

11 ARTISTS TO COLLECT NOW:

The Emerging Plein Air Painters You Need to Know

Meet the rising plein air stars who have caught the attention of today's gallery owners, event organizers, and competition jurors. Find out what inspires them, the breakthroughs that have taken them to the next level, and why you should add their work to your collection now.

— BY KELLY KANE —



Nancy Takaichi



Robin Weiss



Alex Venezia



Mary Giammarino



Peter Bain



Rebecca Arguello



Michele Z Farrier



Brandon Gonzales



Palden Hamilton



Amanda Lovett



Todd Saal

NANCY TAKAICHI

Art education: I majored in art at DePauw University in Indiana, and, atypically for the '70s, it was a tough academic education, thanks to Robert Kingsley. I spent a semester in New York City as an apprentice to Jack Beal (figurative) and Jane Frelicher (landscape and still life). Fast forward past a 30-year career in Silicon Valley — half of that as a technical and marketing writer and the other half as a sales conference organizer — and I returned to art in 2012. I attended a couple of Plein Air Convention & Expos in Monterey, California, which introduced me to great artists whose workshops I later pursued. To jump back into art after many years makes me feel young again.

Painting style: The short answer is impressionistic, with a painterly application. Light is everything (after composition). I think one way to tell a “Takaichi” is by the soft edges. I love my filberts!

Favorite subjects: Because I compose using dark and light patterns, I look for a strong light source, particularly back light. I'm drawn to buildings, cars, and lately, the addition of people to tell a



(ABOVE) **Paul's Airstream**, 2018, oil, 11 x 14 in., available from artist, *plein air* • (LEFT) **Nikolas' Garden Shed**, 2019, oil, 8 x 10 in., collection the artist, *plein air*



“You can tell ‘painting from life’ is Nancy’s true passion and natural method of working; she is not trying to impose her will or her own formula on the subject, but rather she is willing to see what is in front of her with open eyes. The results are seemingly effortless atmospheric paintings based on astute observation. Softly and deftly painted, they render a beautiful quality of light, and only just enough detail.”

— *Jill Carver*

better story. They also help define a point in time in the continuum of a changing landscape.

Aha moment: The best teacher has been practice — there just is no getting around the work! I enter plein air events and plan trips with others so I am painting all day for three or four days, which pushes me artistically.

Favorite artists: Len Chmiel’s keen observation of nature is as evident as his strong design. I take cues from his variety of subject matter, and have learned to slow down and study the scene before jumping in. I’m also fascinated by the way Charles Movalli applied paint. His brushwork was an immediate response to the scene before him, and he didn’t bring every square inch to completion, resulting in the “this place at this moment” feel that I strive for. But my painting partner Randall Stauss has shaped my work the most, always completely honest in his critiques.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career:

I believe you have 100 bad paintings in you when you begin. You just have to put your head down and do the work. Figure out what you don’t know, because you need the right questions to get the right answers. Then find a good workshop or attend a conference. Oh, and draw cars! A car has everything — the curves of a figure, perspective lines — and you know instantly if you got it right.

Price range: under \$950, in sizes ranging from 8 x 10 to 12 x 16 inches

Representation: Gallery 24, Los Gatos, CA; Colibri Art and Framing, Morgan Hill, CA

Website: nancytakaichi.com

ROBIN WEISS

Art education: I don't have a lot of formal art education but always had a passion for drawing and art. My high school art teacher, Louis Penfield, instructed me in the basics of watercolor and became a lifelong mentor until his passing in 2002. I continued to draw and paint after enlisting in the Navy, where I would make perspective drawings of the steam pipes in the ship's hold and portraits of my shipmates. When I got out, I attended Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington, on the GI Bill. I started out in architectural drafting but quickly focused on art courses. Jane Wallis was an early drawing instructor in 1977, and we are now fellow members of Plein Air Washington Artists. I have also taken workshops from Ned Mueller, Jim Lamb, Deanne Lemley, and many others.

Favorite subjects: I live in the Pacific Northwest, where there is a lot of water, but also mountains, vast grasslands, forests, and salt marshes. I love the variety of natural subject matter, but I'm also drawn to the human element in the landscape, whether that's figures or architecture.

Aha moment: I have had a few of those moments. They usually come after struggling to the point of throwing my hands up and my brushes out the window! But as an artist, I can't just not paint, so I've powered through. As soon as I stopped trying so hard to force a masterpiece and let the joy of creating a scene take over, I produced paintings that were more immediate, authentic, and, well ... better! Those pieces sold quickly and confirmed I was on the right track.

