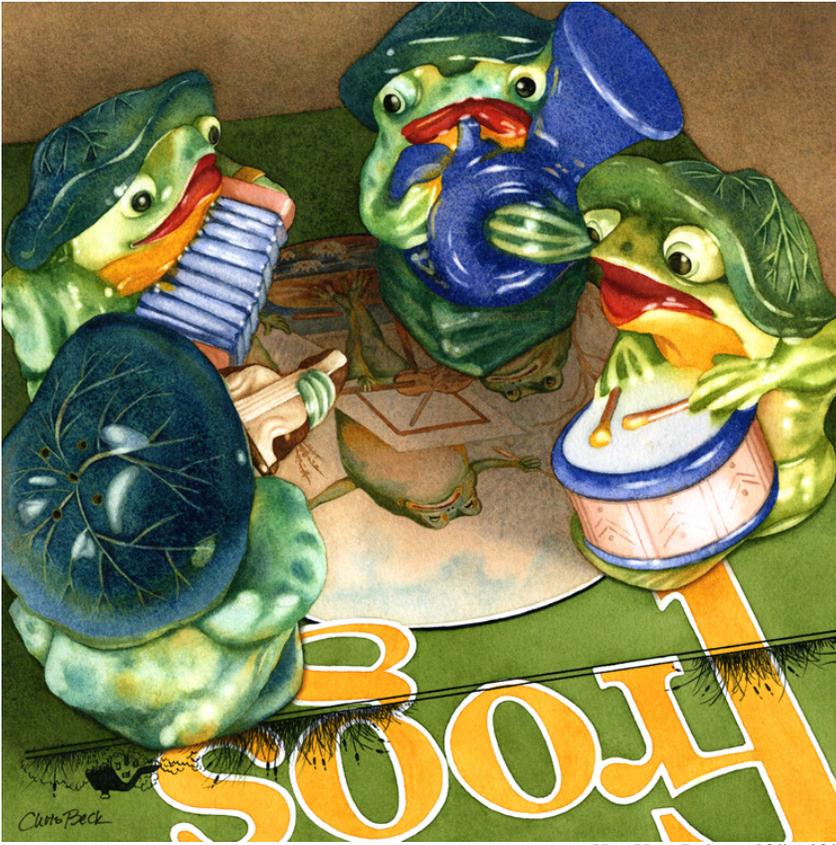


Interview with an Artist

Chris Beck, NWS



Hip Hop Bebop, 12" x 12"

Chris Beck's work first caught my attention in the feature article "Playing in Earnest" in *The Artist's Magazine* (September 2012). Her love of strong design, patterns and colors is so beautifully married to her playful subjects. The details in her paintings add a "wow" factor that is delightful.

I was thrilled to see her watercolor, *Hip Hop Bebop*, hanging in the NWS 73rd Annual Open last year. And I am giddy to learn that next year we will both be featured in *Splash 15* (Summer 2014). We're practically sisters!

Well, maybe not... But I do hope to continue to cross artistic paths with Chris Beck. And you should as well!

Charlene Collins Freeman
www.charlenecollinsfreeman.com

Tell us a little bit about your background.

I was born and raised in Wisconsin, completed a bachelor's degree in the fine art program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and then worked as a graphic designer for many years. Along the way, I dabbled in jewelry-making and also spent about 10 years creating award-winning art quilts. I returned to painting in 1996, following a mysterious health crisis the previous year.

In the years since, I have earned my signature in the National Watercolor Society, the Transparent Watercolor Society of America, and Watercolor West.

Why did you start painting?

As far back as I can remember, I loved to create things by hand and my parents were very supportive, keeping me well-supplied with art and craft materials.

We had weekly art classes in school starting in first grade and I continued with daily classes throughout junior and senior high, taught by several excellent teachers (and accomplished artists in their own right). When I got to college, I was torn between my love of biology and my love of art.

