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A Comparative Analysis of Selected Twentieth Century Watercolorists

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
SELECTED
TWENTIETH CENTURY WATERCOLORISTS
(TITLE)

BY

BONNIE L. FERGUSON

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1974

YEAR

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INTRODUCTION

In introducing my paper, I feel it proper to set forth my objectives in writing it, and to make a statement of the structure of the paper. I shall attempt to pull together my objectives, the results of my research, my personal reactions and the conclusions I reach into a concise whole.

My objectives in writing this paper were to research selected watercolorists whose work I admire and whose work bears a relationship to my own, and to make a comparative analysis. In the process of research, I found that not all of the work of the artists I had chosen related totally to my own, but there was at least one of the basic elements that did apply. I wanted to learn from looking at their work and reading about their philosophies. That I did; and it has stimulated in me many thoughts and plans, wishes to try some of their methods, ideas of my very own, and ways in which I may develop them. The "stars" of the artists I researched apparently rose during the late 1940's and peaked during the 1950's. These years coincided with the activity and prominence of the American Watercolor Society.

Each of the artists I have chosen to research and write on will be reviewed in the following aspects: 1. inspiration, motivation or subject

matter in relation to his work in general, to a particular painting, or to both; 2. his emotional or intellectual response, if stated, to his work in general or to a specified painting; 3. his technical approach, either as stated or as I analyze it; 4. my response to his work in general and a particular painting, as I compare and analyze it in relation to my own work, based on common aspects.

The watercolor artists I have selected for my comparative analyses are: Ralph Avery, Lars Hoftrup, John McCoy, Ogden Pleissner, Frank Wagner, and Frederic Whitaker. The amount of research material on each of them varied considerably and in varying degrees the conclusions I have drawn are my own.

I. RALPH AVERY

"Born in Savannah, Georgia in 1906. Studied Rochester Institute of Technology, graduating in 1928 and an instructor since 1945. Director of the Rundel Gallery of the Rochester Public Library, 1936-1942. Represented in numerous private collections and in the Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester; the Frye Art Museum, Seattle, Washington. Awarded in 1954, the Pratt Purchase Prize, American Watercolor Society; American Artist Magazine Citation; and the Lillian Fairchild Award. Member Rochester Art Club and American Watercolor Society".¹

Ralph Avery has been adept at finding inspiration and subject matter in his own neighborhood, which is only a few blocks removed from the most historic section of Rochester (N. Y.).² He has made innumerable sketches of the same familiar scenes under different conditions of mood and light, and has found them ever interesting and worthy of his attention. (Ex.: "Seventh Ave. Rain") However, he most certainly does not discount his wide travels as a source of inspiration and a modifying element in the treatment of his subject matter. Unquestionably, his favorite and most successful subjects are viewed in a rainy, wet atmosphere.

Avery emphasizes memory as his intellectual response in general to his paintings, finding that the result is less cluttered by the detail

and unimportant features.³ Emphasizing rough sketches, he states that they are frequently more interesting and revealing than the finished painting and stresses them highly.⁴ He also states that it is the big patterns of masses and colors that the subject suggests, as well as how skillfully these elements can be arranged, that makes him select a certain subject to paint.⁵

The reproduced examples of his work that I found in my reference material suggest that the bulk of his work is best exemplified in the wet-in-wet technique. He emphasizes the importance of many "on the scene" sketches, and does the full sheet watercolor in his studio--after arranging the design elements in accordance with his mood. He uses a normal assortment of brushes, and finds a sponge indispensable. His palette consists of cadmium yellow pale and medium, cadmium orange, burnt sienna, cadmium vermilion, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, manganese blue, Hooker's green deep, raw and burnt umber, and Payne's and Davey's gray.⁶

The material available limited my research, but I find Ralph Avery one of the artists with whom I can most closely relate. Although our subject matter differs--his are most frequently cityscapes, while mine are rural landscapes--I feel the establishment of a mood is dominant to both of us: a theme of a hint of loneliness and a personality influenced by the elements--the moodiness of a wet and dreary day. A similar sense of loneliness and a response to the weather is also dominant in my work. In this context I would compare Avery's "Springtime Reflections" (Plate I) with my "Rural Oklahoma" (Plate II). My "Rural Oklahoma"

also deals with a spring day. His is based on a rainy, dismal day in the city, while my painting is based on a springtime storm in Oklahoma. My painting evolved from sketches made in the rural areas and I attempted to visually portray the feeling of approaching violent weather, the suggestion of loneliness and starkness which the turbulent sky and raw-colored land implies. Over the years this has been a dominant theme in much of my work. (See also Plate III: "Stormy Weather.")

