

# North Carolina Plein Air Art Festival in historic New Bern – Beaufort - Oriental

*May 11-17, 2026*

*Mark your calendar and plan early*



*New Bern, North Carolina, on the banks of the Trent and Neuse Rivers – Courtesy Visit New Bern –  
Photography by Allen Fairbanks*

**NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA** – The 6th Annual North Carolina Plein Air Art Festival in historic New Bern begins Sunday, May 11, and continues through Sunday, May 17. The eight-day Festival showcases 37 nationally and globally acclaimed plein air artists, including 20 newly juried painters, joining 17 award winners and top performers from 2025's Festival.

“The term ‘plein air’ is French and means ‘open air’,” said Kippy Hammond, Festival organizer. “Plein air painting can be traced back to Impressionist artists such as Monet, Renoir, and Degas – painting

outdoors and capturing fleeting moments of light, color, atmosphere, and the mood of a scene, rather than detailed representations.”

Painting venues include historic New Bern, the first state capital and second-oldest European-American town in North Carolina; Beaufort, the home of the North Carolina Maritime Museum; and Oriental, the sailing capital of North Carolina. In addition, artists will choose more sites and landscapes in Craven, Carteret, and Pamlico Counties.



*Watch artists create paintings from start to finish - NC Plein Air Art Festival  
Photography by Alan Yoder*

According to Hammond, artists will create approximately 400 paintings featuring local scenes, subjects, and vistas, in a friendly competition to win the Best of Show Koffenberger Award, plus other prominent awards and recognition.

Festival attendees will have numerous opportunities to meet and talk with the artists, including using a real-time cell phone app showing the locations of featured painters each day. In addition, youth and adult amateur artists can meet with the pros and compete for ribbons and cash awards in the annual Quick Paint competition. Festival headquarters, including demonstrations, daily gallery talks, adult and youth workshops, art displays, and sales, will be based in historic New Bern’s Farmers Market, less than two blocks from Tryon Palace. In addition, pop-up exhibits, and art sales will happen in Beaufort and Oriental, with location details, dates, and times on the NC Plein Air website. All activities are free except the workshops, and a modest fee for artists to enter the Quick Paint competition (no charge for spectators).



*Exhibition and Sales for wet canvases – NC Plein Air Art Festival in New Bern  
Photography by Jeff Sherman*

Workshops include award-winning plein air artists Russell Jewell, an internationally recognized plein air painter with signature memberships in the American Watercolor Society, National Watercolor Society and The Transparent Watercolor Society of America and John T. Eiseman who will offer a rare opportunity to engage in a mentored, immersive plein air experience with students. Both are renowned American Impressionist painters and in-demand instructors conducting workshops across the United States and Europe.

“Plein air is a popular form of art and recreational activity influenced by the rise in global tourism,” said Hammond. “Artists are interested in capturing the essence of a particular place and time and celebrating the world’s beauty. Plein air painters typically work in oils, watercolors, or pastels.”



*Daily scheduled demonstration to interact with artists. – NC Plein Air Art Festival in New Bern  
Photography by Robbin Haigler*



*Paintings from left to right– by Vlad Ducheve, Katie Dobson-Cundiff*

NC Plein Air Art Festival is owned and operated by Plein Air New Bern, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization expanding opportunities for individuals to Be a Part of Art in their communities. Artists commit a portion of all Festival art sales to support this mission.

[Click for NC Plein Air New Bern website](#)

[2026 Media Kit](#)

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