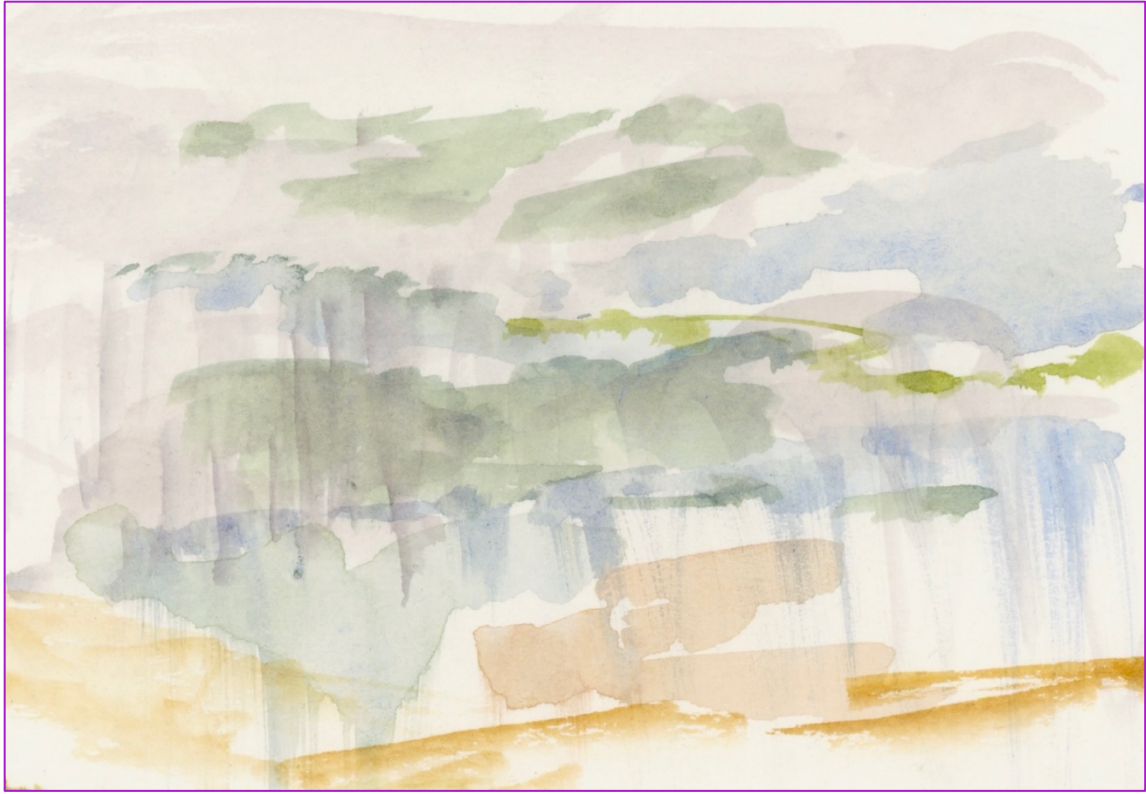




Cloudscape, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina on Cold Press Paper

Unmasked: Imprints and Impressions of a Calendar Year

Dolores Rivas Bahti



Winter Rain, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina on Cold Press Paper

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DEDICATION

Sixty-Fifth and Sixty-Seventh U.S. Colored Troops Infantry Regiment recruits represent most of more than 180,000 African American Civil War soldiers who died of epidemic disease.¹ USCT soldiers who fell ill at Benton Barracks, Missouri died primarily before they mustered in; others as they took the field. Soldiers with smallpox died for lack of medicine and lower resistance, a legacy of poverty and captivity. Measles outbreaks intensified risk of exposure to viral pneumonia. For my father, I dedicate “*Unmasked...*” to the memory of young †George Biggs and †Beauchamp Biggs, who in spring 1864 died of viral pneumonia at Benton Barracks. Today is Memorial Day, 2021. In their names, I honor valiant men at midpoint of our family’s recorded history whose service led us to live and love in Arizona/Sonora, in the American Southwest. Gracias, Grandfathers.