Second-choice career: I love to work with wood and make a lot of my own frames, so I would probably pursue a carpentry job. But I like music too, so maybe I would be a traveling busker.

Favorite artists: John Singer Sargent, Joaquín Sorolla, and Anders Zorn, to name a few. Ted Kautzky was a big influence early on, when I was painting primarily in watercolor. I have books covered in paint stains that I used to learn his technique. I also have dog-eared copies of John Carlson's *Guide to Landscape Painting* and *Richard Schmid Paints Landscapes*, which I drew from to develop my palette. In fact, Schmid was one of the reasons I switched to oil painting.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: That painting could actually be a career — something I didn't realize until later in life.

It was my wife, Ann, who urged me to quit my job and focus on my art career. Also, marketing is important. I had a little head start by joining the Daily Painters movement in 2005. And later I attended some of the Plein Air Convention & Expos and learned a lot more about it.

Price range: \$600-\$700 for 9 x 16 inches to \$1,400-\$1,600 for 18 x 24 inches, and up from there



(ABOVE) Salt Creek, 2019, oil, 9 x 12 in., private collection, plein air • (BELOW) The Arrival, 2020, oil, 11 x 14 in., private collection, studio from plein air study



Representation: The Michael Birawer Gallery, Seattle, WA; The Cole Gallery, Edmonds, WA; The Roby King Gallery, Bainbridge Island, WA; The Oh Be Joyful Gallery, Crested Butte, CO; The Front Street Gallery, Poulsbo, WA

Website: robinweissfineart.com

"Alex is a once-in-a-generation painter. While he is supremely skilled, the surprising fact is that he is self-taught. His talent is a result of his fierce study of his artistic idols along with what can only be described as a gift. We are proud to be representing him."

— *Steve Diamant, Arcadia Contemporary*

ALEX VENEZIA

Art education: I mostly took the "self-taught" route to studying painting, which meant learning from workshops, videos, and books, then practicing on my own. Each of the painters I took workshops with helped shape me in some way, but if I had to mention a few specifically who had a big impact on me, it would be Odd Nerdrum, Michael Klein, and Jeff Hein.

Painting style: I hope to develop in a manner that best represents what I'm after universally, with a not-so-obvious "style." Hopefully it's constantly evolving for the better, but it's definitely representational and realistic.

Favorite subjects: Recently I've been working on more paintings where the figure is outdoors. The involvement of the landscape introduces many new challenges that painting the figure and still life do not. Because of this, I've been plein air painting a lot more to get a feel for nature. A studio work involving the landscape can be informed by multiple plein air sketches.

Aha moment: I spent a couple of months with Odd Nerdrum at his studio, and then immediately after moved into a studio with Michael Klein, Joshua LaRock, and Louis Carr. Being immersed in these two environments full of beautiful paintings made something "click" — not technically, but aesthetically — in my work, which felt like a creative breakthrough. It could best be described as a shift of focus in my learning, from technique to aesthetic.

Second-choice career: I'm very enthusiastic about music, so I'd have to be a musician.

Favorite artists: The list is large, and I admire each one for different reasons, but I'll say it all started for me with Caravaggio and John William Waterhouse.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Draw more, a lot more. This is advice I'm sure I heard, but wish I had listened to. It's one of the key drawbacks of not going through an atelier training.

What's next: I'm working on many new pieces for upcoming projects, but nothing I can share at the moment. Besides that, I'll be teaching a workshop in Yorkshire, England, with Rosemary & Co in June 2021.

Price range: \$5,000-\$25,000, depending on size and subject matter

Representation: Arcadia Contemporary, Pasadena, CA; occasionally Collins Galleries, Cape Cod, MA

Website: alexvenezia.com



(ABOVE) At Rest, 2020, oil, 26 x 28 in., private collection, studio from plein air studies • (RIGHT) Outdoor Self-Portrait, 2020, oil, 14 x 11 in., available from Arcadia Contemporary, plein air





The Sun Smashes Things
 2019, oil, 16 x 20 in.
 Available from artist
 Plein air

MARY GIAMMARINO

Art education: Greenfield Community College, Greenfield, MA; University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA. Early in my art education I discovered a small Dover art instruction book, *Hawthorne on Painting*.

Painting style: Abstract Impressionism

Favorite subjects: Quality of light

Aha moment: While struggling with a painting one day, I scraped and brushed the masses with turpentine, eliminating distracting detail.

Second-choice career: A farmer or naturalist

Favorite artists: Winslow Homer for his light-filled representations of New England; John Singer Sargent for his confidence; Claude Monet for his insistence on showing the world the effect of sunlight on things, as well as his use of the science of color to invent impressionist painting; Richard Diebenkorn for his abstraction of the natural world, using all the elements of plein air painting; Nicolas de Staël for his use of a putty knife as a painting tool; James Abbott McNeill Whistler for his nocturnes; and Joan Eardley for her energy, vitality, and desperate need to express the beauty before her.



