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FORMERLY ART & MAN.



WINSLOW HOMER

painting from nature

 SCHOLASTIC

Winslow Homer, 1880.
Photo, Bowdoin College
Museum of Art, ME.



ARTIST of the OUTDOORS

SCHOLASTIC

ART

Maurice R. Robinson, founder
of Scholastic, Inc., 1895-1982

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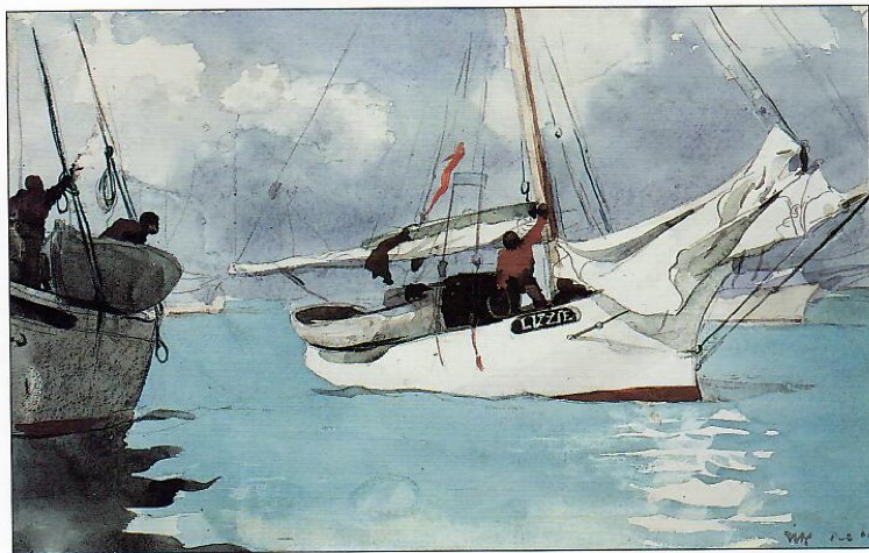
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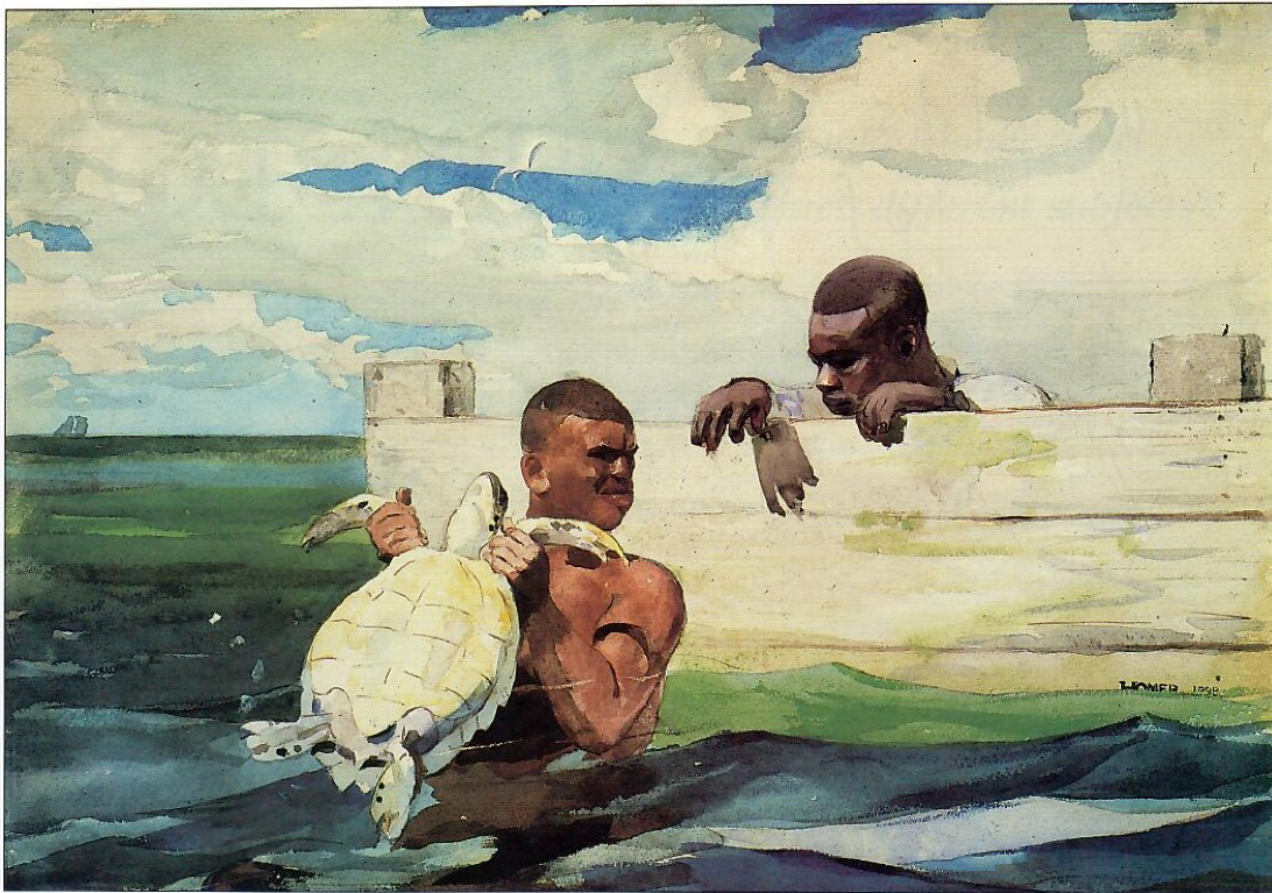
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Winslow Homer loved water. He lived on the coast for most of his life and it was the subject of many of his paintings such as the two shown on these pages. The artist even used water as a medium to create some of his most striking images. Most 19th-century American painters used watercolor only to sketch out ideas for large oil paintings. Winslow Homer worked directly in watercolor and he was the first American artist to make watercolor an important art form.

COVER: Winslow Homer
(1836-1910). *Fishing
Boats, Key West, 1903.*
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, NY, NY.





