



BELOW
Harby created this larger-format piece on site at the Temple of Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, Cambodia. This is the great lost city of the Khmer kings whose heyday lasted from the ninth to the 14th century A.D. "I painted at sunrise," he says, "as the forms of the temple emerged from the mist right before my eyes. It's a reminder of the plein air challenge: While there's pressure to adapt to changing conditions, one must fix the scene to a specific point in time."

A I'd say that 80 percent of my past work has been done in the field during travels, which means that both the size and amount of detail is limited by the constraints of time on site and size of my luggage. Within the past few years, however, I've become more interested in working in the studio to complete larger, more complex paintings that are inspired by sketches and smaller watercolors I produced on site. Thus, my travel sketchbooks, of which I have dozens, serve as a catalyst for potential larger-format paintings.

Q What's your favorite location for painting and sketching?

A My favorite place to sketch and paint by far is Venice, Italy, just as it must have been for Whistler, Turner, Sargent and so many other artists before me. Called "la Serenissima" when it was an autonomous republic, its serene atmosphere results from the absence of the bustle and clatter of wheeled vehicles—banished since canals replace streets and roads.

The quality and movement of light, thanks to the city's marine atmosphere and the reflections off of the water, offer endless inspiration as does the wonderful architecture, which is always presented with great vistas and viewpoints.

I also find Rome, which I've had the pleasure to visit many times over the past 50 years and where I've taught architecture students for more than a decade, greatly inspiring due to its rich palimpsest of architecture from all ages. I'm sure I've done more sketches and paintings in that ancient city than anywhere else.



The Things He Carries

I always travel with at least a sketchbook, but often bring a setup for painting with an easel on larger sheets of loose paper. I never check luggage, so I've organized my kit to be as light and compact as possible. I use a lightweight camera tripod with telescoping legs, on which I've mounted a 9-inch aluminum strip which holds a sliding clip. This, in turn, secures a Masonite board cut to fit the side flap of my roll-aboard suitcase. Two of these boards sandwich however many sheets of paper I think I'll be able to use. I've created a thin plywood piece that slips onto two of the tripod legs to serve as a place to hold water, palette and brushes. This setup allows me to work standing up and eliminates the need for a folding stool, which took up valuable space.

—Stephen Harby



"I did this monochrome sketch at the Pyramids in Giza in my sketchbook," says Harby. "These are the largest man-made structures on earth and the only surviving wonder of the world as identified in Hellenistic times. I defined perhaps four gradations of light value from full sun to deep shadow using layered washes. The vast scale and emptiness of the space is conveyed and dramatized by these colossal objects."

Stephen Harby

A World of Architectural Wonder

Stephen Harby (stephenharby.com) is an architect, educator and artist. He maintains an architecture practice in Santa Monica, Calif., and is a visiting lecturer at the Yale School of Architecture, where he has directed the school's study program in Rome since 2002. He also leads cultural and artistic tours for small select groups to destinations all over the world.

Q Describe your experiences as a world traveler.

A I've decided that I was born to be a passionate traveler. My American parents were sojourning in London upon my birth and brought me home at six

months on the legendary Cunard Lines ocean liner, the SS Queen Elizabeth. Since then—well, since the age of autonomy—I've traveled as often as the spirit, funds and opportunity permit.

Q How does traveling impact your art-making?

A One non-negotiable tenet of the Yale School of Architecture was that students maintain a sketchbook to document phenomena observed in the built and natural environments. For me and others, watercolor made its way into these sketchbooks to give added clarity and vividness. It wasn't long before my images got larger and transitioned from the rather unforgiving paper of the typical sketchbook to the inviting surfaces of Arches 140-lb cold-pressed.

Q How do your travels continue to inspire you at when you're home working in the studio?

ABOVE
Harby made this full-color watercolor on 11x14 Arches paper. "The Parthenon, which sits atop the Acropolis in Athens," he says, "is one of the earliest buildings [447-432 BCE] designed by known architects, Iktinos and Kallikrates. The use of color permits the bright warm tone of the stone to be framed by the cool blue sky, and the gradations of light created by the sun-cast shadows define the forms."