¹ Sarah Anderson “*Quite Unhealthy:*” *Deadly Diseases Among Albemarle-born Black Soldiers.*” April 18, 2017 (Updated April 2020). William Kurtz, Project Director UVA John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History naucenter.as.virginia.edu. Access date: 9/15/20

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INTRODUCTION

This geo-emotive array contains poems and watercolors made from the start of national orders to shelter in place in March 2020 to March 2021, one year later. It chronicles life events in memory and in time during days and months of COVID-19 in southern Arizona. Protection in spring joined shelter, food and water as a basic daily need. Life then moved yet more slowly in desert time. Heat in pandemic time amplified the hypnotic power of memory and imagination.

Waves of emotion as life unfolded anticipated and accompanied death. Not everyone I love survived. The heartbeat of my eternal flame in May stopped its search for love in art. My grandniece, a young mother, in July died of an opioid overdose during the summer surge. Our old soldier in September died in care without his family beside him. In October, my dear friend feared exposure to the virus and so delayed diagnosis and treatment for a fatal illness. Spectra of sudden death, mental illness, elder loss, and prolonged suffering reverberated in narratives of police brutality, calls for social justice, and pervasive malady. Mandates to reconsider or forgo mourning converted poetry to secular liturgy and painting to solo performance.

Blinding out-of-body sensation in record drought ignited my search for words in the spirit of Joy Harjo, whose book *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* (2015) cleared a path for meditations in retrospect. Emotion in rhythmic language summoned my Arizona/Sonora homeland and recalled my African American fathers, Mexican mothers and ritual kin at Hopi. I contemplated mundane and sublime life in amorphous time, in poetry, in filtered morning light, in manuscript and on the screen. In fall and early winter, I climbed spiral stairs to paint rooftop views of sunrise, sunset and starlight. Solitude synchronized and syncopated with stillness in a waning year slowly awakening to the promise of healing. *Mvto*/thank you, Joy.

Watercolor led outward toward direct observation of the sun moving through winter clouds guided by imagery in *The 'Skies' Sketchbook* (2016), an exhibition catalog of watercolors and drawings by J.M.W. Turner that softened the blow of summer travel bans. The exhibition's sole foreign venue was in Mystic, Connecticut, an hour from the estuary where for three decades I painted light on water moving from the Narrow River across Narragansett Bay into the Atlantic Ocean. Turner's art arose from the April 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora, in the volcanic ring of Indonesia. Three dark years followed. This most devastating volcanic event released acid, ash and gas that polluted the earth's atmosphere and obscured our sun and moon. 1816 became 'a year without a summer.' Crops failed, cholera and typhus plagued the globe; veterans and lost souls roamed city streets; insurrection reigned amid millennial readings of science and apocalyptic visions of humanity. Catastrophe halted travel. Turner in England turned skyward to render experience, memory and imagination in art. After a six-months summer, midwinter in the vein of Turner for me became prismatic desert light.. Thank you, Sara.

Burnished words rooted in memory and spontaneous painting embodied sensation in the shadow of COVID-19. Emotive language recollected a year early on marked with trials by fire and dark nights of the soul. Then, southerly clouds from the Sea of Cortez draped Santa Cruz County and our Valley of the Sun with nourishing rain and snow. Refracted light in a transformative journey into perception at new year mapped the cave of my heart, where intervals of loss and love came to rest. These vignettes in memory honor my bond to more than a century of ancestral Arizona land and in the present lay bare the fragile intensity of life inside, in this landed sliver of eternity, in this prism of time. Gracias, Santiago.

Spring into Summer. I thought to survive exile by calibrating pandemic time; by finding abstract beauty in universal chaos. Inner ramparts as I stayed put broke apart and emotion became word music. A global crisis in the desert Southwest acclimated to improvised state mandates and institutional protocols. Masking, closings and regulations politicized medical and psycho-social effects of widespread infection with no known cure. I lived the first six weeks of record heat counting days, frozen in time, riding out arbitrary shutdowns and surging disease. I began to write in May shortly before the night sky tracked a lightning-sparked blaze in the Santa Catalina Mountains. Wind moved smoke eastward. The Bighorn Fire advanced toward and consumed 120,000 acres from full moon on June 5 to just past new moon on July 20. Fire within days converted our northern mountain quadrant to a charred landscape in gradient amber.