Beachy
 2020, oil, 12 x 16 in.
 Available from artist
 Plein air

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Start showing your paintings locally and work outward. Have a second career.

What's next: I plan on working larger, with more expression of the landscape in Vermont and Cape Cod. I'll continue my struggle to keep "less is more" as my mantra.

Price range: \$750-\$7,000

Representation: Four Eleven Gallery, Provincetown, MA; DaVallia Art Boutique, Chester, VT

Website: mary-painting.com

PETER BAIN

Art education: I learned to paint with Cape Ann artist Paul George when he ran classes at LexArt in Lexington, Massachusetts. He not only taught me about painting, he gave me the confidence to pursue it with vigor.

Painting style: This is always the toughest question. I try to capture the beauty of everyday scenes, objects, and people around me. I would say my paintings are filled with light, but the colors are not overly saturated. I like to stain my canvas with a red or yellow to bring a warm harmony to the finished work. I put a lot of effort into making sure my shapes and values are correct to achieve a realistic feel. I don't like to see the canvas weave in a painting, so I use lots of paint in my final layers for a textural look.

Favorite subjects: I like the energy — the endless interplay of boats, piers, rocks, waves, and reflections — of the waterfront. But I also love to paint serene scenes of barns and fields, rock walls and trees. In any case, I try to include a manmade element in my landscapes; even a simple fence post can humanize a scene.

Aha moment: After a couple of years of taking classes, I was still only producing one “keeper” out of every five or so paintings. My aha moment came in 2014, when I made the decision to paint more often and not worry about creating “finished” works. Painting just about every day really improved my ability to see and to render a subject on canvas.

Second-choice career: I always wanted to buy and restore old houses. However, I let my subscription to *This Old House* lapse when I picked up my paintbrushes.

Favorite artists: The artists of Cape Ann are the ones that really got me jazzed about painting. In particular, I continually look at the work of Frederick Mulhaupt, Aldro Hibbard, and Charles Movalli for inspiration.



Ogunquit Dory
2018, oil, 12 x 16 in.
Available from artist
Plein air and studio

From them I have learned that the strength of a painting lies in creating a strong value pattern and eliminating detail. I have various degrees of success in my pursuit of that goal!

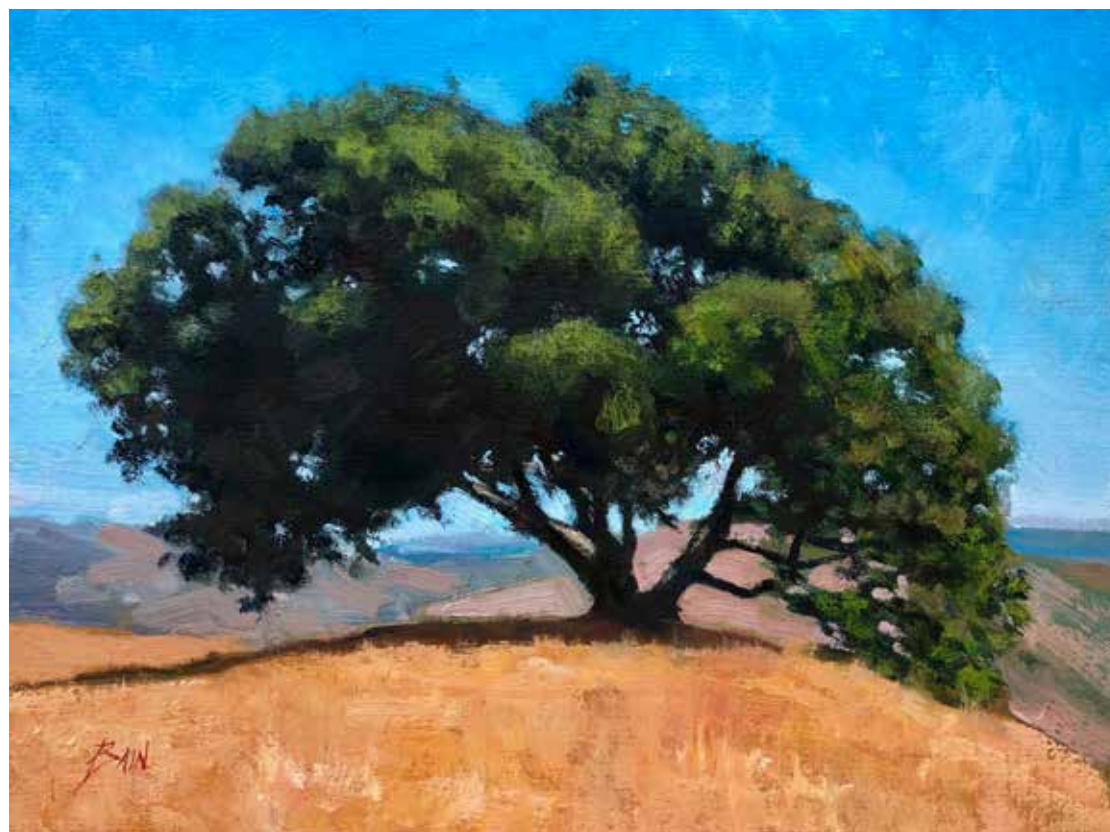
Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career:

