

Fourth International Watercolor Biennial

Alfredo Guati Rojo*

Making Mexico a world center for disseminating watercolor painting and presenting an overview of the aesthetic concerns of watercolorists from different countries of the world was the aim of the Fourth International Watercolor Biennial, organized by Mexico's National Watercolor Museum. Its success has shown that the museum is not alone in its efforts to renovate this genre, as for the first time it brought together a considerable number of associations of watercolorists from different parts of the world.



Roberto Angulo, Colombia, *Reflections*, 56 X 76 cm.



Jaime Tarín, Spain, *Detail Facade, Sacred Family*, 50 X 70 cm.

In Mexico, the art of watercolor painting was reborn in the second half of the twentieth century, but this has not yet been fully appreciated by either art critics or the cultural media.

The first Watercolorists Salon, convened in 1957 by the Art Institute of Mexico, was the beginning of a kind of movement which brought important changes to this genre of painting. Since

then, this salon has been held every year, bringing together artists who have parented the evolution of contemporary watercolor painting.

The founding of the National Watercolor Museum was also a special event. The first of its kind in the world, it has set itself the tasks of recovering the country's artistic patrimony in this field with works from both the past and the present and creating a space for the watercolorists of the world.

The museum's main commitment since its founding has been to continue to hold the year-

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Victor Tarenko, Russia, *Sleeping Under the Moonlight*, 49 X 69 cm.

ly salon, including prizes and incentives for participants.¹

The first international watercolor exhibition was part of the Cultural Olympics organized at the same time the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games were held, with 50 works from New York's American Watercolor Society (AWS), an exhibition which attracted many visitors. In return, the museum was invited to take the work of Mexican painters to the AWS's annual exhibition in 1970. Another Mexico-U.S. show was held in New York in 1980 and Washing-

ton's Smithsonian Institute sponsored a two-year tour of the show's Mexican paintings in several U.S. cities.

In the interest of establishing relations with groups of watercolor painters in other countries, the museum has hosted exhibitions of paintings from Spain, Italy, Canada, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Japan, Australia, Russia, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, Denmark and Iceland. It has organized four international bienials since 1994. The most recent one, held in 2000, boasted the participation of painters from



Ei Nakamura, Japan, *Child of the Wind*, 75 X 56 cm.

15 countries on four continents, among them South Korea, England, Belgium and Panama.

Since its founding 33 years ago, the museum has been supported by private donations from its founders, Alfredo Guati Rojo Cárdenas and his wife Berta Pietrasanta, who have also served as its directors. This has not been an easy task and, given the lack of official subsidies or funding from other private sources, has required an enormous effort.

The museum's first venue was the Art Institute of Mexico, founded in 1954 for the teaching of visual arts. However, that building was destroyed by the earthquake that hit Mexico City in 1985. Two years later, on April 29, 1987, the museum was reopened at its present venue in Coyoacán, donated by then-President Miguel de la Madrid. The museum's international efforts have received support from the National Council for Culture and the Arts and the Foreign Relations Ministry.

In its 13 years in Coyoacán, the museum's facilities have been constantly renovated. Its approximately 4,000 square meters include both gardens and the house-museum with seven permanent exhibition rooms that cover pre-Hispanic watercolors, with examples of codices and murals; nineteenth-century precursors; contemporary watercolors; and paintings from abroad. The facilities also include an art library, offices, a conservation and restoration laboratory, a museography workshop and a storage area for watercolors not being exhibited.

The museum's collection consists of 300 modern and old works, dating from pre-Hispanic times until today, gathered by its director, a watercolorist himself, for the purpose of leaving this legacy to Mexico.

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL WATERCOLOR BIENNIAL

In 2000, the museum's work culminated with the celebration of the Fourth International Watercolor Biennial and the Forty-Fifth National



Alison Musker, England, *London*, 44 X 61 cm.



Nadia Tognazzo, Italy, *The Glacier*, 72 X 50 cm.



Ana Laura Salazar, Mexico, *Transparencies into the Wind*, 51 X 76 cm.



Diomira Rodríguez V., Venezuela, *Gramp s Odds and Ends*, 56 X 76 cm.



Jaime Galdeano Moreno, Spain, *Vínuesa*, 50 X 70 cm.



