



LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

LPAPA Plein Talk Q&As with Shuang Li February 2020 Signature Artist Member of the Month

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

OBSERVATION – *learning to observe in open air should be #1 task for any plein air painter, especial for beginners. The actual techniques of painting outdoors are not much different from those for studio painting, no matter what medium you prefer. However, a plein air painter must acquire the knowledge and ability to correctly observe and select shapes, values, lines, colors etc., along with other visual characters from the real world, before putting any brushwork done. What and how you see as an artist, will determine not only your subject matter, but also your process of translating a real world into 2D pictorial representation. Correct observation is critical for the success of your final painting. Observation seems to be less emphasized by the beginners while compare to other plein air details such as selecting tools or colors.*

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

*Ultramarine Blue,
Cadmium Red,
Rose Madder,
New Gamboge
Cadmium Yellow Lemon*

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

Painting outdoors provides the best opportunity for the artist to directly observe and learn the secret of light, color, shapes or lines, etc., that Nature presents to us. What human eyes can see and understand, then interpret and translate through our brain into artistic language for artworks, are so superb that no best camera or other manmade equipment can compare. Painting from life, also gives the artist great opportunities to use human being's other senses such as smell, hearing or even touch. Together all these will stimulate the maximum creativity within any artist towards the best artistic expression for the artworks. I also paint in studio, but without continuing to paint and learn directly from life in the open air, my studio works would have become lifeless reproductions with no creative quality.

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

I don't consider myself a high-risk taker in life, but when it comes to outdoor painting, I constantly seek the best locations for my paintings even if sometimes I have to step out of my comfort zone. One year I was at Acadia National Park and a ranger suggested a spot for painters called Ravens Nest. It was almost at dusk by the time my painting buddy and I found it. The view was incredible from a very steep cliff-top but hardly any place to set the easel leveled. I barely managed to find about 2 square feet flat surface for the easel and myself standing almost at the cliff edge. I painted as quickly as I could under the fast fading evening light, I tried to keep my balance without falling down, while my whole body sensed the coldness from the deep dark Atlantic Ocean arising right beneath my feet. In the end, the painting was a good piece, so was the experience, though a pretty nerve wracking one.

(Only months later, I learned that because this location was too dangerous for the tourists, the park removed the direction sign to Raven's Nest completely)

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

Though I've painted plein air for many years, my choice of using watercolor as primary plein air medium has been greatly influenced by the following two great outdoor painters:

John Singer Sargent, as one of the past masters, showed me through his watercolor works the importance of capturing light when painting outdoors. He also demonstrated the endless possibilities of using watercolor as "painters' medium" for plein air painting. Sargent's incredible bold and beautiful brushworks of his plein air watercolors also had deep impact on my personal style formation.

Joseph Zbukvic of Australia, one of the greatest plein air watercolor artists of our time, reinstated the importance and possibility of painting outdoors using watercolor through his masterful plein air paintings. Zbukvic's ingenious composition skills for almost any plein air subject matter also set higher standards for me when I am continuing my plein air journey.