



"Fearless Plein Air Painting"

May 26th – May 29th, 2026

Greetings, friends!

Thank you for enrolling in this workshop! I am looking forward to working with each of you to help bring your art to a new level.

The workshop will be quickly upon us...Hooray! We will be together from Tuesday, May 26th through Friday, May 29th at Dillman's Art Workshop Retreat Center. This letter will answer a few questions some of you may have. If I miss something, please feel free to call me.

Plein air painting, in itself, is a great teacher, because we are forced to make decisions quickly and accurately. It is at once, both demanding and exhilarating. My goal in this workshop is to arm you with the tools that will help make painting outdoors a rewarding and fruitful experience. I will share what I have learned from numerous mentors and what I have come to understand through my own research and experience. In this package, I will give you general information, our basic itinerary, materials list, and guidelines for preparation.

This is not required reading...just something to get the juices flowing and prepare any questions you may have for me.

Enjoy! 😊

Mary

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WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS WORKSHOP

There is an elusive quality in great oil paintings that goes beyond the literal transcription of the retinal image in front of us. How do we take that critical jump from recorders to interpreters, while keeping and evolving the artistic merit of our work?

This is a question at the core of Expressive Realism, and at the forefront in this workshop. We will take elements of the landscape and will draw connections between the surface appearance and their essence. This understanding will give us the first steps towards conveying our artistic message in an expressive, lively way.

We are going to paint paint paint :)! Although I know I know that we are going to have a lot of fun, I take a very serious and disciplined approach to the craft of picture making.

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Page 1 | 4



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This will be a very comprehensive 5-day workshop in which I will take you mostly on a journey of the fundamentals, but will also discuss the considerations of a consummate artist. Within the framework of my philosophy (heart, mind, hand) you will learn how to relate each of the components of a painting to the underlying, abstract structure of the piece.

You are all at different levels, but I personally guarantee you that there will be something for everyone to dramatically improve your work... no matter where you are starting. Each day we will spend some time discussing technical elements, then on to gorgeous locations with "Great Starts" painting exercises which will add strength to your compositions and aid in your confidence in that all-important "lay-in"! Since this is a small workshop, I plan to paint along-side you every day, while giving much one-on-one attention!

Here are some thoughts to get your juices flowing ...

The goal, technically, is to achieve UNITY. When we create a painting, we want Clarity and a sense of Wholeness. This is how we get it:

Fundamental - Visual Components:

Line
Shape
Value
Color
Edge and texture

Abstract - Considerations of Each:

Balance
Rhythm
Harmony

MATERIALS LIST

Most of you have already painted outdoors, so you probably do not need this, but here are a few reminders of what you may want to bring:

Clothing: I suggest staying away from white or extremely bright colors, because they often reflect off the canvas. The mornings might be a little chilly...dress in layers.

Weather appropriate jacket: We'll be both outdoors (rain, snow or shine) and indoors throughout the weekend. Please plan accordingly.

Sun protection: Sunscreen and hat

Bags: For garbage. I love the skinny bags that newspapers come in.

Paper towels: I use the heavy blue shop towels from hardware or box stores.

Wet wipes: Great if paint gets on your hands or clothes.

Portable easel and palette: I personally use the Soltek Ultra 2 easel and also the Strada easel. There are many other great plein air easels on the market. Most all are good. Just ask around. :)

Umbrella and clamp (recommended, not necessary): to protect your eyes and palette from direct sun. You will also see color better with your pupils wider, believe it or not...I use the EasyL umbrella by artworkessentials.com.

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Page 2 | 4



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Brushes, nice size assortment: Assortment: I like long, stiff hog hair, flat bristles sizes 4 to 12. I do most of my paintings 11 x 14 and under with a #6 bristle flat. I like Rosemary and Co Ivory extra-long flats sizes 3,4,6,8 (or Princeton Art & Brush Company 5400F or Silver Grand Prix 1001).

Palette knives: to clean your palette, mix paint, scrape off mistakes and to be used as a painting tool for textural effects. 1"-4" long spatula style is good. (In addition to my little pie-shaped 1" knife, I have 2 very expensive painting knives that I love, but you don't have to be obsessive about materials like I am! I have a Holbein series A painting knife, no.6S; and a Holbein series MX-3. LOVE them!)