I began painting at age 40 and wish I had gotten serious about it sooner. I would advise my younger self, taking those first classes and workshops, to push beyond the weekly assignment, to draw or paint every day. Painting is a hard and often frustrating process, and results only come after lots and lots of brush mileage. It's like most things; the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

Price range: \$100-\$200 for small studies; \$1,800 for my largest pieces

Representation: Gallery Twist, Lexington, MA; LexArt, Lexington, MA; North Shore Arts Association, Gloucester, MA

Website: pbainart.com



“Peter’s work carries a freshness to it, whilst accurately reflecting the spirit and character of the people and places that he paints. He captures light on water particularly beautifully. We also love the way his work flies out of the gallery!”

— *John and Gillian Ross,*
Gallery Twist

Live Oak
2018, oil, 12 x 16 in.
Available from artist
Plein air and studio

REBECCA ARGUELLO

Art education: I have taken classes and workshops from a number of professional artists and instructors. My two most influential instructors would be Terry Miura and Jennifer Diehl.

Painting style: Expressive Realism

Favorite subjects: The inspiration to create pieces comes from my emotional attachment to the landscape. All of my works start either plein air or through on-site observation. I tend to favor a high-contrast or heavily atmospheric scene.

Aha moment: My aha moment came from a self-portrait exercise. I knew my own face so well, I could sense what was wrong as I was painting it, and I just could not get it right. At some point my frustration became greater than my fear of messing up the painting, so I took some real risks. The risks became growth. I still have the piece and look at it from time to time to remind myself to take the risk and make meaningful, confident strokes ... but it's still scary.

Second-choice career: I'm a University of California, Santa Barbara alum with a science major. I loved being out in the field and studying environmental impacts, so I'd go back into environmental science.

Favorite artists: I love Terry Miura's abstractions of cityscapes and backlit scenes. I draw inspiration from his style, the grittiness that he draws from realism, and his ability to set a mood. His workshops taught me how to simplify a scene and abstract information. I also love a good vista, and Edgar Payne does it so well. I feel adventurous just studying his work. He inspires me to walk a little farther or get a little closer to that ledge to find the perfect scene to paint. I also love the current works of Jesse Powell, who does seascapes beautifully. His nocturnes are breathtaking and they inspire me to find those subtle value shifts that make viewers believe they are actually there.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: You will spend more time on the business side of your art career than you think.

Price range: \$400-\$2,200

Website: rebeccaarguello.com



(TOP) **Carpenteria Bluffs 2**, 2020, oil, 12 x 16 in., available from artist, plein air and studio

(ABOVE) **Orange Bucket**, 2020, oil 9 x 12 in., available from artist, plein air and studio

MICHELE Z FARRIER

Art education: Jill Carver, Ray Roberts, and Peggi Kroll-Roberts have strongly influenced my artistic development, generously sharing their knowledge and perspective.

Painting style: My style depends upon direct visual stimulus and painting from life. My work feels modern in that rather than capture the numerous value shifts of light and shadow, I focus on the simplicity or complexity of the shapes first, and then the contrast or subtle color shifts within those shapes.

Favorite subjects: I am enjoying exploring the Southwestern Colorado landscape. Every sage and juniper, every mesa or mountain, has its own personality. We are taught to pursue big, simple shapes, but the essence of this landscape lies in its intricacies, of both shape and color, and the repetition and pattern of these forms.

"I have rarely observed the gritted determination to 'know a place' that Michele displays. Transitioning from the landscape of the West Tetons to the Four Corners, she has shown that repeated direct study through painting is the best way to learn about a landscape. Her intricate and structural depictions of sage and cedar are so acutely observed that they are rendered with delightful individual character and personality. Her work is both powerful and joyful, and most importantly authentic — I think she might just have a bit of Maynard Dixon's soul in her."

