



Watercolors

Jeanne Emmons

I grew up in Texas, the daughter of a Latin teacher and an English professor. As a teenager I experimented with oil painting and sculpting with clay but never had time to fit an art course into my academic curriculum. I earned a doctorate in English from the University of Texas before moving with my husband to Iowa, where we raised two children. During my long career teaching at Briar Cliff University, I began seriously publishing poetry and gave up my pursuit of the visual arts, devoting myself exclusively to writing.

But my thirst for the visual arts was never quenched, and I continued to linger over artworks in books and museums. On my retirement from academia, I vowed to return to painting and focus on what proved to be a challenging medium: watercolor. Like poetry, my first love, watercolor

painting drew me into an intense absorption with the medium and a close observation of the world. And, as with poetry, I found myself longing to fuse representational imagery with the emotions and ideas within me.

Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins said that when you stare hard enough at nature, it will stare back at you. This is one of the most profound connections for me between writing poetry and painting. I try to capture in my paintings that sacred moment when the world gives in to your gaze and yields up its beauty and meaning. When that happens, you can turn away from your reference image and paint from memory and feeling. I believe my best work arises from painting not a replication of the world, but an idea or impression about the subject, or, as the poet Wordsworth put it, “emotion recollected in tranquility.”

At times I use artificial techniques to blast me out of mere imitation, just as, when writing poetry, I like to play with forms and experiment with language as a way of leading me deeper into the subject. These painting techniques include laying textured materials into wet paint or sprinkling charcoal powder on the paper and then dousing it with water to create a smoky background. The effects of these techniques, along with the accidents that inevitably happen in watercolor painting, are both the challenge and charm of the medium and are in themselves motivation and inspiration.

The dialectic between my need to control vs. yielding to the unpredictability of the medium is always a struggle but this tension remains a source of endless fascination to me. And, when the paint itself is allowed to work its magic, then it is possible to achieve the transparent radiance only watercolor can achieve.



Resurrection



Bison Grazing



Night Garden



Overhang



Night Garden