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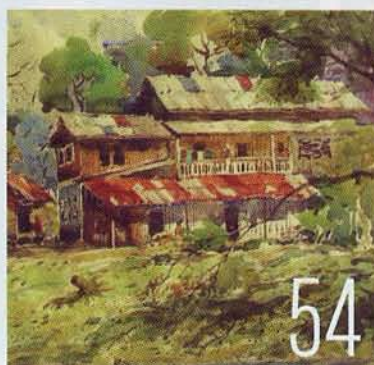
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Awake (watercolor and ink on paper, 25x25) by Jonathan Frank

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special report

20 **Color Revival** BY JESSICA CANTERBURY WITH BUTCH KRIEGER

Exciting new colors join reformulated favorites on the market this year. No matter what type of painter you are, you're bound to find something here that will excite your senses and stir your creative spirit.

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High Definition

Jonathan Frank's unconventional watercolor and ink paintings celebrate the astonishing landscapes of the American West.

By Meredith E. Lewis

When Jonathan Frank was in high school, a teacher had his class blow a puddle of watercolor paint with a straw to create wisps and pools of arbitrary color across sheets of paper. Later, after the paint had dried, Frank spontaneously outlined his composition with a ballpoint pen. He liked the effect and remembered it years later when he was developing his own professional watercolor technique.

The artist has come a long way since his days as a student, but his unusual, high-definition landscape painting style, in which he floats hundreds of abstract pools of color into a representational framework before outlining the entire composition in India ink, still bears the marks of this early discovery, granting truth to the notion that sometimes the most inauspicious beginnings can bring shape to the course of an artist's career.

Stone Song Of Desert Dimensions (watercolor and ink on paper, 24x24), Frank remarks, "I was drawn to the element of space in this scene: a 450-foot pillar of stone, cast against the towering cumulus clouds."





Crystal Clear Lucidity

Serpentine (below), a painting that earned the artist the Alice Leonard Memorial Award at the National Watercolor Society's 88th Annual Exhibition in 2008, presents an elevated view that's both remarkable and believable. The artist came upon the scene during an early morning hike in the Colorado River Canyon, just as the sun was cresting the surrounding rock domes.

The painting, which shows a placid blue river snaking through rolling rock formations, ties individual pockets of color into a coherent and majestic whole. After covering his paper with a series of abstract shapes, created by floating pure color in clear washes layer by layer, Frank unified his composition by outlining it in its entirety with India ink from a Rapidograph pen.

This part of the process, he says, not only cleaned up the composition, making it easier to

Colorscape The blossoming desert flora in *Birth Ritual* (watercolor and ink on paper, 21¹/₂x29) is an experiment in color and shape.

read, but it also created the effect we so often seek from new media: to see life as a heightened account of reality, where everything in the world can be seen, explored, recorded and presented with crystal clear lucidity.

If Frank is often celebrated for his technique, it's perhaps his devotion, care and obvious affection for his subjects that lend his work its palpable authenticity. Born in Grand Junction, Colorado, the artist spent his early years along the banks of the Colorado River and in the canyons of the Colorado National Monument before moving with his family to Denver. He would spend 40 years there, during which time he became interested in watercolor and began to teach himself the techniques that now make up his repertoire.

"Once I settled on watercolor with the India ink outline as my *modus operandi*, I read every article and book I could find on watercolor

painting techniques and spent all my free time teaching myself to paint," he says. "For four or five years in the late '90s, I worked at a job where I had to start at 7 a.m. In order to paint, I would go to sleep at 7 p.m., wake up at 2 a.m., and paint for four hours until I had to get ready for work. I do my best painting when I've just woken up and I'm still half asleep."

Frank also spent a great deal of time in Denver-based galleries, often admiring the work of William Matthews, who, the artist says, perhaps inspired him the most. "I went to many of his gallery openings when I lived in Denver," he says. "I added up the red dots [indicating sold paintings] and determined that, yes, one can make a living as a watercolorist!"

Red Rock Country

Yearning to return to the landscapes and customs he delighted in as a child, Frank relocated to the



Rock Dome "An early morning hike afforded the elevated view of the Colorado River canyon in *Serpentine* [watercolor and ink on paper, 13¹/₂x39], just as the sun crested the slick rock domes that surround the area," says Frank.



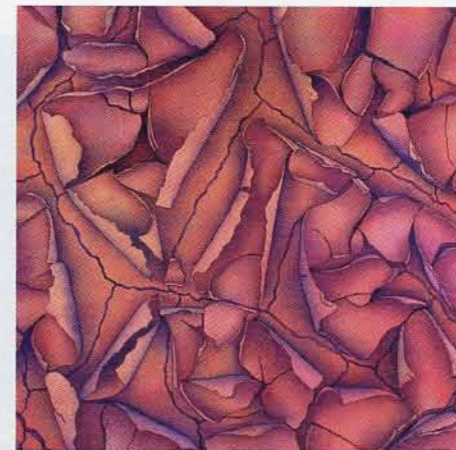
Light Invention “The source photo for *Sedona Altar* [watercolor and ink on paper, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ x29] was taken on a completely overcast day,” says Frank. “So I got to invent all the light you see in the painting.”