Sunset 10.5 x 14.8 cm Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina on Cold Press Paper

Agape

†Louis Jessup Delsarte

Still now I wonder how
You lost your race with time
At last fearless at the brink of death
Master of light and dark, man of furrowed brow

Memory serenade, two hearts unite
Across a lengthy span
Mountain canyons echo tales of
Pensive woman, kinetic man.

Heartline weaves through you to me
Like layered spirits you once drew
Your prayer for peace forever new
Flew quickly toward eternity

Ink trails draw a breaking heart.
No delaying abrupt fate
Smoke clouds build in desert sky
You paint light at heaven's gate.

Generous spirit, seeking mind
This legacy in art you leave behind

Pandemonium

Pink moonrise at dawn of spring

Turning points in distant stars

Spinning, yield to life's mystery

Sink, pause, rise and breathe

Precipice, calamity, catastrophe

Burden and blessing, archive of life

Convert unbridled fire to creativity

Learn again, resolve to heal

Water spirits just now skimming southern sky

Carmine clouds in indigo

Below, brown trails and yellow hills spring green

Above, red-tailed hawk and white-winged dove

Pray to Mother Mary and the Sacred Heart

To sun and moon; to plants in bloom and gone to seed

To marble jaguar and agate hare

To serpentine eagle; to spirit bundle on turquoise bear

Unsettled

Memory of sudden intimacy

Love is dissonant time is

Limited movement, structured lines

All transformative

All ephemeral

Unexpected and disordered spark

Love is primal unsung song

Faint images etched on lonely hearts.

Planet isolates in place,

People six feet under and apart.

Red flags dot the unknown path,

Eye of needle rules take hold.

Cloud shadows, late spring light.

Wise and learned hearts,

Skip a beat. Return to solid ground.

Sublime

Poems assemble

Sensation in translation

Record cold reason, blind emotion

Balance vertigo of ecstasy and despair.

Art revives

Ancestral words in language for today

Replaces known signs in images for

Ideas word sounds cannot convey.

Visions heal

Recurring wounds and abject loss

Fulcra in chaotic whirling plague

Ravage time and harbor death.

Far away, just within reach

To close for comfort, Sistine touch

Night fright, waking dreams

Hold me. Save me, Love.

Prism

The loving heart pulses.
Our empress commands we work
To speak and animate desire
To bring the inside out.

The aching heart leaps
From sleepless night
To write and read the words in time
That sing of mystery and the sublime.

The sacred heart has spirit guides
Seeks peace in quietude,
Wages war in solitude,
Sees light and shade in the divine.

Apocalypse Millennium
You grant no rest, and so
We move toward generous love
Embrace imperfection, live as one.

Disembodied

Digital waves vainly

Replicate sensation.

Remnant emotions

Reach their shores and dissipate.

No lingering mist at horizon line

No breathing swirling sand

No twittering of fledgling birds

No pristine saline air

Instead, heavy stillness craving rain

Early birds in gray-green trees

Gardens rest from winter work

Languid day, scarlet sky, endless night

Thrice ten years of sand and heat

Pearl-pink Atlantic dusk, mandarin Sonoran dawn

Reconfigure memory.

Reconsider. All remains that now feels gone.

Flora

Night bloomer scents night and early dawn

Snakes round creosote up to organ pipe.

Guadalupe heir of desert rain

White flower fleeting as a wedding day

Desert Goliath, great grandfather nopal

Aloe-like protector of bare adobe plane

Bird- and bug- pocked mid-green pad

Wet tissue layer erupting into yellow-red flame

Lizards absorb heat at foot of Sahuaro crown.

Yellow centers seen from heaven ringed with white

Purple Santa Rita, crimson Cholla, flickering Ocotillo spike

Renegade agaves migrate from dry to moistened ground.

