

A METHOD OF GOUACHE PAINTING

by

Bessie Lourdes Mulholland

B.A., University of Iowa, 1925



378.788B

M8993m

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of the University of Colorado in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts.

Department of Fine Arts

1943

	Page
This Thesis for the M.F.A. degree, by	2
Bessie Lourdes Mulholland	4
has been approved for the	7
Department of	9
Fine Arts	12
by	14
A. Value Studies	16
B. The Color Sketch	17
C. The Cartoon	19
D. The Printing	20
The Conclusion	21
Bibliography	

F. C. Truckess

James M. Bayle

Date August 10, 1943

# Mulholland, Jessie (U.S. in Art Education)

## Table of Contents

### A Method of Gouache Painting.

	Page
Introduction	2
Gouache as a Medium	4
The Approach	7
The Materials	9
The Composition	12
A. Value Studies	14
B. The Color Sketch	16
C. The Cartoon	17
D. The Painting	19
The Conclusion	20
Bibliography	21

A gum arabic solution was the vehicle or binding medium employed. A formula for its preparation is given, the brushes, palette, pigments and paper are described.

The preliminary steps preceding the execution of the pictures in their ultimate form included mental prepara-

Subjects including landscape, genre, still life and flowers were chosen because of their personal and sensuous appeal.



Mulholland, Bessie Lourdes (M.F.A. in Art Education)

A Method of Gouache Painting.

This thesis is a demonstration of gouache painting. It takes the form of a group of eight pictures averaging about three hundred and twenty square inches, executed in this technique, and a written supplement containing approximately fifteen hundred words describing the method employed. Included with the written part are photographs of the paintings.

The characteristics of the medium, its colorful luminosity and its adaptability to spontaneous execution, are given as the chief reasons for its selection as the medium used in the work.

A gum arabic solution was the vehicle or binding medium employed. A formula for its preparation is given, the brushes, palette, pigments and paper are described.

The preliminary steps preceding the execution of the pictures in their ultimate form included mental preparation, sketches, studies in color and values, and a cartoon.

Subjects including landscape, genre, still life and flowers were chosen because of their personal and sensuous appeal.



This abstract of about one hundred and twenty words is approved as to form and content. I recommend its publication.

Signed F. C. Truckess  
Instructor in charge of dissertation



## Introduction

This paper is supplementary to a group of gouache paintings, submitted as the creative thesis required for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Art Education.

The titles of these pictures are as follows:

1. Mine Shaft, Georgetown ✓
2. Asleep in Church ✓
3. Apple Blossoms ✓
4. Twigs ✓
5. Central City ✓
6. Little Italy, Pittsburgh ✓
7. Shadowed Lane ✓
8. Roof Tops at Ward ✓

The term gouache refers to a method of painting little understood by those who do not practice it. There are many and varied possibilities in it, not found in other media. The charms of gouache determined its use in the group of paintings offered in this thesis.

The attractions were found to include spontaneity and a lively color quality involving an airy delicacy, a luminosity, and a particularly solid appearance. Painters who are accustomed to the use of gouache find a facility in it which greatly adds to its appeal.

The characteristic facile spontaneity of gouache, required that the work be executed quickly, directly, without much time devoted to deliberation and planning. It is a medium adapted to improvisation. Thus several



pictures can be made in the time required for one thoroughly studied oil or tempera painting. For this reason it was thought suitable that the thesis should consist of a group of several pieces, rather than the customary single one.

Superficially, tempera and gouache may appear similar, but tempera<sup>2</sup> is a medium employing an emulsion as a vehicle, while the binding medium of gouache may be one of several kinds of gum, in a water solution. Gum arabic was used in this instance.

The formula employed in the preparation of the paint was as follows:

1/4 lb. gum arabic. (Powdered, or in lump.)

Dissolve in hot water. When cold strain through cheese cloth. Makes a pint of solution.

13 tsp. honey.

Add to gum water. The honey makes the solution flexible when dry. Test by placing a drop of the solution on non-absorbent paper and allow to dry. If the drop is hard, but flexible, when dry there is enough honey. If it is sticky after

<sup>1</sup>Ralph Mayer, The Artists' Handbook of Materials and Techniques (New York: Viking Press, 1940), 245-246.

<sup>2</sup>Hilarie Hiler, Notes on the Techniques of Painting (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934), 219, 231.

## Gouache as a Medium

Gouache is opaque water color. It is distinguished from aquarelle,<sup>1</sup> transparent water color, in that gouache is opaque and the colors hide the ground over which they are applied.