— *Jill Carver*

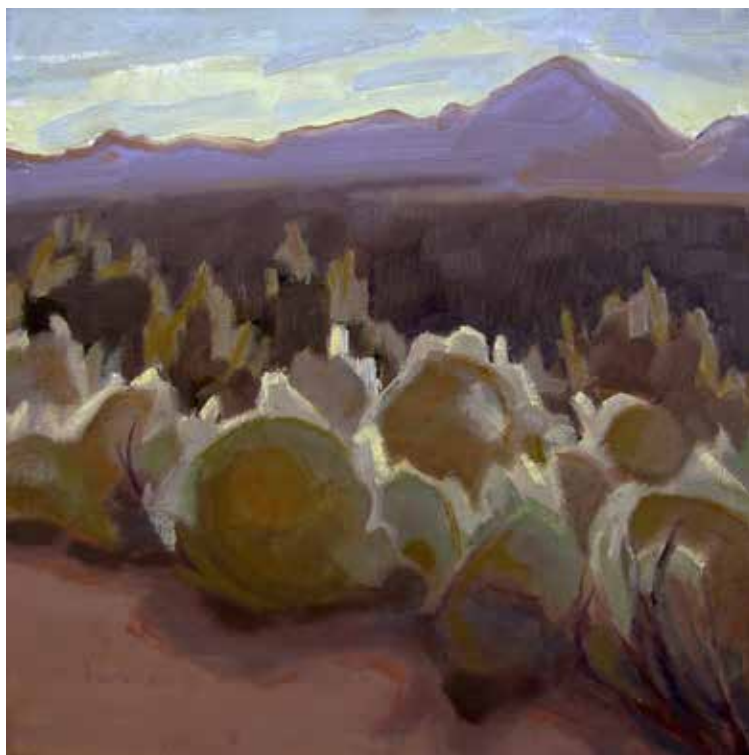
Aha moment: I have realized that I should let go of my ego and paint true to my subject. When I struggle, it is because of preconceived notions rather than what is actually at hand and where my focus should be.

Second-choice career: I often look back and think that I would have enjoyed studying geology, as understanding the landscape is of deep interest to me. I also have a fascination with archaeology, an active hobby of mine. I live on a plateau where ancient Puebloans once resided. Artifacts dating from the 6th to 13th centuries are prevalent here. It's a magical place.

Favorite artists: I have always been drawn to work that is strong in composition and shape. Len Chmiel, Richard Diebenkorn, Maynard Dixon, Victor Higgins, and Joaquin Sorolla are all artists that I study for compositional strength and clarity.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Being in college in the early 1970s, I would have benefited from a stronger understanding of art history and a more rigorous technical curriculum.

What's next: I have spent the last two years observing and painting my new high desert environment. I have reveled in the intimate study of this subtle landscape; it is extremely nuanced compared to the landscape I was used to painting in Wyoming. I plan to continue this practice as well as explore these findings further through larger studio works. I am also looking forward to becoming more involved in the Southwest artist community and developing shared interests.



(TOP) *Lit Up Sage*, 2020, oil, 10 x 10 in., available from artist, *plein air* •

(ABOVE) *The Lookout*, 2019, oil, 10 x 10 in., available from artist, *plein air*

Price range: \$700 and up, depending on quality of framing

Representation: DeSelms Fine Art, Cheyenne, WY; Guchiebird's, Driggs, ID

Website: michelezfarrier.com

BRANDON GONZALES

Art education: I graduated from Art Center College of Design with a B.S. in Entertainment Design, and from Laguna College of Art & Design with an M.F.A. in Painting. In becoming a plein air painter, Rick J. Delanty, Greg LaRock, David Dibble, and John Burton have been paramount in my progression.

Painting style: I would say my work is loose realism with both photorealistic and abstract qualities. I love using expressive brushstrokes to capture that initial feeling and energy of the moment. I try to maintain the integrity and freshness of the initial block-in through to the completed painting.

Favorite subjects: I can find inspiration in almost anything, but I love big rocks and fallen trees. I'm also really drawn to water and old barns.

Aha moment: There have been several aha moments over the years, but one in particular stands out. I was working on a bigger painting (23 x 32 inches). I first drew out the composition from life, then cut it into six different panels. My goal was to paint each panel at a different time of day and lighting condition. Together, the panels made a whole scene, but individually they could stand on their own as unique paintings. The aha moment was later realizing that half of the panels did not contain a sky, and that it was not a requisite element for a great painting. This changed the way I approached the composition of my paintings, as I gained the confidence to break traditional landscape norms. I often zoom in now and eliminate the sky in order to focus on what I consider most important to a scene. I see possibilities where others might not — fallen trees, overlapping rocks, hillsides, and small, intimate nature scenes.

