

## Absence of Water

## Julie Rauer's Watercolor Paintings Interpret Science Through An Asian Prism

Devoid of an identifiable horizon line, foreground or background color, and even a single static point of visual reference, the Japanese handscroll, *Acrobats* (ca. 1800), by an anonymous Edo period (1615-1868) painter is the essence of constant agitated motion, with numerous top and bottom bleeds of figures and perilous apparatuses weaving and tumbling in resounding musical rhythm. Selective, defined areas of color and calligraphic line conjure a vivid, palpable environment against white paper that is anything but blank. Tangibility of air is not relegated to Western painting traditions of viscous sky over weighty ground, but is rather the egalitarian presence of Eastern space, visceral force and pervasive character inhabiting structures and animating their world.



Photography: Louis Sorokin

Writhing stalks yield Chinese lanterns as both skeletal cages and spectral globes hovering on the verge of disintegration in Julie Rauer's watercolor painting, *Undaunted By the Impossibility of the Truly Delicate* (2005), flaying its ivory paper background with Japanese fire maple claws, thrashing in frenzied disquietude before evaporating without a sound. Refined structures carve fathomless space, dancing and churning—fueled by linear precision and surreal, graphic abstraction rarely associated with watercolors.

Paper without the insistent saturation of watercolor pigments layered succes-

### *Undaunted By the Impossibility of the Truly Delicate*, 2005

Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (17" x 7")

© Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist

sively over whiteness adopts the ability to transform, morphing into positive and negative elements of shifting substance, creating ribbons of transience within richly detailed objects of waning life. In her metaphysical still lifes, fine art based on science, Rauer sculpts ravenous day lilies and sacrificial paper wasps in flickering dimensions, as *Feast of Fools* (2005) cascades in saturated hues down to carnal finality, where insect and flower, watercolor and unpainted ground undulate en masse as a new and bestial organism.



Photography: Louis Sorokin

### *Feast of Fools*, 2005

Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (17" x 10 1/4")

© Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist



Photography: Louis Sorokin

### **Entropy, 2005**

Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (14" x 11")

© Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist

Unraveling strands of color, the veins of dragonfly wings, sail through achromatic air and coalesce in the rigorous weld of stained glass in *Entropy* (2005), Julie Rauer's painting of ontological collision, where integrity of both dragonfly and walkingstick is compromised—entomological manifestation of a doctrine of inevitable social decline and degeneration, window into the human condition.

Exemplified by *Entropy*, and most ancient Chinese and Japanese art, the painter does not assert the pigment's own intrinsic properties at the expense of subject matter, as much contemporary watercolor work imposes the diaphanous nature and wavering, feathery, amorphous strokes of its customary techniques evenly—across the most diverse subject matter. Asian artists and their pigments morph poetically with each disparate element, as paint becomes stone, pine needles and

moss, thrashing waves and dragon scales, monkey hides and demon claws.

Earth and sky, as unpainted paper with the savage presence of bleached bone, weave between a series of asymmetrical, exquisitely delineated vignettes of Gods, monsters, and hell spawn in Zheng Zhong's (active ca. 1612-48) fantastical handscroll, *Searching the Mountain for Demons*, which evokes the legendary and diabolic with an absence of the expected infernal background. Such are the indelible artistic achievements and infinite possibilities when cultivating the muse of timeless Asian masterworks (all Chinese and Japanese works referenced in this article were recently on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, peerless font of inspiration), unbound from frequent Western preoccupations with omnipresent backgrounds, spatial conformity and obsessive symmetry, thematic certitude, rigid perspective, and sometimes slavish devotion to the accepted physical characteristics of a particular medium.

Released from established watercolor conventions, contemporary painters can also flourish in a comparatively arid technical atmosphere, creating in the relative absence of water, on dry ground. Abandoning traditional watercolor paper altogether, Julie Rauer has chosen to work exclusively on Strathmore Bristol hot-pressed, which allows for: uncompromising exactitude of both line and stroke, casting brush as blade gliding across ice; experimentation with myriad textural representations and pigment densities in service of subject structure; meticulously controlled translucency experimentation independent of standard wet ground effects; retention of hue lucidity and brilliance, without the soaking up or dulling down of color. While inadvisable for painters pursuing watercolor's more recognizable aqueous impressions hinging on copious amounts of water floating wandering pigments, Strathmore Bristol hot-pressed is ideal for those creators informed by an Asian aesthetic, keepers of a bold flame ignited on dry paper and silk.

