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Transparent and Opaque: Watercolors From The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden

Daphne A. Deeds

Curator at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska- Lincoln

George W. Neubert

Director at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska- Lincoln

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TRANSPARENT AND OPAQUE:



*WATERCOLORS FROM THE
SHELDON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY
AND SCULPTURE GARDEN*

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Ninth Annual Sheldon Statewide Exhibition
1995-96

Milton Avery
1885-1965
TREES AND ROCKS
1943, watercolor on
paper
22 3/8 x 31 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1944.H-246



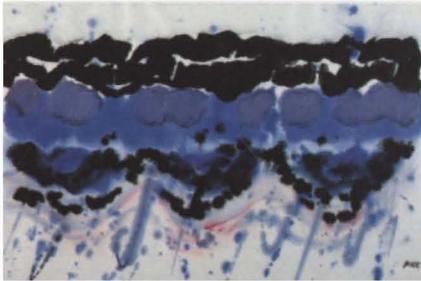
Milton Avery's quiet, contemplative scenes of the natural world were often painted during summers spent in Vermont with his wife and daughter. Throughout his career he adhered firmly to the rule of never inventing imagery, never introducing elements into the composition which did not exist in the physical world. Avery drew tirelessly, keeping tiny notebooks recording visual sensations with indications of natural color. From these he produced enlarged watercolors, such as *Trees and Rocks*, in which we see thin washes of close-valued color areas with detailed, graphically articulated forms.



Charles E. Burchfield
1893-1967
ABANDONED
FARMHOUSE
1932, watercolor on
paper mounted on
board
23 1/2 x 33 in.
JNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1938.H-194

Charles Burchfield painted the American scene, particularly in the 1930s when the drab streets and weatherbeaten buildings of the small towns and surrounding country near his home in upstate New York were a dominant theme. As an artist, Burchfield evolved alone and independently, isolated from the mainstream of European and American art. He preferred to be called a romantic-realist, and watercolor was his preferred medium. His technique of heavy, overlapping strokes on large surfaces gave his work a power and solidity more commonly associated with oil. *Abandoned Farmhouse* exemplifies Burchfield's ability to combine "the spirit of landscape with the soul of the house."

Gail Butt
1924-
DELUGE
n.d., watercolor on
paper
26 1/4 x 39 1/2 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1980.H-2511



The artist, a former UNL art professor, expresses an interest in aspects of the Great Plains experience - both the earth's surface and the skies above. *Deluge* illustrates his style, described as abstract impressionism, used to depict the elements of a summer rain storm. Color and bold decisive brush strokes create a forceful depiction of the atmosphere. Butt says much of his artistic motivation and emotional support are derived from music as well as his awareness and perception of natural forces.



Charles Demuth
1883-1935
APPLES
c.1925, watercolor
on paper
11 3/4 x 18 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1944.H-244

The influence of Cubism can be seen in a delicate faceting of space developed around the organic shapes of apples in this still life painting. Also apparent is a unique aspect of Charles Demuth's *oeuvre*: the light source that seems to flow from within the apples, goblet and napkin. The artist is considered a "master watercolorist for whom line, edge, and the nuance of tone meant most." With precision, control and restraint, Demuth painted still lifes using flowers from his mother's garden or fruits and vegetables purchased at a market near his home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, as well as animated figurative illustrations and landscapes with architectural motifs.

Arthur Dove
1880-1946
CENTERPORT
SERIES #2
c.1941, watercolor on
paper
5 x 7 in.
UNL-Howard S.
Wilson Memorial
Collection
1982.U-3114



As America's first abstract painter, Arthur Dove was a bold pioneer in the search for a new language in painting. Abandoning a successful career as an illustrator, Dove sought an abstract imagery based in nature and the forms and forces of organic life. His personal vision was "to make something that is real in itself, that does not remind anyone of any other thing, and that does not have to be explained, like the letter A for instance" - a difficult ambition for an American of his generation. *Centerport Series #2*, executed when the artist was nearly an invalid and living in Centerport, Long Island, is characteristic of his watercolor sketches made directly from the subject, worked in washes of color combined with a thick line made with a fountain pen and waterproof ink.