A watercolor I have planned and sketched is of a local city street; brick paved, marshaled by large, old homes, and lined with maple trees. It is being tempered mentally by my analysis of Avery's work. As in other work of mine, this too will be dominated by a mood created by rainy weather. I have viewed this street repeatedly in all kinds of weather, and react to it most on a rainy, late fall day--the trees retain just a few brilliant leaves but basically form patterns of dark intertwining lines; the houses can be arranged to form interesting masses; and the wet pavement creates a fascinating reflection of light and texture.

Avery and I also share a common use of the wet-in-wet technique in the handling of sky areas and cloud formations. And, his palette is very similar to mine, except that I use raw sienna, no umber and no manganese blue or Davey's gray. Since some artists feel the use of Payne's gray is an escape route in achieving darks, I was happy to find it on his palette--for I use it extensively, and would eliminate it from my palette with great reluctance.

The recurring mood of Avery's paintings, his techniques, and the colors he uses make him one of my favorite artists.



Plate I. RALPH AVERY

"Springtime Reflections"



Plate II. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Rural Oklahoma"



Plate III. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Stormy Weather"

II. LARS HOFTRUP

At the age of seven, Lars Hoftrup (1874-1954) came to this country with his parents from Sweden. They located on a farm a few miles south of Elmira, New York where Hoftrup spent his boyhood and later his mature years as a veteran painter living an idyllic existence on the hilltop farm.⁷ Except for brief periods of study at Cooper Union and Art Students League in New York and later at the Art Institute of Chicago, he was self taught. Artists from near and far came to his studio, Arts Torp (meaning art farm), seeking inspiration and criticism: Grant Wood was his student.⁸

The axiom that a real artist can find subjects within sight of his own doorstep was never truer than Hoftrup's case. He painted pictures of his two studio houses in all seasons and under various light conditions; he painted on neighboring farms, on the hillsides and in the hamlets nearby.⁹ He painted of the hard country he knew and loved; "Pine City in Green" (Plate IV) is of the old family farm property.

His total concentration on his work seldom produced a literal transcription of his subject as a whole. He selected an attractive motif and then arranged it to suit his idea of artistic order. He paid little attention in the early stages to the form of things; instead, an abstract arrangement of color was swiftly set down--leaving many whites to be

modified later. Often this work was done in the field and then brought to his studio to be studied with a mat and under glass. There the speed of his outdoor technique was reduced to a snail's pace; further details were added and the color qualified by thin washes. At times, he took several days or weeks to complete the painting, each stage of it being carefully studied and criticized.¹⁰

American Artist states that their remarks concerning his technique are qualified--for Hoftrup hated a formal method and never stopped experimenting. I would analyze it, though, as basically applying thin washes of nearly pure color side by side and over preceding dried areas (in rather an impressionistic manner)--leaving many grainy white areas. He usually used the following colors: ochre, cadmium orange deep, cadmium lemon, burnt sienna, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, Prussian blue, viridian green, raw sienna, burnt umber, cadmium red pale, cerulean, Payne's gray, and Hooker's green.

I like Hoftrup's watercolors; they look fresh, vigorous and really joyous. Even though he worked on many of his paintings for a considerable length of time, they retain a spontaneous feeling. Little of my work can be compared to his, except that landscape is the most common ground.

I am presenting two examples of my work which I can compare in certain aspects. One untitled small piece (Plate V) started really by accident. I keep a scrap sheet of watercolor paper by my palette to test colors on; and in this instance, I saw that some rather nice things had

happened. I had unconsciously applied on dry paper thin washes of color, which had dried before the next color was tested either next to it or overlapping it--and there were many grainy white areas. I proceeded consciously to develop it--balancing color areas, letting them dry, and then adding a few details of tree forms and branches. It is loose and spontaneous and not a literal translation. In these aspects and in the technique of the thin washes on the dry paper, I can make some comparison to Hoftrup's "Pine City in Green."

The other example is "Parke County Covered Bridge Festival" (Plate VI). In this watercolor I did the foreground realistically, using the wet-in-wet method for modeling. The barn in the background and the color planes over background and foreground were washes of color applied over already dry areas. I intended developing a balance and rhythm through color and a feeling of a "fourth dimension." I compare this to Hoftrup's practice of using an abstract arrangement of color for "artistic order."

While I admire Hoftrup's technique and the freshness of his work, it is not "natural" for me to work in his way. Although many of my pencil sketches of proposed watercolors are free and more suggestive than literal, I do not retain that quality when I paint.