Second-choice career: I learned Spanish and find the structure of languages fascinating, so perhaps I'd be a linguist.

Favorite artists: Since I first started painting as a teenager, I have loved Richard Schmid's bold brushstrokes and his ability to nail value, color, and edges in a photorealistic way that still feels and looks like a painting. I was introduced to John Singer Sargent later in life, but fell in love with the apparent effortlessness with which he applied each stroke. There is a simplicity there that is always right on and brilliant. Both have a great ability to paint something that seems ordinary and mundane in a way that makes it full of significance and beauty. And both paint masterfully in different mediums.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting

career: Start painting small and learn to fail fast. Also, if you want to get



(TOP) Hillside Golden Hour, 2018, oil, 8 x 16 in., private collection, plein air and studio • (ABOVE) Sticks & Stones, 2017, oil, 8 x 10 in., private collection, plein air and studio

better at painting, draw more. You have to put in the time, there is no way around that.

Price range: \$150-\$1,000-plus, depending on size

Website: brandon-gonzales.com

PALDEN HAMILTON

Art education: After graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2002, I went in search of more traditional instruction. My great-aunt Elaine Hamilton-O’Neal (who was an Abstract Expressionist) referred me to the Art Students League in New York, where she had studied in the 1950s. There, I studied primarily with Ron Sherr, and also with Harvey Dinnerstein and Mary Beth Mckenzie. I consider myself a lifelong student, and continue to take workshops and attend demonstrations when I can.

“Palden is a master at creating paintings that exhibit design precision and artistic skill that captivates and carries the viewer throughout the painting. His subject matter is broad. Figurative, landscape, or still life, each painting has a way of evoking familiar feelings, a sense of touch, emotion, or memory. Poetry, brilliance, and beauty as one.”

— *Lillian K. Ansley, co-founder, Olmsted Plein Air*

Painting style: For me, the process is in some ways as important as the result. I’d like for that “seeking” quality to somehow come through in my paintings. My style, which I have trouble pinning down, must reflect my admiration of the classical figurative discipline, Impressionist color, and Modernist pursuit of the unadorned truth (whatever that may be).

Favorite subjects: I find the landscape most overwhelming in quiet moments, in perfect stillness, when it seems so vast and ancient beyond understanding. What first brought me to landscape painting was the desire to evoke, or just personally satisfy, what could be described as a feeling of longing.

Aha moment: I’ve always been in wonder at the external world, so my initial inclination as an artist was to illustrate “the facts” of the objects before me. Over time, I’ve realized that I’m as much interested in the experience of beholding things as the inherent qualities of things in and of themselves. I’m always trying to better attune myself to the light and atmospheric phenomena in which the world is draped, and also be open to my mind’s interventions, always overlaying memories and imbuing meaning into things. These days, I’m trying to capture a more subjective, human reality.

Favorite artists: Abbott Handerson Thayer comes to mind. Technically brilliant, deep feeling, and visionary, he personifies a rich balance of head, heart, and gut. His paintings have moments of such beautifully sculpted form, then large swaths of ambiguity, where spirit seems to dwell.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career:

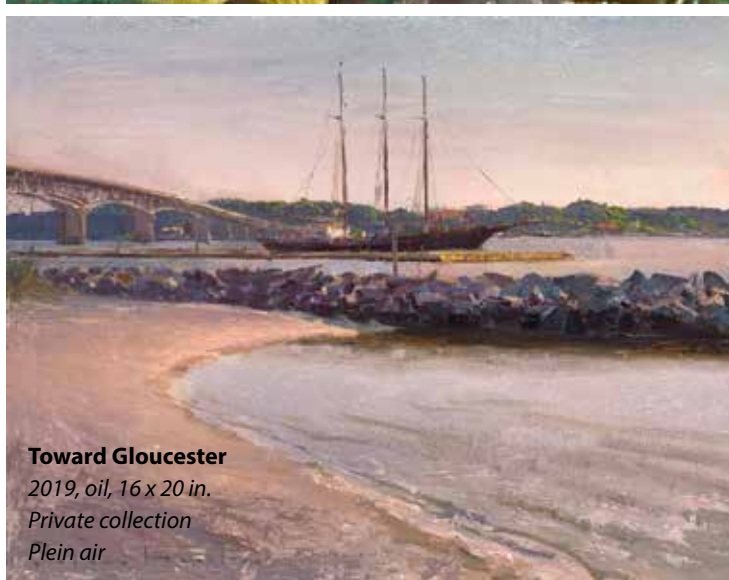
Taking to heart logistical, lifestyle things, like getting on a schedule, good diet, exercise, and sleep. While I sometimes wish I had set out on a more linear path, I have to believe that all the sidetracking and struggles will prove to be meaningful to my art in the long run.

