

The Artist's Almanac August 2007

*Mad dogs and Englishmen
Go out in the midday sun*
Noel Coward

This is the month of The Great Rain Lottery.

Unless a tropical storm rises from the Gulf, the best our browning lawns can hope for is a thunderstorm. The best conversation opener is *did you get any of that rain yesterday?* More didn't than did. August makes rain spotters of us all.

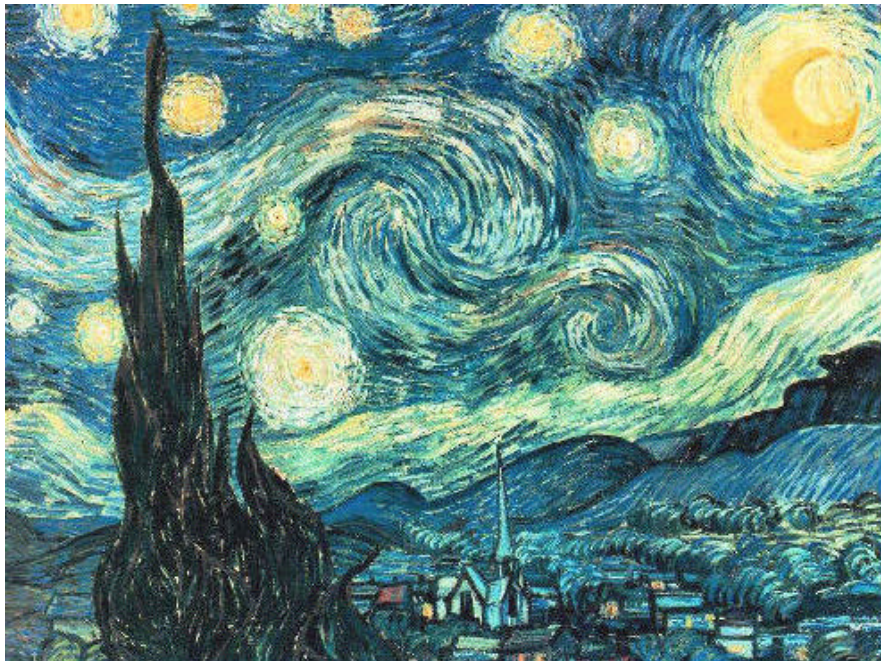
Towards midday the heat index and humidity rise. As cumulus clouds tower to the west we wonder if this will be our day.

As my columnist friend Elmer Hinton wrote several years ago

August seems like the tail end of things. Nature is at her worst. She deals out some of the hottest days ...when you'd like to do nothing but sit and doze on the shady side of the house. But she won't allow anything like that. She fixes it so flies bite the hardest, pond water stinks and sweat bees multiply.

Air conditioning has changed all that. Now we can shut August out, turn on the TV, and learn about the heat index from the Internet. We have conquered nature by isolating ourselves from it.

But much is lost. August has superb nights, with the mysterious choirs of katydids in the dark trees, and clear nights turning cool after a sultry day. The Persiad meteor showers on the night of August 12th open our eyes to the glories of deep space.



Starry Night – Vincent Van Gogh

As a boy, I slept by an open window at the opposite end of the house from an exhaust fan, which pulled cool night air across my face and all the night sounds through my dreams.

Few choose this month to go traipsing through the woods, and those who do return sweaty, bitten by ticks, infested with chiggers or itching from poison ivy. Creeks are isolated pools and the fish lie low. Even inside the house, we feel languor and, like our sleeping cats, stretch supine. The stupor of August heat kills our initiative.

To the artist willing to accept its heat, August offers great opportunities for painting outside. These include dry weather, hayfields, children, cattle, boats, magnificent skies and the famous August Light. Light in spring is thin and blue, but August's is rich and golden. By mid-month heat inversion sets in and distances disappear in a haze - what my teacher Gus Baker called Venetian light. Late in the month we get a foretaste of fall, with wind from the north and high fleecy clouds on parade across the bluest of skies.

The clouds pile higher and higher. We hear the distant rumble of thunder and the leaves rustle nervously. We try to estimate distance and bearing and wonder whether we will be winners today.



Safe Harbor – Bill Puryear, Artist

Local rain spotters trump the Internet; afternoon storms are spotty, springing up and disappearing without any seeming pattern. Yet there is one, for yesterday's storm that

came through us and missed our neighbor a mile away creates an invisible channel for today's. This means tomorrow's storm is more likely than not to follow today's – the meteorological equivalent of a gambler's winning streak.

The sky thickens; the wind shifts and the leaves of the maple tree reverse and show white. Lightning cracks and the cats flee as the first big drops splat hard on the patio. This is when, as a young child, my mother would run about closing all the windows as my nurse would hide with me under the bed. I was too young to be marked by her terror of storms but still remember her warning not to talk on the phone or pat dogs.

The excitement of an approaching storm is seasoned by danger. Who has not pulled to the side of the interstate or under a bridge to escape the fury of successive waves of rain lashing the windshield, blinding the driver, and slicking the road with sheets of water? Lightning killed the golfing father of my friend after he thought the storm had passed.

Once, in a roofed shelter with a dozen golfers we found ourselves the target of a crackling lightning storm with explosions dancing all around. The shelter lacked walls, and we all managed to wedge ourselves into the interior restrooms as lightning struck nearby trees. Afterwards, feeling more alive for being shot at and missed, we finished the round on a course sparkling in sunshine with gushing streams. Storms that thrash us may also refresh us, it seems, just as the rain does the earth.

I secure the top on the hot tub and linger outside, facing the oncoming storm, savoring the electric excitement, until the first furious wave of rain advances across the field from the barn. Minutes later, Nature, to prove she is still in charge, strikes a transformer somewhere, the air conditioner groans to a halt, and the computer goes dark.

I sit a long time in the darkened library and listen to the pulsing hammering of the rain on the roof. Rain yesterday; rain today. Maybe we'll get rain tomorrow. Maybe we'll win the Trifecta.

.Upcoming Events

- October 5th-7th – Fall Into Art Show – Hendersonville High School , Juried Show of 40 Regional Artists
- October 13th – Benefit Show and Auction, New Gallatin Public Library
- November 30th-December 2, Twelfth Annual Fine Art in Brentwood Show and Sale, Brentwood Academy