

Artists roam across West Marin in Plein Air Paint Out

by **Jacoba Charles**

Golden hills, cypress trees and rusty trucks were some favorite subjects of the Sixth Annual Plein Air Paint Out last weekend, organized by the William Lester Gallery in Point Reyes Station.

For three days, 21 painters from around the nation—all of whom are represented by the gallery—roamed the byways of West Marin, capturing their favorite spots on canvas.

“You’re painting outside, so you have to do it fast,” said Pamela Priest-Naevé, a painter who drove up from Pacifica to participate. “The light, the shadows, the colors—everything changes so quickly. That’s how you can tell who painted from a photograph: it’s just too perfect.”

On Friday and Saturday, the artists could be found scattered from Stinson Beach to Tomales. On Sunday, they were all asked to paint in the Point Reyes Station area.

Tim Horn of Fairfax, who painted in the alley behind the Old Western Saloon on Sunday afternoon, was offered friendly heckling from bystanders. “I think you’re done,” said one. “It’s time to come in and have a beer.”

A second settled in a chair and offered advice about color selection, which Horne cheerfully ignored.

On the corner of Second and B Streets, Stefan Pashtuhov of Maine explained to passersby why he comes to Marin to paint, and how Saturday’s wind had threatened to knock over his canvas and forced him to move inland.

Overall, the participants spoke highly of the paint-out, which was reduced from 45



Tim Horn of Fairfax took part in the Plein Air Paint Out last weekend. Photo by **Jacoba Charles**.

painters to 15 this year because of logistics.

“Artists love to paint with each other in a sprit of camaraderie and friendly competition, and art lovers have the chance to watch a lot of painting being created,” said Amber Menzies, the gallery manager. “Then there is the pleasure of seeing finished paintings that only hours before were in a state of becoming.”

Each artist produced roughly half a dozen finished paintings, which were framed while still wet and shown at a gala reception on Sunday night. Seen hanging in clusters, many similarities appeared between

the artists: all were somewhat pastoral and, in part because of the nature of the style, somewhat impressionistic. The gallery walls offered a snapshot of West Marin, from chickens to a silver Airstream, all of which evoked a similar emotional tone.

Individual themes were also clear within each artist’s work. Horne created clean, Hopper-esque swathes of light and architecture, while Pashtuhov worked in tidy, dipping brushstrokes that wove color and complexity into each form. Mark Roberts of Antioch presented stark, linear juxtapositions of horizon and sky;

Dana Hooper of Chileno Valley depicted barns, chickens and cows with broad, charismatic strokes; Teresa Dong of San Rafael rendered lanes and houses with a tender old-photograph effect; and so on.

This opportunity for a viewer to appreciate both the commonalities and distinctiveness in each artist’s work is one unexpected advantage to the post-paint-out show. Visitors who were in town on Sunday had a chance to see how weather and time of day affected all the artists simultaneously, and the myriad choices each artist made in response.

An inconvenient truth about bridges

GUEST COLUMN
BY HATHAWAY BERRY

My understanding is that the Giacomini Wetland Restoration Project is first and foremost about the fullest possible restoration of the wetlands and the hydrological activity of the once pristine Tomales Bay. When complete it will represent 12 percent of all California’s coastal wetlands. It has been designated a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance.

How fantastic that we humans are choosing to do such a thing, and how rare for us to recognize our impact and respectfully, even reverently step back and work to reduce it.

I wonder then about the clamor for the bridge—what appears to be a “Yes, but.” Of course it would be a lovely convenience for us and our kids to stroll, bike and ride back and forth across a bridge. But I wonder what it will cost the

generations to come.

As Al Gore’s film made abundantly clear, we need to do maximum restoration wherever and whenever possible, and to ask ourselves, “How much is enough?” Given the state of our planet, the inconvenient truth is that it’s no longer about our convenience.

Those of us lucky enough to live here know we already live in paradise. We have so much: we are surrounded by parks and trails. We have managed just fine so far without a bridge. Not perfect, but good enough.

It seems the proposed bridge/path won’t solve the alternative transportation and safety issues. It will bring more traffic and more density of use. And access to the wetlands, through existing or proposed overlooks and spur trails, is already abundant. So I’m concerned about the high cost (ecological cost and the cost of county and park personnel time) of this possible convenience.

I’m concerned that in our human hab-

it of wanting more we may lose the very thing we were intending to preserve. One argument I’ve heard is that having more public access to wetlands is educational. We can learn and teach our children why they are so important to preserve for future generations. I’m puzzled. These *are* the wetlands that need preserving and this *is* the future. Now is when we get to practice.

When asked, “What would be best for the bay?” Greg Kamman, hydrologist and engineer for the restoration project, explained that the wetlands are the “kidneys” of the bay. Taking down *all* the levees and letting Nature go to work restoring this essential filtration system that we’ve been interfering with for all these years would be the very best.

Any levees interrupt the natural cleansing flow. Building a bridge would channelize Lagunitas Creek, and would invite increased human activity (along with the fear that our mere human presence—and that of our dogs—inspires in

all things wild) into a streamside conservation area, a vital riparian habitat.

The environmental impact of a bridge seems to be at cross purposes with the guideline in the restoration project: “public access opportunities should not conflict with the project’s purpose of restoring natural hydrologic and ecological processes and functions.”

I imagine we all share a deep wish to leave the best possible legacy for future generations. Even if it is a little inconvenient. Preserving, protecting, and restoring the natural world is such a gift. My own wish is for my children and grandchildren to enjoy and revere a fully functioning and pristine bay—the hearth around which we have all settled.

After we are long gone and all our opinions, appetites, and preferences are returned to fresh air, it may be that the best way to steward this wetland (though global warming, rising sea levels, or an earthquake may do it for us) was to give it back to nature 100 percent.