

JEAN LEGASSICK

When Being Determined Pays Off

Nevada artist Jean LeGassick set a goal: "I was determined to create at least one painting every day. I was ruthless about meeting my goal, and the result was that my paintings became looser and more expressive. What I didn't anticipate was that my studio work would also get dramatically better and I would derive more pleasure from both."

The fact that Jean LeGassick confronted challenges to become one of the top plein air painters in the country will likely make her one of the most effective demonstrators and teachers during the *First Annual Plein Air Convention & Expo* in Las Vegas from April 12-15, 2012 (www.pleinairconvention.com). Her experience makes her a highly

empathetic and motivating instructor. She has a clear understanding of the obstacles that can get in an artist's way, as well as the rewards that come from being unwavering in one's commitment to succeed.

"I studied commercial illustration at Art Center College of Design, and although I did go outside painting with Dan McCaw, who was

Canyon Light Show

2010, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Private collection

Plein air





Canyon Patriarch

2001, oil on canvas on board, 24 x 30 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



Afternoon in the Granite Chief Wilderness

2007, oil on canvas on board, 24 x 30 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



Wind Shaped

2011, oil on canvas on board, 11 x 14 in.

Collection the artist

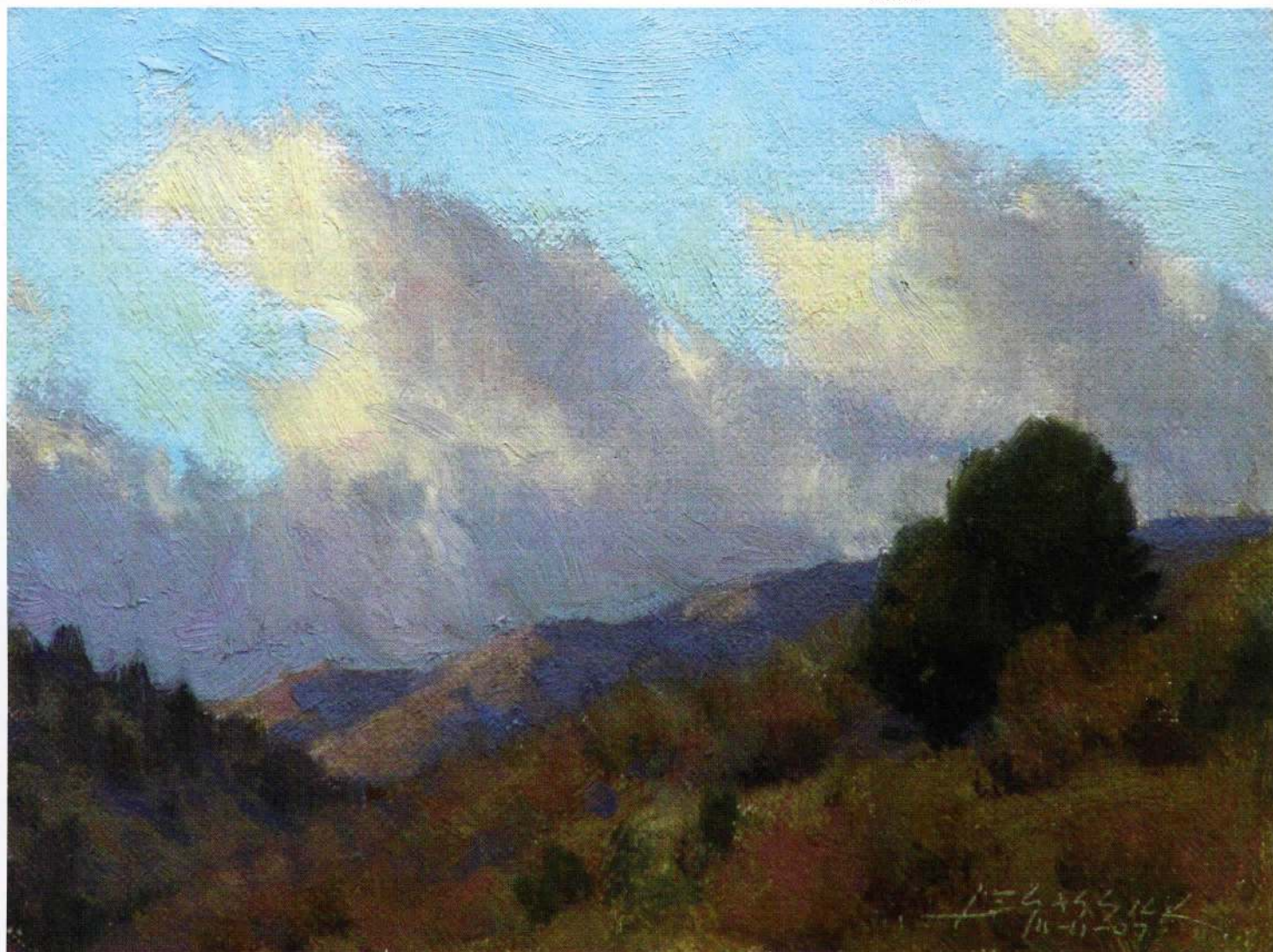
Plein air

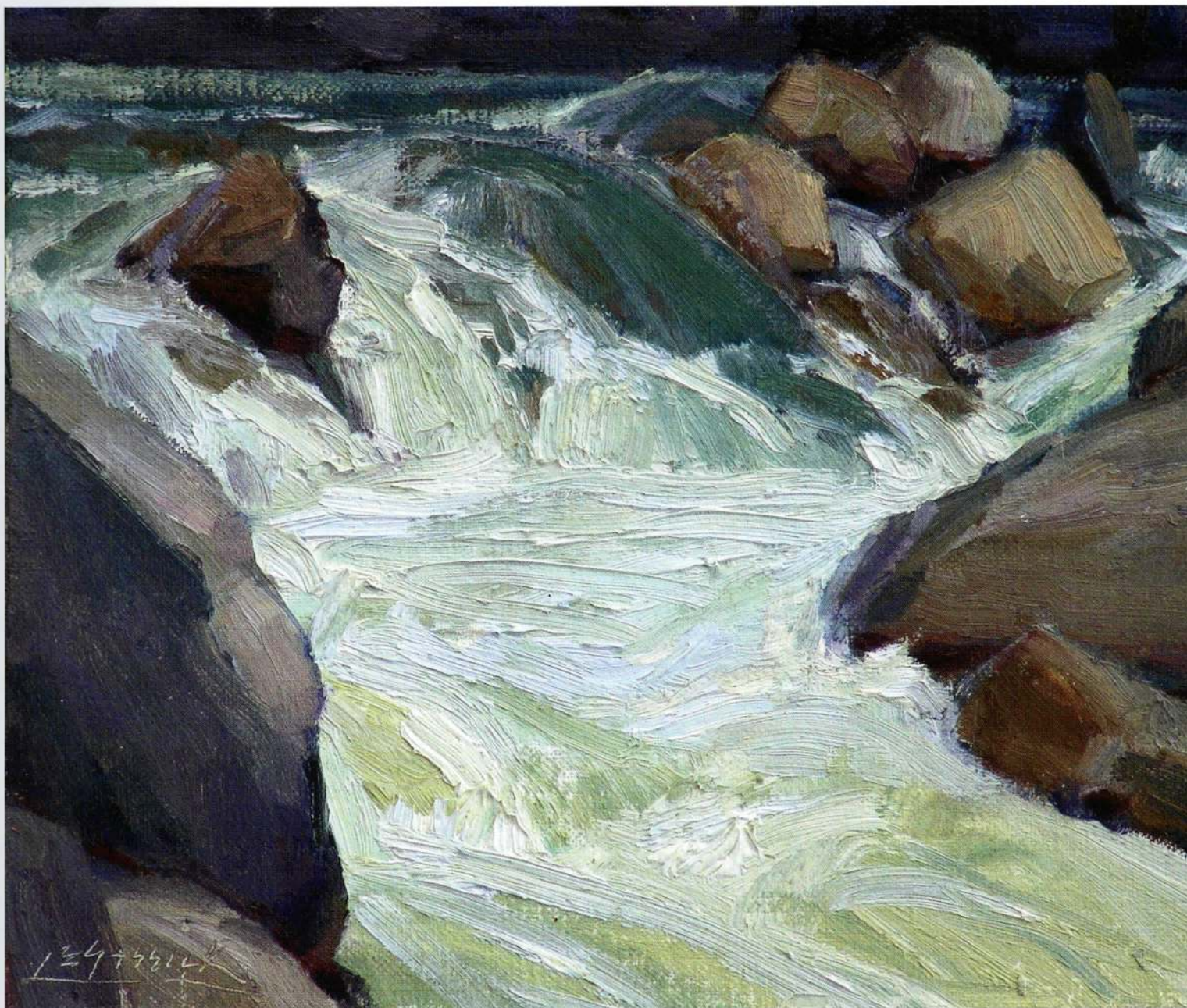
Dancing Clouds

2008, oil on canvas on board, 6 x 8 in.

Private collection

Plein air





Every Which Way

2008, oil on canvas on board, 8 x 10 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Jean LeGassick

BIRTHDATE: 1950

LOCATION: Silver City, NV, and Surprise Valley, CA

INFLUENCES: Maynard Dixon, Edgar Payne, Robert Loughheed, Isaac Levitan

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one of my instructors, most of my experience was in the studio," LeGassick says. "After graduating, I moved to Bishop, California, where many of the early plein air painters worked, and I assumed I knew enough about painting to just set up my easel and paint pictures of comparable quality. When that didn't happen, I was humbled by the reality of what it takes to paint outdoors and I knew my education was far from complete.

"I might have given up and stayed in my studio, but I'm happiest when I am outdoors, so I wanted to find a way to improve my skills and combine my love of art and nature. I signed up for a workshop with Michael Lynch in 1990 and with Kevin Macpherson in 1991. Michael lit the fire in me for plein air work, and Kevin encouraged me to paint every day because that would help me solve problems and learn. I followed their advice for a while, but as my career developed, there was more and more pressure to paint large oils in the studio because that's what gets attention in galleries and in competitive shows."