Revealing the full breadth and splendor of nature, Asian art frequently employs diptychs, triptychs, and multi-paneled screens to elaborate on conjoined themes, realize expansive compositions, or evoke transitional environments, such as the passing of seasons and progression of time. Suzuki Kiitsu's resplendent *Morning Glories* (Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), early 19th century) dance across two gilded six-panel screens with the regal bearing of sapphires, while branches wither around an imaginary portrait of the legendary Chinese God of agriculture and medicine in *Triptych of Shennong and Landscapes of Summer and Winter* (Japan, Edo period), Kano Tan'y's three hanging scrolls of ink and light color on silk.

Gothic architecture seen through the prism of science soars across Julie Rauer's diptych, *Coleoptera Polis* (2005), a city of beetles visually constructed from the wing covers, jaws, legs, antennae, and various appendages of over two dozen individual insect specimens from numerous species; uniting the two paintings is a flying buttress mandible, which terminates in a blanched atmosphere kindled by translucent lyre beetles sailing past the iconic jaw.



Photography: Louis Sorokin

***Coleoptera Polis*, 2005**

Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol, diptych (14" x 7 1/8" and 14" x 7 1/8")  
 © Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist



Photography: Louis Sorokin

***Gamelan*, 2005**

Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (12" x 17")  
 © Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist

“..the painter does not assert the pigment's own intrinsic properties at the expense of subject matter..”

Sea bass skull, amphibian viscera, and a 48 million year old fish fossil speak plainly of archaeology, but are transformed into a writhing meditation on the fluidity of time and telescoping infestation of inner space in Rauer's watercolor, *Gamelan* (2005), inspired by the demanding graphic presence and marked asymmetry of Japanese woodblock prints, and wondrously alien silhouettes in both Japanese shadow puppet theater (performed against the all night music of a Gamelan orchestra) and Lotte Reiniger's astounding 1927 silent film, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*.

Fascinated by the tall, slender dimensions of many Japanese and Chinese hanging scrolls, with their severely compressed space and serpentine compositional elements violating boundaries in suggestion of unseen vastness, Julie Rauer brought this unusual format and structural sensibili-

ty to her interpretations of the vegetal, aquatic, and entomological in three sharply divergent paintings, *Progress of Lemons* (2004), *Conch, Spider Conch, and Shell Fragments* (2004), and *Chimera* (2005). In the absence of water, where paint inhabits but does not saturate or dominate its paper, dying lemons fragment as hoary spirits coursing from a Dickensian grave; withered pulp, ochreous hide and petrified seeds unravel into the parched expanse—where pith and paper become indistinguishable. Seashells barter their calcified husks for background alabaster, emerging as barbed crowns over invasive arms and Stygian hollows. Spectral empress tree branches with the inscrutable destination and intangibility of smoke erupt into iridescent weevils and beetles, ephemeral hybrids of plant, insect, and the boundless paper itself.



Photography: Louis Sorkin

**Progress of Lemons, 2004**  
Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (14" x 8 3/4")  
© Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist



Photography: Louis Sorkin

**Conch, Spider Conch, and Shell Fragments, 2004**  
Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (14" x 7")  
© Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist



Photography: Louis Sorkin

**Chimera, 2005**  
Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (17" x 8 3/4")  
© Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist

In the depths of an ocean without moisture, tiny fish cavort amongst behemoth submarine rock formations in Zhu Da's (Bada Shanren) hanging scroll, *Fish and Rocks* (dated 1699), which eloquently summons the many elusive properties of water which have historically bedeviled generations of Western painters struggling to invoke aqueous minutia in complex backgrounds straining under the blanketed weight of paint. But it is truly here in this Chinese painting that one can swim in bracing currents and taste the sea's ravenous brine—without a single ink wash or brush stroke to indicate water. ♡



Photography: Louis Sorkin

**Cocos Nucifera, 2004**  
Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (17 3/8" x 11 5/8")  
© Julie Rauer, from the collection of the artist

**ABOUT THE ARTIST**  
**Julie Rauer**

To learn more about Julie Rauer and her work, please go to the web site [www.hudsonvalleyantiques.com](http://www.hudsonvalleyantiques.com).

