

THE ART OF Watercolour

THE ART MAGAZINE FOR WATERCOLOURISTS

CALL FOR ENTRIES:
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NG WOON LAM

The secret
of powerful
urban scenes

PORTFOLIO

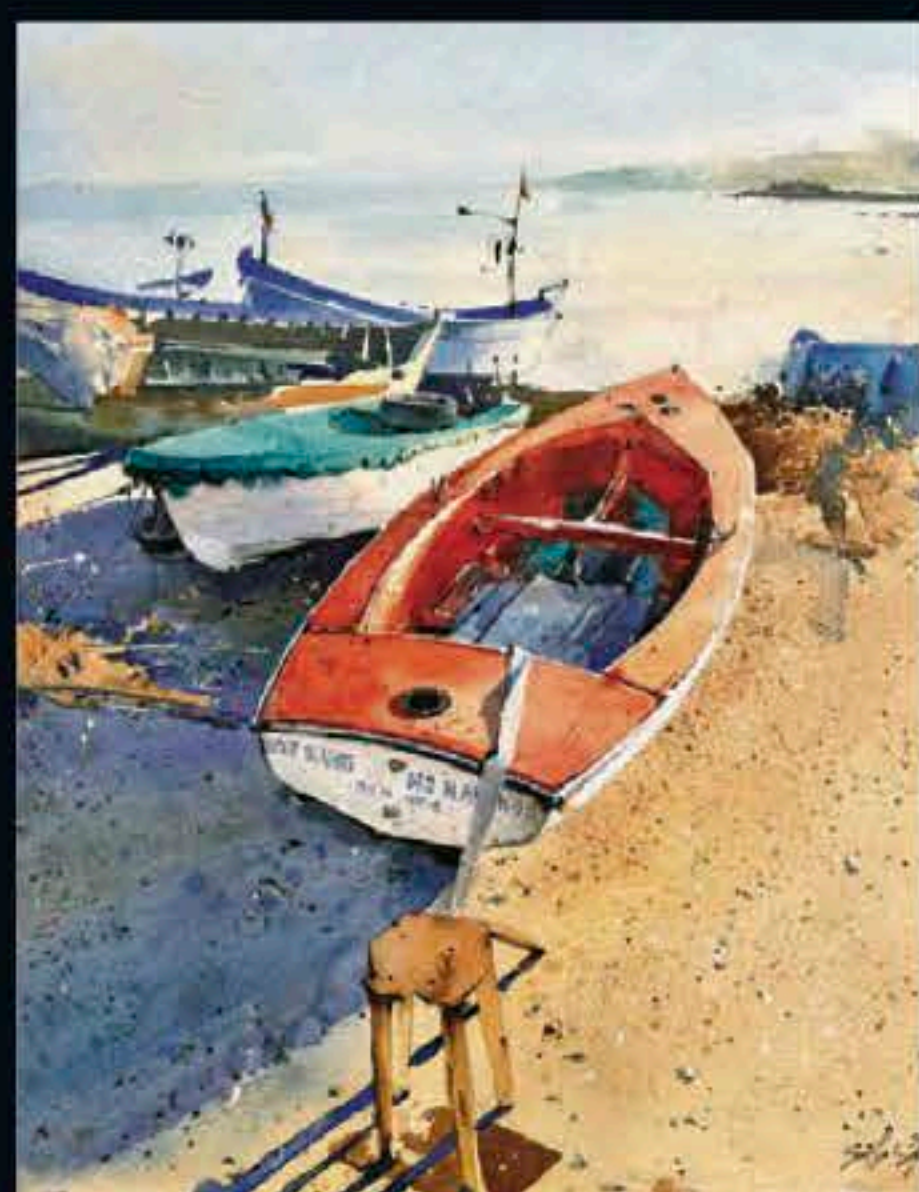
Rance Jones
Painting
the soul of Cuba

NEWS

International
exhibitions
& major shows

CINDY BARON

Watercolours that
look like oils



Svetlin Sofroniev
Texture, light and
reflections

Daniel Blagg
Turning the ordinary
into art

Reto Balzer
Reinventing the
watercolour portrait



Lisa Pope
A master of glass, light
and transparency

Jeannie Vodden
The keys to luminous
colour



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UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT Grahame Booth: Capturing light, mist and atmosphere

The art of looking again

What makes a subject worthy of being painted? This issue of The Art of Watercolour offers a wonderfully simple answer: almost anything, provided we learn to look at it with enough attention. Across these pages, our artists repeatedly transform the familiar into something new. Jeannie Vodden finds inspiration in the flowers and small details surrounding her California home, painting, as she says, “from love”.

Shirley Greenville devotes months to the fragile presence of a bird, searching for that tiny spark in the eye that brings it to life. Lisa Pope turns jars and children’s marbles into dazzling studies of transparency, reflection and colour. And Gloria Tseng Fischer gives everyday objects an unexpected narrative power through an approach shaped by architecture, Chinese calligraphy and the expressive white of the paper.

Elsewhere, traces of time become subjects in themselves. André Kano’s muted landscapes have the atmosphere of old postcards, while Svetlin Sofroniev is drawn to boats marked by sun, salt and years of use. Daniel Blagg finds poetry in roadside signs, motels and fragments of urban America that most of us would pass without a second glance. In each case, watercolour becomes a way of rescuing the overlooked and revealing the character hidden within ordinary things.

This ability to see beyond appearances also lies at the heart of Rance Jones’s remarkable Cuban series. His paintings are not simply records of streets, architecture or local colour. They are encounters with people, built from memory, conversation and shared experience. His work reminds us that observation is never only visual: it can also be an act of empathy.

The same idea appears differently in Ng Woon Lam’s urban scenes. For him, painting a city begins before the first brushstroke – in walking its streets, tasting its food, absorbing its climate, colours and rhythms. Cindy Baron likewise insists that studio painting depends upon what has first been understood on location. Grahame Booth’s Tuscan landscape shows how a rapid sketch can preserve an atmosphere that a photograph alone cannot capture.

What is especially striking in this issue is the variety of paths leading to a successful watercolour. Some artists plan every value, edge and glaze with extraordinary precision. Others invite accident, improvisation and uncertainty. Reto Balzer even begins with an abstract painting before allowing a portrait to emerge from its layered surface. Yet behind these very different methods lies the same discipline: learning when to control the medium and when to allow water and pigment to speak for themselves. Perhaps that is one of watercolour’s greatest lessons. Technique matters, materials matter, planning matters – but none of them can replace curiosity. The artists gathered here continue to progress because they keep looking, questioning, experimenting and discovering.

May these pages encourage you to do the same: to look again at what surrounds you, noticing what others might overlook and finding in the ordinary the beginning of your next painting.

