

A BRUSH WITH NATURE

May 15 to June 10, TRU Visual Arts Gallery, Old Main Building

Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm, Weekends 12pm to 5pm

Meet the Artists: Gallery Reception Wednesday May 31, 5pm to 8pm

Media Tour: Tuesday May 23, 11 am

In celebration of the country's 150th anniversary, the Wells Gray group presents "A Brush With Nature," a collection of plein air and studio paintings featuring the landscapes of Kamloops and the Wells Gray park.

If landscape is central to the Canadian identity then landscape painting is an expression of common experience, if not common meaning. All of us spend our days immersed in geography, enveloped in climate. We think about it, when we do, primarily in practical terms. For most of us it may even fade to background as we leave to machines the hard work of contesting gravity and elevation, distance and isolation, elements and extremes.

Landscape painting departs from the practical, attempting to capture the supernatural: the passing light on a hillside, the procession of clouds across an afternoon sky, the cold that cuts through the best dressed intentions to last a little longer at the February easel. And if our daily routines send landscape to the background, then it is the job of the landscape painter to draw what is remarkable from out of the conventional. Landscape paintings frame simple fragments of observation, package them in paint and throw them back upon all our eyes to see perhaps for the first time what we look at every day.

Lloyd Bennet and Terry Thompson have been painting and showing together as the Wells Gray group for nearly a decade, while Marc Brzustowski, a recent arrival in Kamloops, is showing with the group for the first time. All three painters share a passion for plein air and landscape painting and find constant inspiration in the landforms of the Thompson Valleys and Wells Gray Park. Canadian plein air traditions from the Group of 7 and Emily Carr to the post-impressionist works of J.W. Morrice inform their outdoor and studio practice.

"A Brush With Nature" runs from May 15 to June 10 at the Visual Arts Gallery in the Old Main Building of Thompson Rivers University. Gallery hours are 9 am to 5pm weekdays and 12pm to 5pm weekends. All are welcome to meet the artists at the Gallery Reception, Wednesday May 31st from 5pm to 8pm.

Terry Thompson

Sometimes I paint during an afternoon outing, scouting out nearby locations to see what inspires me. Other times I bring my paints along on a vacation or camping trip. Camping, hiking and canoeing; to me these activities are an integral part of the painting process as they stimulate my senses, helping me to become one with nature and bringing back memories of outdoor adventures with my late father.

The muse can be planned or it can be spontaneous; sometimes I stop thinking and just paint, not knowing where the brush will take me. First I look at my surroundings to see what speaks to me. A rock formation or a cluster of trees may be selected as a focal point to anchor my painting. I paint the anchor first then work out from there.

There is a peaceful tranquility in plein air painting. Whether I'm gazing at majestic mountains or listening to the sound of rushing water, I find the outdoors to be very relaxing, though I cannot let myself too comfortable as I am exposed to the elements with only my tent for shelter. This unpredictability is all part of the appeal of plein air painting. A sudden rainfall or unexpected snowstorm just might lead to your greatest painting yet.



Lloyd Bennett

Plein air painting involves the placing of a series of impulses on a surface so that they come to represent a scene for a moment in time. Sometimes the impulse is measured as if under a controlled brush, and at other times the mark making is more random, more open to chance and the good graces of the muse. The perfect temperament is to sit on the fence between control and discovery. This is the exhilaration that comes from working before nature—you never know what you are going to get.



Marc André Brzustowski

The price of admission can be steep — trekking through the back woods, battling terrain, a 50 km bike ride — and there is no guarantee of an audience with the muse, regardless of the dues paid for the possibility. But when she speaks through brush and paint to blank canvas, there is no doubt you have been granted your interview. The price may be cheap — an hour by car to get you to the painting place — but wind and weather and changing light will always add a premium. And if the muse will see you now, leave your expectations at the door: you may be the instrument, but you are not calling the tune. It is all illusion. The painting is a stand in for the inspiration, a surrogate for the scene which called you in the first place. It is flat and contrived no matter how deep and authentic. And in the tension between what you see and what you get, you may find a way to document that brush with nature — the only encouragement a painter needs to try again.

The dusty hills and arid ranges, the wide rivers and sculpted valleys that form our local scene cannot be found anywhere else in the country. The hoodoos rise as natural cathedrals, their character changing with the light, their forms become more intricate with every glance. The combination of river and desert, elevation and bench land provide constant variety and immediate inspiration. If I didn't live in Kamloops I would travel here just to paint.

