

MARCIA BURTT & ANN LOFQUIST

Contrasting Approaches to the Same Landscape

Plein air painters can enjoy working alongside one another, even when they are exploring completely different approaches to the landscape. That's what Marcia Burtt and Ann Lofquist discovered while responding to their individual visions of the same scenes in California

Ann Lofquist (foreground) and Marcia Burtt painting together in California
Photo: Dale Howard



Burtt beginning a large, square plein air painting
Photo: Dale Howard

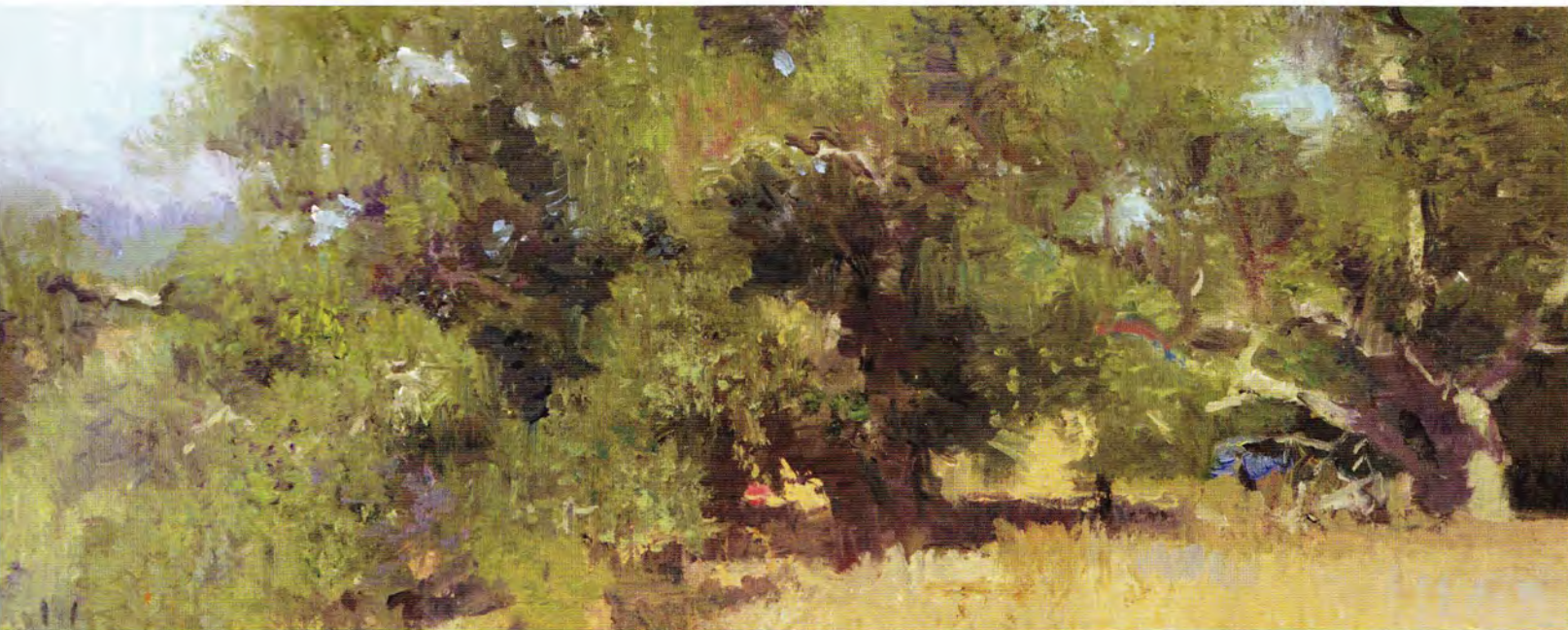


Marcia Burtt and Ann Lofquist are clear about the reasons they paint landscapes, and one might think their sharply contrasting notions would preclude any kind of collaboration between the two artists. For example, Lofquist rarely takes her paint box to the beach, but Burtt can often be found painting in acrylics by the Pacific Ocean. But last summer the women spent a week painting in the same locations along the coast and on several ranches in California, and the resulting paintings were exhibited from November 12, 2011 until January 15, 2012 at the gallery Burtt owns in Santa Barbara, California.

As many plein air painters like Burtt and Lofquist recognize, there is something quite stimulating about working alongside an artist who has an entirely different way of responding to the same location. When there is friendship and mutual respect, the exchange between the two painters can be beneficial to both.

