

Notes from Civita Castellano
By Eileen Eder

When I came across Israel Hershberg's Master Class program in Italy my only thought was that it was an opportunity too good to miss and I applied for admission. Once accepted, I cleared my calendar, convinced my family and made plans to join the group for one month of intensive landscape painting in Civita Castellano from mid July to mid August 2012. Even though I have been painting for years, show in galleries and teach painting classes myself I saw this as an opportunity to improve my work. Israel works in a realist, perceptual manner with outstanding aesthetics and I wanted to absorb some of his exquisite, artistic taste.

There were several classes available in addition to Israel Hershberg's Master Class that were being taught by different teachers from the US as well as the Jerusalem Studio School for artists with various levels of experience. Each teacher was renowned for their own work and were experienced teachers. Students were able to choose from 2, 4 or 6 weeks of class time as well. All the groups made for a terrific mix of artists from all over the globe with the majority coming from Israel and the JSS.

Now that I'm back home and gave had time to reflect on the trip here are some of the highlights; the camaraderie and conversations between 30 to 40 artists all living and working nearby and often sharing meals together, the beautiful and ancient town of Civita Castellano and surrounding area offered amazing and beautiful motifs wherever you turned your head, the ability to paint morning and evening 6 days a week (Thursdays we traveled to see major influential artists in churches or museums, an important adjunct to our learning), the frequent inspiring lectures from distinguished artists and, finally and probably the most important, was learning by seeing everyone's work and listening to the group critiques for the Master Class I was in that were conducted by the Israel Hershberg as well as artists Yael Scalia and E.M. Sangia (our guest artist for 2 weeks).

The challenges I encountered had to do with creature comforts; one of the biggest was the heat which we avoided from 1 to almost 5 pm as it was a frypan 36 to 40+ degrees Celsius. Fortunately it cooled down considerably during evening and morning hours. Sleep was sometimes a challenge as lectures started at 9 pm and easily went to 11+ making it tough to get out early to paint and especially tough to get on the 6 am bus trips. I figured out real fast that sonnellini (naps) were the only way to survive. I was grateful for our beautiful hotel with AC. Many evenings I had to decide between eating dinner or painting which was frustrating. Surprisingly, even though the heat and not getting enough sleep would typically have me exhausted I found that I was completely energized everyday! I was anxious to get back out to paint at every opportunity or listen to the next lecture.

In all it was a great adventure and I learned a lot. I am grateful that I was there for a full month and would have wanted to continue the additional 2 weeks if I could. (A two week program isn't long enough to accomplish much positive change.) I did achieve my goal of absorbing some of the elements I need to strive for to become a better artist. Getting feedback through the critiques, though not pleasant at times, has resulted in making some positive changes. In my case it is giving up details and simplifying to become more of a poet and less of a reporter. Painting is a slow and continuous journey where, in addition to putting in a lot of milage drawing and painting, I need to be constantly re-energized by looking and learning from other great artists while re-evaluating my own work. And yes, I'd like to go back and do it again!