



# Springs Invitational Art Stories: The Wednesday Group Reveals a Range of Art Inspired by Nature & Each Other

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by Dakota Arkin Cafourek

“En plein air is not for wimps,” said [Alyce Peifer](#), an oil painter and member of The Wednesday Group Plein Air Painters of the East End. Scouting the perfect vantage point calls for one to be adept in minor mountaineering, backpacking with canvas and paints in tow and braving the elements, she said. A good memory helps too, she added, to capture the shadows, the saturation of light and color, the placement of the clouds constantly changing in space as your hand hastens to seize the moment for the canvas.



Frank Sofo, Gene Samuelson, Teresa Lawler and Aurelio Torres from The Wednesday Group. Photo: Dakota Arkin Cafourek.

[Gene Samuelson](#), a lifelong artist and co-founder of The Wednesday Group, put his time as an ad man behind him years ago in favor of scouting locations for plein air painting. “I joined the Artists Alliance of East Hampton because I didn’t want to join the stamp club,” he said with a gentle presence and quick wit.

It was there that he met [Frank Sofo](#), an accomplished illustrator—known for book covers for the Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys series—who had also relocated to the East End, fleeing Madison Avenue in pursuit of fine art. They shared a yearning to paint outdoors, and so, together they organized a plein air group to meet Wednesdays, hence the earned moniker.



Artists Gene Samuelson and Frank Sofo with a portrait of Samuelson by Sofo. Photo: Dakota Arkin Cafourek.

Gene Samuelson's mother came from a family of artists and dancers; his father was in the meat business. Early trips to the slaughterhouse tipped his hand toward the artist side of the family.

"As far back as art school, I was drawn to buildings, their shapes, the textures of wood," he recalled from his porch in Amagansett. As a student, an early teacher brought Samuelson's class to paint decrepit structures on the outskirts of his native Philadelphia. That impression never left him. The architectural connection can be found in his painting selected for the Springs Invitational.

A first-time participant, Samuelson said he is flattered to be showing *Wainscott Garage*, a watercolor he captured on Wainscott's Main Street, at the 50th annual Springs Invitational at Ashawagh Hall.

The painting has incredible contrasts in both color, light and mood. Two cars, cast in dark shadows, partially obscure the composition's anchor—a bright yellow modern-esque garage, punctuated by rich and wild greenery. Adjacent, a fading wooden barn, adds rustic charm as a focal point through Samuelson's attention to detail to the weathered surfaces and warping boards, caused by aging and exposure to wind, sun and rain. In the background, a modern home makes almost a guest appearance with its careful cedar planking that cloaks the home. At a single glance, the painting captures country life.



"Wainscott Garage" by Gene Samuelson. Watercolor. Courtesy of the artist.

Frank Sofo speaks with enthusiasm and a smile during a recent group interview. His foray into plein air painting began as a self-described urban plein air sketch artist. His professor at the School of Visual Arts would recite, "If you really want to learn how to draw, draw from life." To do so, Sofo would slink his 5 x 7 inch sketchbook behind a newspaper, to sneak in portraits of subway riders.

Painting en plein air is to paint what you see, and the essence of what you see and how it makes you feel, said Sofo. Inspired by art history, the impressionists are ever-present as he makes work en plein air, especially when returning to familiar locations. Drawing on his inspiration, [Claude Monet](#), who'd depict Giverny time and time again, Sofo said he finds inspiration through the changing light and selecting new vantage points to create new vistas for familiar locations.

"I'm searching for the secret of the universe," Sofo said, when he looks onto the natural landscapes of the East End.

Teri Kennedy, 2017 Springs Invitational curator, selected Sofo's *My Beach Ride* for the show. The painting depicts a long-haired woman arriving at the beach with her bicycle, towel and sun hat that creates an idyllic scene. Also a first-time participant, Sofo said that he's overjoyed to be a part of this year's show.



"My Beach Ride" by Frank Sofo. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Originally starting out with a handful of members, The Wednesday Group today constitutes 17 artists who meet during the warm months at East End locations, scouted by Samuelson and Sofo, and at sites preserved by The Nature Conservancy. They are a diverse group of artists with distinct styles arising from varying motivations and muses. What they share is a love of making art on location and an enjoyment of the camaraderie of working together.

