

Romance Maker: The Watercolors of Charles Russell

ABSTRACT

Analyses of Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) watercolor artists' materials and techniques were undertaken using magnification, polarizing light microscopy (PLM), X-Ray Fluorescence (Tracer III XRF), Infrared Photography (IR) and ultra violet (UV) radiation. Russell's pigments are identified, as well as shifts in his technique over the course of his career. A largely self taught, prolific artist Russell starts out with a crude talent that develops quickly. He abandons cowboy life and begins painting fulltime in 1893. He master's transparent watercolor in the 1890's peaking around 1898. His technique takes a major turn after a 1903/4 visit to New York City where he comes into contact with other professional artists—their work greatly affects his approach. After this visit he starts to work predominately in opaque watercolor. By the time of his death in 1926 he is one of the great American watercolorists. Pigment samples were collected from Russell's studio materials housed at the CM Russell Museum, the Britzman collection at the Gilcrease Museum and a paint tin belonging to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. The Russell paint samples were compared to known historic paints to confirm and identify marked and unmarked paint pans within Russell's studio materials. In addition, focus is given to the wide variety of high quality artists' materials available on the Montana frontier in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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