



July 2020

**An Interview with
Awards Judge for AIS First Online Exhibition
Ned Mueller, AISM**

I am only a few months away from turning 80 and have been drawing and/or painting since I was four years old! We did not have much money, but I was very fortunate to get encouragement from my parents, teachers and friends and along with growing up in one of the most beautiful areas in the country...the beautiful Gallatin valley just north of Yellowstone National Park. My Father was a bit of a frustrated artist and one of my great uncles was one of the countries better sculptors....drawing, sports, exploring and climbing mountains were my great passions and I had plenty of opportunities to be involved in all of them...the area was safe and I was not dissuaded from trying anything except criminal activity...I certainly didn't appreciate what I had at the time...I thought the rest of the world was all like that!

They were still teaching the Arts in the schools then... that is sadly missing so much from most of our school systems now! I had a great Art teacher in high school that encouraged me a great deal and I did the cartoons for our school paper. We lived in Bozeman and Montana State University is there, it was 1958 and their Art Department was deeply committed to the more contemporary Art movement of those times. I did not have the sophistication or appreciation for it and as I was a pretty good draughtsman, the Architecture Department looked like a good compromise for me.

My parents had moved to the San Francisco Bay area and I stayed behind to be with my friends and lived in a Fraternity house for a year, before wanderlust and boredom led five of us to drop out of school and rent a house looking for more excitement in San Francisco. That lasted about a year and fortunately some encouraging soul searching from home led me to decide that I wanted to become an Illustrator...had little confidence and no idea how to do that...but my father had the wisdom to tell me to try in get in the best Art School I could as that quality was what I would be having to compete with if I wanted to survive in that very competitive field.

I was amazed that one of the best Art Schools in the country, The Art Center School of Design accepted my threadbare portfolio and offered me a scholarship starting with the third semester. I had to work some nights and odd jobs on weekends, and with some aid from home and a Government loan, I was able to manage and immersed myself along with some of the most talented people not only in the country, but also students from around the world! The school had majors in Illustration, Fine Art, Architectural Design, Product Design, Photography and Automobile Design where Detroit sent their top people to study. All the instructors were working professionals and if you didn't keep up with their high standards, they politely asked you to leave! We were buried with homework and we didn't get much sleep, ate poorly, but we got out on weekend to play flag football and I helped get us into the Hollywood Studio Basketball League...got to play against movie stars and the like...didn't win any games and the school frowned on it...but it was a great experience and gave some much needed balance to our monk like existence. The school started a high school drawing class on Saturdays and they asked me to teach it and I soon found that I loved to teach and they paid me more than I had ever made in my life! They also had me filling in for some of the regular drawing instructors when they got sick...that was a bit of a disaster as I was way over my head...older students resented me and I did not handle it well at all! We started out with about a hundred of us and by graduation there were only ten of us left.

After graduation I spent a short time in the Marine Corps and went back to the Bay area and San Rafael. I started to take on freelance work when I could...competition was really stiff in the San Francisco area and

good Illustration work and assignments were really hard to come by, as I had to work as a laborer, carpenter and eventually as a mailman to keep myself afloat. The one thing I did then and always have...I attended open life drawing sessions to keep my eye and judgement as sharp as I could...and took on freelance work at night and weekends when it came my way.

At Art Center one of the top Instructors told us if we could learn to draw well, we would always be able to find work...and he was right. My drawing skills have served me well all through my career. Art has a lot to do with taste and judgement; sharpening the eye and how and what we see. **I am convinced, as are many other successful artists, that drawing is the main thing we can do to improve the quality of our work.** I see it as improving your judgement/your eye as to what works and what doesn't and you don't necessarily have to draw the figure. Learn how to draw well. If you want to focus on doing figures that is fine, but if you draw couches, trees, mountains, you are still sharpening your eye and your judgement. Ask how big, how wide, tall, what angle, it's all about the "Art of Seeing" that I call some of my best workshops. I have a friend who is one of the best landscape artists in the country tell me that he envied me, because I was more of a "true artist" and could draw and paint everything well. I told him that you don't want to draw or paint everything like I do...you love landscapes and so do them...and you do them so bloody well!! I was trained as an Illustrator and one never knew what assignment one would get and so we needed to be able to do everything, from silver teapots to rugged mountain scenes and very accurate skyscrapers...and the good drawing skills were a necessity.