Plate IV. LARS HOFTRUP

"Pine City in Green"



Plate V. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Untitled"

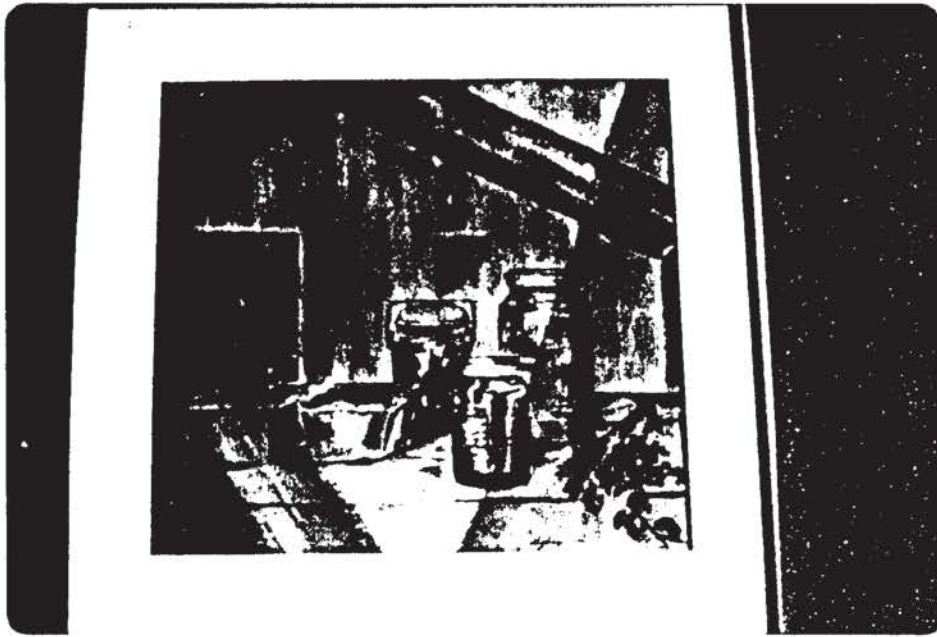


Plate VI. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Parke County Covered Bridge Festival"

III. JOHN W. McCOY, II, N. A.

"Born in Pinole, California in 1910. Graduate Cornell University (B. F. A. degree), 1933; studied Beaux Arts School Fontainebleau, France; at State Theatre, Stuttgart, Germany; with Despuyols and Medgys in Paris; and with N. C. Wyeth. Instructor Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Represented in many private and public collections. ---Awards include the Obreg and Whitmer Prizes, American Watercolor Society; Obreg Prize, National Academy of Design; on the Second Prize, Baltimore Watercolor Club. Member of Wilmington Society of Fine Arts (Director); American Watercolor Society; Audubon Artists; Philadelphia Water Color Club. Elected Academecian, National Academy, 1950."¹¹

John McCoy is a landscape painter in the true sense. His art points up this truth: that conscience and long association with things and places are the grist from which his pictures are made.¹² His landscapes of Maine are done with authority in realistic and straightforward terms with a nice eye to the northern atmosphere. He uses an agreeable, but low keyed unity of color.¹³ (Examples: "Fish Cove" and "Mending Traps.") In his faultless technique, he renders the somber magnificence of the Maine landscape; many of his works convey an overwhelming stillness (example: "Metronome"), a timelessness which seems to characterize the New England terrain he paints.¹⁴

The art of John McCoy gives permanent record to his nostalgia-- too often people in looking ahead, forget where they have been.¹⁵ He paints what he is familiar with; he says, "For how can I paint a door I have never opened, or a road whose length I do not know."¹⁶ An example of this familiarity with the subject matter is demonstrated in "Village by the Sea" (Plate VII), a place where he spent many summers. He feels in his work that design and color personality will manifest themselves through sub-conscious bidding, and the worth of the picture will be determined by the awareness of its creator.

McCoy states that he believes "there are no rules in watercolor that should not be broken. Every picture painted could require a different method, paper or tools for its creation."¹⁷ He has used knives, bristle brushes, sticks and rags when the occasion warranted. As I analyze his work though, he usually uses the wet-in-wet technique-- dropping in more color in barely damp areas as the work progresses and finishing with wet-on-dry areas as accents (Plate VII, "Village by the Sea" and also Plate IX, "Spruce Tree"). He uses what apparently is the usual palette for landscape watercolorists: cadmium yellow pale, burnt sienna, yellow ochre, cadmium red light, alizarin crimson, burnt umber, ivory black (which I never use), Payne's gray, cerulean blue, ultramarine blue, and a green made with thalocyanine--plus occasionally some other colors. Most of his water colors are painted on the spot in about two hours and brought into the studio for modification after being studied under mat.

