



FROM HARRISON'S SKETCHBOOK, 2009, WATERCOLOR WASH AND INK

**Although it would be gratifying to call** myself an *artist*, I tend instead to think of myself as a person who just likes to draw. In my teens I received instruction in painting with oils. Aside from that, I'm self-taught. I gave up oil painting in my twenties due to the cost of supplies. Naturally, my first watercolors were painted like oils with color used straight from the tube.

The standard approach to painting landscapes in oil is to paint the sky and distant objects first, followed by the middle-ground and finally the foreground. Since working time is essentially unlimited and mistakes easily corrected, this process is soothing, almost therapeutic. But watercolor is different. Lights must be saved or painted first, then mid-values, then darks. Working time is limited and mistakes hard to fix. Consequently, more planning is required. Painting a watercolor is like playing chess. You have to think ahead, and yet still maintain enough awareness of your idea's progress to recognize when, often unexpectedly, it has reached its peak.

Working in watercolor has taught me that I'm impatient, often rushing disastrously ahead before washes are completely dry, compulsively given to adding unnecessary detail or sometimes overworking otherwise promising passages into pathetic mud puddles.

Mixing color is a critical skill that every watercolorist must acquire. Work that appeals to me does so more often than not on the basis of bold and authoritative color. In my fantasy life I am able to flawlessly blend an infinite spectrum of living colors. My reality, unfortunately, is different. Every painting presents at least one situation that requires a color I have never mixed. The road to "nail-on-the-head," real-time color mixing is paved with countless brave attempts.

What's important, though, is to keep trying, for if each sketch, sincerely attempted, brings us even one step closer to aquarelle enlightenment, then we are better for the effort. And on that joyous trip home from the field in the gathering shadows of a summer's



DAVID HARRISON, *KIVIRANTA*, 1977, INK & WASH ON ARCHES PAPER, 18" X 12.5" (*KIVIRANTA* IS FINNISH FOR "STONE SHORE")

day, with a "keeper" in your sketchbook, who can fault you for visioning the future grandeur of your achievement?

In *my dream* I am wise and kind as I receive the Dalai Lama seeking guidance on the path to watercolor enlightenment. And I am prepared, as from the sleeve of my kimono I gracefully draw forth a delicate velum roll and pass it into his eager hand.

#### ZEN OF WATERCOLOR SKETCHING

- Sketch every day
- Sketch from life, not from memory
- Decide the focal point before you begin
- Attend to composition
- Limit values
- Simplify
- Keep it loose, use a big brush
- Leave something undone to give the mind a chance to play
- Add people to add interest
- Never give up
- Date and sign every sketch
- Remember, it's only a sketch.

David Harrison is a graduate of Gettysburg College with a master's degree in psychology from Temple University. Following his discharge from the service in 1968, he entered corporate life and began designing learning experiences for working adults. Over the next four decades, Dave offered his skill and creativity to those seeking personal growth on the job in local businesses, labor unions, colleges, universities, government agencies, not-for-profit entities and large multinational organizations. Through it all, pen and pad have been constant companions. His sketches trace a life's journey and reflect his enduring interest in travel, nature, military history and "how things work". Now retired, Dave lives with his wife, Heljä, in a small village half an hour north of New York City. ♦