Three walls block hot sun from fragile beds

Eden replicates on damp and scented earth

Shade shelters velvet frill, savory herb and moistened twig

Inside, mesquite protects young pomegranate, quince and fig

Magdalene

For you, I prayed to Crow Mother as dawn became day
As yellow pollen on red earth in winter foretold spring
Where elders recount life as downy mist that leaves our breath
Becomes white clouds and summer rain.

Transparent strokes for you became horizon lines
Carved into chalk-white Quetzalcoatl walls
Where orchid stems and metal dust
Drew pictographs on earthen shrines

Lenten passion culminates
Long weeks of solitary prayer
Talismans and amulets became
Three decades woven into current time

Allegories come alive
Turn dream to trauma and return as
Tentative fledgling calm
Determined to survive.

Moonlight wrapped in heat and haze
Magdalene held in unforeseen embrace.

Summer into Fall. Retrospect thus far committed my pandemic experience to memory woven into present time. Words played into fleeting pleasures. Companionship held foreboding at bay. Discriminate police violence on May 25 broadcast nine minutes and 29 seconds of truth. End of life for George Perry Floyd, Jr. went viral in digital time. My son joined voices of his generation in Los Angeles. I called upon our ancestors to write a tribute for my father, who in July entered care and for his protection lived out his days sequestered from his family. His long life slowly ebbed. His beautiful young descendant met with tragedy. My sister's children soon after braved state lines and quarantines in New Mexico to mourn her granddaughter. Spirits in dead of summer lived in blue-gray days. I breathed white-hot heat and withdrew into cobalt night. Life was jagged and vaguely mesmerizing as sorrow arrived unheeded and as expected. Even so, yellow light and a faint scent of water dawned day after exquisite day. Yes, exquisite.



Yellow Light 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper

Pulse

Word and deed trigger memory

Delicate systems of sympathy

Survive life's wounds,

Cultivate gifts of empathy

Troubled hearts turn blind and mute

Ensconced behind protective wall

Relentless inner fire pit

Opaque caverns, no space for light

Stillness born of innocence

Our babes bring to the world

Forgotten over time

Converts to impulse, restlessness

Touch my heart, ignite its chakra glow

Radiant vital field of green,

Counterpoint to melancholy,

Be hallucinogen, medicine, remedy

Fauna

Eagle rides thermal clouds

Climbs then dives to graze the earth

Hummingbird spans hemisphere

Heralds lightning, wind and rain

Bear retreats to keep the world at bay

His dark repose eclipses light

Crane flies toward north in spring and south in fall

Tracks sun in time from seed to crop

Doves awake with mourning song

Bathe in dust near green mesquite

Nest near blooming ironwood tree

Dance with wrens, seek cactus fruit.

Infrared jaguar with coyote wanders asphalt road.

Summer insects and seed pods dot dry hot ground.

Life spans etched in mountain, cave and spring

Molten *desértico* earthen *metálico* crystalline.

Heal

Childhood in transient world

Constant movement, vast unknown

Sudden death consigned to memory

Amid generations of survival and longevity

Migrate from homelands east to west

Where loved ones live and elders die

Repeated annual pilgrimage

Benevolence at water's edge

Contradiction invades constancy

Hearth and home, kith and kin

Ancestral place to land, to sleep, to dream

Peaceful, pleasant place to breathe

Seasonal unrest in arid clime,

Heal in place that harbors time.

Wall of words on backlit glass,

Leave timeworn imagery behind.

Resurgent

Spirit behind translucent veil

In imagination dreams life's mystery

In pensive realm built to survive

Abject loss, sheer pain, unrelenting cruelty

Hard scales on hearts

Track inward into known terrain

Sleep, retreat, and then return

Like snakes at slightest trace of monsoon rain

Generations lost to centuries of war

Brave foreign fields and city streets

Judgmental foe of spontaneity,

Cold reason outlives reverie

In this century, in this plague

Law and order again at war

Erupting, spewing death

We have all been here before

Turn inward for color, light and sound

Brave to save the tortured heart, liberate the captive mind.

Pivot

Emotion tied to inner worlds

Repeat patterns in our current age

Beauty at margins of mistakes

Averted gaze, ancient grief, self defense

Forgiveness, calm these storms

Safely guide our hearts to shore

Relegate memory to dreams

Restore evening psalms and morning prayer.