There are several aspects in which I compare my work to that of McCoy. Landscape watercolors are my dominant interest and I believe my favorite ones also reflect my nostalgia for the rural areas with which I am most familiar and which evoke my deepest feelings for the land. "Medicine Mound, Texas" (Plate VIII) is one of my favorite paintings. In spite of its faults, I feel it captures the hot stillness of the land and the timelessness of that almost-ghost-town in West Texas. I am particularly familiar with the rural areas of northern Oklahoma, southwestern and western Oklahoma, and West Texas. Perhaps I am a romantic, but to me this is "God's Country"--and I love it. I can truly appreciate the Indians' great love of these prairies and plains. At times my technical performance is subjected to my emotional reaction and the impact of my feeling that I want to convey for the particular landscape.

I also compare my painting "Night Light" (Plate X) to McCoy's work (example: Plate VII and Plate IX). This ("Night Light") is a nostalgic night view of a rural residence, illuminated by an incandescent yard light which wards off the encroaching darkness. Here I have made use of dropping in dark values, using the colors extravagantly, as the paper dries; wiping out areas of the trees and branches while the paper is still damp (with the fourth finger and side of my hand and a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch dry bristle brush) and scratching the surface with a knife to retrieve some whites. My colors are low keyed (as are those of McCoy's¹⁸); and I have consciously strived for good design--note rhythm in the way the eye is led through the painting from leaves and tree branches on the upper left and left, through foreground grasses and up the tree, branches and leaves on the right

side of the picture, to confine one to the inner area of the composition. This landscape is seen from a "different" perspective than normal--as also are McCoy's "Spruce Tree" (Plate IX) and "Village by the Sea" (Plate VII), which both emphasize the foreground.

A basic difference in our work is that I seldom work on the spot-- I much prefer using pencil sketches, which include color notations, and doing the actual painting in my home studio.

McCoy is another of my favorite watercolorists, and I relate to him in the areas of realistic representation, low keyed color, and particularly the emotional response with which he paints.



Plate VII. JOHN W. McCOY, II, N.A.

"Village by the Sea"

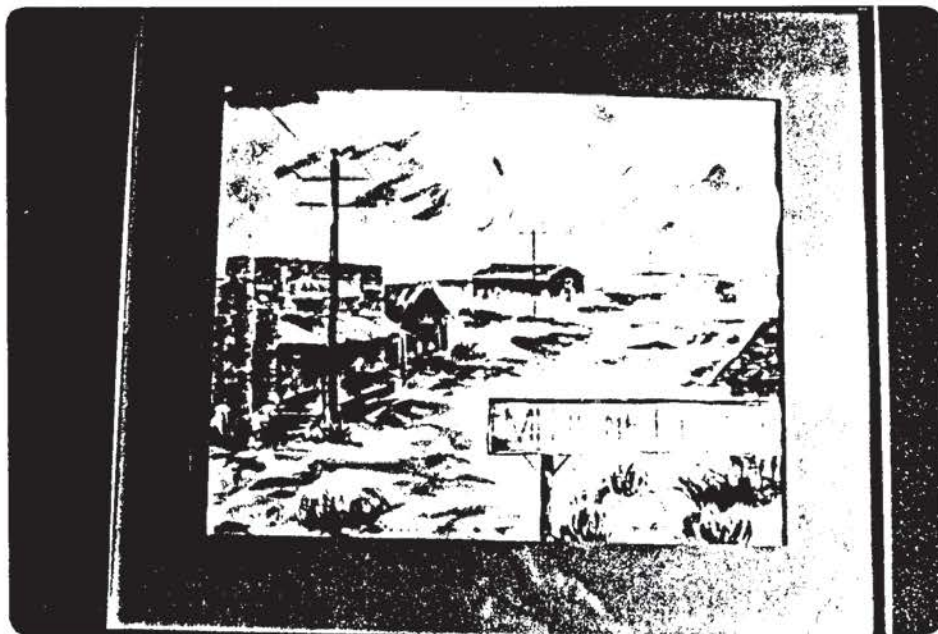


Plate VIII. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Medicine Mound, Texas"



Plate IX. JOHN McCOY, N. A.

"Spruce Tree"



Plate X. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Night Light"

IV. OGDEN M. PLEISSNER, N. A.

"Born in Brooklyn, in 1905. Studied Art Students League.

Represented in many private collections and in more than 40 museums, among them the Metropolitan, Philadelphia, Toledo, Brooklyn and Worcester museums; Minneapolis Institute and the War Department Collection.

