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Harvard Art Museums
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Press Release

Over 100 Years of Artists' Bold Experimentation and Innovation on Display in *American Watercolors, 1880–1990: Into the Light*

John Marin, *Seascape*, 1914. Watercolor over graphite on white wove paper.
Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of James N. Rosenberg, 1950.48.
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Cambridge, MA
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This summer, the Harvard Art Museums present over 100 years of dazzling and imaginative artistry through the medium of watercolor. ***American Watercolors, 1880–1990: Into the Light*** showcases more than 100 watercolors by over 50 well-known and historically underrepresented artists selected from the museums' deep and diverse holdings—a rare opportunity because of the light-sensitive nature of these works. From Winslow Homer to Richard Foster Yarde, from stunning natural landscapes to delicate still lifes and bold abstractions, there is something for everyone. The exhibition is on display through August 13, 2023, in the three adjacent University Galleries located on Level 3 of the Harvard Art Museums. An accompanying illustrated catalogue—designed to generate conversation about the watercolor movement—includes personal reflections on the medium and introduces new scholarship to the field through contributions from curators with specializations in historical European and American as well as contemporary art, a conservator of works on paper, and artist Richard Tuttle.

Into the Light was organized by a collaborative group of Harvard Art Museums curatorial and conservation colleagues: **Joachim Homann**, Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings; **Margaret Morgan Grasselli**, Visiting Senior Scholar for Drawings; **Miriam Stewart**, Curator of the Collection, Division of European and American Art; and **Elisa Germán**, former Emily Rauh Pulitzer Curatorial Fellow in Contemporary Drawings (now Lunder Curator of Works on Paper and Whistler Studies, Colby College Museum of Art); with contributions by **Penley Knipe**, Philip and Lynn Straus Senior Conservator of Works on Paper and Head of the Paper Lab, Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies; and **Horace D. Ballard**, Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr. Associate Curator of American Art.

For generations of American artists, watercolor was a medium of innovation and experimentation. This challenging form of expression allowed practitioners to let loose their imagination and reflect on process and perception. While the visual vocabulary of American watercolors changed dramatically over the century—from vibrant floral still-life compositions and radiant summer landscapes to surrealistic fantasies and immersive abstract works—the medium's unique ability to capture light fascinated artists throughout.

"This is a different presentation of watercolors and an unusually broad one," said exhibition co-curator Joachim Homann. "There are the masterpieces by Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, and John La Farge that have endeared the medium to us, but there are many artists over subsequent decades who have engaged with watercolors, who came to the medium from different angles, different backgrounds, some of them with academic training and others as amateurs, who are also included."

The installation's three galleries present an astounding versality of watercolor in roughly chronological order. Beginning with rarely seen works by 19th-century artists such as Winslow Homer, John La Farge, John Singer Sargent, and Fidelia Bridges, the exhibition extends to the generation of celebrated modern artists, including John Marin, Edward Hopper, Jane Peterson, and Charles Burchfield. Mid-century experiments by Mark Rothko, Beauford Delaney, Philip Guston, and Dorothy Dehner attest to the potency of the medium for artists working in an abstract mode. The overview concludes with provocative and powerful works by Sol LeWitt, Richard Foster Yarde, Hannah Wilke, and Richard Tuttle, among others. Along the way, watercolors by Bill Traylor and Zelda Fitzgerald demonstrate that artists did not have to be trained professionals to do important work. Pavel Tchelitchew, Alfonso Ossorio, Eva Hesse, and George Grosz are some of the many artists born abroad who immigrated to the United States in the 20th century and went on to change the face of American art.

A display case in the first gallery offers a glimpse into the preparations, materials, and practices behind the watercolors on view and includes examples of pigments (raw sienna, cadmium yellow, rose madder, cobalt blue, and others), gum arabic, watercolor papers, and other tools that an artist might use, including a recently acquired complete watercolor kit, c. 1863–81, from Winsor & Newton, famed purveyors of artist tools. John Singer Sargent's own watercolor tubes, brushes, and a scraper as well as sealing-wax sticks from Alfonso Ossorio's studio are also included.

Said Homann: "Watercolor is a medium that allows us to tell a richer and more complex story of American art, and we are very proud to present a cross-section through a collection that is very dynamic and that has grown in the process of preparing this exhibition."

Built over a period of more than 100 years with the purpose of studying and supporting contemporary practice, the Harvard Art Museums' collection of watercolors embodies the museums' long-term engagement with the art of the present. Through gifts, bequests, and purchases, many watercolors have been added to the museums' collections in recent years, including works by Thomas Pollock Anshutz, Romare Bearden, Charles E. Burchfield, Dorothy Dehner, Beauford Delaney, Sam Gilliam, Edward Hopper, Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Hannah Wilke, and Richard Foster Yarde. Visitors may

further explore the watercolors collection by scheduling a visit to the Art Study Center, where works not currently on view can be requested for close looking and personal study.

"Until now, this area of the museums' celebrated collection of works on paper had not been comprehensively studied nor published, despite the visual appeal and continuing allure of watercolor," said Martha Tedeschi, the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums. "We are excited to showcase the sense of experimentation that so many artists have discovered when working in watercolor, beginning in the 19th century and still today."

