

Thomas Rebek: Going With the Flow Boston Watercolorist

IN June this year, I will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of receiving the Gohonzon. I remember that when I started chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo in 1972, President Daisaku Ikeda asked that we try this practice for twenty years to truly see the great effects it can bring to us. I thought it a difficult challenge but prayed earnestly that I would be able to practice that long to see what he really meant.

In my case the practice has truly changed my life for the better. My bitter cynicism, originating from a deep insecurity, has changed to compassion for others and hope for the future.

My lack of confidence to pursue an art career was challenged twelve years ago when I just couldn't fake enjoying my job as an interior designer any longer. I wanted to be an artist since I first painted watercolors as a boy of 14. My dream then was that I could paint all I wanted to when I retired at age 65 because I believed that I couldn't make a living at it. Until I began practicing Buddhism, I had no way of overcoming this insecurity. Of course I painted in my "spare time" —weekends and on vacations. Deep inside I knew I could accomplish wonderful paintings if I were to devote full time to it. The more I practiced, the more I could see how I was wasting my talent and that I needed to correct this situation.

Twelve years ago, in 1985, I was asked to give my Buddhist experience at one of our monthly meetings at the Boston Community Center. As I prepared my story, I could see this glaring void of unfulfillment in my life. I decided that I would show my appreciation for fifteen years of accomplishments and finish with my sincere determination to become an artist to the best of my ability, giving up the lucrative interior design practice I had been involved with since before I started practicing Buddhism.

Within a year I was able to fulfill my obligations to my interior design clients and concentrate on my true love—painting watercolors. Many of my clients supported my new career and bought some of my early work.

I knew that I had made the right decision. Everything about this work feels right to me. I'm so very happy getting up every morning to prepare for the challenge of painting; it's then that I face the Gohonzon and show appreciation for making me confront what I really wanted to do early on in my life.

Places That I Love

MY landscape and cityscape paintings are of places that I love. I try to make the viewer reflect upon each environment in an enlightened way—to make it a meaningful and somewhat happy experience. No matter the weather: rain, shine, cold, hot, snow, and so on. I want the viewer to be one with the environment.

I am particularly known for my watercolors of Boston. I hope that people who live in Boston really appreciate this city more after seeing my Boston paintings and that people outside Boston who see my scenes will fall in love with the city so much that they will definitely want to visit here; very much like people who see a Monet painting of Paris, find Paris romantic and would like to visit Paris. My style of painting has been influenced by the Impressionists, as well as by Winslow Homer, John Singleton Sargent, Maurice Prendergast and Walt Disney.

Title: Thomas Rebek: Going With the Flow

Subject: Living Buddhism 02/97 v.1 n.2 p.46 LB9702p46

Author: Thomas Rebek

Keywords: Artists Career Experiences Expressions Flow Gallery Going Rebek Thomas

I do my work on site, weather permitting, but I mostly paint in my home studio since I like to do many rainy and snowy scenes. My smaller paintings take me a few days to complete and the large ones five or six weeks depending on the detail.

Whenever I look at a scene, I think of many ways I can paint it from so many different angles, times of the day or night, in so many different light conditions and at so many different times of the year. This way no matter how many times I may paint the same scene, it is always fresh in my mind.

I almost never repeat my color palettes. I'm constantly learning new ways of putting colors together. I draw the image lightly with lead pencil on the watercolor paper first until I feel it has the right composition and drama; then I begin the painting stage, slowly working from light to dark. I paint onto a fine acid free 300-pound cold press Arches watercolor paper from France. The technique is transparent watercolor. It is a difficult method since the artist does not generally use white paint pigment to produce the white and light areas of the painting. This way I must think of what to leave white in the planning stages before I start the actual painting. It is this specific thought process that lured me to watercolor painting in the first place. This and the immediacy of the medium are the joys of watercolor.

Many sudden changes occur when wet paint flows into wet paint whereby the artist must be willing to work and think through what is happening to the image at the moment in order to make a statement about the images outcome. The watercolor artist must "go with the flow." I have a constant communication with the process of painting as I'm experiencing it. It can be frustrating but many times is exhilarating.

I have maintained a close association with many nonprofit art organizations in New England since many of the artist members are very giving of their time to teach their art techniques to one another. I have been able to continually show my work through these organizations, winning many awards.

My favorite is the New England Watercolor Society. For the past eight years, I've been on its board of directors; in 1996, the members voted me their president for a two-year term. I'm putting my early SGI-USA leadership training to good use here. Every one of the twenty-three artists on the NEWS board of directors takes responsibility to produce our three major watercolor shows each year.

My paintings have become so popular that I've produced prints of them for the general market. They are being sold through many local galleries and gift shops. Many images have been produced into holiday greeting cards by Townhouse Press in Boston and Century Greetings in Chicago. Pimpernel Company in England is producing my Boston images on placemats and coasters that are being sold in the finer gift shops under the name American Artist Signature Series Boston Scenes.

I wish to sincerely thank Steve Potoff for introducing me to this philosophy one June evening in front of Boston's famous Symphony Hall. He was a stranger then but as I grew more and more into this practice, I realized that we had made a commitment to be together as friends, in some near or distant past, to do our part for world peace. I also feel so fortunate that Daisaku Ikeda has been alive and healthy and active during my entire practice. I thank him for the encouragement he gave me to stick with it for twenty years or more to experience the true meaning of it all. I look forward to my next twenty-five years of practice and good fortune. □

Title: Thomas Rebek: Going With the Flow

Subject: Living Buddhism 02/97 v.1 n.2 p.46 LB9702p46

Author: Thomas Rebek

Keywords: Artists Career Experiences Expressions Flow Gallery Going Rebek Thomas