



Sonya Terpening was fortunate to have two wonderful role models when she was growing up in Oklahoma. "My grandfather drew cityscapes for me, and my dad, who painted as a hobby, took my first painting class with me when I was about 12," she says.

Terpening, who now lives in Texas, earned a degree in art education from Oklahoma State University in the mid-70s, but quickly discovered she didn't have the patience to be a teacher. Turning to fine art, she studied with members of the National Academy of Western Artists (NAWA) at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Asked why she turned to watercolors, Terpening responds, "Because I'm a masochist!" Actually, she adds, she wasn't too excited about the medium, but in order to earn her degree she was required to take two watercolor courses.

"I made mud with it for a year or so," Terpening says. "The pigments will bleed together so fast it will be gray, like mud. Now I do a combination of dry and wet. It's challenging to keep it fresh and interesting and still be in control of the medium so that it's saying what I want it to say and keeping the integrity of watercolors. You have to be on top of your game, know what you want to say and how you want to say it. Watercolor is a living, breathing medium."

Working exclusively in transpar-



*A Time to Talk, watercolor, 34" by 26"*

*"I, like most Americans, come from pioneers who settled the West. It is their story that I am trying to tell in paint. There was so much work to be done just to survive in the frontier that personal time was at a premium. Here a mother and her young daughter share some quality moments together, even while they prepare a meal."*

ent watercolors, Terpening says she enjoys the medium's fluency. "I don't really mix a lot of colors," she says. "I let it bleed together or I layer it like different colored scarves lying on top of each other. The values in watercolors are so dependent on the humidity and the weather, because it will be three times lighter when it dries. The longer it takes to dry, the more it will go into the paper and become lighter. You really have to know your paints and your paper. You have to be a technician more in watercolors than in oils. Oils just sit there, they don't move. Watercolors will drip and bleed."

Even though watercolors present unique challenges, Terpening clearly



*Waiting on the Stage, watercolor, 37" by 27"*

*"Using transparent washes of watercolor, I wanted to convey the rough texture of the wood, the worn clothes of the cowboys, and the dusty, sun-drenched setting of Main Street. No less important was the feeling of camaraderie on the weathered faces of the cowboys."*

loves the medium. "You get a light and luminosity you can't get with oils," she says. "The light goes through those transparencies, hits the white [of the paper], and bounces back up. It's an artist's medium; artists know how hard it is. There's a myth that watercolor isn't permanent, but we have [water-

color] paintings from 3 B.C. Any painting in direct sunlight will fade, even oils. A watercolor painting doesn't crack or need re-stretching, and you can get nice glass that won't glare. There also are some solvents you can use so it doesn't need to be under glass. Watercolors are kind of an American medium.

Thomas Moran took watercolors with him when he painted Yellowstone, and the early train posters were done in watercolor and got people to go west. Watercolor should not take a back seat."

Terpening paints in oils, as well, and focuses on figures. "Generally, I'm probably painting the softer side of the West," she says. "I'm a painter, not a woman painter, but as a woman I probably see things a little differently. The West was explored by the cowboys, but it wasn't settled until the women and children came."

*Wash Day, watercolor, 18" by 16"*

*"The challenge of this painting was to create the illusion of a white wall and white laundry on white paper. The only white in the painting is the white of the paper. All folds, shadows, and textures are created with color.*

*By using complementary colors, I fool the eye into seeing the white wall and laundry. This is one of my portraits without people, as you are well aware of the people who have just stepped away."*