Received over 40 major awards including two Halgarten Prizes, and Altman Prize, National Academy of Design; the Pennell Memorial Medal,

Philadelphia Water Color Club; the Medal of Honor and Grumbacher Prize,

Audubon Artists; the Gold and Silver Medals, Allied Artists. Member of

numerous societies including the Audubon Artists; Salmgundi Club;

American Watercolor Society; and Allied Artists. Elected Academician,

National Academy, 1940."¹⁹

I found a wealth of research material on Ogden Pleissner, dating from 1942 through 1972, much of it contradictory. In the early 1940's he was described as "never anything but a landscapist."²⁰ ". . . loves anything as long as it is open country. His work depicts the grandeur of the earth, and the joy of being alive in nature, and he paints these feelings with conviction."²¹ During this period he went West every summer, painting in the wilds and on ranches in Wyoming and adjacent states. In the spring he could be found in the woods and by the streams of Quebec, New England, and in the South.²²

During World War II he was Life magazine's "War Correspondent" and assigned in 1945 to paint the eight major battle fronts in the European theatre.²³ During this time, and well into the 1950's, his work was described as: "portraits of places"²⁴; "realistic acceptance without comment by the artist"²⁵; to, "carefully observed scenes that are imaginatively remembered."²⁶

In the ensuing years his subject matter ranged from the realistic painting of European cities and hamlets to the rural landscapes of Vermont (1970).

The March 1942 issue of American Artist states, "His delight in color, form and design gives him incentive for a picture, rather than the factual subject matter."²⁷ He is a realist in response but the realism is dominated by the picture interest. During this period he suggests details with a few sweeps of his brush; and he prefers to describe not by line, but by chunks and masses.²⁸ Art News of April, 1951, describes the work in a current show at the Whitney as being "with precision if not with passion."²⁹ I analyze his response to his painting in general as becoming more and more analytical as the years pass. He really is a master of compositional design (re: "Quai d' Anjou")³⁰; and he has every technique of describing atmosphere, raw earth, shadows that do not diminish the light, textures you can almost feel (particularly his masonry), etc., at his fingertips. The only picture I was able to photograph was "Pont St. Benezet" (Plate XI), which is an excellent example of his work.

Pleissner uses a wet-in-wet combined with wet-on-dry technique--making use of the rough texture of the paper (300 pound Crisbrook or Whatman) for his grainy whites. He uses a wide range of palette colors--much more extensive than the other artists I am reviewing use, and more than I will describe here. Most of his finished watercolors are painted in the studio--on pre-stretched paper--from small (7" x 10") color sketches which are quite complete in form, or from pencil sketches with color notations. One thing I found most unusual: he makes a preliminary line drawing on tracing paper in which the whole design and perspectives are complete, and transfers this to the watercolor paper.³¹

The more I read of Pleissner's work and the more pictures I looked at, the less I found to compare with my own. I like his work done in the early 1940's best, for it is fairly spontaneous. As the years go on, though, his work becomes more precise, tight, and literal--and I find it "cold" in feeling. Although he states that he uses no "formula" and that style and manner should shine through in an unselfconscious manner³², I find a sameness in his work. I admire him as a master of design--and might compare an example of the carefully thought out design of "Pont St. Benezet" (Plate XI) with my conscious compositional arrangement in "October in Parke County, Indiana" (Plate XII), in which I attempted to achieve balance, rhythm, variety, etc., through the elements of design and color. Also, my picture was more of an "intellectual" exercise than usual in that I really had little feeling for the landscape I was describing in my painting.

I admire his technical skill too, for he is a master of his medium.

But, my early enthusiasm for his work (example: "Monday Morning", 1942)

has cooled, for I find the bulk of his work lacking in emotion.



Plate XI. OGDEN M. PLEISSNER, N. A.

"Pont St. Benezet"



Plate XII. BONNIE FERGUSON

"October in Parke County, Indiana"

V. FRANK WAGNER

"Frank Wagner, a native of Bay Shore, New York first received national notice while still in high school, where he was a recipient of a National Scholastic Magazine scholarship to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and Pratt Institute. He also earned a post-graduate fellowship from the Leonard Schepp Foundation for study at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, Holland.

Since his introduction to the advertising art field in Detroit, Michigan, during 1954, Wagner's stylish work has supported major automotive programs as well as promotions for such firms as 3M, Irish Airlines, Alcoa Aluminum, and the American Medical Association and many others.

He is currently residing in Europe where he is painting and furthering his art study."³³

I found no reference material to Frank Wagner's work other than the above, which was by 3M Printing Products. Telephone calls to three leading St. Louis, Missouri, art galleries resulted in no information--as did a letter to the Director of Advertising of 3M in St. Louis. My acquaintance with his work consists of seeing six watercolors used in calendar form published by 3M Printing Products (litho in U.S.A. with 3M Brand photo offset plates). I very much admire his style, his technique, his use

of color, and his choice of subject matter. I have made my comparative analysis on this basis.

