

# Foster Art & Wilderness

FOUNDATION

## JOURNEY DETAILS

### **Travels without a Donkey in the Cévennes**

In 1982, Tony Foster made his first foray into the explorer-artist lifestyle. With his friend, photographer James Ravilious, the young artist hiked through the Cévennes region of France, painting the picturesque landscapes and villages. The journey was inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson's 1879 book *Travels With a Donkey in the Cévennes*, in which the author recounts a twelve-day trek through the region accompanied solely by a stubborn donkey named Modestine. The resulting exhibition combined the work of both artists. Foster's paintings produced in this journey feature up-close studies of small objects encountered during the adventure, as well as the larger depictions of the surrounding landscapes. These paired elements, micro and macrocosm, become foundational components of Foster's style in future works.

### **Thoreau's Country: Walks and Canoe Journeys in New England**

After transitioning out of his pop art phase and toying with the idea of a career in painting wilderness landscapes, Tony Foster decided to follow in the footsteps of his most revered role models. Henry David Thoreau's (1817-1862) appreciation of nature, along with his conservation mentality and environmental ethic are closely aligned with Foster's own life philosophy. In 1984, Foster traveled throughout Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire painting the iconic woods, meadows, lakes, and rivers of New England—a perfect complement to his hero's writings. *Thoreau's Country* was exhibited at the Yale Center for British Art, in New Haven, Connecticut and was his first solo show in the United States.

### **John Muir's High Sierra**

Continuing his work in America, Tony Foster followed in the footsteps of nineteenth-century naturalist and conservationist John Muir. For his journey *John Muir's High Sierra*, Foster hiked the Sierra Nevada throughout the Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks. Moved by the region's natural beauty, Muir realized that without intervention such wilderness would be lost. Foster's journey pays homage to Muir's legacy and to the US National Park Service, whose creation owes much to the naturalist. Foster's paintings brilliantly capture the granite boulders, giant evergreens, and placid lakes of this unique environment. In addition, *John Muir's High Sierra* helped reignite interest in Muir in Scotland, his place of origin, tying both continents together through the man's legacy.

### **Exploring the Grand Canyon**

Tony Foster was initially hesitant to paint such an iconic and well-known landmark as the Grand Canyon, but was ultimately convinced by his good friend, geologist Bill Brace. The challenge, and the reason for his apprehension, lay in capturing the Canyon in a manner different than the myriad artists and photographers that had been there before. Foster quickly fell in love with the majestic landscape and ultimately succeeded in portraying the region from a new perspective. He painted both from the canyon edge and down along the Colorado River, through which he traveled. The Grand Canyon has since remained one of his favorite landmarks.

### **The Whole Salmon**

Tony Foster created *The Whole Salmon* as part of a larger group exhibition at the Sun Valley Center for the Arts in Idaho. For this journey, Foster produced a chronological series of paintings that depicted his experience traveling down the Salmon River. During the month-long rafting trip—one of his first river journeys—Foster encountered a surprising variety of landscape features including steep canyons, vast flatlands, and green meadows. Each landscape painting pays homage to the Salmon River in some form. The souvenirs that accompany each watercolor reflect on the history of the river, from prehistoric times to present day. The pieces from this journey were exhibited alongside the work of three other artists—a writer, a photographer, and a composer—whose pieces reflected on the river and the people who live along it.

### **Arid Lands: Watercolour Diaries of Journeys Across Deserts**

*Arid Lands* marked a change for Tony Foster as he moved from region-specific themes to broader wilderness themes that spanned the globe. Whereas Foster's previous journeys took inspiration from the lives of environmental role models and locations, *Arid Lands* looked at an entire type of ecosystem as its common thread. Foster chose to explore the neglected landscapes of deserts partly because many of these regions have remained untouched due to their harsh conditions. His work concentrated on portraying the intense beauty of deserts, presenting a differing perspective to counter conventional labels. Foster painted in the American Southwest and Mexico, trekking through a diversity of landscapes including torrid canyons, cactus-littered flatlands, and elevated mountain passes. His distinct watercolor style, along with the micro-to-macrocosm layout of his pieces, exposes landscapes rich in life and worthy of admiration.

### **Rainforest Diaries: Watercolours from Costa Rica**

As a leader in conservation efforts, Costa Rica was the ideal country for Tony Foster to explore and paint. The neotropics, however, presented a completely new set of challenges for the artist. Creating large-format watercolor paintings in one of the most humid, rainy environments on the planet meant Foster needed to work quickly and find ways to keep his pieces dry. In addition, the oppressive heat, mud, biting insects, and dangerous snakes also tried his patience, and the complexity of dense rainforest understory was unlike any open landscape he had previously painted. The resultant works from this journey are richly colored and dominated by lush green hues. Foster captures both the intricacy of the rainforest as well as its vastness. He spent time becoming acquainted with some of the local fauna along the way, choosing to paint insects, frogs, birds, reptiles, and mammals as watercolor studies. As a way of honoring the ecosystem, he also decided to donate a percentage of sales from these paintings to purchase rainforest acreage for conservation purposes.

