



## LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

### LPAPA Plein Talk Q&As with Larry Cannon April 2018 Signature Artist Member of the Month

#### ***What is your #1 tip or advice for the beginning plein air painter?***

Start by studying the fundamentals of composition and values. Without some understanding of those two elements, your progress will be slow and painful. When I have been asked to select paintings for inclusion in exhibits, I have found that those without simple and solid compositions and those without a range of values that give depth and atmosphere to the painting are the first ones to drop out of consideration.

#### ***If you could only have 5 colors on your palette, what would they be?***

When I started out painting in watercolor some twenty-plus years ago, I had no clue of what colors to use. Over time, I learned to use a very limited palette of simple reds, yellows and blues. The “I-can’t-live-without” colors for some time now have been Aureolin yellow, cobalt blue and rose madder genuine – all very transparent and useful for initial washes and glazing. The other two that I could not live without are raw sienna and burnt sienna. With that as a base, I will finish 90% of each painting, and I will normally add no more than another five pigments to both my plein air and studio palettes.

#### ***Why do you choose to paint in the wild plein air rather than in the controlled environment of the studio?***

When I look at one of my plein air paintings in the studio or gallery, I can remember almost the whole day that they were painted. I can remember the way the light changed, the times that I had miscalculated the time of high tide, the state of the weather, and often I can almost feel the pounding of the incoming surf through the soles of my feet. I can also remember my moments of panic and frustration with the painting and the perseverance needed to eventually turn it from a disaster into a successful painting. There aren’t many experiences in life that are so vivid and well remembered.

#### ***What was your most hair-raising extreme plein air painting experience?***

I was painting in a plein air event adjacent to the Carquinez Strait in Northern California. I set up to paint the historic C&H Sugar refinery with its interesting adjacent ship docks and railroad equipment. As so often happens to all plein air painters, I was so absorbed in my painting that I was less aware of my surroundings than I should have been when an Amtrak locomotive and ten cars roared past me 20 feet away at 70 miles per hour – sucking my easel, umbrella and everything else, but me, fifty yards down the track.

### ***Living or not, which artist(s) has had the most impact on your artistic journey?***

There are, of course, a great many. But, for me a life changing event occurred about three years into my painting career. I knew of the work of Winslow Homer and a few others of the Master Watercolorist category but felt there was something missing for portraying what I was feeling about the Nature around me. Then I saw the Percy Gray watercolor exhibition at the Carmel Art Association Gallery. There was no question but that this was truly “fine art watercolor”. I saw in his watercolors the same depth and strength of expression that I admired in the work of the early California Impressionists. Other impacts and knowledge have come from numerous historic and contemporary watercolor and oil painters. I started to list a few, but in the process realized that I have learned so much from so many that it would be wrong to just name a few.

### ***Any closing comments or advice you'd like to share?***

Two pieces of advice:

1. Always be a student. In the first five years of my painter’s life, I read at least ten art books and watched five art instruction videos for every painting that I did. Today, I probably have most of the art books of value to me, but I still watch many videos of both watercolor and oil painters – less for technique now, and more for understanding their insights on seeing and evaluating the landscape and their approach to turning that into a painting of more than normal quality.
2. Don’t feel the need to be overly rushed when out painting. Many plein air painters love to say that you only have two hours to paint before the light changes and you must stop. They often hurry to set up their easels and immediately begin to paint exactly what is before them. I personally feel that any painting should probably consist of at least 70% looking, thinking and planning with a lesser amount spent on the actual painting process. In my mind, a painting should be more than just an accurate record of the scene.