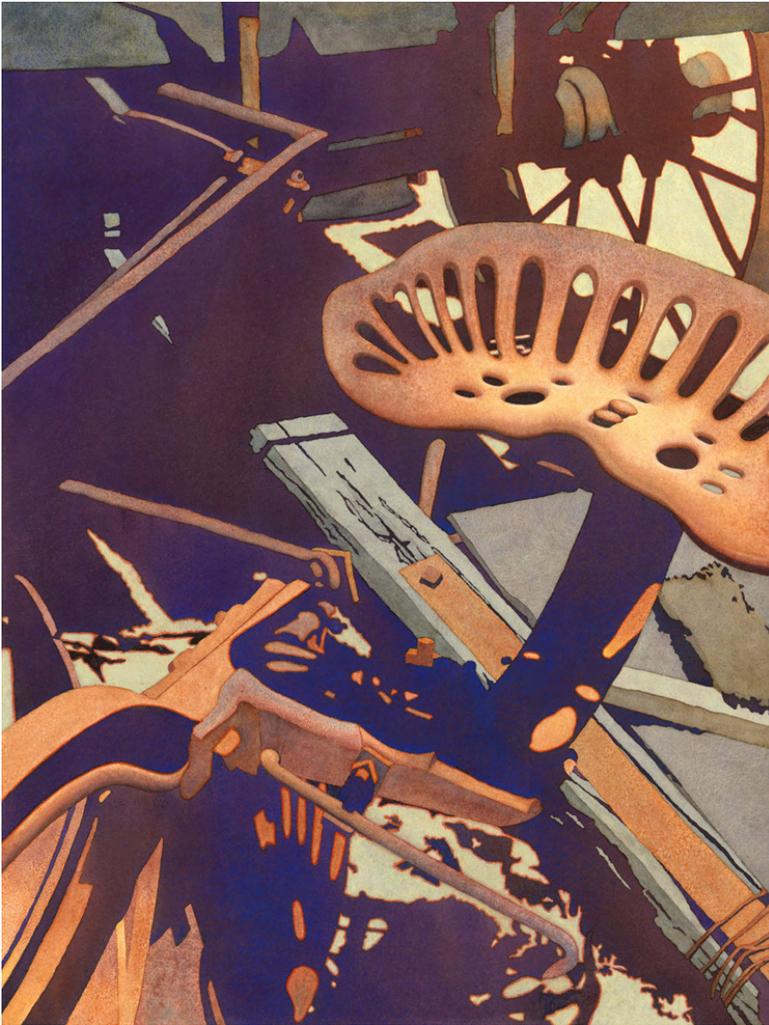
Art finally won out when I realized I was spending all my free time doing art and switched majors.



A Shocking Discovery, 12" x 12"

Interview with an Artist

Chris Beck, NWS



Old Plow
20" x 15"

Although I'd done some watercolors in high school, it wasn't until I took college classes in watercolor that I really fell in love with the medium.

Tell me about your process. How much time do you spend sketching? Do you work from photographs? Where do your ideas for paintings come from?

I work primarily from photographs, composing them as I shoot, then manipulating them in Photoshop to find the best composition or to push color and contrast in my search for an unusual and striking image.

Matters of light and shadow, color, and my fascination with intricate details determine my final choices, but childhood memories are often the basis of my interest in a subject.

I grew up in the home my grandparents built and I was surrounded by objects collected over many years -- from toys to china to household goods. In addition, my grandmother had a large and beautiful garden, filled with many heirloom varieties of flowers and assorted exotic plants.

I suppose it is not unusual to romanticize your childhood to some degree, but my intent is to bring a modern sensibility to that by using strong graphic design and by focussing tightly on things (flowers, old rusty machinery, silly trinkets) that we often overlook as we rush about our daily lives.

Tell us a little bit about your working style.

I continue to explore a variety of vintage subjects -- from heirloom flowers to antiquated machinery and silly vintage salt shakers -- in several long-standing series that stop and start as my interests shift over time.

The majority of my work depends heavily on masking to preserve highlights or complex shapes surrounded by other colors, create special effects, and develop background patterns.

