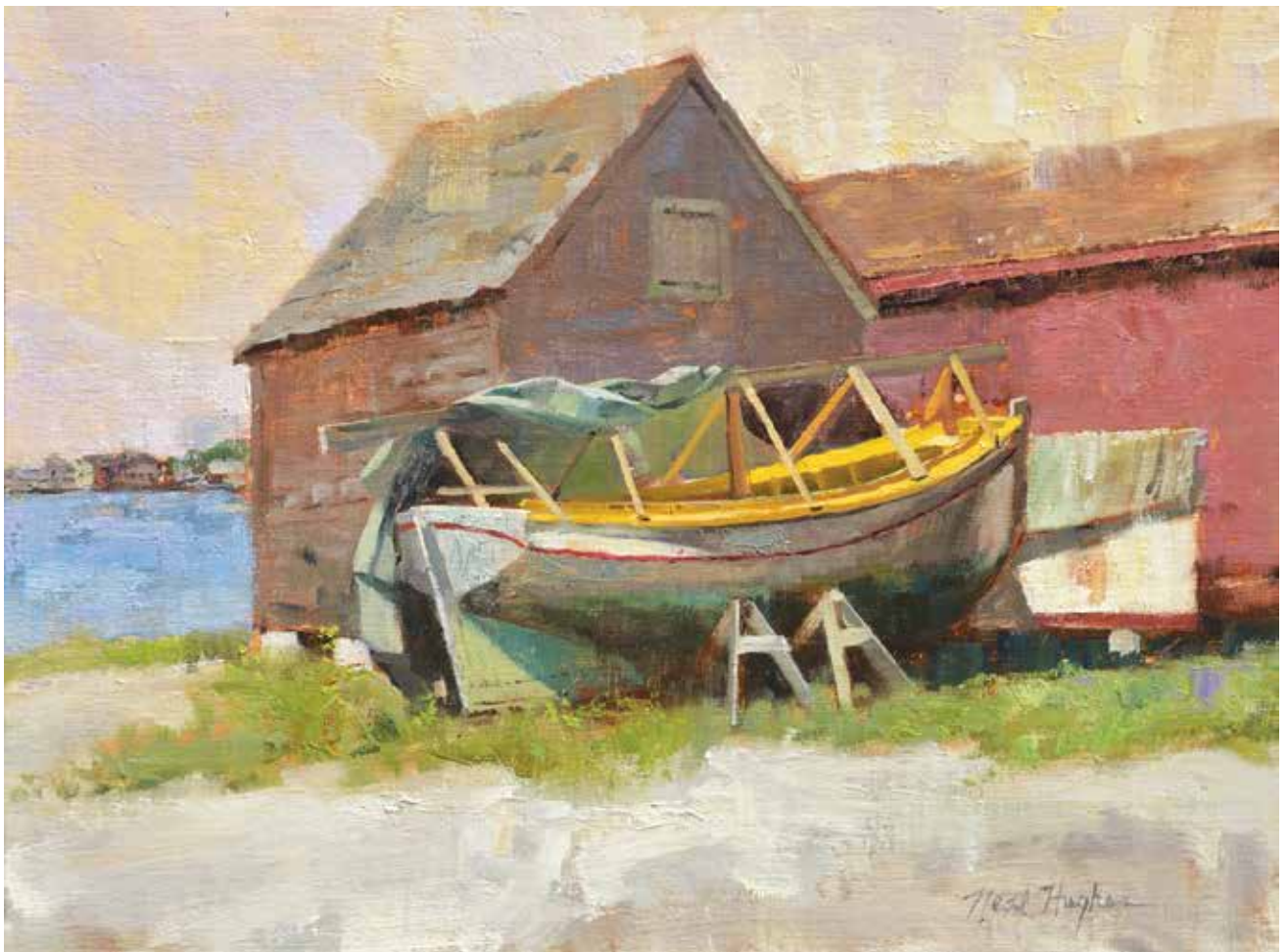


# En Plein Air

by Neal Hughes

**P**ainting “en plein air” is a French term, which means to paint “in the open air.” The plein air movement is credited to the French impressionists of the nineteenth century, although there were other schools of artists at that time who were involved in this practice. Advances in technology, such as the development of modern tube paints and man-made pigments, made it easier for artists to travel with their supplies and a lot easier and less time consuming to set up and prepare to paint on location.