### **Wilderness Journeys: Watercolour Diaries of the Idaho Rockies**

At first, Tony Foster was hesitant about creating a journey based in Idaho. Ultimately, he was convinced by the dramatic landscapes he encountered there. The paintings in this journey include renderings of vast, open valleys, dynamic skies, and colorful vegetation indicative of changing seasons. Although it is one of Foster's smaller journeys, *The Idaho Rockies* does not fail to impress.

### **WaterMarks: Watercolour Diaries from Swamps to Icebergs**

Water, whether in solid, liquid, or gaseous form, prodigious or ephemeral, is a necessary element for life and quintessential in transforming landscapes over eons. It is also the

foundation for Tony Foster's largest journey series: *WaterMarks*. Foster explored the frozen Arctic, the neotropical rainforests of Honduras, and the colorful, underwater coral reefs of the Indian Ocean to produce eighty-one paintings of icebergs, geysers, swamps, waterfalls, and oceans in tremendous variety. Because of the journey's magnitude, this series was amassed over six years of work and travel.

### **Ice and Fire: Watercolour Diaries of Volcano Journeys**

*Ice and Fire* is an exploration of opposites coexisting at some of the most inhospitable and venerated places on Earth: volcanoes. Enduring both frigid and scalding temperatures, Tony Foster traveled to the tectonically-active North-Pacific United States, to the South American Altiplano, and to igneous oceanic archipelagos to depict stark landscapes and towering, snow-covered volcanic peaks. His renderings of viscous lava flows in Hawai'i masterfully capture the incandescence of radiating heat and are one of the journey's highlights. Thematically, *Ice and Fire* serves as a reminder of our planet's dynamism, deserving of both awe and respect.

### **Searching for a Bigger Subject: Watercolour Diaries from Everest and the Grand Canyon**

Thought to be one of his greatest achievements, Tony Foster juxtaposes the world's vastest canyon against the world's tallest mountain. *Searching for a Bigger Subject* is a literal examination of the greatest of all wild landscapes—the Grand Canyon (USA) and Mount Everest (Nepal/China). Given the subject matter, many of this journey's paintings necessitated a large format and are incredibly dramatic, spectacular works. Foster managed to capture the immensity of these landmarks while retaining their integral details. The paintings are not only hauntingly beautiful, but they also provide an accurate sensation of the inhospitable nature of these regions. Foster endured bitterly harsh conditions while traveling for these paintings; on one occasion, he nearly lost his life. In some ways, the stories behind the paintings in this series are almost as powerful as the work itself.

### **After Lewis and Clark**

*Lewis and Clark* emerged after Tony Foster traveled along the Missouri River in the United States, reading excerpts from the journals of famed explorers Meriwether Lewis (1774-1809) and William Clark (1770-1838). In 1804, the intrepid duo had been selected by the government to carry out a survey expedition of the (then unknown) western reaches of the US. Their adventure provided the impetus for a watercolor journey depicting what wild landscapes remained along the same route, two hundred years later. Foster managed to capture the mystique of what was once the American frontier even though much of the land is now developed. He spent three months in 1999, both in Montana and Idaho, following in Lewis's and Clark's footsteps. Foster's paintings became part of an exhibition along with other artists who had explored the same theme of discovering the American West throughout time.

### **Rocky Days**

*Rocky Days* involved another trip to the Rocky Mountains of Idaho. Accompanied by his friends and supporters, Tony Foster ventured out to document the ever-changing landscape of the wilderness there, depicting broad views of rolling hills, towering mountains, and looming thunderclouds.

### **Secret Sites**

For *Secret Sites*, Tony Foster asked several influential people in his life to nominate their favorite locations based on their knowledge of the wilderness in Idaho. Making sure to keep the identity of these sites secret, he ventured out to paint them from an angle that captured their

beauty, and in doing so paying homage to his friends. The watercolor paintings are paired with typical trip souvenirs as well as folded brown paper notes sealed with red wax containing each site's location information.

### **Sacred Places: Watercolour Diaries from the American Southwest**

Between 2010 and 2012, Tony Foster traveled throughout the Four Corners region of the American Southwest, documenting its venerated landmarks. He selected this part of the world because of its cultural and spiritual significance among its many native peoples. Foster lived and worked on location, engaging with indigenous communities to understand their perspectives on the landscape. His paintings attempt to honor these sacred places and are paired with local, symbolic souvenirs to emphasize the human element in this series. The resultant pieces are dramatic portraits of a diverse landscape, prominently featuring the rusty red color of the region's earth and stone against blue skies.

### **Exploring Beauty: Watercolour Diaries from the Wild**

From 2007 to 2015, Tony Foster traveled to the world's most beautiful natural places as nominated by leading scientists, explorers, writers, environmentalists, artists, and mountaineers. The resulting paintings document his experiences working on site around the globe—from the remote jungles of Borneo and desert sands of Chile, to the frosty altitudes of Everest and Machapuchre and the far-away icebergs of Greenland. Each luminary provided a statement on why the location speaks to him/her. Their words, coupled with Foster's art, provide a powerful argument for the preservation of wilderness.