

was a definite 'London look,' " says Parkes. "All the dealers liked things to be flat, well varnished, and tight on the stretcher. They'd rather be done with it and sell it off."

In 1978—after three years at Newman, three at another conservation house, and two more on his own—Parkes came to New York, where he haunted the auction galleries and museums in his spare time. He worked at a restoration studio, then took a job as a cataloguer in the paintings department at William Doyle Galleries. While sorting through pictures from an estate, Parkes took a fancy to a small 19th-century oil sketch of trees with what he assumed was a forged Corot signature, nothing too unusual as Corot is one of the most faked artists in history. (It used to be said that Corot painted 800 pictures—and that 1,400 of them were in American collections.)

"I told Bill I wanted to bid on it, and he said, 'Be my guest,' " recalls Parkes, who won the lot for \$800 in 1979. A year later, Parkes discovered his sketch in a catalogue raisonné. It was an authentic Corot, a study for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's large 1835 salon picture *Hagar in the Wilderness*. Parkes informed the Met of his discovery, and offered to sell it to the museum. "A paintings curator came to see it," says Parkes sheepishly. "I admit I didn't do a great presentation—the picture was unframed and leaning on the floor—and he said, 'Oh, isn't that nice. Sorry, but we don't have the money,' and left. They could have had it for nothing. So, I put it up at Sotheby's, where it went for \$54,000. The Met later bought it, I believe."

Parkes went traveling around the world with the proceeds, but, despite his good fortune, he had no desire to become a dealer. "My taste is notoriously uncommercial," he says. "I am constantly raving over things that most people wouldn't get at all—stuff like landscapes by American artists in Europe in the second half of the 19th century, people like Elihu Vedder and Charles Caryl Coleman. I have 16 Vedder landscapes—nobody wants to look at them. But the main reason I'm not a dealer is that I'm impatient. I have no tolerance for a wasted moment; I need to *do* something all day long. I know there are guys out there who are waiting patiently, making big deals and a lot of money. I like to get paid at the end of the week. It's this working-class ethic of mine."

Parkes seems incapable of leaving an easel for long, and three years ago took up the brush himself as a pleinairist landscape painter. "I like scenes that are quickly rendered and efficiently captured—the weather, the changing light, the time of year. That's my goal. I admire those artists who can capture that without resorting to too many studio antics," he says. So far, he has sold his work only through friends or for charity; his next show (to benefit a maternity hospital in Bethlehem, on the West Bank) will take place in April at W.M. Brady & Co. on East 76th Street.

Among his colleagues, Parkes is exceptional for the



When not restoring other artists' work, Parkes paints his own. He prefers to do pleinairist landscapes such as "Majorca, Spain" (top) or still lifes such as "Yellow Stocks" (right), free of what he calls "studio antics."



wide range of works he treats, though he finds nothing as demanding as contemporary art. "Canvases with big flat planes of color or damage on raw canvas are nearly impossible to fix," he admits. "It requires a whole different set of tools and approaches. Raw linen usually turns dull brown over time. It's not unique to contemporary painters; you see that in Frederick Carl Frieseke's pictures all the time. The blank canvas between his paint is now deep orange and, frankly, they look horrible. The best you can do is gently bleach out the canvas, but you still have to be very careful. When you have, say, a flat black painting with a rip in it, isolating or assimilating that damage into the rest of the picture locally is almost impossible. You can't hide your restoration in a tree or the folds of drapery. Some contemporary artists are mindful of traditional techniques, and their works are a pleasure to do—we've worked on a lot of Alex Katz's pictures, and his paint is healthy, he varnishes his pictures well, and they are quite stable. But if you have a picture with a lot of dry (i.e. oil-deficient) paint, where the colors have cracked or flaked with age, how can you keep things stable and satisfy the client and your code of ethics simultaneously?"

Unlike the Hilton Kramers of the world, who may even delight in the inevitable self-destruction of some contemporary works due to use of shoddy materials, Parkes simply believes that "artists can and should do whatever they like. There's a lot to be said for allowing pictures to just age and develop and leaving them alone. If they discolor or get mottled, so what? If there's a problem, then it's our job to figure it out." But even the unflappable Parkes can be stumped. "We once got an Anselm Kiefer that had a bar of chocolate stuck to it, and the chocolate had turned to dust. I had jokingly suggested just going to the corner, getting a fresh bar of chocolate, and sticking it on, but the client didn't like the idea."