Limited fine art edition giclee prints of Julie Rauer's paintings are presently available for the following works: *Entropy*, *Unicorn Beetle*, *Corn*, *Cocos Nucifera (Coconut Branch)*, *Undaunted by the Impossibility of the Truly Delicate (Frenzy of Lanterns and Fire)*. Signed and numbered in limited editions of 50 and 60, five paintings have been printed on archival museum quality German etching paper and are available only through the artist's representative, Bruce Gemmell, who can be reached at: (917) 553-4762. The artist, Julie Rauer, may be contacted at: [julierauer14@msn.com](mailto:julierauer14@msn.com).



Photography: Louis Sorkin

**Cicada and Celery Root, 2004**  
Watercolor and graphite on Strathmore Bristol (14" x 11")  
© Julie Rauer, from the collection of Patricia Heller

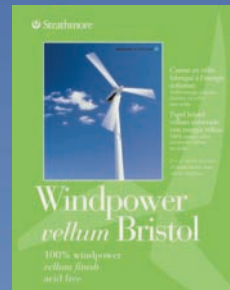
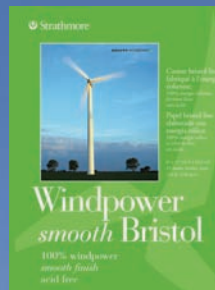
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## The Art and Science of Artist Paper

For many artists the creative process begins when they select their materials. Whether they work with wet or dry media, however, paper is the foundation on which many artists construct their visions.

We suggest experimenting to find what works best for you. But a better grasp of how paper is made may help the enjoyment and success of your work, whether it is experimental or not. Over the next twelve months, this space will describe select Strathmore grades and how their composition and design interact with specific media and techniques. For now, however, we provide a short primer on the basics of paper and its manufacture.

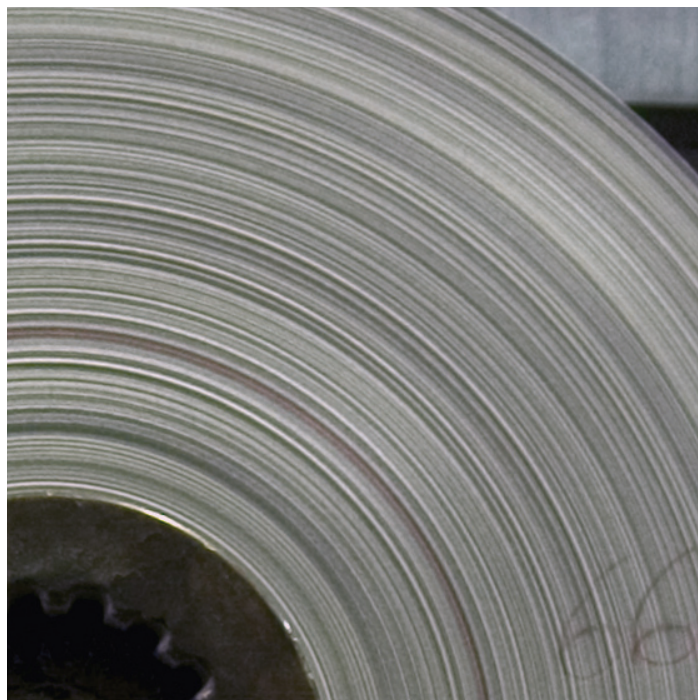
### The Fiber

Put simply, a sheet of paper is a thin mat of cellulose fibers. These fibers can derive from many sources, including hemp, flax, sisal, and other natural materials. Most paper – particularly artist paper – derives from either wood pulp or cotton fiber.

Cotton contains more cellulose and fewer impurities than other fibers, which translates into a stronger, more easily processed sheet. Traditionally, cotton pulp came from beating cotton and linen rags. Today, many “rag” papers are actually made up of cotton linters – fibers left over from the ginning process. Strathmore’s 500 Series of Drawing and Bristol paper are made up with a combination of actual rag fiber and linters, making them one of the few true rag sheets on the market.

Since wood pulp is more abundant, it finds application in everything from newspaper to cardboard, where heat and bleaching processes remove enough of wood’s lignins and other impurities to make a serviceable sheet. Such “groundwood” paper, however, still contains acids that eventually break down the cellulose, causing yesterday’s newspaper to yellow and fade.

With extensive processing and alkaline paper chemistry, wood pulp can create highly pure paper called “alpha cellulose.” Although, by itself, wood pulp generally cannot deliver the same surface strength as cotton, alpha cellulose



contains little or no acid and can last as long as cotton sheets. Sheets in Strathmore’s 400 Series are considered high “alpha cellulose.”

