



Sandra Corpora: A Year of Painting



# Sandra Corpora: A Year of Painting

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Banana Factory  
25 West Third Street  
Bethlehem, PA  
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[www.artsquest.org/arts](http://www.artsquest.org/arts)

*Late Day Peony Garden*, 2010, Oil on Panel, 30" x 40"

"The peony garden was spectacular and when I saw the late day sun making a path of light across the blooms, it gave me the composition I wanted to paint"

(Cover) *Fishing Boats at Day's End*, 2010, Oil on Panel, 40" x 60"

"This afternoon view of Cefalù's fishing fleet has barely changed in hundreds of years. There's a feeling of calm when the day's fishing is done."

# Impressions

I've known Sandy Corpora since 2004, though it seems far longer than that. A mutual friend recommended her when I was organizing an exhibition at the Allentown Art Museum of views of Allentown parks painted by local artists. I distinctly remember her painting in the exhibit, a light-filled landscape that we featured on the gallery card.

Far more than the youthful, pretty, and gently-spoken woman who meets the eye, Corpora is a dedicated professional who ranges widely for her themes and compositions. This ethic of hard work and perseverance became evident early in her career, when she was named top fine arts graduate in her class at Kutztown University. Corpora gives generously to the artistic community; for years she has been a prime mover in the Bethlehem Palette Club, serving two years as president. Recently, she established a scholarship at her alma mater for a freshman focusing on realist painting.

Corpora's oeuvre consists principally of classical still lifes of flowers and fruit, landscapes set in the greater Lehigh Valley region and in Europe, and, more recently, she has experimented with small, painterly portraits, sensitive evocations of her sitters' character.

She has a gift for creating a harmonious, serene, and beautiful environment for work and for living, which impresses visitors to her house in historic Bethlehem. In fact, her home and garden are favorite themes, as we see in her light-filled *Late Day Peony Garden*, depicting pink and white peonies growing against a brick wall bordering the garden. Late afternoon light falls diagonally across the opulent blossoms, casting shadows on the weatherworn bricks.

Corpora and her husband Pat travel to Europe at least once a year; he surveys the landscape from a restless bicycle seat while she spends the day outdoors with easel, brushes and paints recording the scenery on small wood panels. These panels can stand on their own as lively glimpses of a moment and a particular locale, but if a few meet her exacting standards, back in the studio Corpora translates them into large, detailed paintings on canvas. She makes dozens of the small oil studies each year, a lesser number of medium-sized canvases (some of these are still life paintings), and a handful of monumental paintings that she sends to prestigious juried exhibitions. Sketch and finished studio painting are both represented in this exhibition, inviting us to compare and contrast as we walk about the large gallery. For example, *View Towards the Winery* is a fleeting glimpse of a modest landscape corner, set down with bold, quick strokes of pigment, whereas *Fishing Boats at Day's End*, a luminous panoramic scene of an ancient village and harbor, is painted exactly and in great detail. The light reflecting from the water ripples and falling across the row of beached boats is utterly convincing.

Corpora enjoys painting the bounty from her luxuriant garden; her large finished still lifes are composed of a draped table top with a cloth and a plate or vessel holding an assortment of fruit and vegetables, or a floral bouquet. *Peonies in Brass* is a tour de force of light falling softly from the left onto the folds of soft green fabric, picking out the curl of crisp leaves and crinkled flower petals. The gleaming brass vessel with its reflections of objects in the room, a difficult motif for any artist to capture, is rendered beautifully and with deceptive ease. *Peonies* reminds this art historian of floral still lifes by the nineteenth century American masters John Ferguson Weir and William Merritt Chase. *Sicily Still Life*, a smaller, more freely brushed composition, invites us into the corner of a rustic kitchen whose occupant seems to have left a moment ago, perhaps after depositing eggs collected from the farm hens. The blue drape and brown wall are treated in a summary manner, directing our gaze to the tabletop composition; majolica plate and woven tablecloth contrasting with the simple forms of eggs and grapes. The light coming in from a window to the right picks out details like the grape stem and woven bands and tented creases of the crisp white tablecloth.

