

# Women Artists:

An Untold Story  
1880-1940

# Preface

The question of “Why are there no great women artists?” first raised by the eminent art historian Linda Nochlin in 1971, has been and is still a topic of conversation and inquiry. Today, within the contemporary art world, significant female artists play a larger role, but within the realm of art history they continue to be predominantly surpassed by their male counterparts. The canon of art history has long excluded women artists as being significant or of exuding any art historical importance. In spite of this, there are innumerable stories of female artistic accomplishment; they simply remain untold. This exhibition is an important component in the ongoing rehabilitation of the historical female artist.

Although the modern era has brought with it broader recognition for women artists, questions surrounding their absence remain. Is the lack of historical consciousness of female artists due to their exclusion from figure drawing classes and other formal education? Was their lack of skill and in turn lack of recognition due to their culturally obligated “womanly duties”, which also undoubtedly removed them from the studio? It seems that skill has nothing to do with the question – there are great women artists; however the public has not and is not being taught about them. The canon of art history is written in stone and is not often redacted or revised. The problem of no great women artists is a problem of recognition and a vast lack of awareness. The exhibition of these works by women artists of regional and national esteem is a fitting corrective action and a testament to their real and lasting influence, both in the larger community and at organizations as varied as the New Bedford Public Library and the Providence Art Club.

At the time of its founding in 1880, the Providence Art Club was one of the most progressive art organizations in the nation. Counting the important African-American painter Edward Mitchell Bannister and six women among the founders, the Club was far ahead of its contemporaries in its inclusivity. Decades after the establishment of the Art Club, organizations of its ilk continued to struggle with the incorporation of females and people of color.

Artists such as Eliza Gardiner, Grace Albee, and Angela O’Leary greatly impacted and, in turn, were influenced by the Art Club’s priorities. They actively and aggressively forged a path as professional artists who were serious about their practice within the context of a community of fellow artists, both male and female. Their artistic spirit and temperament are still palatably present, not only in the realm of the Club’s history and archives, but among current practicing artists. As Miss. O’Leary’s portrait looms over the Club’s fireplace, her spirit can be felt throughout the walls – she, like her contemporaries, is a force to be reckoned with; a pioneer who still inspires.

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April 15-May 2, 2015  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth  
College of Visual and Performing Arts  
Art History Department

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# Acknowledgements

The catalog was produced as part of the Art History Senior Seminar Exhibition held each spring. We would like to thank the students for their contributions to the catalog and the many hours of hard work that they gave to the exhibition.

Oskar Augustowski  
Johnus Derby  
Betsey Janus  
Monica Lopes  
Danielle MacNeil  
Anna Maravalli  
Colleen McLean  
Adrien Mercier  
Derek Murphy  
Amanda Pacheco  
Miranda Phelan  
Rachael Stillman  
Gabrielle Sullivan  
Joseph Tavares

Special thanks to the catalog editorial team: Monica Lopes, Gabrielle Sullivan, Derek Murphy, and Joseph Tavares for their dedication to proofreading and editing the catalog.

Prof. Anna Dempsey and Prof. Allison J. Cywin would like to extend their gratitude to the Providence Art Club members, especially to Frederick R. Mattis, the Chair of the Collection Committee, who spent many hours sharing his knowledge of the collection and the club's history. We would like to thank the Providence Art Club's staff members, Michael Rose and Traci Lee, whose help was invaluable. We would also like to thank Daniel Mechnig, former President of the Providence Art Club, whose insights and stories about the Club and the women who participated in it were especially enlightening. We give special acknowledgement to Cathy Little Bert of Bert Gallery in Providence, RI who spent most of her career educating the community on the important contribution these women have made to the art world. Her encouragement and guidance was instrumental in the development of this exhibition.

We would like to thank the following organizations for their support and for their generous loans to the exhibition:

Archive and Special Collection at the University of Massachusetts Amherst  
Bert Gallery, Providence, RI  
Boston Public Library  
Claire T. Carney Library at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth  
New Bedford Free Public Library  
Pettaquamscutt Historical Society  
Providence Art Club, Providence, RI  
The Providence Athenaeum, Providence, RI  
Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College  
W. E. B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

We would like to acknowledge Graphics Innovations and Scott Glowka, a UMass Dartmouth Alumnus, who provided the graphic materials for the exhibition.

# Introduction

We might think that Linda Nochlin's famous question "Why have there been no great women artists" is no longer relevant.<sup>1</sup> Feminist historians of American art such as Kirsten Swinth have pointed out that "thousands upon thousands of girl art students" attended art academies right after the Civil War to meet the growing industrial and cultural demands for illustrators, engravers, printmakers, miniaturists and portrait painters (implying that we should have been able to find a few "greats").<sup>2</sup> In 2001, Laura Prieto asserted, "With the notable exception of the two painters Mary Cassatt and Georgia O'Keefe and one sculptor, Louise Nevelson, female American artists still remain largely unrecognized."<sup>3</sup> As a result, many of the works of female artists included in our exhibit have been derided as conservative or as aesthetically uninteresting. Their art has been confined to the artistic and historic sidelines because their work does not conform to a canonical art history in which "good" style is assumed to progress from nineteenth century impressionism to early twentieth century abstraction. Scholars such as Linda Nochlin, Kirsten Swinth, Sarah Burns, Jennifer Scanlon and Dörte Kuhlmann contend modernist critics and historians have largely privileged individual formalist invention over narrative.<sup>4</sup> These scholars have illuminated how the institutionalization of art practices, modernist art criticism, and museum cultural politics have been shaped by patriarchal values.

