

Sail Away With Your Brush: Painting Aboard Sky Pond

by Roxy Podlogar
(4-part series : for part one, see Spring Hotpress 2024)

Part 2, Bula from Fiji - Exploration and Adaptation



In December 2023, the start of the southern hemisphere's cyclone season, we decommissioned our boat, Sky Pond, and securely strapped her to the ground at Fiji's Vuda Point Marina. In May 2024, we returned to Fiji to set sail. Navigating to our favorite anchorage, I looked forward to new painting challenges.



Finding art supplies is a challenge. Due to South Pacific island economies, purchasing supplies locally is impossible. Shipping to the islands is costly, unreliable, and logistically complex. I can only restock during our annual trips to the United States. This year, I included pigments to mix more neutral greens, such as cobalt turquoise and yellow ochre.

Painting is only possible in anchorages with flat seas and no wind. Mornings tend to be calmer, with wind, fetch, and swell gradually increasing over the day, rocking our boat and making drawing a simple line impossible. To escape the motion, I load up my backpack and paddle to a nearby beach (here, the Tuamotus atolls.)



The South Pacific is humid, and paper will not dry without direct sunlight. During seasonal rains, it can take days for it to dry. Avoiding elaborate subjects, I paint simple atmospheric scenes with large brushstrokes.

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Studio space and materials are limited: my works are small. Using a viewfinder measuring 2x2.5 inches, I scale my subject to a 8x10" block of Arches paper.

Isolating a subject in dense, tropical surroundings can be difficult. I aspire, as Monet philosophized, to "capture the air surrounding it," not to simply paint an object.

I look for:

1. Illuminating light and shadows
2. A dominant feature (water, sky, or land)
3. Connected shapes, values, and linear perspectives for depth and interest
4. Interesting positive and negative space



After a value study to simplify the scene and define the focal point, I establish my pallet, consider light and atmospheric conditions, and refer to it throughout the painting process. While it's tempting to overwork the piece, I strive to use less detail, allowing more viewer participation.



The unique landscapes and plant life we encounter challenge me to adapt my skills and pallet. On any given week, we dive in stunning waters, trek through jungles, and call on villages like this plantation on Vanua Balavu, Fiji. During our stay, the villagers warmly welcomed us and allowed many photos, which I later used as reference.



Our lifestyle has taught me the importance of planning, finding favorable painting conditions, and conserving resources. My situation is not a hindrance, but an opportunity to concentrate on my practice and express my experiences through art. As Charlie Parker says, "If you don't live it, it won't come out of the horn."

Sota Tale! Until next time!