

## Chasing the Light

Los Angeles to Singapore (with a quick swipe at Hong Kong)

October 13, 2019



We caught the break of day in Hong Kong. The sun rose and the world turned green. Lush green mountains draped in blue mist shearing straight into the sea. This is a landscape painter's paradise, the mecca, the dream. Soft edges of rich color running together along the seams, all absolutely begging to be painted. Sadly, I was trapped behind the little oval window next to seat 21A without a single bloody hope of breaking free with my old canvas satchel of paints and brushes. Next time; plan a few days for a Hong Kong stop over and head north along the coastline.

Singapore has no trash, at least none that remains on the streets long enough to be observed. And upon arrival, you are presented with a small square card which informs that the penalty of trafficking, using or being in possession of drugs is death, the word death set in oversized red block letters to emphasize that this is no empty threat. My hotel was in a tidy shady part of town, so once checked in, I set off in search of some chaotic messy reality. I found it in China Town. I also found some fantastic shrimp dumplings, but this isn't about food, it's about how to experience a city as an artist. In China Town the buildings seem skewed, the streets are narrow and run off at odd angles, street peddlers jamb every spare inch of curb space selling plastic shoes, parasols, ancient medicinal herbs, tea, spices and boo boo kitty back packs. There are colored lanterns strung back and forth across the streets, roast ducks hanging in restaurant windows, and people walking around in those pointy conical hats, which I had believed to only exist in 1950's movies. It's possible that there is no better place on earth to sit down at an outside table with a sketch book and sharpen your gesture drawing skills.

There is a technique that I have used and maybe even developed a bit for this sort of drawing. I call it scribble-ironing. It is a way to capture the essence and impression of an entire scene very quickly, and also record some of the colors and light play. It starts with a blank sketch book page and a fine point black pen. Begin with a focal point, it might be a particular person or a building or a bicycle leaning against a wall, draw it loosely, don't fuss too much over the minute details, and don't fret about creating perfect neat tidy lines. If you draw a line or a curve and decide that it's not quite right, loop back with your pen and draw it in a different place, then continue on. It's important that you use a pen for this as it eliminates the temptation (and option) of erasing and redoing the line. Keep your pen moving, I recommend not even lifting it from the paper, but simply moving on to the next item you see, maybe a dog sniffing the bike tire, the edge of the curb, the trunk of a tree. Sketch it in, nice and loose using many lines to define each edge, each contour. Draw everything that can proportionately fit onto the page. At the end, you will have quite an eyeful, it may seem inaccurate and messy, but I promise that it will have captured the energy of the scene.

Next, get out your colored pencils, and for God's sake use good ones, not those nasty weak colored things that we send our children off to school with. Invest in very good colored pencils. Sharpen them until they are acutely pointed and then looking at your live street scape determine where the light is. Find some of the small shapes created by the looping and re-tracing of your pen lines and color them in. Choose colors of light like yellow, orange, or cream where you find the light, be as representational with your color choices as you can. Use your cool darks like forest green, indigo, or umbers for the shadows. Color each shape a different tone, but don't color all of the shapes, just enough to insinuate the colors. Limiting the number of colored shapes keeps the lines fresh and it retains the movement and energy of the moment.

The product of this exercise may never end up on the walls of the MOMA, but it will inform you of the idea and colors of the scene when you return to your

studio. At the end of any trip or adventure, it's the sketchbooks filled with drawings that are the most valuable item you can bring home.

*Judy Blundell*