All their studies have informed the research for this catalog. Prieto's conclusion that women artists "used ideas about womanhood to legitimate their position and work as artists" has framed our understanding of modern American women creators. Burns' investigation of Gilded Age American culture and Swinth's nuanced analysis of the critical reception of women's art have been significant guideposts for our catalog essays and exhibition.

Nevertheless, because these historians largely focus on select examples of women's fine art (by artists who were closely tied to the modernist aesthetic) rather than the work produced by many "realistic" painters, commercial illustrators, wood engravers, designers and photographers, there are gaps in their histories of American women artists. For example, Swinth's observation that there was a general backlash against women painters at the turn of the twentieth century does not apply to the many New England painters in our exhibit (Helen Watson Phelps, Ellen Day Hale, Elizabeth Bigelow Greene, Mabel Woodward, Angela O'Leary, Lena Newcastle, and Emma L. Swan). Nor does it hold true for the wood engravers, photographers, designers and illustrators on whom we have focused. Indeed, many of the women included in *Women Artists: An Untold Story* attained professional success by working as illustrators, photographers, engravers or designers for children's books, short stories, and illustrated periodicals (Alice Barber Stephens, Jessie Willcox Smith, Elizabeth Shippen Green, Grace Albee, Sarah Wyman Whitman and Blanche Ames Ames). A few of them even realized greater artistic success than their artist husbands (Stephens and Albee). Other artists chose to use their art to advance political or social causes. Sarah Wyman Whitman, an arts and crafts advocate, designed beautiful books for all. Blanche Ames, who transformed conventional gendered forms in support of women's political rights, was also a scientist who designed her home, engineered the dams on her property and even built an environmentally friendly toilet.

While many women artists could be included in our exhibit, we have chosen to concentrate on those who studied or lived in Philadelphia, Boston and Providence during the period of 1880-1940. These cities, important publishing centers during the nineteenth century, were also the initial training grounds for many women artists and designers. The Philadelphia School of Design for Women (founded in 1848, now known as the Moore College of Art & Design), the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts School, Boston and the Rhode Island School of Design educated many of the artists included in the exhibition. Though "the socially contrived orders of sexual difference" did structure the works of many of these artists, their images did not represent a retreat from the modern. Many of them depicted protected places that empowered them as both women and creators. With their paintings, photographs, engravings, book cover designs, and illustrations, they disrupted conventional narratives regarding home and family, as well as those that shaped the private and public spheres. These women artists altered the American cultural discourse and created gendered communities that eventually challenged the dominant power structure. They were indeed the "new modern women" of the twentieth-century.

Written by Anna Dempsey

## Notes

1. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1988), 147-158.

2. Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists & the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press), 12.

3. Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4.

4. See Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Dörte Kuhlmann, *Gender Studies in Architecture: Space, Power and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

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Catalog designed by  
Joseph Tavares & Johnus Derby

We might think that Linda Nochlin's famous 1988 question—"Why have there been no great women artists?"—is no longer relevant today.<sup>1</sup> As noted in the introduction, feminist historians of American art such as Kirsten Swinth have noted that "thousands and thousands of girl students" attended art academies right after the Civil War to meet the growing demand for illustrators, engravers, printmakers, miniaturists and portrait painters, in the rapidly expanding publishing and design industries. As a result, we should have since been able to find a few female "greats."<sup>2</sup> Nochlin, Swinth, and others suggest that women's representational art has been dismissed by modernist critics because many of them, such as Clement Greenberg, privileged masculine individual heroic subjectivity and formalist invention over the realistic aesthetic favored by many woman artists.<sup>3</sup>

Even today, authors of art history textbooks analyze the work of the men who have shaped the academic and art worlds, but generally overlook the women who studied, created and fought alongside them. This is especially true of women photographers, textile designers, illustrators, engravers and other commercial artists. Because the majority of women artists historically fit into one of these categories, they are often missing from the modernist story.

As Michelle Bogart notes, the absence of the commercial illustrator from this narrative reflects the tacit acceptance of conventional "high/low" distinctions that categorize traditional art history. "Commercial art" has been dismissed by critics because "our picture of art's history is skewed by an over-emphasis on major artists" and on fine arts in general.<sup>4</sup> With the focus instead on the individual fine artist, artistic style and elite patronage, art historians have often ignored the importance of popular reception—and of the power of images to politically speak to and bind non-elite viewers into the modern community. According to Ann Ardis, "traditional histories of modernism in the literary and visual arts refused entirely to acknowledge the specific continuities between artistic and political avant-gardes."<sup>5</sup>

This statement encapsulates the life of Blanche Ames, an artist, illustrator, and scientist who was active in the early part of the twentieth century. Blanche did not just create outstanding art; she created art with a purpose. In her view, a painting was not just a form of creative expression, but a way to explain science, explore technique, and change American cultural and political values. Despite her accomplishments, Blanche has been excluded from the mainstream art history canon, arguably because of her representational, traditionalistic style. If we consider her life story, scientific achievements and political artwork, this is clearly an omission. That is, if we examine, what Ardis regards as the "continuities between [the]

## The Modernist Woman

*Gabrielle Sullivan & Derek Murphy*

artistic and political avant-gardes,” then Blanche Ames and her work should most definitely belong in the modernist story. In order to truly understand her influence on modern art, we must recognize that her values were shaped by the New England culture in which she was reared.

