

TEN TIPS FOR PAINTING EN PLEIN AIR

Eric Maisel

OVERVIEW

Many visual artists crave painting outdoors but feel blocked and resistant about actually venturing out, setting up their easel, and painting. Here are ten tips for overcoming that resistance and giving en plein air painting a try.

TIP ONE: DEAL WITH YOUR SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

The first tip is that you will have to deal with your natural self-consciousness. Most people don't enjoy looking and feeling conspicuous. Even exhibitionists prefer blending in most of the time! So you need to talk yourself into a willingness to be seen, watched, pointed at, gawked at, criticized, and all the rest. You may turn out to be much more invisible than you fear—but if you aren't, so be it!

TIP TWO: GET READY FOR INFINITE VISUAL DATA

The second tip is that you will have to deal with a vast amount of visual data. When you're in front of your canvas you have only whiteness to look at, which can be its own problem. But that's a very different problem from the staggering amount of visual material available to you as you wander in the world. Wherever you turn your head, there is more to see! Accept this reality and talk yourself into the belief that all this visual data is a special kind of abundance, not some sort of problem.

TIP THREE: BE PREPARED TO CHOOSE

The third tip is that you will be obliged to make choices. You can't paint everything you see! Even if that were possible, what would be the point? Isn't the artistry in the choosing? Choosing provokes anxiety and having to make

strong, clear choices about what to paint may well raise your anxiety level. Be prepared for this anxiety, know what you're going to do to combat it, and accept that you have no choice as an artist but to choose.

TIP FOUR: CREATE YOUR KIT

The fourth tip is that you need to bring a painting set-up that works for you. This may take repeated tries, as the first set-up may be too cumbersome, the second set-up too meager, and so on. Learning how to feel comfortable en plein air is a process and there is no reason why you should nail your set-up the very first time. Consider your first tries experiments and learn from them.

TIP FIVE: BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR INTENTIONS

The fifth tip is to be clear about your intentions. Are you planning to make finished paintings while you're out? Or loose sketches? Or something in between, something that's more than a sketch but that still requires work back at the studio? Maybe you actually don't know your intentions—in which case, try to learn them as you go. Maybe you'll discover that you can complete things on the spot and maybe you'll learn that your real goal is to capture a sense of place and finish up at the studio. Learn as you go.

TIP SIX: THINK ABOUT PARTNERING

The sixth tip is to think about partners and buddies. Would you enjoy going out with a friend? Maybe several of you might travel together? You don't have to confine yourself to one way or the other—usually Van Gogh went out alone but sometimes he went out with Gauguin. Think through the pros and cons of painting en plein air with a buddy and if the pros tip the scale in their favor, find a painting partner.

TIP SEVEN: SCHEDULE REAL TIME

The seventh tip is to schedule real time for the experience. Most people are so busy nowadays that they can't find three or four hours "out of nowhere" unless they consciously pencil those hours into their schedule. Look at your schedule and make some decisions about where you might find your "en plein air" time. If you can't find the time, that means that in order to get en plein air painting onto your schedule you will need to rethink how you spend your time.

TIP EIGHT: FOCUS ON THE JOYS AND BENEFITS

The eighth tip is to remind yourself of the joys of en plein air painting. You may be focusing in your mind on the difficulties associated with it and by focusing on them have forgotten how joyful it can be to be out in the world looking, seeing, and creating. Think back to how much you've enjoyed sketching in parks and cafés. The studio is great—but so is the world. Remind yourself of its greatness!

TIP NINE: KEEP IT SIMPLE

The ninth tip is to keep the process simple and not over-dramatize it. It isn't as if you're going to the ends of the earth! We can easily talk ourselves into the belief that something is far more difficult than it really is. Have a quiet conversation with yourself about how easy it will prove to gather up a few things, go out, and find some fascinating vistas to paint. Don't over-dramatize the difficulties!

TIP TEN: REMEMBER ITS IMPORTANCE

The tenth tip is to have a conversation with yourself about the importance of en plein air painting to your creative life. If in the course of that conversation you decide that it is more a romantic fancy or a “should,” let it go. But if you decide that it is central to your growth and something that matters to you a lot, honor your understanding of its importance and make sure that you get some en plein air painting on your schedule—and soon!

ABOUT ERIC MAISEL

Eric Maisel is the author of more than 30 books. His recent books include *Brainstorm: Harnessing the Power of Productive Obsessions*, *Mastering Creative Anxiety*, and *The Depression Code: From Mental Disorder to Meaning Solution* (2012). Dr. Maisel writes for Art Bistro, Professional Artist Magazine, Wholeliving.com., and the Huffington Post, trains creativity coaches and meaning coaches, works with individual clients, and presents workshops worldwide in places like San Francisco, New York, London, Paris and Berlin. Visit Dr. Maisel at ericmaisel.com or contact him at ericmaisel@hotmail.com.