

Plein Air on the Santa Cruz River!



Plein air (pronounced "*plen air*") is a French term that means "open air." It's about making art outside instead of in a studio.





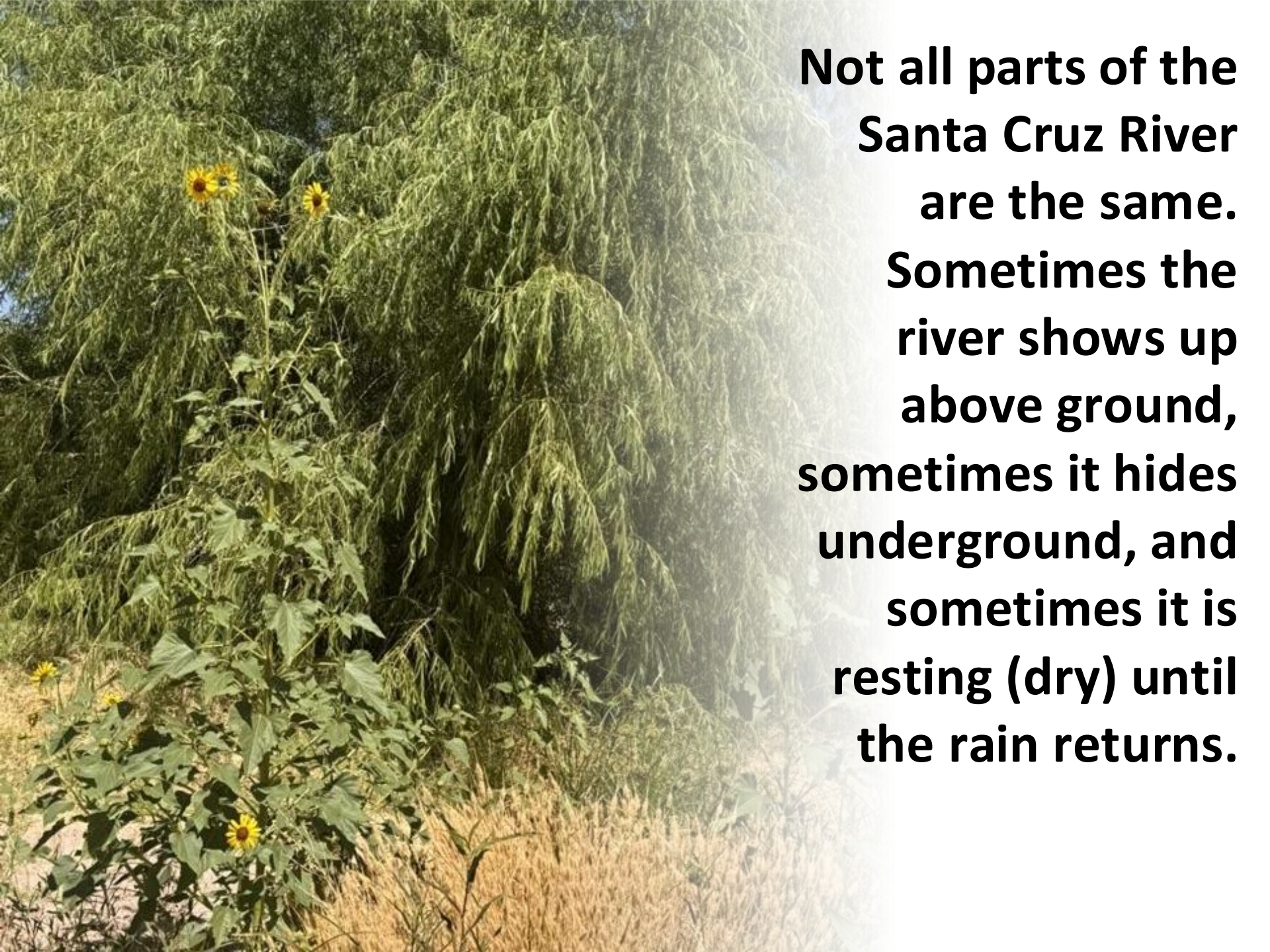
In Tucson, one of the best places to make art outdoors is on the Santa Cruz River!



•The Santa Cruz River is a desert river that flows north from Mexico through the Tucson area.

