

Minnesota Watercolor Society BRUSHSTROKES Newsletter **“Plein Air Sketching in the Heart of the City”**

by Virginia Dudley

Perfect spring weather arrived just in time for 17 participants to spend a weekend plein air sketching in watercolor and ink with Tara Sweeney for a two-day MN Watercolor Society workshop May 17-18. Our materials didn't look like a typical travel set: Tombow watercolor markers, paper palettes, and Niji water brushes were new territory for most of us but we liked the portability. The first day began with sensory delights of the Mill City Farmer's Market as inspiration for blind contour and observational sketches. Many of us were uncomfortable about working with people around. Tara noted, "There is safety in numbers. With all these artists to admire, no one is going to bug you for long." She was right: the general public was curious but respectful. After lunch, windows from the Guthrie's upper floors provided panoramic vistas for sketching the mighty Mississippi before we headed out across the Stone Arch Bridge. It's a delight to discover the variety of subject matter visible from this historic bridge: mills ruins coexist with a striking downtown skyline; diners, strollers, dog walkers, newlyweds, bicyclists and tourists on *Segways* share the pedestrian-only span across St. Anthony Falls. Our second day began on the other side of the river, inside at the Aster Café jazz brunch, where we dined and sketched dancers and musicians. (A few of us even danced.) Then we headed back outside for an afternoon of sketching St. Anthony Main's architecture and the café culture which blossoms there with warm weather. Each day included on-site demonstrations, plenty of sketching time with individualized feedback and tips from Tara. She shared favorite prompts for visual journaling, including a homework assignment: "Write a postcard to your inner critic. Let him/her know when you want advice." The wrap up with sketchbook exchange was a favorite part of the workshop for many. "Seeing all the different approaches to the same subject matter is informative and fun." Saturday morning we arrived with curiosity, portable gear, comfortable shoes, and a sense of humor. Sunday evening we returned home with some surprising and delightful sketches, new friends, and plans to come back soon.