**Port Clyde Harbor**, 12 x 16 inches, oil on linen (painted at the Maritime Gallery at Mystic Seaport for the “behind the canvas series” demonstration. This painting will be featured at the Williamsburg Gallery during ASMA conference in September 2016).



**Uncovered**, 12 x 16 inches, oil on linen (painted during Plein Air Painters of the Maritime Gallery, 2015, at Mystic Seaport Museum).



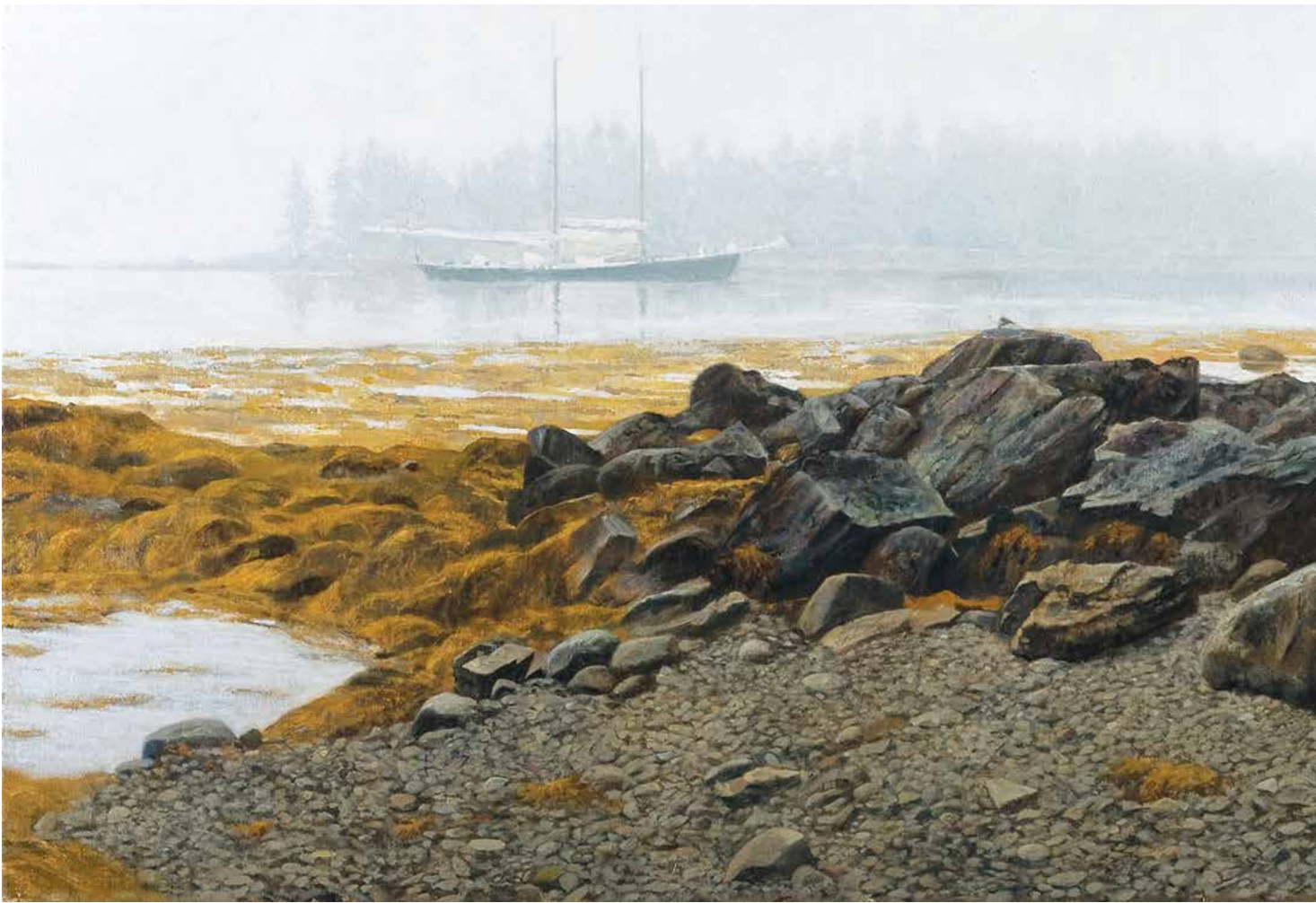
**Night Light**, 12 x 16 inches, oil on linen (painted during the 2015 Plein Air Easton Competition, Easton, Maryland).