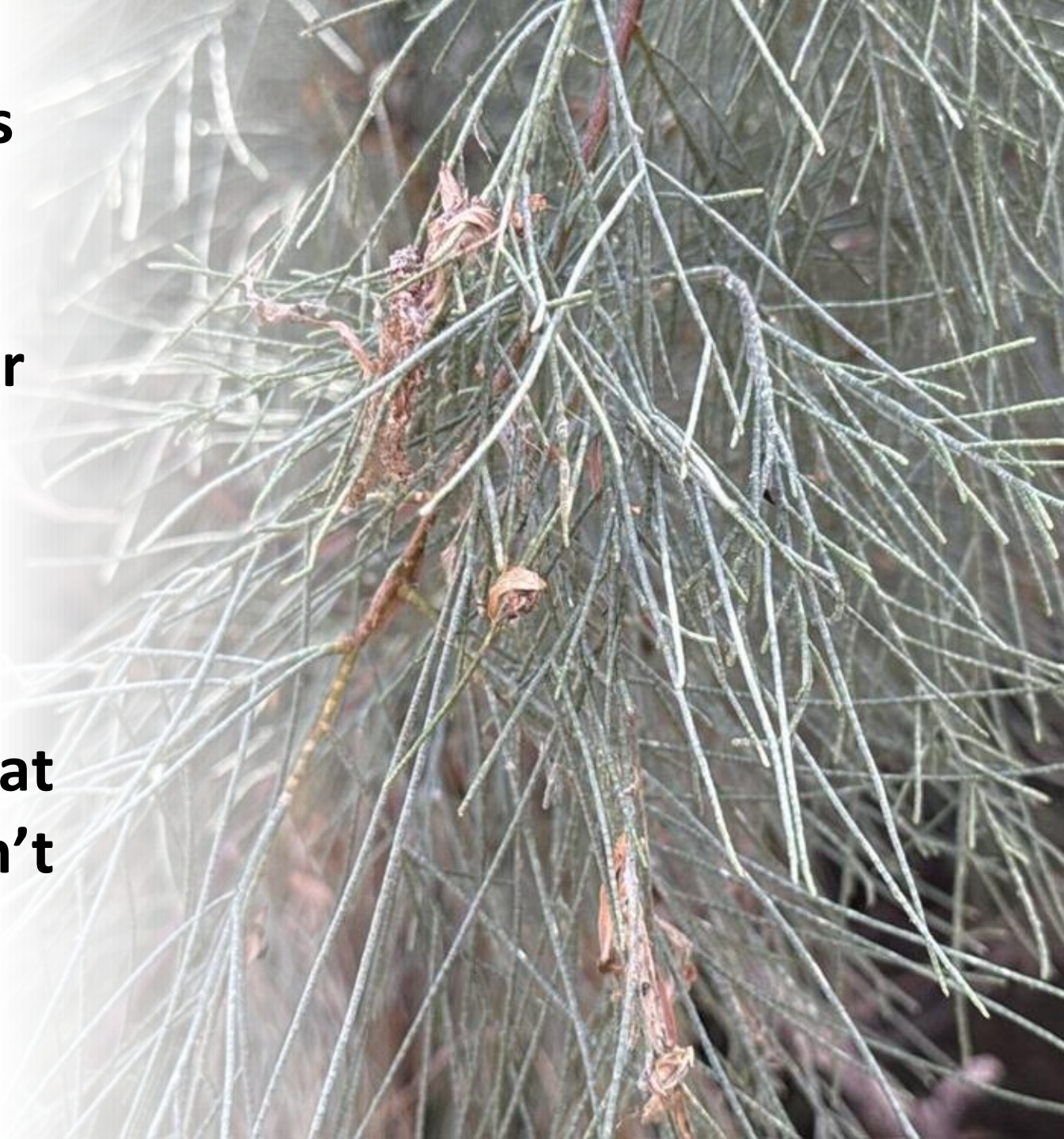


The Santa Cruz River is a great place for plein air because of its beautiful scenery and abundant wildlife!



**Not all parts of the
Santa Cruz River
are the same.
Sometimes the
river shows up
above ground,
sometimes it hides
underground, and
sometimes it is
resting (dry) until
the rain returns.**

Because of this mix of wet, damp, and dry zones, the river creates different habitats that support biodiversity that we usually don't find in our desert.





Places where the Santa Cruz River flows year-round are especially wonderful for plein air because artists can observe water, plants, and wildlife all together in one changing, colorful landscape.

**Did you know
that many
famous artists
painted
outdoors?**

**Let's see if you
recognize their
names!**



Claude Monet

- Monet was a French painter (1840–1926) and leading figure in the Impressionist movement.

- He believed in capturing natural light and fleeting moments, often painting the same scene at different times of day.









