

CHUCK MARSHALL

Painting His Way to Monterey

Determined to make his trip to the Plein Air Convention an adventure in painting outdoors, Chuck Marshall drove through rain, wind, snow, and sunlight so he could learn from the top artists participating in the event. It turned out to be the trip of a lifetime.

Most people who get involved in outdoor painting reach a point at which they want to spend a concentrated amount of time completely focused on that activity. They want to practice, learn, or simply enjoy the experience of painting from nature. That's one of the key reasons people sign up for workshops, participate in plein air festivals, or join a group of artists who share their interest.

All those activities may be helpful and enjoyable, but they may not provide the kind of challenging adventure that will test artists' skills, increase their commitment, and expand their horizons. That's when they decide to join a pack trip into the Sierras, a raft voyage down the Colorado River, an extended visit to Italy, or any other kind of adventure that requires planning, organization, and risk.

Chuck Marshall took on that kind of planning, organization, and risk when he decided to drive from his home near Cincinnati, Ohio, to Monterey, California, where he would participate in the Plein Air Convention & Expo organized by this magazine (April 7-11, 2014). "I wasn't able to attend the first two conventions because of conflicting engagements," he says, "but when I saw that the 2014 dates were open on my calendar I decided to make the event a destination point for a painting trip through the Western states. I had to do quite a bit of planning, both in terms of the



Chuck Marshall's selfie he took at Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona

travel arrangements and my regular teaching commitments, but I had enough time to lay out the trip, organize my supplies, and notify the students who study with me three days a week.

"In some ways, gathering up my supplies and packing the car was no different than if I were heading off to a plein air festival. But instead of being in a hurry to get to one painting location, I needed to have a plan that was flexible enough to deal with the weather and opportunities to paint. I was really psyched about several aspects of the trips, most notably the chance to be by myself and away from the concerns of daily living, as well as the time to paint whatever caught my attention.



A painting Canyon de Chelly National Monument in progress

ARTIST DATA

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Wash Near Amarillo, Texas

2014, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Courtesy Mary Ran Gallery, Cincinnati, OH
Plein air

Marshall recalls, “I spent the last weekend in March packing my Honda CRV, taught my morning class on Tuesday, April 1, and that afternoon got on the highway heading south into Kentucky and on to Missouri. Unfortunately, the weather was uncooperative until I finally reached Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona. Until then, I had to contend with heavy rain, strong

wind, mounds of snow, and freezing temperatures — not the best conditions for setting up an easel and painting for several hours. I enjoyed looking out of the car window at the landscape but wish Mother Nature had given me a few opportunities to paint her scenery.

“I have painted in the Western United States and I lived in California for 13 years, but on this trip I was discovering the landscape on my own as if for the very first time. Once the weather began to cooperate, I was able to maintain my focus and motivation from one painting to the next, from one day to the next,

and from one idea to the next. That’s the kind of continuous flow of painting activity that I was hoping for when I set out on my journey.”

Marshall says he felt a certain amount of shock when he saw the high prices of gasoline and the varying quality of motel rooms from state to state. However, in some ways that just added to the adventure. “One motel operator offered me a room and a joint of marijuana for \$45,” he says. “I thanked her and just rented the \$40 room for one night. And I learned that just because a motel is part of a chain doesn’t guarantee that the standards of quality are the



Rocky Point

2014, oil, 9 x 12 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air

same for all the franchised facilities. The same applies to chain restaurants.”

By the time Marshall arrived in Monterey, he was excited about watching the demonstrations, listening to the lectures, visiting with the other artists, and talking to the vendors. “Every bit of it was incredible, from the early-morning Marketing Boot Camp to the afternoon painting events in Carmel and Point Lobos,” he says. “I learned so much from the artists making presentations, as well as from the exhibitors and other participating artists. At the end of each day, I was overwhelmed by what I learned and how excited I was to be part of the convention and the plein air movement.”

Because the weather caused Marshall to miss painting opportunities during the trip west, he decided to leave Monterey a day early so he could

One of Marshall's paintings of the Pacific Ocean on an easel





Vermillion Cliffs, Arizona

2014, oil, 12 x 16 in.

Courtesy Mary Ran Gallery, Cincinnati, OH

Plein air



drive north to paint in Sacramento, Tahoe, and points of interest in Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. By the time he got back to Ohio, he had a large group of plein air paintings he was proud of, stories to tell his friends and family, and painting ideas to pursue throughout the coming year.

Once his artist friends heard about Marshall's painting trip and the convention, they expressed interest in helping organize a group of painters who would travel to the 2015 convention in Monterey. "The fact that I did it and had a fabulous time has gotten a lot of artists thinking about doing the same thing next year," he says.

A photograph of some of the paintings Marshall created on his trip.

Within a few months after returning home, Marshall mounted an exhibition of his plein air paintings from the trip at the Mary Ran Gallery in Cincinnati; taught a workshop and gave a lecture about his adventures to an art group in Wheeling, West Virginia; and received a commission from a woman in Tennessee who saw a photo of his travel paintings on Facebook. "It's amazing how the trip and the convention have been a catalyst for better paintings and new marketing opportunities." 📷

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