

drawing rooms

BY AMY SPIEZIO

AN ENGLISH WATERCOLORIST FINDS A NEW MUSE IN THE PUBLIC
AND PRIVATE SPACES OF NEW YORK CITY



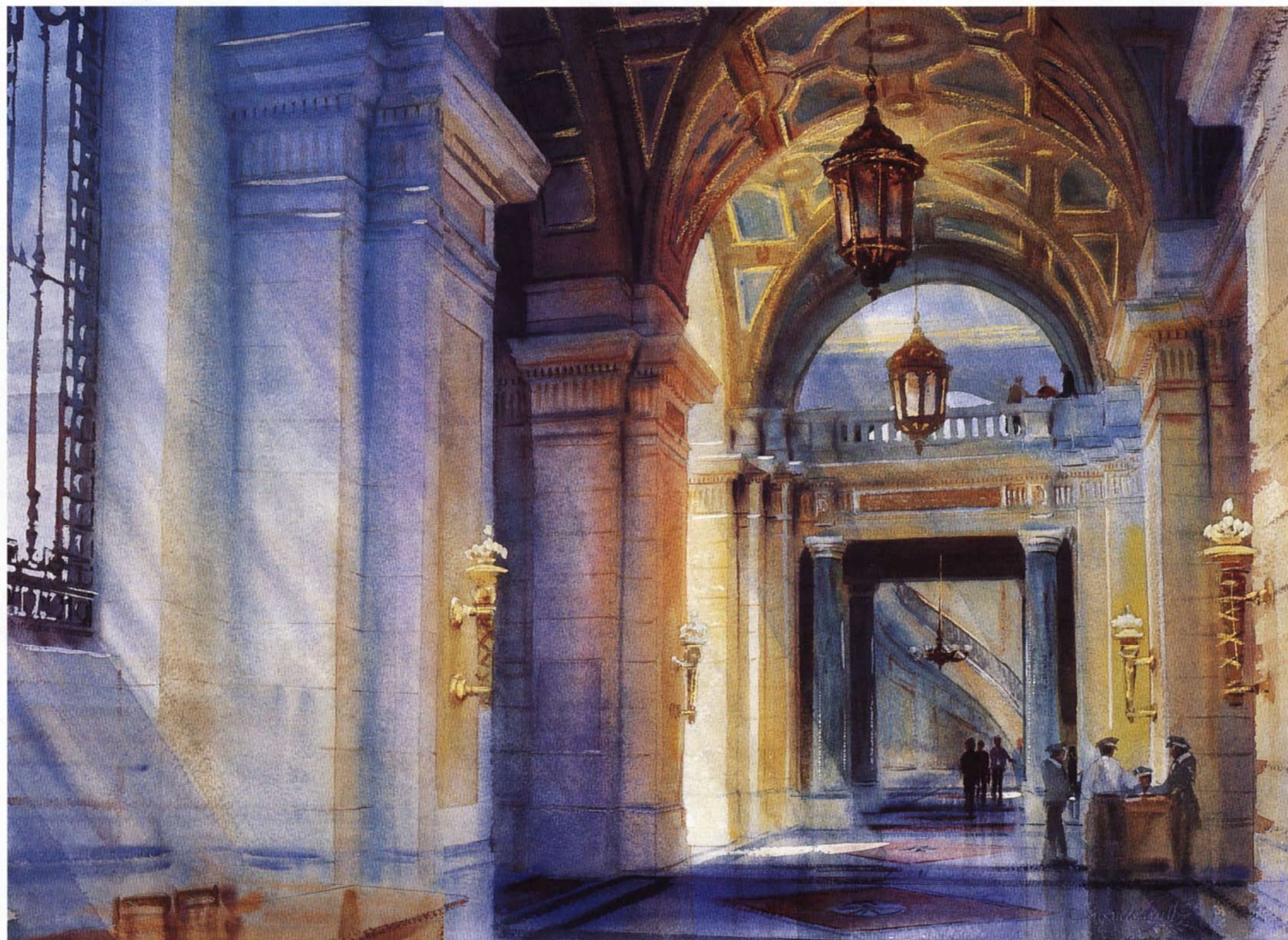
Although English watercolorist Alexander Creswell has traveled within the United States painting or teaching art and architecture periodically for more than a decade, the first showing of his work here occurred just this year. Held at Hirschl & Adler Galleries in New York, "Alexander Creswell: Reflections of New York 2001" featured watercolors depicting the spirit of one of the world's great cities through interior renderings. "You see New York, it's like an oyster: rough and functional on the outside, yet with incredible inner spaces," he says.



