



**THIS PAGE**  
A student in the field,  
who was developing his  
ability to paint elements  
of the landscape.

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
Insalaco painted en  
plein air.

Maddine Insalaco  
& Joe Vinson:



## A Progressive Approach to Improving Landscape Paintings

This husband-and-wife team encourages their workshop students to learn fundamental skills, study the elements of a landscape, and paint in some of the most beautiful and historically significant locations in Italy. To make that a thoroughly enjoyable and successful experience, they provide almost all the supplies and equipment, regular demonstrations, and gourmet meals.

—  
by **M. Stephen Doherty**

Travel workshops often amount to pleasant vacations that include a few hours of painting, but for the past 13 years Maddine Insalaco and Joe Vinson have presented structured programs in Tuscany and the Roman Campagna that are divided into three distinctly different educational curricula.

During these Etruscan Places workshops, students focus on developing a solid understanding of the open-air painting process, refining their ability to observe and interpret elements of a landscape, and gaining a framework of reference for expressing their responses to an outdoor motif quickly. "We have been offering these three separate one-

week programs to help people of various ability levels acquire the skills and experience needed to advance their work," Insalaco explained after completing the Etruscan Places 2007 series of courses. "Working in some of the same locations where great artists of the past have worked inspires many students to make remarkable progress."

Insalaco and Vinson are Americans who began traveling and painting in Italy more than 20 years ago, and they now divide their time between an apartment in New York City and a home in Italy. Insalaco studied art and international affairs in New York, Florence, and Rome, and she earned an M.F.A. from the New York Academy of Art. Vinson studied art at the Ringling College of Art and Design, in Sarasota, Florida, and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Both artists have exhibited their figure and landscape paintings in the United States, Italy, and France, and they have lectured at a number of art schools.

Over the years, Insalaco and Vinson have refined their workshop program so students will face the fewest distractions, receive solid instruction and personal guidance, and enjoy all the visual, social, and gastronomic pleasures Italy has to offer. "We emphasize a serious study of painting, but we want participants to have a wonderful time enjoying great art, food, and companionship," Vinson said. "To help in that effort, we provide participants with easels, Liquin medium,



**ABOVE**  
A student painted during one of the Etruscan Places workshops for experienced artists.

**LEFT**  
Workshop participants at a historic location, where 19th- and 20th-century plein air painters set up their easels.

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
Student paintings lined up for a critique session during a recent Etruscan Places workshop.

## Demonstration: Piana Cemetery



R



1



2



3

### Reference

The scene Insalaco painted for students.

### Step 1

The instructor worked on a toned surface with a clear view of her subject.

### Step 2

Using a thin mixture of oil color, Insalaco painted vertical and horizontal lines to establish the placement and proportions of the elements she intended to paint.

### Step 3

The instructor painted from the top to the bottom of the canvas, and from the background to the foreground of the scene.



THE COMPLETED DEMONSTRATION:  
**Piana Cemetery**  
2007, oil on paper, 9 x 12.

A student participated in a workshop on the fundamentals of open-air landscape painting.



solvents, brush tanks, stools, umbrellas—all the equipment that can be difficult to transport or to buy on location. The only supplies we don't provide are paints, palette knives, and brushes. Everything else is waiting for the students when they arrive, and we are ready to set up portable shelters if they are needed. We can even arrange for private workshops, college credit, or recertification documentation for teachers.

"We provide all local transportation, most of the meals, and all the other daily chores that can get in the way of painting," Vinson added. "Maddine and I offer a minimum of 50 hours of instruction each week, including demonstrations, individual instruction, group discussions, and critiques. At the end of the week, we're just as excited and exhausted as the students."

### Course Descriptions

Insalaco and Vinson encourage less experienced artists and those new to outdoor painting to sign up for a class called Open Air Fundamentals, which they offer in small towns near Siena, Italy. "We arrange for students to live and work in the

countryside around towns such as Buonconvento or Montalcino, where they can learn to handle the unique challenges of open air painting," Insalaco explained. "We cover the basics of color mixing, paint application, spatial construction, and composition; and we demonstrate ways to handle the challenges of changing light and atmosphere that are specific to landscape painting. We introduce our methods through a clearly structured program of lectures, exercises, and demonstrations that enable participants to develop a complete painting within a short period of time. We don't require students to have any previous painting experience and are prepared to help them with every aspect of the process.

"An initial drawing session is followed by monochromatic work with a palette knife," Insalaco continued. "Subsequently, color is introduced with a discussion of color-contrast theory. Students use a palette knife to create two paintings, and then they shift to brushes. We explore the advantages of working on paper and toned grounds. All work takes place exclusively outdoors, where the conditions force artists to work quickly." The instructors also offer two

BELOW

Two students participated in a workshop on the fundamentals of open-air landscape painting.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Students enjoyed a gourmet meal during a recent workshop.



slide lectures, one titled "Nature as Subject in Western Art From 1340 to the Present," and the other called "Technical Aspects of Landscape Painting."

Artists joining the Open Air Fundamentals workshop are encouraged to work with a limited palette of colors listed in literature sent months before they travel to Italy. The selected colors are zinc white, burnt umber, ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson, cadmium yellow light or chrome yellow, chrome green or green earth, yellow ochre, and burnt sienna. Students in this class, as well as in the two advanced programs, use Liquin alkyd medium to thin their oil colors so the paintings are dry enough at the end of the week to be packed into luggage.

