

Interview with an Artist

Earnest Ward



Water Series "Warrum bin ich dich?"
22 x 30

My love for sketching led me to discover Earnest Ward's work. Earnest's sketches are detailed, beautiful and inspiring; his sketchbooks are real treasures. And then I discovered that there's a whole lot more to love about Earnest's watercolor work. Thank you Earnest for sharing so beautifully with the rest of us.

Tell us a little bit about your background.

Shortly after I was born in the US my family moved to the UK. I received informal training - my dad (who was career Air Force) saw his military service as a unique educational opportunity for his kids. So, he volunteered for every overseas assignment that allowed him to take his family along. We lived in England, Germany, and Taiwan (with brief stays in Virginia, Arizona, and California).

And, during school holidays, we camped our way across Europe and Asia. My parents also shared their love for nature with us. Nature was where we went for recreation, to recharge our spiritual batteries. Nature was where we went to experience the beauty, the immensity, and the grandeur of a world not manmade.

My formal training culminated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts with High Distinction from California College of Arts & Crafts, Oakland and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Why did you start painting?

I've heard this question often (I guess we all have) and it always takes me aback. I'll try to explain why. Every human being is hardwired to express themselves visually. Every child draws. Given a pencil and paper, they will draw for hours on end. In fact, drawing and painting probably constitute our first non-verbal means of communication. We learn it long before we learn to read and right. So, for me, asking "Why did you start painting?" is almost like asking "Why did you start breathing?" It's one of the things I do to be alive.

I'm in love with your sketchbooks. How much time do you spend sketching? What came first, your love of painting finished pieces or your love of sketch booking?

Drawing came first -- but, at that time "art," "drawing," and "pictures" was pretty much all the same. Once I decided I was an "artist," painting became my passion and drawing became a means to an end; sketchbooks became a repository for everything that caught my eye. Most recently though, I've wanted to be out in the world, exploring, developing a sense of place, recording the natural and cultural history of "here" and "now." And the sketchbook/journal has become the perfect place to record those events and experiences.

Tell us a little bit about your works in progress, your working style, subject-matter preferences, and how these link up or are developed from what you have done in the past.

The subjects that interest me are as eclectic as life, running the gamut from sweeping panoramas to tiny flowers and "creepy crawlies." I'm also a topographer at heart; I love to map out the places I'm in and the places I've been. They're all part of Life's Great Mysteries.



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Which artists or art movements inspire/influence you?

As an artist, I am standing on the shoulders of every artist who came before me. And I have been influenced, pro or con, by the works of every artist I have been privileged to encounter. But, among those who quickly come to mind I would certainly include: the Lascaux and Altamira cave painters; the nature studies of Albrecht Dürer; the great book artists of Mogul India and Persia; Ingres's graphite drawings; the artist/adventurers of the Age of Exploration (Ferdinand Bauer, Lewis and Clark, Friedrich von Humboldt, and Thomas Moran); Hokusai's portrayals of daily life in Japan ; Van Gogh; Gauguin; Thomas

Hart Benton; Walter Anderson's Horn Island Logs; and a host of Irish, Chinese, and Japanese calligraphers.

What is your process?

I strive to slow down, to focus, and to observe the very specific nature of one specific thing (be it an insect, a fish, a flower, a person, or a mountain range). When I know how that one specific thing differs from all of its kind and from everything else, I try to depict its Oneness -- and to convey our own Oneness through it.

Marcel Proust said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." And John Muir said, "When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it

attached to the rest of the world."

For anyone who may wish to see something of my technical process I have created a page on my website showing a step-by-step demonstration of the creation of one of my Water Series pieces, which is entitled "Warum bin ich dich?" http://www.earnestward.com/Earnest_Ward/Water_Series.html

When do you paint/how do you structure your time?

I draw and paint almost every day: beginning after a light breakfast/tea, and continuing till the light fades in the evening. I don't really like using artificial light, if I can avoid it.



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What materials do you use?

Watercolor over pen & ink are my favorite media for journaling, watercolors over graphite in the studio. But I also work in oils, acrylics, printmaking, color pencils, and gouache when they seem right for the project at hand.

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

I can't honestly say. For me the creative process takes place in a different hemisphere of the brain from time awareness. I don't wear a watch any more, and my cell phone is always off while I'm working. So, if I'm really focused on observing and creating and things are going smoothly I lose all track of time.

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

No. I sometimes struggle to reach a satisfactory conclusion with a painting. But when it's finished, intuitively I know.

What makes a painting successful?

In today's society a painting is at once both a spiritually enriching experience and a commodity. If the latter has significance for an artist, the painting is successful when it sells. If the former is of primary importance then a painting is successful if we feel good (or very good) about the results we have achieved.

How do you define success (as in a painting, or as an artist)?

This is going to be very subjective but, for me, a painting is successful when I am pleased with the results. And an artist is successful when she/he has the freedom to draw, paint, and/or sculpt when and what they want.

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

From an angel named Hap, or more precisely from something Audrey Hepburn's character, Hap, said in what turned out to be her final movie, *Always*. In the film she was assigned to guide Pete (played by Richard Dreyfuss) as he transitioned from life to afterlife. In their scene together, Hap explained the meaning of "inspiration," "in spiritus," "divine breath" -- and the relationship of those now living to those who came before -- to Pete. It was a beautiful scene and I thought that it was (and is) the most delightful explanation I've ever heard as to where our creativity comes from. So, you could say I draw my inspiration from Audrey Hepburn and an angel named Hap.

Are you involved with any art societies?

Not in the traditional sense. Prior to the internet I belonged to several artists' organizations and societies, just as I regularly exhibited in bricks and mortar galleries. I enjoy



interacting socially with others. I enjoy sharing my art with others whenever the chance arises. And, as a teacher, I enjoy assisting others to find their own creative voices. But, when it comes to creating my own work, I am something of a recluse. I love working on my own, and I love secluded places.

Do you offer workshops?

Oh yes; frequently. I love teaching and I love helping others to develop their artistic skills as much as I love making my own art. These days I spend a good deal of time teaching place-based journaling workshops -- at state and national parks, botanical gardens, and schools.

In fact, I'm currently working on the logistical details for a North Cascades workshop that will be held in Stehekin, WA in mid-May -- no TV, no radio, no cell phone reception, and 50 miles from the nearest highway, but with hundreds of square miles of exquisite snow-capped mountains, a crystal-clear lake, giant trees, fresh air, hiking trails,