Jean-Philippe Moine
Editor-in-Chief
The Art of Watercolour

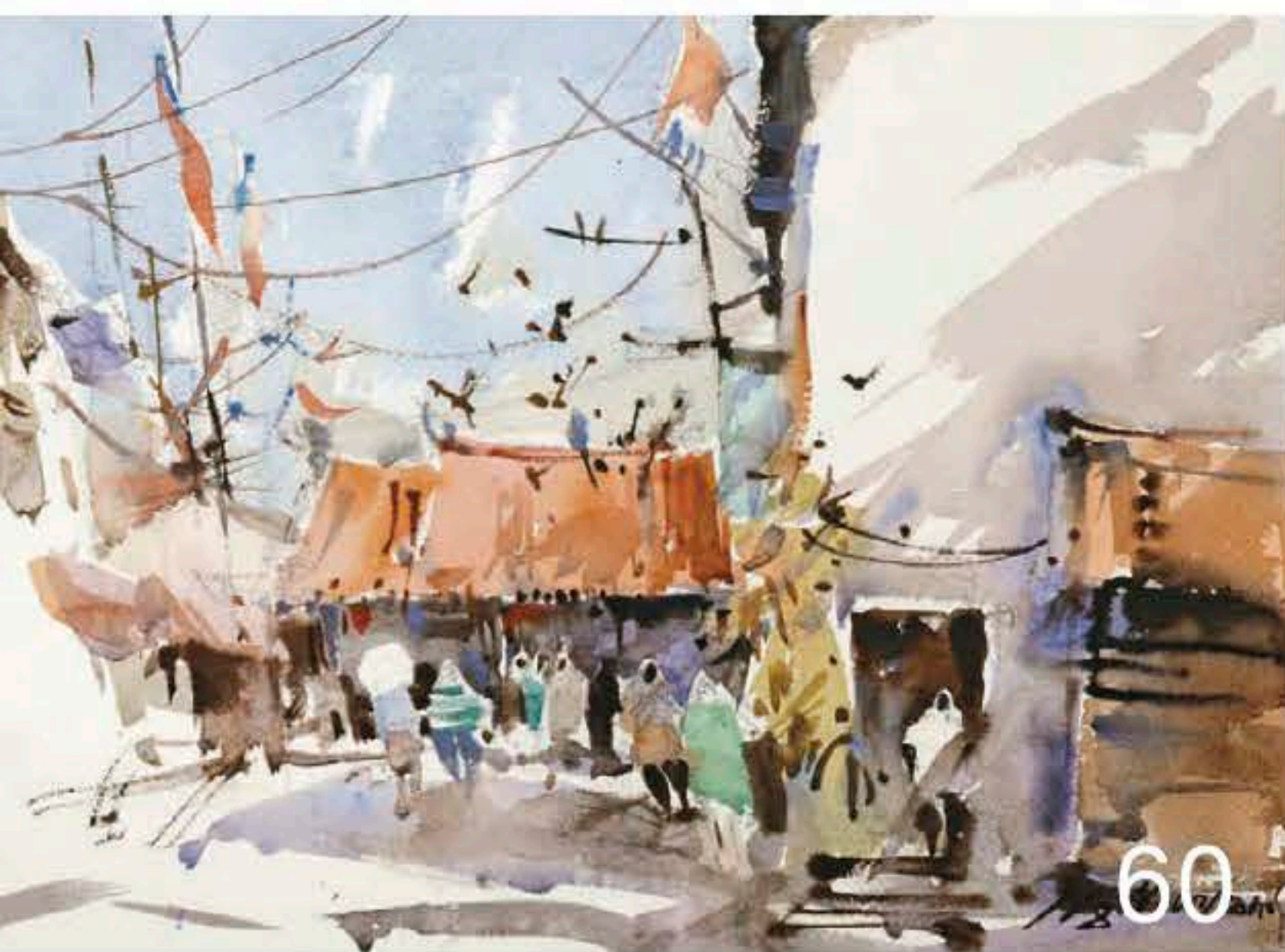
EDITORIAL

Our cover:

Rance Jones,
Fumando (2022).
Watercolour on paper,
64 x 53 cm



No.63



66 GRAHAME BOOTH (www.grahamebooth.com)
He reveals the story behind his signature painting "Monzone Alto", named after a small village in the Lucido Valley in Tuscany.

68 DANIEL BLAGG ([Instagram: danielblaggart](https://www.instagram.com/danielblaggart))
Inspired by the urban landscape of Fort Worth, Texas, he transforms signs, motels and everyday roadside landmarks into an exploration of light, memory and the fabric of American life.

74 SHIRLEY GREENVILLE (www.facebook.com/greenvillearts)
A bluebird perched on a branch, a sparrow caught in a shaft of light is all it takes for Shirley Greenville to feel inspired to paint.

80 GLORIA TSENG FISCHER (www.gloriatsengfischer.com)
Drawing on her background as an architect, she composes with the whites of the paper and paints with remarkable freedom of gesture, between classical tradition and contemporary sensibility.

88 LISA POPE (www.lisapope.com)
Through transparencies, reflections, refractions and coloured shadows, she takes on the challenge of capturing the full complexity of light passing through glass.

96 CALL FOR ENTRIES
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The heart

Bloqueo (2021)
Watercolour on
paper,
64 x 86 cm



FOR AMERICAN ARTIST RANCE JONES, CUBA IS FAR MORE THAN A COLLECTION OF COLOURFUL STREETS AND WEATHERED FAÇADES. DURING FIVE JOURNEYS BETWEEN 2018 AND 2023, HE DISCOVERED A COUNTRY WHOSE GREATEST RICHNESS LIES IN THE DIGNITY AND RESILIENCE OF ITS PEOPLE. HIS SERIES

of Cuba *Rance Jones*



Fumando
(2022)
Watercolour
on paper,
64 x 53 cm

"LA VIDA BRAVA" GOES BEYOND DOCUMENTARY PAINTING TO TELL DEEPLY HUMAN STORIES. IN THIS INTERVIEW, JONES REFLECTS ON THE ENCOUNTERS, OBSERVATIONS AND ARTISTIC CHOICES THAT SHAPED ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BODIES OF WORK OF HIS CAREER.

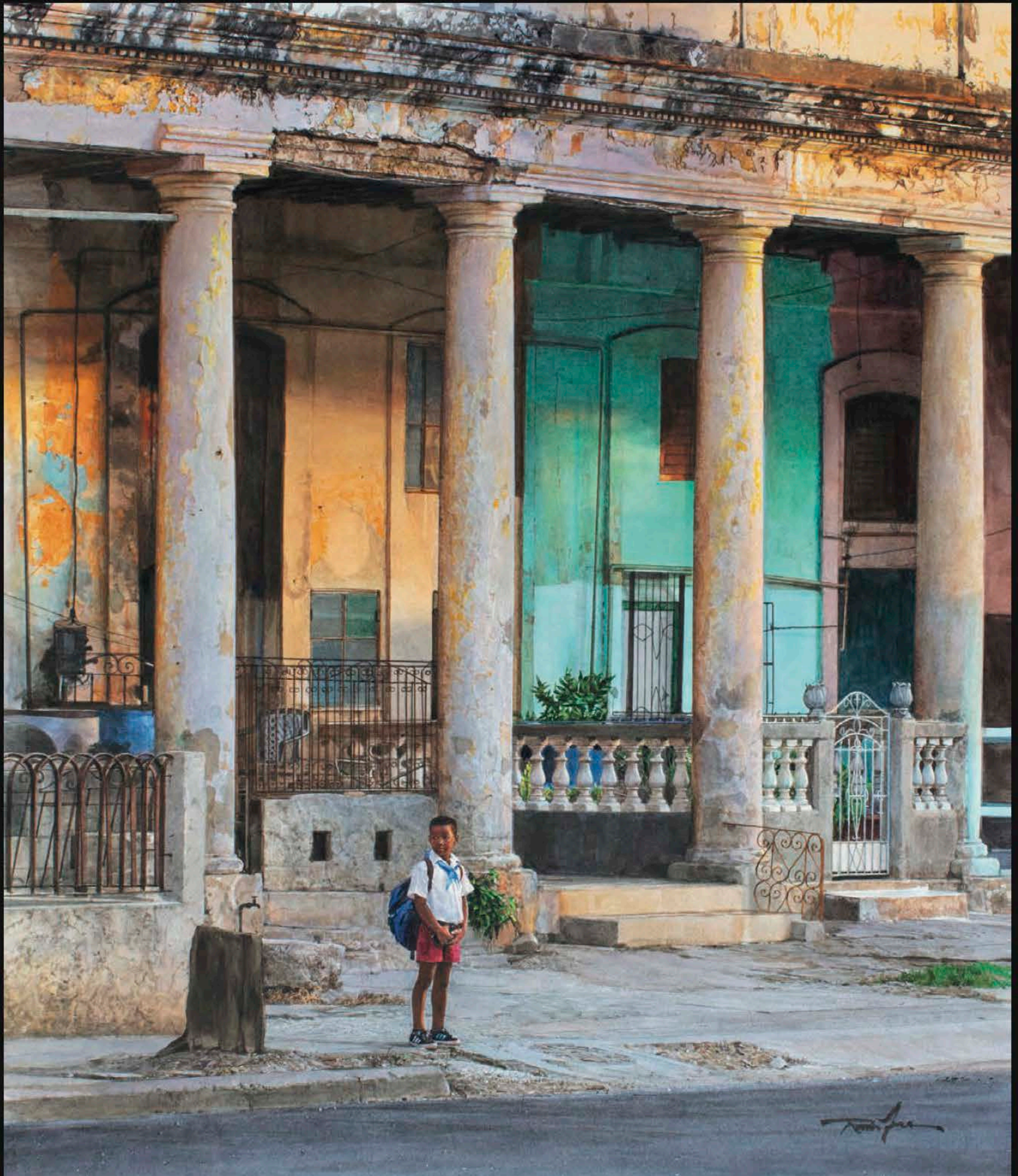


Añejo (2020), watercolour on paper, 53 x 46 cm





Meditation (2019), watercolour on paper, 53 x 64 cm



Mythology of Valor (2021), watercolour on paper, 64 x 53 cm



Cariño (2023), watercolour on paper, 64 x 53 cm

"I wanted to express tenderness without allowing the painting to become sentimental. The young girl and the puppy are united in a pose that is both awkward and deeply affectionate. The palm fronds surrounding them seem to embrace the pair, reinforcing the sense of closeness. In Cuban families, affection is not always expressed openly, but it is unmistakably present, revealed through quiet gestures of honesty, warmth and genuine care."



Tobaco Cubano (2019), watercolour on paper, 53 x 46 cm



Cuban Ballad (2018), watercolour on paper, 53 x 46 cm



UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Positive Space (2022)

Watercolour on paper, 81 x 64 cm

The subject

I was walking near the railway station in Sagua La Grande one morning when the light immediately caught my attention. The building's façade, with its remarkable stonework and weathered plaster, drew me in. The layers of peeling paint had become almost decorative over time. Then I noticed someone standing on the top-floor balcony. We made eye contact, and I had the distinct feeling that he was just as curious about me as I was about him.

The intention

Although the building reflects years of decay and hardship, I wanted the painting to convey a sense of calm and quiet contemplation. To me, it says something profound about Cuba: even in the midst of struggle, there is often an unexpected feeling of peace.

The composition

The composition is deliberately frontal, allowing the geometry of the architecture to take centre stage. Rectangles of every size — from narrow horizontal openings to tall vertical windows — create a strong underlying structure, while the bold orange lines guide the eye across the façade and reinforce its rhythm.

The artist's view

Whenever I look at this painting, I feel a genuine sense of peace. One of my favourite aspects is the way the open windows invite the viewer into the upper apartment, where the light falling across the back wall creates a quiet, intimate moment beyond the façade.

INTERVIEW

THE ART OF WATERCOLOUR: YOUR CUBAN PAINTINGS ARE REMARKABLY HUMAN. BEYOND THEIR VISUAL BEAUTY, THEY SEEM TO INVITE A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES. WAS THAT YOUR INTENTION FROM THE BEGINNING?

