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Painting in Watercolor

La Salle University Art Museum

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Painting in Watercolor:
Selections from the Permanent Collection

La Salle College Art Museum
November 5, 1983 - February 1, 1984
History of Watercolor

A thought conceiv'd in the first warmth, an effect with which we are struck at the first view, is never so well express'd as by the strokes that are drawn at that instant.

Johann Gessner (1764-1826), Swiss watercolor painter

Until the 18th century, watercolors, with rare exceptions such as those by Albrecht Dürer, were considered a minor by product of a major production. Related to watercolors were those Old Master drawings which were partially executed with a brush, using flat tints of sepia, bistre and/or various color washes to effect light and shade or provide highlights (see no. 6). However, from the 15th through the 17th centuries watercolors and wash drawings were usually executed as preliminary studies or as instructional guides for works to be produced later in another color medium such as oil painting, tapestry, or costume.

It was not until the 1750's that the British brought 'pure' watercolor into frequent use, producing works intended as finished works of art, and thereby raising its status to an independent medium, valued for its own sake rather than as a means to an end.

The prolific development of watercolor landscape in the British Isles was indirectly encouraged by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars which inhibited travel to the continent until 1816. When European travel was again made possible, the 'tourism' to the continent resumed and watercolors, and their reproductions in print became highly regarded as picturesque momentoes of visited sites.
Artists, both amateur and professional ventured to the Middle East and the farthest reaches of the British Empire and their drawings and water-colors were later reproduced as aquatints, mezzotints, or lithographs, often in large folio publications, providing 'arm-chair' travel for their less adventurous patrons.

The prolific output, the apparent ease and impromptu manner of water-colors are misleading factors which have all contributed to their comparably inferior status. This exhibition will hopefully foster an appreciation for a medium which undeservedly still dwells in the shadows of the more obvious and prestigious color medium, that of oil painting.

Caroline Wistar
Curator
Watercolor Technique

To gain an understanding of the expressive powers germane to a watercolor, an explanation of the medium is essential. Briefly, the technique involves painting with pigment ground up with a water-soluble gum, usually gum arabic, which acts as a binding material and is referred to as a colloid. Without this colloid the pigment would not adhere to the paper. Using a very soft brush which has been previously dipped in water, the pigment is applied to absorbent paper in a varied manner: flecks, dashes, stipple, or as a wash in one continuous stroke. The water is an essential ingredient and the only vehicle for the pigment rather than oil. The more water used the paler and more transparent the colors.

The substance used as a colloid in the pigment determines the type of water-soluble, color painting of which watercolor is one variety. If the colloid is the white and/or yolk of egg, the process is called 'tempera', (see painting by Della Corna in the 16th century gallery). If gelatinous or glutinous material from animals is used, the process is called 'distemper' painting (see Vuillard in the 20th century gallery). It is very difficult to differentiate between these processes and when in doubt the medium is cautiously described as 'opaque water-soluble color painting'. Each of these processes employ color washes which are opaque, whereas in watercolor the washes are transparent.

Because watercolor is transparent or semi-transparent, the white or tinted surface of the paper is never entirely covered. This permits light which is reflected from the paper surface to shine through the thin washes of color, producing the effects peculiar to the medium: fresh luminous colors, elimination of outlines, and brilliant, vaporous or subtle gradations.
of tone so effective in rendering nuances of atmosphere.

The trial and error approach or re-working of the composition, permissible in an oil painting, is not appropriate to watercolor where best results are obtained by anticipating the color effect before it is applied to the paper. Efforts to darken, lighten or mix colors after they have been applied often lead to dull and muddy tones. Of course, colors may be superimposed without loss of light penetration, but each color layer decreases the luminosity. The greater the thickness of the watercolor pigment, the less light is reflected through it. To make a dark color lighter, it must be washed down to allow the paper to reflect more light.

To decrease the transparency of a color wash or to achieve contrast or highlight certain areas, the artist may thicken the pigment with a Chinese white material called 'gouache' or 'body color.' If no opaque washes are used, the work is usually referred to as 'pure' watercolor where light reflected from the paper surface through the transparent color washes provides the sole illumination.

