

JSS Summer Art Program- Civita Castellana 2012

*“ The strong experience of nature... is the necessary basis for all conception of art on which rests the grandeur and beauty of all future work “ - Cezanne*

The JSS Summer Art program was on my radar for sometime. This was the year that everything was in place to enable me the space and time, all I needed was to apply but for which session? The last time I travelled abroad alone was many years ago. I opted for the Master Class, creative director Israel Hershburg and Yael Scalia both teaching. It gave me the most flexibility over the two weeks I was planning to attend and would allow me to work independently or join any additional groups being run. Having submitted some portfolio images on line my application was accepted. I was now full of excitement and anticipation of the new experience to come.

The weeks flew by, I kept myself busy researching into Corot in Italy, the town of Civita Castellana (65km north of Rome) and surrounding area, looking at the work of the American artists Brian Rego and E.M Saniga, teaching during my two week session and the other artists attending. E-mails were speeding back and forth between my self and Larry Groff about travel logistics and materials. Larry having been on the program before in Italy was most informative and helpful.

Travelling to Europe with paints, a field easel, supports and canvas was going to be a challenge. Not knowing what to expect, I covered all the options. With a very limited luggage allowance due to the British budget airline ‘ Easy Jet ‘ I decided to risk sending my easel and some materials by parcel post directly to the hotel I had been allocated. This did turn out very successfully, but I would not recommend it without double-checking with a courier. One exception was my easel umbrella, (I would highly recommend if considering the JSS next year) I had purchased directly from the manufacturer Julien U.K. who assured me they have the distribution network in place sadly it never materialized. Just before the end of my stay I was contacted to say it was in Italy but due to a typo on the address label (nothing to do with me) the Italian courier refused to deliver the parcel. Being fair skinned fortunately I had a good hat that only came off my head in bed!

As the only representative from the U.K. joining the program and having not visited Rome for over twenty years I chose to arrive a couple of days earlier than the rest of the group, this gave me the opportunity to meet up with an Italian friend, pay a visit to ‘ Poggi ‘ the traditional art suppliers, the Museum of Modern Art and sightsee. I had

arranged prior to meet Larry Groff at the train station, he also arrived in Rome early, so we could travel down to Civita Castellana together. Larry and I navigated our way through the train station onto a lovely bone shaking carriage. The train journey from Rome to Civita Castellana was stunning, snakeing around charming towns and villages along the way. As we got closer to our destination we came upon the majestic Mount Soratte. So vividly captured in the paintings by Corot.

The fortified medieval town of Civita Castellana was unexpected and delightful. We were met at the railway station by Linda Adams, the program co-ordinator and JSS student who drove us to the Palace Hotel Relais Falisco right in the centre of the historical area of the town. The hotel was comfortable and attractive, with plenty of outside space and a roof terrace, very helpful staff who had already put the parcels with my easel and equipment in my room. My bedroom was disappointing as I found it to be rather small and dark. After a few days I did manage to change my room as guests left into a larger one with plenty of natural light. There was an additional cost (I could have done without) that I covered at the end of my stay. The group of 20+ was made up of Americans, Australians and Master Class students from Israel with most staying for the whole six weeks, all over Civita in a variety of accommodation from apartments to bedsits. Unfortunately there was a lot of movement and shuffling around over the first few days due to this being the first time the school had run the program from Civita. With no previous experience of the standard of accommodation, it did take a while for things to settle down. I tried not to let this become too much of a distraction as I was aware of my time being short.

