Making a Splash
East meets West in another Chinese watercolor event, plus a tip for critiquing your own work and a peek through Andrew Wyeth’s windows.
BY JESSICA CANTERBURY

Meet the Masters
Pierre-Joseph Redouté painted flowers for royalty and scientific discovery.
BY TAMERA LENZ MUENTE

Creativity Workshop
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Watercolor Essentials
An accomplished floral painter shares her process for editing reference photos and painting plumeria.
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Sketching is the most direct form of artistic expression. With just a few simple marks, you can capture the essence of your subject. All you need is a pencil and paper (although even a napkin or the back of an envelope will do). Whether you use sketches to record experiences, practice your drawing skills or work out painting ideas, the trick is to transfer the much-sought-after feeling of immediacy to your watercolors.

For Alabama artist Iain Stewart (page 22), sketching is a crucial first step in his process. “To me, starting a large painting without preliminary sketchwork is akin to jumping out of bed at some ungodly hour and attempting to run a marathon having only casually mused about jogging beforehand.” In this issue, he walks you step by step through a painting-in-progress to demonstrate how he maintains the energy of his urban sketches in his studio work.

You can see the footprint of lively sketchwork in Peter Quinn’s vibrant townscapes (page 40) as well. A frequent traveler, he takes a sketchbook with him on all of his trips, filling them with lively, linear-style drawings in waterproof ink. But it’s not just the architecture of a place that he endeavors to record, it’s the people who most often capture his attention. “If I were sitting here with a sketchbook now,” he says, “I’d probably be sketching figures rather than buildings. I often put people in my pictures, perhaps because the composition requires that sense of movement, or because I want to introduce a story or provide a focal point.”

With spring in full bloom, I hope you’ll take the opportunity to open your own sketchbook and record the beauty of the season. Need inspiration? The gorgeous and varied floral paintings in “Say It With Flowers” (page 32) will have you grabbing your watercolor kit and heading out the door in no time.

Write to Us
Please share your questions and comments by writing to Watercolor Artist, Letters, 10151 Carver Road, Suite 200, Blue Ash, OH 45242. Or e-mail us at wcamag@fwmedia.com.
Chica Brunsvold  
www.chicabrunsvold.com
Chica Brunsvold (page 32) holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Michigan School of Art and Design. She has exhibited in more than 200 national exhibitions and won dozens of awards. She conducts one-day workshops on painting watercolor on YUPO and is represented by the Gallery Underground in Arlington, Virginia.

Lynne Railsback  
http://lynnerrailsback.com
Lynne Railsback’s watercolors (page 32) have been exhibited in museums, botanical gardens, galleries, corporations and libraries throughout the United States and Europe. She’s a member of the American Society of Botanical Artists, Geneva Lake Art Association, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Florilegium Society and the Museum of Wisconsin Art.

Marlin Rotach  
www.marlinrotach.com
Born in Salina, Kansas, Marlin Rotach (page 32) earned a B.F.A. in painting from Kansas State University and an M.F.A. at the University of Nebraska. Today he works almost exclusively in watercolor, painting for galleries and private commissions. He’s a signature member of the National Watercolor Society and the Watercolor U.S.A. Honor Society, among others.

Iain Stewart  
www.stewartwatercolors.com
Watercolor artist and illustrator Iain Stewart (page 22) is a signature member of the National Watercolor Society. His work has received numerous awards and been featured in many publications, including Splash 15 (North Light Books). He’s a sought-after juror and workshop instructor and maintains a studio in Opelika, Alabama.

Peter Quinn  
http://peterquinn.tumblr.com
Peter Quinn (page 40), an elected member of the Royal Watercolour Society, graduated from the Glasgow School of Art with a degree in fine art and from the University of Sunderland with a Ph.D. in art history. A recent prizewinner at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, he shows regularly at Newcastle’s Gallagher & Turner art gallery.

Stan Miller  
www.stanmiller.net
Stan Miller (page 48), a professional painter in watercolor and egg tempera for more than 30 years, has shown his paintings in numerous exhibitions, galleries and museums. He’s a signature member of the American Watercolor Society (AWS), as well as an AWS award winner. Miller also teaches workshops and classes throughout the United States.
The real painting journey starts with a sketch.

BY IAIN STEWART
While reviewing a smaller version of this painting, I decided that **Istanbul From Pierre Loti Hill** (watercolor on paper, 12x21) would be better served if I expanded the view to include more of the scene. I waited until the last few washes to add a soft glaze and reflections to the water.
My wife, Noelle, sips her tea at a small café in the Fatih district of Istanbul, chatting with our waitress about the sketch I’m working on at our table (pictured above). Over the last four days she’s had to order second and third cups of tea to allow me time to finish a sketch, and she’ll graciously continue to do so for the next couple of weeks. By now she’s used to the routine, and I know if she gets truly bored she’ll tell me when and where to meet her, and I’ll know where my last sketch of the day will take place. The thing is that Noelle has actually come to enjoy this time, and I suspect she’s doing naturally what I tell my students is the most important part of what we artists do: engaging in the moment and watching life as it takes place.

