

Every week, members of the Artcenter gather together in hopes of...

Finding beauty outdoors

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Summer Guide editor

Northern Lower Michigan's beautiful landscapes make it a perfect place for artists who find inspiration in the outdoors.

A group of painters from the Artcenter in Traverse City are among those who gather each week at scenic sites — from farms to galleries in neighboring towns — to paint.

The practice of painting outside, on location is called plein air painting. For those who do it, there's nothing more satisfying.

"All winter we have to work inside," said Catherine Cron, a plein air group member who has been painting for more than 60 years. "It's so nice to get back outside and work from nature. There's more inspiration, watching something that's actually alive and moving. Like the leaves here are moving and the blossoms are speaking to you and you can hear the wind and feel the sun and then put that all in the painting."

The plein air group was formed by Artcenter member Mary Ellen Thero and friend Ruth Braun five years ago.

"We met in a class and we used to go out together, just the two of us," Thero said. "Then we thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice if there were more people that would like to join us?' So, we put a schedule in our newsletter at the Artcenter that anyone was welcome to come and that's how it started."

On a nice day, like the group's outing to Iris Farms

in Traverse City, eight people showed up to paint. Numbers vary from week to week.

"It's just a very relaxed organization," Thero said. "You come when you want to. And there's no cost involved and there's no instruction. Anyone's welcome to come who likes to paint on location."

Group members can choose their forms of expression, but must be quick to catch the ever-changing landscape, Thero said.

"It's a whole different idea," she said. "You have this whole landscape to consider so you really have to narrow things down. You have to be very quick. That's why a lot of us use watercolor or pastels — to catch shadows and different circumstances of weather."

Group member Lynne Hertler has been plein air painting for a year and finds having a whole landscape a benefit instead of a challenge.

"You don't have to think about what your background is going to be," she said. "You don't have to create something. You always have a background."

The group is made up of mostly amateur artists, but some members have had pieces on display.

"A lot of us are in galleries and sometimes we are lucky enough to sell something," Thero said. "I've sold something right off my easel at times when I'm on location."

Cron and Thero said sometimes the hardest part of selling a piece is letting go of the memories associ-

ated with the location and the people they were painting with.

"I have so many (paintings) that when it comes time to sell them sometimes I think, 'Well, I can't let that one go, because it has too many memories,'" Cron said. "It's something so personal."

Half of the plein air experience is making those memories and forming friendships, Cron said.

"It's so wonderful to meet

other people doing the same thing we're doing," she said. "To meet these other women and for me, to meet people closer in my age group who are painting. It's wonderful for me to have that kind of relationship with other women."

Hertler said the group has given her confidence as a budding artist.

"Everybody always finds a nice thing to say about everybody's paintings," she said. "There's never any-

thing negative. It's always, 'I love that, I want to try that,' or 'what a great idea.' It's always very positive."

The group meets every Thursday through Aug. 26. July's locations include the Grand Traverse Lighthouse, Glen Haven's Coast Guard Life Saving Station and Twisted Fish Gallery in Elk Rapids.

For more information about plein air painting, call the Artcenter at 941-9488.



Record-Eagle/Lara Neel

Right: Michelle Kelly sketches out her piece before she begins to paint. Below: Catherine Cron has been painting for over 60 years and enjoys being able to work at scenic places like the Iris Farm the Artcenter group has visited.



Record-Eagle/Lara Neel

Above: Catherine Cron fills in the irises in her drawing during the Artcenter's plein air painting session at Iris Farms. Left: In early June, the Iris Farm on M-72 was just beginning to see the first blooms in its fields of irises.