Online Resources

Exhibition webpage: harvardartmuseums.org/americanwatercolors

Watch related videos—including explorations of watercolors by Zelda Fitzgerald, Edward Hopper, and John Marin, and a timelapse of the installation of a monumental work by Sol LeWitt—on the museums' dedicated Vimeo channel or YouTube playlist.

Publication

The generously illustrated catalogue accompanying the exhibition *American Watercolors, 1880–1990: Into the Light* considers continuity and change in the American watercolor tradition over a century of production, through the lens of the Harvard Art Museums' collections. In the spirit of the medium, the authors take a fluid and open-ended approach to the topic, offering both personal and scholarly reflections that invite readers to ponder the influence of these works on their own experience of the world. In addition to contextual essays, there are close readings of singular works and examinations of the unique material characteristics of the watercolor medium. Edited by Joachim Homann, Margaret Morgan Grasselli, and Miriam Stewart; with contributions by Horace D. Ballard, Elisa Germán, Penley Knipe, and artist Richard Tuttle. Published by the Harvard Art Museums and distributed by Yale University Press. Softcover, $45.

Public Programming

A robust lineup of public programs will bring *American Watercolors, 1880–1990* to life for a range of visitors. All events are held in-person at the Harvard Art Museums, 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. Admission fees may apply, but there is no additional charge for the following programs. Admission is free for everyone on Sundays and during our monthly At Night events. For updates, full details, and to register, please click the links below or see our calendar: harvardartmuseums.org/calendar.

Lecture – *American Watercolors, 1880–1990*: A Conversation with Artist Richard Tuttle and Curators of the Exhibition

Artist Richard Tuttle and members of the curatorial team discuss their contributions to the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue. This lecture was recorded, the video will be available soon at the following link.

- Tuesday, May 23, 2023, 4–5:30pm

Gallery Talks – *American Watercolors, 1880–1990: Into the Light*

Thematic 30-minute talks by museum staff focused on select objects in the exhibition:

- Wednesday, June 7, 2023, 12:30pm (led by director Martha Tedeschi)
- Wednesday, June 21, 2023, 12:30pm (led by curator Joachim Homann)
- Saturday, June 24, 2023, 12:30pm (led by curator Elisa Germán)
- Wednesday, July 12, 2023, 12:30pm (led by curator Joachim Homann)
- Thursday, July 27, 2023, 12:30pm (led by conservator Penley Knipe & curator Miriam Stewart)
- Saturday, August 5, 2023, 12:30pm (led by curator Elisa Germán)

- Thursday, August 10, 2023, 12:30pm (led by conservators Allison Jackson & Adam Baker)

Exhibition Tours – *American Watercolors, 1880–1990: Into the Light*

Hourlong, in-depth tours of the exhibition:

- Sunday, June 11, 2023, 12pm (led by curator Miriam Stewart)
- Sunday, June 18, 2023, 12pm (led by curator Joachim Homann)
- Sunday, June 25, 2023, 12pm (led by curator Elisa Germán)
- Sunday, July 23, 2023, 12pm (led by curator Joachim Homann)
- Sunday, August 6, 2023, 12pm (led by curator Elisa Germán)
- Sunday, August 13, 2023, 12pm (led by curator Joachim Homann)

Art Study Center Seminar – *American Watercolors, 1880–1990*: A Conversation with Artist Peter Soriano and Curator Joachim Homann

Hourlong seminar focused on Peter Soriano's watercolors.

- Tuesday, July 25, 2023, 11am

Harvard Art Museums At Night

An evening of art, fun, food, and more! All museum galleries will be open, along with the *American Watercolors* exhibition.

- Thursday, June 29, 2023, 5–9pm
- Thursday, July 27, 2023, 5–9pm

Credits

Support for this exhibition is provided by the Alexander S., Robert L., and Bruce A. Beal Exhibition Fund, the William Amory Fund, the Rabb Family Exhibitions Fund, and an anonymous donor. Related programming is supported by the M. Victor Leventritt Lecture Series Endowment Fund. The accompanying catalogue was made possible by the Andrew W. Mellon Publication Funds and the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, comprising three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on art from Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Together, the collections include over 255,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century, they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum

professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States. The Harvard Art Museums have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies. harvardartmuseums.org

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Hours and Admission

Open Tuesday–Sunday, 10am–5pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission: $20 adults, $18 seniors (65+). Free to all visitors on Sundays (all day) and the last Thursday of every month (5–9pm); on other days, free to: members, all students (with valid ID), youth under 18, Cambridge residents (proof of residency required), Harvard ID holders (plus one guest), active-duty military personnel (NEA Blue Star Museums), and individuals with SNAP benefits or an EBT card. On Saturdays, 10am–noon, Massachusetts residents receive free admission (proof of residency required). For further information about visiting, including general policies, see harvardartmuseums.org/visit.

For more information, please contact

Jennifer Aubin
Public Relations Manager
Harvard Art Museums
617-496-5331
jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu