

# Traveling with Art

Taking your art on the road? Read on for a bit of practical advice.

STORY BY *Maria Cecilia Freeman*

**THIS IS NOT ONE OF THE TECHNIQUES ARTICLES** I love so much in this space, but rather a story about travel from which you may draw your own conclusions.

Last fall I was invited to bring an exhibition of my "Rose Studies" to Spello, in Umbria, central Italy, in connection with an annual event dedicated to roses: *I Giorni delle Rose* at Villa Fidelia in May 2015. Sponsored by the united Garden Clubs of Perugia and Terni and the provincial government of Perugia, this celebration of roses has become hugely popular. Over 20,000 people attended, to hear talks, browse artisanal crafts, buy roses and view the annual botanical art exhibition—this year, my watercolors and drawings of heritage roses. I was delighted and disquieted by the invitation.

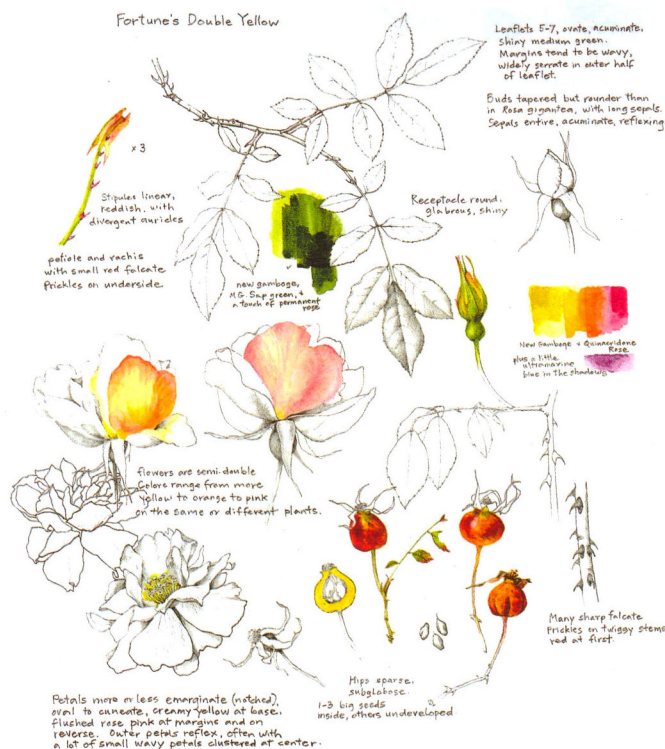
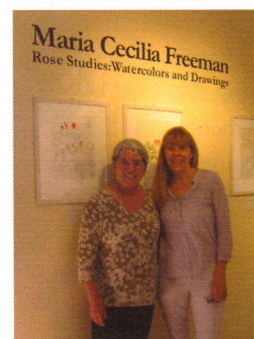
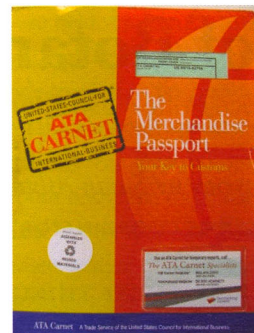


The organization in Italy was up front with me: they had never invited an artist from outside the European Union, and I would have to figure out the customs issues. Thus I embarked on months of research, countless conversations, frustrations and horror stories, and final success — so this article, I hope, might save others some time when it comes to carrying artwork in and out of another country from the U.S.

First I ruled out shipping my 18 paintings. Re-framing in Italy was far less expensive than shipping framed work. Also, the international shippers deliver artwork to Customs in the other country, and you can only hope that your documents are sufficient to get your shipment

passed through to the destination. Here came the horror stories: artwork held up in customs for nearly a year, artwork that arrived only after a show had ended. I decided to carry it myself. I found an inexpensive lightweight portfolio exactly the dimensions of carry-on baggage, to hold my paintings in individual sleeves.

Several experienced friends said, just carry it without declaring it—no one would notice. It's your personal property. Say it's work in progress. But then came more horror stories of chance inspection, confiscation and fines. I admit, I'm an uneasy traveler. One or two pieces OK, but I wasn't going to risk carrying a full portfolio of finished artwork without declaring it. Artwork is subject to





VAT (value-added tax) when entering EU countries, because it has value, and it *could* be for sale. You need a carnet, I was told.

An ATA Carnet is a legal document, a "Merchandise Passport" that lets you carry items into and out of 85 countries, by international agreement, without paying duties or import taxes — in particular, goods for temporary exhibition such as artwork. Fees for a carnet generally range from \$200 to \$400, which is a whole lot less than the VAT. It's basically a promise to take out what you bring in. (If there were sales in the other country, they would have to be concluded upon return to the U.S.) In the U.S., you order a carnet online from one of the providers authorized by the Council for International Business; information is at [www.uscib.org](http://www.uscib.org).

In the end, it worked without a hitch. And in Italy I discovered that there is a vibrant community of wonderful botanical artists, but that's another story too.

Ironic conclusion: After all my anxious care to number, list and

document my paintings, no one ever inspected and counted them. The Italian *dogana* agent gallantly declined: "I take you at your word," as he stamped my carnet. The only agent who even looked at them was the one who stamped me back into the U.S., and only because he was curious— "Hey, these are beautiful! Wow, you must have a lot of patience!" 📖



**Maria Cecilia Freeman** lives in Santa Cruz, California. Her work includes scientific illustration and botanically accurate fine art, often combining the two. She takes a special interest in portraying native plant species with a view to their preservation, and she particularly loves drawing and painting species and heritage roses. Email her at [mcf-art.com](mailto:mcf-art.com) with any questions!

## You, Your Art, and an Overseas Trip: A Checklist

### When you know you're going:

- Find out what kind of help is available at the other end. If you're on your own, proceed:

### As soon as possible in advance (because everything will take longer than you expect):

- Try to consult the embassy of the destination country for Customs regulations.
- For insurance and Customs, get an independent evaluation of your artwork's market value, e.g., a letter from a local gallery owner.
- Ask around—friends, fellow ASBA members—for other artists' experience traveling to/from the country where you're going.
- If you want to ship, check out the options: DHL, UPS, FedEx, USPS. Ask their International Specialists about insurance, timing, duties and VAT, and forms required to clear Customs. Allow plenty of time to figure out the paperwork.
- If you plan to carry your artwork: Compare costs of shipping frames vs. framing at the destination. Consider packing pre-cut mats in checked luggage. Get an appropriate carry-on portfolio.

### When you know what pieces you're taking:

- Order your carnet. The list of artwork on your application can't be changed after it's issued, so be sure of what you're going to carry.

### Before you book your flights:

- Check the hours and location of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices. Make sure you depart and re-enter the U.S. at airports with their offices, and book flights that leave and come back during their hours.

Get the phone numbers for CPB (outbound and inbound) at your airport, including their urgent after-hours number.

- At the airports: Allow a couple of hours extra for carnet processing—finding the agent who can stamp your documents, traveling between terminals, etc.

### Within a year afterwards:

- Copy and return your carnet to the issuing agency. Reminisce and plan your next trip!



**OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM.** 'Fortune's Double Yellow' Rose, watercolor and study ©Maria Cecilia Freeman, 2014. **RIGHT, TOP.** The Carnet. **RIGHT, BOTTOM.** Maria Cecilia Freeman (L) with the curator (R), botanical artist Rosemary Lucca. **THIS PAGE, ABOVE.** Detail, *Rosa californica*, California Wild Rose, watercolor on paper, ©Maria Cecilia Freeman.