

Why Watercolor

By Frank Webb

Why watercolor?

This essential question ought to be asked and answered frequently while studying and practicing watercolor painting and pursuing excellence in this challenging but rewarding medium. Here are some of my personal ruminations on this important quest.

Each of us builds on the arch of our unique experience. My answer to the question *Why Watercolor* will be different from yours. A friend, Arthur Alexander, once told me, "I paint only because I love to cut mats". As a teacher I shared my experience, but never did I suggest that my evidence should also become the student's evidence. We each should conscientiously cultivate our own garden. It should be totally personal, even though paradoxically we each stand on the shoulders of preceding masters.

A larger question is *can life be intensified, clarified or interpreted?*

I will speak for my own experience. Painting beckoned to me when as a child I was delighted by the way that drawing and painting added quality to life, superseding the dullness of everyday routine. I was able to discern long range goals that remained clear even through the great depression and wartime service. These goals provided a design for life. Design of a life is as necessary as design for a painting.

Self-education

In art school, noted painter, Syd Solomon gave us an assignment to go into a poor section of the city and make a sketch. We were then to return to the studio and make a watercolor from it. Furthermore, we were to mat it and then submit it to a critique. A procedure I use to this day. During the 30 years with a day job in advertising art and illustration I was able to be a fine artist at night and on weekends since I was able to make a painting in one hour. I never work from photos, but always from pencil sketches, on site or from memory. James Fiebleman said that the apprentice system is still the best way to study painting. So, as painters we must consistently judge our own work. All art education is self-education, even when in a formal program.

Less is more

Watercolor has limitations, but art thrives on limitations rather than on augmentations. Watercolor also has a longer life than oils. Also, a watercolor painting allows us a more intimate peek into the painter's psyche. Viewers with educated eyes can follow the way a painting was made. (like a glimpse into a sketch book).

Feeling plus seeing

The watercolor painter is a great appreciator, and appreciation is the only handle by which to come to art. The painter must have empathy. By this I mean to feel the float of the cloud, the hardness of a rock, and the pitch and toss of the ocean. Feeling and form go together. I have

found that watercolor painters are not covetous, but generous in sharing . If one painter gets a gold medal, it is considered a victory for the whole tribe.

Superfluous caring

Watercolor has enjoyed a tremendous following despite the fact that many of the top museums of the U.S. have few or none in their collections. Watercolor thrives even though its practitioners often must make a living some other way—proof that a work of art is the product of love.

Some of the characteristics of watercolor:

- Luminosity
- Simplicity
- Faster precipitations
- Permanence
- Pleasure objectified

I challenge you to seek your own motivations and aims in choosing watercolor as your means of creative expression. My path has led me on a rewarding and delightful journey.