



The Great Age of British Watercolours: 1750-1880

Andrew Wilton, Anne Lyles

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The revolution in watercolours of the later eighteenth century and its Victorian aftermath is acknowledged to be one of the greatest triumphs of British art. Its effect was to transform the modest tinted drawing of the topographer into a powerful and highly flexible means of expression for some of the Romantic era's greatest artists, among them Thomas Girtin, J.M.W. Turner and John Constable. The painters of the next generation were no less ambitious, and the range of subject-matter and technical inventiveness that was sustained for much of the Victorian period was to set a standard in watercolour painting that was without equal abroad. In this magnificently illustrated survey of the great age of British watercolours, Andrew Wilton and Anne Lyles trace the development of attitudes to landscape and to the human figure in the landscape from 1750 to 1880. They show how once the traditional pen and ink drawing and its augmented washes of colour had been abandoned in order to paint directly in watercolours without pen outlines, the way was open for the powerful Romantic landscapes of the following decade and beyond, many of which were painted in the wild mountainous regions of Wales and Scotland. During the nineteenth century, as the gilt-framed exhibition watercolour began to challenge the long-established oil painting in terms of size and in brilliance of colour and effect, the range of subject-matter was broadened to include scenes of country and town life from every part of Britain and, increasingly, from the Continent too. By mid-century the Near East was attracting many of the greatest Victorian watercolourists, including J. E. Lewis, David Roberts and Edward Lear. Other leading Victorians who regularly worked in watercolour include the Pre-Raphaelite painters John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt, and the American-born James McNeill Whistler, all of whom are included in this book.

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