

Friends Travel to Paint the Desert

A core group of plein air painters travel with invited friends to Maine, Massachusetts, Mexico, and — mostly recently — Utah. As they set up to paint, some artists were familiar with the regional conditions, while others had to find a way of responding to the unfamiliar.

Painting a familiar landscape is a relatively easy job for most outdoor painters. But fly them to a completely unfamiliar environment, and they will have to make a number of adjustments. The relationships among colors, shapes, distances, weather, and light may be radically different. The humid air and flat topography of Louisiana suggest different color mixtures and value patterns than the crisp air and high peaks of Montana, and the incredibly vast space of the Grand Canyon will call for a different response from what is appropriate for the Florida Everglades.

On various occasions over the past seven years, a group of top plein air artists from several regions of the country has gathered for painting trips to locations that are familiar to some members and relatively new to others. There is nothing formal about the connections between the artists or the locations, and there is never an agenda other than to paint together outdoors. So far, the group has included only men because that has made it easier to arrange shared bedrooms or to fit as many as 10 people into a dormitory bedroom.

“We have to keep the arrangements flexible and inexpensive because we don’t know until the last minute how many artists will actually join us and how we will handle accommodations, meals, and transportation,” explains one member of the group. Artist Paul Schulenburg adds, “The arrangements for Utah were especially tricky because none of the participating artists were from the state, so we didn’t have local reconnaissance.”

The first meeting, of four artists, took place in 2006 in Port Clyde, Maine, a location made

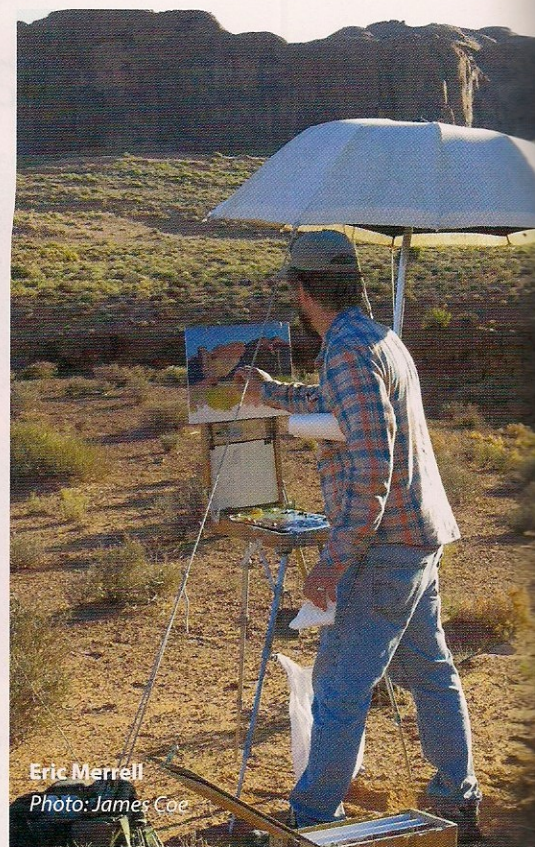
Canyonlands Painting Group (left to right): Colin Page, Jerome Greene, Pete Kalill, Frank Gardner, Paul Schulenburg

Photo: James Coe





James Coe
Photo: Paul Schulenburg



Eric Merrell
Photo: James Coe

The artists (clockwise from back left): Colin Page, Paul Schulenburg, Glenn Dean, Jeremy Lipking, Eric Merrell, Logan Maxwell Hagege, Ignat Ignatov, Marc Hanson, Frank Gardner, James Coe, Ernesto Nemesio, Jerome Greene, Pete Kalill





Monument

Pete Kalill
2013, oil, 11 x 14 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

people and was relatively close to the national and state parks where we wanted to paint. The restaurant options were not so great, so a local wedding planner put me in touch with a woman who agreed to cook for us.”

