



LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

LPAPA Plein Talk Q&As with Nanette Biers September 2019 Artist Member of the Month

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

My #1 tip? Don't panic. No, all kidding aside, when you're starting out, something that can really help is to study the work of others. Not just by watching them paint at events or on online demos, but also by studying their finished work on their websites or on Facebook. There's a lot to be learned by observing their composition decisions, color choices, brushwork. There are many different approaches by different artists, and you can glean what works for you. Take workshops if you can, go to the annual Plein Air Convention & Expo, subscribe to PleinAir Magazine and read it cover to cover. Then when you're initially out in the field, you'll have a lot of the basics already in mind. Small sketches are invaluable for working out your composition. Once you start painting, it's good to stay loose and simplify. Don't get caught up in any detail until you're done with your blocking in. You can often say more by suggesting than by rendering. And don't necessarily paint what you see. Move things around, leave things out, make things up. I think that's about a dozen tips. I guess I overworked the question.

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

I've never worked with such a limited palette, but the first 4 colors would be white and some version of the 3 primaries. Four colors which I currently use in my palette are Gamblin Titanium White, Gamblin Ultramarine Blue, and Sennelier's Cadmium Red Medium and Cadmium Yellow Medium. But rather than use those plus one other color (a neutral gray?), I might actually try using 5 of the 6 colors that Kathleen Dunphy uses in her limited palette. Having watched her do a color mixing demo at this year's PACE in San Francisco, I remember how much I liked the results and how amazingly versatile those 6 colors were.

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

Painting in the studio has its merits—working bigger at a more relaxed pace and incorporating more detail, (plus having a bathroom, food, and temperature controls easily accessible)—but painting outdoors is much more exciting and challenging. It lets me see so much more color than I would if working solely from a photo I've snapped. Plus the pressure of needing to work faster to capture what is ephemeral and fleeting makes me simplify and work looser, which I like. In certain ways, doing a good painting outdoors in a couple of hours feels more

rewarding than taking your time in the studio, and the energy of the effort shows in the painting. And let's not forget how good it feels simply to be outdoors.

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

My most hair-raising plein air experience happened during the very first plein air painting I'd ever done, which was on the first plein air outing at the first Plein Air Convention & Expo outside of Las Vegas in 2012. I came completely unprepared for the weather that engulfed us that day. I had on a long-sleeved cotton shirt and a thick cotton sweatshirt, but it wasn't enough. I hadn't yet bought an umbrella. My clothing wasn't water resistant. First the clouds rolled in, then it started to drizzle, then sleet, then the air turned absolutely freezing. I was shivering, chilled to the bone, and rain was dripping down my panel and pooling in my pochade box. The buses weren't around and there was only a small pop-up canopy someone had brought where a few of us took shelter. Some lovely artist whose name I don't remember loaned me her extra parka, which saved me, but I still didn't really warm up until I got into that blessed steaming hot bath at the hotel. Nothing after that, not stepping in a cow pie or having trouble finding my car in the dark or painting in winds high enough to help my umbrella pull my easel over came close.

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

Artists from the past—Sargent, Sorolla, Zorn, Payne, and Wendt. Way too many living artists to list, but here are just a few—Michael Obermeyer, Paul Kratter, Kathleen Dunphy, Jim Wodark, Bill Cone, Jason Sacran, Clark Mitchell, and Josh Clare.

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

Paint outdoors as much as you can. The more you do it, the better you'll become. And the better you get, the more you'll want to do it, and the more fun you'll have.