



Community Outreach

Martinez Veterans

How to Volunteer, Paint Regularly, and Help Others

Some of you may think that if you volunteer your time to CWA you'll have less time to do your "real work" painting. As Co-Director of Community Outreach, I have found that working with Community Outreach and the vets has only stimulated me to do more of my own artwork.

The vets at Martinez VA Hospital often wheel in from their rooms or come from outside of the hospital to practice painting with watercolors. On one occasion a vet, Jerry, walked in a bit late. The other vets jokingly asked Jerry "What time is it?" There was a big clock on the wall directly across from Jerry's seat. Jerry good-naturedly replied, "It's time to paint." One of the volunteers, Marianne, set him up with a palette, brushes, water, and paper. Then she sat down beside him. Marianne was a great observer of people and ascertained that Jerry didn't see well, and was possibly blind.

She asked him his favorite color to which he replied, "blue." She mixed up a big puddle of ultramarine blue. Then she filled up one of the larger brushes and put it in Jerry's hand, guiding his hand to his paper. Once Jerry felt the brush on the paper it was obvious that Jerry had painted before. He had a feel for the paper and made a good, energetic stroke. Marianne repeated the process and together they painted from the outside to the center of the page. There, with a different blue, Jerry made a special flourish and finished the painting.

When Veterans Day rolled around, the Martinez VA Hospital went all out. We had a large art show. There were speeches and live music. Families came to visit vets, and we CWA volunteers gathered as well. I approached one vet who had quite a bit to say about the artwork in the vets' art show and it was not complimentary. I asked why he thought that our paintings weren't art. He said that they were just paintings of objects and real art drew the viewer's eye through the whole page. That's what made a painting art.

I challenged him to tour the vets' artwork with me and point out the best painting. As we toured he looked and looked, shaking his head no. Finally, he spotted Jerry's blue painting. He stood, gazing for several minutes, and then declared that Jerry's painting was the truest artwork on display.

I thanked the vet for his insight, never disclosing that he had chosen a blind man's painting as the best in the show. I took a long and hard look at the painting. It had mystery and good energy. Others around me saw the suggestions of a drama going on. It was definitely an interesting abstract painting.

You never know what's going to happen when the vets paint together. If you volunteer with CWA you may find, as I have, that working with the vets loosens you up and inspires you to do more of "your real work," your own painting.

On the right is a sample of vets' paintings made with CWA Community Outreach volunteers.

Sheila Cain

Co-Director, Community Outreach

- Who:** Volunteers, YOU, and Maggie Metcalf plus Georganne Zaro-Eddy
- What:** Assisting vets with watercolor painting
- Where:** Martinez VA Hospital, 150 Muir Road, Martinez, CA 94553
- When:** Twice a month, 1:00 pm, day TBD (on Tuesdays or Wednesdays)
- How:** Call Maggie at (925) 849-5212 or Georganne at (925) 980-7722 for more info or to volunteer