Lyonel Feininger
1871-1956
BROODING SKY
1946, watercolor on
paper
11 3/4 x 18 1/4 in.
UNL-Bequest of
Frances Sheldon
1950.U-111

As a teenager, American-born Lyonel Feininger accompanied his musician parents to Europe, where he remained, primarily in Germany, for the next fifty years. Following early success as a cartoonist, he turned to painting, developing a personal style influenced by Cubism. Feininger's watercolors, in which "planes are determined by an overlay of lines imposed over color washes, put on with economy and precision" are informed by the artist's direct experience with nature. In the 1930s when his art was banned by the Nazis, Feininger returned to the United States where he remained for the rest of his life.

TRANSPARENT AND OPAQUE: WATERCOLORS FROM THE SHELDON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY AND SCULPTURE GARDEN

The history of art, like many academic disciplines, imposes certain biases on our perceptions. Because the Renaissance captured the imagination of the Western mind, oil painting and bronze sculpture prevail as the most respected media. This acclaim may be appropriate, but in lauding these traditional art forms, other media have not always received the attention they deserve. In the U.S., watercolor, a medium alternately referred to as painting and drawing, is often still identified as the domain of social young women and amateurs, as was the case in the 19th century. But the history of watercolor painting begins impressively with Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) whose highly detailed renderings of landscapes and animals remain the prime model for naturalist studies. In the 19th century, J. M. William Turner initiated the modern era with his loose washes of color that capture the subtle atmospheres of London fog and cloudy skies, which are the standard for many contemporary watercolorists. *Transparent and Opaque* offers the viewer a concise history of American 20th century watercolor painting. This selection of twenty works is a mere indication of the medium's evocative potency, and a clear indication that its best examples need not be relegated within art history.

Whether executed with a dry brush to effect opaque imagery, or with wet washes of translucent color, the watercolorist must possess an uncommon confidence. Unlike oil paints, which can be endlessly corrected or radically altered, watercolor is an unforgiving medium that responds best to the spontaneity and assurance of the skilled artist. The apparent ease and facility we see in works by artists such as Charles Demuth, Milton Avery, Lyonel Feininger, Childe Hassam, Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin, and Abraham Walkowitz is the result of an informed intuition and an element of risk - their marks are immediately and permanently absorbed into the thirsty rag paper. There is no turning back. The opacity of works by artists such as Charles Burchfield, Dong Kingman, James Torlakson, Gladys Nilsson and Neil Welliver requires a similar tenacity, but a more methodical, less emotional hand. Again the medium is irreversible and clings to the paper with a permanence unknown to oils.

Between the polarities of veiled washes and intense color are the works of artists such as Gail Butt, Millard Sheets and Walt Kuhn who balance areas of saturated color with expressive nuances of watery hues. An artist such as Nathan Oliveira uses minor "accidents" to enhance the imagery, such as the pooled pigment that represents the subject's hair. Arthur Dove's application of paint to a rough, heavy paper creates a dappled effect that suggests highlighting of the abstract form. All these artists have used the inherent properties of the medium to their advantage, creating paintings that are illuminated by their paper supports and softened by the properties of water combined in surprisingly diverse tonalities.

Sheldon Statewide succeeds in large part due to the continuing support of the Nebraska Art Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of the visual arts in Nebraska. We are also deeply indebted to Rhonda and James Seacrest of North Platte, whose generous gift has helped to sustain the Sheldon Statewide program. Of particular importance is the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's support of the Community Programs Coordinator position. Equally invaluable are the many local sponsors who support the exhibition in their respective communities. Their appreciation of both the immediate and long-range goals of Sheldon Statewide is especially meaningful. Their generosity has enabled tens of thousands of fellow citizens to encounter works of art of the highest quality.

Perhaps the most important component of this collaborative venture is the dauntless effort of the many volunteer docents at each venue. Their willingness to receive new and often complex information and disseminate it to the school children and adults of Nebraska is the vital link that binds together the Sheldon staff, the supporters, and viewers of each Sheldon Statewide exhibition.

Daphne Anderson Deeds, Chief Curator

George W. Neubert, Director

Abraham Walkowitz
1880-1965
FIVE WOMEN,
STANDING
c.1920, watercolor
over graphite on paper
10 x 8 in.
NAA-Nelle Cochrane
Woods Memorial
Collection
1972.N-295



From his birthplace in Siberia, Abraham Walkowitz emigrated to New York to become an artist thoroughly trained in academic methods. Eventual exposure to avant-garde ideas in Paris influenced Walkowitz's development as a progressive, with the human figure as his chosen subject. Among his most noted drawings is a series inspired by the renowned dancer, Isadora Duncan, whom Walkowitz declared his "muse." Using graphite and translucent washes of watercolor, Walkowitz subtly portrays *Five Women, Standing*, dressed in cloche hats and dresses popular during the 1920s.



Neil Welliver
1929-
CEDAR POND
1976, watercolor on
paper
22 5/16 x 30 1/16 in.
Nebraska Art
Association Collection
1977.N-479

Neil Welliver's subject matter is the woods of inland Maine where he has lived for many years. As a contemporary artist whose primary interest is "the fact of painting," Welliver does not glorify nature in the manner of 19th century artists, but seeks to portray the character of particular details in their natural setting. *Cedar Pond* frames a relatively small, horizonless area in which fragments of the landscape are perceived with the artist's exceptional acuity. He depicts a landscape of light and color achieved with broad washes of underlying hues reworked with short brushstrokes of different colors to build up density.

John Ferren
1905-1970
UNTITLED
(ABSTRACTION)
1936, watercolor on
paper
6 7/8 x 5 in.
UNL-Gift of Colette
Roberts
1962.U-388



Firmly modeled curved shapes set against the plain ground of this 1936 watercolor suggest a sculptural quality reminiscent of the artist's early apprenticeship to a stonemason. John Ferren developed a manner of abstraction in which groups of small, simple, highly colored geometric shapes were placed against a solid background. As an important member of a group of American abstractionists working in Paris in the 1930s, Ferren's work was critically acclaimed for "subtle color relationships and vigorous designs," when it was exhibited in America. He returned to New York in 1938 where, in another aspect of a prolific career that lasted four decades, Ferren contributed to the development of Abstract Expressionism.



Childe Hassam
1859-1935
FIFTH AVENUE,
APRIL MORNING
1917
1917, watercolor on
paper
11 1/2 x 10 3/4 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1928.H-38

The stirring patriotic imagery of flags billowing above city streets was an ideal subject for Childe Hassam, a painter of light and color. Created during World War I, and inspired by the Preparedness Parade held on New York's Fifth Avenue in May, 1916, Hassam's series of flag paintings are regarded as the ultimate development of his Impressionist style. These paintings also reflect the sympathetic response of American artists to the war and the French and English allies. Throughout his long and prolific career, watercolor seemed to suit Hassam's active lifestyle, allowing him to capture his subject spontaneously in a direct and rapid manner.

Dong Kingman
1911-
NEW YORK AFTER
THE STORM
1942, watercolor on
paper
20 3/4 x 31 1/4 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1943.H-235



Dong Kingman is fascinated and exhilarated by New York City. This complex composition depicting the city after a storm contrasts the solid forms of skyscrapers with the movement of tugboats and birds in flight - almost a signature of the artist's work of this period. Born in California of Chinese parents, the artist's early years were spent in Hong Kong where he was given the name King-man, meaning scenic composition, by his painting teacher. During his long career he has progressed from a talented painter trained in the classical Chinese mode to a "master brushman" and skilled landscape painter whose watercolors combine the best of East and West.



Walt Kuhn
1877-1949
STUDY FOR
"APPLES ON BLUE
CLOTH"
1943, watercolor on
paper
13 3/8 x 19 1/2 in.
UNL-Howard S.
Wilson Memorial
Collection
1982.U-3110

The artist says he spent at least four years "investigating apples in general," sometimes executing at least one small painting a day at his camp in Maine, before finally determining "the 'Winesap' was the very apple which Eve offered Adam, and which every schoolboy polished for his teacher." Kuhn's artistic reputation as a powerful and original painter is based on portraits of clowns, showgirls and acrobats, still lifes and drawings that reveal a profound and solitary contemplation of human life and nature. "Painting is not that easy," he said. "It's not copying."

John Marin
1870-1953
LANDSCAPE,
MOUNTAINS
1918, watercolor on
paper
16 1/2 x 19 1/4 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1944.H-245



The vibrant, abstract watercolor paintings of John Marin bespeak his position as a central figure in a group of avant-garde American artists associated with the art dealer Alfred Stieglitz that included Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe and Abraham Wal-kowitz. Following several years in Europe, Marin returned to this country in 1911 to paint his modernist vision of the architectural monuments of New York, the woodlands of New England and eventually the rugged coast of Maine where he spent the rest of his life. *Landscape, Mountains*, depicted in pale washes of yellow, green, and blue activated by open, negative spaces, reflects the artist's respect for the essential forces of nature that shape and form the world.



Gladys Nilsson
1940-
BIG UGLY
1968, watercolor on
paper
24 1/4 x 19 3/16 in.
UNL-Gift of Jacques
Koek, Chicago, IL
1991.U-4372

Gladys Nilsson is a founding member of the Hairy Who, a group of Chicago artists responsible, in the 1960s, for initiating a funky style known as Chicago Imagism. Nilsson's zany, distorted, intensely colored images poke fun at "the panoply of pretensions surrounding so-called high art." Disparity in the scale of figures portrayed in *Big Ugly* suggests the artist's fascination with the idea of people as "vehicles" and "parasites," while recalling the medieval art tradition of increasing figure size to signify importance.

Georgia O'Keeffe
1887-1986
BLUE NUDE
c.1917, watercolor on
paper
15 1/16 x 11 1/8 in.
UNL-Anonymous
donor
1991.U-4423



As a young art teacher in Texas, Georgia O'Keeffe painted a series of small, gestural watercolors presenting bold, blue, archlike shapes, as well as a series of figurative watercolors capturing the human form. These early works reflect O'Keeffe's interest in design and her expression of the ethereal, transient nature of life. Her work was first exhibited in New York at 291 Gallery, owned and managed by modernist photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who would later become her husband. Throughout her long and productive career as a major American artist O'Keeffe achieved recognition for her unique vision of vibrant flowers, bleached-bone still lifes, cityscapes and landscapes of New Mexico.



Nathan Oliveira
1928-
FIGURE #3
1965, watercolor on
paper
17 x 14 in.
UNL-James E.M. and
Helen Thomson
Acquisition Trust
1985.U-3784

California artist Nathan Oliveira intended to become a portrait painter and has used the human figure as a motif for his art since the beginning of his career. While still in high school, Oliveira was profoundly influenced by a museum experience in which he saw a late Rembrandt portrait of a man and knew immediately that he "wanted to be able to paint like that - to make paintings that convincing." He received national attention when his work was included in the *New Images of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959. The essence and presence of the human form are important to the artist, as demonstrated in *Figure #3*, in which atmosphere or environment is suggested only in a general way.

Maurice Prendergast
1858-1924
SALEM PARK,
MASSACHUSETTS
1918, double-sided
watercolor, chalk and
graphite on paper
14 x 19 3/4 in.
NAA-Gift of Mr. and
Mrs. Thomas C.
Woods
1953.N-78



This double-sided watercolor with a frame made by the artist's brother, Charles, is representative of Prendergast's vision of carefree holidays, picnics and pageantry. The artist spent most of his life in New England where his subject matter was frequently park and seashore crowds largely composed of women, a depiction popular in Boston late in the nineteenth century. The lack of facial detail lends a feeling of detachment and distance between the painter and his subjects. Though he executed works in oil paint and monotype, Prendergast's watercolors demonstrate the wide range of his talent and his interest in experimentation with balanced patches of color.