In December 2006, LeGassick felt she needed another self-determined challenge that would get her out of the studio and back to painting outdoors every day. "I built a little

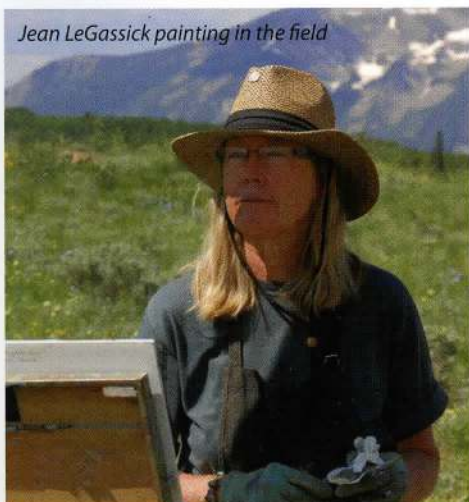


Sageland

2011, oil on canvas on board, 11 x 14 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air



Jean LeGassick painting in the field

pochade box and was so delighted with it after I painted the first 6 x 8-inch painting that I decided to once again establish a discipline to paint one picture from life every single day," she explains on her website. "The little box fit into a satchel that I could put over my shoulder when I went on a walk, and when I saw something that excited me, I would sit down on a low backpacker's stool, prop my box up on the ground, and paint. I could also toss the kit into my truck when I went on errands, and sometimes an impromptu scene would suddenly present itself. I would pull over to the side of the road and paint right from the cab of the truck."

Day-To-Day Challenges

"Some days it was easy and I did several small paintings in the landscape near my home, but on other days I would have to spend the evening painting a still life of things in my kitchen before I could go to bed," LeGassick said during a recent interview. "The result was that I often painted things that I otherwise might not have considered. I stayed with this rigorous daily discipline for six months, then the busy art show period of summer and fall forced me to concentrate on other projects. However, I recognize how valuable the discipline was for me, so I now continue to paint little 6 x 8-inch panels as often as I can."

LeGassick confesses that at the time she did these little paintings, her studio painting was becoming less enjoyable. "The truth is, I hated painting in the studio for a while," she says. "For someone like me, who loves to hike, camp, and gain inspiration from nature, the studio can become a very confining place. Doing those small paintings every day got me excited once again about painting larger canvases in the studio because the experience expanded my range of subjects and stopped me from getting tighter and tighter."



Another unexpected benefit was that LeGassick reaffirmed how she wanted her paintings to look, and she allowed herself the same freedom outdoors that she exercised in the studio. "The pressure to produce made me less willing to scrape a painting down when it wasn't going well," she says, "and I was reluctant to experiment with new approaches. I needed to take more risks to keep myself focused and to be fully engaged in the painting process, and the daily exercise of painting whatever caught my attention helped me understand that."

Rustic Adventure

LeGassick decided to take another risk when she offered a workshop in the Grand Tetons for artists who were willing to give up some creature comforts to work more independently and save money. "I decided to offer the kind of workshop I would like to attend, with people having the option to camp in tents, RVs, or rustic lodges," she says. "That way they would be closer to great painting sites, they could save money, and they could really enjoy the park. I also wanted to avoid what usually happens in workshops, when the participants can only go to locations with plenty of off-road parking and bathrooms."

LeGassick had the workshop participants travel together on the first two days so she could offer demonstrations and lots of individual attention, then encouraged the students to spend the remaining three days at any location within a specific area of the park. She says, "I drove around to talk with students at the various places where they were painting, and I communicated with them by cell phone if I couldn't find them or if they needed me right away. We all got together at 4 p.m. for a group critique, and those who weren't going to drive afterwards could have a cocktail. I know it's

Articles of My Trade

2007, oil on canvas on board, 6 x 8 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air

not the kind of workshop everyone wants, so I'm still teaching the traditional kind of workshop near hotels and restaurants, but I'd like to offer more rustic adventures for those who enjoy them.

"Although I always offer three or more demonstrations during a workshop, I really prefer to gauge the instruction to the needs of the individual students. I can suggest exercises to help with handling values, color mixture, edges, or composition, or I can review the paintings the participants have been working on. I used to teach in a community college, and that helped me gain the ability to articulate my recommendations without having to paint directly on a student's painting. I've recently been doing watercolor paintings, and I can use that experience to help people who work with that medium."

LeGassick is a member of the California Art Club and the Plein Air Painters of America, and at one point was in charge of organizing workshops for the latter group. She will be offering the benefits of her experiences as a teacher, group organizer, and professional artist during the *Plein Air Convention* in Las Vegas from April 12-15, 2012. For more information, visit www.pleinairconvention.com.



M. Stephen Doherty is Editor of *PleinAir* magazine.



See more of Jean LeGassick's work and a short video with the artist in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.