



The Symphony of Landscape, Through Wonder and Curiosity

By Laura Vailati -



Mary Pettis, "Copper Mine Footprints," 2021, Oil on linen, 16 x 28 inches

"My way of seeing the world and painting it in simplicity and purity is my way of honoring 'a country girl's eccentricity,'" says artist Mary Pettis.

Characterized from an early age by a deep curiosity that has always led her to want to understand "why things look the way they do," Mary has combined this productive curiosity with another very important aspect of her personality, being a daydreamer.

Growing up in a rural environment has given her the freedom to contemplate nature in its essence and to understand its rules and flows as much as possible, to the point of establishing a connection with the rhythms of nature that give her a way to express her emotions in order to realize her artistic intentions.



Artist Mary Pettis, "Expressive Realist" at Gallery 366, her primary showcase space, during her exhibition. In 2017, Mary became the ninth American woman painter to receive the Art Renewal Center (ARC) Living Master designation.

Her artistic input came when she was only six years old, when her grandfather asked her to gather the eggs in their chicken coop. Instead of doing this chore, she got lost in the morning sun, which shone through the window and created a ray of dust that changed colors. "I could see a rainbow on the edge of the dust," said the artist, who admitted that the experience affected her so deeply that she asked herself a question that would haunt her for the rest of her life: "Why do things look the way they do?"

In time, she got the answer: "There is a reason why things look the way they do, and that is exactly the answer to curiosity, which is our driving force as human beings and which, through wonder, pushes us to have the right approach to things," she said. Mary sees the artistic process as a continuous dance between the left and right sides of the brain, or between the heart and the brain.



Mary Pettis, "Superior Forest," 2020, Oil on linen, 24 x 32 inches, Private collection

Born and raised in Minnesota, Mary received her BA in Art Major, Humanities Major, French Minor from the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, MN and went on to study with many important artists such as Bela Petheo, Richard Lack, Daniel Graves, Kevin Macpherson, Jove Wang, and Daniel Gerhartz, to name a few.



Mary Pettis, "Nature's Rhythm – Cattails," 2023, Oil on linen, 20 x 16 inches, plein air, private collection. Among her many awards and recognitions, Mary is a Signature Member of the American Impressionist Society, American Society of Marine Artists, Oil Painters of America, and a member of the Salmagundi Art Club.

Her studies with Zhang Wen Xin, Robert Duncan, Joe Paquet, Stapleton Kearns and especially with Jim Wilcox, who introduced her to the "wet-in-wet" plein air approach, were crucial. They all introduced her to the magical and challenging world of plein air and alla prima painting, her favorite. "When I'm on location, I've trained myself to get fast so I can see evidence of a finished piece as soon as possible," said the artist, who considers the "open heart approach" the most important thing in plein air.



Mary Pettis, "Field Road and Meadowlarks," 2023, Oil on linen, 24 x 32 inches, Private Collection.

Mary Pettis finds her deep connection to nature through landscape painting, which for the artist creates "musical chords of balance, rhythm and harmony" that show the beauty of nature.

A firm believer that all processes begin with an idea and that it is inconceivable to create a compelling artistic composition without mastering the fundamentals of art, she explained that she spent many years painting before coming to understand that technical skill and plein air are indispensable as a vehicle for thought, but it is necessary to move to the next level, much more complex and intense, to realize a masterpiece. "Not everyone is able to do it, because it requires a deep connection with the place through contemplation in an open, pure heart," said the artist, who was able to transform the emotions that arise from nature into gestural strokes with which she begins each composition.



Mary Pettis, "Soup Tonight," *alla prima*, 2021, Oil on linen, 16 x 20 inches

Technically, during the artistic process when she felt emotions, she has to isolate and deconstruct the sensations she felt, as they should be objects, and only then she begins to compose her symphony on canvas, studying how to include all the instruments – lines, shapes, values, colors, edges, and textures – in the orchestra. "And then I orchestrate them, pulling up and down in my canvas, looking for relationships between the parts and introducing different instruments that speak with the same kind of sound," said the artist.

She starts with a gestural line – for Mary, gesture represents the exteriorization of our fears – then she blocks in the shape with color, and then she goes right down to the anchor points to make sure the drawing is accurate.

Once the lines, shapes, and values are accurate, she goes into more accurate colors, trying to get the right edge before she moves on. "Edges are very important in a painting," explained the artist, who, when she has achieved her artistic intent, studies the painting, sitting back like a conductor.



Mary Pettis, "Pas de Deux," 2022, Oil on linen, 8 x 12 inches, plein air

Mary Pettis will join the faculty of **Realism Live, online November 13-15, 2024 with an optional Essential Techniques Day on November 12**. According to Mary, to understand how to move through painting, you can look at good paintings or at great art, but the best way is to look at the great contemporary artists who are far superior to their predecessors. "Look at the great contemporary artists who are dedicated to the purity of realism, who are painting today, and learn as much as you can, take what you want, and train yourself to understand what makes a great painting. Realism Live is a great opportunity that will give you the chance to meet some of the most important contemporary artists in the world, all in one place."

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