



LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

LPAPA Plein Talk with Lori Putnam March 2019 Signature Member of the Month

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

Don't freak out. Plein air painting is a tough sport, and it takes a long time to be very successful at it. Just keep trying. Plein air is absolutely the most informed path to artistic growth.

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

At least 95% of everything in nature can be painted with just Cad Yellow Light, Naphthol Red, Ultramarine Blue, plus Titanium white. For that other 5%, I would add Cad Yellow Medium and Phthalo Blue.

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

The number one reason is to learn. That's what plein air really is for me—fact-finding, and it informs my studio painting in ways you can't imagine. I believe the two compliment one another, which makes for a more well-rounded artist. The truth is, I don't like sweat, bugs, freezing rain, or rattlesnakes, but I've painted with all of that and more without even thinking about it. It's that wonderful! In the words of Claude Monet, "Every day I discover even more beautiful things. It is intoxicating me, and I want to paint it all—my head is bursting..."

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

There are so many. The first ones that come to mind involved either bear, elk, alligator or extreme weather. But everyone has some of those at one point or other if you paint long enough. So, if I had to choose just one experience to share, it wouldn't be hair-raising so much as it would be extraordinarily cool. I was teaching a workshop on the South Island in New Zealand in 2018. We were on a farm on the Tukituki River. It was a perfect place to paint with the icy cold clear water, which was supplied by a large Glacier, also in view. We had no idea that the property was home to a flock of over 4000 ewes who roamed much higher on the mountain than we were painting. Suddenly, we saw a small line of just a few of them coming down the road mountain road. Followed by a few more, and eventually the sheep dogs, the mob continued to grow until we were completely surrounded. (Obviously there was no way I could continue teaching.)

They were jumping and running and baaing and stayed there in the field with us for the rest of the day. The farmer told us that she only moves them twice a year for sheering. We just happened to be there at just the right time. We grew pretty used to them and they to us. They grazed and we painted, our little easels poking up here and there in a sea made of wool.

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

I learn from looking at the craft of artists from the past, but I can't say any of them have truly impacted my artistic journey in the same way as my modern day peers have. Dawn Whitelaw, Quang Ho, and Scott Christensen have taught me, supported me, and become life-long friends. No dead guy can compete with that.

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

I have had many careers in my life. With each one, I came to a point of burn out and dissatisfaction. My theory is that is because in all of those cases, after a few years there was nothing left to learn; no goals to strive for; and certainly not a group of supportive, like-minded comrades. Being a painter never ceases to excite me. There is always something new I want to explore, and with each passing year I only grow more inquisitive. Famous last words of Renoir "[in regard to painting] I think I'm beginning to learn something about it." I believe I will feel the exact same way.