The Art of Seeing

SEVENTH EDITION

Paul Zelanski *Mary Pat Fisher*

black filled-in areas. For lighter gray values, Corot has used parallel lines of hatching. And on the right side of the drawing, he has used the side rather than the point of a pencil to lay down broad areas of graphite, which are then rubbed for an overall gray tone. These value gradations create contrasts that remind us of the continual variations between darks and lights in a deciduous forest. Corot has used a visual shorthand for trees, leaves, stream, and rocks, but gives enough information for us readily to perceive the representational scene.

SILVERPOINT

The advent of the graphite pencil greatly lessened the use of **silverpoint**, which had been popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Silverpoint drawings are made with hard, finely pointed rods of silver in a holder. The paper is first coated with some medium, such as opaque white pigment or rabbitskin glue with bone dust, to prepare a rather abrasive surface that will scrape off and hold minute grains of the metal. The lines made as the silverpoint tool is run across this prepared ground are silver at first but soon oxidize to a darker, duller color with a special light-reflecting quality. Copper, gold, and lead have also been used in the same way. Shadows and textures are usually built up using parallel lines.

CHARCOAL

In contrast to the tight, thin lines produced by silverpoint, **charcoal** is a medium that moves very freely across the paper, depositing broad, soft lines. Charcoal is made of charred wood or vine in sticks of varying width and hardness. The marks it makes are easily smudged. Though this possibility is often exploited by artists in toning an area, charcoal drawings are coated with a fixative when finished to prevent further accidental smudging.

Käthe Kollwitz's uses of charcoal in her *Self-portrait with a Pencil* (**4.6**) demonstrate the great versatility of the medium. She has given a faint tone to the paper

4.6 Käthe Kollwitz, *Self-portrait with a Pencil*, 1933. Charcoal, 18¾ × 24⅞ ins (48 × 63 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Rosenwald Collection.
Charcoal's various possibilities make it an excellent medium for Kollwitz to express the sorrow-molded features of her face as well as the focusing of all the grief of the war years, in which she lost her son, into her creative work.

4.7 Richard Lytle, *Norfolk*, 1976. Charcoal, 22½ × 30 ins (57.1 × 76.2 cm). Collection of the artist.

with a slight deposit of charcoal. The charcoal has also been used sideways with a light touch to create broad strokes across the chest. Laid down this way, the charcoal dust sits on the surface of the paper, allowing the grainy texture of the paper itself to show through. The side of a soft piece of charcoal has been worked into the paper with great strength along the arm, creating lines of a darker value whose boldness bespeaks the creative energy of the artist at work. The tip of the charcoal has been used to create lines describing the artist's features. And Kollwitz has used the tip of a harder, finer piece of charcoal to complete the upper contour of her head.

Because charcoal is such a soft and free medium, the tendency is to use it in a quick way, as Kollwitz has done. The spontaneity of the act of drawing is revealed in this very natural use of the medium. But it is also possible to use charcoal in a tightly controlled manner. Richard Lytle's charcoal study, *Norfolk* (**4.7**), is a rare example of a very refined charcoal drawing in which the paper is left totally white in places. Whereas many charcoal drawings use only a range of mid-values, Lytle creates very rich blacks whose juxtaposition with true white makes them sing. He comments:

> Most people use charcoal since it is a very forgiving medium. You can rub it off, in contrast to the immutability of ink. But I use charcoal with a mentality that was evolved through my work with ink. The imagery in this piece is slow in revealing itself, suggesting a bit of mystery, with the dark areas worked densely to a pure velvet black and the floating white areas developing volumes.[2]

robes for Jesus and Mary. The red lake was unstable, so after some time only the blue hue was left. Similarly, in the late fifteenth century, verdigris (a natural green pigment made from copper or brass) was commonly mixed with resins. The resins have unfortunately turned the paint black as they decomposed, changing what was probably green foliage in Italian landscape paintings into dull areas of dark brown or black.

WATERCOLOR

An extremely fluid and transparent medium—**watercolor**—is created when pigments are bound with a water-soluble binder such as gum, thinned with varying amounts of water, and applied to paper. The white of the paper is usually allowed to shine through the thinned pigment in some areas. Whereas the white usually appears as the background against which images have been worked, Richard Lytle brings the white into the foreground as the color of flower petals in his *Spring Thaw on Goose Pond* (**5.20**). Note how well watercolor adapts itself to portraying the transparency of water and sky here, with one tone blurring into another.

Although watercolor can be applied with a "dry brush" it is generally a very runny medium, so hard to control that Lytle's tight rendering is exceptional. Watercolor cannot be extensively corrected and reworked like oil paint, so the artist is committed to each stroke, which must be made quickly, before the paper dries. This necessity becomes a virtue in the hands of artists such as Turner, whose *Looking out to Sea: A Whale Aground* (**5.21**) uses the medium's liquid freedom of gesture and transparent airiness to the fullest. The heaviness of the whale is barely suggested by the shadowed area in this powerful and free abstraction.

A more traditional approach to watercolor is exemplified by Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream* (**5.22**).

5.20 Richard Lytle, *Spring Thaw on Goose Pond*, 1986. Watercolor, 30 × 41½ ins (76.2 × 105.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist.