



Sketchbook

Date
c. 1940

Primary Maker
William C. Palmer

Medium
Ink, wash, and graphite on paper

Description
The American Regionalist artist Thomas Hart Benton inspired William C. Palmer, H1975, a student of Benton’s at the Art Students League in New York City, to take up mural painting and,

in 1926, invited Palmer to assist him in installing his first exhibition of murals at the Ferargil Gallery in New York. Palmer subsequently studied fresco painting at the École des Beaux-Arts in Fontainebleau with a former assistant of the famed nineteenth-century muralist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. During the Great Depression, he was hired by the government-sponsored Works Progress Administration Federal Arts Project (WPA/FAP) and the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration to paint murals in civic spaces, including at the Queens General Hospital in Jamaica, New York; the Post Office Department Building in Washington, DC; and post offices in Arlington, Massachusetts, and Monticello, Iowa. In 1939, Palmer was named supervisor of the Mural Department for the New York City branch of the WPA/FAP. The artist moved to Utica, New York, in 1941, when he was appointed the founding director of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute School of Art, a position he held for thirty years. The appointment also included part-time status as the first instructor of studio art at Hamilton College, a position he maintained until 1948. During his years in central New York, his style became more abstracted and landscape-oriented. Palmer acknowledged the British nineteenth-century painters J. M. W. Turner, John Constable, and Samuel Palmer as influences, citing their shared interest in nature and in the changing of the seasons. Daily, throughout his life, Palmer made drawings—or “notes,” as he called them—in sketchbooks, to which he would turn if he needed inspiration for a painting. In 2009, a group of more than one thousand sketches, paintings, and sketchbooks were transferred to the Emerson Gallery from the Special Collections at Burke Library, where the accompanying William C. Palmer Papers are still held. Shown here and on the following spread are pages from a selection of sketchbooks that represent the span of Palmer’s career: one from his days as a student at the Art Students League; one from Canada, where he lived with his sister in 1930 and continued to visit throughout his life; one created around the time he moved to the Mohawk Valley; and one created later in life, when his style had become more abstract. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) Brown Spiral Art Craft sketchbook with landscapes, text

Dimensions
Overall: 5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.8 cm) Sheet (each): 5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.8 cm)