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Compiled by Spencer Tamblyn, Interview by Gregory Effing

Photos provided by Gregory Effing , Art contributed by Kathleen Lanzoni

Painting What Moves Her:

Kathleen Lanzoni's Life in Watercolor

For watercolor artist Kathleen Lanzoni, the next painting matters more than the last award.

That outlook has served her well. In recent years, Lanzoni's work has earned awards, appeared in exhibitions, and received recognition in art publications. Yet when she approaches a blank sheet of paper, she tries to leave those accomplishments behind.

"I try not to think about that," she says. "Then I get in my own head."

Instead of painting to satisfy a judge or repeat a previous success, Lanzoni focuses on creating the best painting she can at that particular moment. The goal is neither perfection nor external approval. It is continued growth.

"I've got to keep painting," she says. "I'm always trying to learn."

That dedication is currently taking her work in several directions. Lanzoni is showing at Creative Framing Art Gallery in Louisville, Colorado, and has work in the San Diego Watercolor Society's 46th International Exhibition. She will also exhibit in Steamboat Springs. Beyond exhibiting, she teaches artists both near and far. Her upcoming schedule includes a workshop in Tuscany, followed by international workshops in Mexico and Stockholm.

Traveling and painting are two of Lanzoni's great pleasures, and teaching lets her combine them. A workshop in Italy promises more than technical instruction: artists will stay at a villa, work on location, and share the experience of interpreting a new landscape.



Speachless Moment 22 x 30



Beloved 22 x 30

For Lanzoni, paintings made while traveling become personal postcards—not merely records of what a place looks like, but expressions of what the artist noticed and felt while standing there.

The reedom to Paint for Yourself

The relationship between artists, collectors, and jurors can be complicated. Lanzoni has learned that anticipating what someone else might like is rarely a productive starting point.

An artist may become convinced that a certain subject will attract buyers, only to discover that viewers pass it by. Conversely, a deeply personal painting may connect with an audience in an unexpected way.

"You can't predict what people will buy," she says. "Paint what you want to paint. It's the only way to go."

Her painting Beloved, which received second place in a Colorado Watercolor Society exhibition, grew from that personal approach. The large watercolor depicts two horses nestled together, their heads and necks conveying a quiet sense of affection

Lanzoni had taken the reference photograph herself and lived with it for more than a year. She repeatedly returned to the image until she knew she needed to paint it. Before beginning the finished work, she made value and color studies. She ultimately painted the subject twice, believing she could improve upon the first ersion.

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The e was no guarantee that the second attempt—or the subject itself—would succeed in competition. That was not the point. She painted it because the relationship between the horses moved her.

"I painted it purely for myself," she says.

Finding Expression Within Realism

Lanzoni describes her style as "painterly realism." She wants viewers to recognize the subject, but she does not believe every branch, rock, or architectural detail must be reproduced exactly.

The landscape already exists in front of the artist, and nearly everyone carries a camera capable of documenting it. A painting offers something diffe ent: the artist's selection, interpretation, and visual handwriting.

Two painters standing side by side may face the same landscape and produce entirely diffe ent results. One may be drawn to violet shadows while the other emphasizes green. Their eyesight, preferences, movements, and life experiences all shape the finished wo k.

Lanzoni's background in architectural rendering gave her strong drawing skills, but it also posed a challenge. Architectural work rewards precision; expressive painting requires knowing when to loosen control. Inspired in part by her mother's freer painting style, Lanzoni deliberately worked to make her own approach looser and more gestural.

Plein-air painting helps. Working outside encourages her to stand, use her whole arm, and respond physically to the scene. A time limit can also be liberating. Rather than laboring over every component, she must establish the large idea before the light changes.

She begins very loosely and wet, building detail as the painting develops. When working in watercolor, she typically starts with a light drawing using a 4B pencil. Structures require more

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Barely a Whisper 10 x 20
Best of Show, Estes Valley Plein Air, 2025

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careful preparation because faulty perspective can make a building appear unstable. Landscapes allow greater flexibility; viewers will not know that a rock was moved or a tree omitted.

