

American Rose

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'Faith Whittlesey'

Genus Rosa

Cover Feature: An artist explains the process of her "Rose Studies"

New Rose Intros

View the latest offerings from your favorite rose nurseries for 2013

Miniature Winners

Award of Excellence Winners and Miniature Hall of Fame Inductees announced

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City of Sakura Rose Garden was host to the 12th International Heritage Roses Conference.
Photo courtesy Yuki Mikanagi



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Roses Abroad

International Heritage Roses Conference in Sakura, Japan

The Art of Documenting Genus *Rosa*

by Maria Cecilia Freeman

The rose on the cover of this issue, 'Faith Whittlesey', is a subtle subject for an artist. The white in its slightly nodding flowers includes pale hints of a rose-pink which is echoed in its stipules and at the margins of its glossy green leaves.

When a large leafy 'Faith Whittlesey' rose arrived at my house in a one-gallon pot after a cross-country trip from Roses Unlimited, I unpacked it in the kitchen and was immediately struck by the shape of the buds: plumply round, yet pointed in the manner of teas. That roundness would be retained at the center of the opening flower, on a petiole that curved to give the flower a slight nod. I was beginning to notice details particularly characteristic of this rose, i.e., details of its "presentation," that which makes a particular rose inescapably what it is.

I painted 'Faith Whittlesey' as part of a body of work I've called "Rose Studies," which was exhibited at the Horticultural Society of New York in 2008 and 2010, and at San Francisco Botanical Garden in 2011. In this collection, most roses are portrayed in two complementary pieces: a watercolor portrait, and an informal collage of annotated pencil drawings with patches of color representing the palette of the rose. Together, the paintings and drawings "document" my observations of the rose as well as my process of creating the art. They also (together) create an artistic whole.



Watercolor of 'Faith Whittlesey' excerpted on the cover.

AN ONGOING PROJECT

When I consider a rose as the subject of a painting, I take time—if the rose allows me that luxury—to get to know it through careful observation, drawing it repeatedly from different perspectives, as a whole and in its details. At the end of the process, as I'll explain below, these details and observations are captured in the set of annotated drawings I call the "study" of the rose. These drawings and notes help me paint the rose accurately, rendering its distinctive characteristics implicitly in a watercolor portrait.

To a botanist or taxonomist, the distinctive characteristics of a plant are those that identify and distinguish it from other species or varieties.

Many rosarians are amazingly good at observing these characteristics in the field. I try to create art that renders those details in a beautifully accessible way; this is how I intend my art to serve as "rose documentation." Selectivity of detail is the key to documenting a rose.

I am always delighted when I recognize a rose that I've drawn and painted, and confirm that it looks like my painting—just as I was originally delighted to create a painting that looks like the rose. That's an indirect way of suggesting a goal of documenting roses in art: to share that experience with viewers of the art. It's to make the botanical details that distinguish a rose visually salient and explicit, as well as delightful.

I want them to be seen as part of the beauty of the rose, and to do that I have to make them part of the beauty of an artistic composition.

That underscores the overriding intention of creating a unified piece of art in which drawings, text and watercolor work together. The colors of the plant are captured in the collage and also accurately represented in the painting. Important details that are annotated in the drawings tend to be salient in the painting. Both the watercolor and the study are intended to be informative and aesthetically pleasing at the same time. I see them as in symbiosis, each enhancing the other and creating a unity. By experiencing them together as a single

Faith Whittlesey
Hybrid gigantea / Tea



Permanent Rose
+ Raw Sienna
✓ bluish on buds and
in white flower

Permanent Rose
+ yellow ochre
a little
too pink



Shadows
P. Rose
Phthalo Green
Hansa Yellow
- Leaf reverse



Leaves:
Phthalo Green
+ Raw Sienna ✓
with a bit of Hansa Yellow
for stoma
and more for
midveins of leaves



Petals oval to
cuneate, cupped
with reflexed margins.

flowers tend to nod.
Petals warm white shaded
with pale pink on edges of
outer petals, and reverse
of concavely cupped
inner petals.

Bud
stout but
pointed.