Five artists from The Wednesday Group were selected to share their work at this year's Springs Invitational: Alyce Peifer, Gene Samuelson, Frank Sofo, [Aurelio Torres](#) and [Teresa Lawler](#). While all five work en plein air with The Wednesday Group, for the Springs Invitational, Torres will be exhibiting a stone sculpture and Lawler one of her glass fusion portraits.

Teresa Lawler is new to the group but her tales of capturing scenes from her car in frigid winter months make clear she is no stranger to painting in the elements. A retired art teacher from the East Hampton school district, she lives by the notion that as a teacher she must always also be learning. Driven by constant experimentation and the element of surprise, it was just 10 years ago that Lawler began working with glass, learning the art of fusing.

The Montauk-native is soft spoken, but her passion for preserving the nature and beauty of the East End is unmistakable. "Water is what we love the most and it needs our protection," she said, hoping she can help raise people's awareness of the fragility of nature through art.

For the Invitational, her glass fusion portrait *Rosie* was selected. The work captures her niece, a leading vocalist in the local soul/R&B band, Mamalee Rose and Friends. In the portrait, A. Rosie Lawler performs at the mic with a backdrop of 1946 sheet music, selected by Lawler's mother-in-law and a bandmate, which proclaims: "perfectly contented."



"Rosie" by Teresa Lawler. Courtesy of the artist.

For Torres, who joined The Wednesday Group three years ago, venturing into the elements to capture the moment is a practice, a discipline in keeping the artist's eye trained. Creating art may well be part of his genetic composition. His grandfather was Uruguayan modernist master, [Joaquin Torres-Garcia](#) whose signature styles earned him international acclaim and took him around the globe.

Torres's father Horacio Torres was a great figurative painter, whose career moved the family from

their native Latin America to New York when Aurelio Torres was a child. Instead of college, Aurelio Torres sold his car for a ticket to Barcelona to train under his uncle, classically trained painter, Augusto Torres. With Emersonian allure, Aurelio Torres' work always circles back to his experience in nature. Expressing himself in a variety of mediums, he is captivated by marine subjects and honored his sculpture of a boat hull, *E la Nave a*, will be presented in the Springs Invitational.



"E la Nave a" by Aurelio Torres. Courtesy of the artist.

Unlike others in The Wednesday Group, Peifer did not start to pursue her art until post-retirement. Responding strongly to an instinct to paint, she was determined to learn, and master, painterly techniques. She enrolled in art classes, among them was a plein air course in the Adirondacks. Now with 10 years of experience, she beams with immense confidence, doubling as a curator for the group, helping to exhibit the East End's plein air marvels.

She was once smitten with a smokehouse at East Hampton's Mulford Farm and it is her small, captivating oil painting of it, *Smokehouse at Mulford Farm*, that will be on display at Ashawagh Hall. With soft strokes and an exploration of shades of greens and grays, she captures its charm and senescence all at once.



"Smokehouse at Mullford Farms" by Alyce Piefer. oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Artists composing in unison their unique interpretations of a place and moment, through composition and color, have the effect of materializing a creative zone among nature where the artists can find silence or connection. Members help each other, share a new technique or methods learned to created nuanced shades of color. This is the essence of The Wednesday Group—a haven of peers and passion.

"All art is valid. All art is good;" said Samuelson paternally, verifying the atmosphere of support offered among kindred spirits who choose not to look "out a window at the world," as Torres describes, but to be among it.

[The 2017 Springs Invitational Art Exhibition](#) presents art by around 114 artists with work selected by Invitational curator Teri Kennedy. The show will be on view from August 4 to 20, 2017 at

Ashawagh Hall in East Hampton, N.Y. Presented by the Springs Improvement Society (SIS), the exhibition is a benefit for SIS which maintains and manages Ashawagh all.

The “Springs Invitational Art Stories Series” was arranged by Teri Kennedy to reveal the stories behind some of the art on view, presented from the point of view of the exhibiting artist or artists. To read the series introduction for the Springs Invitational Art Stories, click [here](#).

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**BASIC FACTS:** The Springs Invitational will be held August 4 to 20, 2017 at Ashawagh Hall. The Curator’s Tour of the Invitational takes place on Sunday, August 13 from 11 a.m. to noon. Ashawagh Hall is located at 780 Springs Fireplace Rd, East Hampton, NY 11937. [www.ashawagh-hall.org](http://www.ashawagh-hall.org).

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