“red rock country” of southern Utah in 2005. Today, he makes his home and studio with his wife North and dog Zoey, not far from Arches National Park, where he’s provided with endless views and inspiration. “The red rock wonderland surrounding Moab, Utah, has inspired me since my childhood,” Frank says. “I feel very fortunate to have been able to move here four years ago.”

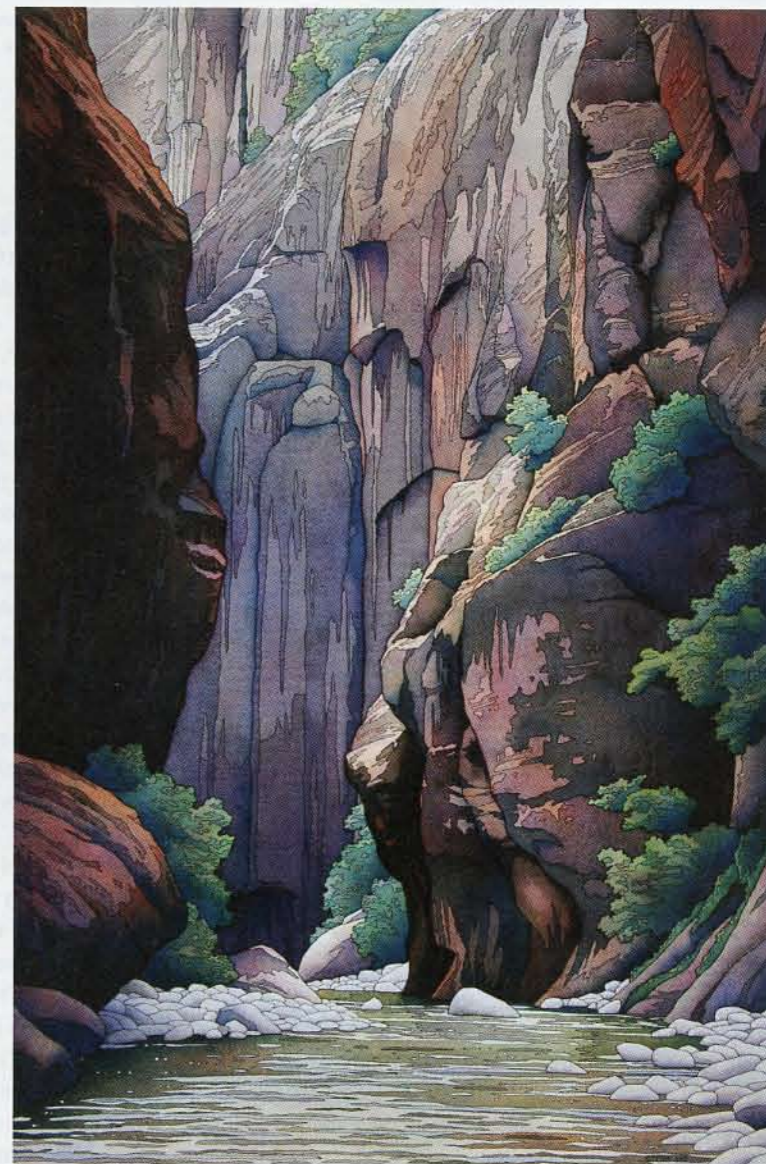
The artist’s highly charged takes on the landscape, detailed renderings of desert flora and concentrated use of color and light, betray his enthusiasm and delight in his native surroundings. “My favorite subjects are typically landscapes,” he says. “I’m particularly drawn to scenes with strong vertical elements. To me, they make for a more dramatic, dynamic

composition. Very seldom do I paint any people or man-made objects in my landscapes, since my primary aim is to depict unspoiled, wild places.”