Millard Sheets
1907-
ARIZONA PINTOS
1953, watercolor on
paper
22 1/2 x 30 1/2 in.
UNL-Howard S.
Wilson Memorial
Collection
1982.U-3152

Millard Sheets delights in horses and uses them as his favorite models, painting them as "unhalted spirits bounding free in wild, open spaces." The artist, whose work is characterized by clear colors and firm designs, reinforced a childhood desire to paint by winning his first prize at age eleven. At twenty-two he held his first one-man show and has continued a remarkable career as watercolorist, designer, architect, teacher of art and world-wide traveler. His work is included in numerous museum collections and our nation's White House.

Ronald Slowinski
1932-
UNTITLED (BLUE-
GREY ABSTRAC-
TION)
1980, watercolor on
paper
28 1/2 x 21 1/2 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall
Collection
1981.H-2521



Chicago native and Kansas City Art Institute Professor of Painting Ron Slowinski's work has evolved through a series of changes since his early career in the 1950s. Of that time he said, "Avant garde, explorative, questioning contemporary work was what art meant to me." Since then, Slowinski's work has developed from formal complexity to minimalist simplicity in an "on-going response to the abstract issues of form and color." *Untitled (Blue-Gray Abstraction)* resembles an earlier series of works constructed on a subtle and complex grid, a precise substructure on which a monochromatic field of color emits a sense of light.



James Torlakson
1951-
TRAILER #92
1975, watercolor on
Arches paper
18 3/4 x 26 3/8 in.
UNL-Gift of Jacques
Koek, Chicago, IL
1991.U-4361

Contemporary American realist painter Jim Torlakson depicts unremarkable subjects with a brilliance and clarity that transcends the dullness of a photograph. The artist combines an unusual compositional sense suggestive of Hyperrealism with a mastery of light and color. Torlakson's use of the watercolor medium provides an intriguing comparison with the representational work of earlier artists such as Charles Demuth or Walt Kuhn.

TRANSPARENT AND OPAQUE

Statewide Touring Exhibition Program Schedule

- Chadron** **September 5 - 23, 1995, Memorial Hall Main Gallery**
Local Sponsors: Chadron State College, student fees, KN Energy, U.S. West
- North Platte** **September 24 - October 21, 1995, The Mall**
Local Sponsors: First National Bank, United Nebraska Bank,
Western Nebraska National Bank, North Platte Telegraph
- Grand Island** **October 22 - November 18, 1995, Grand Island Public Library**
Local Sponsors: Home Federal Savings and Loan,
Grand Island Public School District,
C.A.R.P., Inc., Community Arts Resource Personnel, Inc.
- Holdrege** **November 20 - December 16, 1995, Phelps County Museum**
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Dr. & Mrs. Doak Doolittle, First National Bank of Holdrege,
Holdrege School Foundation, National Art Honor Society, Holdrege Chapter
- York** **December 17, 1995 - January 13, 1996, First National Bank of York**
Local Sponsor: First National Bank of York
- Aurora** **January 14 - February 3, 1996, Plainsman Museum**
Local Sponsor: Hamilton County Foundation
- Columbus** **February 4 - March 2, 1996, Columbus Art Gallery**
Local Sponsors: Columbus Area Arts Council, Columbus Public Schools
- Beatrice** **March 3 - 30, 1996, Gage County Historical Museum**
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- Nebraska City** **March 31 - April 27, 1996, Morton-James Public Library**
Local Sponsor: The Steinhart Foundation, Inc.
- Fremont** **April 28 - May 25, 1996, Fremont Area Art Gallery**
Local Sponsors: American National Bank of Fremont, First State Bank,
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- Cozad** **May 26 - June 29, 1996, Robert Henri Museum and Historical Walkway**
Local Sponsors: Cozad Arts Council, Monroe Auto Equipment Company

The Sheldon Statewide Program is managed by Nancy Dawson, Sheldon Gallery Community Programs Coordinator.
For additional information about the Sheldon Statewide Touring Exhibition contact (402) 472-2461.



The Nebraska Arts Council, a state agency, has supported all the year's programs of the Nebraska Art Association through its matching grants program funded by the Nebraska Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

