

FRANCESCO FONTANA

An Inherent Connection to Nature

Watercolor has a very long tradition, much older than oil. In traditional Chinese art, watercolors were developed around 4000 B.C. and would eventually dominate all Chinese brush painting. Masters such as Anders Zorn, John Singer Sargent, Giovanni Boldini, and J.M.W. Turner all painted beautifully in both oil and watercolor.

Today, doubt about the durability of paper as a support is risible. Artist-grade watercolor paper is acid-free and durable — and can be more costly than canvas. Modern paints are also lightfast, made with superior-quality materials.

For me, the medium's natural relation to water encourages a deep connection to the landscape. I especially love to use watercolor for seascapes and marina paintings because of its ability to mimic the transparency of water. I also feel that watercolor is strongly related to drawing, so I prefer it for scenes that suggest a graphic approach, such as urban scenes.

Working with watercolor, it can be difficult to manage a consistent value scale. Due to the transparency of the paint and the addition of water, watercolor paintings tend to lose intensity as they dry. Starting with a good design and tonal map can make sure you stay on track.

Watercolor also offers very few opportunities when it comes to correcting mistakes, so it's unforgiving in that way. I paint a lot so that I continue to develop the skills needed to respond to — or better yet, avoid — problems. I also do a lot of planning before I pick up my watercolor brush. I like to know how a piece will turn out before I even start on it. Improvisation is OK if you're playing or exploring, but maybe not if you're racing to finish in a competition.



The Mountain Hut

Francesco Fontana

2019, watercolor 10 1/2 x 14 1/4 in.

Available from artist

Plein air

The Well, Elba

Francesco Fontana

2017, watercolor, 11 1/2 x 15 1/2 in.

Available from artist

Plein air