When I travel, I always marvel at the rushing about going on around me. It’s as if the tourists are let out of a nursery with stern warnings of cold supper and early lights out if they don’t take at least 500 photographs and see all the major sights in one afternoon. That’s no way to see a city and certainly no way to immerse yourself in a culture. My travel mantra is “more of less,” meaning I try to spend more time enjoying where I am rather than checking places off a travel guide list. It’s also an essential part of understanding where you are. When I stop to work in my sketchbook, I’ve hit the pause button on my day. Everything else keeps moving, but instead of being part of that machine, I’m now an observer, an editor and a recorder. When I return to the studio, I find that those observations can serve as well or better than any of my photographs.

Clockwise from opposite:

Bridges are one of my favorite subjects, especially those of New York. In The Queensboro Bridge (watercolor on paper, 20x12), I wanted to play up the lacywork-like quality of the struts and cables. The only solution I could find to do that properly was to use masking so that I could apply a gradient wash to help give the illusion of unity to the bridge as a whole.

Akbiyik Caddesi—Istanbul (graphite on paper, 11x9) depicts a great street of cafés and rug shops. This is one sketch that I’ve been working up the courage to attempt on a much larger scale.

Most of my work is done in one or two sittings, but I let From Union Square (watercolor on paper, 16x11) simmer for a few days. I liked the unfinished look of my first attempt, but over time I realized I wanted to continue working on it, mainly solidifying the buildings and adding strength to the tree at right.

Sketch Is Best

At some point in the last few years, my artistic output has shifted from serious studio work to taking the joy I find in sketching and keeping that alive in the studio. I honestly cannot think of a better way to create. Working in a sketchbook is one of the best perks we artists get. A sketchbook has no other responsibility than to
Amsterdam is such a wonderful city; I would have loved to see it by boat. Canals 1–Amsterdam (watercolor on paper, 18x12) is how I took myself on such a tour vicariously.

St. Andrews Boatyard (opposite; watercolor on paper, 22x14) is an example of how I’ll use two or three sketches along with reference photos to do a studio piece. The moody atmosphere, although very Scottish indeed, is actually from a sketch I did of a wet street in Alabama.

**Iain Stewart’s recommended reading on drawing in perspective**

- *Architecture: Form, Space, and Order* by Francis D.K. Ching (John Wiley & Sons, 1943)
- *Sketching—from Square One… to Trafalgar Square* by Richard E. Scott (Sierra Madre Press, 2013)
serve you. It’s completely private unless you decide to share. Safe from the critical eye of jurors, it’s a place where you can explore with abandon all of your ideas. It’s also the best tool I can think of for preparing to work in the studio.

To me, starting a large painting without preliminary sketchwork is akin to jumping out of bed at some ungodly hour and attempting to run a marathon having only casually mused about jogging beforehand. Preliminary sketches are the first real dialogue between your mind and the physical reality of your ideas. When I begin a sketch, I work quickly, rarely allowing my pencil to leave the paper. I often use a harder lead to complete these layout drawings before moving on to something softer to add strength and solidity to my linework. I don’t concern myself with erasing the preliminary layout; I find these lines add depth and character to a drawing. As you add color to your sketches, the linework will be obscured or almost entirely lost anyway.

In April 2013, I was able to see the John Singer Sargent exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. I created The Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch—Brooklyn (watercolor on paper, 11x9) immediately after. The statuary on the arch itself is quite intricate, but my intent was to use shape and tone to suggest detail rather than get too caught up in accuracy.
a streetscape comes to life

My studio pieces are really just more complex versions of what we see here. They require more planning and are more difficult technically, but at the heart of it, they’re just my sketches that have had a chance to be reviewed and reworked. This is what keeps me coming back for more.

Step 1: Using this photograph taken in New York City facing the Freedom Tower, I use an overlay of tracing paper to indicate the horizon line, vanishing points and major shapes to begin developing the thumbnail sketch.

Step 2: After checking proportions and the overall composition, I’m ready to proceed with the layout drawing. I work rather loosely with an HB lead pencil, only concentrating on the major shapes and placing all the elements in the sketch.

Step 3: Once my layout is complete, I go back and add strength to my linework using a softer lead. I concentrate on using varying line widths and depth of tone to give the drawing character, as well as the illusion of distance. Note that objects in the distance are treated as silhouettes; only the foreground contains detail.

Step 4: After taping down my paper, I begin the underpainting. The first and most important part of the process is knowing where my light source is and reserving my highlights by leaving areas of the paper untouched. I begin by mixing three very light combinations of pure cobalt, burnt sienna and raw sienna. I muddle some cobalt and burnt sienna for the tower and then, as I progress down the sheet of paper, begin to add large swaths of cool and warm tones. As I near the bottom of the sketch, I add a little alizarin crimson to the cobalt mixture and deepen the burnt sienna to give the base of my painting some solidity. The
shaded areas remain cool and the sunlit areas warm. I finish with a light misting of clear water with an atomizer.

