

## Older Adults Paint En Plein Air Where It's 19 Degrees

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By Barbara La Valleur



Credit: Barbara LaValleur

*Editor's Note: This story is part of the [Vitality Arts Special Report](#).*

Paul T. Boecher, 76, considers himself an all-around artist rather than a specialist. He's been painting, sculpting and carving since his high school days in Milwaukee. His high school art teacher recognized his talents early and challenged him to carve a ram's head out of limestone while his classmates were working with milk cartons.

Although Boecher took art classes at Chicago Institute of Arts, Layton School of Art and Marquette University, he didn't complete a degree. That didn't stop him from being a successful art director in the ad business for 44 years. Ten years ago, he added teaching to his repertoire.

One of several instructors at the [Rumriver Art Center](#) in Anoka, Minn., Boecher recently carried on the tradition of challenging his students by leaving the four walls of the art center for a class *en plein air*, which is French for "the art of painting outdoors." The temperature? 19 degrees.

The hardy group of older artists met outdoors on an overcast day and preceded to follow in the footsteps of French Impressionists Claude Monet and Pierre Auguste Renoir, who made the *en plein air* art form famous. View the accompanying slideshow to see how the students learned to do it.



## A Teaching Artist

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

Paul T. Boecher's students appreciate his supportive teaching style. "Paul's very intuitive and understands what each individual wants. He doesn't force his style. He wants you to have your own vision," said Tom Pace.

According to Judy Martin, Boecher "waits until I ask for help and then gives me good suggestions."



## Expert Tips

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

Boecher offered suggestions on how to work in the cold. "My suggestion, especially with watercolors, if you're using pan watercolors, is to be careful; the paint will crystalize in this weather. And keep your water warm inside your coat."

MaryLeah Marshall, 64, used watercolors and ran into trouble about an hour into the class.

"My colors froze right onto the paper," she said. Despite help from Boecher, who tried to warm the paints by blowing on them, Marshall had to go inside the conference room to thaw her paints.



## Bringing Art Outside

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

It didn't take long for the artist group of nine students to set up their easels for the two-hour class. The outdoor location was Elmcrest Park, only a few miles from their regular classroom at Rumriver Art Center.



## The Long View

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

Tom Pace, 64, a retired graphic designer, lined up his subject with the help of a composing viewer.

“The plein air experience has been a great opportunity to form friendships with like-minded people to help boost your creativity and share your artistic vision. Feedback from others is always a great way to expand your knowledge,” Pace said.



## Exploring a New Medium

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

Deborah Coder, 63 (foreground), has been painting for more than 40 years. She also teaches fiber art at a local farmers' coop.

Coder's painting transformed during the class from a canvas of yellow and red lines to a recognizable winter scene with snow, trees and the park map sign structure. Despite the cold, she preferred painting sitting on the concrete with only a thin cushion.



## Detailed Work

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

Mark Hagemeyer, 71, is another lifelong painter. He worked as a letter carrier for 32 years. His unique — to the group — oil “sticks” worked especially well in the freezing temperatures.



## Illustrating the Landscape

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

Deborah Ann Kirkeeide, 65, has a BA in painting from Northern Arizona University. She was an illustrator for 14 years doing "lots of children's illustrations in a variety of jobs. When I retired, I had forgotten how to paint. I'd been away from it for so long," Kirkeeide said.



## Time to Go Inside

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Credit: Barbara LaValleur

Just before heading inside to thaw out following the conclusion of the class, the artists gathered for a group shot. From left, back row: Mark Hagemeyer, Denise Sucik, Randi Barbour, Judy Martin, Paul T. Boecher and MaryLeah Marshall; second row, Patti Hartwell, Deborah Ann Kirkeeide and Tom Pace; in front, Deborah Coder.



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By Barbara La Valleur

Barbara La Valleur is an international photojournalist living in Minneapolis. Her current photo exhibit, ¡Hola,Cuba!, at First Universalist Church in Minneapolis runs through Oct. 14. On Oct.

11, she opens an exhibit called *European Women in Traditional Male Professions and Trades* at the Pearson Lakes Art Gallery, Lake Okoboji, Iowa.

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