



LAGUNA PLEIN AIR PAINTERS ASSOCIATION

LPAPA Plein Talk Interview with JoAnne Unger January 2021 Artist Member of the Month

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

I think it's a good idea to find an artist whose work you admire and, if he/she teaches, take a workshop. Maybe the artist has made a CD or written a book. Learn as much as you can from the pros, then paint, paint, paint. It takes time to learn to see and then interpret the landscape on canvas; be patient with yourself.

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

Ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson, cadmium yellow light, viridian, transparent oxide red (white, of course).

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

Since I paint in Southern California, the weather conditions aren't too "wild". I admire the artists out there freezing in the snow and wind and feel lucky to have so many days of relative comfort in the field. That being said, painting in plein air is really challenging even under the best of circumstances. It is, however, critically important in terms of how it informs and influences your studio work. Although I love my comfortable studio, I enjoy being outdoors and the opportunity it gives me to explore the effects of light.

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

I think an artist friend who was with me that fateful day already mentioned this experience, but I was there too and it was, without a doubt, hair raising. We were all interested in painting a huge, very old oak tree standing alone on a nearby hill. The three of us set up our easels on a blisteringly hot day and began to paint. Quite suddenly, a form emerged from the cool shadows under the tree. It paused for several long moments, gave us a long and menacing stare and then bounded up the hill out of sight. We had disturbed a beautiful, golden mountain lion.

I think it's a good idea to paint with a buddy if you can. None of us were imposing enough to scare him off by ourselves, but the three of us may have given him pause.

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

In the beginning of my journey, I took as many workshops as I could afford. I also read a thousand how-to books and watched every CD I could find that showcased the artists I admired. There are so many artists to whom I feel indebted, but a few were inspirational. One of them is Richard McKinley, an amazing artist, but also an outstanding teacher. Not all artists can do both. His workshops, books and CDs provide so much of the important information a

landscape artist, either beginner or professional, could possibly require.

By the way, the journey never ends. There's always more to learn. I think that's a large part of the appeal.

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

Although many artists seem to thrive while painting alone, I think many of us need the support and camaraderie of others. It's sometimes difficult to hurl yourself into the art world, but going to a workshop, an artists' convention, or joining an art organization are great ways to put yourself and your art in front of like-minded people who can make your journey easier and more enjoyable.