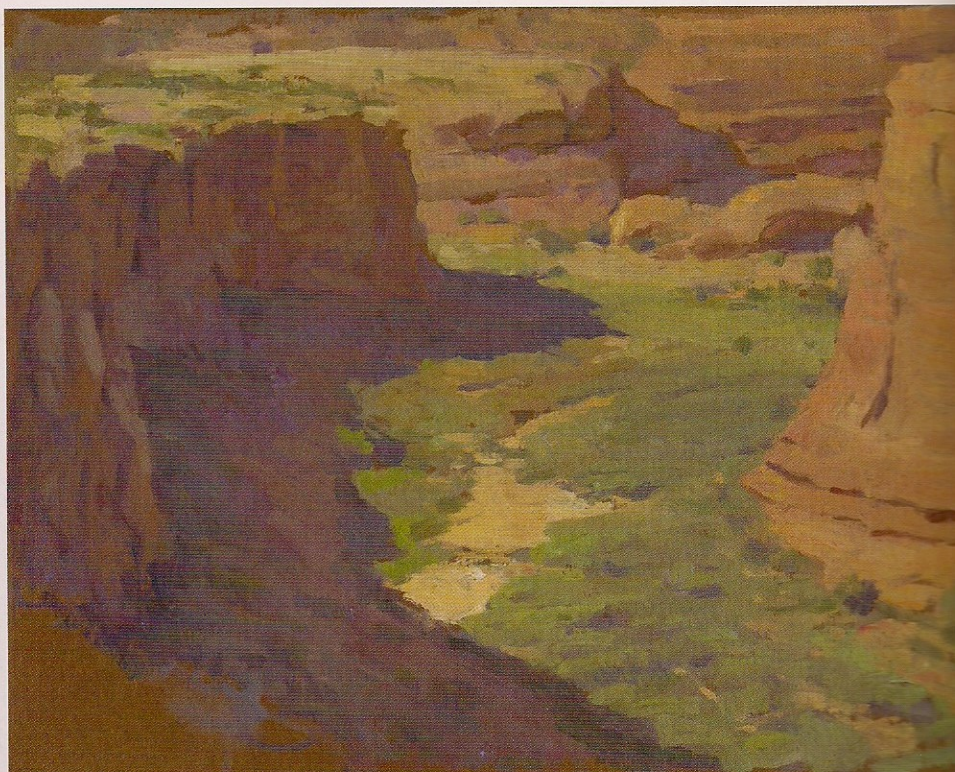
Among the arrangements that had to be made was a way to get painting supplies to Blanding. The artists who drove from California could obviously put supplies in their cars, and they agreed to bring extra solvent and medium for those who wouldn't be able to take them on a plane.

Schulenburg, Kalill, Greene, and Gardner flew to Santa Fe, where Schulenburg was able to go to an art-supply store to buy what he hadn't shipped in advance. “I ordered panels and had them delivered to the woman who would be making dinners,” Schulenburg says. After the painting trip was concluded, several artists shipped their supplies and paintings back home via USPS.

Kalill says, “The painting locations were inspiring, but they were all quite a distance from each other, so we did have to spend more time

famous by one of the seasonal residents, Andrew Wyeth. In 2008, there were 12 artists who painted together in Maine; in 2009, 16 artists gathered in San Miguel, Mexico, where Frank Gardner served as host. The most recent trip, to Blanding, Utah, included 13 painters and took place in the fall of 2013, and the paintings and photographs in this article document that trip. The artists who painted in Utah's state and national parks included Schulenburg as well as James Coe, Glenn Dean, Frank Gardner, Jerome Greene, Marc Hanson, Logan Maxwell Hagege, Ignat Ignatov, Pete Kalill, Jeremy Lipking, Eric Merrell, Ernesto Nemesio, and Colin Page.

“Since none of the artists live in Utah, I agreed to search the Internet and contact the local Chamber of Commerce to find out what accommodations, restaurants, and other services were available,” says Kalill. “Everyone was extremely helpful, and I found a large house in the town of Blanding that could sleep 12 to 15



Arches Valley

Ernesto Nemesio
2013, oil, 9 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



