



LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

LPAPA Plein Talk Q&As with Jim Lamb July 2019 Signature Artist Member of the Month

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

The most ideal skill to have, even before painting, is to get some experience drawing in black and white, no color. Too many beginning plein air painters have never learned to draw. Painting is basically drawing with color and a brush. After that, the most important concept for the beginner is to KEEP IT SIMPLE. Don't try to paint a subject that is above your pay-grade for your drawing skills or your painting skills. Large, simplified shapes in your design will take you a long way in your painting development.

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

The colors I would use are the same colors I use on nearly every painting I create. My policy is a simplified palette for beginners as well as myself. Simple shapes for design, simplified palette for color harmony. My palette always contains: Ultramarine Blue, Permanent Red Medium, Hansa or Lemon Yellow, and Titanium+Zinc White. I will also add Transparent Red Oxide and/or Veridian at times. Most of the colors in Nature can be achieved very nicely with these colors and White. Every artist has his/her own preferences. These are mine.

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

If I'm always in the studio it's easy to get as stale creatively as the air can get in there. No inspiration is stronger for me than to get out on the river, in the countryside, breathing the fresh air, hearing the sounds of Nature, and experiencing the true light effects that present themselves. It feeds my soul and helps to bring life to my painting, even though sometimes everything out there can seem like it is fighting against my attempts at producing successful representations of what I'm seeing. It helps to bring more authenticity to my work and forces me out of all my little studio habits I tend to develop indoors. If I'm feeling discouraged or frustrated, it's usually the very medicine I need to take to get me creatively jump-started again.

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

I have had a number of experiences over the years when out painting alone where I have been very creeped out by individual dudes who stopped by to check out what I was doing...when it was very obvious I was painting. I could tell they were casing the area to see if anyone else was around. When they slowly drove on, every time I had that creepy feeling, I threw my gear together and got out of there as fast as I could, regardless of how much I just wanted to finish that painting.

But I had a "hair-raising" experience a number of years ago while painting the Teton country in Wyoming. I was finishing up a nice little painting, and feeling pretty good about it, but still had some work to do on it. I had noticed a herd of buffalo off in the distance, maybe 300-400 yards away. Didn't pay much attention to them, because I was focused on my painting.

After some time, I noticed the herd was a little closer, grazing peacefully about 200 yards away. Nothing to even think about. My truck was on the side of the dirt road 50 yards from me. Some 20 minutes later I became aware of this huge bull just across the road and behind me, sixty yards away. I noticed him because he started pacing back and forth, snorting, kicking up dirt and getting increasingly agitated. I had forgotten it was early October and he was officially in charge of his little harem of about 10-15 cows. As I looked down, it suddenly dawned on me that I had set up my tripod & easel right smack dab in the middle

of what was obviously his favorite pathway across this little dirt road to his next pasture. And he was in no mood to change his habit of leading his harem along that pathway now. It was going to be him or me, and I instantly decided it was going to be him. I grabbed up my entire set-up in my arms and my other gear and high-tailed it to my truck, threw everything in the back, and jumped in. As I turned to look back, that bull was already leading his harem right through the very spot I had been set up to paint that morning! It was a heart-pounder.

I definitely can define the experience as hair-raising.

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

Early on, when I was only about 10 or 11, I became entranced by some of the German landscape painters from the late 1800's whose paintings were a part of the permanent collection at the Frye Art Museum in Seattle. As I got older, every time our family visited the Frye, I locked in on those large, landscapes. I knew I had to do that some day with paint. As I got older, I discovered Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Cole, John Kensett, George Inness, and Sanford Gifford. I loved the way they depicted the drama of Nature with the way they handled the effects of light on the landscape.

After moving to Southern California, following four years in the US Navy, and beginning a free-lance illustration career in Newport Beach, I became acquainted with a number of the early California painters and was especially attracted to the paintings of Edgar Payne, William Wendt, and Hanson Puthuff. Their looser style intrigued me after so many years of appreciating the more tightly rendered paintings of those earlier landscape painters.

During my illustration career I was introduced by my illustrator friend, Bill Duffus to his friend in Palos Verdes, Dan Pinkham. All three of us had attended the Art Center College of Design in LA at one time or another. Dan introduced me to the idea of plein air painting, which I thought at the time was the dumbest idea for painting I had ever heard in my life. This was in 1990-91 when there weren't very many people out plein air painting. I thought, "Why in the world would you stand outside and paint in the weather when you could just take a picture of it and paint it in the studio?" But Dan encouraged me to try it. He said if I got hooked on plein air painting I wouldn't have time to go fishing anymore, which was a terrible sales pitch to me for plein air painting at that time. But he sold me a little Russian paint box and a huge umbrella and that was it. I was hooked, and I haven't hooked a lot of fish since. So thanks, Dan...you really did it to me. Best advice I ever received about art. :)

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

The only final comments I would make would be to encourage other artists out there, whether new at plein air painting or pros who do it for a living, is to keep in mind your reason for doing what you are doing. Most artists want to be appreciated for what they do, to be noticed, to win awards, to have their work validated by their peers and collectors and those in the "art world." Social media is a great avenue these days for our work to be seen and admired. But if that admiration and acceptance is not realized to the degree we hope for, it can be discouraging and disappointing. We all have experienced those ups and downs no matter where we are on our artistic journey. We all have to work through and past those times in our own ways. We've each been given varying degrees of gifts for creative expression. For me, I have to step back now and then and remind myself that each piece I create just needs to be a small, but honest-hearted effort and worship offered to the Ultimate Artist who created it all and who is my most important audience of One.