

Aimee Erickson, instructor

## Plein-Air Painting Workshop

Plein-air painting is very different from painting in the studio. Conditions are not controlled, so you will be facing changing conditions in temperature, wind, and lighting. There is an immediacy that occurs naturally; paintings tend to have freshness and energy. You do have to carry all your gear, so bring what you need but don't feel that you have to transport your entire studio. For example, bring five or six paper towels instead of the whole roll. Consider using a limited palette.

Recommended reading: *Mastering Composition* by Ian Roberts, or *The Simple Secret to Better Painting* by Greg Alberts.

### **Materials** for oil painters. If you are using a different medium, bring comparable supplies.

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**Prepare for the weather.** In colder seasons this means warm layers, gloves, and a thermos; in the summer it means a sun hat, sunblock, insect repellent, and drinking water. Always bring snacks.

**Tools for planning & exploration.** Viewfinder (homemade or the ViewCatcher), sketchbook, pencil

**Portable or French easel.** A practical easel is one that is light enough to tote around, yet sturdy. French easels are the 19<sup>th</sup> century's answer to this need; get to know yours before heading out into the field. Other good options are Strada and Open Box M, which attach to a tripod.

**Something to paint on.** Canvas, prepared paper, board—whatever your choice of support, prepare enough of them in advance for the week. Gesso and tone each board; I prefer a warm golden brown semitransparent tone because it can hold the place of sunlit areas while I put in shadows. Expect to use one or two supports each day depending on your pace. 9x12 is generally a good size for a 3 hour painting.

**Palette and palette cups.** A good palette is rigid and has a neutral medium value; thus the traditional wood palette is very good. Plexiglas is also fine; peel off the protective paper and tape cardboard to the back to give it a medium value. If you must use a disposable palette, get the gray-toned one and bring clothespins. White palettes make judging value very difficult.

**Brushes.** Flats give you the most control; filberts are good too. Hog bristle is preferred. Brushes should be cleaned and reshaped to maintain usefulness and spring. If your brushes are stiff with dried paint in the bristles, clean them or replace them.

**Medium/solvent.** Paints behave differently outdoors depending on the weather. Linseed oil is therefore useful in hot weather. Any drying medium like Liquin may result in gummy paints. Gamsol in a leakproof container may be used as a medium and to clean brushes.

**Paints.** Gamblin makes a line called Art Sketching Oils which is economical and of good quality. As for which colors, the best is to know your paints and what you want. Successful paintings can be made from two colors or twenty. At a minimum, you need

- White
- Cadmium yellow light
- Cadmium or Naphthol red
- Ultramarine blue
- Black (I like Gamblin's Chromatic Black).

After that I suggest adding these:

- Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Orange, Alizarin Crimson, Transparent Earth Red, Cobalt Blue, Manganese or Cerulean ("Hue" is OK), Sap Green, Raw Umber. After that it is up to you. Research paintings you like; each artist has a preferred palette and it's interesting to see what possibilities are.

**Other useful items.** Plastic bags for trash. A means of carrying wet paintings (you can put them face to face with matchsticks as spacers, and tape the corners together; put a matchstick in the center and in each corner). An umbrella for shade. Clamps. Bungee cord (can stabilize a wobbly easel). Camera. More snacks.

“Starting to paint, I felt gloriously free, quiet, and alone.”

--Henri Matisse