The six watercolors on which I base my analysis are all realistic rural landscapes of the United States. Although they may have been motivated by a commercial consideration, Wagner undoubtedly loves the landscapes of his native country. He has played no favorites in geographic location, and seems to capture the atmosphere of each area.

His paintings range from "The Bayou", in which he obviously reacts to the wet swampy area; to "Tree in Forest", which captures the feeling of filtered light and fuzzy undergrowth of a pine forest. He has painted "Smoky Mountains" (Plate XIII) with their ever present haze; and "Canoe Country" (Plate XIV), with the suggestion of a maze of waterways plus the cool crispness of our north country. A definite New England flavor is present in "Covered Bridge" and the grandeur of the West appears in his painting "Monument Valley."

Consciously or unconsciously, his paintings are composed within the precepts of good design. He uses variety (small, medium and large areas); rhythm, achieved both linearly and through the arrangement of masses (Plate XIII); balance, both in color and weights of masses (notice repetition and balance of colors in Plate XIV); and he employs a variety of textures, which he achieves through a faultless technique (note the dry brush work superimposed over underlying washes in Plate XIII to describe the rough texture of the fence and the furrows of the foreground field to the wet-in-wet indistinct tree masses in the middle-ground to the

wet-in-wet and dry-on-wet areas of the hazy mountains and cloudy sky).

He uses the wet-in-wet technique skillfully and varies it with wet-on-dry areas. It is apparent from the reproductions that his work is first laid out in pencil. His colors appear to be the usual for a landscape watercolorist--but I particularly found of interest that he uses alizarin crimson to both gray and enrich his use of Hooker's green deep, which I also find effective in producing a dark and grayed green that is not dead.

There are a number of my watercolors which I could compare with Wagner's. "Bridge on the Arkansas" (Plate XV) is similar in the use of color and technique of dropping in darker colors in wet areas at different points in the drying period in order for the darks to hold and retain their richness.

I feel "In Rocky Mountain National Park" (Plate XVI) a kinship in subject matter--a desire to capture something of the more spectacular scenic areas of our country; and I think it successful in the feeling of cool, crisp mountain beauty--as Wagner similarly has caught the hazy beauty of the Smokies. "In Rocky Mountain National Park" was not consciously "composed"--the elements more or less fell into place naturally, although I did do a bit of shifting in the foreground rocks and brought the mountain cliff in the middle-ground (right side) closer in perspective than it actually was.

I very much like Frank Wagner's watercolors that I have seen. They are definitely realistic but have a restrained looseness and easiness

which makes them quite intimate and natural-- the "you are there"
feeling. I would like to see more of his work.



Plate XIII. FRANK WAGNER

"Smoky Mountains"



Plate XIV. FRANK WAGNER

"Canoe Country"



Plate XV. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Bridge on the Arkansas"



Plate XVI. BONNIE FERGUSON

"In Rocky Mountain National Park"

VI. FREDERIC WHITAKER, N. A.

"Born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1891. Long career as a designer and manufacturer of religious articles, in Providence and New York. Self taught in art. Represented in many private and public collections. Received more than 35 major awards for watercolor, exclusively, since 1942. Among them the Silver Medal and two Ryder Prizes, American Watercolor Society; two Gold Medals, Silver Medal, and Bronze Medal, Oakland Art Gallery, California; the Homer, and Anonymous Awards, Audubon Artists; a Silver Medal, American Artists Professional League; and the Moss Award, Boston Society of Watercolor Painters. Member of many art societies throughout the United States, including the important watercolor societies. President (1943-1946) Audubon Artists; President, American Watercolor Society, since 1949. Elected Academician, National Academy, 1951."³⁴

Of the artists I have chosen to research for this paper, Frederic Whitaker's career is the most prominent and of the longest duration. The earliest material available to me was published in 1945, and the latest I have seen was an autobiography published in 1972--at which time he was still painting and writing. (In about 1954 he began writing guest editorials for American Artist and has continued to do so for various

publications throughout the years.) His subject matter, basic precepts, style, and philosophy have changed little during these years; I have found them still valid, for they always have been so very fundamental. I admire his work very much; and, I admire the man for what he has stood for in American watercolor throughout the years.