New England was one of the earliest European settlements in North America. In 1620, one hundred Puritans and Separatists sailed from England on the Mayflower and landed in what is now known as Provincetown Harbor. Despite early difficulties, the settlement thrived with help from the native population. Indeed, the population of the entire region continued to expand rapidly throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century. This expansion extended into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. This resulted in new labor opportunities for both genders. Women sought employment outside the home for the first time as weavers, teachers and seamstresses.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, not everyone accepted this transformation of women’s roles. Women were generally seen as homemakers above all else. In fact, the woman as ideal mother was one that also emerged in the early nineteenth century.

With the advent of industrialization, middle-class families no longer needed to manufacture or grow what they needed to survive. Most Americans believed that the husband should work outside the home to provide for his family. The mother/wife, who should follow the ideals of “republican motherhood,” must teach the children how to be proper citizens.<sup>7</sup> Although some women supported the notion of separate gendered spheres, many others opted to leave the home in order to gain greater financial independence. New Englanders Mary Marshall and Mary Allen, for example, worked as nurses during the War of 1812, aboard Commodore Stephen Decatur’s ship the *United States*.<sup>8</sup> In 1837, Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke College, the first woman’s school of higher education. Smith College, which opened its doors in 1871, represented another institution devoted to women’s education. Blanche Ames chose to attend Smith in the late nineteenth century.

She was born on February 18th, 1878, in Lowell, Massachusetts. Her father, Adelbert Ames, and her maternal grandfather, Benjamin Butler, were Union generals in the Civil War. Both also spent significant time in political office. Adelbert served as governor of Mississippi during Reconstruction, and Benjamin was Governor of Massachusetts for a year. Previously, Adelbert was a representative from Massachusetts to the United States Congress, where he led the impeachment proceedings against President Andrew Johnson.<sup>9</sup>

The Ames and Butler families produced numerous inventive and intelligent women. Blanche’s grandmother was a Shakespearean actress and her mother invented a non-wrinkling laundry starch. Thus, Blanche’s progressive, unconventional gender values were, in many ways, an integral part of her birthright. Throughout her childhood, her parents played an active role in her education and encouraged her to learn and compete in sports. Both parents wanted her to be a self-sufficient, strong and active young woman.<sup>10</sup> After graduating from high school—an unusual accomplishment at the time—she attended college where she studied art history and studio art. Blanche graduated from Smith in 1899 as president of her class. In her commencement address to her classmates, she noted, “We are fortunate to live in an age that—more than any other—makes it possible for women to attain the best and truest development in life.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it was during this time in New England that more women were able to seek higher education than ever before.

Although Blanche married and had children, she was able to attain a successful career as an artist, illustrator and political activist. She was not alone. In the late 1800s, American women commonly began to enter into professions outside the household. However, most of these career opportunities continued to be shaped by gender. Women essentially had to rationalize their ambitions by choosing occupations that complemented their feminine role as caregiver; for instance, they could work as teacher or as social workers.<sup>12</sup> Soon, an interesting, new opportunity opened up to women: they could become artists or designers. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, as the advertising and demand for well designed manufactured goods began to increase, American and British middle-class women—as well

as those who aspired to achieve class mobility—entered the workforce in great numbers. Despite their absence from art history textbooks, strong evidence indicates that there was an increase in the number of working female artists. In 1880, Providence Rhode Island officials added the occupation “artist” to the city directory’s professional listings. A quarter of those artists listed were women, a number that doubled by 1905. This occurred, in part, because of the establishment of new art and “normal” schools. By the 1860s, American art schools began to open their doors to women. Around this time, art educators strove to emulate a European model of teaching. They discarded Romantic and allegorical subjects in favor of what we now term Academic Realism—a style of art that emphasizes narrative and the careful rendering of the figure over abstraction.<sup>13</sup> This is the style favored by Blanche Ames throughout her painting career.

In 1900, Blanche married Harvard botanist Oakes Ames (of no relation). Together they had four children. She considered taking care of them to be her “greatest hobby.”<sup>14</sup> Despite this rather wry remark, Oakes and Blanche shared a steadfast interest in protecting the rights of mothers and children. They were leaders in their respective branches of the Massachusetts Women’s Suffrage League. In addition, Blanche co-founded the Birth Control League of Massachusetts in 1916 to promote medical research focused on women’s health. The league also sponsored debates with leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, who opposed many of the group’s progressive positions.<sup>15</sup> Although she was active in a number of political causes, Blanche remained an artist. At this time she began to create political cartoons for suffragist publications, a venture which allowed her to unite two of her passions.

