

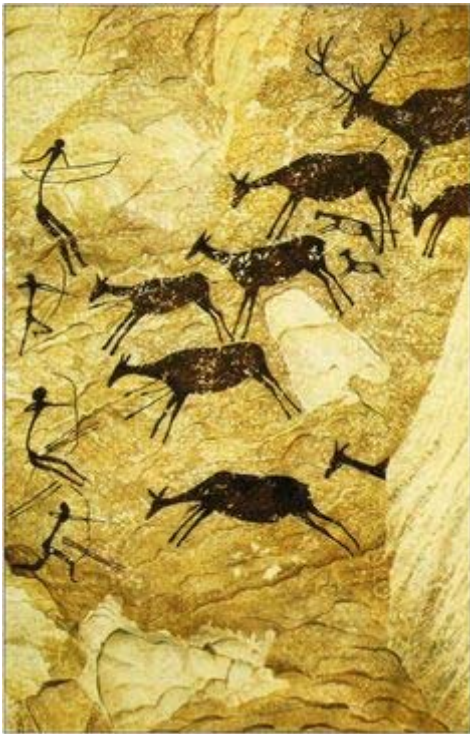
Realism: Then & Now

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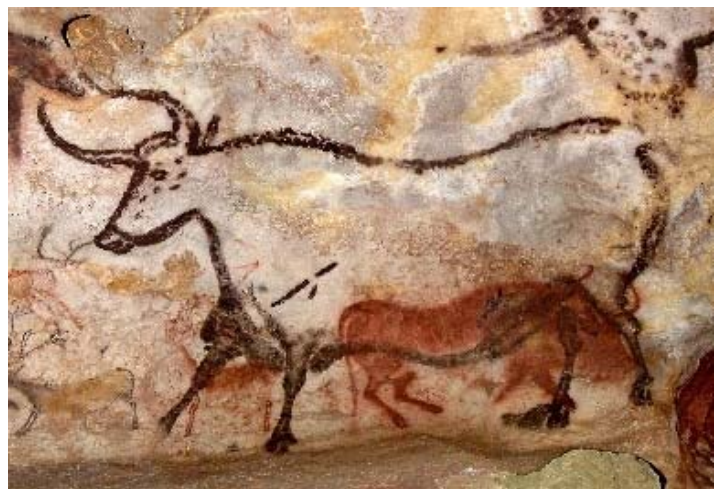
Earliest Examples of Realism

Realism has been with us from the beginning of time. Even the cavemen were trying to draw and paint what they saw as accurately as they could. Although some civilizations gravitated to stylized depictions of the world around them, think of the Temple drawings of the Egyptians and the Sumerians. By the time of the Greek and Roman eras realism was the norm in creating frescos and mosaics.

Cave Paintings



French coast



The Caves at Lascaux

Roman Realism



Roman Fresco



Ceiling Tiles



The Un-Swept Floor in tiles

Even during the middle ages - roughly 500 AD to 1500 AD - monks endeavored to draw and paint the world in a realistic manner when illuminating Bibles, Psalters and prayer books, and Books of the Hour. The scientists of the time labored to depict their experiments with the greatest realism possible. While art, in general, was not available to the public during this time, the church and the wealthy continued to value and create art in a realistic manner.

Book of Kells



Typical "A"

Book of the Hours



Sacred Images

Secular Images

Everything started to change as the middle ages came to a close, in the late 1500's. Better means of farming were developed, famine decreased, the plague came and went, commerce grew, governments were formed countries were created and art again became an important thing in everyday life.

Realism in the Early Renaissance

The year 1492 stands out in this period as many important things happened just before and just after this date. Durer, XXXXXXXXX start of realism in Holland and Spain, start of the Renaissance

The first internationally important artist of this period was Albrecht Durer. Durer was a print maker and a painter. He painted in the oils like many of artists did from the early days of the Renaissance onward. But for our purposes his importance, centers around that fact that he was a watercolorist. He not only did studies in watercolor, but he also did completed paintings in the medium as well. For all intents and purposed, Durer created the approach to painting that we now call Plein Air.



Plein Air Paintings

Durer—like almost every painter during these early days of the Renaissance—was a realist. He drew and painted the world as he saw it.

“The more accurately your work represents life, the better it will appear”.

Albrecht Durer



Wing of Blue Roller Young Hare



Dancing Peasants The Knight, Death and The Devil Great Clump of Turf

Durer influences:

Durer paintings and prints were greatly influenced by Martin Schongauer. During this time Hieronymus Bosch was combining a high degree of realism with his fantasies of Heaven and Hell.

Martin Schongauer



Christ Bearing His Cross

Hieronymus Bosch



Garden of Earthly Delights and Detail

The Dutch and Flemish painters of the 15th, 16th and 17th Century established a new standard for realism. The Van Eycks, in their Altarpiece located in Aachen, made brushes of only three hairs to enable them to paint the small white flowers in the main panel, similar to those seen in this painting of the Benefactor with the Virgin and the Christ Child.

Van Eyck



Man and Turban Benefactor with Virgin and Christ Child

Realism in other countries - Spain

During these years, painters in every country embraced realism. A good example is the Spanish painter, Luis Melendez, who created a very high degree of realism in his still lifes of produce, bakery goods and wine containers.

Luis Melendez



Still Life with Figs and Bread

Dutch Still Life Painting:

The Flowering of Realism in North Europe

The Dutch Flemish still life painters created art for wealthy individuals, not just the church and the state. They created a significant demand for realism among the growing numbers of traders, and craftsmen who forming of Guilds and were beginning to control the economy.

Dutch Still Life Paintings:

Willem Kalf



Still Life with Chinese Bowl Still Life with Drinking Horn

Pieter Claesz



Still Life with Glass of Beer and Smoked Herring on a Plate

Willem Claesz Heda



Breakfast Still Life

Clara Pieters



Cheeses Almonds and Pretzels

While the Dutch and Flemish painters painted primarily in oils, most of them used watercolor to do their studies. The floral painters recorded the finest blossoms during their seasons and later combined them into fanciful bouquets in the large still life

paintings. These paintings were full of the insects, butterflies, and salamanders that were related to the flowers in the painting.

Dutch Floral Paintings

Jan Davidz DeHeem



Bouquet in Glass Bowl Detail

Rachel Ruysch



Bouquet

The Renaissance Moves North

I am sure that most of you are well familiar with all of the progress that was made during the early renaissance to bring civilization, learning, culture, art, writing, teaching, etc. back into the life of Europe.

As the renaissance moved north, it was welcomed in most countries and transformed the lives of those that did welcome it. Art started to blossom in many countries: Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlandish countries, and later in England and Scotland. During this period these countries were being created through the amalgamation of feudal lands, wars and marriages.

Watercolor runs as a central theme through these times. It was not as popular as oils, but it was there, creating a new approach to art through the invention and production of art materials that were more portable and more affordable than oils.

Realism in France

The French were some of the early users in watercolor as a realist's medium. Unfortunately, in later years it fell out of favor as a medium, but many continued to use the medium. Let's look at a few wonderful examples of watercolor realism by French painters.

Camille Corot



The stone breakers

Jean-Francois Millet



The Gleaners

Honore Daumier



Coach Class

Louise Moillon



Gericault



The Horse Market

Coal Wagon

Eugene Isabey



Boats

Bonnington



Pile Driver at Rouen

Note: Classic French Matte in Lieu of Frame

Who were the artists that led the development of Watercolor in England?

At the center of this effort to create a profession of watercolor were some of the most famous painters in England, including many who had significant careers painting in oil as well.

Some of the most significant figures were William Reeves, Thomas Girtin, John Sell Cotman, Fredrick Lewis, John Constable, David Cox, John Robert Cozens, and J M W Turner. We could add a number of names to the list: Peter Dewint, William Gilpin, and William Blake. My friends and fellow watercolorists in England and Scotland will probably chastise me for leaving out their favorite watercolorists.

Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria had a positive influence on the growth of watercolor. She, like many Royals, was a watercolorist. She was an enthusiastic watercolorist and supported the painters' efforts to create a profession for watercolor and the sale of watercolors. She

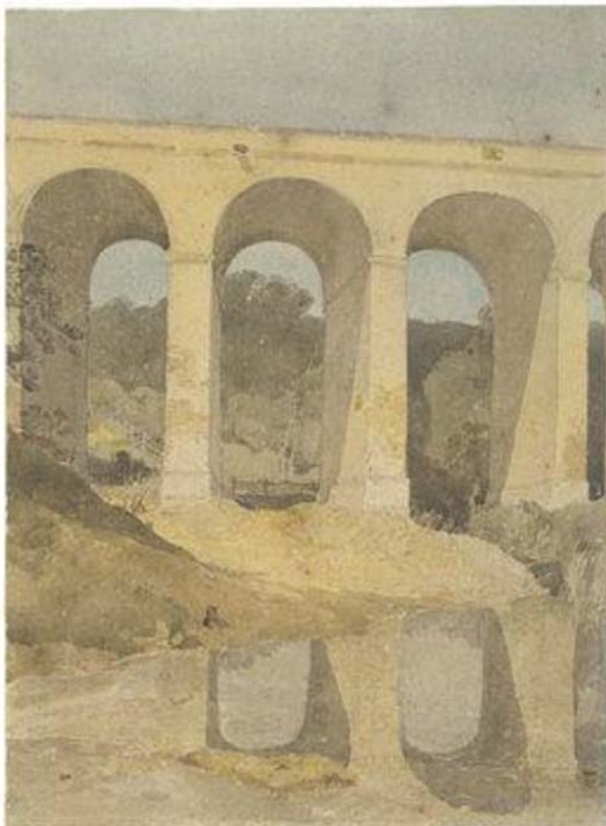
and Prince Albert attended the openings of the exhibitions of the Academy and gave warrants to art societies.

