



LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

LPAPA Plein Talk Q&As with Thomas Jefferson Kitts August 2018 Signature Artist Member of the Month

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

Paint small, no larger than 8 x 10 or 9 x 12 inches and limit yourself to just a few brushes. You don't need a lot of gear because most of the time the gear just gets in the way. Concentrate on painting shapes and avoid detail at all cost. Reduce the number of value breaks you create to three or four at most, and make sure each value belongs either to the Family of Light or the Family of Shadow. Set a timer and limit the time you spend on each painting to one hour and no more. When it dings put your brush down and move on. And finally, at minimum, start a painting every day. Don't worry about the finish. Finishing isn't as important as starting.

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

Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Red Medium (or Deep), Ultramarine Blue, Viridian Green, and Titanium White (This will bias your colors towards the warm side, but warm is preferable to cold. Just sayin'...)

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

Well, in truth, I often do both, moving the paintings I am working on in and out all the time. But, if given the choice, I prefer to paint *en plein air* because no camera or computer monitor can represent color as accurately as we can see it directly from life. Even if our goal isn't to paint naturalistically, it is helpful to understand the color relationships that exist before we start altering them by choice. Plus, there is something about working outside that intensifies the experience. Beer and hot dogs taste better in a stadium seat, so why not let the adventure of painting outdoors fill you with excitement and joy?

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

There are many experiences I could share, ranging from the night someone threw a large spanner wrench at me from a passing vehicle as I was painting a nocturne, to the time I sensed someone was standing close behind me and turned around to find a homeless man staring at my painting as he bled from a terrible gash in his head. But the most disturbing thing I ever experienced *en plein air* was the night I was painting a late summer sunset on a bucolic rural island near my home. I was almost done when I heard the sound of a couple of shotgun shells being racked into the barrel, and a gruff voice

from behind saying, “Git offen mah Land!” Okay, I admit I may have been trespassing, but just barely over the line. Regardless of that, I picked up my easel and threw it over the fence and then dove over after it. I grabbed whatever I could reach while on my knees and tossed it into the Jeep. Then I got out of Dodge. Didn’t even stop to look back so I’ll never know just how close the farmer was when he told me to ‘git’. Those three experiences are why I no longer wear earbuds when I am painting *en plein air*...

Oh, apropos of nothing, there was another time a few plein air friends and I snuck past the guardhouse on 17 Mile Drive near Carmel, CA, to paint the 'Ghost Trees' at midnight. (The drive runs along Pebble Beach and we should not have been out there after hours. But let's just say someone who will remain unnamed came up with the idea shortly after last call was announced in a nearby bar. Ha!) After we had parked our cars and set up to paint, one of us walked over to get more gear out of their trunk and set off the car alarm. Two minutes later we were surrounded by a very serious-looking SWAT team, complete with automatic guns, Kevlar vests, and very sharp, pointed questions. They were a bit confused (as were we) because they had caught us wearing headlamps, gloves, and a lot of black fleece to guard against the ocean chill – and apparently we were doing something strange in the dark – like loading our palettes and waving little sticks around. If you want to know more about that story ask Larry Moore or Hai-Ou the next time you see them. (Ha!)

Living or not, which artists have had the most impact on your artistic journey?

Well, the 'Holy Trinity' for me is Sargent, Sorolla, and Zorn. But which of those three I’d anoint as the Holy Ghost I couldn't say. I can only dream of ever achieving such virtuosity before I die.

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

If you feel you are struggling with the plein air thing then, yes, you probably are. Just keep reminding yourself that nothing worth doing comes easy. Have fun and persevere. I mean, what's the worst thing that could happen, right?