In most cases the outlines of a watercolor composition are executed in pencil, chalk, or ink before the color is applied. But in most instances these outlines become barely discernible, and the finished work takes on a painterly rather than linear quality. Thus, form is more apt to be defined through color and tone in a watercolor rather than line.

Sometimes the artist will sketch the composition in pencil in 'situ' and later apply the watercolor back in the studio. The more customary procedure, however, keeping in mind the portability of the painting equipment, is to execute and complete the watercolor on the spot. Such a direct observation, along with a swift and necessarily spontaneous execution, imparts a sense of immediacy and accurate rendition of local color.
Selected Bibliography

Hardie, Martin, *Water-Colour in Britain*, 3 volumes, 1966-1968


CHECK LIST

1. Edward Dayes (1763-1804), English
   Norwich Cathedral
   Watercolor
   (Sight) 5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2} \text{ ins.}    76-D-95

2. Samuel Prout (1783-1852), English
   Rouen Cathedral
   Watercolor, pen and brown ink with touches of body color (gouache).
   (Sight) 13 5/8 \times 9 \text{ ins.}    78-D-123

3. Auguste Delacroix (1809-1868), French
   Seated Monk
   Watercolor
   22 \times 16 \frac{3}{16} \text{ ins.}    78-D-140

4. William Payne (c. 1760-after 1830), English
   Waterfall at Tivoli, 1819
   Watercolor
   10\frac{1}{2} \times 15 \frac{3}{8} \text{ ins.}    76-D-92

5. John 'Warwick' Smith (1749-1831), English
   Approach to Point Aber Glaslyn From Tan y Bwlch,
   Caernarvonshire, Wales. July 16, 1792
   Watercolor
   5\frac{1}{2} \times 8 \frac{5}{8} \text{ ins.}    77-D-104
6. William Cosens Way (Late 19th Century), English

*Egleston Abbey, England*

Pen, ink and wash

9 x 6 3/4 ins. 83-D-297

7. Hippolyte Petitjean (1854-1929), French

*Woman Seated on Grass*

Watercolor

6 1/2 x 9 1/2 ins. 79-D-145

8. William Wood Deane (1825-1873), English

*A View of St. Paul's Cathedral From Across the Thames*

Watercolor with touches of bodycolor (gouache).

22 1/2 x 18 1/16 ins. 76-D-93

9. Carl Friederich H. Werner (1808—1894), German

*Gypsies Among The Ruins of Diocletian's Palace, Salona, Dalmatia 1854*

Watercolor

25 7/8 x 20 ins. 83-D-293

Purchased with funds donated by The Friends of The La Salle College Art Museum, 'The Art Angels.'

10. François-Marius Granet (1775-1859), French

*Entrance To The Capuchin Cloister, Rome*

Sepia wash and watercolor

5 1/2 x 3 7/8 ins. 76-D-75
11. Victor Pierre Huguet (1835-1902), French
   Landscape With Covered Wagon 1887
   Watercolor
   8 x 12 ins. 78-D-137

12. James Hanes (1924- ), American
   Early Spring
   Watercolor
   7 x 4 3/4 ins. 77-D-105

13. Ebenezer Wake Cook (1843- ), English
   St. Clement's Chapel, St. Marks, Venice
   Watercolor
   10 x 6½ ins. 76-D-77

14. S.R. Badmin (Contemporary), English
   Hunt Going Home, Egdean
   Watercolor
   5 1/16 x 8 3/8 ins. 76-D-99

15. Unknown
   Sleeping Girl
   Watercolor
   20 x 14½ ins.
   Given by Benjamin D. Bernstein 80-D-160
16. Alex Gritchenko (1883-1977) Ukrainian/French

*Palais Du Minos,* 1923

Pencil and Watercolor

11 x 15 ins. 73-D-48

17. Guillaume-Sulpice Chevallier, Called Gavarni (1804-1866), French

*Le Cambrioleur* (The Burglar), 1841

Pencil and watercolor with touches of gouache.

