

LORI PUTNAM

Chasing the Light Across Countries

Tennessee artist Lori Putnam arranged to meet up with artist friends in Ireland, France, and Italy, where they could explore the qualities of light in the villages and countryside. It was an adventure of too many train rides, miles of walking, inspired painting, and special friendships.



Lori Putnam painting along the Seine River in Paris



A group of artists painting during Art in the Open in Ireland



Haidee-Jo Summers and Putnam painting in Brittany

About five years ago, Lori Putnam and her husband sold all their belongings and traveled to Italy, where she spent seven months in “self-study and artistic growth.” Looking back on that risky venture, Putnam says the “concentrated work accomplished during that period culminated in an impressive breakthrough.” She went back to Europe last summer in the hope of more personal and professional growth, and she planned meetings with other outdoor painters, including Peggi and Ray Roberts, Haidee-Jo Summers, James Richards, Jim Carson, Al Tofanelli, Carol Gray-Weihman, and others.

“I was planning to return for the third year to the Art in the Open plein air festival in Wexford, Ireland [July 29-August 6], and my husband, Mark Putnam, and I also wanted to travel back to Italy later in the summer,” Lori Putnam explains. “I decided that instead of making two separate trips abroad, I would travel and paint on my journey from Ireland to Italy. I mentioned my plans to people I saw at plein air festivals, gallery openings, and the Plein Air Convention in Monterey, and I learned that a number of my friends would be in locations along the way or would be interested in joining us in Peschici, Italy, where Mark and I lived for a couple of months. Before long, I had a list of people to paint with and invitations to demonstrate for workshop groups.”

Art in the Open was one of the largest gatherings of plein air painters from around the world, with more than 200 artists traveling to Wexford, Ireland, from Finland, France, Holland, Australia, England, Spain, Germany, Russia, and the United States. Among those painters were 22 Americans, including Ned Mueller, Marc Dalessio, Joseph Paquet, Valerie Whipple Craig, and Billy O’Donnell. “Artists were working in a wide variety of styles and media, and those who watched us paint and demonstrate were very enthusiastic,” Putnam recalls. “There was a designated painting location on each day of the event, and we were bused to most of them and made our way around on foot. I taught two half-day workshops and gave a seminar on marketing.”

Next on Putnam’s travel itinerary was Brittany, France, where the Tennessee artist met up with Haidee-Jo Summers, a British artist who spends her holidays in Ile de Bréhat. “I painted in Ireland during the two previous plein air events in 2012 and 2011, but this was my first painting trip to Brittany, and I had never seen colors in a village like the ones on that so-called ‘pink island,’” Putnam says. “The island is about two miles long, with lots of great views to paint, under lighting conditions that were much cooler than I would find in Italy.”

The City of Lights was Putnam’s next stop, and she had to haul her luggage on and off three different trains to get from Brittany to Paris.





Sketch of the Louvre

Lori Putnam
2013, oil, 8 x 10 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

Island Living (Ile de Brehât)

2013, oil, 12 x 16 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



(Opposite) **Stopping For Café**

2013, oil, 10 x 8 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



DEMONSTRATION Top: Working with a limited palette of Blue Ridge brand cadmium yellow deep, pyrole red, ultramarine blue, and titanium white, Putnam tones her painting panel with a warm ochre-colored mixture and draws the outlines of the major shapes with a dark color. **Middle:** She then establishes the darkest-valued shapes within the composition. **Bottom:** She then continues breaking up large shapes as she refines this painting of an Irish cottage.

She then spent three days painting by herself, on the streets and along the Seine River. “I was able to figure out the Metro, although I really preferred to walk to various locations so I could see more of the city,” she says. “It was a totally exhilarating experience just being in the city, starting each day with a hot buttered croissant, and painting both familiar and unfamiliar sites.”

Onward to the Champagne region of France, where Putnam met up with James Richards, an artist from Atlanta, Georgia, who was teaching a two-week workshop from August 4-18. “The workshop took place at Le Bonne Etoile, a private home that had been turned into a wonderful venue for workshops,” Putnam explains. “There was a big space for a studio and private bedrooms for all the workshop participants, and I offered a painting demonstration and gave a program on marketing art.”

While attending the Plein Air Convention & Expo in Monterey, California, Putnam asked Jean Stern, executive director of the Irvine Museum in California, to recommend his favorite city in France, the country where he was born. Putnam says, “His immediate answer was Avignon, and that was all the encouragement I needed to make that my next stop in the southeastern region of France. Once I settled in for six days of painting, I knew why Jean recommended it. The colors of the buildings and the light illuminating them were exceptionally beautiful, and there was a great painting subject at every turn.”

The train trip from Avignon to Rome, Italy, took 12 hours, during which Putnam could view the mountains and ocean until she reached Marina di Bibbona. She traveled through Pisa and Livorno along the Ligurian Sea, spent one night in Rome, and then took another eight-hour train ride to reach her destination on the eastern side of Italy, the small community of Peschici. “Mark and I fell in love with the place,” she says, “and I thought it would appeal to a lot of other painters because of its proximity to the deep blue Adriatic Sea and surrounding towns that offer a wide variety of architectural and landscape subjects.” To make it easier on their friends who were traveling to Peschici, Mark Putnam met some of them in Rome and escorted them on the six-hour train ride to the seaside town.

“As I stopped to paint by myself or with other artists, I was able to arrange free or deeply discounted accommodations by giving painting demonstrations and lectures, or gifting paintings to my hosts,” Putnam says. “For example, the Norwegians who own the four apartments in Peschici have purchased several pieces in the past. They are great collectors of mine. I gifted them a painting and they generously allowed all 12 of us to stay here and pay only the owners’ expenses. We had the use of beautiful, fully furnished, full-kitchen homes in the historic center for only about \$30 per night per person.

“The great attraction of this area for painters is the differences in all the painting locations and the warm, glowing light that is so special to Italy. I could promise my friends who visited that they could paint open countryside, whitewashed buildings, the deep blue Adriatic Sea, or charming villages. It’s all available within a short radius of Peschici.”

To make the invitation even more irresistible, Mark Putnam cooked many of the meals for the artists so they could concentrate on painting.

Richland Fine Art in Nashville, Tennessee, is planning to exhibit some of the paintings created by Putnam and her painting companions next year. For more information, visit www.loriputnam.com or www.richlandfineart.com. 

M. STEPHEN DOHERTY is editor in chief of *PleinAir* magazine.

**A street scene in Peschici
that Putnam painted**



Arco Zaffarano
2013, oil, 10 x 8 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

**The group of painters who
joined Putnam in Italy
(left to right): Ray Roberts,
Peggi Kroll-Roberts,
Carole Gray Weihman,
Jim Richards, Katerina
Ring, Krista Straughn, Jim
Carson, Mark Putnam,
Lori Putnam, Sandie
Yarbrough, and Al
Tofanelli.**



**Several artists paint together on a street scenes in Peschci, Italy, where
many of the buildings are whitewashed and domes are blue.**