Never one to stick with a tried and true formula, recently Corpora has worked on a series of portraits of friends and acquaintances, studies in head and shoulder format made during weekly sessions painting from a live model. If one of the studies is deemed satisfactory, she spends additional time working it up in the studio. Corpora has also painted larger, more detailed portraits on commission. Here again, both sketch and larger finished composition are available for comparison. In the resolute *Marianne*, rendered with simple and confident brushstrokes, Corpora's keen ability to convey character with a minimum of time and fuss is evident. *Lucia*, a larger commissioned portrait of a young girl, presents the sitter in a delightfully interactive pose. Our eye picks out hands, hair, face and the distinctive striped dress, noticing a dramatic contrast with the simplified background. Although a spontaneous and seemingly contemporary pose, this portrait is classical in its pyramidal composition consisting of the oval forms of the ends of the chair's arms, linked with the sitter's oval head by the diagonals of legs, arms, and stripes in the skirt. The use of the monumental red armchair and the swag of drapery enframing the sitter recall portraits of a century ago by Irving Wiles and William Merritt Chase. Not surprisingly, Corpora has spent many hours studying the work of historical masters, mentioning Vermeer, Hals, Robert Henri, Anders Zorn, and John Singer Sargent as particularly inspirational.

This exhibition features paintings completed by Corpora in the past year, but symbolically it can be considered a retrospective, featuring as it does different phases and developments moving through her career. Landscapes, her earliest focus, are joined by fruit and flower still lifes, a focus of the past six or seven years, rounded out by recent explorations in portraiture. Evident in each piece is Corpora's intense study of inanimate or animate subject, her skill in rendering color, light, form, and personality, and her drive for learning and refinement. Moving forward, I'm eager to view the artist's continued explorations and amplifications of the humble yet tremendously challenging domain of portraiture.

Christine I. Oaklander, Ph.D.



*Peonies in Brass*, 2010, Oil on Linen, 18" x 24"

"These peonies from the garden had a beautiful boldness to them, so I painted them life-sized and in a dramatically lit composition with a similarly eye catching container of shiny brass."



*Lucia*, 2010, Oil on Panel, 20" x 16"

"Lucia's animated personality is complemented by her striped dress and the red chair."



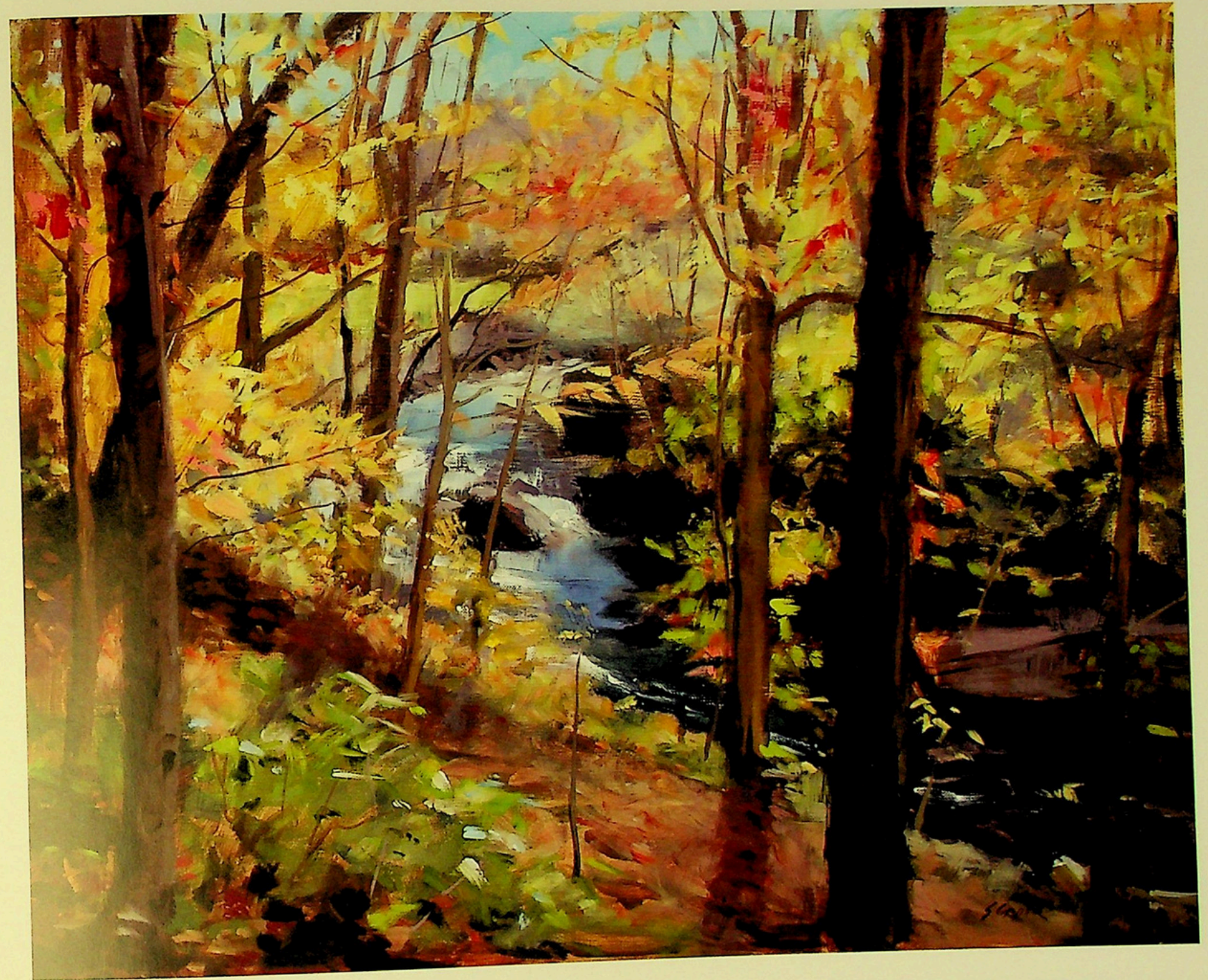
*Marianne*, 2010, Oil on Linen, 10" x 8"