Odorless mineral spirits: Gamsol is by far the best and least toxic - and a covered container for it.

Wet panel holder: I use panelpak.com carriers. You may also like RayMar (<http://www.raymarart.com>)

Panels: I like linen or canvas mounted on board. You'll need a minimum 1-2 pochade size (6x8" or 8x10") and 1-2 larger (9 x 12" 11x14" or 12x16") for EACH DAY!! I get my panels (and most of my frames) from Doug and Joyce at Lakeside Studios. You can reach them by e-mail at Lakesidestudio@centurytel.net or by phone at 715-553-1244. We highly recommend them! I love C15 and C13, but that is Claussens linen and is more expensive than you need for study.

Paints: Bring the paints you are familiar with! I LOVE COLOR and there is no need to be afraid of it! Over the years I have tried nearly all brands and many combinations of limited palettes. This is my firm belief: *More than WHICH colors you bring, it is important to know exactly what you can do with the colors you have!* The only exception I might make to this is that, as a rule, cheap student grade paints are really inferior and frustrating to work with, compared to professional grade oil paints. Call me if you have questions.

The best way to know about your colors is to do color charts, as proposed by Richard Schmid in his book "ALLA PRIMA Everything I Know About Painting" or Edgar Payne's classic "Composition of Outdoor Painting." A good white, plus a warm and cool version of each of the primaries is useful, and all that is necessary. I love the selection of colors suggested in Schmid's book and/or The Yin Yang of Painting. Or, if you don't have a palette you already love, a limited palette of the following are sufficient:

Bright Violet (Old Holland)
Ultramarine Blue Deep (Old Holland)
Pthalo Turquoise (Gamblin)
Cad Yellow Medium (Gamblin)
Fast Dry Titanium White (Gamblin)
Transparent ox. Orange (Rembrandt)
Cinnabar Green Light Extra (Old Holland)
Quinacridone Rose (Gamblin)

PREPARATION

There are many things you can do to prepare to get the most out of your workshop experience. Painting is important, of course, but don't beat yourself up over not having the opportunity to paint constantly. Becoming a whole artist includes important work other than painting!

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Page 2 | 4



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Seeing

There are many painters who paint several hours a day, yet will never advance beyond a certain point because they are not asking themselves the questions which will affect the *quality* of their attention and understanding...and consequently, their work. I cannot emphasize this enough. We can train ourselves to see more accurately. *That work does not need to be done with a paintbrush in our hands!* In fact, it might be said that isolating the VISION and UNDERSTANDING work from the PAINTING work might be a more direct route to achieving your artistic goals. I will be spending time on this in more depth throughout the course of the workshop, but here are a few starting points:

As you go about your day, be increasingly present to the beauty that is around you. Look at life as if you were painting it. *Constantly compare everything* – values, hues, chromacity, edges, etc. Ask yourself these questions to exercise your observation skills and they will serve you better when you are painting:

- On a scale of 1 to 7, (1 being the brightest spot and 7 being the darkest shadow), what values are the largest masses?
- On a scale of 1 to 7, (1 being the softest transition between two color masses and 7 being the sharpest), how sharp are the various edges?
- Look at everything in your field of vision that is green. Compare. Which greens, if you were painting them would have more yellow? More blue? More red? More white? Then do this with everything that is blue (for example...)

Reading

There are so many excellent books out there! I cannot wait to share mine! I would suggest, first and foremost (most of you know this...) Richard Schmid's "Alla Prima -Everything I know about Painting". Other excellent books are John Carlson's "Landscape Painting" and Kevin Macpherson's "Fill Your Oil Paintings with Light and Color". I LOVE "The Yin Yang of Painting" by Hongnian Zhang! I used to only read books which have artwork that I liked, but now I read everything I can get my hands on, and I have greatly expanded my understanding as a result!

Painting

Finally, practice painting. Do color charts (mixing 2 colors at a time, and lightening the value with white in increments) and small paintings with a BIG BRUSH!!! 😊

I am looking forward to seeing you and painting with you in this stunning venue!!! HAPPY PAINTING!!

Mary

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Page 3 | 4