



art journey america

LANDSCAPES

89 PAINTERS' PERSPECTIVES | Edited by Kathryn Kipp

JONATHAN FRANK

Living in Moab, Utah, in the heart of red rock country, it's no wonder that watercolorist Jonathan Frank feels a deep spiritual connection to his surroundings. "I become awed, humbled, energized and inspired, all with a deep sense of peace," says Frank. A signature member of the National Watercolor Society, his watercolor process involves painting hundreds of abstract shapes, all with hard edges, within a representational framework. He paints layer over layer, floating pure color into clear washes, letting the colors blend visually on the paper. When the colors reach the desired intensity and the painting is otherwise finished, he takes the extra step of outlining every shape first with paint and then with India ink and a Rapidograph technical pen. The practice of outlining his paintings began as a spontaneous extracurricular experiment on a high school art class assignment. Frank was so impressed with the results that he adopted the concept into his general artistic thinking from that day on.

What inspired this painting?

I'm continually amazed by the combination of red earth and blue sky that is so prevalent in southern Utah. This was the view from our first campsite on the White Rim Trail in Canyonlands National Park. I sat here for an hour or so with my coffee through the warming sunrise of a cold November morning, all the while imagining how I would paint this scene to convey this amazing experience.

Do you prefer particular seasons or times of day?

Like most landscape artists, I love low angled light that you typically get in the early morning or late afternoon hours. However, I'm not above altering a scene to create a mood, or combination of seasons that doesn't actually exist. I'll use whatever it takes to express my vision and make the painting more interesting. This also supports my creativity, and keeps me from being merely a copyist.

Do any historical movements, periods or artists inspire your painting?

I've always been particularly inspired by the art of Maynard Dixon. The bold colors and outlining were inspired by the art of Peter Max.

How do you plan your compositions?

I always start a composition from photos that I've taken on hikes or various trips. I try to do most of my composing through the camera lens, but usually end up adding or eliminating some elements in the final piece. I start by sketching out the image on a sheet of newsprint the same size as the painting. Here I can experiment with ideas, erase, change, and arrange elements to my heart's content. This drawing is usually just the primary shapes with very little detail. When I'm satisfied, I trace it onto the watercolor paper using graphite paper.

What does landscape painting teach us about life and art?

Our planet Earth is the landscape and to paint it is the unique opportunity for me to express my feelings of gratitude toward the planet, and my place on it.

