

The Artist's Almanac

June 2005

Summer – the handmaid of the poor.

- Anonymous

Summer, the season of light.

The solstice on the 21st is the oldest holiday of mankind, written in rocks by the old ones from Stonehenge to Mesa Verde. This is the day the sun rises earliest and easternmost and travels longest and latest to the west. It aims a momentary shaft of light on its carved icon, is gone, and the world turns back towards night.

Mother earth, impregnated with the sun's heat growing these past months now brings forth her many fruits, and the celebrations begin. The ancients prayed for rains and had harvest festivals; we have swimming parties, barbecues, and campouts. What can be better than a summer's evening soiree on a moonlit lawn?

As the days grow shorter the earth, a giant solar battery, gives back its stored heat as produce and flowers. City dwellers savor the farmers' market with the sights and smells of ripening melons, tomatoes, and cucumbers. Yellow squash pairs up with green beans and fresh limas with fresh corn makes ancients of us all, savoring succotash.

Magnolias perfume our gardens and daylilies spread their galaxies of variegated gold around our patios. We bring choice roses to grace our dinner table and share the rest with those who go out no more. A happy memory is that of Miss Susie Green trundling up East Main Street to the hospital with her arms full of roses.

All around us all is green. Green is both the glory of summer and the landscape artist's biggest problem. It is said no man willingly eats a cake with green icing. Paris green was an ancient poison and is not a healthy color for flesh. The mass of green we see surrounding us in summer does not make an appealing painting if served up raw.

Both ancient and modern artists have used various workarounds, bluing and purpling near distances to indicate atmosphere, using ten different greens to give variety, or even avoiding green altogether. Claude Lorraine and Rembrandt favored the use of bistre, sepia, and siennas to simulate greens, knowing the mind analogizes and sees colors as it will. But the viewing of many of these grows tiresome after a while and we long for color. Constable sparkled his greens with flecks of pure white to simulate light, and that works well.

All of us know that green is a hybrid or secondary color lying between blue and yellow on the color wheel. A simple expedient is to mix all greens from the two, say from ultramarine blue and cadmium yellow. That has the added advantage of allowing an infinite number of gradations of color and value and it seems to work for me.

The color green is an artificial construct of our minds. Try this experiment for yourself. Go outside on a sunny day in June and look at a green landscape. Squint. Squint hard. Look at what you see. Be open-minded. Green devolves into yellows, blues, blue greens, reds, browns, blacks, and purples. There are many factors influencing the color green -

the color of the light on a given day, the color of the sky, the position of the particular section of a tree or bush, where the shade falls, reflections of light from surrounding objects, whether it is early or late in the growing season, whether it is raining, the type of plant, the time of day.... the list goes on and on. It is the artist's job to synthesize all this, and it is both his joy and his challenge to do so.

Try one more experiment. You will have to wait, however, until the winter solstice to do this. Dig out an old local newspaper and find in it one or two clippings featuring photos of children in their yard, holding their dog, playing with the hose, whatever. It must be a black and white photo and must be against a backdrop of shrubs or trees. Look at it intensely and see if, even in a faded monochromatic photo, it does not, at winter solstice, look a little like a green paradise.

Could it be that we, like children, or like our parents, Adam and Eve, live in a green paradise here and do not recognize it until it is winter?



Summer Gardens at Cragfont

Coming Events

- Join Joel Knapp and myself for a workshop July 9th when we shall try to capture the light in the heat of summer in the gorgeous gardens of Cragfont. This will be fun, regardless of your experience level. There is nothing quite like painting out of doors. Joel will demonstrate a quick onsite oil sketch, while I will demonstrate how painting in watercolor differs from oil. Each of you will have the opportunity to do your own paintings, with lots of attention and encouragement from both of us. Picnic tables and rest rooms are onsite, as this is a park, with lots of flowers, history, buildings, views, a gazebo and even a small lake. The one-day fee is \$75. Contact me by email (purj@comcast.net) or by telephone 615-452-1540, and bring your own paints and equipment, stools, hats, sunshade, etc. We'll furnish an ice chest of cold drinks. There are lots of shade trees to paint under. Come out and enjoy the company of other artists July 9th.
- Southern Light Artists of America in Fairvue Parade of Homes in Gallatin June 12-27. And check out the new B&B Cottages at the Club, furnished with our paintings
- Bledsoe Family Reunion, Bledsoe Fort Historical Park, 10AM – 2PM Saturday June 11th. I will display two paintings of Bledsoe's Fort, based on the archeological diggings and contemporary journals, as well as other historical materials. A limited number (five) 12x24 Giclee prints on canvas will be made available at that time for those family members or others who might have an interest.
- November Opening Reception for Southern Light Artists Four-Man Show, Auld Alliance Gallery, Highway 100, Belle Meade

Southern Light Artists of America



"Cragfont Mansion"

Oil, 30" x 30"

Joel Knapp
Oils
615.451.9718
joelknapp@earthlink.net

Contact the artists for information
on the upcoming workshops at the
Cragfont Mansion and Gardens.

Bill Puryear
Watercolors
615.452.1540
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"Cataloochee"

Watercolor, 8" x 10"

Show Opening

November 11th, 2005 • Works by Southern Light Artists
Auld Alliance Gallery • Westgate Center • 6019 Hwy 100 • Nashville, TN

www.southernlightartists.com