

# MISSION SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO

## *History at Home*

### MAKE YOUR OWN PLEIN AIR ART

*This activity is appropriate for all ages. Younger students may need help reading the background information and directions.*

#### **Background Information: What is Plein Air Art?**

The term “en plein air” literally means “open air.” Plein air paintings are painted outdoors allowing the artist to capture the light and colors in a scene. This style of painting became possible in the late 1800s with the invention of the portable paint tube which allowed artists to take their supplies with them anywhere rather than being confined to a studio and painting from memory. These paintings were usually made on canvas materials, but sometimes on wood or other available materials.

Starting in the early 1900s, artists started coming to the Mission to paint the ruins. Many early plein air artists came to the Mission because it was located close to the Laguna Beach Art Association.

Today the Mission’s museum collection houses a special collection showing what the Mission looked like over 100 years ago. These paintings serve as a record during a time when there were very few photographs. Preservationists use the paintings to help in creating special treatments and projects that protect its historic architecture.

#### **Materials You Will Need**

If painting:

- Paint (watercolor is recommended, but acrylic is fine)
- Paint brushes or sticks
- Paper, cardboard, cloth, canvas (or any recyclable material)

If drawing:

- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Paper, cardboard, cloth (or any recyclable material found around your house)

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### DIRECTIONS

#### Step 1 – Find Your Inspiration

Look at these examples of plein air paintings done of Mission San Juan Capistrano for inspiration.



**Title:** Sheep Grazing

**Artist:** John Gutzon Borglum

**Date:** 1897

**Fun Fact:** This artist is the same artist who later sculpted Mount Rushmore!

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**Title:** Mary Pickford's Wedding

**Artist:** Charles Percy Austin

**Date:** 1924

**Fun Fact:** This painting shows a real wedding that happened at the Mission between silent movie stars Mary Pickford and Owen Moore.

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**Title:** Bells at the Mission

**Artist:** Kevin Davidson

**Date:** 2016

**Fun Fact:** The artist forgot paint brushes when he went to paint this image and used a palette knife and sticks to create this beautiful piece!

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## Step 2 – Choose Your Subject

Decide what you would like to paint or draw in your plein air art. Will you look out your window and draw the building across the street? Will you paint a nature scene from the comfort of your backyard? Will you use a photo from a special family vacation as the subject of your art?

## Step 3 – Choose Your Method

Decide if you will be painting or drawing your plein air picture and gather your materials.

## Step 4 – Make Your Plein Air Art

Create your plein air masterpiece! Take your learning further by filling out the worksheet “*My Plein Air Story*” found along with this activity.

**Share your plein air art on social media with the hashtag  
*#MissionSanJuanCapistrano* and we'll reshare it in a future post!**

This activity was created by Mission San Juan Capistrano.



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