### Sizing and weight

Sizing defines the working properties of a sheet. It is incorporated internally during the mixing process, and often applied externally to the finished sheet like a coating. Without it, you get blotter paper. Sizing also helps improve a sheet’s drawing, painting or printing properties. It is especially important in watercolor papers where it helps control absorbency. External sizing may also influence a sheet’s erasability and texture.

Paper is often categorized by its basis weight, which is closely linked to its basis size. Basis size represents dimensions based on traditional standards for a specific paper grade. The basis size for watercolor paper, for example, is 22 x 30 inches. Other popular basis sizes are 25 x 38 inches for sketch paper, and 24 x 36 inches for drawing paper.

Basis weight is determined by measuring the weight in pounds of 500 sheets, or one ream, in a given basis size. That means a 140-pound watercolor paper is one in which a ream of 22 x 30-inch sheets weighs 140 pounds, while a 100-pound drawing paper is based upon a ream of 24 x 36-inch sheets that weigh a total of 100 pounds.

This system makes it difficult to compare weights due to the different basis sizes. The best way to compare weights of different types of paper is to use grams per square meter (g/m<sup>2</sup>). For example, a 140-pound watercolor paper is equivalent to 300 g/m<sup>2</sup>. A 100-pound drawing paper, meanwhile, is equivalent to 163 g/m<sup>2</sup>. Comparing the two shows that the drawing paper is a little more than half the weight of the watercolor paper. Many suppliers, including Strathmore, include this information on the product package.

## Papermaking tools

Many working properties are determined by how pulp is processed into a sheet. First, the fiber is beaten to break it down. Longer beating creates pulp with more microscopic fibrils, providing greater strength to the finished paper. It may also contribute to a more translucent sheet, or a sheet with lower formation, which is the cloud-like pattern that appears when paper is held up to a light.

Traditionally, paper was handmade, wherein beaten pulp was dispersed into a vat of water. It was then scooped out with a large wire screen called a mould that, when shaken, spread the fibers evenly over the screen as the water drained. Pressing and drying the resulting mat of wet fibers created a sheet of paper that was turned over onto a felt pad. Hence, the terms “felt side” and “wire side.”

Modern papermaking methods date back to the Nineteenth Century with the invention of the Fourdrinier press. These machines pour the pulp onto a moving belt-screen that passes in a single, continuous web through all the subsequent steps. The Fourdrinier process creates a more economical, uniform paper, although it can also introduce a grain direction as fibers align in the direction of the moving belt.

Another type of papermaking equipment is the cylinder mould machine, which uses a cylinder mould with half its diameter immersed in a vat of pulp. As the cylinder rotates, pulp clings to a screen affixed to it and is lifted, drained and transferred onto a felt web where it passes through a

series of rollers. Cylinder machines make it easier to produce thicker paper because the machine operates slowly and reduces grain direction. Cylinder mould machines are primarily found in Europe.

At the end of the Fourdrinier papermaking process, paper passes through a stack of steel rollers in a process called “calendering.” In addition to giving the paper a uniform thickness, calendering determines smoothness.

For example, applying moderate pressure from the calendar roll to a watercolor paper surface produces “cold-press” paper, which has a moderately textured surface. “Hot press” paper takes this a step further using more pressure to create a surface with less tooth or texture.

Plate- or high-surface paper is made by interleaving sheets with highly polished metal plates into a “book.” Repeatedly pressing the book between steel rolls under great pressure imparts the smoothness of the metal plates to the paper’s surface. Plate surface paper is ideal for pen and ink, airbrush and mechanical layouts. This contrasts with a Vellum or Kid surface, which describes paper with a minimal or moderate tooth.

Yet another processing tool, called a Dandy roll, creates the laid finish or watermark common to calligraphy paper.

## The paper for you

Artistic expression takes many forms. Dry media alone include pencils, pastels and charcoal, and the list of wet media is even longer, encompassing a variety of ink, watercolors, oil and acrylic paints. Add in the multitude of tools available for applying a selected medium, and these choices multiply even further.

Fortunately, Strathmore’s selection of artist papers offers hundreds of options for beginner and advanced artists alike. Our manufacturing philosophy falls somewhere between an art and a science. Like art, it requires active attention, craft and discipline; but, like science, it demands consistent, repeatable results.

When you select a Strathmore product, you can be confident it is manufactured from formulations that haven’t fundamentally changed in over 100 years. The result is consistent high quality that shines through the art you create. 