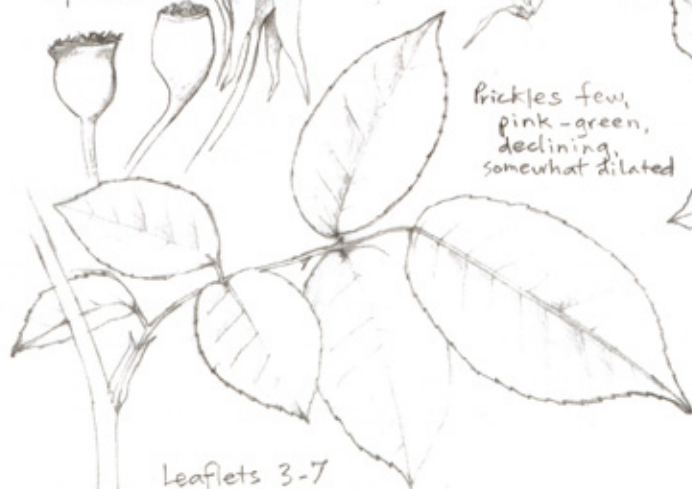
Petiole glabrous,
subtended by
reddish bracts

Sepals lanceolate,
reflexing,
deciduous.

Hip turbinate



Prickles few,
pink-green,
declining,
somewhat dilated



Leaflets 3-7
ovate-elliptical
semi-glossy dark green with red on widely
serrate margins, reddish to light green reverse



New leaves rosy,
turning green with red
margins, red rachis

New growth:
olive green
permanent rose
+ Raw Sienna

Stipules, petioles
and tiny prickles
are more rosy:



Rosy stipules linear-
medium with divergent
red-tipped auricles.
Margins red, glandular.

McF 2010

Study (annotated drawings) for 'Faith Whittlesey.'



ABOVE: The artist's work table with 'Faith Whittlesey.' LEFT: Drawings in progress, leaf of 'Faith Whittlesey.'

work of art, too, the viewer is invited into the creative process.

HOW I WORK

This is a process that can't be hurried. I always work directly with live plants, either with cuttings or in pots on my work table. As a practical matter, I start by drawing the flowers because they are the first thing to wilt. I draw them from different angles, keeping the light source consistent (a big window to my left). I draw leaves in their natural position on the stems, and larger sections of the plant to capture the overall habit.

Besides buds and flowers, leaves and overall habit, I examine individual petals, sepals, bracts, leaflets, petioles, stipules and their auricles, hips, canes and prickles. I draw all of

these details and take notes about size, shape, margins, and surface textures, including the presence or absence of glands, bristles, soft hairs, and so on, in both new and mature growth. If possible, I compare my observations with published descriptions in texts, and resources such as helpmefind.com/rozes. When I can, I sometimes consult with expert rosarians in an effort to be accurate in my observations. When I run into regional variation within a species, as I did when I painted *Rosa californica*, for instance, I note that too.

Early in the process, I mix watercolors and test the mixtures on a piece of the same paper I'll use for the painting—140-lb. hot-press acid-free watercolor paper—until I've got mixtures that precisely match the colors of the different parts of the plant. For reference, I take notes on how I mixed pigments to achieve those colors. It's interesting that the palette of any given rose usually turns out to include only four or five colors, variously mixed—a sort of natural harmony. A bit of the petal color is

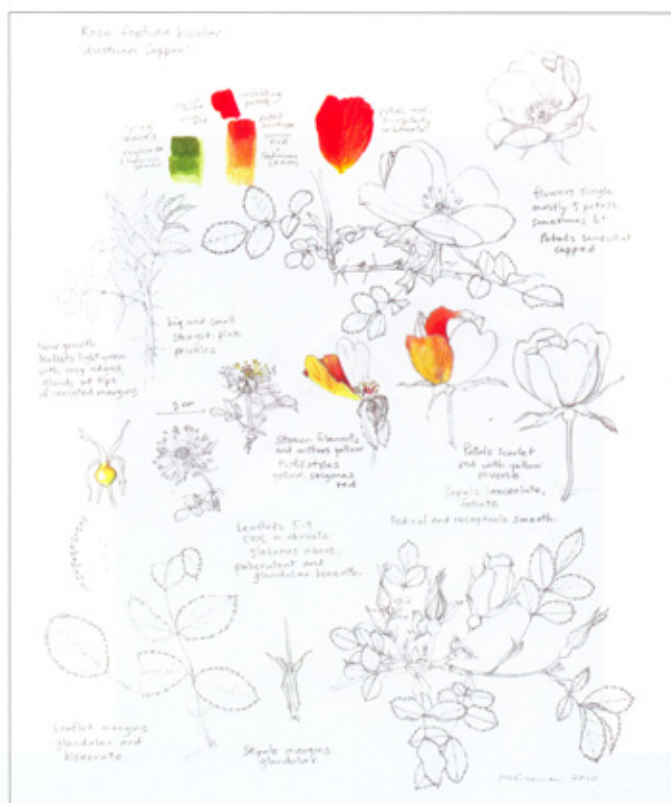
essential to mixing the green of the leaves, and a touch of the leaf green is a subtle element in the petal color. For example, the painting of 'Faith Whittlesey' relies on just four colors from my watercolor palette: Permanent Rose, Raw Sienna, Phthalo Green, and Hansa Yellow.