After about 25 years of freelance and studio stables around 1980 I ran on to one of the many Western Art Shows where I was amazed by all that was going on. Artists were mostly doing a lot of western figure, animal and landscapes scenes that I really loved. Having been raised in western Montana, I got involved with them and eventually felt like I could work full time as it was a booming Western Art Market and all my skills enabled me to kind of hit the ground running. I eventually got invited to show in some of the best Galleries and Western Art Exhibitions in the country, like the National Academy of Western Art, Artists of America and the Northwest Rendezvous Group. They had many of the very best Traditional and Impressionistic artists in the country and I got to meet them, paint with them, become friends with, and take workshops and inspiration from it all. It is a lot like sports or so many other things...one plays or works with the very best and one gets better! A lot of life seems to be just showing up!

I have always enjoyed being around people and, generally speaking, get along pretty well with everyone, I have always enjoyed being part of Art Organizations and meeting artists...most proud of being one of the Founders and President of "The Puget Sound Art League" we started here in the Seattle area. We modeled it after the "Palette and Chisel Club" in Chicago where we had about 150 members and two studios where everyone could come and draw or paint every day from live models, both portrait, figure, and still life. We invited artists like Richard Schmid, Harley Brown, Bill Reese and Ron Lukas to teach workshops. We were a non-profit and everyone loved it. We just wanted a place where people, mostly those who didn't have a chance to go to Art school, could come and sharpen their skills and creative nature! It lasted about 6 years; some of us just got burnt out and couldn't keep it going. Been a few efforts to start it again, but never did happen. I am amazed that more large cities do not have similar things going like that. All it usually takes is one or two people to get together and organize it, and particularly get someone who knows about grants and things like that. We had annual dues of about \$150, which covered our studio and model expenses, but it was all volunteer and after five or six years some of us got burnt out and we could not find anyone to pick the ball up and run with it.

I kind of always liked belonging to Art Organizations. It's very nice to get away from the confines of the studio and share struggles, ideas and opportunities with other Artists. I became an officer in some, a couple of Presidencies, but after a while it can get too time consuming and new faces with fresh ideas need to come in...rewarding in many ways, but most of us can only do it for so long! I had this idea that I wanted to be a

"great Artist", one of the best. My problem: I thought I "had" to be instead of a healthier "wanted" to be, and had to work in all the mediums and do every subject under the sun...and all exceptionally well! Mainly, because of my drawing skills, I could do that, as good drawing compensated for a lot of ills. I was doing still life, figures, portraits, boats, landscapes, animals, everything, and also thought I should be able to do them all in all the mediums...oil, pastel, gouache, watercolor and acrylics. I even dabbled in sculpture for a while. I enjoyed them all and did pretty good; got in a lot of different galleries, shows, organizations, got a bunch of awards...you get the idea! I thought that everyone would respect that, and most Artists did, but not so much with some of the galleries and special exhibitions as I was told by some galleries that I was unmarketable and to get into some of the best exhibitions I was told, "If you do figures you have to be as great as so and so, and if you do landscapes you have to be as great as so and so"! I was very good at this, but not a Master of most. Needless to say, it played havoc in my mind...after all, remember I "had" to be the best and if you are not...you are worthless. I was getting some therapy at the time...but quite in denial about a lot of things! One morning I woke up and realized that no one else is trying to do all this, and what the hell is going on. At least that was a start...some of those old core beliefs linger on in many of us and we just have to put them in their place!

I have a lot of questions that Doreen has asked me to try and answer and I am kind of trying to do that and put it in somewhat of a flow or order is that is at all possible! As an instructor, I found that it is very difficult to put the ideas or concepts of creating Art into words. I think the reality is that it is very difficult to teach "Art", as that has to come from the individual. We can teach some processes and fundamentals, and even that goes only so far.