What’s next: I’m working on a series of life-sized figure paintings, which has been a stop/start project for several years. I’m also doing a series of paintings of piles of clothes — allegories of modern life, and perhaps more accurately, my personal accumulation of unfinished ideas or paintings.

Price range: \$650 for small plein air paintings; \$10,000 for larger paintings and portrait commissions



Shaded Reach
2019, oil, 24 x 18 in.
Private collection
Plein air



Toward Gloucester
2019, oil, 16 x 20 in.
Private collection
Plein air

Representation: Crystal Moll Gallery, Baltimore, MD; Cross Gate Gallery, Lexington, KY; 2020 Olmsted Plein Air Invitational online gallery
Website: paldenhamilton.com

“Amanda paints those things that have meaning to her. Her emotions come through via her boldness of color and the active nature of her subjects. Her paintings have a glow about them that brings the viewer close.”

— *Lillian K. Ansley, co-founder, Olmsted Plein Air*

AMANDA LOVETT

Art education: Early on, I was given the advice, “If you want to make a living in art, you’d better go into advertising,” which led me to the Atlanta Portfolio Center to study art direction and illustration. Afterwards, I had the good fortune to land a job at one of the leading advertising agencies in the Southeast, and at just 19, I became an art director. In 1998, while still working in advertising, I took a watercolor landscape class with Frank Broadhurst. After only a few classes, he looked at me and said, “You are going to do this professionally, right?” It wasn’t really a question. I took his meaning to heart, and it became my mission in life. Making the transition to oils around 2000, I studied with Peggy Everett, Bill Davidson, James Richards, John Pototschnik, Marc Hanson, Tom Gilleon, Don Demers, Jason Sacran, John Lasater, Larry Moore, and Patrick Saunders. Each of these artists has added something unique to my journey as an artist.

Painting style: I would say I’m a representational storyteller.

Favorite subjects: I love to paint all aspects of water — how it reflects, flows, and even falls. I’m drawn to the textures and shapes in old barns or rusty cars and tractors. I also enjoy adding an element of life, either an animal or a person, to my work. Since I grew up riding with my dad, horses spark a deep-seated passion in me, and I believe understanding the anatomy as well as I do helps me portray them more believably. The main thing I look for, though, is light. Strong light patterns offer me the opportunity to hint at information in the shadows.

Aha moment: During my first workshop with John Pototschnik, he explained his approach to painting with a limited palette, taking a complicated subject and making it so simple that it became second nature. I no longer overthink color; instead, I paint small color studies so I have a clear vision of how I want the painting to look. Then I can relax and paint with a higher level of confidence, which ultimately shows up in my work.

Favorite artists: In my eyes, every element of Morgan Weistling’s work is sheer perfection. The way he brings the canvas to life — the detail and



LoganBerry Farm

2020, oil, 8 x 10 in.

Available from Illume Gallery
Plein air



Kingston Rail

2020, oil, 12 x 16 in.

Available from artist
Plein air

deliberation of every brushstroke, the use of color, value, and edges — sets the bar to the highest level. Every time I look at one of his paintings, I learn something.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career:

Not every painting has to be a masterpiece; be fearless!

Price range: \$150 for studies; \$400 to \$6,000 or more, depending on size and complexity

Representation: Castle Gallery, Fort Wayne, IN; Frameworks Gallery, Marietta, GA; Genuine Georgia, Greensboro, GA; Lovetts Gallery, Tulsa, OK; Wild Hope Gallery, Alpharetta, GA; Where in the World Is Plein Air 2020 with Illume Gallery of Fine Art, St. George, UT; 2020 Olmsted Plein Air Invitational online gallery

Website: amandalovett.com

TODD SAAL

Art education: I took some pastel and oil painting classes for a few months when I was young, but when I started playing music, art took a back seat. Although I continued to draw occasionally — more like doodling, really — I found my way back to drawing as an outlet for stress and gradually became interested in watercolor for its looseness and portability. For about two years, I tried to teach myself from books and videos before deciding to take a workshop with Dan Marshall to see how it was actually done. That experience changed everything, and I became obsessed with what I saw was possible with watercolor.

Painting style: I only ever intended to paint for myself from my observations during my travels. Today, I strive to translate the everyday activities, people, and places I observe. I take common subjects and romanticize them by creating a narrative impression of the scene.