Patience, away with urgency

Claim space deep within this arc

Turn ideas in written words

From the academy toward poetry

Beauty, reveal yourself in sight and sound

In every gesture toward the heart

Transmit love in every touch,

Tender lip, and fingertip.

Rise mindfully with light of day.

Breathe. Choose life. Find a way.

Gravid

Clouds lift trance of daytime heat
Monsoon swirls in trees and chimes
Rain on tin and perfumed air
Conversation late into night

White light of summer sun
Filters through fledgling monsoon cloud
Yellow early morning haze
Softens memories and time.

Search blue sky for moistened day
Dream of corn fields wet with rain
Wake to songs of migrant birds
Sailing through a path of stars

Peregrine summer awaits return
Awaits desire conceived in spring
Moonlit source of painted light
Wind chimes evening into night.

Here rain's promise is everywhere alive
Here is where is home, is where we breathe.

At winter's end and dawn of spring
Two pipers came in virtual unison
High notes with low notes in between
Tiny duet for flute and violin

Little hands smoothed Nana's quilt
In summer, swam in desert sun
In winter, birdsong bundles in purple and pink
In girlhood, reading, writing and learning to dream

Our hummingbird in summer
So newly grown has flown
In half-light of first-quarter moon
Our flower came full circle in full bloom

Dearest, breathe in monsoon clouds
Live in light behind the misty night
Move softly from here to hereafter
In beauty, every passing day.

Cactus wren at morning greets the mourning dove
Family gardens fill with birdsong, fill with love.

Fall into Winter. My brother and I in mid-September awakened to our father's passing. His spirit flew in sunlit clouds and five generations prayed for him. My heart broke open. Comfort came in conversation under an old mesquite tree in late afternoon and at night as the first-quarter moon sailed the southern sky. The pandemic derailed custom. In a world stilled by death, my sun assured me that time to celebrate and remember one day would come. Still, we gathered at state tributes and attended his burial on my mother's early October birthday. Gracias, Ryan. My dear friend soon left the world and life in COVID's shadow felt like an existential marathon. Life in passing opened to newness. Remi McMaster arrived newly born to remind us life and death exist alongside each other. Unrelenting heat persisted into fall; record 100-degree days and extreme drought denied our land its winter rain. Still, national elections with medical science and holidays gifted longest night and the new year with glimmers of hope.



Rémance, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper

Fragile

Scan remnants of prior time

Map points of no return

Chart paths on unknown ground

Cultivate the gifts we've earned

Turn from counting days and months

Toward cherishing the march of time

Mix past and present memory

Blend nearness with the far away

Eternal fathers, heal our hidden fears

Return old stories to our dreams

Comfort all our weary hearts

Release us from past injury.

Holy mothers, lead tenderly toward love

Where we have learned our children grow

Where we revere those we esteem

Begin again, choose love, come here.

Engage this time inside and find

New pathways to our hearts and minds.

Patriarch

†George Washington Biggs

Breeze brings summer into fall
Halo of new crescent moon
Navigates toward an open window
As midnight moves toward daylight

Cool air currents in clement sky
From Santa Cruz horizon line
Pierce a silken cirrus veil
Elder spirit then takes flight

Sorrow rains down upon surface and core
Angeline morning, young birdsong at dawn
Brotherly love, Rose carmine radiance
Sandy winds on cerulean shore

Gather now in love and prayer
Beneath mesquite, on sacred ground
Family ritual at midweek Mass
Morning light on rainbow glass

Splendid human now divine, rest at our ancestral shrine
Exquisite father, forever mine.

Son of maiden and fish in midwinter light
Drove spirited rings 'round high desert roads
Avenue merchant knew outlaw bands
Young man in tune and at odds with time.

Lifelong harmony with recorded sound
High and low chronicle in poetry and song
Self-healing glaze of thin white smoke
Tarnished, then burnished heart of spun gold.

Uneven arcs toward century's end
Drew diminishing circle of family and friends
Lingering shade across pale blue eyes
Lasted twice ten years in passing time.