**Step 5:** I separate my mid-ground from the background along the first action line indicated in Step 1 by painting throughout the U shape created by the buildings on the right and left sides of the street. I'm still careful to retain as many of my highlights as possible here. Using the same mixtures from the end of Step 4, I carefully paint around signs and areas of the van, car and figures on the sidewalk. I also develop the yellow of the umbrella.

While the wash is still wet, I drop in areas of warm and cool hues to give the shadows warm highlights and suggest shadows for the areas in sunlight. As I near the bottom of the image, I begin to wash in clear water to allow the darks to fade out.

**Final Step:** To finish, I create depth using a mixture of ultramarine blue and light red in varying strengths. I add a little sap green with burnt sienna to the trees and, using the darker mixture, begin to suggest architectural detail, tree branches, shadows on the umbrella and figures. When this is barely dry, I add pops of color directly from the tube to strengthen some of my figures and signage. I move my brush rather quickly while it's fairly dry to make these marks. I make sure to take a few steps away from the image so I can see how it's working. It's very easy to overdo this step. When I'm satisfied with the results, I stop. Once the image is dry, I may use clear water to scrub out some highlights or use white gouache to recover highlights that have been lost. After a quick spattering of the dark mixture for texture, **LES to the Freedom Tower** (watercolor on paper, 11x7½) is finished.

My sketchwork informs how I approach everything in the studio. Because I’m able to use my reference photos merely as suggestions, I often change my composition around and reorganize a scene to suit what I’d like to say about it. When I return to my studio after sketching on site, I’ll spend hours sorting through pictures and sketches before beginning to settle on a few ideas. I usually have a few different images in my head, and often it takes a few minutes doing thumbnails to settle on the one I’ll move forward with.

**Suggest, Don’t State**

It’s important to understand the way I treat architectural detail. As long as I’ve located my horizon line and work from established vanishing points, I only need a suggestion of detail (see To the Heiligeweg [Holy Way]–Amsterdam, opposite). In this type of painting, a good rule of thumb is “suggest, don’t state.” If the bones of the work are

**Grace Church Sketch–NYC** (above; watercolor on paper, 11x9) is a delightful scene, but I could tell that compressing the view and focusing on the church itself as a more studied studio piece might better suit my goals. Overall, its detail work is very similar to that in the final piece (at left).

**Grace Church–NYC** (watercolor on paper, 28x10) was my first work accepted into the American Watercolor Society in 2013. When looking at the sketch above, you can see a few obvious major changes to the overall composition. My hope was that by accentuating the vertical, the focus would become the church itself rather than a typical street scene.
right, then you can add or subtract detail as you see fit. I try to use only enough detail so that an object is recognizable but not completely understood; the tops of car roofs with a windshield and headlights, figures’ heads and shoulders, and signage and street lamps should be treated in a way that makes them understandable but only enough to add character to the scene. Unnecessary detail removes the very thing that makes me want to take a second and third look at a painting: a sense of mystery.

Arches, colonnades and hundreds of windows all can be suggested on buildings with just a few strokes of either a pencil or brush. This is the only trick I employ, and the only tricky bit about it is trusting that shape and edge are more powerful visual indicators than detail. It’s also extremely important to understand that the drawing should serve only as a placeholder. Your painting shouldn’t be held back by misjudged lines; paint over or through them if that’s what the painting needs. Let go of the idea that you paint to a line—a line is only a suggestion and one you can certainly ignore. I often say I draw a scene twice, once with a pencil and then the second “true” drawing with a brush. Don’t let anything you do early in your process limit what decisions you make later in your painting. Be willing to change anything, but remember your game plan.

I consider my sketches to be some of my best work, and the joy I take in creating them is truly why I paint. A good sketch can spawn an idea that takes you months to fully realize, and that journey is what art is all about. When I step back from one of my larger studio pieces and can still see and feel that energy from my initial sketch (see Grace Church—NYC and its sketch, opposite), I know I’m on to something. Either that, or I’ve had too much coffee.

On a 2013 painting trip to Los Angeles, I found myself at this spot on the Venice boardwalk racing the setting sun to complete Venice Boardwalk–LA (graphite on paper, 11x9). This is what I really love about working in a sketchbook. Not only do I remember doing the drawing, but I remember the chill of the air, the bustle of the musicians as they packed their vans, and one of the most delightful Italian meals just up the corner from here.

I painted To the Heiligeweg (Holy Way)—Amsterdam (at right; watercolor on paper, 14x10) in the studio after returning from Amsterdam. My goal here was to let go of the “studio” mentality and focus on painting with the same expression as I do on site.

Let go of the idea that you paint to a line—a line is only a suggestion and one you can certainly ignore.