Homer was born in 1836 in Boston. His father had a hardware business and his mother was a watercolor painter who taught her young son to draw and paint. When Winslow was 6, the family moved out of Boston and Homer was able to spend his summers in the countryside, exploring the meadows, woods, and streams around his home. Later, this love of the outdoors would be reflected in his art.

After he graduated from high school at 18, Homer worked in a printing shop. Every day from 8 until 6 he copied drawings so they could be printed. It was his first and last office job. After two years, the artist became a freelance illustrator and began selling his work to many publications including *Harper's Weekly*, a highly regarded periodical of the time.

In 1859, Homer moved to a studio in New York City. Mainly self-taught, he attended some drawing classes and took a few formal painting lessons. Several years later, as an artist-correspondent for *Harper's*, he began making trips to Virginia to the front lines of the Civil War. Soon *Harper's* offered him a high-paying job as a staff artist. But he didn't take it. As the artist later put it, "The slavery of my first job was too fresh in my memory ... from the minute I left that place I have had

no master; and never will again."

By 1875 Homer had done his last illustration for *Harper's* and began concentrating on painting. Eight years later he left the city for good. He built a studio in Maine on a rocky cliff overlooking the ocean. He lived there alone, for the most part, and painted for the rest of his life. He traveled frequently—north to the Adirondack mountains and Canada and south to Nassau, the Bahamas, and Florida. He carried his watercolors with him and used them to capture the brilliant and intense colors he found in the tropics.

But whether he was painting the calm blue waters of the Caribbean or the fury of waves breaking on the Maine coastline, Winslow Homer loved the drama of the sea. And he found that watercolor, which allowed him to paint quickly and spontaneously, was the perfect medium for capturing his favorite subject.

Homer found watercolor ideal for capturing the kind of bright, reflected light he saw in tropical scenes like these.

The Turtle Pound, 1898. The Brooklyn Museum.

"To paint nature, you must wait patiently for the wonderful effect. Then, you must be able to recognize it!" —WINSLOW HOMER

the two worlds of WINSLOW

Compare the two paintings on these pages. Both show people in natural settings, but are the images at all similar? What are the differences you notice immediately?

In the 1870s, when Homer was relatively young, he depicted peaceful, sunlit scenes like the one below, left. He painted children picking berries, women in white dresses on sunny beaches, people sailing, or playing games on carefully cut lawns. He painted nature,



People were the subjects of Homer's first watercolors.

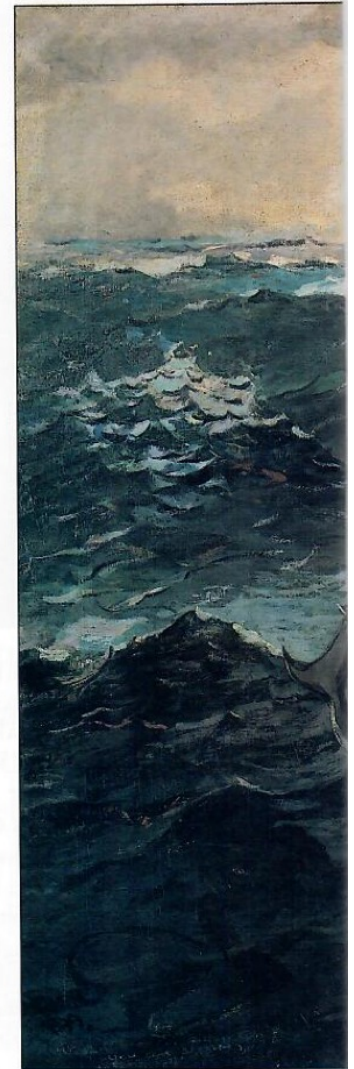
Fresh Air, 1878. The Brooklyn Museum.

but it was tame and parklike and his subjects were usually fashionable people who lived in rural settings.

In 1881, Homer went to Europe and settled in a small fishing village on the coast of England. He spent a year working mainly in watercolor, painting North Sea fishermen and their families as they struggled to make a living from the sea. After that experience, when Homer returned to this country he was no longer interested in painting parks and suburbs. His new subjects were tough, hardy sea people and dramatic shipwrecks and rescues.

During the summer of 1883, Homer moved to Prout's Neck, on the coast of Maine. His parents had a house there, and Homer turned a neighboring stable that overlooked the ocean into a studio. While sitting on his studio's covered porch, he was able to paint the sea breaking on the rocky cliffs below. Living alone in this setting allowed Homer to experience and to paint the enormous power of the sea. In his new paintings nature—violent and forceful—took over and people, although sometimes included, became less important. He painted the sea in all its moods, at different times of day, and in all kinds of weather. And it was in this setting that he created one of his best-known oil paintings of the sea called *The Gulf Stream* (above, right).

While in the tropics, Homer had sketched fishing boats and the men who sailed in them. He had also made a number of drawings of sharks. He worked from these tropical sketches and from the waves breaking directly below him in Maine to compose *The Gulf Stream*.



Later in his career, Homer focused more on nature and its overwhelming power.

The Gulf Stream, 1899. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY.

HOMER

*How could Homer paint
two such different subjects?*



When you look at the painting above, where does your eye go first? Do you see the waterspout in the upper right or the sharks swimming below? Or do you look at the **focal point**, the figure on the boat trapped between two dark waves? The **opposing diagonals** of the boat and waves set up the painting's **visual tension**. The work is made up of **angles** and **wedge-shapes**—the **wedge-shape** of the boat is **echoed** in the sharks' heads and is **repeated** in the waves. The red stripe or **color accent** on the boat is picked up by the red strokes in the water (What do these reds make you think of when you see the jaws of the sharks below?).

Of course, when you first look at *The Gulf Stream* you don't think about lines, shapes, and colors. But it is Homer's arrangement of these formal elements that creates the work's immediate emotional impact—terror at the situation; relief at not being there; and sympathy for the man in the boat. He appears powerless and overwhelmed by the natural forces surrounding him. This painting shocked and upset so many people that Homer finally wrote, "The man was not eaten by sharks; he did not starve to death; he was not hit by the waterspout. He was rescued by a passing ship, returned home, and lived happily ever after."

