



CYNTHIA FAW

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ARTIST INTERVIEW

Watercolor artist Cynthia Faw paints memories of voyages through both natural and imaginary worlds. A resident of Seattle, Washington U.S.A., Cynthia garners much of her inspiration from sailing on the Salish Sea and visiting other lands around the globe. Her marine landscapes and dreamscapes artworks are included in numerous private collections.

Tell us about yourself and your background.

I was raised in Champaign, Illinois, a university town where the Arts were readily accessible. As a child I delighted in train trips to see Chicago's world-class architecture. I decided in primary school that I wanted to become an architect, because I enjoyed solving 3D problems. Painting and drawing were part of my undergraduate studies, a language for communicating my design solutions. I loved painting in its own right. After graduating from the University of Illinois with a

B.A. and Master of Architecture degrees, I managed the building design process for large commercial, civic and corporate clients working with firms in St. Louis, Dallas and Seattle. Ten years ago I refocused my priorities and have concentrated on painting full time.

Tell us about your process and what you feel when you are creating.

I begin by imagining the completed work. Watercolor, like Sumi-e painting, can be quite unforgiving and demands forethought. I do, however, make allowances for "happy accidents". Sketchbook studies help me to develop the composition, line, value, shading and hues. I spend several days working on these studies. Next I draw the image directly on watercolor paper. Adding a series of washes from lighter to darker tones fleshes out the image, to which I sometimes add drybrush strokes. It usually takes between a week and a month to complete a painting. My



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colors are often more saturated than is common, but I believe there is no "right" or "wrong" way to use watercolor.

Describe the unique DNA of your art.
On its surface, my work is representational marinescapes and landscapes, often with people, boats or buildings associated with traditional activities that transcend our current time.

I want the viewer to relate to an image that contains something familiar, but also something beyond their daily experience: a journey that tantalizes with potential escape. Though most of my subjects are literal, sometimes I skew the plane of reality a bit, using a bird's eye view, or incorporating symbols from my pattern language.

How do you want to impact viewers?
I marvel at the world and its fantastic diversity of peoples and creatures. As an undergraduate I had the great

opportunity to take classes in anthropology, and the insights gained have helped me better understand the peoples I have met during my travels in 50 countries (so far). How a person sees art is influenced by their experiences and culture: none of us see quite the same thing. My paintings tell stories from my observations and imagination that reflect how I visually process the world. I hope the viewer delights in my images and escapes their daily grind, hearing the waves breaking on the shore or the call of the heron, feeling the heat of the noontime sun or the motion of a boat rolling on the sea.

How do people tend to react when they first encounter your paintings?
They gaze for a while; my paintings have a calming effect, portraying people, creatures or natural features in a quiet state. People have told me they find my images refreshing.



Direct us to your most notable works and why.
I like to portray edges between things: sea and dry land, earth and sky, past and present. I've painted a series of views from lighthouses looking out to sea, incorporating remembered elements that aren't necessarily real. I also enjoy depicting atmospheric images—portraying landscapes or boats through sea fog, for example. My "Anchorage" series of works was created to memorialize special places I've anchored in the Caribbean and the Salish Sea; these incorporate symbols from my navigation: compass roses and depth markings.

Tell us about themes you've explored.
I look at life as a voyage—coming from the known, going somewhere unknown, then repeating it. The fact that I've sailed a small boat for 35 years contributes to my passion for voyaging: I enjoy both crossing seas and gunkholing where wild nature prevails.

The themes of my work are greatly influenced by travel of all kinds: over land, across oceans, through time. Since I live at the edge of the sea, depictions of edges have a special place in my work. I am grateful to live near people who fix and build wooden boats, and I celebrate their crafts in my work. I also celebrate old-growth trees and the wild creatures that visit my home.

What are you currently working on?
I am currently working on a studio painting for myself: I have never expressly painted with myself as a client! Composed of individual panels, each depicts places and symbols from one branch of my Swiss immigrant family. There are landscapes, a falcon and peacocks (my name means peacock: Pfau). Since one of the peacock images is derived from a stained glass window, I'm using the opportunity to incorporate formlines.

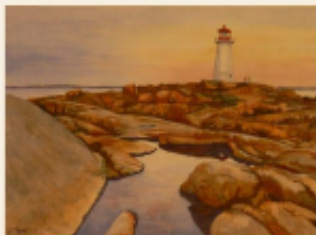
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What can we expect from you in the future?
I am planning a series called "Habitations", exploring the dwellings of cultures different from my own Eurocentric heritage. What I'm seeking to portray is the light, air, comfort, privacy and intimacy of what makes a home.

My Anchorages series has many more journeys to include. My purpose is to further develop my formline work and abstract symbols. More wooden sailing boats, fishing trawlers and workboats are planned. I also want to continue painting things that are endangered, such as: bridges, lighthouses, buildings, shorelines, creatures and forests—in the hope that viewers will feel moved to help save them. If I am able to cross the Atlantic again in 2021, my plan is to travel around the African continent, and I am excited just anticipating painting memories of new places.

What attracts you to your current mediums?
I've always preferred working in watercolor because it allows me to be both expressive and technical; watercolor sticks and pencils further extend my wet-palette range. Also, since I often include bodies of water in my images, water media seem appropriate.



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What do you feel when you are creating?
Pure joy! I'm challenged to become my absolute best self; continually invigorated and renewed.

What are your views on art's role?
I believe Art in all its many forms is (and has always been) Humanity's highest achievement— but Art does not belong on a pedestal. The intensely human, cultural insights channeled through the arts are what matters. In some indigenous cultures, well-off tribal members spent large parts of their days creating art—supported by others who did the hard labor. This is still somewhat true. I think a better model would be for societies to nurture every person's capacity to both appreciate and create art.

Tell us about your location and how it influences your art.
Relocating to Seattle was a deliberate act to embrace nature at my doorstep—offering me both subjects and inspiration. Seattle's fishing fleet is docked a mile from my home studio. All my life I have also been drawn to the formline art of the Pacific Northwest's indigenous peoples, and I collect works by Coast Salish, Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw artists.





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How has the Covid pandemic affected your creative expression and how has it changed you going forward?

With my June show, travel and family visits all cancelled, I've had a surplus of time to devote to planning and creating art. I value centeredness and quietness—themes of my work—so I view this strange lapse of planned activities as a great gift of creative time. I recently painted 'en plein air' with a fellow artist and am encouraging myself to loosen up my brushwork. Perhaps the greatest change I have noticed in myself is a focus on my gratitude at simply remaining free and healthy when so many others have lost the gifts of life and liberty during these past three months.



www.cynthialafaw.com