

## SOME OF MY EXPERIENCES PAINTING OUTDOORS 2013

### INTRODUCTION.

I would like to share some of my en plein air experiences with you as we seem to have had one of our better British Summers for some time. As far back as I can remember I have always enjoyed drawing and also painting during family camping holidays in Europe. In those days enjoyment was gained by having a personal record other than the usual camera driven photographs. Since retiring and becoming more serious on developing my painting skills, I have enjoyed painting courses and workshops with several artists at various venues including the West Norfolk Art Centre at Castle Rising with its European Painting Courses, the Earnley Concourse (now closed) and always have the painting gear handy on holidays.

Usually, the results never look a “finished” painting and often seem to be incomplete in some way or another. However, several have vibrancy and show the immediacy of working quickly and have “captured the moment”. My question to all of you is “How can one produce these wow factors in a finished painting where you have all the time in the world in the studio to achieve the masterpiece”. In my search for an answer to this seemingly simple question some of the replies are worth noting. Quite a few professional artists have said “when you find out, please let us know!” Others including Bridget Woods ( our President's favourite watercolourist! ) favour the response “its just not possible because the moment of discovery is a unique point in time which by definition cannot be repeated. One Wapping member simplified the problem by saying “Don’t worry about it Bob—Just go out and paint for fun!”

### PAINTING FOR FUN

I think 2013 is my lucky year as I have had several en plein air “experiences” which have really given me the encouragement first hand as it were. I shall describe just a few that you may find interesting.

Winter in February. I was thrilled to accompany Steve Alexander (Secretary of the Wapping Group of Painters) and some of his friends over two days in very cold and drizzling weather in Henley and Hartley



Wintney.

Near the riverside at Henley, sheltering under an umbrella in a steady drizzle standing at my easel , I attempted a couple of watercolours on ¼ Imperial Waterford 200lb. with much difficulty. Not in my comfort zone. I imagined what the scene would be like in the Springtime and painted a bright sunny day. All the others painting in oil or watercolours actually painted exactly what they saw. They captured the atmosphere and mood accurately with low contrast and subdued colour intensities.



The next day at St. Mary's Church in Hartley Wintney where we had permission to paint inside and hence out of the rain, I managed a reasonable interior watercolour with very low light levels and hence some difficulty in getting correct colours on the paper. To my surprise, I was not alone as another far more proficient oil painter, after checking his canvas outside in brighter light, realised that he had been mistaking his Alizirin Crimson for Pthalo Green with some interesting effects!



Spring in France. (31 May to 9 June) Mike Richardson, a Wapping Member, and his wife arrange a painting holiday every year, this time to the Island of Ile de Re near La Rochelle travelling by coach and using the Portsmouth to St. Malo night ferry crossing. I was lucky to get a place and, although a tad costly, I thought it would be a good experience knowing that several painters would be "in the office" as most of their en plein air paintings finish up framed in Galleries. I planned to sketch in whatever media suited me for the occasion so included pencil, conte, pens, watercolours keeping picture sizes down to ¼ Imperial with slightly smaller blocks of NOT, Rough, and HP paper. I also took my small pochard box for Artisan oils on 6X8 inch mountboard just for the fun of it! I found that whilst painting "solo" was very good experience, I benefited more when painting amongst a group of 3 or 4 where experience could be shared and discussed. Steve Alexander enthusiastically suggested a "sunset" painting and one evening 7 of us prepared for the event working in various media (oils, W/C, acrylics etc). I can thoroughly recommend the experience to any readers who have not yet tried capturing the varying light levels, changing colours and reflections on foreground until the light suddenly diminishes and all the excitement disappears. I was quite happy with my efforts which could not be repeated when I went "solo" the next

evening (for a better one?) After a week of concentrated en plein air, I felt that I had accomplished a fair number of paintings some better than others. Then at the “exhibition” of work done before we left for our return to Dinard, I saw the amount of work completed by the professionals. It made me think just how could they have produced so many attractive finished paintings? In a word- EXPERIENCE. They were so efficient in every aspect, setting up, deciding on composition, colour combinations and application of paint without any “lost time”. We amateurs , unless we paint every day, can’t apply paint so effectively as the professionals but there are ways of improving if one gets out there and makes mistakes.

Summer in Dedham (30 June – 6 July) Several painting friends have waxed lyrical about the food at Dedham Hall, the venue for several residential Painting Courses and I signed up for my first visit on a week with Roger Dellar taking “Outdoor Painting in Oils”. I have known Roger for many years and always enjoy his painting techniques and demonstrations at various Art Societies. His ability to create the “finished” oil in less than 2 hours is a true reflection of his vast experience, especially en plein air working. Drawing on my experiences so far, I decided to work small and took my pochard box extended to take 6X10 ins. as well as 6X8 ins. I can use this with a stool/rucksack and an old Winsor and Newton wooden easel which makes for a fairly simple set-up and easy to transport to a different location a few metres away. I can thoroughly recommend the course where Roger gives an enormous amount of tutoring every day and gives one to one critiques at least once an hour to everyone. Outdoors every day in places such as Dedham, Pin Mill and Manningtree we were often all spread out but he still gave attention to all. I could almost write a book on all the tips and “happenings” during the week but I must share a couple with you all.

Firstly, painting amongst a field of cows by the river in Dedham with fine reflections of trees and boats , I was interrupted by one of the cows (instantly identified as a bullock!) gently pushing me nearer and nearer to the river bank. He then started snatching at my stool/rucksack which I could see being dispatched into the river at any moment. Just in time, Roger came to the rescue, picking up my easel/tripod with one hand and I taking the stool/rucksack. We both legged it to the bridge and safety where Roger then repeated the rescue of another course member also being molested by the same creature. Now I understand the phrase “work in progress” when someone sees an unfinished painting! Secondly, probably the last painting of the course in Dedham Church grounds with a study of shapes and shadows through to shop fronts in main street was interrupted by a couple of men with the comment “I’m a professional photographer teaching a friend, do you mind if I take a few photographs?” After a good 15 minutes chatting about photography and my old Leica III G he departed and I completed the painting. (Attached photo of me received by e-mail and my sketch.)





Elsewhere. Throughout this Summer I have joined outdoor painting groups from Fleet Art Society, Odiham Art Group and several solo trips to local venues and produced several quick sketches in all media to try to “capture the moment”. These do help to consolidate the lessons learnt from a more formal course. (several copies available as per attached photos)

#### ADVICE

Keep equipment for en plein air as simple as possible, quick to assemble/dismantle. Have equipment which can be grouped into 3 different categories of paintings namely:-quick 15 min sketches; Quick 90 min paintings; Less quick 2 Hours 20X16 oils or Full Imperial W/C.

Keep size of work fairly small so that painting can be completed in less than 90 minutes. Essential to cater for changing light, tides, shadows.

With squinted eyes, only paint what you can see, no fiddling with small brushes!

Don't “finish off” the sketch in the studio – it will die due to overworking especially if you have a photo as reference.

Never forget the basis of a good picture – composition. Also, choose combinations of colour which match the mood/atmosphere you are capturing. Try not to make a mark which has no purpose.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Working direct from the subject and to a time limit improves the observation skills and how to represent the subject with the minimum amount of actual mark making. Simplifying the subject gives you the opportunity to interpret.

Have I solved the problem of getting spontaneity into my studio paintings? Of course I haven't. But time will tell and I have enjoyed every minute of this year outdoor painting with a great bunch of people! Happy “en plein air” to you all!

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