Walter Tyndale (1855–1943)

TONI HUBERMAN

INTRODUCTION

Walter Frederick Roofe Tyndale was a popular watercolour landscape painter and book illustrator in the early years of the twentieth century, noted for his vivid renditions of foreign places, and his beautifully produced artistic travel books. He first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1880 (‘A Souvenir of Sarah Bernhardt’), and over the years exhibited thirty-six paintings there, the last being in 1934. He was the subject of over a dozen exhibitions of his work and the author and illustrator of many travel books. Tyndale was a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours and an Associate of the Royal British Colonial Society of Artists.

For most of his career he worked in the Middle East and southern Europe, but in 1909 he visited Japan, which resulted in two books, his own illustrated account, Japan and the Japanese, and illustrations for Mrs Basil Taylor’s Japanese Gardens.1
PORTRAIT PAINTER

Tyndale was born near Bruges in 1855, the son of English parents.3 His father, John Nash Tyndale, had been a barrister at Middle Temple in London. From an early age Walter took a keen interest in art. He took drawing lessons at the Academy in Bruges, in Bath when the family moved there in 1871, and at the Academy in Antwerp when he returned to Belgium on his own in 1874. He then moved to Paris to study portrait painting at the Atelier Bonnat. Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) was a highly successful portrait painter whose students at various times included Raoul Dufy, Georges Braque and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. He also attended the studio of the Belgian painter, Jan Van Beers (1852–1927).

By the age of twenty-five he was established in London as a portrait painter, with a studio in All Soul’s Place, having succeeded in getting a number of substantial portrait commissions, including one for Lord Chelmsford. Up until 1880 his success as a portrait painter had brought him financial stability, enabling him to marry and support a family. Thanks in part to what he called a ‘funeral form of art’, he had also developed a successful career painting portraits from photographs of the dead.5 But then it was suggested that he try watercolours instead of oils, and a new career opened up to him.

With the encouragement of Claude Hayes, a fellow student from Antwerp days, he began a class in outdoor sketching and eventually came into contact with Helen Allingham, noted for her watercolours of rustic scenery and gardens, who was a great influence on his work.6

WATERCOLOURIST

Tyndale then embarked on a career as an ‘outdoor’ painter. However, he found working in England possible for only half the year. As with many artists of the time, poor quality light (smog, limited sunlight) was a real problem. As a result over the following years he led a peripatetic life. In 1894 he visited Tangier and Jerez for the first time, and continued travelling and working in the Middle East and North Africa, and in Italy, the south of France, Germany, Dalmatia, England and Japan, only very occasionally being accompanied by wife and children.

ONE-MAN SHOWS AND ARTISTIC TRAVEL BOOKS

In 1897 he was commissioned by Dowdeswell’s Galleries to paint sixty pictures of Egypt. This resulted in his first one-man show, ‘Cairo, the Lebanon and Damascus’ (1898), for which he was highly praised in The Studio, the most influential chronicler of the art world at the time, as a colourist ‘who neither shirks the problem of dazzling light and brilliant colours which strike a Western eye.