Superficially, tempera and gouache may appear similar, but tempera<sup>2</sup> is a medium employing an emulsion as a vehicle, while the binding medium of gouache may be one of several kinds of gum, in a water solution. Gum arabic was used in this instance.

The formula employed in the preparation of the paint was as follows:

1/4 lb. gum arabic. (Powdered, or in lump.)

Dissolve in hot water. When cold strain through cheese cloth. Makes a pint of solution.

13 tsp. honey.

Add to gum water. The honey makes the solution flexible when dry. Test by placing a drop of the solution on non-absorbent paper and allow to dry. If the drop is hard, but flexible, when dry there is enough honey. If it is sticky after

---

<sup>1</sup>Ralph Mayer, The Artists' Handbook of Materials and Techniques (New York: Viking Press, 1940), 245-248.

<sup>2</sup>Hilarie Hiler, Notes on the Technique of Painting (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934), 219, 231.

drying an hour, there is too much honey.

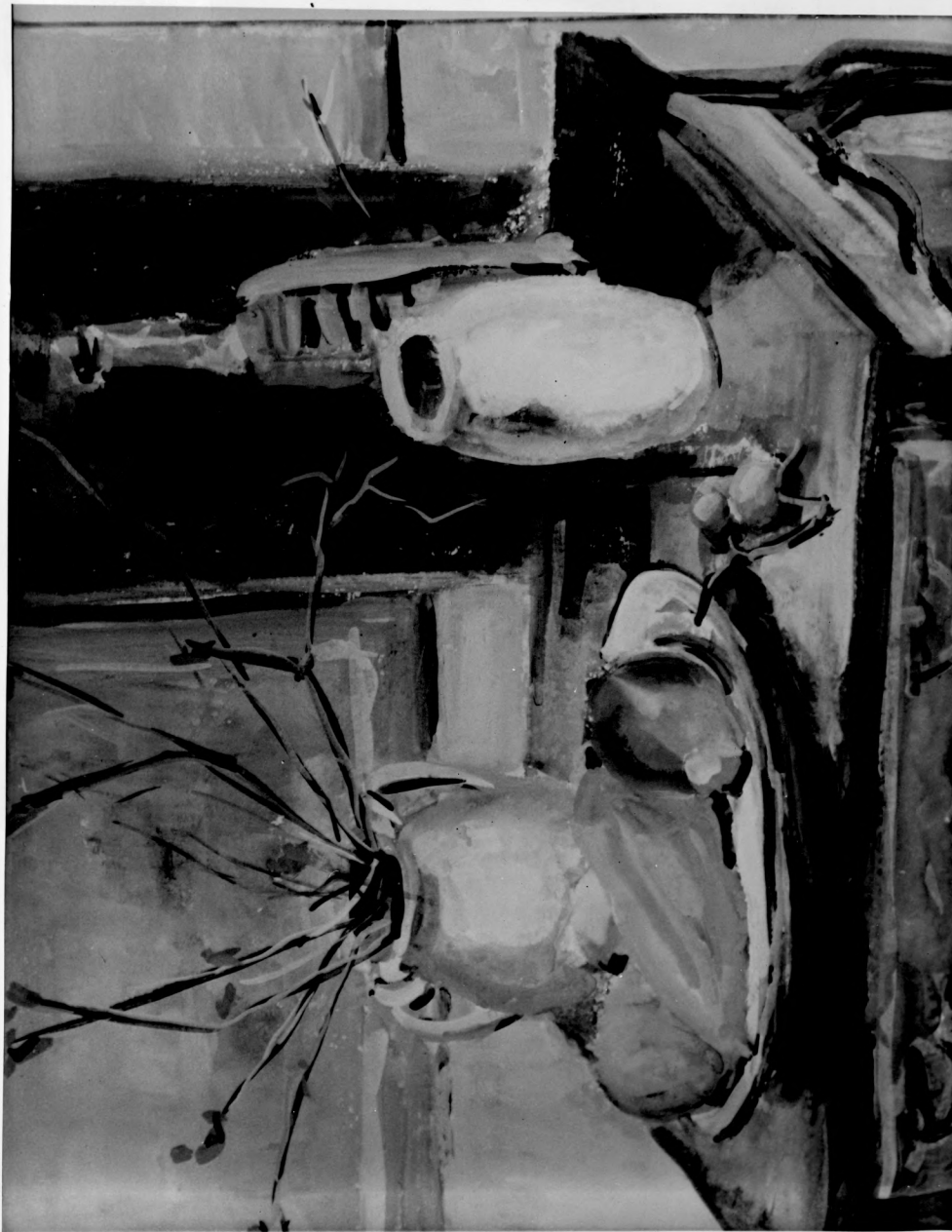
1 oz. bitter almond oil (or synthetic bitter  
almond oil)

1/16 tsp. benzoate of sodium

Add a few drops of carbolic acid or formal-  
dehyde to preserve solution.