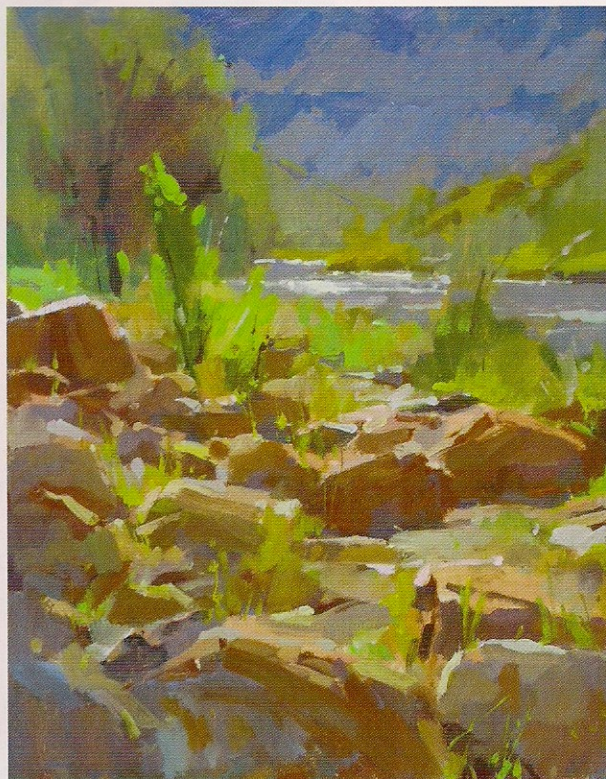
Sunset Light Near Moab

Paul Schulenburg

2013, oil, 9 x 12 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



River Rocks

Colin Page

2013, oil, 14 x 11 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



traveling than we did in other locations. I've painted in the Southwest, Mexico, and Central America, so I had some familiarity with the vast space, monumental land formations, and warm palette of colors, but I certainly had to adjust to the differences between that landscape and the lush vegetation and proximity to water on Cape Cod, where I live."

Most of the East Coast artists had very limited experience with painting deserts, so they shifted their palettes and procedures in response to the locations. Schulenburg notes, "Painting landscapes is a matter of evaluating shapes, values, and colors, so in theory an artist should be able to paint the desert in much the same

The Precipice, The Wind

Marc Hanson

2013, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



Along the Colorado

James Coe

2013, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air

from extremely dry to excessively moist, and the altitude of the selected painting locations might range from 4,000 to more than 6,000 feet above sea level. Given those conditions and the unusual land formations, a painter might not use the same techniques to paint in Arches National Park as he or she would in New York's Central Park. "At first it was rather tricky to select what scene I wanted to paint and to determine how to approach it," Schulenburg says. "It really helped to see how others establish their vision and interpret the landscape."

Although the original intention of the painting excursions was just for the painters to enjoy each other's company and the inspiring locations, a gallery in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, that represents several of the participating

way he or she would paint a forest, a truck, or a figure. However, painters have to interpret and edit what they see."

Part of the reason the painters had to spend the first couple of days establishing a

new rhythm to their routine was because there were such big swings in the weather, altitude, and atmospheric conditions on any given day. Temperatures in that region can drop by 30 to 40 degrees at night, humidity levels can range