**MASTERPIECE
OF THE MONTH**

Preview

**Winslow Homer predicted,
"In the future, I will live by
my watercolors."**

*Palm Tree, Nassau, 1898. The
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY.*



the drama of NATURE

Winslow Homer's first trip to the tropics was in the winter of 1884-85. He was immediately struck by the intense, almost blinding quality of the *light* there and realized he needed to find a medium and style that would capture his impressions of this new world.

When Homer painted in oils, he worked from *dark to light*, covering the surface of the canvas with layers of paint and adding white last. He wanted to paint the translucent brilliance of the tropical sunlight and he couldn't do that with oils. He had been working with watercolors for a number of years; he usually brought them on his trips because they were so much easier to carry and use than oils. Since watercolors are *transparent*—you can see through them—any white in a watercolor painting is the white of the paper showing through the paint. Watercolor allowed Homer to work from *light to dark* making images appear much brighter. Compare the boat and water in the oil painting *Gulf Stream* on pages 4-5 with the same images in the watercolor on the cover. The thick, heavy, built-up strokes of oil paint convey the strength, power, and danger of the stormy waves in *Gulf Stream*, but only watercolor could capture the sparkling reflections of "Lizzie's" white hull in the clear, deep-blue tropical waters.

Homer made many oil paintings after his first trip south, but from that time on he worked more and more in watercolor. The two paintings here and the one on pages 8-9 (done while the artist was in Canada) show Homer's increasing interest in painting nature. If he included people at all, they were small in scale and dominated by the natural setting. In *A Good Pool* on 8-9, who is catching whom? Homer has **compressed** the space so we see the scene from the fish's **point of view**. Its huge form dominates the picture and the tiny figures in the background struggle to catch it.

All three of these compositions are **asymmetrical** (the elements on both sides are not identical but appear visually equal). Nothing is centered; the **positive shapes** at the bottom; top; or to one side (palm trees, rock cliff, fish) are **visually equal** to and **balance** the **negative spaces** (sea, sky, river, and rapids). **Red color accents** become **focal points** in all three paintings (a flag, a figure, fishing flies).



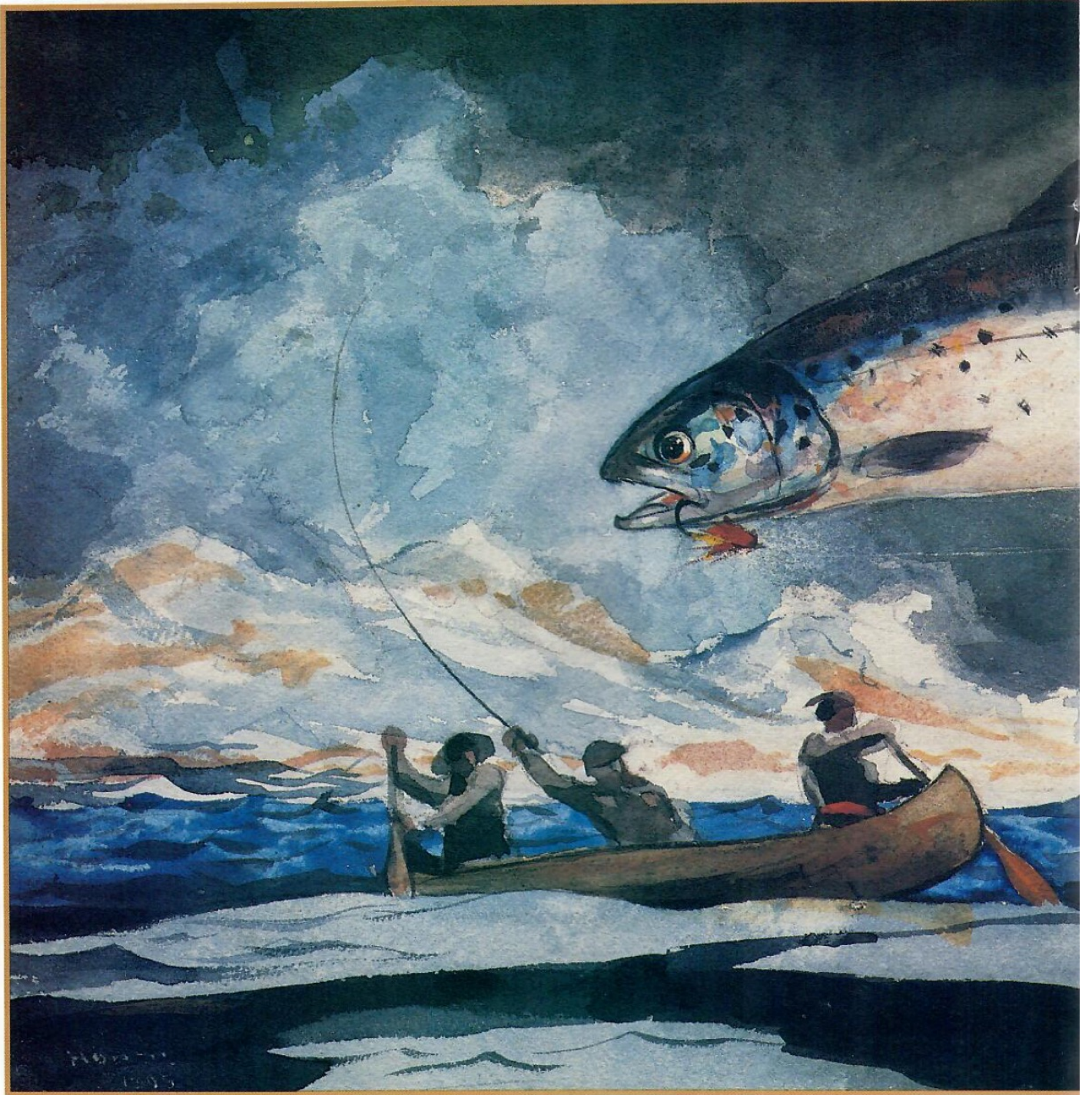
The secret behind Homer's watercolors is their simplicity; he included a limited number of brushstrokes and little detail. Once he had worked out his idea with a few pencil lines, he put down a light wash (blue sea, gray sky), then quickly brushed on darker details (palm trees, red accents). Some of the most important elements in his paintings were the ones he *didn't* paint. The waves, the lighthouse, the cliffs, the large fish are merely white shapes and a line or two. These stand out from the rest of the elements in each composition and become the **focal point** of the picture.