It seems that there are three stages of being an Artist: The first stage a beginner will usually draw or paint what they know: grass is green, the sky is blue, flesh is "fleshy color", all shadows are cool, all light is warm, etc. In teaching portraits, 95% of the time, even though the head is turned sideways and up, a beginner will draw it "straight on". Then they learn to draw and paint what they see: sometimes the grass is yellow and the sky is green, sometimes shadows are warm, light is often cool...on and on. Then, the third stage is the best, we start painting more what we feel, ironically also what we think, but our thinking has changed. The problem is so many want to be able to paint the third stage right away, and it takes most of us years to get to that point!

I tell my students the definition of a good painting is "An interesting or compelling arrangement of shapes, colors and edges and textures"; not a perfect definition, but it can be pretty much applied to Classical, Traditional and Abstract! It is quite difficult to make a go as an Artist, and if I had to give any advice, at least as far as improving the quality of our Art, common sense tells us that if we do a lot of anything, we will get pretty good at it. Whether you are doing landscapes, figures, still life, or whatever, we need to love whatever that is, not just a grind, and much of the time a joy! It's a little easier if one has a trust fund or someone to support us, but many of us don't and we may have to bag groceries, dig ditches, deliver mail, pound nails...all things I have done...but those experiences enrich our lives and help build character! I also have tried to live more simply: get a used car, not have a big mortgage, ask myself if I really need what I would like to buy. My biggest sin has been buying Art books, but I can rationalize that as being a great source of guidance and inspiration.

Most people working 8 to 5 may have a bad day and they still get paid, but we do a bad painting, we probably won't sell it. But, then, that is relative, for many of us it can be difficult to even sell our best work! That can get us into a long subjective and complicated discussion on what is good Art, what is a good Collector, and all of that.

I am not the best Artist to give advice on the "Business of Art". When I started out, we relied a lot on just getting better and on the Galleries and Exhibitions to promote us and sell our Art. With the internet and huge influx of Artists today, it is a different world. Many Artists seem to do it right and certainly certain styles and

techniques are more appreciated. It seems like everyone has to work that out for themselves and often do a lot of things we just don't want to do. There are many more promoters now that make a living telling us what we need to do, certainly no shortage of that! I used to be much more outspoken with my opinions...and still am at times...but I have just seen too many people get submarined when they try and speak their truth! Many different points of view on that.

Back to the process of creating Art...be patient, be persistent and try and not to get too discouraged. Keep drawing, not necessarily having to do the figure well...any kind of drawing will sharpen our eye. Develop your judgement, try and look and appreciate "Good Art" and know the difference from "Bad Art". It's true, that is all very relative, and over time that judgement should improve. Often one hears that "bad Art is good business" and that is true at times...we all see it...and it's probably a good thing when we are starting out. I look back at so many paintings that I sold when starting out and I cringe when I see some of them now (and that includes a couple in a Museum here) but our skills improve and our tastes will change. Otherwise, if we like so many of the same things we did 40 years ago, it probably means we haven't grown much! Growth is painful, we need to - no we don't need to - but why not? Then our lives become richer. Money is not the only "richer" thing that counts, many do both! Find a good instructor that cares about their students as individuals and how they can help them with their needs and make them better. Too many people are teaching just to sell their demos...too much emphasis on that instead of helping the students.

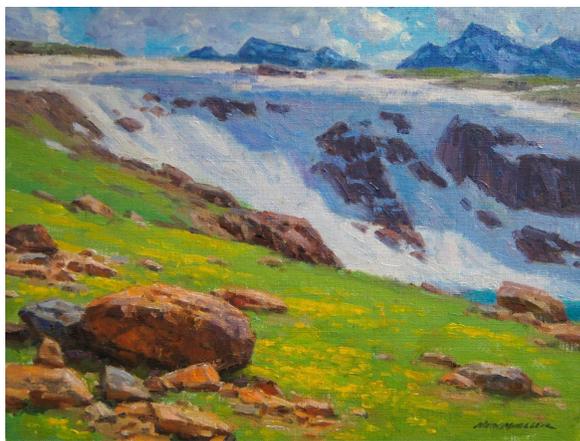
I have juried a lot of shows and always ask myself, "What was I thinking!?" Trying to play expert in something that needs to be objective...but also very much subjective! I encourage students to enter juried shows...but usually save your typical work for galleries and try and have something a little unique...as most "good" judges have seen it all, and are usually looking for something that is not just well done, but unique or different. This is easier said than done...but at least maybe have that mind bent when considering what to enter. I am like everyone else; I often wonder how the judge could pick what they did. I have seen Artists I highly respect pick something that I just don't get, and also Gallery and Museum directors jury shows and wonder what the heck is going on!? On the other end I have won awards with paintings that I felt were just not as great as some others who did not get an award and also vice versa, not get an award when I thought I had a good chance for one and thought that some of the winners...well, were not winners!! In a way its a bit of a "crap" shoot...life is not fair and a good argument can be made by many that Art is even less fair!

