

## WATERCOLOR AT TWENTY-EIGHT THOUSAND FEET



**Rob Burkhard 2005**

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some of my most sophisticated pieces.

The first step was figuring out how to simplify my complicated and messy studio setup into something I could realistically (and legally) get through airport security, and set up in the very limited space of the coach cabin seat of an aircraft. Not disturbing adjacent passengers is of utmost concern to me and I have experimented with several painting palettes in an attempt to keep the paint and water solely in my area.

My first palette idea came to me from a child's watercolor set I found at a local art and craft store. The watercolor set consisted of four twist together stacking trays with 7 wells in each and a clear plastic top for mixing. Removing the child quality watercolor and filling the wells with artist quality pigment from tubes was not without challenges, but in the end produced a functional and highly compact palette. I can separate the colors into four



Mykonos Harbor

April 9-11, 2007

United 301 IAD to DEN and

United 964 DEN to BOS

two very different things. I tried several different times to make the field box usable, but it was cumbersome, and in the end I kept going back to the stacking palette set up. Nowadays I only use the field box for what it is designed for: field use.

Most people dread long cross-country airplane rides. I am no exception. In today's highly accessible air travel environment, flights are jam-packed full with frequent business travelers and vacationing families. It is easy to be overcome by stress and boredom while traveling.

When I started traveling with my job again in 2006, I devised a plan to overcome the status quo of modern airplane travel. Already an active studio watercolor and oil painter, I decided to see how far I could push the limit of what could be painted on a 4-5 hour cross country plane trip. The results have been nothing short of spectacular and have produced



Natalie and Anthony

November 15-17 2006

United 923 IAD to DEN and

United 902 DEN to IAD



Bull Run Reflections

January 30 2006

United 915 IAD to LAX



Five Bored Fish

March 13 2007

United 379

IAD to DEN



Bouys

March 7 2006

United 229 IAD to SAN



Woodpeckers Yard

July 28 2006

United 236 IAD to SAN

The stacking palette set up remained my airplane workhorse through the fall of 2006, but I decided I wanted to press the envelope further and started working on a system which would allow me to use liquid watercolors, without having to carry the tubes onboard. With the new regulations about liquid and gel carry-on items, it was becoming more risky to have a TSA security agent confiscate hundreds of dollars in. I finally found a solution in a pharmacy while getting a prescription filled, and when I saw it, it was obviously perfect. It consists of a pocket sized, individually compartmented, and watertight pillbox. After some experimenting, I discovered that I could keep small amounts of liquid watercolor in it at tube consistency for days. Today I take both the stacking palette and pillbox system onboard and use both simultaneously, and quite successfully.



Stacking palette setup



Pillbox setup

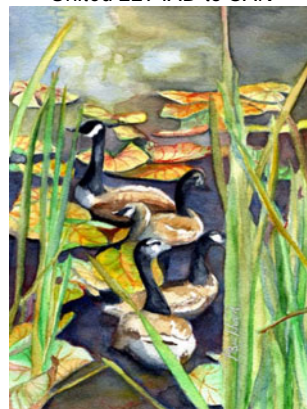
In April 2007 I completed my 50<sup>th</sup> flight and 20<sup>th</sup> airplane painting after 14 months of travel. Not all the flights have been suitable for painting. Commuter flights, for example, are usually much too bumpy and short to accomplish anything other than a poor sketch. I have taken several “red-eyes” from California to Washington DC and understandably preferred sleep over painting. I have also started feeling like a recognized figure. Recently a flight attendant complimented my work, noting that she also like what I did on a flight she had seen me on several months earlier.

Passengers adjacent to me have been very understanding and complimentary. Most seem appreciative of my attempts to keep from disturbing them and even go out of their way to help be accommodating to me. Surprisingly, I find the easiest place to work is in the coach cabin. Business and first class cabins might be less cramped, but they are a challenge because the seats are not designed for sitting straight up. Another problem is the constant distraction of the meal and beverage service throughout the cabin. The best, and rarest scenario is an empty 3-seat row in coach. In such a situation I can easily work wet-in-wet with paper sizes as ridiculously large as 15 x 22 inches instead of 9 x 12 inches when I am in a full row and packed into the middle “sardine” seat.

So, the next time you fly, why not try something new and pack some brushes, paper and paint. You might be surprised at how well you can do when faced with limited workspace, erratic turbulence and cramped conditions.



Cazuela 2  
January 29 2007  
United 229 IAD to SAN



On Walney Pond  
July 13 2006  
United 920 DEN to IAD



Wrecked on a River  
October 4 2006  
United 701/1218 COS to DEN  
to IAD



Venice  
September 19 2006  
United 7394 IAD to BOS