RANCE JONES: Absolutely. I wanted these paintings to become a catalyst for dialogue. My goal was never simply to document Cuba or create beautiful watercolours. I hoped viewers would care about the people they were looking at — not through pity, but through recognition. To me, that's an important distinction. I want people to recognise themselves, their families or their neighbours in these paintings. Human experience is remarkably universal when we take the time to look closely. That has always been central to my work. Whether I'm painting someone in Cuba, Palestine, Peru or Ireland, I'm searching for the shared humanity that connects us beyond geography or politics. The title *La Vida Brava* reflects that perfectly. My first exhibition, *The Lingering Revolution*, inevitably evoked Cuba's political history. But when Forum Gallery invited me to create a second exhibition, we realised the true subject wasn't politics — it was the extraordinary strength and dignity of the Cuban people. *La Vida Brava* captured that spirit much more honestly.

TAW : WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO CUBA, AND HOW DID THOSE FIRST IMPRESSIONS GROW INTO SUCH AN AMBITIOUS SERIES?

R.J. : My first visit in 2018 felt both unfamiliar and strangely familiar. The way people dressed, children playing outside and even the food reminded me of my own childhood. Yet all of this unfolded against an urban landscape unlike anything I'd ever seen. What fascinated me most was the contrast between the vitality of everyday life and the magnificent but crumbling architecture. Those buildings seemed to carry the memory of another era, while the people brought incredible energy to the streets. I immediately felt there was a story waiting to be told. I returned four more times over the next five years. The most memorable trip was during the Covid pandemic. Strict mask regulations made photographing people in public almost impossible, so our friend Giovanni Guerra introduced us to families in their homes and on small farms. That unexpected situation transformed the project. Instead of taking quick street photographs, we spent hours talking, drinking coffee and sharing everyday moments. I particularly remember visiting Roberto Lima's family in north-central Cuba. We spoke for hours, then quietly visited his seriously ill mother simply to hold her hand. Experiences like these changed everything. We were no longer just observing Cuba — we became, however briefly, part of people's lives. Those conversations shaped the paintings as much as the photographs themselves.