My preliminary drawings are done on acid-free tracing vellum, which is a smooth and forgiving (easily erased) surface for graphite. Because it's translucent, it works well for transferring a composition of drawings onto watercolor paper over a light box. I paint in transparent watercolor, a medium which allows the white of paper to show through and layered washes of color to suggest the translucence or shine of rose petals. I use very small brushes with a dry-brush technique to finish details such as stamens, petal venation, leaf margins, etc. Finally, I choose a representative subset of my drawings to arrange into a finished collage with color patches and annotation to accompany the watercolor portrait.

To capture the development of a rose through the seasonal cycle, I need to revisit it at different times of the year. I conduct my research in public and private rose collections, botanical gardens, and in the wild. I'm strict about collecting plant material in an ethical way, whether it's from gardens or in the wild, which means getting permission, or sometimes not collecting at all but visiting the rose where it lives. If possible, I purchase a plant and find a place in my garden to squeeze in one more rose.

BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION AND ART

Just as I am not creating an illustrated field guide to roses, I am not creating traditional botanical art either. These "Rose Studies" draw on two rich historical traditions, scientific illustration



Watercolor and accompanying study of *Rosa foetida bicolor*.



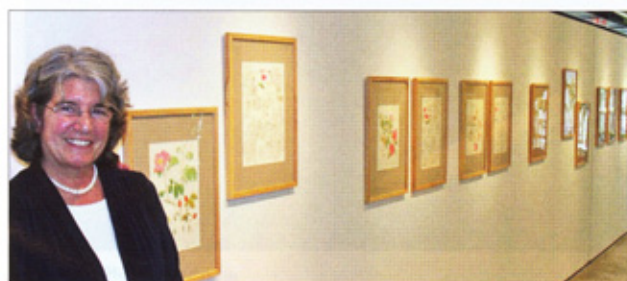
and botanical art. Space doesn't allow me to explore that history here, but if you're interested you can find an informative discussion in Patsy Cunningham's excellent article, "Illustrating Roses ... Then and Now," in the 2008 *American Rose Annual*.

I have studied and continue to practice both scientific illustration and traditional botanical art, and I thrive on the insights and techniques offered by both, but my rose documentation art doesn't fit easily into either category. The primary goal of scientific illustration is to inform the viewer, through an aesthetically pleas-

ing (sometimes truly beautiful) presentation. Traditional botanical art strives to portray plants with artistic and aesthetic sensitivity as well as accuracy. My preoccupation with imparting information, even to the point of including text, is unconventional for botanical art; and my overriding concern with aesthetic composition and watercolor technique strays from the goals of science illustration. Whether one effort detracts from the other or enhances it probably depends on the context in which one considers this project. Because I have sometimes pushed the "boundary" of these traditions, my art has

also been described by some as entering the realm of "fine art." But the world of fine art allows traditional boundaries to be crossed, and the world of rose documentation has room for art. So my aspiration is to make a novel addition to the botanical literature pertaining to roses, and to make an innovative contribution to the world of botanical fine art.

More information and images can be found at Maria Cecilia Freeman's website, www.mcf-art.com. Maria Cecilia Freeman also speaks and gives classes on her watercolor technique (email: mcf@mcf-art.com).



The artist in her exhibition at the Horticultural Society of New York in 2010.