

June ArtWalks Column, OPAA 2021, Suzan Noyes

“There are no lines in nature, only areas of color, one against another.” Edouard Manet

This is a great area for landscape painters. I usually paint nature; I’m hooked on trees. Green is a big deal in Washington, so I seriously want to get it right. As a studio painter, I photograph my subjects for future use.

I search for impressive light, a great composition for a lovely painting. Something which shares how I feel about foliage, skies, and water. Then I take it home. I’ve missed glorious moments: the cloud that got away over Happy Valley off 101 is engraved on my conscious forever... (no place to pull over) and those cows in the shade today, one gazing out at the stately Olympics. Plein air painting would have helped me had I been kitted out, ready in that spot, in hope of such a moment. More often, you take what you get. That might be rain, fog and wind. Heat, cold, dust clouds, or snow flurries - all of which distract me no end. Give me my quiet studio where I concentrate and refine what I’m painting.

I asked a plein air painter I’ve known for years for his opinion of plein air vs studio work. Richard Gallego is a versatile, accomplished Californian painter. For Rich, *“Plein air painting provides a spontaneity that is much harder to achieve in the studio. It allows me to see with my own eyes, far more sensitive than a camera, the subtle variations in color, value and temperature. Also – a camera ‘sees’ everything in its visual field with the same level of definition, which isn’t how we experience the world. Of course, getting out into nature’s wild places feels just so much more satisfying for me in general.”*



Okay, I’m just a wimp.

In self-defense, I asked if Rich literally finishes all his small works in the field. Not always, mostly they are studies for larger studio works. Though if the studies are good, he frames them for sale.

Perhaps artwork revisited and finished in a studio isn’t truly plein air, but there’s lots of latitude as to how painters paint. Even the Impressionists left wiggle-room on this.

I admire professional photographers as well. Ansel Adams scored *way* many perfect moments in his artistic lifetime...but he worked his butt off getting them too. Trekking along the peninsula, snapping away (even without that perfect moment), I can create a painting later that truly satisfies me with what I add to it. A shot of light, perhaps Does that make me a cheater? *Yes*. Here I expose my weak underbelly. Plein air painters may now hit me with your best shot - but I'm still at my computer, you're outside with your easels. Heh, heh.



Lately I've been meeting more of you. I tagged along with Alice Crapo's local plein air group who meet weekly around Sequim but also travel out of the area to paint. I tried not to distract them from their work as I hovered, camera in hand. They were clearly enjoying themselves – it was a fine day for it.

Later I queried Alice about love of her craft and her own artistic journey, of course.

Alice always loved art but hesitated in devoting herself to it. A wonderful Art 101 teacher in college, Stanton Inglehart, opened her eyes about artistic possibilities and investing some time and supplies to this. For Alice, it was about time and trying to make a living. Oil painting demanded prep and clean-up so Alice segued to watercolors – risky but easier. Another teacher, Karyn Gabaldon suggested, “If you want to learn how to paint, go outside and do it.” Alice soon found a group of plein air painters.



I naturally asked about her current inspirational artists: Pat Howard, Carl Purcell, Stephen Quiller, all teachers she studied under. Lawrence Sisson inspires, also Eric Rhodes who owns Streamline Art. Alice says he's provided a free demo every day since Covid-19 hit over a year ago, available on YouTube.

(This past year has pushed many artists online – love it or hate it, it's reality now. And hey - it's a good thing.)



Back to fieldcraft. Does Alice literally finish a painting outside or inside her studio? Sometimes she'll end in the studio, she says. Light changes too fast to finish outside. However, she doesn't enjoy painting inside at all. She prefers the light and birds outside while she paints, and believes she sees so much more, this only possible with plein air.

I asked if she would share specifics to new artists interested in working plein air.

Her suggestions follow:

Stay simple. Do what you love. The first hurdle of plein air is not including too much.

Next: squint to see the dark shapes and the light.

Repeat.

Stay comfortable. Hydrated, not too hot or cold.

(That one's for me.)



Alice says there are many things she's learned. She loves being outdoors as much as she loves painting, so listening to birds, watching the light, shadow and color, creates her happy place. As a woman of faith chosen to appreciate the outdoors, Alice shares plein air with those open to this beautiful gift; she loves the concept of "growing beauty" through sharing it.

Alice Crapo's' revolving group of plein air artists meet most Mondays between 9:30 and 12 p.m. in various spots around Sequim and environs. Wherever they go is a good place to be.

Inquire about joining plein air sessions: alicecrapo@gmail.com

Visit Richard Gallego's paintings at: richgallego.com

connect at: proudhawkart@yahoo.com

For the history of plein air painting try:

<https://paintoutside.com/the-history-of-plein-air-painting/>

Image 1 - Richard Gallego plein air study

Image 2 - Alice Crapo paints

Image 3 - A. Crapo watercolor study

Image 4 - Plein Air class

Image 5 - Plein Air class

Image 6 - Plein Air class