In some cases, I pour paint or use saturated brushes to mix color on the paper, and I combine these techniques with direct brushwork for development of form and for finishing details.

Because much of my work is so detailed, I spend a lot of time in planning -- probably my favorite part of the process -- all the fun of designing and dreaming without any of the difficulties involved in getting the paint and paper to cooperate!!



Disk Harrow #3
15" x 20"

Interview with an Artist

Chris Beck, NWS



Hollyhocks Too
15" x 15"



Morning Glorious, 15.5" x 18"

Which artists or art movements inspire/influence you?

Over the years, I have acquired quite a list of people whose work has inspired me, from watercolorists like Maurice Prendergast, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and Charles Demuth in the late 19th and early 20th century to Keith Crown, Joseph Raffael, Mark Adams, Gary Bukovnik, Janet Fish, and Carolyn Brady in the latter half of the 20th century (and up to the present).

Although she was primarily an oil painter, Georgia O'Keeffe's florals had a large impact on me as well.

Abstract Expressionism still held sway when I was a student, but I came to realize when I returned to painting after a long hiatus that I feel most at home as a realist. I identify with the Contemporary Realism movement because, as I interpret it, it allows for expression outside of a rigid formula but the final result is still realistic.

Among my influences over the past 15 years, I especially value Judy Morris, Jean Grastorf, Roland Roycraft, Jean Dobie, Jan Kunz, Miles Batt, Sr., and

Jim Kosvanec for their artistry and technical expertise. And of course, there are innumerable inspirations in the work of my contemporaries -- far too many to list.

Other than other artists and art movements, where do you draw your inspiration/creativity from?

I find inspiration in patterned fabrics, in ethnic crafts, in the play of light on objects, in word play, and from specific themes or objects. I like to set up exercises for myself -- perhaps devising a certain narrative, playing with puns, solving design puzzles, creating a special look in a painting, mimicking other media with technical tricks, whatever makes it a fun challenge.

Many of the subjects of my most successful paintings came about almost by chance. I'd find a photo I'd taken that suddenly sparked my interest, or I'd chance upon an object that I wanted to paint.

As a former quilter, I love fabric and often develop a painting around a fabric that catches my eye.

My interest in vintage household goods -- salt shakers, tablecloths, housewares -- has been a big source of inspiration in recent years. I also find I'm more and more interested in sharing wit and humor through my work -- especially in paintings featuring my vintage salt shakers.

What materials do you use?

I paint primarily on stretched 140 lb. cold-pressed paper, either Arches or Winsor-Newton, though I prefer Winsor-Newton.

I have been using a palette of primarily Winsor-Newton watercolors, with a few Holbein colors and a good selection of Daniel Smith colors, -- primarily quinacridones in the earth tones.

My favorite brushes are kolinsky sable -- quill brushes by Isabey and da Vinci and standard rounds from da Vinci and Escoda. I also use Loew-Cornell synthetic brushes, in particular their ultra-rounds, when I need to use less water in an area, and I like the softness and capacity of squirrel quill brushes (assorted brands) for color blending and for glazing large areas.

Interview with an Artist

Chris Beck, NWS



Heirlooms
10" x 10"

How long does it take to complete a work of art?

My work is very labor-intensive, often requiring 60 hours or more to complete a painting.

Do you sometimes struggle to know when a painting is finished?

I seldom struggle with knowing when a painting is finished. My struggles generally take place somewhere in the middle of it all as I adjust values and colors to create a dynamic image. However, the small corrections I make to sharpen the final image can become a trap -- at some point I simply have to decide to stop fine-tuning things.

What makes a painting successful?

The basic principles of design and competent paint-handling skills are important for any good painting, but the artist's passion for the subject is absolutely critical. Without that, a painting falls flat. I used to think this was a bit bogus (after all, you can't measure passion by any objective means, as you can design or color) but I've noticed in my own work that when I am passionate about a subject, it somehow invigorates the painting and makes it much more appealing.

