**“Revelations” by Elodie Blain**

**Tara Sweeney/United States**

I paint to find the boundary between control and chaos. I paint to express something more than a mere likeness or a particular place. I paint to answer questions. What holds my attention? Where am I? Who is here with me? Why does any of it matter? This way of working is as much about relationships as it is about skill or choice of subject matter.

In “Draw With Me” I wanted to express the force of my two-year-old grand daughter’s personality and also something about our relationship. Maria spends Fridays with me. Drawing together is one of her favorite activities. She initiates by making marks on the paper first, and then hands over the pencil with the directive, “Draw with me.” I needed observational and conceptual elements to create the painting. I considered overlaying one of our existing drawings to suggest the theme and develop a pattern in the background. But in a bold moment, I invited her to “draw with me” and collaborate directly on the watercolor paper instead. She did not hesitate. I confess I held my breath at first. From earlier explorations in mixing water media I knew that the combination of poured pigments, watercolor pencils, and traditional brushwork would allow all the marks to be visible in the final painting. For the first layers I masked her silhouette and poured the background and darks in the hair. The aqueous blend of transparent color created a crisp leading left edge and a diffuse receding right edge around the face and shoulders. When the poured layers were completely dry, I gave my grand daughter a quartet of primary-hued watercolor pencils (warm red, cool red, cool yellow, cool blue) and invited her to draw. Her original watercolor pencil marks appear undisturbed in the background. The more distinctive strokes she made on the hair and features softened, but did not disappear, as I worked subsequent transparent layers with a brush to complete the painting.

Whether I am collaborating with the medium itself, with a new technique, or directly with my subject matter, I relish the control and the abandon that watercolor allows me. In 35 years I have not grown complacent or bored with it because to paint I must be singularly present to painting alone, and nothing else. The inherent release of this focused call and response, as well as the discoveries encountered along the way, are as satisfying to me as the painting that results.

**CONTACT:** <http://tarasweeneyart.com>

**KEY DATES:**

**1955** Born in Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA

**1978** Plein air watercolor course, West Surrey College of Art and Design, Guildford, UK

**1978** Undergraduate diploma: textile design; studio art, University of Wisconsin, USA

**1997** Master of Fine Arts diploma: visual studies, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, USA

**1979-1991** Designed and illustrated books and publications

**1991-present** Teaches drawing and painting, Augsburg College, USA

**1999-present** Teaches plein air sketching in Italy and France

**1998-2013** Ten invited solo exhibitions

**2006-2013** Eight awards and thirty-six juried and invited group exhibitions, including National Watercolor Society, Red River Watercolor Society, Watercolor West International, and “Waterborne” at Frederick Weisman Art Museum

**2006-2013** Twelveinvited workshops and presentations

**2008** Signature status, Minnesota Watercolor Society

**2009** Artist Initiative Grant, Minnesota State Arts Board

**2012** Grangaard Grant: created daily plein air sketches walking 300 km., Lucca to Rome, on historic Via Francigena pilgrimage trail, Italy

**2013** Solo exhibition: sabbatical series, “Close to Home: A Visual Journal,” Phipps Center for the Arts, USA

**CAPTIONS:**

*Image 1: Draw With Me,* 38 x 56 cm.

*Image 2: Standing Together,* 33 x 23 cm.

*Image 3: Formula For a Dance,* 38 x 56 cm.

*Image 4: Angel Voices,* 56 x 38 cm.

*Image 5: Chapel of the Umbrellas,* 38 x 56 cm.