The major portion of Whitaker's work is "naturalistic" landscape. It ranges from cityscapes ("Harlem Sunshine") to rural landscapes ("Connecticut Countryside") to Mexican village scenes ("Market on a Mound"). Particularly in his Mexican paintings, he has added figures of people and of animals to add character to the landscape. He also has done some watercolors of nudes. His work has been critiqued as: "old fashioned but acceptable"³⁵; "displays finished craftsmanship . . . appropriateness of color, surety of touch and harmony of design"³⁶; and "profound feeling for Connecticut . . . quality, sense of organization and richness of color . . . places work high in naturalistic school."³⁷

Whitaker's motivation for a painting and his intellectual response are bound together, for often his intellectual response to a given scene provides his motivation. In Artist (April, 1955) he says that whatever the artist presents should be different and of his own conception--that the composition should not be nondescript and should have character of its own. He goes on to say, "Here are five of the component characteristics of any painting composition: (1) Subject matter; (2) Form--shapes of the items; (3) Scale, . . . ; (4) Colour--or rather combinations of colours; (5) Mood--sunshine, fog, storm or other atmospheric conditions."³⁸

Whitaker looks for at least one of the five characteristics that is different in a scene that captures his eye--perhaps it is a farm building, selected because of its unique construction. Or, perhaps he arbitrarily assigns a "different" atmospheric mood (bright sunlight being the "least different") to the scene he has composed.³⁹

Ordinarily he tries to incorporate in his pictures objects that are already in the scene or in the neighborhood--sometimes shifting them from where they were to where he thinks they should be; however, he does not hesitate to invent entirely new objects or to insert others from remembered earlier scenes. He also uses color in the same manner--picking and choosing--all to the end result of satisfaction with the balance, arrangement, and rhythm of the composition.

A good example of Whitaker's use of something "different," his shifting of items for design purposes and changing of actual colors is demonstrated in "Humble Home" (no illustration). The fact that one side of the house was completely windowless is what attracted him. Also, the side of the house was in sepia shadows, so he keyed his colors to the shadowed area--using autumn foliage colors (though in actuality, they were green); and, he moved an out-building in closer for design purposes.⁴⁰

He amplifies," . . . the matter of scale, which is of great importance in giving character to a picture." By "scale" he means the size of detail--and he uses as an example a house, which could be a small spot set in the midst of a panorama, versus using it in the forefront of the composition where it would fill half the page (a "close-up".) Thus, "Often a house

or other picture part, that might be uninteresting in its entirety, could make a 'different' composition when only a section, with its attractive detail, is employed."⁴¹ One might compare his use of "scale" with the term "point of view."

In creating a watercolor, Whitaker first makes a small pencil sketch of the chosen scene--perhaps 4" x 6"--which gives him the lineal and spatial plan for his composition. It may be rough and simple or carefully detailed, depending on the force of the reminder he may need. Pencil notes are made to tell the color of the objects, and perhaps notes to remind him of the characteristic that first attracted him to the scene. He also may take snap-shots. Back in his studio he does a detailed color sketch, making his mistakes, adding or deleting on this 8" x 10" study. From this he proceeds to the finished watercolor--knowing exactly what he wants to do so that the finished painting appears spontaneous and effortless. This process may take him from five hours to three days and enables him ". . . to reach for the perfection of composition of the best oils, while retaining the freshness, the fluidity and the transparency typical of a good watercolor."⁴² No mention is made of his palette colors. I would judge he uses the usual ones for landscape--with a good amount of Hooker's green, Payne's gray, and burnt sienna--but little evidence of viridian or alizarin crimson.

Whitaker advocates "changing ones methods repeatedly"--and the material suggests his use of different techniques. At one point in his career he used Higgins ink in brown or black with a pen or brush for

accurate structural components; and when dry, overlaid this with colored washes.⁴³ (I intend trying this.) In the June 1955 issue of Artist he describes a technique of very careful drawing, using all-over washes and "mopping" them after they are dry to achieve integrated color--applying the strong color "simply and with verve." (I believe his "River Guardian" [Plate XVII] must embody this technique as I also think many of the Mexican ones do too--they have a "mellow" look--versus the clarity and sharp whites in "Harlem Sunshine.") He also discusses methods of taking out color, stating he does not agree with the "brush it and leave it school."⁴⁴ He uses some wet-in-wet, wet-in-dry, and thin washes applied over other dried washes and bold, loose brushwork.

I have devoted considerable space to Whitaker's approach to water-color landscapes, for I feel he is a true master and there is much to learn from his words and the words of others about his work.

I have chosen two of my watercolors to compare to Whitaker's: "Night Light" (Plate XVIII) and "Country Moonlight" (Plate XIX). Both are "naturalistic"; both are "designed" to achieve balance, rhythm, and variety of proportion; and both are "different" in mood; and, "Night Light" is different in scale (as defined by Whitaker). These pictures were painted from impressions and mental notes of rural landscapes at night--the characted of the scenes change completely with darkness. In both water-colors I was primarily interested in the mood that night created and in projecting the resulting feeling of solitude and isolation. Observing the rural landscape at night inspired both of these pictures. In both paintings, the basic shapes of the larger buildings were actual; but I drew upon my

"dictionary" of barns and out-buildings for the details and inserted the smaller sheds (in both lower right portions) because I needed a particular shape in those areas for design purposes and for foreground interest.