"This alla prima portrait of Marianne was painted in one sitting and captures her lovely spirit."



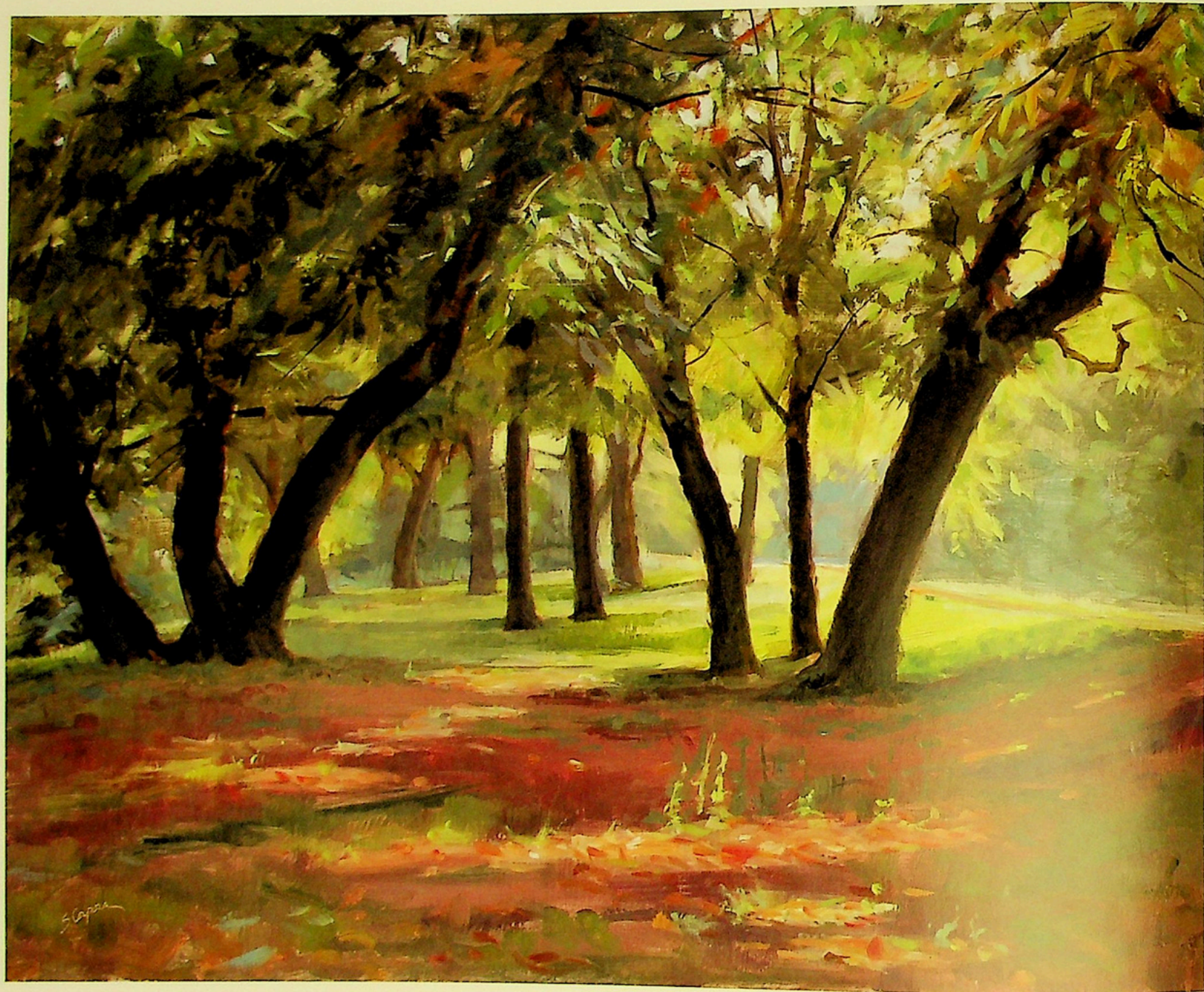
*Fall Morning, Graystones Preserve, Pennsylvania, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 40" x 60"*

"The beginning of this day started foggy; the colors were muted by the mist and the sun was kissing the treetops and lighting the trees on the opposite side of the creek. I loved the softness and quiet of that ephemeral moment."