I think unusual subjects or viewpoints, if handled well technically, also contribute to success because they are unexpected and generate a certain excitement about a painting.

How do you define success?

I measure success on two scales -- one, if I'm pleased with my own work and feel that I'm growing as an artist -- and two, if I receive recognition in the art world I inhabit. Of the two, receiving recognition is certainly a headier sign of success, but I feel very strongly that my own self-evaluation is more important in the long run.

Are you involved with any art societies?

In my first years back to painting, I was very involved with our local watercolor society: I showed in the annual exhibitions and I was in charge of the group's booth at a local festival for several years.



Sliced with Salt
6" x 6"

Interview with an Artist

Chris Beck, NWS

I was also active in a smaller group of professional artists, developing an all-member portfolio/resume book, doing all the editing and design as well as the printing; I also served as president for two years. At this point, I have enough other obligations that I no longer take an active role in the operations of any societies.

What are some of your artistic accomplishments that you are most proud of?

Over the past five years, I have had the good fortune to be featured multiple times in both *The Artist's Magazine* and *Watercolor Artist*, and my work appears in *Splash 7* and *Splash 14* and has been accepted for *Splash 15*.

I won the Gold Medal in Watercolor in the 112th Annual Open Juried Exhibition of the Catherine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club and numerous awards in other exhibitions over the years. My work was included in the Shanghai Zhujiajiao International Watercolour Biennial in 2012.

Do you offer workshops?

Yes, I resumed teaching workshops in the past year. I teach design, color, and painting techniques. For more information please visit my website at www.chrisbeckstudio.com.



Snail Mail
6" x 6"

Chris Beck has an impressive list of exhibitions and publications which featured her work, including:

Selected exhibitions:

2013

Transparent Watercolor Society of America 37th National Exhibition, Kenosha, WI

Northwest Watercolor Society 73rd Annual Exhibition, Mercer Island, WA

California Watercolor Association 43rd National Exhibition, Pleasanton, CA

2012

Shanghai Zhujiajiao International Watercolour Biennial, Shanghai, People's Republic of China

National Watercolor Society 92nd Annual Exhibition, San Pedro, CA

Transparent Watercolor Society of America 36th National Exhibition, Kenosha, WI

2011

National Watercolor Society 91st Annual Exhibition, San Pedro, CA
NEW SIGNATURE MEMBER

TOYS, Annmarie Sculpture Garden and Arts Center, Dowell, MD

The Artist's Magazine Competition
FINALIST - Still-life

2010

California Statewide Watercolor Exhibit, Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA
HONORABLE MENTION

2009

Watercolor Artist magazine's 2009 Watermedia Showcase Competition
HONORABLE MENTION

Transparent Watercolor Society of America 33rd National Exhibition, Kenosha, WI

The Artist's Magazine 2009 Online Competition
HONORABLE MENTION

Publications:

Splash 15 - Creative Solutions (North Light Books, Summer, 2014)

Splash 14 - Light and Color (2013)

Splash 7 - A Celebration of Light (2002)

Her work is featured on the cover of Best of America Watermedia II by Kennedy Publishing (September 2010), and also on the cover of The Mouse Project by Steve Worthington (October 2010).

Chris Beck's watercolors were the subject of two feature articles -- "Playing in Earnest" in the The Artist's Magazine (September 2012), and "Adventures in the Ordinary" in Watercolor Artist magazine (August 2009). She has been included in several other articles in The Artist's Magazine. In addition, The Artist's Magazine featured Chris in the "Competition Spotlight" (June 2009) and as Artist of the Month on their website in January, 2008.

In December 2008, she created Brush-Paper-Water, a watercolor showcase blog featuring watercolorists working in a variety of styles and techniques; she curated and edited the site, posting 66 bi-weekly features between 2008 and mid-2011. The blog is now inactive but continues to serve as a resource for watercolorists.
<http://chrisbeckstudio.blogspot.com>

Interview with Chris Beck, NWS
by Charlene Collins Freeman
www.charlenecollinsfreeman.com