

PleinAirTM

MAGAZINE

INSIDE

COVER: JANE MCGRAW-TEUBNER

TREES AS DESIGN ELEMENTS

TWO PLEIN AIR WATERCOLORISTS

HAI-OU HOU, GREG SCHEIBEL,
LINDA APRILETTI, PAUL KEYSAR



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KEN KARLIC

A Sense of Urgency

This Maryland artist stopped painting three years ago so he could reflect on the direction of his watercolors and establish a better way of exploring his voice. "I needed to find a more personal style of expression," Ken Karlic explains.

By M. Stephen Doherty

In describing his approach to plein air watercolor painting, Ken Karlic says he "paints with a sense of urgency and passion that is more about capturing the essence of subjects than the specifics of the location." That self-imposed pressure makes him an ideal participant in the plein air festivals, where there are time and subject limitations imposed by the event organizers.

"I love plein air events in which there are expectations but they still allow me to become immersed in painting for a week," the artist says. "I feel an adrenaline rush, lots of inspiration, encouraging support from residents and collectors, and a reassuring exchange with other artists. When I return home, I find it hard to slow down."

The excitement Karlic expresses wasn't always part of his plein air experience. "After participating in events for about five years and not feeling totally satisfied with my paintings,



Ken Karlic painting on location



House of Cards

2017, watercolor, 14 x 21 in.
Private collection
Plein air

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Ken Karlic
BIRTH YEAR: 1963
LOCATION: Bel Air, MD
INFLUENCES: "Nature, architecture, graphic design, and travel; watercolorists including Joseph Zbukvic, Chien Chung-Wei, and Eugene Chisnecian; oil painters including Georganna Lenssen, Patrick Lee, William Wray, and Carlos San Millán."
WEBSITE: www.kenkarlic.com and www.splicedesigngroup.com



Sister Bay Plant

2017, watercolor, 14 x 21 in.

Private collection

Plein air



I decided to step back and take a hard look at why I was applying to the events, what I wanted to get out of them, and what I wanted to submit to the exhibitions at the end of the week," he recalls. "I actually stopped painting altogether for a year so I could give myself time to really think about who I was as an artist."

A Year Of Experiments

"I spent that year experimenting with new ways of approaching the entire painting process," says Kartic. "It was a risky step to take, but I emerged from that year with a much clearer idea of how best to express

Red Light District

2016, watercolor, 10 x 14 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



Waterfront Condos

2017, watercolor, 20 x 20 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



The Other Side of the Tracks

2016, watercolor, 14 x 10 in.

Private collection

Plein air

myself and to connect with people who looked at my finished paintings. I returned to the Wayne [PA] Plein Air Festival in 2015 charged up and ready to pursue a new direction in plein air painting.

"I was rewarded by sales and favorable comments from people who recognized I was speaking more clearly in my own voice through a more personal and unique style. One person said I was now painting 'sophisticated chaos,' and that comes pretty close to the reaction I was hoping to elicit."

When asked to identify specific ways he now uses watercolor paints, papers, and brushes to develop these personal expressions, Karlic indicates he sometimes begins in a traditional way, drawing the outlines of important shapes with a mechanical pencil, and then gradually building up layers of transparent color over a bright white paper surface.



"Once I'm deep into the painting, I consider almost any way of bringing an image into existence," he says. "I might add and subtract paint by spraying clear water to re-wet colors and lift them off the paper. At the same time, I might drop opaque colors onto the damp surface and let the edges blur as the paint is absorbed into the fibers of the paper. If I need to, I'll use my brushes to scrub the surface, or my fingers to smear areas. I usually paint across the entire surface of the paper while it is damp and then adjust the paint application as parts of the paper dry.

"No two paintings develop in the same way because I respond to each image as it is taking

Engulfed

2017, watercolor, 28 x 20 in.

Collection the artist

Studio.



GAF on Ponca
2016, watercolor, 6 1/2 x 21 in.
Private collection
Plein air

shape. Surprises are not only welcomed, but invited, as marks, scratches, drips, and splatters all become part of the final piece.”

Supplies & Technique

Karlic usually has his watercolor paper (quarter-sheet or half-sheet sizes) taped to a board that is held in a vertical position by a sturdy aluminum easel. “Positioning the cold-pressed paper vertically allows gravity to affect the direction and intermixing of the paints,” the artist says. “I sometimes squeeze paint right from the tube along the taped top edge of the board, and then I spray it with water so it will drip and flow down the page in a somewhat random pattern. I can control the flow with a brush, or I can let it find its own resolution.”

Giving Way to the Night
2017, watercolor, 7 x 21 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



The palette Karlic uses includes about nine Daniel Smith brand colors, with extra pigments added as needed. He never cleans his plastic palette unless a green invades and dominates the paints left from another effort, and he often mixes colors on the painting. He has a large supply of brushes available but usually works with four to six soft haired brushes and one or two stiff bristle brushes.

Whatever technique Karlic uses, he is mindful of the importance of maintaining the glow of transparent colors on a white painting surface. “My goal is to use the incredible glow and translucency of watercolor and not to overwork the surface so much that the paints become dull and dirty,” he explains. “I paint the least number of washes possible so that I keep the transparent and translucent layers of color.”

Recently, Karlic has been creating studio paintings in order to refine and expand upon his vision. Working from sketches, notes, memory, and photos, he works in a way that maintains the energy of his plein air pieces. “Plein air and studio work fuel each other,” the artist explains. “Except for the differences in sizes, I don’t want observers to immediately

know whether a painting was created in the studio or on location. I want all my paintings to express my voice as an artist.”

One of Karlic’s goals when teaching workshops or classes is to help students create paintings that are more expressive and fun. “I’ve been teaching weekly at the Chesapeake Fine Art Studio in Stevensville, Maryland, and my objective has been to encourage people to spend more time thinking and considering new ways of handling the materials in their hands,” he says. “I don’t just talk about nuts and bolts. Instead, I help people identify what works for them, how they can better connect with a subject, and how they can make a personal statement. I show them ways to loosen up, feel more confident, understand themselves better, and learn how they can pursue a new way of expressing themselves.”

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



See more of Ken Karlic’s paintings in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.