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Cézanne's watercolors exhibit not only kaleidoscopic arrays of translucent color but also very light graphite pencil lines that contrast strikingly with the soft watery touches of color. These drawn lines have been largely overlooked in previous studies of Cézanne's watercolors.

In this ravishing book, Matthew Simms argues that it was the dialogue between drawing and painting—the movement between the pencil and the paintbrush—that attracted Cézanne to watercolor. Watercolor allowed Cézanne to express what he termed his "sensations" in two distinct modes that become a record of his shifting and spontaneous responses to his subject. Combining close visual analysis and examination of historical context, Simms focuses on the counterpoint of drawing and color in Cézanne's watercolors over the course of his career and as viewed in relation to his oil paintings. More than a tool for sketching or preparing for oil paintings, Simms contends, watercolor was a unique means of expression in its own right that allowed Cézanne to combine in one place the two otherwise opposed mediums of drawing and painting.