

## **New Orleans en Plein Air**



*Plate #1: View of houses from Audubon Park, by the entrance to the park at Pitt and Walnut streets.*

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Foreword by  
M. Stephen Doherty



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*To my loving wife, Michele Many*

*Special thanks to R. M. ("Mac") Frazer and Michele Many for their assistance in editing and to M. Stephen Doherty for writing the foreword.*





*Plate # 2: Docked barge tugs in hazy morning light.*

It seems to me that the present day man, with all his reverence for the old master, is interested in seizing other qualities, far more fleeting. He must be cool and he must calculate, but his work must be quick.

All his science and all his powers of invention must be brought into practice to capture the vision of an illusive moment. It is as though he were in pursuit of something more real which he knows but has not as yet fully realized, which appears, permits a thrilling appreciation, and is gone in the instant.

—Robert Henri

## FOREWORD

I've never met a more spirited or informed artist than Phil Sandusky. He has an enthusiasm for painting and an understanding of the creative process that are remarkable. Watching him paint, I find myself amazed by his engaging personality and his exceptional talent. He's a tall, spindly bundle of energy who is always excited by life and who uses his expanding knowledge of the human experience to enrich his plein-air oil paintings.

Sandusky's youthful enthusiasm connects to a profound understanding of how human eyes gather information about the visual world and send it to the brain; and then—even more remarkably—how artists summarize that data in their pictures. As explained in the text of this book, Sandusky's painting process is based, in part, on his thorough knowledge of the complex process by which people see and understand the visual world. In simple terms, he has learned to paint what he *actually* sees. That separates him from artists who paint what they *think* they see, what they imagine, or what a photograph records.

To accomplish this, Sandusky insists on painting outdoors, where his ever-changing subject is directly in front of him. That gives him firsthand knowledge of how light reveals his subject and how the passing of time changes both its appearance and its mood. He offers up a lively, gestured painting that is based both in the science of perception and the artistry of painting.

His approach is not easy in New Orleans, where the air is saturated with moisture, the heat is unbearably intense, the bugs are alarmingly aggressive, and the property owners are understandably suspicious. As someone who has painted along the streets of the Vieux Carré and the Garden District, I know how challenging it is to stand for hours with a brush in one's hand as

the tropical climate and parades of tourists work against you. The Big Easy tests the mettle of even the best plein-air painters, but it also offers some of the richest painting material available in any city in the world. It is a perfect location for creating pictures that achieve Sandusky's main goal: to "present an entirely new way of seeing the world you thought you knew."

In offering us this fresh vision of the world, Sandusky continues a practice begun in the seventeenth century of going out into nature to search for its truths. Artists first set up their easels in gardens while waiting for patrons to pose for portraits, but in time they came to regard the activity as an essential method for understanding the visual world. By the mid-nineteenth century, painters felt a moral obligation to train their eyes amidst the changing light and atmosphere of the Italian, French, and American landscape. Great painters like Camille Corot, Claude Monet, William Merritt Chase, and Frederic E. Church carried their supplies to locations near and far to gather material; and many of them also conducted classes for eager art students.

Sandusky's ideas about painting directly from nature are shared by an increasing number of contemporary artists. Groups of plein-air painters are active in every region of the country, especially in California, where the climate and tradition make outdoor painting an obvious choice of activities. But few of those artists operate with as much awareness and commitment as Sandusky.

The reproductions in this book of Sandusky's paintings offer a marvelous study of how one determined, knowledgeable, and spirited artist responds to his environment; and the text explains the fascinating process by which those pictures were created.

M. STEPHEN DOHERTY





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