Frank often removes power lines, buildings and other unwanted objects from his original source photography. “The only exception is that I do enjoy painting ruins,” he says. “Beautifully dilapidated structures



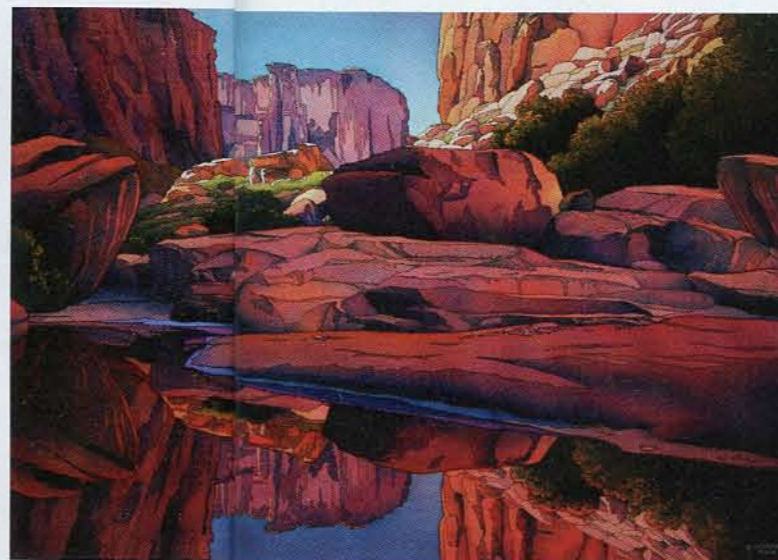
Desert Vignette Frank describes *After the Flood* (watercolor and ink on paper, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ x21 $\frac{1}{2}$) as “a common desert vignette—a creek bed after a long dry period, preceded by a flash flood.”



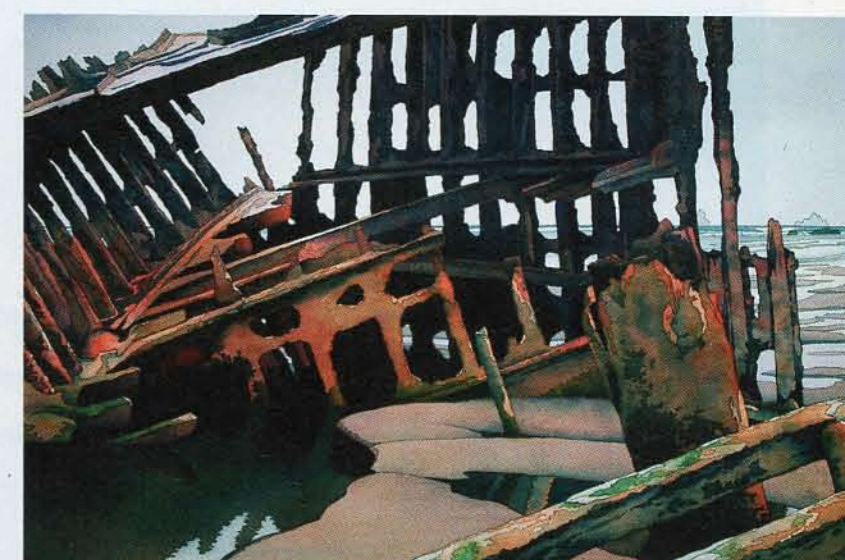
Out on a Limb “I literally had to go out on the limb of a tree to get the source photo for *Within October’s Dream* [watercolor and ink on paper, 30x22],” says Frank.



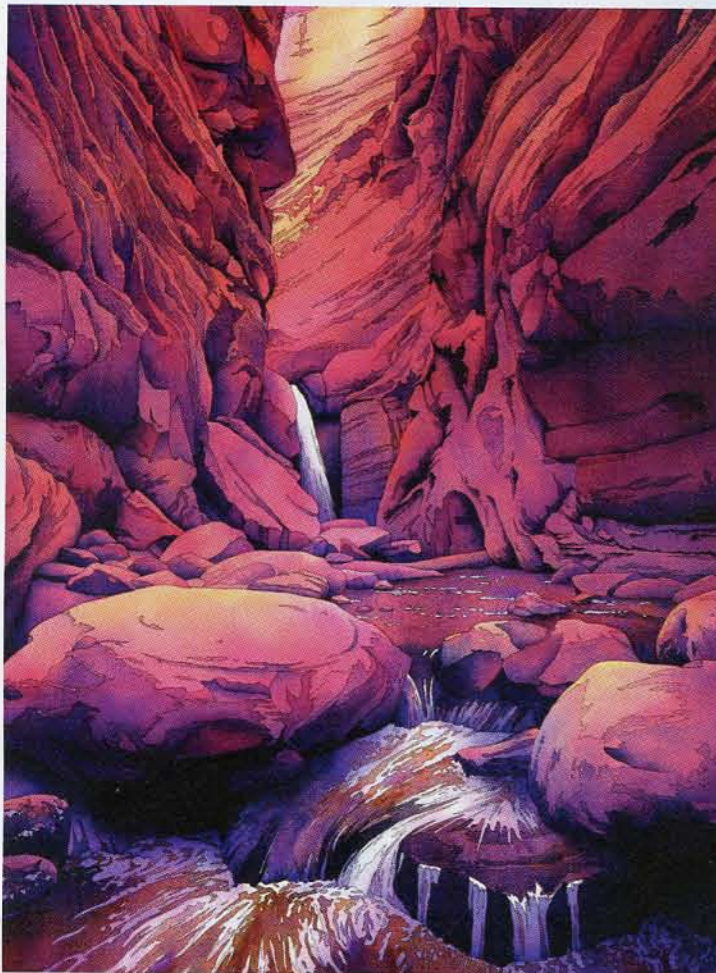
Icon in Snow According to Frank, “an early morning hike during a rare winter snowstorm resulted in a unique depiction of the iconic ‘Delicate Arch’” in *Convergence of Memories* (watercolor and ink on paper, 21x29).



