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Plein Air Peconic:

Preserving Our Treasured Island

By Joanne Schenker





Eileen Dawn Skretch, *Charnews Farm, Southold*

En plein air, a French expression meaning "in the open air,"

is mainly used to describe the act of painting outdoors. While this type of painting is hardly new, it was not until the advent of the Impressionists that moving out of the studio and painting en plein air became an accepted style of landscape painting. Working in this environment also plays a prominent role in photography, es-

pecially for photographer Ellen Watson who is part of the Plein Air Peconic (www.pleinairpeconic.com), a collaborative of 12 Long Island artists dedicated to helping preserve the East End's natural resources by donating proceeds from their work to The Peconic Land Trust (www.peconiclandtrust.org). This non-profit organization was established in 1983 by John v. H. Halsey and a group of local residents to ensure the protection of Long Island's working farms and natural lands. The artists participating are founder Gordon Matheson, Ellen Watson, Casey

Chalem Anderson, Susan D'Alessio, Terry Elkins, Aubrey Grainger, Gail Kern, Michele Margit, Joanne Rosko, Eileen Dawn Skretch, Tom Steele, and Kathryn Szoka.

Artist Gordon Matheson and Peconic Land Trust Vice President, Rebecca Chapman, created the Plein Air Peconic in 2005. The Trust enables the artists to spend considerable time in the preserves and hamlets of the East End, painting and photographing private properties not seen by the general public. This past October, Peconic Land Trust held their third exhibit originating from the collaboration, Plein Air



Susan D'Alessio, *Red Barn Farm, Riverhead*



Joanne Rosko, *Tanners Neck, Westhampton*



Previous Page, Top Row: Gordon Matheson, *Birch Grove at Dam Pond, Southold*; Tom Steele, *Phillips Pond, Southampton Village*; Gail Kern, *Sagg Pond Goldenrod, Blair Preserve, Bridgehampton*; Bottom: Casey Chalem Anderson, *Quail Hill Morning, Amagansett*.



Plein Air Peconic Artists
Photo by Ellen Dooley

There is nothing like taking the time to be out in the middle of a field, lying on your back, looking at the sky with mammoth sunflowers swaying overhead.

Peconic III, at The Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor. Since the summer of 2006, over 40 PLT sites have been painted and photographed specifically for Plein Air Peconic events in an effort to save as much land as possible from the massive development the East End is experiencing.

Ellen Watson's commitment to Plein Air Peconic is fulfilling on many levels. Having grown up in the Midwest, the East End brings Ellen back to her roots as she explains, "I find it inspiring to be out on these open vistas; I love the way the clouds hang in the sky and how the flat lands go

on for miles. I'm comforted by these views, so when I relocated here I felt like I'd landed in heaven." Unfortunately, within only a few years of her move, a great deal of farmland had been developed. Watson's passion to conserve the terrain is evident in her work, as she states, "There is nothing like taking the time to be out in the middle of a field, lying on your back, looking at the sky with mammoth sunflowers swaying overhead. We should take care of this place so that we can continue to experience this and so that generations after us will have this to marvel at."

Now in its 26th year, PLT is planning Plein Air Peconic IV* on Columbus Day weekend and will once again feature The Traveling Exhibition. Beginning in 2007, the Trust and the artists agreed to create a "portable" version—taking the work on the road and bringing it into communities throughout the East End. After its heralded success for the last two years, where it was shown in libraries across the north and south forks, it will continue to even more venues in 2009. 🌱



Ellen Watson, Wölffer, Sagaponack

2009 Exhibitions:

Rogers Memorial Library Windmill Lane, Southampton – March 2 - 29
Meet the Artists Reception on Saturday, March 7, 2-4 pm.

The Clinton Academy Main Street, East Hampton – June 12 - July 6
Meet the Artists Reception on Saturday, June 13, 5-7 pm.

Cutchogue-New Suffolk Library Main Street, Cutchogue – August 1 - 30
Meet the Artists Reception on Friday, August 7, 5-7:30 pm.

*Venue for Plein Air Peconic IV to be decided.
Please check the website for updates.