Winslow Homer did what many artists dream of doing—built a studio in a natural setting where he could concentrate completely on his painting. His career started just before the Civil War in 1861 and ended with his death in 1910, four years before the beginning of the First World War. During the 19th century, most American artists were still influenced by European art. Winslow Homer chose the subject he wanted to paint—nature—found the medium he wanted to use—watercolor—then used it in a new way to paint exactly what he saw. He worked directly from physical, observable fact in a style that was completely his own and uniquely American.

How important is the figure shown in the painting above?

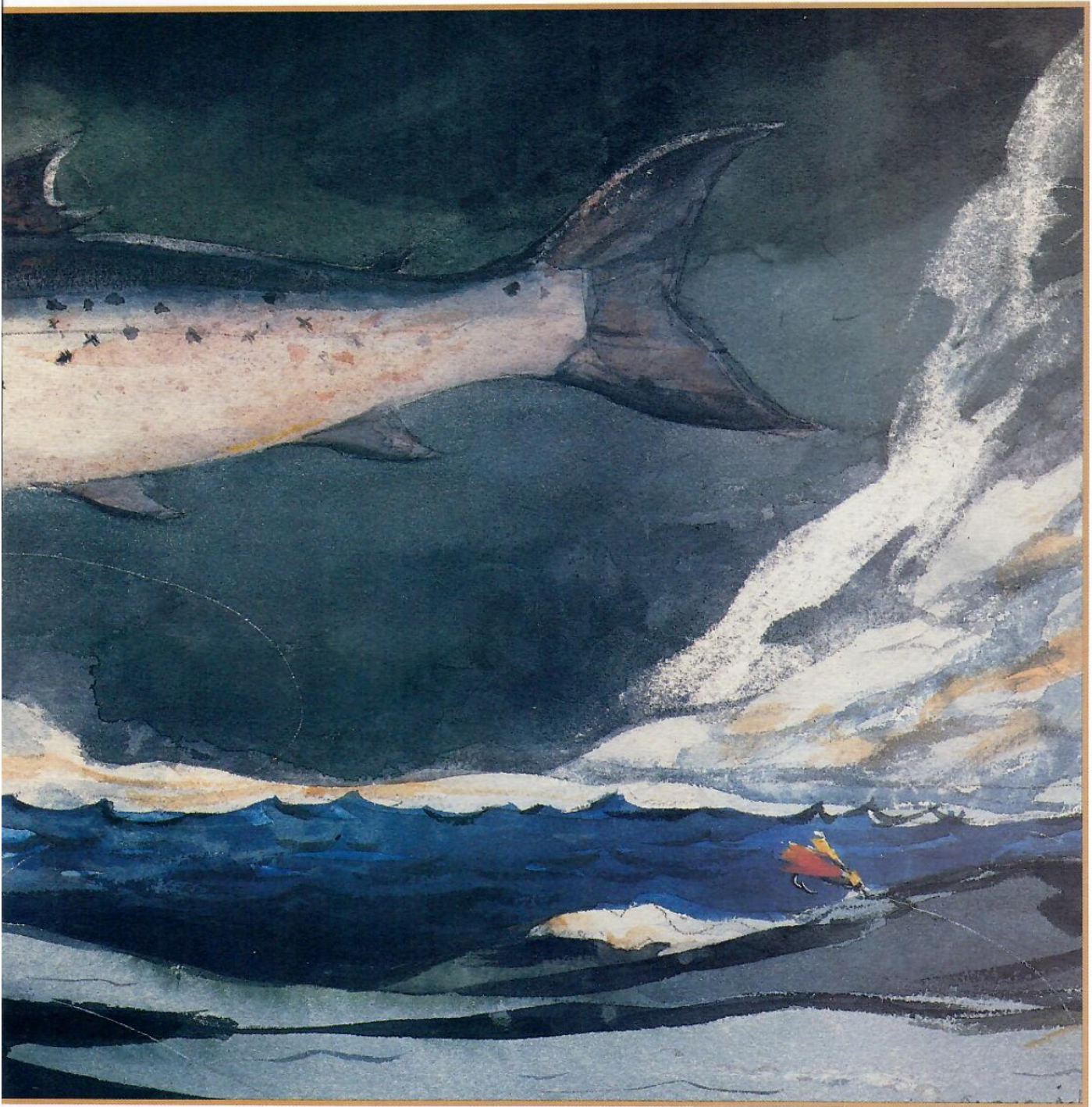
Natural Bridge, Nassau, 1898. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY., NY.

**Winslow
Homer used
watercolor in
a completely
new way.**



SCHOLASTIC
ART

A Good Pool **W**
MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH #3



Winslow Homer (1836-1910). *A Good Pool, Saguenay River*, 1895. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA.

WINSLOW HOMER

IMAGES OF NATURE: Over the centuries, artists have painted nature in very different ways.



In the painting above, what do you think artist Catherine Murphy is saying about nature?

Catherine Murphy B. 1946. *Frank Murphy and His Family*, 1980. Oil, 41" x 46" Lennon, Weinberg Gallery, NY, NY.

Suburban Landscapes

Contemporary American artist Catherine Murphy paints nature, but it is the kind of nature you might see in a typical American suburb. In *Frank Murphy and His Family*, above, the artist shows three generations—grandfather, father, and children—gathered together on a sunny weekend afternoon. This scene focuses our attention on a certain aspect of modern American life—the family gathering that takes place in a small private backyard, a square of grass surrounded by bushes and a fence.