Blanche also utilized her artistic talents to support her family’s scientific endeavors. She periodically assisted her husband by illustrating his studies on orchids and other plant forms. To this day, she is well known among botanists for her scientifically accurate and remarkably effective drawings. Certainly, the distribution of Blanche’s botanical illustrations would not have been possible without the invention of machines to produce inexpensive paper during the Second Industrial Revolution. These machines, in turn, led to the emergence of print media in the late nineteenth century, including the science publications in which Blanche’s illustrations appeared. As a result, new ideas spread rapidly throughout the scientific community. Some critics believed that “public support for science was essential to establish the cultural authority of the scientific elite.”<sup>16</sup>

Oakes Ames contributed to the dissemination of this knowledge. He traveled around the world to study unusual orchids, bringing back specimens for Blanche to illustrate. Before Oakes’ studies, little was known about orchids. Without new printing techniques, his work would have been useless to a reader without access to an orchid garden or an in-depth knowledge of botany. With Blanche’s detailed illustrations, Oakes published the seven volume *Orchidaceae: Illustrations and Studies of the Family Orchidaceae*.<sup>17</sup> These books are still celebrated to this day. Botanists regard Blanche’s work as an indispensable component of the volumes’ success. She portrays the flower with remarkable accuracy even though she rarely used color. Her use of thick outlines to define each petal with subtle gradations revealed the orchid’s delicate folds and decorative spotting. Though simply rendered, Blanche captured the essence—even the smells—of this delicate flower. Her illustrations suggest a light touch. With this work, she lays to rest the notion of “flower painting” as a frivolous, feminine endeavor.

Blanche Ames also collaborated with her brother Adelbert Ames Jr. on an innovative painting technique which involved the use of a color system based on optical physiology. Their collaboration began in 1910 after Adelbert abandoned his law profession to study art. Together they created an extensive color notation system. This system required the user to create a grid of the subject matter with different blocks of color. After this, he or she would identify a matching swatch for each color and paint with the corresponding tube. This “paint-by-numbers” method marked the start of Blanche and Adelbert’s extensive experimentation with color technique and theory.

In the fall of 1912, Blanche used this “color swatch” system to paint an elm tree at

Borderland State Park in Sharon, Massachusetts. Though wonderfully detailed, Aldebert and Blanche believed the painting did not successfully convey the illusion of depth. For them, her depiction of the elm tree merely reinforced traditional Renaissance singular perspective. Aldebert and Blanche began to research binocular and peripheral vision. They experimented with several of Adelbert's observations, which they discussed in *Vision and the Technique of Art*, (this included Adelbert's use of two cameras to replicate human vision.)<sup>18</sup> After documenting several key observations, he used these findings to develop a formal color theory that Blanche applied in her paintings.

In his studies, Adelbert noted that pointillist artists—such as Georges Seurat and Paul Signac—carefully detailed how the eye interprets color. However, most other “great artists” did not consciously apply the laws of optics in their work. When objects are out of focus, they have distinct chromatically hued edges. The edge's hue depends upon the source of the light and actual color of the object. The edge of a dark object appears to be blue when backlit, and the edges of lightly hued objects appear orange. Distant objects have softer, textured edges, while those closer to the focal point have sharply delineated outlines. In addition, he observed that objects curve outward at a certain distance from the center of vision (known as the barrel distortion effect). Although most artists are at least instinctively aware of this visual distortion, the effect remains theoretically unrecognized. Adelbert believed most artists adjusted their work so a painting would “look right.” In his study of binocular vision, Adelbert observed that the field of view broadened as each eye saw objects from a slightly different angle. While these were important findings scientifically, he admitted that great artists do not simply portray reality.

Blanche created several still life paintings that attempted to replicate her brother's observations. Upon first glance, the objects appear slightly fuzzy, as though painted from the perspective of someone with double vision. However, the eye is naturally drawn to the sharpest focal point, and the illusion of depth falls into place. Although scientifically interesting, it is Blanche's detailed, spare style that truly helps us understand Adelbert's optical color research. Her renderings allow us to viscerally experience what the eye instinctively knows. For the first time, according to Adelbert, an artist painted with binocular vision. While Blanche's paintings were impressive feats, personal and professional differences with her brother halted their collaboration—and thus altered the course of her artwork.

In 1914, Adelbert decided to apply to ophthalmology degree programs. He also argued with Blanche over whether to include her as an author of the published studies.<sup>19</sup> Though they came to a personal agreement, their professional work came to an end. Blanche continued to illustrate Oakes' botanical investigations, and she also pursued her own scientific inquiries. She successfully secured patents for a propeller snare used to entrap enemy aircraft, and for a “green” anti-pollution sewage system. Without her brother, the direction of Blanche's art practice began to shift. Around the time Adelbert left to attend Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, Blanche redirected her artistic efforts towards the growing women's suffrage movement. She was deeply engaged with all aspects of women's health and welfare and was a fearless advocate for the causes she deemed just. In her advocacy for women's rights, Blanche combined her scientific and artistic interests with her political concerns.

While an undergraduate at the turn of the twentieth century, Blanche supported the women's suffrage movement. This movement formally began with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Many activists from the concurrent abolitionist movement were also strong supporters of women's rights. They believed that both women and African-Americans suffered injustices and were treated unfairly and that this had to be rectified. In 1851, abolitionist and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth delivered her famous “Ain't I A Woman?” Speech in which she addressed the inequities and difficulties that women faced because they were seen as the weaker and ‘lesser’ sex. The following year, Connecticut-born author Harriet Beecher Stowe released her bestselling abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like Truth, Stowe was a highly influential figure in the abolitionist and suffragist movements.<sup>20</sup> She once stated, “The position of

a married woman...is, in many respects, precisely similar to that of the Negro slave. She can make no contract and hold no property; whatever she inherits or earns becomes at that moment the property of her husband...In the English common law a married woman is nothing at all. She passes out of legal existence.”<sup>21</sup> By the time Blanche Ames became actively involved in women’s suffrage, the topic had become one of widespread national debate.