Artists who have either taken the Etruscan Places fundamentals class or have studied oil painting with other teachers are encouraged to sign up for the Elements of Landscape program. "The content of this course is inspired by the theoretical writings of the 18th-century French painter P.H. Valenciennes," Vinson explained. "In his famous treatise on open-air painting published in 1800, Valenciennes advocated the separate study of the individual elements of the landscape, such as trees, the sky, and water. The objective of such a focused study was to obtain an intimate familiarity with nature in order to sharpen the artist's visual memory for studio work."

During morning slide presentations and discussions of Etruscan Places workshops, Insalaco and Vinson tackle the problems and opportunities associated with painting elements of the landscape, such as trees, clouds, open fields,

## Demonstration: Badia Ardenga Cemetery



### Reference

The scene that Insalaco focused on for her painting demonstration.

### Step 1

After drawing the outlines of the major shapes with thin mixtures of oil color, the instructor blocked in the major forms with fairly dark oil colors.

### Step 2

Once she had blocked in the lightest values, Insalaco painted some of the detail within the scene.

### Step 3

As she continued to refine her painting, the instructor clarified the shapes and the composition of values.

### Right

Insalaco at work on her demonstration painting.



BELOW, THE COMPLETED DEMONSTRATION:  
Badia Ardenga Cemetery  
2007, oil, 5 1/2 x 15.





OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Painting equipment set up in a field during a workshop on the elements of landscape painting.

Canopies are provided to protect students from rain and glaring sunshine.

A student worked during a recent workshop on the elements of landscape painting.

An easel positioned so the artist could paint the setting sun.

Students at work along roads and in the field, where they were focused on painting the elements of a landscape.

Students enjoyed a gourmet meal during a recent workshop.

Artists worked side by side during a workshop covering elements of the landscape.

water, and atmospheric conditions. The two artists show students how to paint those elements under conditions influenced by distance, light, and weather. "No technical instruction is offered, but the instructors are available to work with participants individually," Insalaco said. "Group critiques are held each day."

For artists capable of working independently, Etruscan Places offers a Historic Itineraries workshop in the region north of Rome, known as the Campagna. "Our base of operation is the town of Civita Castellana, which was a favorite location for Corot, Valenciennes, and Turner," Vinson explained. "Each day we have both a morning and an afternoon painting session at a variety of locations where artists have worked for two centuries. The land morphology is very dramatic, and students find it to be very inspiring. At the end of each day we review what everyone has done. We also include an excursion to a nearby Renaissance villa or archeological site."

Occasionally, artists joining one of the three workshop programs express interest in painting with watercolor rather than oil. "Although we are really geared to oil painting, we both have enough experience painting with watercolor to be able to provide instruction in using that medium," Insalaco mentioned.

### The Instructors

Maddine Insalaco and Joe Vinson bring distinctly different backgrounds and orientations to their work as landscape painters and teachers. Insalaco pursued academic training in figure drawing and painting, spending a great deal of time working from plaster casts of classical sculpture as well as live models. "My early experience was almost completely focused on the figure and on studying light on human forms," she explained. "My love of nature led me to adapt what I knew to landscape, and the satisfaction derived therein made me continue to specialize."

Vinson's education at both the Ringling College of Art and Design and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, predisposed him to respond to the abstract relationships of color, form, value, shape, and line. "The interesting thing is that Maddine and I approached the same process from completely different backgrounds," Vinson said. "That allows us to describe a number of approaches to our workshop participants."

*M. Stephen Doherty is the editor-in-chief and publisher of Workshop.*



### About the Artists

**Maddine Insalaco** earned an M.A. in international affairs from Columbia University, in New York City, and studied art at the Scuola delle Arti Ornamentali, in Rome, and art history at Syracuse University, in Florence. She also earned an M.F.A. from New York Academy of Art.

**Joe Vinson** earned a B.F.A. from the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, and a diploma in painting and drawing from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where he also taught drawing and painting. Until recently, he taught drawing at the Cooper Union School of Art, in New York City.

For more information on Insalaco and Vinson, visit their website at [www.landscapepainting.com](http://www.landscapepainting.com), or e-mail them at [info@landscapepainting.com](mailto:info@landscapepainting.com).

[www.myAmericanArtist.com](http://www.myAmericanArtist.com)

Visit the Demonstrations section of [www.myAmericanArtist.com](http://www.myAmericanArtist.com) to view a step-by-step demonstration of Alan Flattmann's landscape *The Abita River*.

*The Abita River*, by Alan Flattmann.



## Insalaco's Work



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT  
**View of Badia Ardenga**  
2007, oil, 5½ x 15. All artwork  
this article collection the artist.

**Treia Valley Civita  
Castellana**  
2005, oil, 9 x 12.

**From Chiusure**  
2006, oil, 9 x 12.

**Palazzo Ruspoli and  
Lake Nemi**  
2007, oil, 7½ x 7½.

## Vinson's Work



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT  
**Ombro River Autumn**  
2006, oil, 24 x 30.

**Piana Road With Poplars**  
2007, oil, 5½ x 5½.

**Badia Ardenga Vineyard**  
2006, oil, 10 x 14.

**Oak at Poggiarellino**  
2007, oil, 24 x 30.

**Abbey With Potted Palm**  
2007, oil, 9 x 12.