*Wooded Creek View, Graystones Preserve, Pennsylvania, 2010, Oil on Linen, 16" x 20"*

"From the path high above the creek, I liked the unusual vantage point of the water below through the sunlit trees; I had to paint quickly as the light would quickly change."



*Sunlit Grove*, Freemanburg, Pennsylvania, 2010, Oil on Panel, 16" x 20"  
"Between the canal and the river was this serene spot, plus perfect plein air conditions, shade, 70 degrees, no wind, few bugs and a couple hours of good light."



*October Upstream*, Graystones Preserve, Pennsylvania, 2010, Oil on Linen, 11" x 14"  
"I climbed down the bank to get a vantage point of the bleached tree lying near the island in the creek. The afternoon sun intensified the fall colors and warmed my back as I painted."



*Château Pitray and the Great Oak, France, 2010, Oil on Panel, 11" x 14"*  
"Soon after arriving at the chateau, I set up to paint because the sunny afternoon was perfect. The oak and the chateau looked like old friends."



*View Towards the Winery, France, 2010, Oil on Panel, 11" x 14"*  
"This was the only gray day in Bordeaux and I loved the colors and steady light; it was getting dark when I packed up my paints."

# Artist's Statement

"Each subject I choose to paint attracts me in a particular way and the challenge lies in making the painting feel true to that. Sometimes I want to capture the grace of a human figure or animal, or the "person" in the portrait. In the landscape I look for the specific light, color and shapes unique to those places. Those elements are created by the roll of the land, or time of day, or the atmosphere that sharpened or softened the colors. My still life paintings are mostly inspired by the harvest of fruit and vegetables and flowers grown in our garden. Being able to watch these subjects grow and mature gives me a connection with them and an anticipation of what I want to convey in painting them."

