

# Woodson Art Museum

*in your classroom or in your home*

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*Celebrating Summer: Plein-Air Painters of America*  
**Summer 2013**

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Jean Perry, *Morning Sun*, oil

## Introduction

This summer the galleries at the Woodson Art Museum feature landscape paintings in *Celebrating Summer: Plein-Air Painters of America*, on view Saturday, June 22 through Sunday, August 25, 2013. Capturing the essence of summer through depictions of landscapes and outdoor activities, artists who paint *en plein air* – a French phrase meaning “in the open air” – incorporate natural light, color, and movement from their surroundings. Carrying on a tradition that began in the mid-1880s with the advent of portable paint in tubes and box easels and peaked with Impressionism, artists who paint on location today are enjoying a resurgence of interest in their work. The Plein-Air Painters of America (PAPA) is a testament to this resurgence as are the numerous regional plein-air organizations across the United States.



Christopher Blossom, *Maine Sunset*, oil

Increasingly, plein-air painters share their talents and creativity with one another and the public when they gather in outdoor areas for “paint outs.” The artworks created in paint outs convey the ambiance of a scene that often must be painted swiftly amid continually changing light and atmospheric conditions. The Plein-Air Painters of America organized *Celebrating Summer* specifically for the Woodson Art Museum along with a downtown Wausau paint out during the opening weekend.

## Plein-Air Painting\*

Famed plein-air painter and PAPA Signature Member Frank LaLumia articulates the essence of plein-air painting when he says: “We paint from life in order to learn how to see. If you can paint light, you can paint everything under the sun.” Painting from life is a pursuit unlike any other painting technique. It challenges artists to concentrate every sensory nerve on the information in front of them. They absorb it all – from sight to sound, from temperature to atmosphere – and then channel those feelings from head to hand, re-creating their impressions in paints on paper or canvas.



John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral*, field sketch, 1823

The roots of painting from life are found in nineteenth-century Europe. Englishman John Constable believed the artist should forget about formulas and trust his or her own vision in finding truth in nature. To find that truth, he made sketches outdoors and then elaborated on them in the studio. Around the same time in France, in a small village outside Paris called Barbizon, a group of artists focused their attentions on peasant life and the surrounding natural world. Like Constable, François Millet and Gustave Courbet challenged conventions of the day, choosing everyday subjects and presenting them in realistic settings, painted from field-sketch references.

## Realism to Impressionism



Claude Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*, oil, 1903

These “realists,” as they came to be called, created the groundwork for the mid-nineteenth century revolution in France that took painting from life to its logical conclusion. Led by Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Edouard Degas, and Auguste Renoir, these “Impressionists” espoused the belief that artists should trust their eyes. Using newly developed theories of how the eye physically registers color, they maintained that what you saw in nature was not form, but rather light on form. And light could be conveyed by color. To prove their theories, they took their newly invented paint tubes with them into the outdoors, where they re-created the world using colors to suggest light. Rebuffed at first for what appeared to be unfinished paintings, the Impressionist vision soon became a standard for truthfully conveying the outdoor experience.

### **On Location**

Painting *en plein air* (in the open air) would forever change how we see the world. Late nineteenth-century artists in the United States were attracted to the concept, and many – including Willard Metcalf, Theodore Robinson, John Singer Sargent, Guy Rose, and Frederick Frieseke – visited Monet’s Giverny. Suddenly, places with remarkable light were of particular interest to painters. Art colonies formed throughout the country in the early twentieth century, notably on both the east and west coasts. The goal of teachers and students alike was to capture the light and colors particular to a place. William Wendt in California and Childe Hassam in New York are two of many artists comprise the American Impressionist School.

\*Plein-air history courtesy of the Plein-Air Painters of America



John Singer Sargent, *Claude Monet Painting by the Edge of a Wood*, oil, 1885

### **Before Your Visit**

When preparing your group for Museum visits consider these suggested discussion questions and activities.

- Plein-air artists work outdoors to create their paintings. How can you tell which of these works have been completed in the elements rather than in the artist's studio? Compare and contrast these images.