I was asked to share my palette and I generally have a cool and warm of each basic color: Titanium white, cad lemon yellow, cad yellow light, orange, cad red light, alizarin crimson, transparent brown oxide, chromium oxide green, viridian, cobalt blue, ultramarine blue, and ivory black. I will add colors as I see fit such as permanent rose, thalo green, etc. BLACK is a COLOR: it makes beautiful greens, violets and more. It was ostracized by instructors as beginners would see shadows as darker and just use black, as that made such sense to them! Try different things, brands, colors, brushes, substrates. Everyone is different, so find out what works best for you, not what necessarily works best for Instructor X. As we proceed with our Art we will find out a lot about what we like and don't like.

As I am the juror of Awards for this historic first online Impressionist show...a few words on my thoughts of how I interpret the word or title "Impressionism". In a way the word is self-explanatory...it's an Artist's impression or interpretation of whatever they are seeing and feeling about a subject. As opposed to more "Traditional" painting, it is usually done with looser (not sloppy) brushstrokes, and/or an exaggeration, refinement and more beautiful than the original scene or subject the Artist is interpreting. It seems like it comes into play more when an Artist is really trying to impose more of their own individual style and techniques instead of copying just what is in front of them. I might add that again those that have mastered those first two steps of painting and are starting to get into putting more of their feelings, ideas or interpretations seem to me to have the best quality. It's not unusual that students want to do that stage first...a lot of work and time...not months, but many years involved in the first two, although I understand

where skills can get in the way of creativity. It doesn't have to, but it does, and we all have to work those things out as best we can. We can all talk a great game...but it is another thing as to how much and are we being true to ourselves...and I do include myself! Lucky ones that I call "naturals" have that special quality where seemingly it just flows out of their brushes early in their artistic careers!

Last, but not least: how has COVID-19 affected my life and Art? I have a very rare auto immune pancreatic disease and so I am at high risk , and also 80 years old...and if I get the virus I most likely would die...at least that is a strong possibility, and my true love, Karen, keeps me more guarded than most, so I have some pretty strong opinions on how careless and inconsiderate so many people are, especially at this time of writing. I also had a back surgery that went bad some eight years ago and left me with nerve damage (it does not heal), chronic pain and a half dead left leg and sore back! I was in denial for some time...I was really going all out with exhibitions, galleries, plein air shows and workshops and would get in a lot of pain and then get very cranky and did not like that. I probably lost some friends because of it! Anyways, I am still adjusting and have been much marginalized, but having my drawing, painting, and my Art is a saving grace. I have something to get up for in the morning and something to keep my mind occupied and doing something I love. It sometimes affects my work, but I feel that my work is still improving in some areas ..I just can't travel all over the world and hike like I used to, or play tennis and soccer, give more workshops or produce larger paintings, submit so much to exhibitions and such, but that is not so bad...I needed to slow up anyways! And obviously still able to give my opinions and advice when asked and sometimes not asked! Last, but not least...fall in love! After my back surgery, I did not want to be a burden on anyone, but my wonderful Karen came along and we fell in love...we get along so well.. she is also an Artist...lives in Ireland where we met...I was a special Guest Artist in their great "Art in the Open" plein air show....we tease and joke around a lot, dance in the studio and sing badly together. She is with me for my handicap parking card and I am with her as we can use the HOV lanes!! She has stayed over this trip to look after me with the pandemic, and I am so grateful!! Thanks for getting this far if you did, and best of luck with your Art and have a safe and happy summer!! www.nedmueller.com



www.americanimpressionistsociety.org 231-881-7685

Founded in 1998