# Selected Exhibitions/Awards/Events

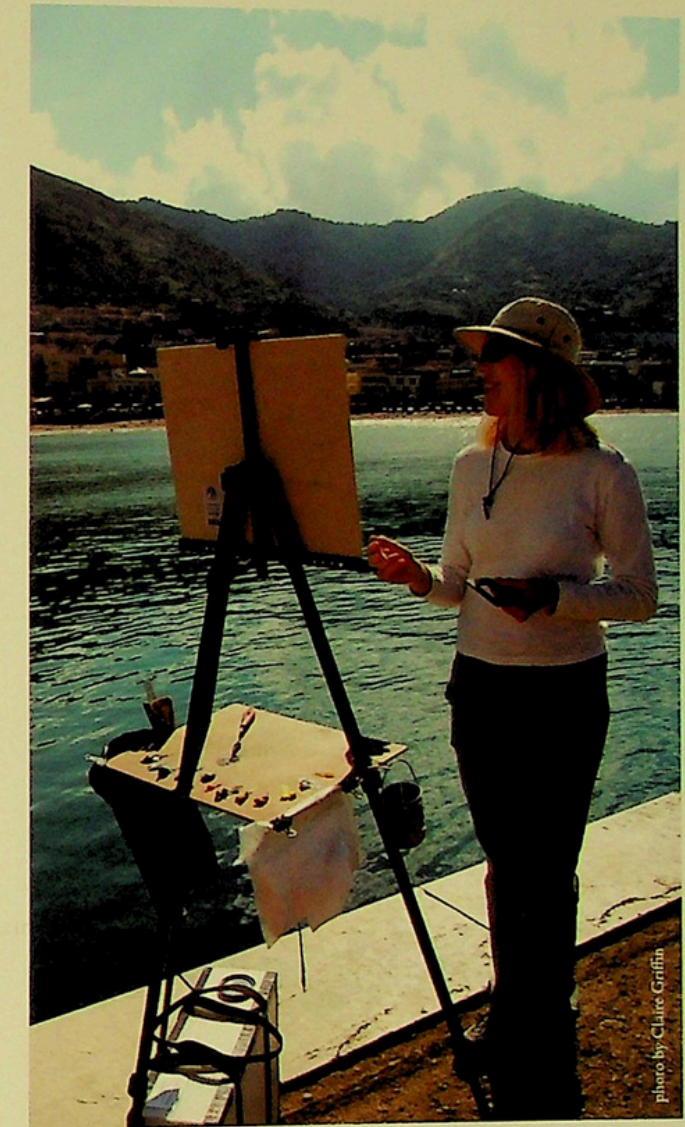
- 2011 Teaching Residency Awarded, Swain School in Allentown, PA
- 2011 Portrait Society of America, Finalist in the Members' Competition for Still life
- 2010 First Place Award, Moravian Archives Portrait Competition, "The Art of Thy Countenance"
- 2010 The Philadelphia Sketch Club 147th Annual Exhibition of Small Oil Paintings
- 2009 Finalist Award in August 2009 FineArtViews Contest for "Peonies in a Silver Pitcher"
- 2009 Solo Exhibition, Baum School of Art, Allentown, PA
- 2009 Oil Painters of America National Exhibition, Santa Fe, NM
- 2008 American Artists Professional League Eightieth Grand National Exhibition, NYC
- 2008 "The Magic of Light" still life workshop taught, Bethlehem Palette Club, PA
- 2007 Solo Exhibition, Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2006 Peoples First Choice Award, Bethlehem Palette Club Exhibition, City Hall Rotunda
- 2005 "Moments in Time" Juried Exhibition, Payne Gallery, Moravian College, PA
- 2005 "Allentown Impressions: Views of City Parks" Invitational, Allentown Art Museum, PA
- 2004 Oil Painters of America Thirteenth Annual National Juried Exhibition, (Award of Excellence)
- 2002 Artist in Residence, Inn at Spry Point, PEI, Canada
- 2002 Summer New Works Exhibition, Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2001 Solo exhibition, Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2001 and 2002 "Best Loudoun County Artist" award at Waterford Red Barn Art Exhibit, VA
- 2001 American Artist Magazine, "The River as Muse", July, 2001
- 2001 Featured workshop instructor, Lehigh River Sojourn 2001
- 2001 Public Commission, Town Portrait of Castel di Lucio, Italy
- 2000 "Riverscapes: Paintings from Lehigh River Sojourn 2000", Artist in Residence Lehigh Valley Wildlands Conservancy, Emmaus, PA
- 2000 Bethlehem Palette Club Juried Exhibition at the Allentown Art Museum, PA (Award)

- 2000 Philadelphia Sketch Club, 137th Annual Exhibition of Small Oil Paintings (Award)
- 1999 Featured Artist: Artists of the Lehigh Valley, Lehigh Valley Hospital, Allentown
- 1999 Invitational Salon Exhibition of Small Works, New Arts Program, Kutztown, PA
- 1998 Solo exhibition: "Plein Air Paintings", Northampton Community College, PA
- 1998, 1999, 2000 Phillips Mill 69th Juried Art Exhibition, New Hope, PA
- 1998 Solo exhibition: "Recent Paintings", Bethlehem City Hall Gallery, PA
- 1998 through 2010 Yellow Springs Art Exhibition/Sale, Historic Yellow Springs, PA
- 1997 Art Association of Harrisburg, 69th Annual Juried Exhibition, Harrisburg, PA
- 1997 Lehigh Art Alliance, 62nd Annual Spring Juried Exhibition, Mountain Top Campus, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA (Award)
- 1996 Berks Art Alliance 19th Regional Juried Exhibition at the Reading Museum, PA
- 1996 Binney & Smith Mural Competition for Three Rivers Landing, Easton, PA (Finalist and Second Prize)
- 1996 and 1997 Woodmere Art Museum, Annual Juried Exhibition, Philadelphia, PA
- 1995 The Salmagundi Club 18th Annual Non-Member Juried Art Exhibition, NYC
- 1995 Solo exhibition: "Figures & Landscapes", Design Accent Gallery, Allentown, PA
- 1994 Lehigh Art Alliance 59th Annual Fall Juried Exhibition, Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA (Best of Show)
- 1994, 1995, 1996 Juried Art Exhibition & Sale, Lehigh Valley Hospital, Allentown, PA (Purchase Awards)
- 1991 Mayfair Regional Juried Art Exhibition, Allentown, PA (Third Place Award)

# Acknowledgements

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(Back Cover) *Sunflowers on an Antique Rug*, 2011, Oil on Linen, 14" x 18"  
"The warm tones of the sunflowers, rug and solid crockery are cooled by the daylight by which I painted them."



Sandra Corpora painting in Cefalù, Sicily, 2010  
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