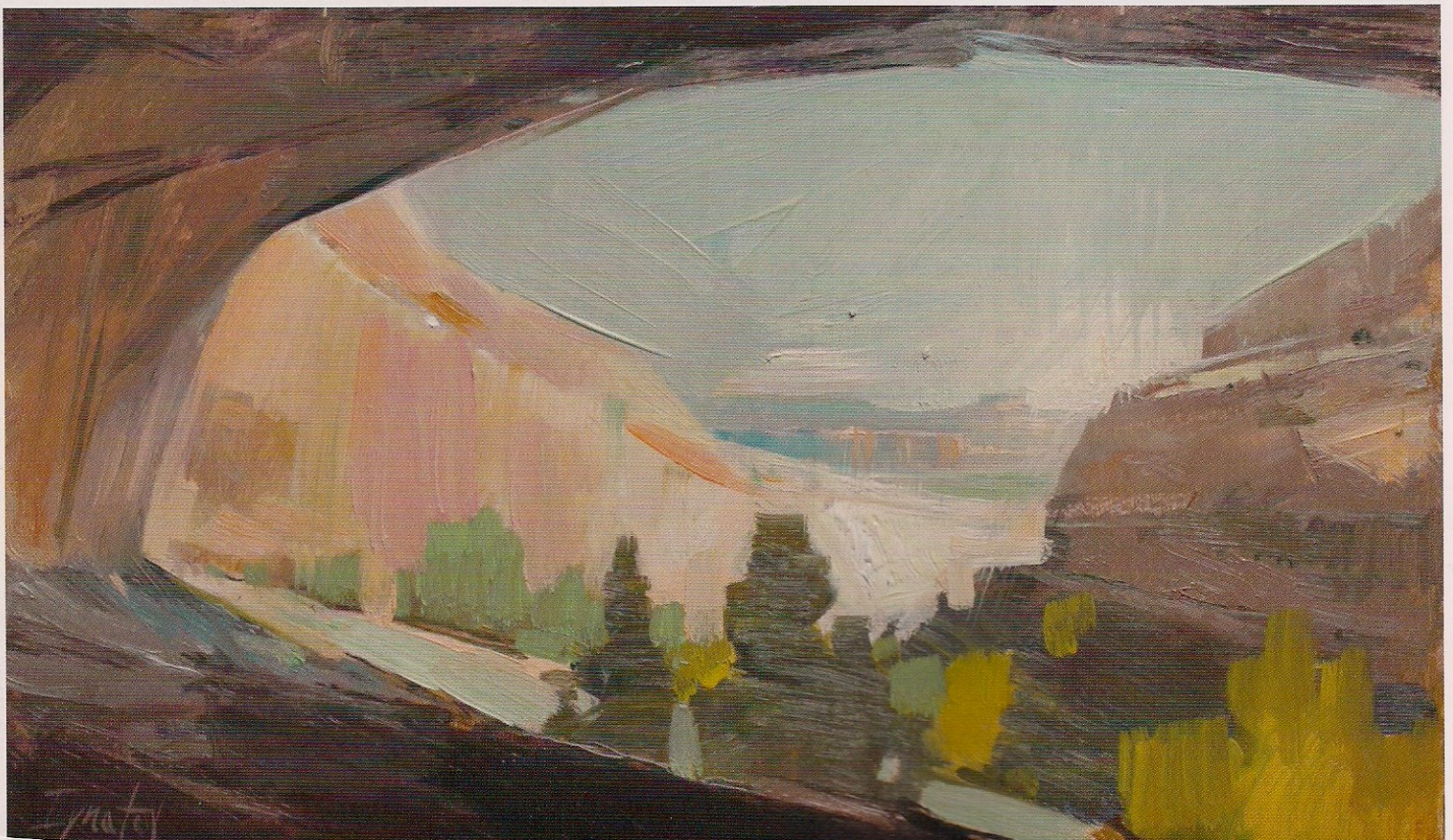
View From Monarch Cave

Ignat Ignatov

2013, oil, 7 1/2 x 12 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air






Transitions

Eric Merrell
2013, oil, 12 x 16 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

artists expressed interest in mounting exhibitions of the plein air paintings. “The first trip to Maine resulted in an exhibition both at the Addison Gallery in Orleans, Massachusetts, and the Cape Cod Museum of Art,” Schulenburg says. “There were more artists and paintings on the second trip to Maine, so the gallery and museum offered to host simultaneous shows. And even though we didn’t think the gallery

would want to display the paintings of Mexico, Addison Gallery agreed to present that work as well.” There is no plan for a group show, but some artists have already exhibited their plein air pieces with the various galleries that represent them. 

For more information, visit the artists’ websites:

- James Coe: www.jamescoe.com
- Glenn Dean: www.landscapesofthewest.com
- Frank Gardner: www.frankgardner.com
- Jerome Greene: www.jeromegreeneart.com
- Marc Hanson: www.marchansonart.com
- Logan Maxwell Hagege: www.loganhagege.com

- Ignat Ignatov: www.ignatovart.com
- Pete Kalill: <http://petekalill.blogspot.com>
- Jeremy Lipking: www.lipking.com
- Eric Merrell: www.ericmerrell.com
- Ernesto Nemesio: www.ernestonemesio.com
- Colin Page: www.colinpagepaintings.com
- Paul Schulenburg: www.schulenburgstudio.com

M. STEPHEN DOHERTY is editor-in-chief of *PleinAir* magazine.

See more paintings and photos from the artists’ Utah trip in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.