Claude Lorraine 1923

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)

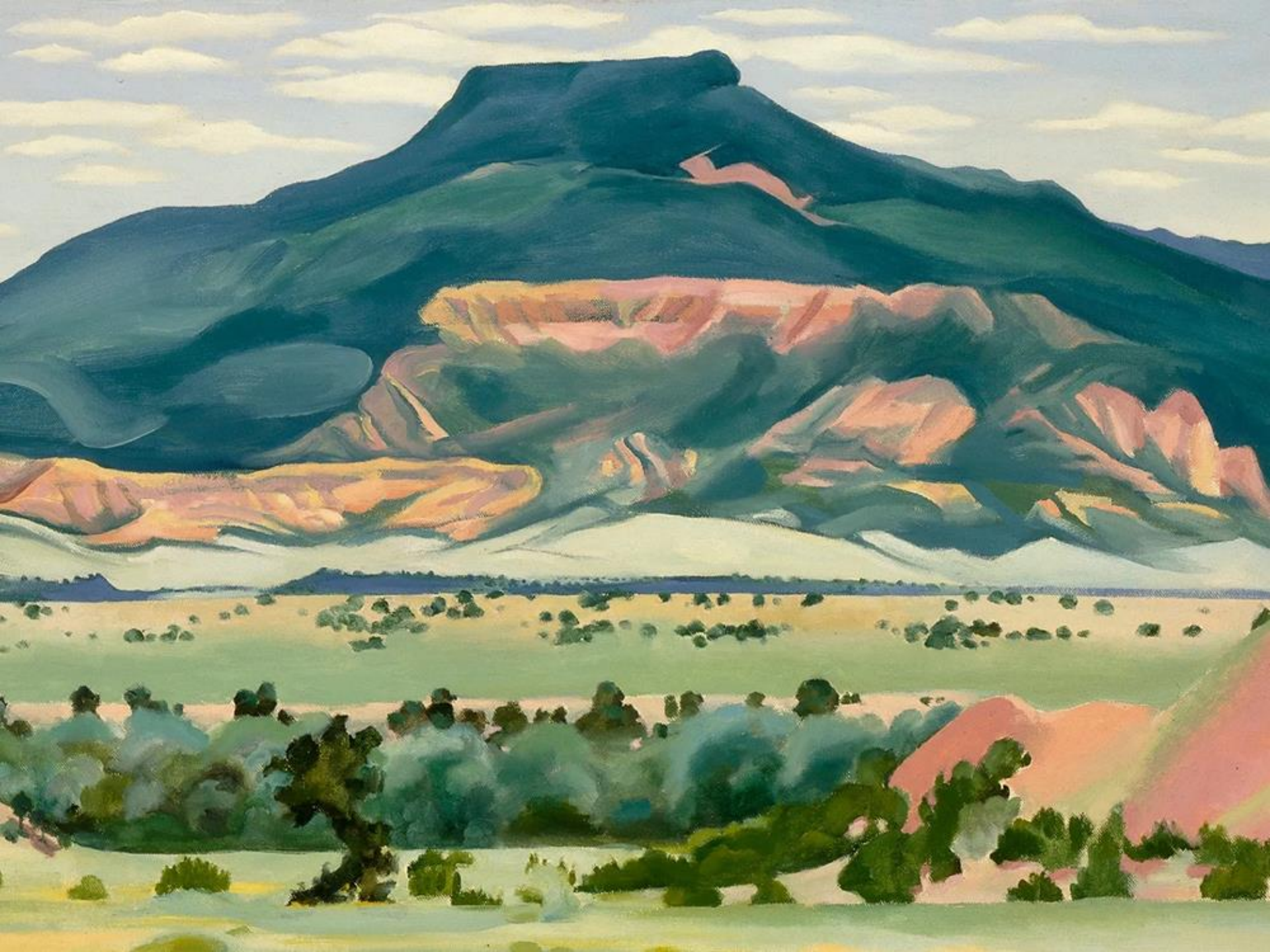
•O'Keeffe is known for her bold paintings of flowers, bones, and New Mexico landscapes.

•She painted outside in the desert, often hiking with her supplies.









Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) painted plein air mostly during the late 1880s.

He was inspired by the bright sunlight and vivid landscapes.

He created many of his most famous outdoor works by painting directly in nature to capture light, color, and movement.









Ready to make
art on the Santa
Cruz River?



**First, we'll need to decide where we want to go!
Some great locations on the river include:**

Marana Heritage River Park (Marana)

El Rio Preserve (Marana)

Crossroads at Silverbell Park (Tucson/Marana)

Sweetwater Wetlands (Tucson)

Santa Cruz Heritage Site at West Starr Pass Blvd. (Tucson)

Tumacácori National Historic Park

The Chuck Huckelberry Loop Bike Path

Materials you might want to bring:

- Sketchbook or nature journal
- Paints, pencils, or pens
- Brushes, water cups, paper towels, and apron
- Hats, sunscreen, and drinking water, and snacks





Outdoor safety and etiquette:

How is making art outdoors different from indoors?

How should we behave during plein air?

What kind of safety concerns should we have?

How can we show respect for the environment during our visit?

Happy Plein Air!

**Ms. Conners
UHS
Pima College**