8 1/2 x 6 3/8 ins. 72-D-24

18. Marguerite Zorach (1888-1968), American

*Figures and Autumn Trees, New Hampshire,* 1915

Watercolor

(Sight) 13 1/4 x 9 3/4 ins. 73-D-44

19. Edmund Darch Lewis (1835-1910), American

*The Race, Packeucha [

Watercolor highlighted with gouache

9 3/4 x 20 3/4 ins. 79-D-144

20. Luigi Loir (1845-1916), French

*A South Italian Town*

Watercolor and gouache

6 7/8 x 5 ins. 76-D-78
21. Wilfred Fairclough (Contemporary), English

**Volterra-Porta Pocciola, Italy**

Watercolor

(Sight) 8 x 10 5/8 ins.  76-D-98

22. Charlotte M. Halliday (Contemporary), English

**The Knights of St. John, 1976**

Watercolor and gouache

(Sight) 16 1/8 x 11 ins.  76-D-97

23. Hobson Pittman (1900-1972), American

**Wild Roses, 1967**

Watercolor

9 x 11½  79-D-151

Given by Edward Bernstein

24. Thomas Hovenden (1840-1895), Irish

**A Farm in Country Cork, Ireland**

Watercolor

20 x 25 ins.  76-D-101

25. Richard Seddon (Contemporary), English

**Merligen on the Thunversee from Spiez, Switzerland**

Pen and ink and watercolor, highlighted with gouache.

(Sight) 21 x 25 ins.  76-D-91
26. Seymour Remenick (Contemporary), American

Still Life
Watercolor
(Sight) 8 x 10 ins. 73-D-50
Given by Benjamin D. Bernstein

27. Edith Emerson (1888-1982), American

The Bridge, Rhona, Spain 1923
Gouache
14 5/8 x 10 1/2 ins. 79-D-141

28. Bruce Samuelson (1946- ), American

Nude Woman with Red Heels, 1974
Watercolor
(Sight) 16 x 13 1/2 ins. 81-D-187
Given by Benjamin D. Bernstein
PAPER CONSERVATION MUST FOR PRINTS, DRAWINGS, AND WATERCOLORS

1. Framing:
ALWAYS use 100% rag board—this is available at art supply stores and reputable framers upon request in white, off-white, and cream. If 100% rag board is not used, the object will become discolored, and deteriorate from contact with the acid in the mat board, which is composed of woodpulp. The colored mat boards available in art supply stores are all extremely acidic, and should not be used unless some 100% rag board is used as a "buffer."

2. When attaching the work of art to a mat board, Use Japanese tissue (available at art supply stores)—as a hinge. Do not use stamp hinges or other gummed tapes.

3. NEVER use any kind of pressure-sensitive tape (Scotch, masking, mystic, etc.). They will permanently stain the paper. Use library paste, wheat-flour paste, wallpaper paste, or cornstarch paste. (See recipe below). Never use rubber cement, Elmer's, or any other glue that is not water-soluble.

4. Do not frame work of art in a way that will put the paper in direct contact with glass. Use a window mat or a spacer (a thin strip of 100% rag board) to keep the glass off the surface of the object.

5. Never hang a print or watercolor in direct sunlight, which will fade the color and yellow the paper. Avoid hanging prints on the wall of a frequently-used fireplace. If a frame is to be hung on a damp wall, allow for air to circulate freely around the frame.

6. If framing a work of art yourself, do completely seal the back with rag board paper; the high pollution content of city air is as damaging to paper as it is to humans.

7. Do not attempt to paint or cover over stains yourself; leave them alone, or take the object to a qualified conservator recommended by the Curator.

Recipe for Cornstarch Paste: Put 2-3 tablespoons of cornstarch in an enamel container. Add enough cold water to dissolve while stirring. Add boiling water to thicken. Pour cold water on mixture to keep from forming skin. Cool. Keep in refrigerator or freezer.