TAW : YOUR PAINTINGS FEEL SPONTANEOUS – NOTHING ABOUT THEM SEEMS STAGED. HOW DO YOU FIND YOUR SUBJECTS AND EARN THE TRUST THAT ALLOWS YOU TO PORTRAY THEM SO NATURALLY?

R.J. : I never travel looking for a specific subject. Instead, I immerse myself in everyday life, walking through neighbourhoods, markets, parks and workshops with my camera. If I'm lucky, someone invites me into their home and those moments often become the most rewarding. What attracts me isn't a particular profession or age, but a certain presence. Some people possess a quiet dignity that immediately tells a story. I remember visiting a community recreation centre where one young boy stood out because he was the only child wearing a genuine martial arts uniform. He wasn't the most athletic, but his confidence revealed an inner strength that immediately caught my attention. Photography is essential, but I try not to let it dictate the encounter. I often take a first photograph before introducing myself because, once people become aware of the camera, they naturally begin to pose. What interests me is the brief moment when they forget they're being observed and simply become themselves. I also keep a journal throughout my travels. A photograph records appearances, but not the warmth of the air, the rhythm of a conversation or the emotion of an encounter. Those memories are just as valuable when I begin painting back in the studio.

TAW : YOUR PAINTINGS ARE WONDERFULLY COMPLEX, WITH ARCHITECTURE, FIGURES AND LIGHT WORKING TOGETHER TO TELL A STORY. HOW DO YOU TRANSFORM YOUR PHOTOS INTO A FINISHED COMPOSITION?

R.J. : Everything begins with observation. Whenever I travel somewhere unfamiliar, I photograph constantly – textures, buildings, gestures, animals and changing light. By the time I return home, I often have several thousand images to work from. I rarely paint from a single photograph. Instead, I combine different references, creating rough digital collages until the composition feels right. Once the drawing is transferred to the paper, I carefully plan the order in which the painting will develop. Watercolour rewards preparation and I like to anticipate where the real challenges will be. People are often surprised by the amount of detail in my work, but that comes from my previous career as a storyboard artist. For years I produced highly detailed drawings for television commercials and that discipline never left me. Even when working on large sheets, I still divide the painting into manageable sections, solving one visual problem at a time. Pink Kitchen is a good example. Everything depended on the soft pink light on the back wall. It took fifteen attempts before I finally achieved the atmosphere I was looking for. Starting over never discouraged me – it was simply part of finding the right solution. Just as important as the figures is the architecture surrounding them. I never think of the buildings as backgrounds. Their cracked walls and eroded surfaces become equal partners in the composition, creating a visual dialogue with the people. That tension is essential because I'm not simply presenting a subject – I'm telling a story.

TAW : LIGHT IS ONE OF THE DEFINING FEATURES OF YOUR WORK, YET IT NEVER FEELS COPIED FROM A PHOTOGRAPH. HOW DO YOU RECREATE THE ATMOSPHERE OF A PLACE RATHER THAN SIMPLY RECORDING WHAT YOU SAW?

R. J. : Light is fundamental to narrative painting because it

immediately establishes mood. The time of day becomes part of the story, so I'm always trying to recreate the feeling of a place rather than the exact appearance recorded by the camera. When I return to the studio, I don't just study photographs. I remember the heat of the sun, the humidity, the sounds and even the smell of the air. Those memories help me invent a light that feels authentic rather than merely accurate. My palette has remained almost unchanged since childhood. I use warm and cool versions of the basic colours together with a few trusted earth pigments such as Burnt Sienna, Raw Umber and Cobalt Blue.

Cuba, however, has its own distinctive light. I found that the whites often carry a subtle violet cast, so I glaze them with very thin washes of Smalt to recreate that atmosphere. Every country has its own visual language and learning to recognise those differences is one of the greatest rewards of travelling as a painter.