By 1912, eight states had ratified the woman’s vote. This was a moral boost to women in New England, who had struggled to gain support for suffrage since the Seneca Falls Convention more than fifty years ago. Blanche Ames drew on these examples in the illustration *Our Answer to Mr. Taft* (1915). In it, women from suffrage states declare local victories against long work weeks, child labor and prostitution. Women’s rights activists took the opportunity to pressure conservative states into adopting more progressive positions.

New England in the 1910s was in the midst of political turmoil. Suffragists demanded that women be given the right to vote. Temperance adherents wished to ban alcohol. The Catholic Church inserted itself into political discourse. All this resulted in a tense political atmosphere. Lois Ratoul, a member of the “Boston Brahmin” aristocratic class, underwent one of the most publicized divorce cases of the time.<sup>22</sup> Divorce was still frowned upon by many Americans, but to Ratoul, independence was more important than keeping up appearances. Her refusal to adhere to moral conventions sent an important message to upper class women, encouraged others to speak out on behalf of individual rights.

Unlike many other young suffragettes, Blanche Ames had the full support of her family. Her relatives had long supported individual civil liberties. Blanche’s grandfather, Benjamin Butler, was one of the first congressmen to advocate for women’s suffrage in the nineteenth century. Though many women sought the right to vote, it wasn’t feasible for working-class women to spare time or risk public ridicule to become actively involved in the suffrage movement. Thus, “upper-class” women such as Ratoul and Blanche Ames supported their working sisters by publicly advocating for all women.

New England, with its Quaker traditions, had long endorsed liberal, progressive values—including suffrage.<sup>23</sup> On July 4th, 1915, *The Boston Globe* provided coverage of a suffrage event on the Boston Common. Prominent speakers from New York to Nebraska attended this gathering. Meanwhile, several women were arrested at similar events in other parts of the country, including the District of Columbia. The next day, following a naturalization ceremony at Faneuil Hall, the Election Divisions of Boston distributed pamphlets to the new citizens urging them to show their support for women’s voting rights. The pamphlet also declared, “on this momentous occasion, that his Excellency, Gov. Walsh, His Honor, Mayor Curley of Boston, and Louis D. Brandeis, Esq. the orator of the day, are all in favor of giving full suffrage to the women of Massachusetts at the coming state election.”<sup>24</sup> It was clear that Boston suffragists enjoyed the well-placed support of public officials, and thus believed that “the vote” was well within their grasp. Blanche seized this opportunity to support the cause. She became the art editor of the Boston-based *Woman’s Journal* and also contributed her own illustrations for this mass-produced periodical. While her early paintings were carefully rendered in an Impressionistic style, her cartoons were noticeably similar to the work of activists in England and the United States. Suffragists in England were already publishing etched line drawings that were easy to interpret and inexpensive to reproduce. Publications such as *The Women’s Penny Paper* and *The English Woman’s Journal* blended captivating graphics with socialist political commentary. Blanche and many of her colleagues adopted the efficient, simple, linear style favored by the editors of their sister periodicals.

Blanche also may have drawn inspiration from the works of the Ashcan School—many of whose members contributed to *The Masses*, an American socialist periodical. The Ashcan School was a loosely defined group of artists and illustrators who had little

in common other than a desire to present a realistic portrayal of early twentieth century culture. These artists believed that mainstream artists often painted an idealized version of American life rather than the reality most Americans experienced. Because many ordinary citizens, and artists, now lived in cities populated with new immigrants, John Sloan and other Ashcan painters depicted the scenes that their Impressionist counterparts often ignored.

These artists employed textured, thick strokes and a muddier and darker palette than was popular at the time. “They saw lusty and vigorous activity around them, that with all its crudeness was still colorful and romantic.”<sup>25</sup> The painters wanted to represent an unbiased depiction of poverty, prostitution and other gritty realities. Although some Ashcan artists claimed to be apolitical, the themes represented in their work—including women’s suffrage—unmistakably reflected the politics of the day. John Sloan’s career, in fact, somewhat mirrored Blanche Ames’.

John Sloan was one of the most prolific painters and designers of the Ashcan School and one of the more politically involved. Though he rejected any categorization, including “membership” in the Ashcan School,<sup>26</sup> and denied any political messages in his work, Sloan was actively involved with the American socialist movement.<sup>27</sup> He became art director of *The Masses* in 1912 around the same time Blanche began her work with the *Woman’s Journal*. In addition to producing literature on labor movements and economic theories, *The Masses’* publishers strongly advocated for gender equality and used numerous illustrations and cartoons to support their political positions. Sloan created many well-known political cartoons for this and other magazines, including the *New York Call* (for the latter, he used an anagrammatic pseudonym).<sup>28</sup> Despite the conceptual similarities between Sloan’s artistic work for the socialist party and Blanche’s for the suffrage movement, their art differed in style and tone.

Blanche Ames created the simplified black and white etchings that suited the *Woman’s Journal*. Sloan’s illustrations, which are similar to his paintings, evidence a distinct roughness. This may indicate the speed with which they were produced. Nevertheless, his rough graphite sketches incorporated color and experimented with the aesthetics of the medium. Blanche, by contrast, grounded her visuals with text. She utilized type in many of her cartoons. Text was a key feature in all her political work—this included captions or written statements on the image itself. Sloan did not approve of captions under his printed work. Because the publishers refused to adhere to this wish, Sloan quit *The Masses* in 1916.

