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# PRAIRIE LAKES EN PLEIN AIR FESTIVAL IS A HIT

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By Heather Rule

When the pandemic hit, many arts workshops at the Art of the Lakes in Battle Lake were canceled. But that doesn't mean that art was canceled. Instead, some artists in the area began taking an interest in painting outdoors, also known as "en plein air" translating to "in the open air, al fresco."

"We saw that as the opportunity to try hosting a plein air festival of our own," said John Olesen, president of Art of the Lakes and co-chair of the Prairie Lakes en Plein Air committee. "Because what's more covid-friendly than painting outside?"



By Susan Seaborne

The inaugural Prairie Lakes en Plein Air festival of art education, exhibition and competition was held in summer 2021, kicking off June 21 with an opening reception at Art of the Lakes and ending in late September. Forty-three artists participated in the first competition.

Ninety percent of submitted work for the competition needs to be painted outdoors. To verify the work was painted en plain air, The Battle Lake festival asked artists to take selfies with their work and post that on social media and use the tag #plpa2021.

Lisa Stauffer, a Minnesota based painter and educator, was the judge and consultant for the competition, awarding first, second and third place along with five honorable mentions. Art of the Lakes board members also chose a winner for the best total presentation by a member of Art of the Lakes in the show. Most of the competitors were from out of the area, according to Olesen. Many artists previously unfamiliar with Otter Tail County, were "surprised and delighted by the prairie lakes area," Olesen said. "They didn't know what we

offered,” Olesen said. “They loved [Glendalough \(State Park\)](#). We had a huge number of paintings that were done in Glendalough.”

The paintings were displayed at Art of the Lakes gallery until late October. The first year of the event was a success, with painters coming to the area from all over the state, including some who weren’t in the competition but tagged along with friends.

Separate from the competition, the event included five plein-air-related workshops for artists who weren’t competing. Three of the workshop presenters were competitors and all had great content to share. The workshops, held socially distanced in Railroad Park in Battle Lake, covered different types of media from watercolors to acrylics and even an introductory workshop for kids.

For 2022, the event will be held throughout the summer and will be open to artists from throughout Minnesota and bordering states. The event is open to professional and amateur artists; the number of entrants is a maximum of 50 because there is only so much space to display artwork in the gallery. The event will kick off with a summer solstice celebration combined with the start of the plein air events. The summer en plein air competition wraps up in September, the first Saturday after the equinox.

To learn more about the event visit [ArtoftheLakes.org](https://ArtoftheLakes.org)

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