Sensory Experience Frank says, “The dank smell of the pool, wet sand and the coolness of the shadows, juxtaposed with the warmth of the light receding in the distance, created a sensory experience that I aimed to convey in *Ephemeral Pool* [watercolor and ink on paper, 19½x29].”



Nature's Triumph Of *Skeleton Coast* (watercolor and ink on paper, 19x29), the artist remarks, “The wreck of the Peter Iredale, near Astoria, Oregon, is an example of how nature often triumphs over mankind's failures.”



Creek Bed “The scene in *Sustenance* [watercolor and ink on paper, 29x21] no longer exists,” says Frank. “A month or so after the source photo was taken, a flash flood scoured out the creek, washing away all the boulders and lowering the creek level by more than 5 feet.”

deprived of mankind's care or upkeep serve as a reminder that nature prevails, as seen in my painting, *Skeleton Coast* [on right, opposite].”

Although the artist enjoys painting *en plein air*, he prefers to avoid setting up and tearing down his work space over and over again, and as a result considers himself a studio painter. In his studio, he has all of his supplies, the light is just right and he can take his time with his work. “All of my paintings are done from digital photos that I take while on hikes,” he says. “I consider these hikes to be an integral part of my painting process, because this is where I first get inspired. The southern part of Utah where I live is so inspiring to me that I tend to shoot everything I see. I've got a bazillion different scenes that I could paint, of which I'll probably only get to paint a few hundred, so I have to be very selective.”

After returning from a hike, Frank reviews his photos. While sketching out his composition on newsprint sized to the expected dimensions of the painting, he'll often combine elements from several shots, edit out or add in elements. “This allows me to erase and replace as much as I need to get the composition right,” he says. “There's generally not a lot of detail at this stage, just basic shapes and important landmarks.”

After stretching a sheet of watercolor paper onto Gatorboard, Frank transfers his drawing with graphite paper. At this point he'll apply Incredible White Mask, if needed. “Liquid frisket

works well with my style of painting,” he says, “since everything I paint has hard edges.”

Starting with big washes, Frank works his way layer by layer into the finer details of his paintings. “Most of my color mixing is done on the paper using successive glazes,” he says. “The first three quarters of the process is construction, and the last fourth is simply fixing things that don't look right. Once I get to the point where nothing else irritates me, I consider the painting part of my process to be finished.”

That's when the artist picks up his Rapidograph pen and outlines every shape that he's just painted. “This is the part that literally ‘defines’ my work and makes it different,” he says. “The outline unifies the whole painting, makes it clean and creates the effect of looking at the scene with hyper-clarity—as if you could see everything perfectly. I also like to think of the outline as an exclamation point for the painting.”

Surrounded by the Landscape

Frank, who's almost entirely self-taught, admits that other artists might find the outlining stage of his process a little unusual. “I know that painting with just hard edges is considered a big ‘no-no’ in art school,” he says. “I also know of a handful of watercolor artists who paint everything with hard edges, but they stop there. I'm very attracted to their work, but

I find that more than anything, I just want to outline shapes.”

Frank prefers Arches 140-lb. cold-pressed paper and artist's colors by Winsor & Newton, Holbein and Daniel Smith. His favorite brush is the Isabey Onyx, a kolinsky sable quill that only comes in one size, which he uses for 85 percent of his paintings. He also uses two kolinsky cat's tongue brushes by Kalish, from Ireland, and Nos. 1 and 2 Winsor & Newton Series 7 brushes for fine detail.

A .35-millimeter (0) Kohinor Rapidograph pen with India ink is Frank's chosen tool for outlining. Frank doesn't use a palette, preferring 6-ounce porcelain ramekins instead. “They're heavy,” he says, “so I can vigorously mix a lot of paint and then squeegee the brush on the edge without knocking over the container. They're also easy to clean and change colors.”

The artist, who recommends developing and trusting your intuition, believes that a successful work of art needs to evoke emotion—first from the artist, and then from the viewer. The fact that Frank has chosen to live surrounded by the landscapes he paints is testament to his own work's clear emotional legitimacy. “I believe that all art is an expression of beauty,” he says, “no matter its intention, or how it's perceived.”

MEREDITH E. LEWIS is a Manhattan-based freelance writer and editor.