

Tuscany Landscape Painting Program 2012
Instructor: Nora Lehmann
Syllabus

"He saw in nature the means for an arrangement of form and colour; he sought not so much the beauty of a part as the relation of parts to an organized whole."

— Written of the artist John Henry Twachtman (1853 - 1902)

"I could paint for a hundred years, a thousand years without stopping and I would still feel as though I knew nothing." — Paul Cezanne

Overview

In this class, students will learn to paint *en plein air* in the Tuscan countryside, a remarkably beautiful landscape. While discovering the varied challenges of painting the landscape and negotiating the exigencies of working out-of-doors, we will explore the transformative power of giving our attention to the world around us.

This landscape painting class can accommodate painters of different levels of experience, and will deal with a number of technical concerns specific to painting outdoors, while also encouraging the development of individual interests. The curriculum is flexible, so as to be responsive to the particular needs of students, and circumstances which may arise.

Weeks 1 and 2: The Jumping Off Point

Initial investigations . . . Creating a portable studio . . . The Problem of Green

Landscape painting is a kind of sport, in which the normal challenges of painting are amplified by the physical difficulties of working at the mercy of the elements. Painting outside can veer between bliss and extreme physical discomfort: when you are standing still in one position outdoors, a delightful sun quickly becomes scorching; dew-soaked grasses wet your feet and chill you to the bone; bugs bite you and fly to their deaths in your wet painting; you become ravenously hungry; there is no bathroom close to hand; and perhaps most irritatingly, passers-by will play art-critic while you are trying to maintain a beatific state of mind.

The difference between a transcendent experience and a terrible time depends greatly upon the thoroughness of your preparation. If you have ever prepared for a camping trip, you will appreciate the level of forethought necessary to ensure that you will not only have everything you need to be physically comfortable but that you will have everything you require to be able to paint. We will learn to plan and pack for a day of painting outdoors, and students will create a portable studio set-up that is effective and specific to their needs.

Color mixing and palette management will be thoroughly reviewed, and will be of fundamental concern throughout the course. Particular attention will be given to the problem of green: namely, that when painting the landscape there is *too much of it* — the grass, the leaves, the trees, etc. We will address ourselves to mixing more interesting and subtle variations on what is an often strident hue, and exploring ways to subvert or tame the tyranny of nature's favorite color.

Specific, carefully calibrated color is our goal, whether subtle or surprising.

Weeks 3 and 4: Perennial Fundamentals

The Necessity of Omission . . . The Ever-changing Light

One of the great challenges of painting the landscape is that there is no longer something clearly demarcated as *subject*. The “landscape,” far from being a discrete object at a safe remove from the artist, is beneath and above, before and behind, to the left and to the right, in short, is all-encompassing. Thus the first task of the plein-air painter is to edit; to discard the majority of his or her visual experience in favor of a relatively small selection. Composition in the field becomes largely a process of selective focus and omission. We will focus on compositional decision-making, the implications of different formats, and thinking our way intelligently around the rectangle.

Another significant challenge to painting the landscape is that we are on a planet in constant rotation around our light source. While it may seem obvious that the sun is always moving overhead, when you are used to the consistent lighting of the studio it is shocking how fast the light changes outdoors. We will make paintings at different times of day to examine the different qualities of light and shadow at morning and evening, and examine how radically it can change the appearance of a place.

Weeks 5 and 6: . . . and Beyond

Assimilation . . . Invention

At this point, students will embark on a final project that delves more deeply into an aspect of the landscape that compels them. We will discuss the significance of where and what one chooses to paint, avoiding the obvious, and trying to go beyond the beaten path.

My ultimate goal for students is not that they necessarily become landscape artists, but that in developing a portable practice they will gain both a flexible set of skills and the habit of seeing the painting potential in their everyday surroundings that is transferrable to anything, anywhere in the world.

Course Requirements

This is an intensive course, and students must participate fully and be able to work unsupervised. You will be expected to paint *a lot* — almost everyday— even when we don’t have a scheduled class. Due to the compressed schedule of the course, the amount of information to be learned, and the time-consuming nature of landscape painting, the distinction between class-time and out-of-class time is not always clearly demarcated. Enthusiasm, energy, and willingness to step into the unknown are musts.

Grading

Grading will take into account effort, participation, and development. The fundamental criteria is the degree of growth shown by the student, and the sincerity of their efforts to improve. Someone who comes in strong but slacks will not do as well as someone who tries hard and builds on their work over the entire course. A good grade will reflect full participation, a clear understanding of the concepts, a real investment of time and energy, and a high level of execution. A grade of C indicates *fair to average* work. A grade of B indicates *good* work. An A grade is reserved to indicate *exceptional* work.

