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Barse Miller, *Balboa Inlet*, 1942, transparent and opaque watercolor and charcoal on very heavy wove [Arches] paper. Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.7

CHECKLIST

Frank Tolles Chamberlin, American, 1873–1961

Palm Springs, 1942

Transparent watercolor over graphite indications on laid paper
Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.2

Emil Kosa Jr., American, 1903–1968

Skyline Pattern, 1959

Transparent watercolor over charcoal indications on very heavy wove [Arches] paper
Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.6

Barse Miller, American, 1904–1973

Balboa Inlet, 1942

Transparent and opaque watercolor and charcoal on very heavy wove [Arches] paper
Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.7

Millard Sheets, American, 1907–1989

Near Riverside, 1930

Transparent watercolor over graphite indications on very heavy wove paper
Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.13

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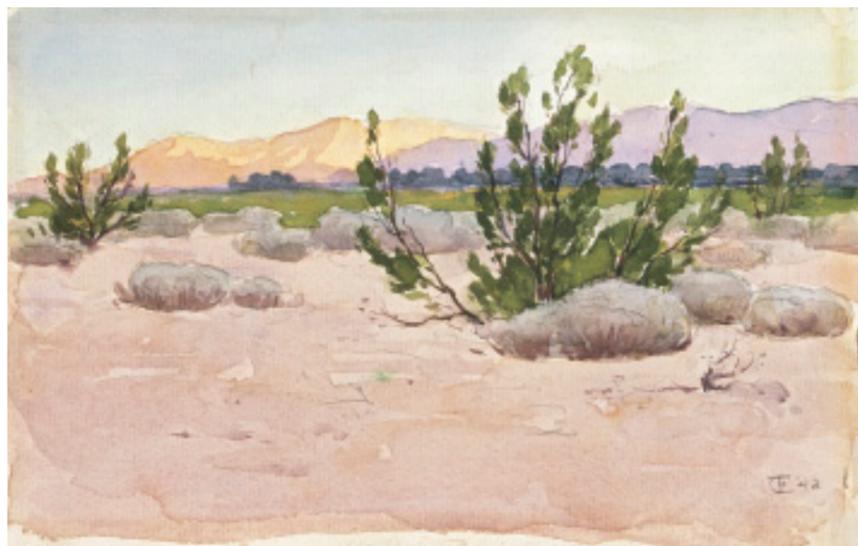
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Miller Sheets. *Near Riverside* (detail), 1930, transparent watercolor over graphite indications on heavy wove paper. Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.13.

WATERCOLOR WASHES AND THE LURE OF THE SUN

The Climate and Demographics Informing the California Watercolor Movement



Frank Tolles Chamberlin, *Palm Springs*, 1942, transparent watercolor over graphite indications on laid paper. Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.2.

The Golden State. Eureka, I have found it! The Eldorado State. The Land of Milk and Honey. California Dreamin'. The persistent taglines associated with sunny California derive from the state's mild climate, varied topography, and abundant natural resources—all of which fostered California's early reputation as (and development into) a place associated with prosperity and promise. From the 1930s to the 1960s, a group of watercolorists based in Southern California responded to the region's distinctive environment by creating primarily large, colorful watercolors of the local scene, painted on the spot outdoors. These generally upbeat, optimistic images celebrated the Edenic California landscape, despite the dramatic demographic and economic forces that were already altering both the physical characteristics and social mosaic there.

Each of the watercolors in this exhibition depicts different aspects of Southern California's topography and social geography. All of the works depict scenes located within 150 miles of each other. Despite having been created in neighboring counties, the watercolors represent extensive variations in the landscape. As an example, microclimatology helps to explain the contrasting appearance of two of the watercolors, *Balboa Inlet* and *Palm Springs*. The temperature variance between the cool coast and warmer inland areas, a distance

of about one hundred miles, averages 18°F, explaining the dry, desert-like conditions we see in *Palm Springs* in relation to the rich, seaside conditions of *Balboa Inlet*.