TAW : AFTER FIVE JOURNEYS, THREE EXHIBITIONS AND A BOOK DEVOTED TO CUBA, WHAT HAS THIS REMARKABLE BODY OF WORK ULTIMATELY TAUGHT YOU – BOTH AS AN ARTIST AND AS A PERSON?

R. J. : The exhibitions at Forum Gallery were tremendously rewarding, but what mattered most was seeing people connect with the individuals in the paintings. That is also why we published *Watercolors of Cuba*. A single painting can tell one story, but together they reveal a much broader narrative. What stays with me most is the resilience of the Cuban people. Their strength, humour and generosity exist alongside real hardship and that balance is what I wanted the series to express. The experience also changed me personally. Every time my wife Christina and I travelled to Cuba, we filled large duffel bags with medical supplies, school materials, tools and equipment for the families we had come to know. We understood we could never solve their difficulties, but helping in whatever way we could became an important part of every journey. Even today, Cuba continues to haunt me. I wish I could do more. Yet that feeling is inseparable from what *La Vida Brava* represents. When people think of Cuba, they often picture colourful façades or vintage cars. I think first of its people. Their lives are a constant balance of hardship and hope, beauty and decay, heartbreak, humour and joy. That extraordinary humanity captivated me from my very first visit, and it remains the reason these paintings continue to matter.

Interview: Alex d'Abo. Photos: All rights reserved



PORTRAIT

Rance Jones was born in 1965 in Richardson, Texas. He holds a Master of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of North Texas in Denton. Renowned for his realistic, narrative watercolours, he portrays people within their rural and urban environments, exploring the ways culture shapes our understanding of the world. His work has been featured extensively in leading art publications and exhibited in

more than thirty solo and group exhibitions. Jones's paintings are held in private and public collections throughout the United States and Europe. He is represented by Forum Gallery in New York and LewAllen Galleries in Santa Fe, New Mexico. www.rancejonesart.com

THE ART OF Watercolour

THE ART MAGAZINE FOR WATERCOLOURISTS

In this new issue of The Art of Watercolour, the extraordinary is hidden in plain sight. From flowers glowing in the morning light and weathered boats marked by time, to the streets of Cuba and Singapore and portraits emerging from fields of abstract colour, these artists invite us to look again at the world around us. Through observation, patience, experimentation and emotion, they reveal what watercolour does best: transform the familiar into something unexpected, personal and unforgettable.

JEANNIE VODDEN

Painting from love

Flowers, glass and the smallest wonders of nature become luminous worlds under Jeannie Vodden's brush. Using a remarkably limited palette and successive transparent glazes, she proves that harmony begins with looking closely at what we love.



CINDY BARON

Watercolours with the depth of oils

Layer upon layer of transparent colour gives Cindy Baron's landscapes an extraordinary richness. Throwing paint onto saturated paper before lifting it back to reveal form, she has developed a highly personal technique that bridges watercolour and oil.



RETO BALZER

Portraits born from abstraction

Before the face comes colour, texture and chance. Reto Balzer builds complex abstract underpaintings, then allows his portraits to emerge from their layers, creating powerful images in which subject and background become inseparable.



RANCE JONES

The human face of Cuba

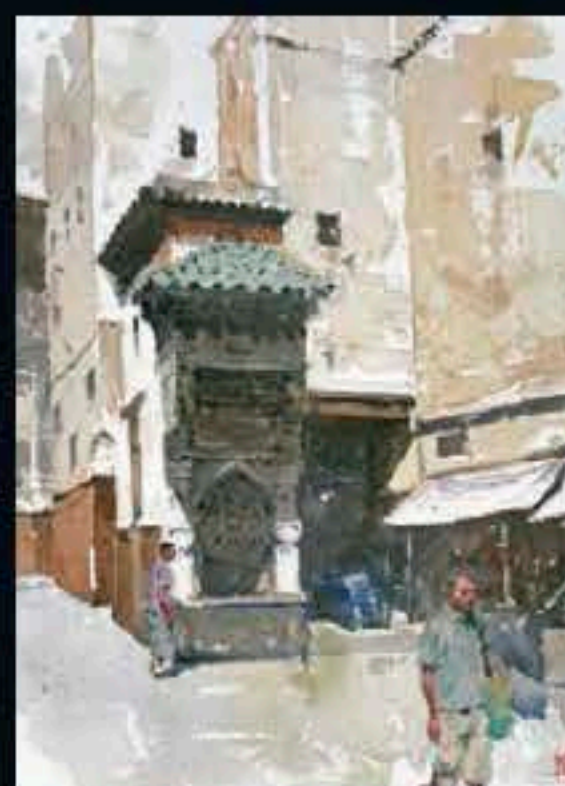
Behind the colourful façades and vintage cars, Rance Jones found the true heart of Cuba in its people. His monumental series La Vida Brava combines virtuosity with empathy, transforming encounters into deeply human visual stories.