However, this summer, removed from the ordinary academic framework, I hope you’ll be willing to try new things, engage with the process, and even to “fail” at first. Openness to the unknown

and the possibly uncomfortable will ultimately take you farther than anxiety about achieving immediate results.

Ci vediamo in Italia!

Supply List

Plein air painting is a bit of a logistical headache even without having to first transport everything to Italy: please read this list carefully, and email me with any questions or concerns at noralehmannmiller@gmail.com or call me at 617 549 5799
I will be more than happy to talk shop with you!

There will be a trip to the Zecchi's art store in Florence to purchase art supplies, *however, I strongly recommend* that you bring your paint (and brushes) from the US — that way, you will be assured of having the colors you need in a familiar brand and at a better price. You can use the Zecchi's trip to buy panels and canvases, extra brushes, and any other unexpected supply needs that arise. It is important to pack your art supplies carefully in your luggage.

Paint

Utrecht & Dick Blick both make decent paint at very affordable prices. Gamblin is excellent quality although a bit more expensive. However basically the only brand I strongly advise against buying is Winsor & Newton's student grade paint, Winton — it is absolutely terrible. (Regular Winsor & Newton is great.)

Suggested colors:

Big tubes:

- Titanium white (maybe even 2 tubes — everybody always runs out of white)
- Ultramarine blue
- Yellow ochre

Small tubes:

- Venetian red (or another earth red)
- Cadmium red medium
- Cadmium orange
- Naples yellow
- Cadmium yellow medium
- Cadmium yellow lemon
- Permanent green deep (Or viridian — any green made with Pthalocyanine)
- Sap green
- Chromium oxide green
- Cerulean blue (hue)
- Dioxazine or quinacridone violet
- Raw umber
- Burnt umber
- Ivory black

And any other colors you can't live without, of course.

I have recently discovered a product that safely holds and transports tubes of oil paint, and I have become very enamored of it. (Just putting tubes of paint into a bag is problematic, because the

pointy ends of the tubes can poke holes in other tubes, which makes a big mess and wastes paint.) The brand name is Tran, and I've found a link on Amazon that looks pretty much like what I have:

<http://www.amazon.com/Tran-Paint-Tube-Carrier-For/dp/B003ZFW604>

It is not required but is extremely handy.

Brushes

I suggest bringing a combination of natural bristle and synthetic brushes, since they have different properties, and you may find you prefer one to the other for particular tasks. Brush preferences are idiosyncratic, and you will discover what you like the best with time and experience. You should have at least three sizes— and more would be better — in each shape of brush — **rounds, filberts, and flats**. You want a range of sizes and shapes so that you can move between details and broad strokes, and make a variety of marks and textures.

Rounds

at least three sizes: small, medium and large

Filberts

at least three sizes: small, medium and large

Flats

at least three sizes: small, medium and large

You will also want some **small, synthetic rounds** — watercolor brushes are good — for detail work.

It will be less expensive to purchase your brushes in the States rather than Italy. Decent brushes aren't cheap, but will last a long time with proper care.

Brush Holder

I recommend purchasing some kind of protective brush holder: they are extremely handy for carting your brushes around without ruining the bristles.

Palette Knives

We will be doing a lot of mixing, and you must have the right kind of palette knife. You should have *at least* two, and they should be neither too small nor too big. I recommend the kind of palette knives that are shaped like a skinny piece of pie, and that are off-set from the handle. Again, practice will determine which shape, style and size of palette knife you end up preferring. I both mix paint with my knife, and use it to apply paint to the canvas, so I like to have several different types.

Palettes

Portable wooden palettes will be available for use at Capitignano.

However, you should bring a 9" x 12" pad of waxed palette paper, for storing paint between sessions.

Backpack

This is important – you need a backpack to carry all your painting gear in, since there is a lot of walking involved in landscape painting. The most interesting views are usually not right on the side of the road. However, be warned it will likely get paint on it!

Mediums & Thinner

Obviously, you can't fly with this stuff. To be purchased in Italy.

Containers

(These are for holding thinner and medium out in the field; you can scavenge these out of the recycling.)

2 small empty jars with screw-top lids — you can purchase these or scavenge them from your recycling bin

Drawing Supplies

- Charcoal
- Pencils, eraser, and sharpener
- Sketchbook (with good quality paper)
- Straight edge
- Set of watercolors or gouache (optional)

Other Really Essential Items:

- **Roll of duct or masking tape
- **Box of latex or nitrile gloves
- **An old beach towel that you don't mind getting ruined
- **Wide-brimmed hat to keep the sun off
- **Sunscreen
- **A long-sleeved work shirt

Canvases/Panels

It's probably a lot easier to buy your canvases and panels in Italy. However, please bring 4 small panels or canvases with you to get started with. These should be between approx. 6" x 8" and 8" x 10".

Easels

Both studio and portable easels are available at Capitignano.