the Whip," part of the Laguna Pageant of the Masters.



# Why, the art is so *lifelike* in Laguna

By Hunter Drohojowska

**A**nyone outside California — and a fair number within — might wonder why hundreds of responsible citizens from Laguna Beach and its environs would spend half their summer evenings in costumes and makeup, standing around pretending to be characters in an old master painting.

Of course, the next question might be why more than 300,000 people a year attend the Pageant of the Masters, the so-called living pictures. But night after night, week after week, from tonight through August, children and adults will pose motionless as ragamuffins, grape pickers, schoolgirls or, this year, as torch runners on the face of the Olympic Coin. Without pay. Why? Why? Why?

Pageant of the Masters has been playing to sellout crowds for 52 years. Tickets are sold out months in advance, though there are usually some cancellations. There is only one press preview and it was attended by so many representatives of the media, anyone might have thought a Jacksons was on hand — Michael or Jesse.

First we were ushered en masse to the makeup rooms, where the children looked truly pathetic as they were being swabbed with gray powder and smeared with yellow paint, to match

Winslow Homer's autumnal scene of "Crack the Whip." Their clothes were splashed with big swatches of brown and orange to match the artist's impressionistic style. One wonders when the pageant will summon the nerve to try a Jackson Pollock, dripping abstract expressionist squiggles and splashes all over the little fresh faces.

This is Dan Ferguson's third year, and he's only about 8. A reporter asks sweetly, "Do you look at paintings more carefully now?" "Not really," says Dan.

Most participants are young, but Ron Foster is 33 — aged further by grotesque ash-gray makeup. He plays the bishop in "The Altar of San Biagio," an "Austrian polychrome on carved Swiss stonepine altarpiece by Nicolo da Brunico from the early 1500s."

"You look great," says a volunteer without sarcasm while taping a papier-mache miter to Foster's head. Usually employed as an art director for a Newport Beach ad agency, Foster tries to explain: "It's different from anything else I've done — particularly on a Monday night."

Foster got involved for less than the sheer theatrical thrill of the event. "A friend of mine thought it would be a good idea, but we tried out and I got chosen and she didn't. I thought it was going to be a good way to see her for 42 nights for sure. Instead, it's 42 nights I'm *not* going to see her." He didn't look happy. A plump young girl walks by and confesses that she is playing the Madonna in the altar. "But I'm carrying

a styrofoam Jesus."

In the wash of reporters, photographers, mothers and children, an efficient, harassed young man in white rushes about, adjusting hats and wigs, reminding children the one thing they mustn't forget — don't move. Glen Eytchison, 29, has been pageant director for six years, since he left South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa.

He recounts a brief history of the pageant, originated by artist John Hinchman in 1932. "The artists in the '30s came to Laguna because the landscape and sea were inspirational. But they needed to sell paintings in order to keep eating. To attract tourists, they did these primitive tableaux vivants. They'd put a hat on a lady and have her head behind a frame. That was it. Then, the third year, Roy Ropp, a local builder and artist, said, 'Let's do a show.' So the pageant became a kind of combination of visuals on stage, music and narration. It's the way those elements are combined that turns it into a show that's not just people on stage."

Eytchison calls the pageant a 14-month job that he does in 12 months. He has to find two complete casts for each picture, since they alternate. "Forty-five pieces of art each have to be rehearsed twice. There's casting, makeup, sets, costumes. Ninety scenes have to be rehearsed between January and June. The summer takes up the show. Then we have from September to December to decide what to do next year."

It's something of an understatement to call this year's pageant selections eclectic: They range from Myron's discobolus, to Kuan Yin, a 19th century Chinese jade, to Renoir's "Grape Pickers at Lunch," to a 19th-century gold ormolu-and-marble mantel clock to the pageant's annual Grand Finale: Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper."

The pageant traditionally includes one work by a Southern California artist. The press has gathered in the outdoor amphitheater, the lights grow dim, and all is expectantly silent in the cool beach air. The curtains are drawn: Painterly children stand frozen in tableau, as if gallivanting in surf — a 12-by-16-foot, blue and green coastal scene framed in gold. A disembodied voice from the heavens booms: "Emerald Bay" by Torrance artist Jane Shuss!

"Ooooooooooooooooooooo . . ." says the less-than-jaded press. It was pretty convincing, all right. It looked really three-dimensional, even without laser holography or paper glasses with red and green lenses or "Ghostbusters" special effects. Maybe this is why people come year after year.

Then . . . a child wriggles, ruining the effect.

<b>Where</b>	Pageant of the Masters Irvine Bowl Park, 650 Laguna Canyon Road Laguna Beach		
<b>When</b>	8:30 p.m. tonight through Aug. 26		
<b>How much</b>	\$6 to \$25		
<b>Info</b>	(714) 494-1147		

Paul Chan/Herald photographer