Favorite subjects: Having lived in New York City most of my life, I'm naturally drawn to the grit of cityscapes. I tend to go to places off the beaten path and observe people going about their daily activities, subjects that exude a level of intensity. Since moving to Nashville, I've come to learn there can be just as much energy in a serene rural landscape.

Aha moment: The main revelation for me came when I got some technique under my fingers and began to express myself more creatively. I saw things for how I wanted to see them and not how they were in front of me. I wasn't just trying to copy a subject, so colors and details became less important.


Favorite artists: I'm involved in many creative disciplines, so I get insight from painters, sculptors, filmmakers, and musicians. Many years ago, my friend and guitar teacher Ron Zabrocki told me to create a discipline of intentional practice. The idea was to learn the technique well enough so that when I perform, I don't have to think about it. The practice and performance are separate things, but they're both part of the path. I apply that philosophy to everything I do.

Best advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting

career: While learning any craft requires isolation, don't spend all your time alone. Find someone you admire, someone with experience, and take a workshop. To watch someone paint in real time and be able to ask questions is incredibly valuable. I wish I had taken my first workshop a lot sooner.

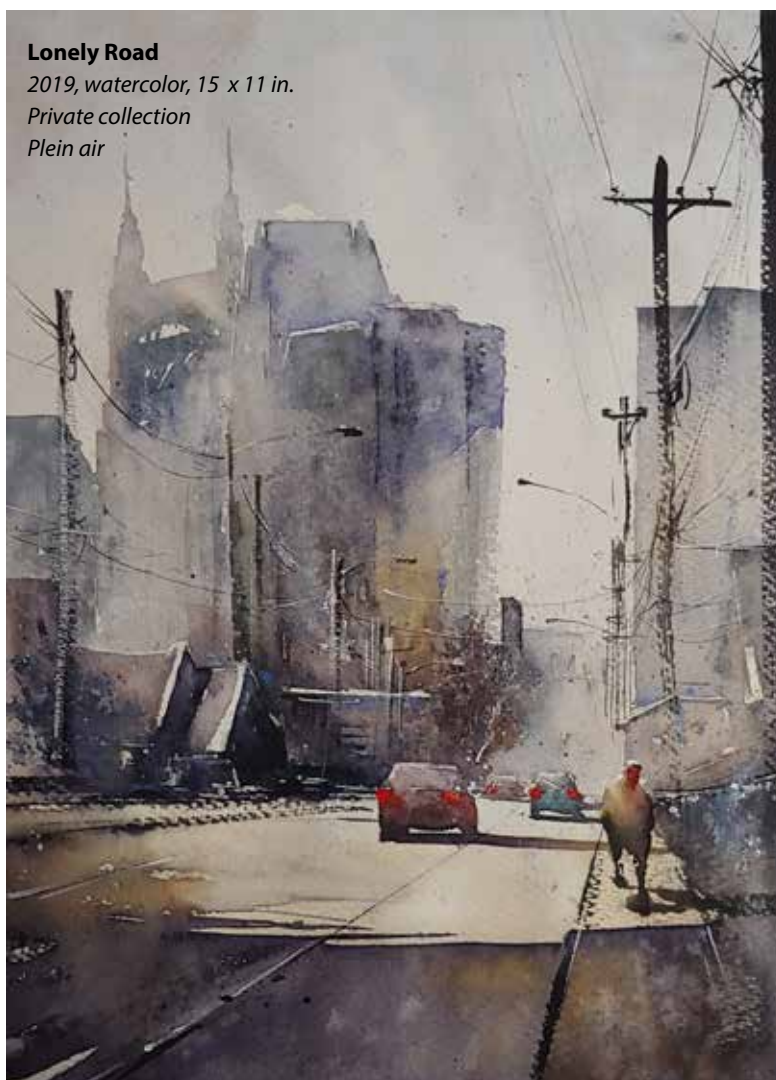
What's next: I'm working with the chef, an artist himself, of one of the high-end restaurants here in Nashville to supply large watercolors of local views for each season. The artwork will support his vision for the seasonal tasting menus. And with in-person workshops and plein air events on hiatus for the moment, I've put together a video broadcasting setup in my studio and developed some online courses.

Price range: \$500 to \$3,000, depending on size

Website: toddsaal.com 

"For me, Todd's brilliance lies in the 'unfinished' parts of his work, where the paint doesn't actually complete the object but encourages your mind's eye to do it for you."

— Cheryl Strichik, *Monthaven Arts & Cultural Center*



Lonely Road
2019, watercolor, 15 x 11 in.
Private collection
Plein air



Old Homestead
2020, watercolor, 11 x 15 in.
Private collection
Plein air