

A Few Fun Words by Writer Darlene Mueller Morse on Paint the Poudre Plein Air

I was drawn to Lion's Park near La Porte for several reasons today but the main one was to find the *en plein air* artists who allegedly had planted themselves on the banks of the Poudre River. Thirty-nine artists from different haunts had come to paint the Poudre River in ways only they could see and then release their catch to the public on July 12th at an art auction.

I pulled into the crowded parking lot and knew I was in the right spot when I saw a license plate which read, "Degas." Another said P8NTR.

There were only a few people around and these plainly were not artists: they carried inner tubes over their shoulders and drank libations (not that artists don't do at least one of these activities). I walked from the parking lot to the path and was very excited to be at this park again. It had been years and over that time, the Poudre had jumped its banks several times and taken out most of the picnic area. What remained was a reconstituted area with the Poudre as its architect.

I came to a wood-framed staircase filled in, at least on the upper steps with dirt, which led to the water. The lower steps were hollow where the river had reclaimed its silt. The Poudre was still black with ash and its banks held scores of blackened pinecones and small pieces of charred bark. The quick-flowing water held its opaque secrets.

With the sun sharing the blue sky, the shadows of the cottonwood leaves dappled the black water below. I took pictures. As I walked another half-mile or so I

marveled at how quickly nature surrounded and engulfed me. I saw live branches mingled with dead branches, how thickets appeared and then barren ground, and how the path meandered in a way dictated by the riverbank. The air was light with low humidity but heavy with scents of the wet. It was refreshing to be away from my neighborhood with its even curbs, sidewalks, pruned trees and bushes and covenants.

The *en plein air* artists must have disappeared into thin air, I thought, as I walked back toward the parking lot without a single sighting. I then met Marie Massey, the organizer of this event, who told me the artists were all under the bridge. Ah ha!

My slice of river time was over so I climbed up the wooden steps and made my way to my car. I will wait until July 12th for the gallery reception to see what their visions of the Poudre will be. In the meantime, I have my own visions, both in my camera and in my mind, telling me that this river is indeed something extraordinary.

Darlene Mueller Morse - 07/02/13