In the coming year, Creswell expects to continue his work in the United States, heading south to Washington, D.C.; Mount Vernon, Virginia; Charleston, South Carolina; and Savannah, Georgia. The artist says he looks forward to exploring the nation and the variety of architectural styles that make up the landscape. "There's a huge spectrum for architecture. We are not unique in Europe in having an old style and architectural quality," he observes.

Creswell has found considerable success in watercolors, but the medium was unfashionable in the 1970s when he was a student. In England's art education system, postmodernism ruled and technical training was ignored in favor of creative self-expression. "I happen to believe it's the other way around—you need skills to exercise whatever creativity. It's a fairly good traditionalist point of view," he says.

Inspired by masters such as John Singer Sargent, Edward Lear, David Roberts, and Joshua Reynolds, Creswell focused on watercolors and has mastered the art of interior renderings. The choice satisfied his artistic drive and experience as a student of art history and architecture.



PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Office of a Magazine Proprietor* features the ultimate in business success: empty in- and out-boxes. LEFT: This rendering of the Frick Collection's Fragonard Room demonstrates the artist's ability to imagine light for a closed-in room. ABOVE: The Astor Hall in New York Public Library shows a perspective wider than the human eye. SEE RESOURCES, PAGE 121

LIGHT FLOODS DARKENED CORRIDORS AND PERSPECTIVE EXPANDS TO REVEAL HIDDEN CORNERS, CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF THE SPACE



CRESWELL'S WORK HAS A TIMELESS QUALITY: THE PICTURES ARE HISTORIC, CONTEMPORARY, AND PERHAPS A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

ABOVE: In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Creswell observed that one could see the architecture of the world and never leave the building. This Frank Lloyd Wright room is the only exhibit room that features natural light. RIGHT: When first arriving in New York, the artist headed to the city's museums. Visitors to the Metropolitan, impressed with the artist's ability to render details such as the scenic wallpaper and classic furnishings of the Richmond Room, invited him to render their home interiors.

"Watercolor is the medium I get on with—it answers all the questions for me," Creswell says.

Having settled on his method, Creswell joined the generations of professional watercolorists who have toiled to gain a rightful portion of the art world's prestige. Often thought of as a hobby for wealthy young women, travelers, and old ladies, the artist fought against preconceived notions, believing that he could find a buying market for watercolors. Quitting his job as an art framer, Creswell rented space above a London pub for a showing in the early 1980s and discovered that his artistic intuition



was on the money: The paintings found a ready audience. "It turns out that I was correct—people came rushing in and bought them all," he says.

The artist truly found popular acceptance when a prince came along to support his work: HRH Charles, the Prince of Wales. A gifted amateur painter, the regent had published a book of his own works, *HRH the Prince of Wales Watercolours*, in 1991. Predisposed toward the medium, the Prince commissioned Creswell to record the restoration of Windsor Castle, damaged in a devastating fire in 1992. His work was published and became a permanent part of one of England's most prestigious collections of artwork: The Royal Collection, Windsor.

In his series "Out of the Ashes," Creswell illustrated each phase of the repairs to the castle. The eerie images of fire-gutted halls are heartbreaking, but Creswell finds hopeful patches of light and miraculously preserved portions in every room. One of the outstanding traits of Creswell's series is the timelessness of the images of the burned-out Windsor Castle. They could be from a long-ago battle, the actual blaze from less than a decade ago, or an as-yet-unlit fire. "It makes people wonder which were painted when, and wonder if it all weren't just a bad dream," he says. "I love promoting that idea. We are far too specific about time. It's great to allow years to travel a bit one way or another." 🌟