

WHAT'S NEXT

GOING WITH THE FLOW

A new exhibition celebrates the rise of watercolor from a disparaged craft to a favorite medium of American artists

In the decades prior to the Civil War, professional artists in America tended to look down on working with watercolors—a medium already popular in England, thanks largely to J.M.W. Turner—as a lowly pastime for women, children, and amateurs.

It wasn't until the founding of the American Watercolor Society in 1866 that the fluid and spontaneous expression made possible by easy-to-use water-based pigments found widespread favor. The group's annual exhibitions in New York City drew such talents as Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and John La Farge and helped launch a taste for watercolors among collectors and the public that remains strong today.

"American Watercolor in the Age of Homer and Sargent," at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, assembles more than 150 works representing a stunning variety of styles and formats created between 1860 and 1925—from Impressionist landscapes to the botanical studies of long-forgotten Fidelia Bridges to the intense abstractions of John Marin (March 1–May 14; philamuseum.org).



Pink Cyclamen, c. 1875, a watercolor on paper by Fidelia Bridges.