Do the members of this family appear to be connected or at all interested in each other? Each figure seems frozen in position and stares off into space, creating a mood of loneliness and isolation. The natural elements—sunlight, blue sky, and green grass **contrast** with the straight, **geometric**, man-made houses and steps. The buildings and figures **frame** and **enclose** the small patch of green that represents nature, making it appear even tinier and further emphasizing the encroachment of industrial society on a once-rural America.

Eastern Scenes

Many artists including Winslow Homer painted scenes in which natural forces completely dominate the human figures in the picture. Some of Homer's compositions may have been influenced by the work of the early 19th-century Japanese print-maker Hokusai (HO-ku-sigh), who did the woodblock print on the right. Compare Hokusai's print to Homer's painting *A Good Pool* on pages 8-9. Both artists depict their scenes from **unusual points of view**. The subject of this print is Mt. Fuji, a huge volcano known as Japan's "sacred mountain," while Homer's subject is the small canoe and the men in it. In both painting and print there is a **dramatic contrast** between foreground and background. Both subjects are **framed** by large objects in the foreground: the canoe by the fish in front, the mountain by the tree and the travelers huddled below it. In these two works, the fish and the mountain are **symbols** of nature's awesome power.





Can you find the subject of the Japanese print above?

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849).
Mishima Pass in Kai, 1825. From
 "The Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji."
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY.

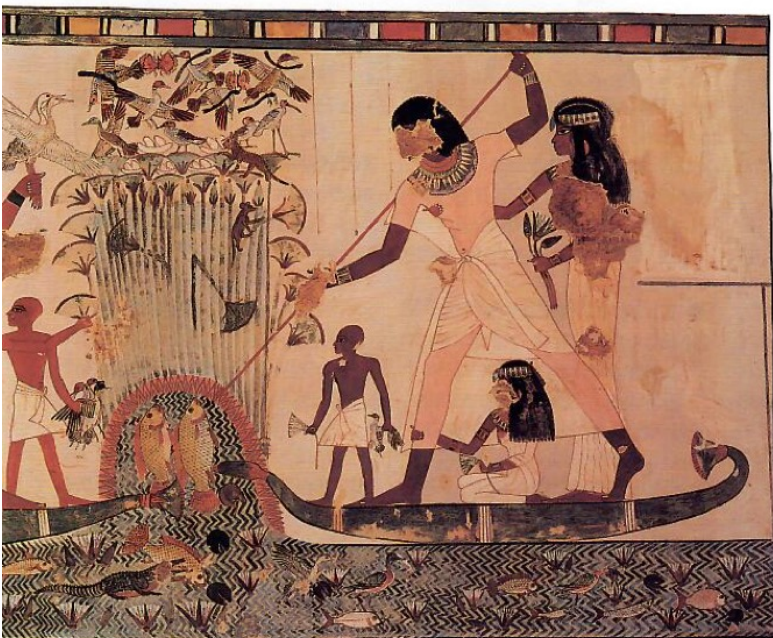
Ancient Animals

As you can see in the painting below, nature was one of the ancient Egyptians' favorite subjects. This work, done more than 3,400 years ago, was painted on the wall of a tomb. The Egyptian king, or *Pharaoh*, was thought to be immortal, so his elaborate tomb was

fully equipped for life after death—this included clothing, jewelry, furniture, food, and representations of the activities he enjoyed most. This painting shows the king and his family (they are the larger figures) in boats on the Nile River spearing fish. The animals (and the people) are flat, and are placed in **two-dimensional space**. Every creature—fish, crocodile, ducks, butterflies (Can you even find a cat and a mouse?) is shown from its most **characteristic angle**. Each species of bird and fish is different and is depicted in great detail. The shapes in the painting are so **simplified and stylized** that they seem to form a symbolic visual shorthand—zigzag lines stand for water; vertical lines represent reeds growing at the edge of the river; the oval shapes above the vertical lines stand for birds' eggs.

Although done centuries ago, Egyptian paintings show animals and birds that are still common today.

Egyptian tomb painting—
 Dynasty 18 (1559-1320
 B.C.) Metropolitan Museum
 of Art, NY, NY.



Kristen Melby: REFLECTIONS ON NATURE

The Scholastic Art Award winning painting on the right shows nature in an unusual way—a suburban landscape is seen as a series of reflections on the surface of an automobile.

Fifteen-year-old Kristen Melby did this work while she was a freshman at Rolling Meadows (Illinois) High School. This was the first watercolor* Kristen ever did, and she painted it as a class assignment.

This year, as a sophomore, Kristen is continuing her art, working in pencil, charcoal, and experimenting with oil paint. Eventually she would like to pursue an art career.

When she's not drawing or sketching, Kristen plays volleyball, basketball, and soccer and is a member of the student council.

*Unlike Winslow Homer, Kristen used opaque watercolor, which is thicker and includes the use of white paint.

Photos by Richard Abbott



Kristen worked on her award-winning painting for a whole semester.

■ **When did you first get interested in art?**

I've been drawing ever since I was in first grade. But I never took any art classes until I was in junior high. I really got serious about art in freshman year. My teacher was really creative; he introduced us to so many new ideas I had never thought about before. He gave us guidelines and helped us, but we were also free to experiment.

■ **Where did you get the idea for this painting?**

The painting was a class assignment. Our teacher wanted us to work with watercolors. It was the first time I ever worked in this medium. The assignment was to find a photograph of a car and paint our own version.

■ **Does the car you painted belong to someone you know?**

No. It was in the photo. I liked the picture because of the reflections in the shiny surface. I loved the idea of seeing the house and landscape inside the car. The picture wasn't just a car, it was a picture full of scenery and full of life as well.

■ **How did you actually do this painting?**

First I sketched a basic outline of everything that would be in the picture on a small piece of cardboard. After I had a basic outline, I went back over it and indicated the large shapes—the car parts, the reflections, the background.

■ **Then how did you proceed?**

After the drawing was done, I started to paint. Because there were so many colors in this picture, I worked on mixing all the variations of one color.

I'd take a color—let's say blue—and I'd mix a whole color wheel of tints and shades. For lighter blues, I'd mix in one drop of white, then two drops, and so on. For darker blues, I'd mix blue with one drop of black, and so on. I used these colors to show the darker tone fading into the light. For the sky and the grass, I used bands of color. Other times I blended the colors by mixing them while they were still wet.

■ **Did you want to capture a particular time of day?**

I wanted to capture the light of early morning in this painting. To help do that, I put a bright green line of grass in back. There was no grass in my original composition but as I went on, I intensified the green of the grass more because I wanted to emphasize the effect of the sun coming in through the trees.

■ **Did you add any other colors to your picture?**

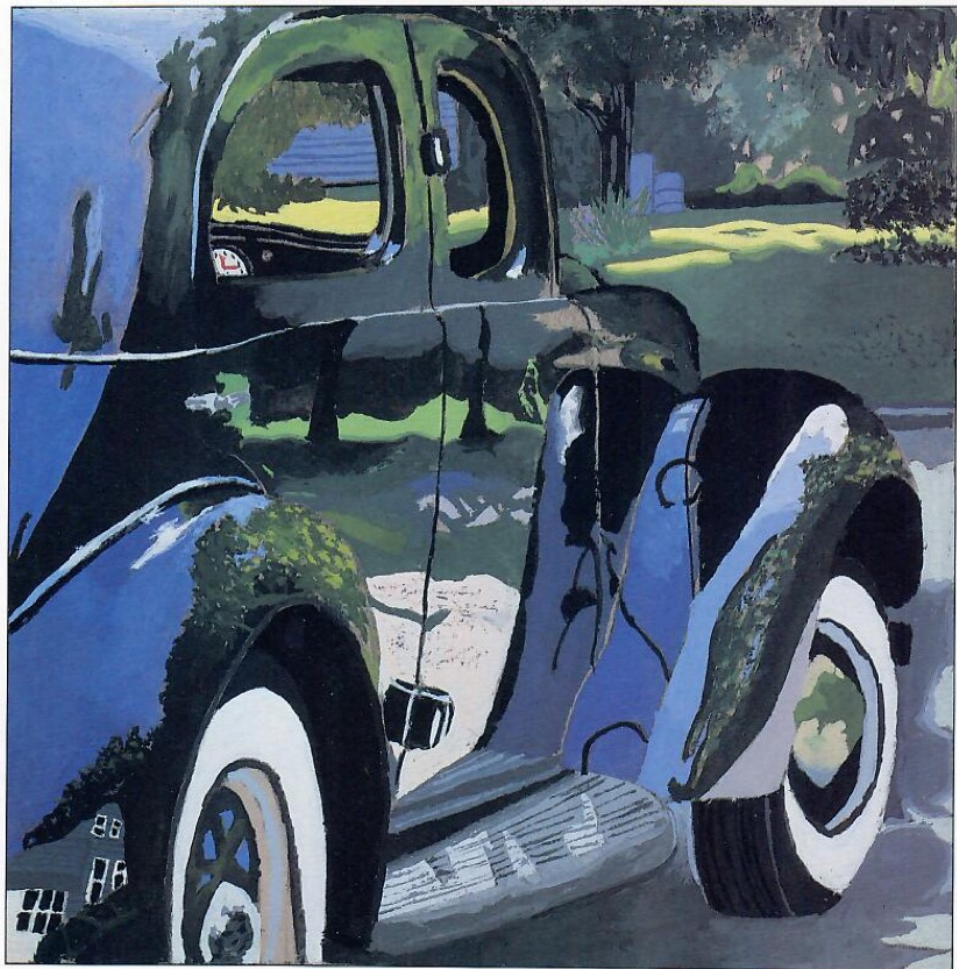
Basically, I tried to keep the picture as realistic as possible. But I did brighten all the greens and blues so they stood out more against the dark car. I let the gray of the cardboard show through to emphasize the brightness of the colors and to tie the whole painting together.

■ **How did you like working with watercolor?**

I've mainly only done drawing and sketching, so at first I didn't think I would enjoy watercolor. But then I got to like it. Whenever you try something new, you think it'll never be as good as what you've already done. But I liked how the colors came out. The painting gives the feeling of a sunny day.

■ **Were you satisfied with your painting when you were done?**

Mostly, yes. But now when I look back, I see things I would like to change. There are some big color jumps which I would like to make more smooth so I



I wanted to capture the light of early morning in this painting . . . to emphasize the effect of the sun coming in through the trees.

could give the painting a softer lighting effect.

I don't think you're ever really totally satisfied with what you do. But generally, I was satisfied with the way it turned out.

■ **How long did it take you to complete this painting?**

It took me a long time; probably about one semester. I'm really slow at painting so I'd take the picture home with me. The class period was never really enough time. Sometimes I'd work until three in the morning weeknights. Then I'd work every weekend. At first I just felt relieved when I was finally

done. But then, as I kept looking at it, there was a huge feeling of accomplishment.

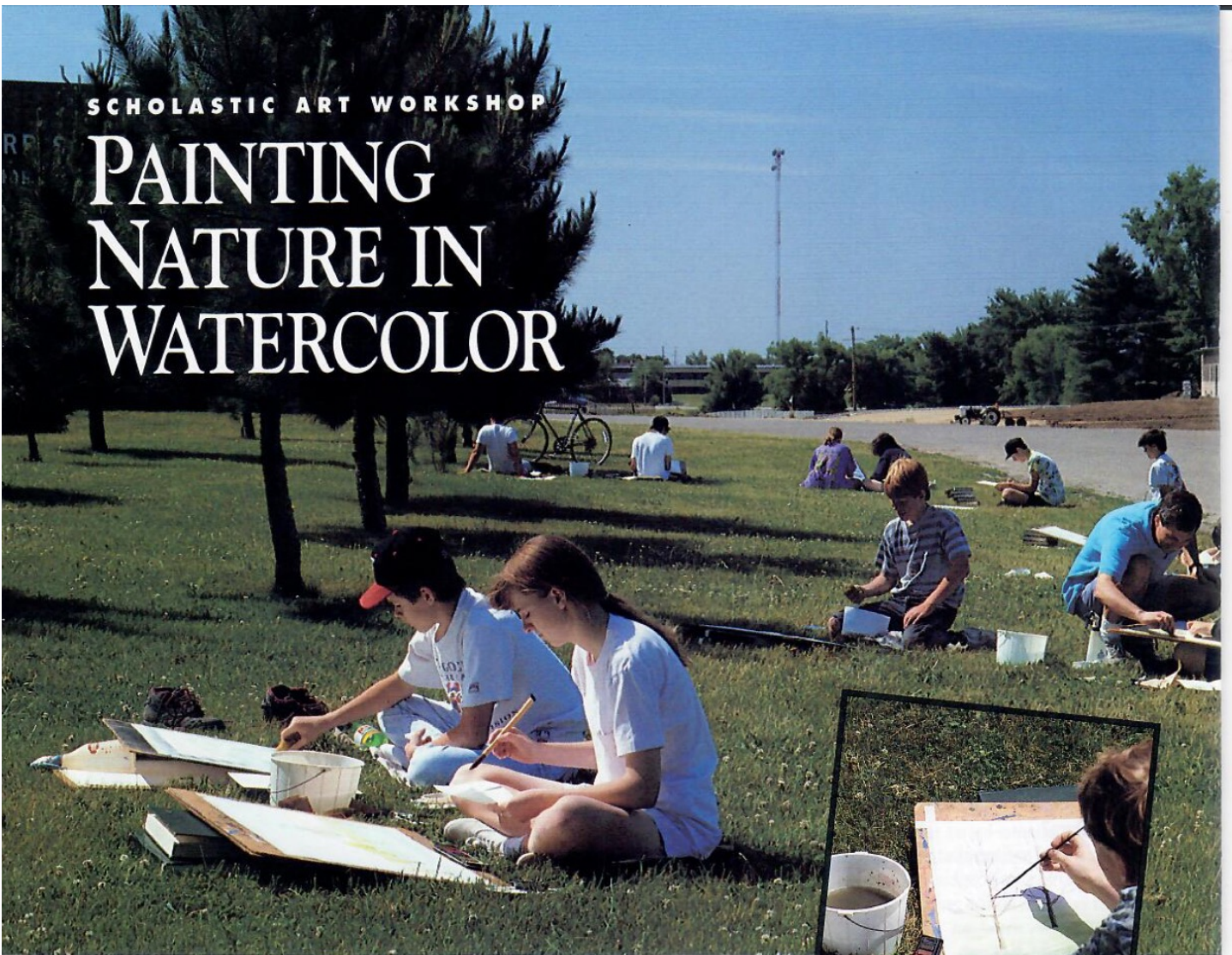
■ **Do you have any thoughts about art?**

Basically, I want to just go with what I feel when I draw or paint. I also want to experience all different kinds of art before I decide what I want to specialize in. If I hadn't tried watercolors in this class, I would have never discovered it. But now I really enjoy it and I want to do more. I'd also like to try oil painting. I want to get a taste of all different kinds of mediums before I settle on a path for my career.

We select our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Art Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 for entry deadlines and rules books. *Scholastic Art* magazine does not have a separate competition.

SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP

PAINTING NATURE IN WATERCOLOR



Winslow Homer wanted to capture the *essence* of certain moments in nature—a line of waves breaking, the glint of sunlight on water, palm trees blowing in the wind. He found that the simplicity, speed, and spontaneity of watercolor was ideal for this purpose. Most paint, like oil or acrylic, is “opaque,” meaning you can’t see through the colors. Because it is transparent, watercolor gives a light, airy feeling. Watercolor is also a very difficult medium to work in. It should

be put down quickly and should not be reworked or painted over.

In this workshop, you’ll do a watercolor landscape. It took Winslow Homer many years to obtain the visual effects he was looking for. In this exercise, learning watercolor technique is more important than the appearance of the final results.

Materials

- Watercolor or 80 lb absorbent paper cut a variety of sizes
- Drawing board
- Pan or tube watercolors
- Variety of watercolor brushes, No. 3-12
- Palettes (or old dinner plates) for mixing paint
- Containers for water
- Sponge; Q-tips; toilet paper
- Spray bottle
- Masking tape to hold paper on drawing board
- Paper toweling
- Small scraps of paper to try mixing color

Julia C. Velazquez

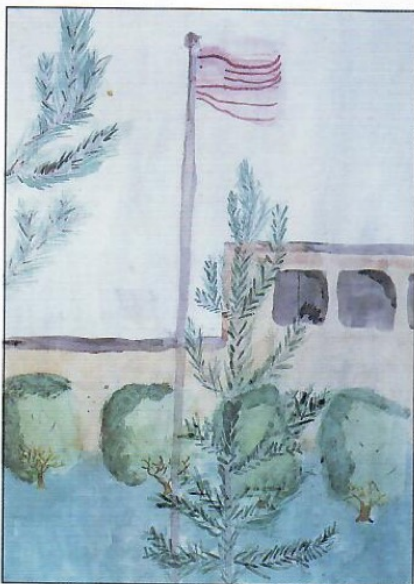


Starting Out

Step 1. Experiment with several basic watercolor techniques before trying to paint your landscape. Put down a color wash. Work “wet on wet” by painting over the wash with another color, allowing it to “bleed” into the first color. Let the wash dry. Now add another transparent layer by

painting over the wash with another color, allowing it to “bleed” into the first color. Let the wash dry. Now add another transparent layer by

Joshua D. Graham



Your watercolor should be done quickly, on-the-spot, and should be finished in one sitting.

James S. Palmer



Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr., Morrison (IL) High School. Photos by Larry Gregory.

putting a second color on top of the dry surface (“wet on dry”).

Lay down a color wash on another sheet of paper. Try creating white areas and areas of texture by absorbing the wash with a sponge or paper towel. Then practice working on details with a “dry brush.”

Step 2.

Plan a simple composition (the students on these pages chose an area in their schoolyard). Tape your paper to a drawing board so it doesn’t wrinkle. Lightly sketch in the major areas. Begin painting by lightly washing in major areas (sky, grass, building, trees). You must work quickly and accurately.