Frank LaLumia, *Shark Harbor*, oil



Albert Bierstadt, *Seal Rock*, oil, 1872

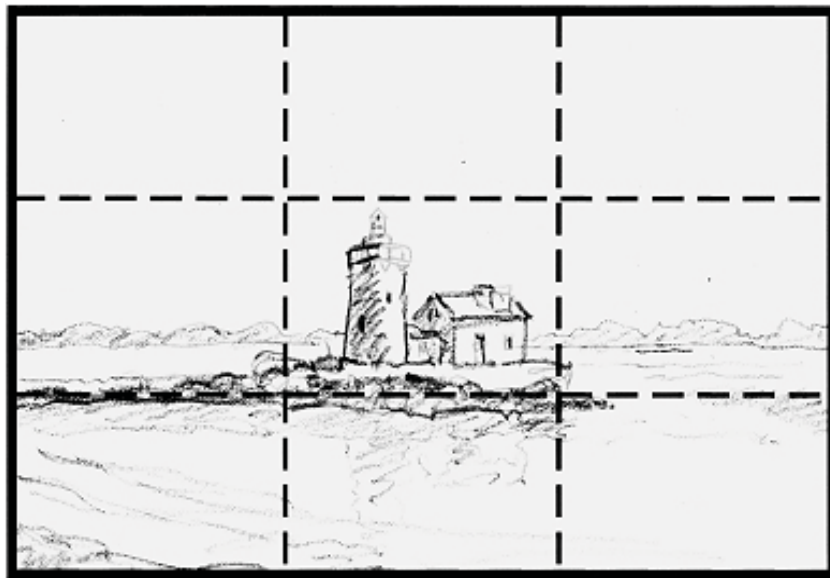
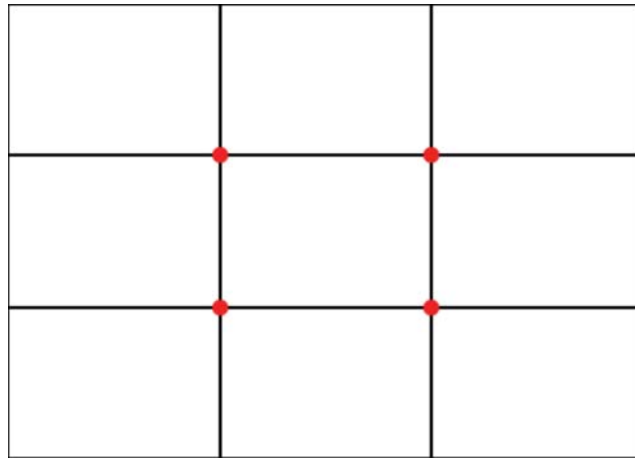


Thomas Cole, *The Four Elements – Catskill Mountain House*, oil, 1843-44

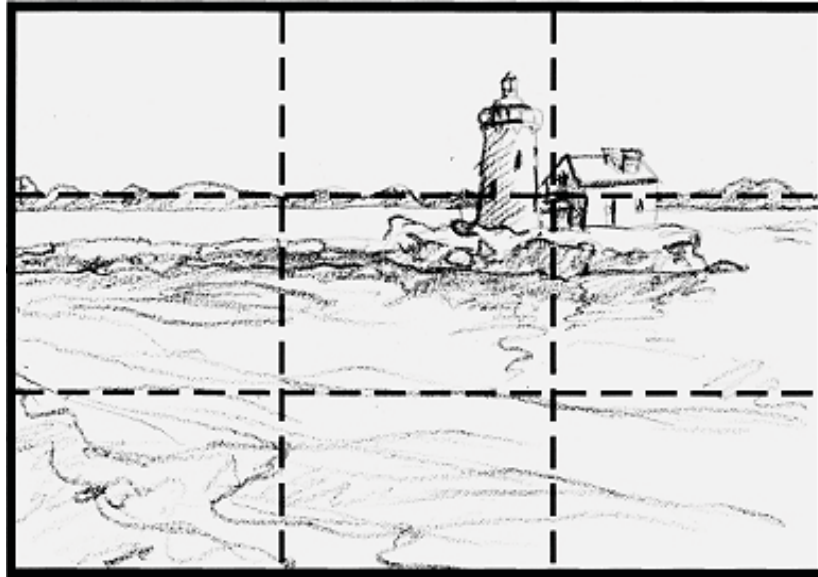


Don Demers, *Sunlit Fields*, oil

- As well-known impressionist painter Edgar Degas once said, “even nature has to be composed.” While plein-air painters aim to capture the essence and integrity of an outdoor scene, composition and control remain key. The rule of thirds is a widespread and simple approach used by artists to achieve eye-catching and thoughtful compositions. The rule of thirds employs the use of two horizontal and two vertical lines to divide an artwork into nine equal cells, or vertical and horizontal thirds (see the chart below). Note the four red dots where the lines intersect, these points indicate the key areas of interest or focal points that will successfully lead a viewer’s eye throughout a painting.



