



LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

LPAPA Plein Talk Q&As with Carolyn Hesse-Low September 2020 Signature Artist Member of the Month

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

My advice is to start simply. Paint what you can comfortably handle and gradually increase your level of challenge to create improvement. You will improve with effort over time, so allow yourself to grow. Observe keenly and paint constantly, learn by doing and by watching others. Take a few workshops from plein air artists whose work you admire, and visit a lot of art museums.

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

Ah, that's easy. I only use 5 besides titanium white, all Winsor-Newton: alizarin crimson, cadmium orange, cadmium yellow, ultramarine blue and cerulean blue. Occasionally I'll plop other colors onto my palette, depending on whether there is a preponderance of specific colors or accents in the scene. But most often I use those 5 colors and do a lot of mixing.

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

Plein air painting informs studio painting, which in turn informs plein air painting. I think both are necessary modalities of creating representational work. Painting en plein air allows me to intimately study a scene or a subject. I can see how shapes and planes articulate with each other in three dimensions, how values behave over time, and how colors change in unison with the light. I can understand basic relationships in nature, such as wind and water or sun and clouds. I can see a lot of subtlety a lot more clearly. And most of all, I get to be out in the wild somewhere or out in some part of a city and just explore. I get to have an adventure!

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

I suppose the most extreme experiences for me have been when animals got involved: coyotes, rattlesnakes, bobcats, javelina, muskrats, otters, deer, herds of cows, hordes of bees, wild dogs, and the absolute worst—geese! Yeah, I did say it's an adventure...

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

Rembrandt Van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer, Joaquin Sorolla, Winslow Homer, William Merritt Chase, Frank Benson, Andrew Wyeth.