ANDRÉ KANO

Atmosphere beyond detail

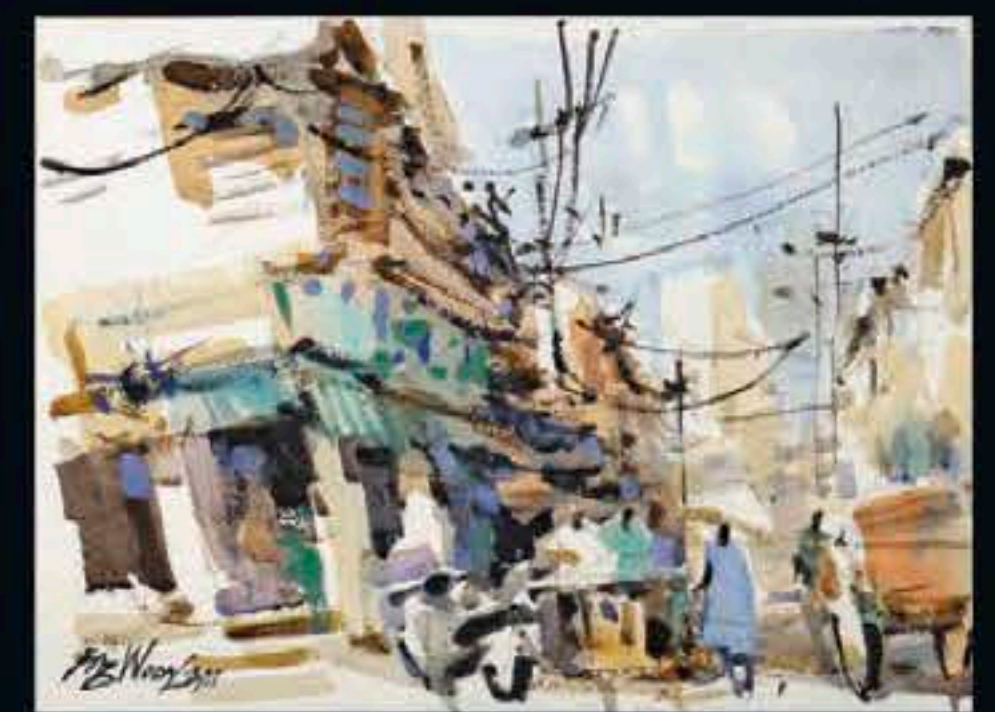
Muted colours, expressive textures and carefully judged simplification give André Kano's landscapes their timeless quality. From rural Portugal to distant shores, he captures not simply a place, but its mood, memory and silence.



NG WOON LAM

Painting the city with every sense awake

For Ng Woon Lam, urban painting begins with immersion. Light, climate, architecture, food and street life all shape his vision. From Singapore to New York, rigorous composition and fearless colour bring the energy of the city onto paper.



SVETLIN SOFRONIEV

The beauty of time

Peeling paint, weathered timbers and shimmering reflections make old boats irresistible subjects for Svetlin Sofroniev. With vibrant colour and remarkably economical brushwork, he turns the marks of age into pure painterly energy.



LISA POPE

The magic of glass and light

Marbles and glass jars become spectacular landscapes of colour in Lisa Pope's hands. Through reflections, refractions, transparent glazes and preserved whites, everyday objects reveal a complexity — and a beauty — we might otherwise never notice.



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