

Guest Article:

My Residency in Holland by Jerry Ross

After returning from a 30-day painting residency in Holland, I was rudely confronted by the horror of the Las Vegas mass shooting. I wrote my Dutch friend for some advice. Here is what she wrote:

“Aiaia, what do you ask from us?! Wisdom? I think the cultural and historical differences couldn't be more evident then when it comes to the right for individuals to own a gun. Over here it is a non issue and a overall consensus that when individuals are owning guns the society as a whole becomes more unsafe. That I don't consider wise but common sense. That consensus has been there since centuries, so by now totally engrained in society. The use of violence in general seems to be more accepted in the USA. For example, age ratings of films where children are at an earlier age allowed to see violent scenes but only much later, sex scenes.

...Good luck! Jos en Jaap”

Holland is proof of Human Evolution?

While in Holland, not only did I enjoy experiencing a country with bike paths everywhere (even multiple inter-city paths), but also world-class art museums. I was staying in Renkum, Holland, a city famous for the “Dutch Barbizon” school of plein air landscape painters such as Theophile de Buck, Elizabeth van Limburg, Xeno Munninghoff, and Anton Mauve.

In addition to the attitude towards guns, the bicycle phenomenon was an eye opener. The Dutch are up to over 50% of the population using bikes on a daily basis for most transportation. Entire families are seen on bikes on either side of the road. The bike “routes” are well mapped and take you through pasturelands and forests throughout the

Netherlands. Have the Dutch evolved way beyond us in social consciousness?



Renkum

Upon my arrival, I found I was staying in a small Dutch village with a downtown about the size of Brownsville, Oregon, but a with a larger suburban population about the

size of Junction City. The downtown was decorated with large reproductions of the above mentioned “old masters”, examples of the Oosterbeek School.

I stayed alone in a small mansion in a neighborhood of posh villas. Nearby were vast pastures for sheep where sheep dogs practiced for upcoming competitions in sheep herding.



Renkum

My first visitors were neighborhood children who were playing behind the backyard wall. I learned their names later, but the first to appear was a little girl with large eyes

and a big smile. Angela lifted herself up and peered over the wall. Three others did the same and asked me to return their soccer ball that had bounced into my yard. This was the first of many balls that needed returning. Another of the kids, Nicola, had come into the yard to fetch a ball. Both Angela and Nicola made it into my first paintings in Renkum. Before I left Renkum, I was able to give their respective mothers the finished portraits,



Angela



Dutch Boy with Ball (Nicola)

Simon was the next door neighbor. He was a bookbinder by trade, which in Europe is more common than in the States. I learned this in Italy, when a friend who was a bookbinder told me many of his clients were artists. Whenever they have an opening reception for an exhibit, a catalogue is prepared then printed and bound with a nice cover, as a permanent record of the exhibit. Something we

do not do here as frequently.

Simon was a big fan of the French painter, Toulouse La Trec and his painting instructor Rene Princeteau who was known for his equestrian paintings. Simon had a French hunting horn and was a follower of the French tradition of fox hunting. He made hunting whips that he sold at hunting gatherings in France.



“Dutch Treat” by Jerry Ross, 2017

I quickly became friends with the neighbors: Simon Fuks, a bookbinder and Gerard von Laarhoven, an owner of a B&B. We soon became friends biking together and sharing stories. I painting their portraits:



“Simon the Bookbinder”, oil on canvas, 2017



Gerard von Laarhoven.

Gerard was a retired food scientist/engineer who loved long distance bicycling. Several times he has biked to Italy from the Netherlands, crossing the Alps. Several years ago his wife of many years died of cancer. Before her death, they traveled to a favorite location in Italy. Recently, he returned there by bicycle.

My painting residency in Holland was organized by a Portuguese based organization called OBRAS which means “work in progress.” They usually have residencies in Portugal but were filled up. They had another residency in the Netherlands, which is the one I accepted.

The residency provided three bicycles of which I regularly used two. I would bike to the nearby Rhine River with my bicycle loaded with painting equipment taking the ferry boat across the river, painting from the other side where there were cows and pasturelands and bike paths to other small villages. The ferry boat pilots requested a portrait of their boat so I painted one of the boats and gave it to the boatmans’ association.

Arnhem and Nijmegen

I rode one of the bicycles 20 km to Arnhem the nearest big city to the north of Renkum. The art supply company van Ginkel was located there. Although generally the Netherlands is flat, there were enough challenging hills on the way to Arnhem to make the trip somewhat difficult using the 3 gear “step through” bike I was riding. Just before arriving in Arnhem one passes the Airborn Museum which commemorates the WWII battle for the Arnhem bridge. The British had ignored Dutch partisan warnings about multiple SS divisions hiding near the bridge and landed hundreds of

soldiers via parachute to the area only to be thrown back across the Rhine in retreat. Not until a massive American airlift of reinforcements arrived could the bridge be captured.



Weigh Station in Nijmegen

Arnhem itself was great with outdoor cafes lining the river and downtown areas. The central train station there was massive. Inexpensive Italian pannini and pasta restaurants were a welcome taste. A short train ride to the east got me to Nijmegen which was another very pleasant Dutch city on the Rhine River with large public squares and outdoor cafes and excellent shopping areas.



my plein air easel while working along the lower Rhine river.



Renkum Ferry Boat

Since I had thirty days of undisturbed painting time, I decided to try my hand at a famous Dutch genre, still life painting. I turned my attention on the kitchen and came up with several still life paintings:



Still life, Renkum, 2017

The house in Renkum had a lush garden and I found myself painting abstract versions of the backyard as well as view's of Simon's house next door:



View of Simon's house



An abstract of the backyard

Abstraction has always been an interest and I wanted to work abstract elements into some of the realist works such as my painting of the Dutch countryside. The characteristic orange color of the Dutch roofs and the vast flat areas of grasslands inspired both abstraction and realism in my work.



Magie van de Veluwezoom, oil on canvas, 2017

Towards the end of my residency, I had the opportunity to travel to Utrecht, the Haag, Leiden, and Amsterdam. I was impressed by the beauty of the urban canal scenes, the multi-story bike racks, and the general ambiance of Dutch cities.

I didn't like the practice of mixing marijuana with tobacco when I shopped for joints at their version of dispensaries (coffee houses) but that was one of my few complaints. I did like the ready availability of fresh herring and other fish dishes

at the convenient street side booths.

My artwork can be seen at the Tronson Gallery of Contemporary Art, 740 Main Street, Springfield, Oregon through the end of November. It is open through the end of November Tuesday through Saturday, 1-4 pm.

Jerry Ross