Let dry, or blot dry if you want texture, (leaves or cloud-effects). Do not paint areas that will be white. Experiment with the incorporation of “accidents” (color settles at the bottom of a wash, two colors run together, color runs into the wrong place).

Step 3.

Wash in middleground areas (if any) using slightly stronger colors. Mix enough color to cover entire area to be painted. Quickly put in more detailed foreground areas. Use the tip of the brush for smallest details. The “body” of the brush functions as a storage area for watery paint; heavy pressure will give you a thick line.



Andrea M. Johnson

Some Solutions

Your landscape can be **vertical**, **horizontal** or **square in format**. Will your composition be **symmetrical** or **asymmetrical**? Will **shapes** dominate; will **spaces**; and how will you use both to make your composition appear visually equal?

Which of these compositions is made up of **organic** (curved, natural) shapes, which uses **geometric** (straight, square)

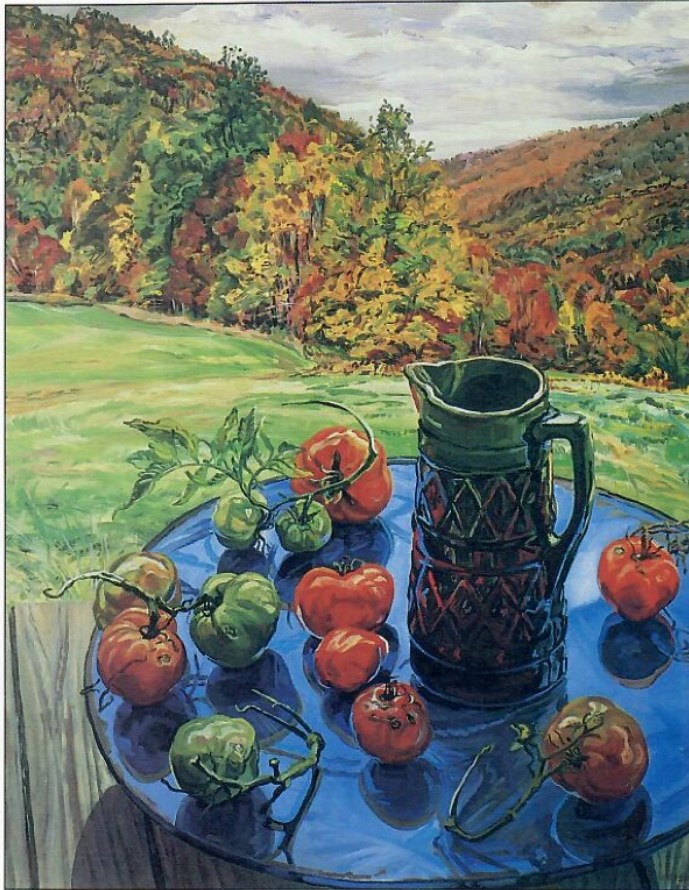
shapes, and which contains a combination of both? Can you find the **focal point** in each of these works? How do **color accents** work in many of these examples? Can you find any areas that have *not* been painted—left white? Can you find a bicycle in some of these watercolors? Are there any in which the trees are so **simplified** and **cropped** that they have become *abstract shapes*? Can you find examples of *washes, wet on wet, dry on wet, drybrush*?

ARTS ALIVE

Two watercolor artists of today

Can you find any human figures in either of the paintings on this page?

Janet Fish b. 1938.
Tomatoes and Fall Trees, 1988. Private Collection.



Northern Landscapes

Contemporary American artist Janet Fish, like Winslow Homer, does realistic paintings of nature in both oil and watercolor. As Homer used to go to upstate New York or Canada to paint nature, Janet Fish leaves her New York City apartment and travels to her Vermont studio.

Compare the scene on the left, *Tomatoes and Fall Trees*, with Homer's painting *A Good Pool* on pages 8-9. One is a scene of violent action, while the other is a very quiet still-life. But the composition of both paintings is very similar. Both have two focal points, one in the foreground, one in the background. Both foreground areas have been emphasized and exaggerated, and both paintings are framed by objects in the foreground. The quick, spontaneous brushstrokes in this landscape make the painting appear as exciting — in a different way — as Homer's fishing scene.

Southern Scenes

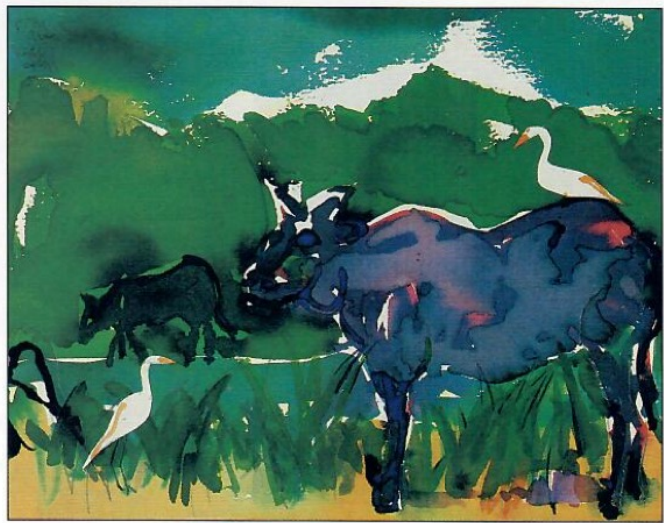
Like Winslow Homer, twentieth-century African-American artist Romare Bearden lived in the northeastern United States but traveled south to paint his colorful watercolors.

Bearden, who was best-known for his collages, made regular trips to St. Martin, an island in the Caribbean. Also like Homer, he chose watercolor to capture the intense quality of the sunlight and the brilliance of the colors he found in the tropics. The watercolor sketch

on the right is Bearden's impression of white birds standing on the backs of cows. The greens, purples, and yellows are exaggerated, and the shapes are so simplified and stylized they give the painting an abstract quality.

What kind of story might the watercolor on the right be telling?

Romare Bearden (1914-1986). *Egrets and Cows*, 1982. Private Collection.



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