Grind, or mix color with the solution and put  
in jars.





or included in the  
TWIGS  
attendant circumstances.  
notes facts, ensure

## The Approach

An attitude was taken during the production of the paintings, which although it was rather personal, had a bearing on the choice of medium and the method employed. Painting, when completely sincere, reflects the personality of the artist. This attitude is briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.

The temperament of the artist, together with the clarity of his notes, and the vividness of his mental impressions carried from the scene, will largely determine his approach to his work. The urge to create will generally result from, and in proportion to, the intensity with which the painter feels his subject. It may be added, the quality of his work is likely to be in proportion to that intensity.

Drawing must be mastered. A good line drawing may be the root of a successful painting. Before sketching, one should study and absorb the significance of the mise en scene and the character of the objects which comprise it; then in great detail and tentatively begin to work. Thorough preparation beforehand makes for freedom and vitality later.

The use of a lead pencil makes possible a drawing in great detail; detail which can be eliminated from, or included in the completed picture, depending on attendant circumstances. A good preliminary drawing notes facts, ensures accuracy, and lays the foundation

for a good painting.

It is well to make several sketches of various aspects of the subject, in order to encompass the transient moods, resulting from diverse times of day and effects of sunlight. These sketches should include simultaneous attempts at composition. Various possible arrangements may be experimented with in these studies. One first orders the placing of the most important motif, then the subordinate objects can be arranged with little difficulty.

The colors were mixed on a simple oval palette, measuring twelve inches on its long diameter and eight inches along the short. Around the edge of the palette were circular indentations to hold the colors. The center space was plain and flat to facilitate mixing. The upper surface of this metal palette was coated with white enamel.

Rather large flat hog bristles brushes, ranging from one-half to two inches in width. In addition to these brushes, a small water brush was found useful for detail. The brushes were especially cleaned after every painting period by washing in soap and water, and rinsing in clear water. Only by such cleaning could they be kept in usable condition.

As much attention was given to the selection of paper as to the choice of colors. For the purpose of a painting is as dependent of the quality of the support, as it



## The Materials

In order to aid in avoiding confusion and inconsistencies in color schemes, and to simplify the work, the number of colors used was restricted to include only the most essential pigments, as the following list will show.

Lemon Yellow	Alizarin Crimson
Yellow Ochre	Vermillion
Veredian Green	Indian Red
Cobalt Blue	Burnt Umber
Ultramarine Blue	Zinc White
Mars Violet	Ivory Black

The colors were mixed on a simple oval palette, measuring twelve inches on its long diameter and eight inches along the short. Around the edge of the palette were circular indentations to hold the colors. The center space was plain and flat to facilitate mixing. The upper surface of this metal palette was coated with white enamel.

Rather large flat hog bristle brushes were used, ranging from one-half to two inches in width. In addition to these brushes, a small sable brush was found useful for detail. The brushes were carefully cleaned after every painting period by washing in soap and water, and rinsing in clear water. Only by such cleanliness could they be kept in usable condition.

As much attention was given to the selection of paper as to the choice of colors, for the permanence of a painting is as dependent of the quality of its support, as it

is on the nature of the pigments used. Experimentation showed that heavy smooth papers were to be preferred to flimsy and rough kinds.

Colored papers permit interesting effects. Areas may be left uncovered by paint, thus exposing the color of the paper, also thin watery coats of paint allow the color of the paper to modify the color coat by striking through. These effects were freely used in the paintings included in this project. .

The papers used were a heavy white American paper and some imported French colored varieties.

## The Composition



CENTRAL CITY



MINE SHAFT, GEORGETOWN



## elements of a picture The Composition

Studies in dark and light values, and other studies in color arrangement, in addition to the detailed sketches and drawings of forms, preceded the execution of each painting. The final preparation for a painting was a cartoon, a drawing which summed up the data of the studies and served as a guide during the progress of the paintings. By thus simplifying the subject matter, many difficulties were avoided, and the clarity and the strength of the designs were improved.

Another important controlling influence in the planning of the picture was an effort to organize deep space, as well as the two-dimensional divisions of the picture areas. It was felt desirable to give each object enough space in which to exist and to order the inter-relationship between, and among objects, and their surrounding space. This was thought necessary, in order to produce a sense of fullness and solidity of pictorial reality in the compositions. To avoid monotonous proportions, and to bring about interesting relationships, the division of the surface areas of the picture plane was also considered.