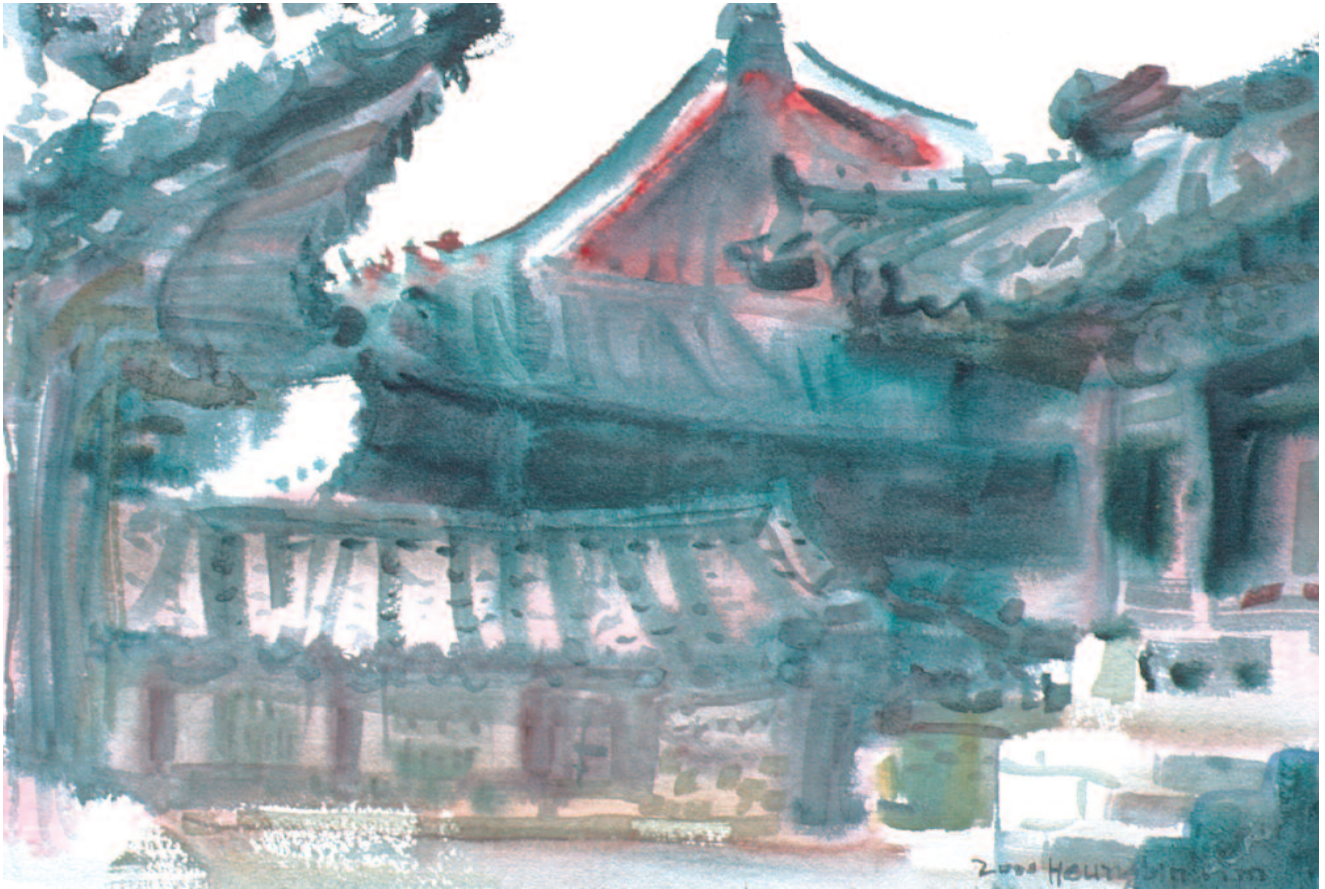
Yeqiang Wang, Canada, *Red Still-Life*, 77 X 54 cm.

Salon. Their success confirmed the validity of making Mexico a world center for disseminating watercolor painting and presenting an overview of the aesthetic concerns of watercolorists from different countries of the world.

The Fourth International Watercolor Biennial has shown that we are not alone in our efforts to renovate this genre of painting. The museum's achievement has been to bring together for the first time a considerable number of associations of watercolorists to make joint efforts in this direction.

When asked, "Why watercolors?" I always answer that our work aim to sow seeds for the future so that talent and genius can reach their potential.

A brief analysis of the 116 watercolors shown in the biennial reveals the painters' passion and interest in moving toward new forms of expressing their aesthetic message. Among the Mexican participants, the change has been total and definitive, revealing that watercolor painting in Mexico has developed greatly in the twentieth cen-



Heungbin Lim, South Korea, *Stillness in Motion*, 58 X 77 cm.

tury. Each of the eight Mexican artists who exhibited has his/her own very individual style and has abandoned both the traditionalism and themes of the nineteenth century.

The achievements can be appreciated by simply looking at the size of the works: they have gone beyond the small format characteristic of works in the past that were mainly intimate and minor paintings. Its different forms of expression reflect the renovation and different contemporary art movements that have advanced while respecting the specificities of watercolor painting. The works of Mexican watercolorists are outstanding for their quality and use of color.

Trophies were given to the 15 participant countries and to ten painters whose work deserved

special mention: Swa Claes from Belgium; Ye-qiang Wang from Canada; Roberto Angulo from Colombia; Heungbin Lim from South Korea; Jaime Tarín and Jaime Galdeano from Spain; Alison Musker from England; Nadia Tognazzo from Italy; Ei Nakamura from Japan; and Frederic Bates from Australia. **NMM**

NOTES

¹ The museum has also held an Annual Amateur Watercolorists Contest to foster and discover new talents; a New Watercolor Salon, which aims to nurture the genre's evolution, enriching its techniques and new expressions; a Children's Watercolor Competition; and collective and individual shows by artists from all over Mexico.