Pencil lines do not always need to disappear. Lanzoni may erase them in clouds or other light passages, but she is comfortable letting some drawing remain visible when it contributes to the image. Drips, marks, and other evidence of process can become part of the painting's character.

The ressure and Pleasure of Plein Air

Painting outdoors may look idyllic, but plein-air events generate their own form of anxiety. Artists work against changing light, unpredictable weather, and exhibition deadlines. Early in an event, unsuccessful paintings can make the pressure mount.

"That one's not going to be turned in," an artist thinks, followed by the same judgment about the next attempt. Before long, the question becomes: What am I going to submit?



Amongst the Trees 10 x 20. Painted by Kathleen, while painting with Greg, as he interviewed her for this article.

Estes Valley Plein Air 2026

Lanzoni has felt those "painting yips," but experience has taught her to trust the week's progression. As she continues working, she becomes more relaxed, loose, and free. Eventually, something usually comes together.

Once she has a strong painting, the pressure eases. That freedom can make room for experimentation.

Lanzoni has participated in the Estes Valley Plein Air event for approximately 18 years. Its proximity to her home made it manageable when her children were young; she could paint during the day and return when they came home from school. Now that her children are grown, she sometimes chooses events near places where family members live.



Her Belongings 12 x 17.5

Her family remains central to her life. She speaks warmly of her husband, two children, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, and young granddaughter. Her husband, whose sales work includes Europe, sometimes joins her at the beginning of an event before continuing with his own travel. At home, he supports her work in practical ways—occasionally preparing dinner after a long painting day and jokingly serving as her "Sherpa."

Every plein-air event offers a diffe ent balance of landscape, hospitality, and endurance. Lanzoni loves Rocky Mountain National Park, which she considers one of her happy places. She also appreciates Steamboat Springs, where artists are treated thoughtfully, and their work is shown in a museum setting. Events such as Snowmass and Telluride can be physically demanding because artists may continue producing paintings without a strict limit, making it tempting to work until exhaustion.

Still, the excitement of encountering a new landscape remains powerful. Lanzoni recalls arriving in Sedona after dark and waking to its extraordinary formations and colors. Seeing the landscape for the first time made her want to jump with e citement.

Teaching and Working at Every Scale

Lanzoni's teaching practice includes Watercolor Wednesdays, an online class she began during the COVID-19 pandemic with technical help from her son. The class continues to bring

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together students from across the country. Because sessions are recorded, participants can revisit demonstrations, pause them, and learn at their own pace.

She also teaches in-person workshops, although she now favors focused workshops over a regular weekly schedule. Whether teaching online, outdoors, or internationally, she encourages students to begin with large shapes and gestures before moving toward detail.

Her own creative work extends far beyond the relatively small scale associated with plein-air watercolor. Lanzoni also owns Boulder Murals and has painted murals for hospitals, medical centers, and schools, including projects for Children's Hospital. Those works are executed in acrylic, a more practical material for walls, but they satisfy her enjoyment of painting large.

That enthusiasm began in high school, when a teacher handed her a house-painting brush, attached an approximately eight-foot sheet of craft paper to a wall, and told her to begin. The scale required movement from the whole arm and helped loosen her approach—an experience that still echoes in the way she paints outdoors.

Across these diffe ent formats, Lanzoni's guiding principles remain consistent: observe closely, preserve spontaneity, keep learning, and paint the subjects that hold genuine meaning.



To Be reckoned With 13 x 20.5

Awards may recognize where an artist has been, but they cannot make the next painting. That requires returning to the paper, accepting uncertainty and beginning again.

For Lanzoni, the work continues not because every painting succeeds, but because each one offers another opportunityto see—and to translate that seeing into a personal mark. S

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