It was believed also that a degree of coherence would be achieved through repetition. Certain colors, forms, and line motives, taken as themes, were repeated with variations throughout a composition. This repetition of a motive, or motives, appeared to unify and hold the

elements of a picture together.

Studies in dark and light values, and other studies in color arrangement, in addition to the detailed sketches and drawings of forms, preceded the execution of each painting. The final preparation for a painting was a cartoon, a drawing which summed up the data of the studies and served as a guide during the progress of the paintings.

Always, however, before any physical work was begun, some time was spent in mental appraisal of the chosen subject, in order to fill the mind with its significant aspects, and to allow these to penetrate the emotions.

Subjects were selected which had a personal appeal, that presented aspects, and combinations of form and color, capable of setting in motion the impulses to creation. Such subjects were found to consist of scenes containing human interest, a background of moral dignity containing the suggestion of former sufficiency, but in a state of present desuetude, houses and soil, where men have lived and struggled and lost. Such subjects, also, containing purely the sensuous attraction of color and form, made a strong appeal.

### A. Value Studies

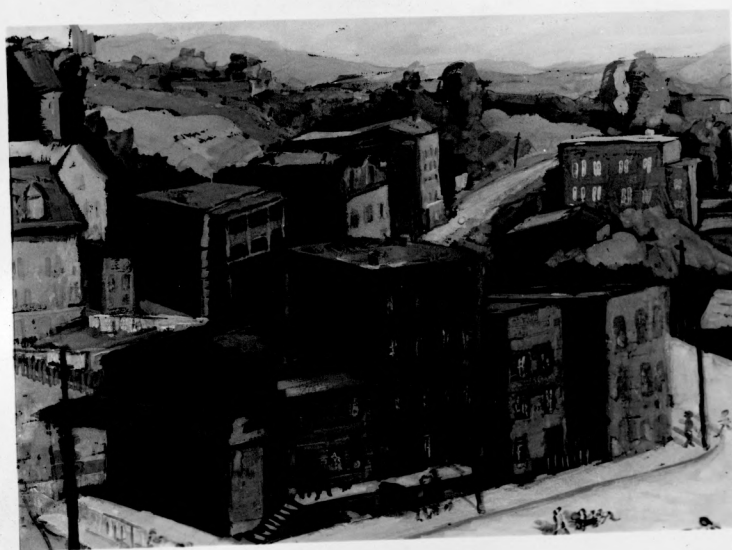
An attitude of thorough investigation was applied to the preparation of studies, and much thought was given to the design of each. The various facets of line, form, mass, movement, tone, texture, and color, were all considered in relation to each and to the whole. To assure a striking dark and light pattern, a preliminary sketch of each subject was executed in a monochromatic scheme. In this way, any uncertainty concerning the total value pattern was eliminated before attacking color.

These value studies were put together in the following manner. First, the main lines of a composition were sketched, indicating the principal masses. Through experimentation, a satisfactory ordering of these main lines was obtained. Then, the areas of dark value were filled in, and after these were found to be correct, the light tones were introduced. Lastly, the middle tones were set in and manipulated until they appeared in the places, and proportions, that would give the sense of completeness which they were expected to produce.





MINE AT WARD



LITTLE ITALY, PITTSBURGH

## B. The Color Sketch

Color organization was the next consideration in preparation for these pictures. In order to achieve a convincing color balance, a rough color sketch was painted, and from this a clearer visualization of the projected whole was obtained.

These color sketches were set down directly from nature, since working thus makes it possible to gain effects that are difficult to achieve indoors without direct recourse to such natural stimulus. If the mood and moment seem propitious the painting may be completed on the spot, for in this way the artist may grasp the passing spirit of the moment and set it down immediately. However, if the artist is not in the right mood, or circumstances are not favorable, he may make notes of color values and forms to be carried back to the studio where the picture may be executed leisurely from such data.

Colors of nature may need modification to enhance and improve the picture. A good balance of color was sought, but a predominating color was allowed to run through the composition, and all colors that did not appear to conform to the total effect were removed. Also, the possibility of achieving an effective result by means of restraint and subtlety in color, as well as through the use of contrasting color, was borne in mind.

### C. The Cartoon

The results of these studies were, at this point, incorporated in the cartoon. This was a line drawing made to the full scale of the proposed painting. By tracing, the cartoon was transferred to the selected paper and all was then ready for painting the picture.





APPLE BLOSSOMS



ASLEEP IN CHURCH