Our first night was really engaging. Israel Hershburg and Yael Scalia took us on a walking tour of the town pointing out possible painting locations and vistas. We were then given a civic welcome by the local major and officers in an extraordinary building in the central square

'*Piazza Matteotti*' called by the locals the 'Barbie' building due to its ornate decoration and pastel colour. A delicious group dinner followed at the restaurant 'Panne Pomodoro' this was the initial opportunity for us all to be together and introduce ourselves. The first week was like a roller coaster of emotions I really did not have any preconceived ideas about what my two weeks would be like. Civita Castellana was architecturally fascinating with many extraordinary details and a distinguished history. The Cathedral of *Santa Maria di Pozzano* in the centre was beautiful. We were spoilt with unusual and breathtaking motifs from the main fortress and surrounding perimeter wall, to Mount Soratte one way and the deep gorges of Tufa dotted with catacombs the other. A town un-

spoilt and real, washing lines hanging above your head, families accompanied by grandparents, children and pets all around. It did feel like a movie set. The whole group was embraced by the locals who were very proud to have all these artists in their midst. At night it was lively, friendly and safe. I chose to eat supper with the small group of painters staying at the hotel, all our meals were pre-booked in local wine bars and restaurants, rotated every week. Meals were fresh, authentic with a vegetarian option. Wine was included but a modest amount. I really enjoyed getting together at the end of the day, sharing ideas and interests it was a very supportive and collaborate atmosphere.

Eventually the days took on a momentum, following a tight schedule of working in short sessions. Critiques were held between 1- 3 pm in the courtyard of the hotel, surrounded by some shade, every day (except at the weekend). Back out again until at least 7 pm then time for a quick shower and clean up of brushes. Supper was booked for 8pm and was frequently followed by a talk from an invited guests or artist at around 9pm in the conference room of the hotel. High point for me was Israel Hershburg's marvelous talk on 'Corot and the Landscape' inspirational and thought provoking and E.M Saniga's presentation of his work. Exhausting but totally fulfilling days. Painting became very intense, the heat was sometimes unbearable (not helped by my elusive umbrella) I was propelled by the energy of the program. The critiques held by Israel and Yael plus guests were long but with so many attending there was much to say. I found them informative, inspiring and constructive. The rigor of making 'one shot' paintings that the JSS students were encouraged to do I found particularly demanding and frustrating. I felt that I had not resolved in a couple of hours the ideas that interested me. Personally preferring to take a slower more analytical approach. Working on a composition, colour mixing and immersing myself into a chosen motif over a longer period. Two weeks really was not going to be enough time for me to get the full benefit from the program. The JSS students work in the critiques was really impressive and accomplished with a strong sense of 'the light', but there was a lot of uniformity particularly with the use of colour that I found confusing and indistinguishable. However, every day there was always some real showstoppers, inspiring, original and individual paintings that definitely grabbed everyone's attention.

I went into the second week having picked up a nasty sickness virus luckily only lasting 48hrs. Disappointed at having missed Israel's presentation of his own work he very kindly offered to run through his slides with me in his own time. His work is beautiful and very moving leaving me lost for words having run out of superlatives. Time was fleeting by! I continued to paint from my

chosen motifs, sometimes joining a small group often working with the American painter Brian Rego who was inspirational. I was thrilled to have had some very supportive direction from the distinguished artist E.M Saniga also teaching that week, his words have had a huge impact on me. At last the full day coach excursion to Urbino, Arezzo and Sansepolcro this was a dream come true. The journey was long, hot and exhausting but to be able to see the paintings and fresco's of Piero della Francesca and Giotto was invigorating. The excursion was exciting with the most picturesque natural beauty all around. The atmosphere on the bus was terrific everyone mixing together, teachers, painters and students with mutual respect and admiration, having spent quality time over the past two weeks, sharing personal group discussions and critiques. Israel telling jokes most of the way, reading extracts and reciting poetry.

Coming to Civita Castellana and seeing first hand how the young Corot's paintings clearly demonstrated his gained possession of the Italian landscape, rhythmic and dynamic, realizing his modern approach to landscape and how it has exerted such a powerful influence on the generation that followed, especially Cezanne is what I take back with me.

I have met some incredibly talented, highly focused accomplished artists. Gained new friends and have been inspired. Returning to my studio in Cornwall full of motivation, empowered and reflecting on my experience.

Judith Green

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