Option 1 (Rule of thirds sketches courtesy of [watercolorpainting.com](http://watercolorpainting.com))



Option 2

Option 1 does not employ the rule of thirds. While our eyes may appreciate the central focus of this sketch, our viewing of the image is short lived and uninteresting. Option 2, however, is aligning key elements in the image roughly along the grid lines delineated by the rule of thirds. When viewing the second version of this sketch, our eyes are led to explore new areas of the image as we scan along the imaginary lines.

When viewing *Celebrating Summer: Plein-Air Painters of America*, ask your group to carefully observe the compositions of the artworks. Are they centrally focused or do they achieve a balanced and intriguing, asymmetrical composition? Share this exhibition painting below, divided up to display the rule of thirds, as an example.



Lynn Gertenbach, *Eucalyptus of Mulholland*, oil

## **@ The Woodson**

During your guided visit to the Woodson Art Museum, a docent will lead your group through the galleries offering insights and encouraging thoughtful dialogue inspired by the artworks. Groups visiting the Museum will observe the compositions, color palettes, and scenes featured in the exhibition and have an opportunity to craft their own landscape sketch in the galleries or, weather permitting, outdoors in the Museum's sculpture garden.

## **Activity Guides**

Each student receives an Activity Guide to extend learning in the classroom and at home. When students leave the Museum with an Activity Guide in hand, they are able to share their Museum visit with friends and family outside the gallery walls, along with their newfound expertise and enthusiasm.

## **Woodson Art Museum Information**

Please encourage your students and group members to visit the Museum with their families and share what they've learned. Admission is ALWAYS FREE! The Museum is open 9 am – 4 pm, Tuesday – Friday, and Noon – 5 pm on Saturday and Sunday. On the first Thursday of each month the Museum stays open until 7:30 pm for Night Out @ the Woodson, featuring hands-on art for all ages. Call the Museum or visit the website for more information:

### **Woodson Art Museum**

700 N. 12th St.  
Wausau, WI 54403  
[www.lywam.org](http://www.lywam.org)  
715.845.7010

# Celebrating Summer

## Plein-Air Painters of America

Experience the exhilaration of outdoor landscapes and warm-weather activities. More than eighty paintings by members of the Plein-Air Painters of America, founded in 1986 on California's Catalina Island, invite viewers to celebrate summer. Capturing the essence of favorite pastimes and bucolic vistas, artists who paint *en plein air* – a French phrase meaning “in the open air” – work swiftly amid fleeting sunlight and shifting shadows. Painting on location continues a tradition that began in the mid-1880s with the advent of portable paint in tubes and box easels and peaked with Impressionism. Capturing light is key. Whether working outdoors or from field studies in the studio, plein-air painters strive to depict the timeless beauty of the natural world in oils, pastels, and watercolors.



## Opening Weekend

**Friday, June 21 5 – 7 pm**

### Members Preview

Museum members gather on the summer solstice to preview *Celebrating Summer: Plein-Air Painters of America*, meet artists, and enjoy refreshments and conversation.



Paint the Town: A Plein-Air Paint Out funding comes from a Community Arts Grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Wisconsin, with funds from the Wisconsin Arts Board, Community Foundation, and the B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation.

**Saturday, June 22**

### Paint the Town: A Plein-Air Paint Out

Plein-air painters often gather in outdoor areas for “paint outs” to share their talents and creativity with one another and the public.

**Downtown Wausau 9 am – Noon & 1 – 4 pm**

✳ River Views @ the Eye Clinic of Wisconsin,  
800 N. First Street

✳ City Scenes @ City Hall, McClellan & Fourth streets

Members of the Plein-Air Painters of America and Wisconsin plein-air painters set up easels and paint what they see.

**Plein-Air Review @ the Museum 5 – 7 pm**

Join the artists at a public reception in the Museum's sculpture garden, or indoors if the weather insists, to see the array of Paint Out artwork and to enjoy refreshments and camaraderie. Some artworks available for purchase directly from the artists.

**Sunday, June 23**

### Painting @ the Museum 10 am – 1 pm

Wisconsin plein-air painters paint in the sculpture garden. Meet and talk with the artists as they depict scenes amid the verdant backdrop of the gardens.

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