Lofquist developing a painting at Otter Point
Photo: Dale Howard





Live Oaks Near Atascadero

Ann Lofquist

2011, oil, 6 x 16 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air

All photos of artwork this article: Bill Dewey

Two Oaks

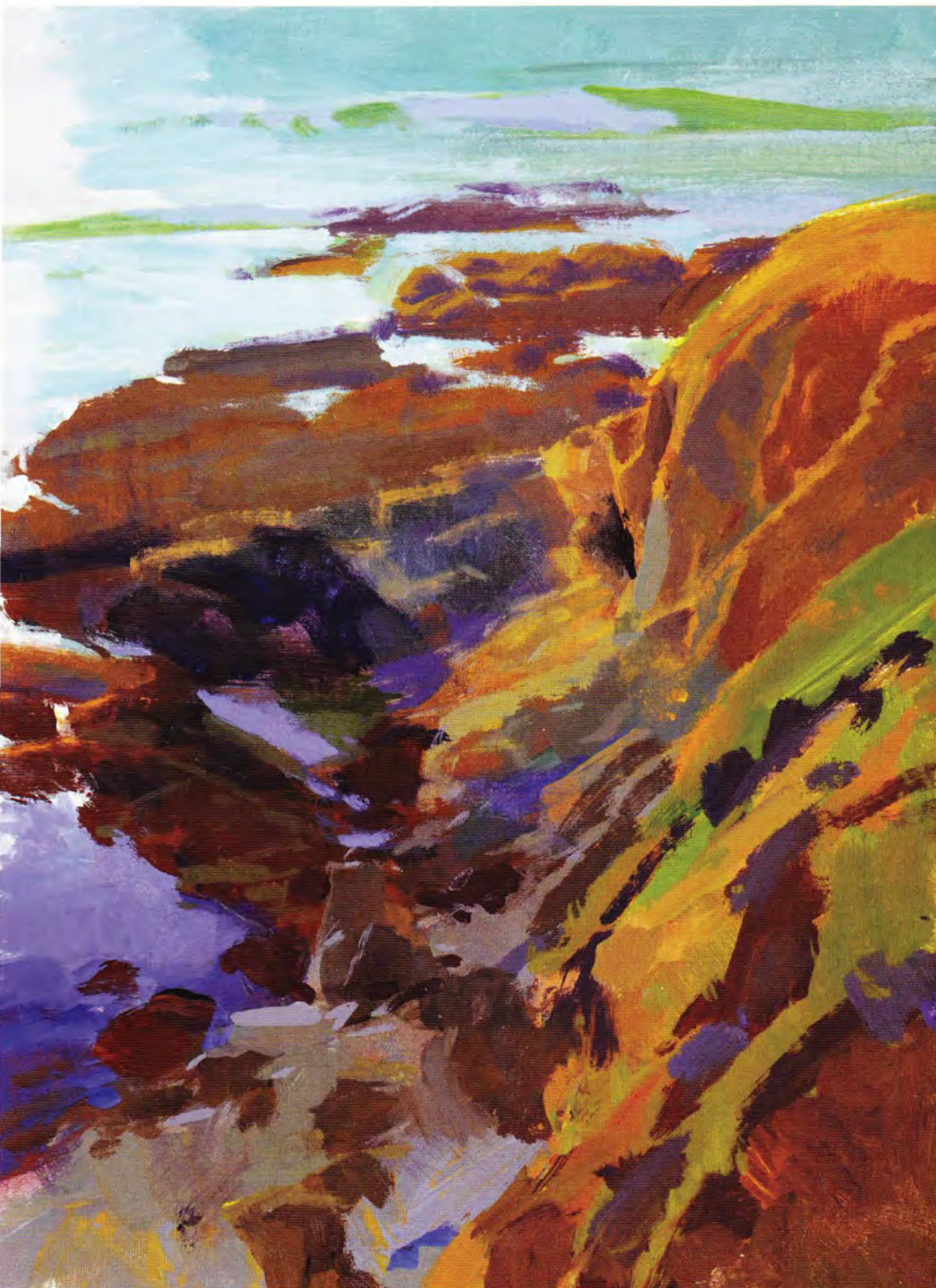
Marcia Burt

2011, acrylic, 10 x 18 in.

