

6 Things to Discover About Thomas Wilmer Dewing

If American artist Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851-1938) is not well known to you, you are in for a treat. His haunting colors, woman-centric subjects and lush landscapes all but guarantee you'll remember his name. After reading this art history roundup about the artist and his life through paint, let us know what you think of his work!

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Dewing started out as a creative child with an interest in both drawing and in playing the violin. He began his artistic career not as a painter but as a lithography assistant, at least until he turned 19.

He went to Paris to study in 1876, training under the tutelage of painters Gustave Boulanger and Jules Lefebvre. By 1878, he had returned to the U.S., settling in New York City, where he met and married [Maria Oakey](#), an established painter from a well connected family.



Dewing's interest in music would persevere throughout his career, with many of his paintings incorporating figures playing or holding musical instruments or sheet music. Lady with a Lute by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, 1886, oil on wood

Dewing and his wife spent every summer amidst the lush gardens and meadows of the Cornish Art Colony in New Hampshire. Both were avid gardeners and for Dewing, glowing green fields would become the setting for many of his paintings.

He called his landscapes his “decorations” and believed them to be his most refined works. Many were created with their final hanging place in mind. The interior design of those spaces, from the specific woodwork, to wall colors and furnishings, were taken into consideration as the artist painted and in some cases, were decorated by the artist himself for the patron.



Summer by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, 1893, oil on canvas

As a student in Paris, Dewing met William Merritt Chase and both became a bit enamored with Spanish painting. Dewing was also inspired by and made works in loose homage to French greats like Jean-Léon Gérôme.

Years later, as Dewing continued to develop his style, he was much more drawn to the work of Dutch master [Vermeer](#), James A. M. Whistler (Dewing's works were in fact often compared to Whistler's) and English artist Albert Moore. He was

also intrigued by Japanese prints. He eventually began to work in a Tonalist style with a much freer manner with brushstrokes that were soft and blurred.



Summer by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, 1890

If Whistler was the father of Tonalism, then Dewing is most definitely a devoted son. Tonalism was an American art movement of the 1880s in which artists painted landscapes with an overall tone of color, spread over the entire surface like an atmosphere of mist. Many artists used dark, neutral hues but Dewing gravitated toward green, perhaps because of his love of verdant landscapes.

Tonalism was eventually eclipsed by Impressionism and Dewing was part of that movement as well when he joined The Ten American Painters (also known as The Ten and included Childe Hassam and John Henry Twachtman). This group broke with the conservative art establishment in America to embrace originality and imagination in their group shows.



Lady with a Mask by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, oil on canvas, 1911

Charles Lang Freer was one of Dewing's key patrons. Many of his works were acquired by Freer before the paint was even dry, though Freer often allowed many of the works to be exhibited frequently. Dewing in turn acted as an art expert on Freer's behalf, purchasing Japanese prints for his patron. He was also often involved in discussions about how artworks (many his own) were hung in Freer's home.

There is a room devoted entirely to Dewing's work based on Freer's collection in the Freer|Sackler Smithsonian Museum of Asian Art.



Green and Gold by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, oil on canvas, 1917

In the winter of 1893, Dewing received a ream of brown paper from Freer and proceeded to create a body of pastel work as a result. All the paintings were of a single female figure, some clothed and some nude, against a minimally detailed background.

The works, though often compared to Whistler's pastels, are much more carefully modeled and subtle in coloration. Dewing also, unlike Whistler, never used black to outline forms and figures in his drawings.



Lady in Rattan Chair by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, pastel on brown paper, 1895-1908

Author: [Artists Magazine](#)