"Night Light" also has features that comply with Whitaker's emphasis on "scale"--or as I stated, "point of view." It is not a panoramic view of a farm yard; the out-building in the lower right and the foreground trees are in "close-up," and I think give a different character to the picture.

Like Whitaker, I also do small pencil sketches--sometimes rough and sometimes quite complete. I often make a separate sketch of a particular detail and explanatory penciled notes. Most of my work is wet-in-wet, wet in varying stages of dampness, with some dry accents for sharpness.

My approach to watercolor is realistic; and, I suppose it would be termed "conservative." This is the manner in which I personally respond and find satisfaction. I was gratified to read these words of Fredric Whitaker: "Conservative is a perfectly honorable word and should need no defense."⁴⁵



Plate XVII. FREDERIC WHITAKER, N. A.

"River Guardian"



Plate XVIII. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Night Light"



Plate XIX. BONNIE FERGUSON

"Country Moonlight"

EPILOGUE

In closing, there are a few thoughts I wish to set forth. I found researching the six artists presented in this paper very enriching and feel my own work will be broadened in scope as a result. In searching through the works cited in the "Sources Consulted" section of the bibliography, I often was "led astray" by other articles of interest; and feel this, too, was valuable reading. I have made notes and some sketches of particular paintings that I want to further examine, and have made notations of ideas for future watercolors of my own.

The fact that John McCoy paints familiar scenes with nostalgia, touches very closely the emotion with which I paint my landscapes of Oklahoma. But, I have been greatly influenced by Whitaker's work and his feeling for treating a familiar scene with something "different" to add character to it. I believe his works and words have made the most profound impression on me.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Watercolor Methods, ed. by Norman Kent, N.A. (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, Inc., 1955), p. 21.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
- 3 American Artist, XV (June, 1954), pp. 56-58.
- 4 Watercolor Methods, pp. 22-26.
- 5 "Ralph Avery Prefers to Paint Away from his Subject," American Artist, XXX (April, 1966), pp. 26-27, 67.
- 6 Watercolor Methods, pp. 22-26.
- 7 "The Watercolor Series," American Artist, X (October, 1946), pp. 32-33.
- 8 American Artist, XXXII (June, 1968), p. 8.
- 9 "The Watercolor Series," American Artist, X (October, 1946), pp. 32-33.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
- 11 Watercolor Methods, p. 105.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 106-110.
- 13 Art News, VIII (January 15, 1945), p. 27.
- 14 Art Digest, XXVIII (October 1, 1953), p. 21.
- 15 Watercolor Methods, p. 106.
- 16 Ibid., p. 108.
- 17 Ibid., p. 107.

- 18 American Artist, XI (January, 1947), pp. 34-35.
- 19 Watercolor Methods, p. 69.
- 20 Art News, VIII (December 1, 1944), p. 18.
- 21 American Artist, VI (March 1942), pp. 4-11.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 4-11.
- 23 American Artist, XX (March, 1946), p. 20+.
- 24 "Patience and Firmness," Time, LXII (November 23, 1953), pp. 86-87.
- 25 American Artist, XIII (December, 1949), p. 39.
- 26 Art Digest, XXV (November 1, 1950), p. 19.
- 27 American Artist, VI (March, 1942), p. 4-11.
- 28 Art News, VIII (December, 1944), p. 18.
- 29 Art News, L (April 1, 1951), p. 38.
- 30 Studio, CLII (August, 1956), p. 59.
- 31 Watercolor Methods, p. 73.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 69-74.
- 33 "Rissmann, Supplier to the Graphic Arts," 3M Brand Printing Products, St. Louis, Missouri.
- 34 Watercolor Methods, p. 117.
- 35 Art News, VII (November 1, 1945), p. 6.
- 36 Art Digest, XXII (October 1, 1947), p. 15.
- 37 Art News, L (October 1, 1951), p. 47.
- 38 Frederic Whitaker, "Water Color Painting Outdoors," Artist, LL (April, 1955), p. 8.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 8-10.

- 40 American Artist, IX (November, 1945), p. 31.
- 41 Whitaker, "Water Color Painting Outdoors," p. 10.
- 42 Watercolor Methods, p. 122.
- 43 Artist, IL (May, 1955), pp. 26-28.
- 44 Artist, IL (June, 1955), pp. 67-69.
- 45 American Artist, XVIII (September, 1954), p. 3.

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