



**'Golden Threshold'**  
Watercolor  
by Maria Cecilia Freeman

Maria Cecilia Freeman blends the beauty of traditional botanical art and the equally fascinating world of scientific illustration resulting in an artist's style that is recognized around the world. The American Rose Annual sits down with Maria for a Q&A about her fascinating and beautiful work.

by Gene Waering

**Your distinct artistic style has been described as "documentation." What does that mean to you?**

When I paint a rose I want an image beautiful to look at and enjoy as a framed watercolor hanging on the wall. I want the rose to be recognizable to a rosarian and the botanical details in my drawings to be sufficient and accurate enough to identify that rose uniquely. With that precise description, a viewer could recognize it or compare it with another rose in detail. This is how my art serves as "rose documentation."

Roses are documented in texts, photographs and some scientific illustration. But I want to do something different, to make the botanical details visually salient as well as delightful. I want them to be seen all at once as part of the beauty of the rose, so I have to make them part of the beauty of the artistic composition.

We are all taxonomists by nature. We name and categorize the objects of our interest. We categorize roses on the basis of color, growth habit, lineage, or botanically, on the basis of the characteristics of different species. I want my "documentation art" to represent those details in a beautiful way.

**What are you hoping to achieve with your work?**

I hope my work overall can:

- help with the identification of rare old roses, found roses and species,
- promote species and heritage roses that are in danger of being

lost from the trade, destroyed by development and neglect, or just forgotten,

- describe and represent species that have contributed to the gene pool of garden roses but have not yet been adequately documented,
- help spark greater interest in the social history and personal stories that sometimes attach to celebrated roses,
- make a novel addition to botanical literature pertaining to roses, and,
- finally, hopefully, also make an innovative contribution to the world of botanical fine art by creating new ways of seeing and understanding roses.

**From Redouté to Parsons, I see you as one in a line of artists whose work is botanically accurate and "fine art"; what is new in your work that pushes beyond conventions of botanical art?**

I want to acknowledge many other artists who paint or have painted beautiful portraits of roses, accurate enough that one can recognize the rose in the painting.

But my purpose is somewhat different from theirs. While I want a rose to be recognizable from my painting as a whole, I also want to document the details that allow a close-up analytical identification of that rose, as an organic part of a graceful composition.

This goes beyond the primary goal of traditional botanical art, which is to portray plants beautifully, with artistic and aesthetic sensitivity and accuracy

as well. My preoccupation with imparting information, even to the point of including text, is unconventional for botanical art.

On the other hand, scientific illustration intends primarily to inform the viewer, through an aesthetically pleasing (sometimes truly beautiful) presentation. My overriding concern with aesthetic composition and watercolor technique strays from that goal as well.

So in a sense, my "Rose Studies" violate the conventions and expectations of both scientific illustration and traditional botanical art. A more positive way of looking at this is that I try to exceed the expectations of each, in terms of making the informative beautiful, and enhancing the aesthetic with more explicit information.

**Where does your work go from here?**

For "rose documentation," I'm trying to emphasize species and hybrids that are botanically interesting and historically significant.

My sense of purpose as an artist is becoming more coherent. While I hold consistent goals in terms of "documenting roses" my approach is more closely integrating the aesthetic and the cerebral aspects of my art. I'm exploring ways to integrate watercolor painting with drawings and annotation in a unified composition, without sliding into mere illustration. But it's a challenge. ■

Go to [www.mcf-art.com](http://www.mcf-art.com) for more about Maria Cecilia Freeman.