**Boatyard**, 11 x 14 inches, oil on linen

Today, this impressionistic approach is taking on the status of another “movement” across the United States, with more artists painting in the open air than ever before. Numerous plein air competitions and festivals are scheduled each year, with many artists participating who make their living competing at these events.

My personal journey has been that of an illustrator, who transitioned to the world of fine art and more recently as an artist whose output is mostly done outdoors. My work is about seeing the beauty in creation—making a connection between art and nature. I am constantly exploring new ways of working outdoors, while attempting to share my personal vision of the subject I am painting. Avoiding copying nature like a camera, I strive to make a personal interpretation or convey





**Island Fog**, 14 x 28, oil on linen (Warren Island, Maine).

my impression of the subject. My goal—and the job of every artist—is to elevate the everyday and the ordinary and to allow the viewer to see beauty that might otherwise be missed. My hope is that all who see my work will experience the joy and beauty that I experience while creating it.

I feel very blessed to be an artist. And as Plato once put it, I believe that “when we experience beauty, we are given a glimpse of the divine.” †

*“There are certain advantages and disadvantages to working outdoors. The biggest challenge is the quickly changing conditions and lighting. This can also be an advantage in that you see the subject in different lighting and can pick the best lighting situation for your painting, but most of the time I know what lighting I am after and do not make changes to shadows, etc. when the light changes. I have worked on sustained paintings, where I will work on the same canvas for a number of days in a row, at the same time of day if necessary. This is especially helpful if it is a large painting or complicated subject to avoid “chasing the light” as the sun moves across the sky. Very often, I will start a morning painting and a different painting in the afternoon and will work on both for consecutive days. This practice also applies to a sunrise or sunset painting, when the light changes really fast. Nocturnes present a different challenge: I sometimes will start a nocturne at twilight so that I can see things that may become unclear or not visible at all once it goes completely dark. For example, if you begin painting when has already gone totally dark, you may not see the trees on the horizon or the edge of a roof against the sky or other elements that might be helpful in your composition.”*



**Checkup**, 11 x 14, oil on linen (Cape Porpoise, Maine).



**Fish Houses,**  
18 x 24 inches, oil on linen  
(Monhegan Island, Maine).

**Up For Repairs,** 12 x 20, oil on linen  
(painted during Plein Air Easton 2015,  
Easton, Maryland).



Neal Hughes is a graduate of the Philadelphia College of Art (University of the Arts) and resides in the historic town of Moorestown, New Jersey. A former illustrator, he has been painting professionally for more than thirty years. His paintings have been accepted into many local and national juried exhibitions, where he has won more awards for both plein air works and paintings in oil than we can print here. Of particular note, however, was his entry in the Utrecht 60th Anniversary Art Competition in 2009, which won the top prize out of over 12,000 works. His art has been featured in Plein Air Magazine, American Artist Magazine, and other publications. Neal Hughes was elected a Fellow of the American Society of Marine Artists and is also a member of Mid-Atlantic Plein Air Painters Association.

### National Marine Art Conference

The National Marine Art Conference gets underway on 8 September in Williamsburg, Virginia, where Neal Hughes will give a presentation on working en plein air and discuss his approach to quickly capture the essence of the subject, while emphasizing strong



design elements to ensure a successful painting. Len Tantillo, John Stobart, and other award-winning contemporary artists will also present at the multi-day conference. ASMA will open its 17th National Exhibition on 9 September, the second day of the conference, at the Muscarelle Museum in Williamsburg. Included in the exhibition is Neal Hughes's *Island Fog* (top of page, at left).

You can learn more about the artist and view his works online at [www.nealhughes.com](http://www.nealhughes.com). To learn more about the American Society of Marine Artists, visit [www.americansocietyofmarineartists.com](http://www.americansocietyofmarineartists.com).