

Watercolors by Bryn Craig

- Casey McCabe

You wouldn't know by looking through his serene and seemingly effortless portfolio, but Bryn Craig has had his issues with watercolors. The renowned oil painter even went on record in *American Artist* saying that he didn't like the medium. Watercolors are more unforgiving than oils, he says, making it hard to correct mistakes. They require the artist to be more thoughtful, to be more in the moment.

Eventually Craig decided those were just the kind of challenges he wanted, and for the next 15 years he toted his easel to nine U.S. states and ten foreign countries, not only making peace with watercolors but finding new expression for his artistic instincts. "It's fresher and looser," says Craig. "It's something I can't replicate in the studio. I have to be on site."

Decades into his career, Craig continues to "quietly rebel against what I learned in college" and challenge the rules of composition. Whenever possible he likes to challenge himself as well. It would have been easy to immerse himself in seascapes, for which he has a demonstrated gift, or stay close to his Marin County home, where he continues to illuminate roads less traveled and undesignated landmarks. Instead Craig kept moving, seeking his critical "sense of place" in a variety of places. Taken together, Bryn Craig's watercolors play like a seamless travelogue, real places blended into the same daydream. The snowmelt on Mount Rose, Nevada flows into a lagoon in Kiawah, South Carolina before stopping on an ivy-covered tree in Bolinas, California. Greens give way to rusts as Craig moves onto the mesas of New Mexico, then to bright whites as he takes in a hillside village in

Greece. The whites dissipate into a cool haze as he returns to an early morning beach in Marin

His uncommon framing might center on a single tree caught in a certain light. When the light goes away, so does Craig, returning the next day to recapture the moment. You can imagine that process repeated in most of these paintings. It wasn't the forest that caught his eye in British Columbia, it was a single decaying stump. He has more than one painting of boats sitting out of water. A feed barn in Novato is treated with the same reverence as the Park Hotel in Ireland. A tin roof is as intriguing as a yacht club. Even the normally familiar San Francisco skyline gets new life as a Bryn Craig watercolor, a thin line of civilization dividing a vast expanse of sky and water.

It would not be unlike Craig to gently bend reality as needed. "I take great liberties with my subject. I move things around if I want," he says. "I want to capture what the subject gives me, so someone else can feel the same way I did years later." In Bryn Craig's portfolio, any subject can appear timeless as long as you catch it in just the right light.

Craig will continue to explore the world with watercolor and easel, a discipline that keeps him in the moment. "I've gotten good enough that I only throw away one out of ten," he says.