Sometimes, the works contain evidence of how humans interacted with the geography of Southern California over time as well. Despite the varied subjects and topographies portrayed, each of the watercolors featured here celebrates distinctive features of this area in a manner consistent with the regionalist movement of this period, which reacted against a perceived homogenization of regional social distinctions. In focusing on the unique qualities of these specific regions, the art captured the rural scenes, free from any anxiety about rapidly developing technological advances and changes. Millard Sheets, the renowned pioneer of the California Watercolor School, conveyed his affinity for the land (as well as horses) through painted acts of homage to the pastoral lifestyle that contrasted so dramatically with the suburbanization of Riverside and elsewhere. In 1930, when Sheets created *Near Riverside*, the wild horse population had already declined as the human population was expanding. Although some herds yet remained, these horses were being systematically captured and slaughtered, primarily for the production of animal feed (MacAdam, 60; cat. 1, n. 5). Sheets does not reference this troubling reality directly in his imagery but instead uses the watercolor medium to capture (and honor) Riverside County's last remaining open hill country.

Barse Miller's work depicts a different kind of idyll, one more aligned with the overall human impact upon this particular kind of countryside. Bordering Los Angeles to the north and Riverside County to the east, Orange County had its own micro-economic climate, one reflected by its temperately warm Mediterranean breezes and resistance to the worst societal effects of the Great Depression. Miller's paradise-like *Balboa Inlet* (with its palm trees, sailboats, and deep blue water) celebrates this picturesque, wealthy yachting center and tourist mecca in the vicinity of Newport Beach. The vibrant, upbeat scene challenges the prevailing notion of an absolutely comprehensive economic slump as a result of the Depression, but one should be aware of the region's unique physical make-up before drawing too many conclusions about its apparent economic invincibility. The Newport Beach area is comprised of three artificial islands, which, prior to the 1930s, were connected only by family-owned ferry operations. With no bridges to help exploit it, then, Newport Beach was able to remain a very quaint and charming place that primarily accommodated the vacationing needs of residents of Los Angeles. Though the coastline of Balboa Inlet may no longer look like Miller's watercolor, it has developed into an area of concentrated wealth and continues to satisfy, if in a different way, California's popular association with beauty, opportunism, and prosperity.

Moving inland into Riverside County, Frank Tolles Chamberlin, in the same year of 1942, painted a representation of a physical landscape that was about to undergo equally momentous demographic shifts in the name of California's success story. This scruffy, flat desert on the outskirts of Palm Springs, and the regressing, nuanced green hills in the background, would soon be overtaken by entertainment industry executives and stars, and a host of ordi-

nary vacationers, all drawn by the area's hot, dry climate. Chamberlin seems to deny the possibility, however, including no evidence of development in his serene composition, with its orange hills and pale blue sky. Eighty years later, of course, the California dream has littered this landscape with (at last count) 125 golf courses and 100 lodging amenities in a 95-square-mile area, of which exactly nine-tenths of a square mile is water.

As the city of Los Angeles spilled over into these neighboring locations, artists turned to its unique vistas as well. Emil Kosa Jr.'s *Skyline Patterns*, though painted in 1959—almost twenty years later than the other watercolors—presents the results of the development processes that were underway in the 1930s, and that resulted in the city's massive, now notorious, freeway system. Despite Kosa's inclusion of the freeways, high-rise buildings, and suburban explosion of dwellings, this urban scene—like the earlier watercolors—is “bathed in sunlight”—one of California's most renowned features (MacAdam, 58). Instead of avoiding the city's physical and demographic changes in his work, Kosa boldly embraces them, presenting a unified composition through a harmonious palette of purple and blue washes that become more diffuse toward the distant skyline. He even includes people in this cityscape. In contrast to the more bucolic landscapes by Miller, Sheets, and Chamberlin, Kosa manages to suggest the beauty and opportunity associated with the state through the works of its human population.

Though the objects in this installation appear to work in counterpoint rather than harmony, given their varied subject matter and artistic styles, all of them celebrate aspects of California's cultural and physical climate. Qualities such as we see in these images played a key role in the state's founding, its historical development, and, of course, its continuing fascination in the popular imagination.

Hannah Jeton '12,
The Kathryn Conroy Intern

Emil Kosa Jr., American, *Skyline Pattern*, 1959, transparent watercolor over charcoal indications on very heavy wove [Arches] paper. Partial and promised gift of Philip H. Greene, in memory of his wife and co-collector, Marjorie B. Greene; EL.2007.6.6