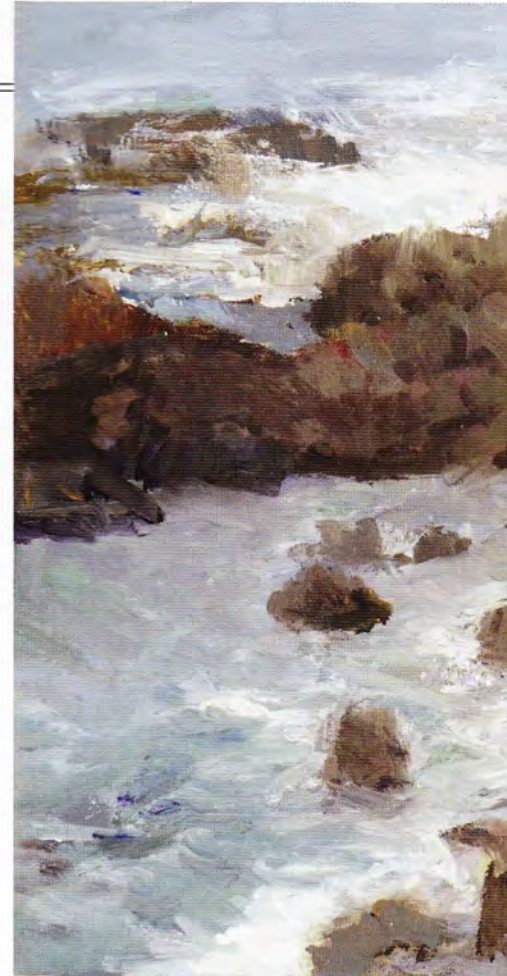
Collection the artist

Plein air





Late Sun, Otter Point
Marcia Burtt
2011, acrylic, 16 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



Otter Point II
Ann Lofquist
2011, oil, 8 1/2 x 13 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Marcia Burtt
BIRTHDATE: 1941
BIRTHPLACE: Harrisonburg, VA
LOCATION: Santa Barbara, CA
INFLUENCES: Caravaggio, French Impressionism, Van Gogh, Abstract Expressionism, Richard Diebenkorn
WEBSITE: www.marciaburtt.com

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Ann Lofquist
BIRTHDATE: 1964
BIRTHPLACE: Washington, DC
LOCATION: Camarillo, CA
INFLUENCES: Giovanni Bellini, Pieter Bruegel, and Frederic E. Church



our approaches to painting,” Lofquist recalls. “I returned to Maine, where I was teaching at Bowdoin College, and the friendship lapsed until 2008, when I subsequently moved to Southern California to be closer to my aging parents.”

Burt says, “I had been following Ann’s career during the intervening years, and when I learned that she’d moved to California, I suggested we get together again. I expressed interest in showing her paintings in my gallery, and much to my surprise, she proposed that we hang our work together after painting the same locations. It was a great idea, and a nice opportunity to get to know her better.”

Different Media, Different Styles

The two artists scheduled a week of painting near a beach house in Cambria and on several ranch locations nearby, and they immediately recognized how differently they evaluated potential subjects, organized their supplies, set up to paint on location, and developed plein air paintings. “To begin with,” Burt says, “there is the obvious difference that I create most of my paintings on location in acrylic and Ann uses small plein air oil sketches as the basis of studio paintings she works on for months at a time. A more subtle difference is that Ann is a very disciplined, well organized person who begins with an understanding of where she is going with a painting.”

Lofquist and Burt met by chance about 20 years ago, when Lofquist attended a wedding in Santa Barbara. “We arranged to have lunch afterwards and found that we respected each other’s work despite some differences in

Two Cows, Santa Rosa Creek Road

Marcia Burt
2011, acrylic, 10 x 18 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air





Burt says she herself “may begin painting a patchwork of shapes or lines, then I step back to evaluate the picture.” She says, “I don’t try to visualize the final painting. Instead, I keep responding to what I see in nature and on the evolving painting.”

Following a different approach, Lofquist explains that she doesn’t “walk into the landscape with an agenda of exactly what I will paint.” She points out, “Sometimes I spend almost as much time choosing a site as executing the painting itself.” She spreads an old blanket on the ground, puts her supplies on it, and puts a small prepared panel inside the lid of a shoebox.

Lofquist rarely uses an easel when painting outdoors; she says, “I find working on the vertical surface provided by an easel to be difficult. Painting on a near-horizontal surface affords me much more control of the brush, although tall grass and stiff legs create their own set of problems.”

Lofquist says she is attracted to scenes with a certain scale of space, scenes that are neither extremely intimate nor vast. “When Marcia suggested painting along the Pacific Ocean,” she says, “I was agreeable to the idea, but I thought it was very unlikely I would use those plein air sketches as the basis of large studio paintings.”

Santa Rosa Creek Road

*Ann Lofquist
2011, oil, 5 1/2 x 18 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air*

Garrapata I

*Ann Lofquist
2011, oil, 8 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air*



I generally respond to middle-ground spaces that are accessible to a human scale, not vast spaces along miles of beaches or overpowering mountain forms. I find that I usually prefer domesticated landscapes, such as pastures, villages, streams, or even urban sprawl.”

In contrast, says Burtt, “Subject is the least important consideration to me. I can get excited about big spaces or intimate ones. The more important consideration is the abstract relationships of shapes and values, as determined by the light. That’s why I often paint on squares or elongated rectangles rather than the standard 11 x 14 or 24 x 36-inch canvases. Ironically, I’ve always been a realist painter and Ann started out as an abstract painter, yet she considers the identity of the location to be an important consideration, while I am attracted to abstract qualities of a scene.”

Responding to Burtt’s comments on the differences in their backgrounds, Lofquist remembers that she and Burtt talked about the anomaly of their both being representational painters. “To me, the divide between painters is not whether the subjects of our pictures are recognizable or not,” she says. “Rather, the divide lies in whether or not the content of an artist’s work is ironic in conception. A lot of contemporary art is slick and cynical, whereas Marcia and I want to explore a genuine love and delight in the visual world. We want to share our visions without cynical commentary.”

Working Procedures

The separate working procedures of each artist also lead to very different finished results. Burtt paints on relatively large stretched canvas and builds up layers of fast-drying color that allow her to continually change shapes, values, and colors, whereas Lofquist paints with slower-drying oil colors on canvas-covered panels sealed with rabbit-skin glue and coated with several layers of traditional oil gesso. After Lofquist blocks in the preliminary design of her painting with diluted burnt umber, she builds up the layers of paint, starting with the “biggest and most assertive shapes,” then breaks those into smaller forms using synthetic-hair brushes.

“My college professors insisted that I use expensive natural-hair brushes, but I found that I really prefer cheap synthetic sable brushes,” says Lofquist. “I never wash them, and as the ends of the hairs become frayed I cut them with a pair of scissors to create a completely different kind of tool that establishes diffused, soft-edged layers of oil color. Toward the end of the painting process, I can sharpen the lines and exert more control over the edges using a liner brush or a brand-new synthetic brush. The result is that I achieve a soft diffusion of light without having to deliberately blend edges.”

Burtt says, “My brushwork is exactly the opposite. While Ann ends her process by sharpening edges, I deal with the fact that the

fast-drying acrylic colors leave a lot of hard edges I have to soften in order to create atmosphere and depth. I seldom concern myself with adding small details, preferring to let the brushwork remain obvious. Ann winds up with very specific information about the key elements in her landscapes, and the brush marks are much less apparent.”

Another difference that became apparent during the week Burtt and Lofquist painted together is that one is interested in breaking up her work with conversation, and the other is not. “I’m a curious person and enjoy talking to the people around me,” says Burtt. “Ann seems to be the exact opposite. She becomes so totally absorbed in the painting process that she doesn’t talk and doesn’t get up and walk around. Plein air painters seem to fall into one category or the other. I love talking with passersby and the other painters unless I am at a crucial juncture, while some of my friends insist on setting up their easels where no one will bother them. For years I painted with the late Glenna Hartman, and she had the same persistent approach as does Ann.”

That difference in personality and approach is part of the reason Burtt has been involved with various art groups, while Lofquist seldom paints with other artists. Burtt has been an active member of the OAK Group since it was formed 25 years ago, and she teaches workshops that help support conservation efforts. Lofquist says that while she enjoyed being a college teacher and sharing her knowledge with students, she rarely participates in plein air festivals or joins groups of artists who go out painting together.

Both artists say that while they live too far away from each other to meet on a regular basis, they enjoyed the collaboration enough that they would like to do it again. Burtt says, “I’m delighted with the exhibition of our paintings, and think the comparisons are helpful to me and to collectors who come to my gallery.”

M. Stephen Doherty is Editor of *PleinAir* magazine.

Garrapata II

Ann Lofquist
2011, oil, 10 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