Solitary soul in ancestral home
Near westerly grove of once young mesquite
Felt full circle of love and friendship's embrace
In dream time and ultimate moments of grace.

Aquarian moon in a heaven of stars
Chimed precise time to go, his way, into the mystic.



Anochecer, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper

Winter into Spring. Words early on described the substantive power of nature and of ever-present solace in adversity. Comfort became joy near solstice and the Nativity, then Amanda Gorman sang us into the future. Painting became gestures toward bittersweet empathy for the past; with what now is here and has yet to come. My bereavement year in memory was as fleeting as it in life was eternal. Isolation as a form of captivity at a distance and in proximity dissolved. Time lapsed into billowing light on greening mountains. Clarity became strokes of insight on sheets that bathed the sky in pristine color. Red-orange cumulous in indigo sky. Blue fire mirror in refracted light. Luminous isle in cerulean sea. Quietude appeared as the sound of gentle rain and the scent of burning cedar. The miracle that signified a capacity to love and live beloved is everywhere present in this chronicle. In beauty, poetry embodied feeling. Blue with red became magenta. Gracias, de verdad.



Amanecer, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper

Polaris

Electric

Energetic field

Clear as day, dark as night

Inhabits wide concentric arcs

Organic

By nature and necessity

Thinking, seeing, feeling

Invites you, come inside

Crossroads of sensation

Love of beauty, sound and touch

River weds to borderland

Trace wet lines on arid earth

Light the cave within the heart

Move from return to what once was

Live presently in future time, where

Imperfection becomes proof of life.



Snow Line, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper



Snow Cloud 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press

Triad

Green fig leaf flames at dawn of spring
Appears at very top of every limb
Like open palms above a dove gray trunk
Absorbing growing spans of winter light

Pomegranate haze on speckled wood
Appears first at amber intervals, then
Newborn buds emerge from carmine mother leaves
Sheltered by dark mesquite tree bark

Infant rosebud form on maiden quince
Appears unfurling on a moss brown frame
Late to the dance, slows garden pace
Keeps and repeats time with bulbs and seeds

Three sister trees arrived in fall before the plague
Survived dead heat and winter drought
Dense beds strewn with Penstemon
Revive within these courtyard walls

Plague-ridden year has come and gone
Spring greens life and limb. Love song.



Green Light, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper

Cloudscape

Yellow Sonoran light from the Sea of Cortez

Enters at morning from Santa Cruz toward San Xavier

Billowing clouds on blacktop pools break through

Southerly roads that lead from there to here

Mammoth forms in mottled sky

Black snail shadow on valley floor

Carried by Pacific rain and torrential wind

Imposing, dark as clouds by day can be in spring

White clouds at noon lift above new snow

Quench scorched earth since summer raw and dry

Santa Catalina peaks touch cerulean sky

Cast brilliant light across the north

Receding storm due east veils Santa Rita fields

Gray clouds, red hills, blue mountain line

Spirit medicine, planetary play, air and light breathe out and in

Healing winter sky greets resurgent growing season.

Compass of four directions, prism of valley light

Complete land circle in this web of sacred time.



Santa Cruz, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper

Emergence

From Pima valley floor at twenty-eight hundred feet
Follow riverbed southward on well-worn trail
Toward Santa Cruz cottonwoods near five thousand mark
Where March winds at dusk and dawn lift moisture veil.

Wait, whisper violets in red brick precincts
Where perennials wear new and remnant leaves.
Where Iris spikes and winter shade shelter
New life by day submerged in cold to clement soil.

Presently green wands spring from mother trunks and
Ironwork arabesques
Reveal atmospheric shifts and
Polychrome multiflora arias

Lady hedge proscenium
Entwined round ancient limbs
Slender canes shoot skyward
Cabaret prelude to scented petal pomander

Now, avow jonquils and myrtle on an altar of dreams
Daffodils in glass just now float above sacred ground where my people sleep.



Rain Line, 2021 10.5 x 14.8 cm. Winsor & Newton on Fabriano Gran Fina Cold Press Paper