Examples of Watercolors by a few of the leaders:

Thomas Girtin



John Sell Cotman



J.M.W. Turner



Fredrick Lewis



John Constable



I encourage you to study the history of these painters and to become familiar with their work. These artists as a group and as individuals shaped what we know today as British Transparent Watercolor. This approach to watercolor is the platform on which the majority of watercolor is created around the world today. It has set the international standards by which watercolor is now judged.

John Robert Cozens is given credit for codifying much of what we know today as the basics that a painter must master to become a watercolorist. He said that a painter must have a mastery of the following techniques to be able to paint successfully in watercolor: Continuous Wash, Graded Wash, Broken Wash, Wet into Wet, Wet into Dry, Dry Brush, The Two-Brush Technique, blotting, lifting, and masking.

John Cotman and Thomas Girtin set the standard for the Continuous Wash. Frederick Lewis set the standard for Graded Wash with his paintings of the deserts from his visits in the Middle East.

Other techniques have been added over time as technology and practice have advanced, but these remain the basics of what we know as modern watercolor.

The impact of the Camera

It should be mentioned how important the invention of the camera in 1839 by Henry Fox Talbot and Daguerre. The camera allowed the landscape painter to take their paintings more easily into the studio. It also made possible the option of creating still lifes and other subjects that could be painted later or at other locations such as the studio.

Watercolor's growth in the USA 1800's early 1900's

Winslow Homer is indicative of the growing interest in watercolor in the US. Homer, while he also painted in oils, painted many finished paintings in watercolor. These gained a large audience in the US and also acceptance by the critics and the museums.

Masters of Watercolor Realism and its competition

Winslow Homer



The Adirondack Guide Boat, Bahamas

Realism fell out of favor in the 1940s in the US and in Europe as interest in abstract painting boomed. This interest in Abstract painting and in Abstract Expressionism grew in the 1960's and was paralleled by the Pop Art Movement

There has always been a sliding scale between Realism and Abstraction with other art movements such as Impressionism and Pointillism falling somewhere in between. In the midst of all this can be found artistic efforts that were closer to fads than movements such as Dadaism.

Wyeth and Pollack

As examples of this dichotomy of interest in art we have these two artists of note:

Andrew Wyeth and Jackson Pollack

At mid-century America and the world's taste in art was torn between two very different approaches to seeing and creating art. In 1948 Andrew Wyeth showed his masterpiece "Christina's world" and Jackson Pollack showed his first drip paintings. For years both approaches to painting influenced world thinking and they were both greatly discussed and argued about. The existentialists had a field day in these discussions.

Andrew Wyeth and Jackson Pollack



Christina's World

Accountant

20th Century Realists

The interest in realism continued to grow in the 50's and 60's. There was a growing interest in this approach to art among the emerging artists of this period. There was also the development of new art materials that helped, such as the invention of acrylic paints and light-fast watercolors.

A number of these artists were picked up by well-established galleries, especially in New York, or caused new galleries to open that specialized in realism, such as the highly influential Meisel Gallery. This new brand of realism was also gaining popularity in art centers in Europe such as London and Moscow.

Ralph Goings



Ketchup

Double Ketchup

Rockola

Diner

Their brand of realism harkened back to the high degree of details in the work of Durer and other painters of the late medieval and early renaissance era. It became known as Hyper Realism or Photo-Realism.

The Realism artists of this time were in head-to-head competition with the Pop artists as the pop artists often used mechanical tools such as silk screen, rub-on letters and other mechanical devices to create their work.

Realism Today

Here is but a sampling of the artists who, through their paintings in the new hyper-realistic style, moved to the forefront of the art movement in the US. The overwhelming talent and the artist's willingness to put in extremely long hours in the creation of their work separated them from the mass movements in art.

These hyper-realistic artists are willing to spend months on the creation of one piece in comparison to artists in other styles who boast of how quickly they can complete a piece of art.

Carolyn Brady



Patterns Table

Carolyn Brady is known for her watercolors that combine clashing patterns and colors. She is also known for her paintings on the dinner table before, during and After a meal.

Part of the attraction of the new Realists artists was the subject matter which they chose to paint. It was new, it was fresh, and yet it was simultaneously familiar. Like the Medieval and Renaissance painters who were painting the world around them, so too were the new realistic painters. The camera allowed them to bring the world into their

studios where they had the environment and the time to create this new brand of realism.

John Salt



Inside

Gypsy Caravan

The new Architecture that was being built played a large part in their new vision of art. They were influenced by the new materials in which buildings were clad, inside and out. The new skyscrapers like the shiny new metal clad Chrysler Building and the sleek and shiny interiors of diners and gas stations. This was also the time of slick Madison Avenue advertising. The public became accustomed and accepted realism because it was around them all the time. Realism was the world they lived in.

Richard Estes



Telephone Booths

During the 50's and 60's there was a great deal of interest in totally abstract art. Much of it was three dimensional; a pile of brick or stones, or a pile of pieces of candy exhibited asking the viewer to take one piece. As the century came to a close this is what was filling the galleries and the museums. However, the realism movement was gaining ground during this period.

Then over the first ten years of the 21st Century we saw that public sentiment was moving away from all kinds of abstract art. The giants of the movements stayed popular, especially with museums, but public tastes started to turn to realism.

All of the major art publications have declared that in today's market Realism is the preferred art genre. Magazines like Fine Art Connoisseur, Art in America, Art News ..., The Art Newspaper, etc. have all published lead stories about the growth of the interest in realism.

Watercolor artists, both studio painters and plein air painters have always had realism as a mainstream movement in the genre of watercolor.

The Wyeth Family

Three of the leading painters in realism came from the same family. The importance of the artists in the Wyeth family- WC, Andrew, and Jamie- cannot be overstated. Their work was and is of the highest standards of realism and has influenced generations of artists and the public's taste in art, in the US and around the world. Here are Examples of each artist of their work in watercolor.

N.C. Wyeth



Treasure Island

Pirates



Andrew Wyeth



Wind from the Sea



Tree

Jamie Wyeth



John F. Kennedy



Corn Flakes

Examples of current watercolorist from around the world that are painting realism

While there are many landscape and floral painters in watercolor whose paintings hold varying degree of realism, in the interest of time, I am going to conclude this presentation with an overview of those watercolorists, who I aware of, that paint in the highest degree of realism. My apologies to the artists whom I did not include. Perhaps you will contact me so that I can include you next time.

Angus McEwan, Scotland



Shroud of Qingdao 22x40.5 Tea Break – 22x15

Mikhail Starchenko, Meecha, Russia



Can2 50x70cm pakrovkaparking 30x40cm

Giovanni Balzarani, Italy



Empty 2.0 38x56cm Under the Seventh 76x56cm

George Politis, Greece



Found in Agios Pavlos 15x20cm SYMPHONIE 20x25cm

Atanas Marsoureff, Bulgaria



At the End of the Day 76x56cm Nr 52 73x56cm

Zhou Tianya, China



Belief 56x76cm Breakfast Time 112x150cm

Stanislaw Zoladz, Sweden



Strand Kant 56x79.5cm Lotshamn 76x56cm

USA Realists

Matthew Bird



Ploughman's Lunch 22x30 Winter 22x28

Kim Miniciello



A different Perspective 20x20 The Way of the Warrior 32x24

Frank Spino



Fresh Start 15x22 Color Wheels 24x18

David Stickel



Lady of Catalana, Barcelona 30x22 Galleria Versace 30x22

Dean Mitchell



Early Spring, St. Louis 20x30 The Artist Bob Ragland 16x11.5

Laurin McCracken



Still Life with Hand Tied Rug 28x28 Three Magnolias and Silver 20x26



Apples on Foil

I hope that this presentation has been informative. There is much more information available about realism. I have included a list of the major sources I used in researching this paper.

Like all movements in the History of Art, realism is always changing. I hope that you will be watching and enjoying these changes.

Afterword

Let me acknowledge that there are parts of the globe not covered in this brief history. While China, for instance, has a long and storied tradition in watercolor, it does not have a strong history of realism. Their painting style, while based on observation of the real world, is stylized in nature. This is also true in many of the other countries in that hemisphere and particularly the Muslim countries.

This was meant as a general overview of this subject, not a deep dive. I am sure that I have not included every realist painter working today. If you have a favorite realist painter that I did not include, I'd like to hear from you. If you want to share your favorite realist painter with me, here is my email address. Just send me a note and link to where I can find examples of their paintings. Laurinmc@aol.com

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