Although Blanche and Sloan created political cartoons for many of the same causes, these artists represented the “anti-suffragists” in very different ways. Both believed that their political opponents rejected “progress” in favor of oppressive traditions. When Sloan sketched those who disagreed with his socialist views, such as the wealthy aristocrats in *The Unemployed* (1913), he portrayed them as ruthless and unattractive. As Carolyn Kitch notes, “his poor women were often pretty, while he portrayed the



**Sketch of a Female Figure on a Crucifixion**

Pencil on tracing paper. 14.5" x 12.75"  
Courtesy of Sophia Smith Collection,  
Smith College

wealthy women as ugly and overweight.”<sup>29</sup> The wealthy playgoer in *The Unemployed* is larger, less confident and less attractive than the girl in *At the Top of the Swing* (n.d., ca early 20<sup>th</sup> century), or even any of the women in *The Return from Toil* (1915). This biased caricature powerfully reinforces the artist’s message without any textual reinforcement.

Unlike suffragist cartoonists such as Sloan, Blanche Ames was remarkably restrained in her representations of the anti-suffragist. She was morally unwilling “to deride or humiliate other women.”<sup>30</sup> Blanche generally portrayed the suffragist woman as a confident, conservative mother, as Lady Liberty or Columbia. The anti-suffragist is not corrupt or evil, but may be silly, frivolous or wear outdated clothing. In *Two Pedestals* (1915), she directly compares the ethical values of a suffragist and an anti-suffragist. The suffragist, in her conservative clothing, holds her two children with care. She stands atop a thick pedestal of religion, education and love. The anti-suffragist, in her gaudy apparel, sits naively with her pets on an unstable pedestal of sham chivalry. Blanche does not depict the anti-suffragist as ugly or corrupt, but instead as “just mistaken.” She makes a strong point while still treating her opponents with an unreciprocated respect.

Blanche was intelligent, progressive and played an important role in the women’s suffrage movement. With the support of her husband and family she was at the forefront of American cultural change. Blanche appropriated conventional gendered forms in support of women’s political rights. She transformed the image of mother and child, so artfully done by Jessie Wilcox Smith, into a pillar of strength, and repositioned the home as a buttress for the public sphere rather than a refuge from it. Blanche’s cartoon women are a response to Reverend Lyman Abbot’s February 1910 editorial in *Ladies Home Journal* on “Why the Vote Would be Injurious to Women.” Abbot states “The question for the man is not, shall I refuse to woman an equal share?...But, shall I lay upon woman an equal share in the burden which my fathers bore alone?” Blanche transformed her ideas into actions and images that spoke to the ordinary modern woman. Her political cartoons detailed women’s lives and were anchored in the specifics of their daily existence. They represent her stamp on a modern public discourse from which she refused to be barred.

Blanche Ames is not only an inspiration for women artists, but for anyone who sees the role of art as tied to political and cultural change. While society stresses the educational value of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields, many hope that art will be valued as equally important. These “STEAM” advocates can use the life and work of Blanche Ames as a template for the interconnection between art and science. While there is something to learn from every artist, many have been excluded from history because of gender or aesthetic conventions. The exclusion of artists such as Blanche Ames narrows our understanding of history—and limits our present creative possibilities.

In industry, education and politics, women have continuously proven themselves to be just as talented and innovative as their male counterparts; they have just done so a little more quietly. Despite the fact that nearly every book on art, history or civilization may not adequately discuss the role that women have played in our society, their contributions have undoubtedly shaped the modern world.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the industrial revolution transformed the United States from an agricultural to a manufacturing society. Farmers and artisans left their homes to travel to cities to find jobs in factories. These plants were equipped with the machinery that could produce goods far more quickly and inexpensively than skilled artisans had. Manufacturers, in turn, needed skilled workers to produce high quality, well-designed goods to satisfy the demands of an emerging middle class. To do so, industrialists established art and design schools in order to train new workers for the new jobs in the textile and book publishing industries. During this period, new technologies, such as the development of the half-tone printing process, also spurred the growth of mass periodical publishing. Many female art students, who wished to take advantage of all these changes, enrolled in illustration and engraving classes at the new art academies. With their graduation, the “professional” woman artists entered into the American cultural scene. These new women included printmakers Grace Albee and Eliza Gardiner as well as illustrators Jessie Wilcox Smith and Elizabeth Shippen Green.

While some women studied art to become independent working artists, others attended educational institutions out of necessity. Like their more economically advantaged sisters, the arts were one area in which women could pursue an independent and respectable “career.” At this time, the strictures that prohibited many women from studying art had begun to fall away. Printing developments generated a proliferation of periodicals and books, which increased literacy rates and inspired a flood of art manuals for “ladies.” As April Masten pointed out in her recently published and well argued *Art Work*, mid-nineteenth century women, like men, could work as both fine and industrial artists to meet the growing demand for engravers, illustrators, lithographers, and colorists in the burgeoning printing trades and publications.<sup>1</sup> They could do so, not only because of economic demand, but because traditional art hierarchies had been flattened and the new categories were not yet in place. However, this did not last long. By the end of the nineteenth century, traditional categories were reestablished and a modernist aesthetic replaced the genteel, narrative that women had and were still required to produce—an aesthetic to which their male counterparts had also once subscribed. Masten contends that “Women artists’ accomplishments and disappointments expose tensions within American art practice that are often hidden in histories of male artists.”<sup>2</sup>

This tension largely has to do with how we define modernism, and modern art more specifically. According to Hilde Heynen, modernity may be defined as: 1) the “present” or current; 2) the “new,” which suggests a break with tradition or 3) the “momentary” and transient.<sup>3</sup>

## Blurring Boundaries:

Grace Albee and Her Part in  
the Modernist Revolution

*Monica Lopes*

The latter two definitions will frame my discussion of the modern (as applied to art)—a concept that is important to distinguish from cultural modernity.

Modernity is an exclusively Western notion based on a model of time that is linear, irreversible and progressive. Renaissance humanist philosophers, for example, placed “man” at the center of history. Because they considered humans to be rational, they believed progress would prevail. During the Enlightenment, human progress was tied to critical reason; rational forces would counterbalance reactionary human tendencies.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, philosophers, such as Hegel, suggested that every age could be viewed as unique and as an advancement over the preceding period.

Modernism, specifically in art history, generally refers to the period between the late 1800s and mid-1900s. Formally, modern art is associated with the abstract: with geometric shapes, simple forms, expressive color, and abstraction. Modernists rejected most artistic traditions—especially realist conventions associated with naturalistic color and linear perspective. Many were not, however, simply interested in avant-garde visual language. For them, new aesthetic language was bound up with a new philosophy—one whose adherents attempted to “directly [confront] the fragmentation of modern life and [wished] to reintegrate ‘disparate elements of that experience into new and original wholes.’ They valued integration and authenticity as well as self-referentiality and self-criticism.” That is, modernists believed that the artist’s hand should be present. For some, “individualism superseded universalism,” a kind of art for art’s sake.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, cubists experimented with a new visual language; while Russian Constructivists embraced the new language for a new socio-political world. That is, the latter married the political with the aesthetically avant-garde.

With the advent of modernism, women began to insert themselves into the professional sphere. However, this was not an easy journey. The modernist wish to bridge the gap between fine art and handiwork, break down barriers between “traditional” and European cultures, free design of “crass” commercial influences (at least this was an advantage for those traditionalist women artists) and most importantly, celebrate self-expression. Some of this did help women enter the professional art world. However, they faced a lot of criticism. Women were still subjected to the gendered cultural norms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, painter Edward Simmons asserted: “‘no genius is or has been a woman.’ It was folly he cried, for a woman to take up a serious career in art ‘in a vain attempt to rival men.’”<sup>6</sup> Some critics even used gendered words such as “feminine” to critique “bad” art. Outstanding artwork necessitated masculine adjectives. In effect, womanhood was excluded from the language of artmaking—as well as from its educational institutions.

Even though the new modernist movement was advantageous for women, many still sided with traditionalists in “decrying modernism as an aesthetic travesty.”<sup>7</sup> Painter Cecilia Beaux argued that “Art has always been modern. We should never separate the art of our time from the past. There is no fundamental reason for new standards. Art is what it has always been—a result of humanity—not a gift of the gods to one period—withheld from another.”<sup>8</sup> Beaux’ statement both confirms some modernist values while vehemently denying others. Although she believed that all good art should be of its time (and thus “modern”), Beaux also contended that we should not separate our art from the past—in contradiction to what modernists, such as the futurists, clearly advocated. Indeed, the progressive modernist model (associated with political change) regards the new period as always distinct from the previous: and one that is always an advance over the past. And yet, if all good art was inherently modern, then Beaux would appear to advocate for a universal, unchanging standard for art. This rather traditional sentiment was part of the rationale that excluded many women artists—particularly those who were not painters or sculptors. Grace Arnold Albee was one such woman.

Grace Arnold Albee was a prolific wood engraver and printmaker. Though she was a well-regarded artist during the first half of the twentieth century, today she is largely unknown. Albee was born in Scituate, Rhode Island in 1890 to Henry Cranston Arnold and

Susanne Arabella Arnold. Her love of the arts began at a very young age. Albee's artistic "genes" came from both sides of the family: her grandfather, Simeon Cranston Arnold was a poet whose illustrated books inspired the young Grace and her mother, Susanne Arabella Arnold, was an amateur oil and watercolor painter. Nonetheless, her father did not approve of young Grace's wish to obtain an artistic education. He looked down on both his own father's and his wife's artistic talents, regarding them as "frivolous and impractical." Henry Arnold even forced his wife to give up painting just as her work was receiving public notice. Despite her father's resistance, Albee studied at the Rhode Island School of Design from 1910 to 1912.

Albee's father's views were largely consistent with the period's patriarchal cultural values. At this time, women generally could not enroll in art schools, because they were deemed too "sensitive" to participate in anatomy lessons. To study the nude figure, artists drew from live models. In the nineteenth century, a proper young woman could not view the unclothed body in the company of others. Thus, if women wished to be regarded as "professional" artists, they had to create their own art academies that would offer ladies' life classes to female student artists. Thus, women founded their own formal institutions in order to provide women with professional credentials.<sup>9</sup> One of these was the Rhode Island School of Design—the school Albee attended.

The Centennial Women, a group created to collect funding for a separate Woman's Pavilion at the 1876 Centennial Exposition, raised over \$10,000 in funds for RISD. At the World's Fair, the RI Centennial Women were left with \$1,675 and had a decision to make about where that money should go. In 1877, the members voted to invest that money in founding the school. In 1912, Albee received a diploma for completing the Department of Free-Hand Drawing and Painting's four-year program. Though there was no record that any printmaking classes were offered at the school, Albee recalls learning the basics of woodcut while attending the college.<sup>10</sup>

At RISD she met her husband, a mural painter named Percy Frederick Albee. They eloped in 1913 and over the next few years had five sons. Albee was not a "career woman" in the accepted sense of the term: "[U]nlike those who with singleness of purpose completely sacrifice domestic life to professional pursuits, Miss Albee first distinguished herself as a mother."<sup>11</sup> This was a struggle that many women in this era faced. How could a woman be a professional artist while still caring for a family? To be a wife and mother was the equivalent of a full time job already. To do more was considered "wrong." Indeed, painter Margaret Lesley Head Bush-Brown agreed that motherhood came first, art second—and only if there was time.

Bush-Brown was unwilling to "exempt women artists from the demands of femininity and motherhood."<sup>12</sup> She firmly believed that most women are "intended to be wives and mothers" and that all women including "the most intelligent class" led the happiest of lives when they adjusted their professional careers in favor of the men who need them.<sup>13</sup> It would seem that Albee adhered to this sentiment. During the beginning of her marriage, she devoted more time to motherhood than to her art. As her children grew, she worked more "to elevate her goals from amateurism to professionalism."<sup>14</sup> Sometime in late 1919 or early 1920, she picked up her tools and made a few small linocuts, a type of relief print in which the artists cut designs into blocks of linoleum using gouges and knives. Printmaking allowed Albee to work from her home while she took care of her family.<sup>15</sup>

When her husband became a lithographer, his career helped Albee gain access to professional artistic institutions and events. One such venue was the Providence Art Club. The Providence Art Club was organized in 1880 when a group of sixteen individuals, six women and ten men, came together one evening to draft a constitution and hire a room. It became a location where "artists could show their work and collectors could find good pictures."<sup>16</sup> Within the first month, they had enlisted one hundred twenty eight members. In six, they had leased an entire floor of a building for studio and gallery space. This new club would exist "for art culture," a statement the founders then inscribed on the seal.<sup>17</sup>



*Collector's Items, 1945*  
Wood engraving. 5.25" x 5"  
Courtesy of Bert Gallery  
Providence, RI

Albee used her husband's membership to exhibit at the club until she became a member in 1948.<sup>18</sup> Other female members of the Providence Art Club included Angela O' Leary, Emma Swan, and Mabel May Woodward, who became its first female president.

After exhibiting her work at professional venues such as the Providence Art Club, Albee finally received the recognition she deserved. Nevertheless, this was unusual. For example, when Percy and Grace collaborated on a printmaking venture in 1926 that resulted in a new method of printing color linocuts, the *Providence Journal* cited Percy as the developer of this new process—despite the fact that Grace was his full partner in the endeavor.<sup>19</sup> Finally, in 1927, she was credited with having worked on two intricately done tapestries independently of Percy.<sup>20</sup> This marked the first time her work received positive critical evaluation. She was no longer her husband's helper, but recognized as an independent female artist.

Although Albee initially produced linocuts, she is best known for the wood engravings that “depicted the great urban centers where she lived in the 1920s and 1930s and the bucolic scenes of rural life she knew in her later years.”<sup>21</sup> As a participant in the wood engraving revival in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she, along with her peers, brought back a form of relief printmaking that had been developed in the 1790s by Thomas Bewick—a technique which “[cut] into the fine grain at the end of a wood block to achieve a precision of detail unattainable on the plank side.”<sup>22</sup> This technique is responsible for the varied tones seen in Albee's black and white prints.

She became interested in wood engraving after she moved to Paris in 1928 as a means of furthering her own and her husband's artistic careers. Albee was attracted to an engraving by Paul Bornet in the window of a bookshop.<sup>23</sup> After enrolling in his class, she dropped out after four lessons. Her son Percy Frederick Albee Jr. mentioned she did so because “[she knew] more than he [did] – it's a waste of time.”<sup>24</sup> She had already developed the foundational skills she needed to produce artistically proficient wood engravings:

*“Albee's normal working process began with a careful pencil sketch drawn on the spot, followed by a tracing of the mail contours. She then taped the drawing onto the end grain of a boxwood block and traced the outlines again over carbon paper. After cutting away the white lines of the design, the artist inked the block and painstakingly printed each impression by hand, using her burnisher to apply pressure to the paper over the block's surface.”<sup>25</sup>*

Japanese wood engraving aesthetics served as one model for modernism's new visual language. When trade routes opened between Japan and the rest of the world in 1854, Japan began to follow western values and the West became interested in Japanese visual art. This sparked the trend known as Japonisme: “Through its influence on Manet, Degas, Lautrec, van Gogh, Gauguin, Bonnard and Vuillard, it utterly transformed painting and the decorative arts.” Many of the formal aspects of ukiyo-e, Japanese wood-block prints, influenced the avant-garde language<sup>26</sup>—this included a flat sense of space, bold outlines and a graphic look, patterned surfaces, asymmetrical compositions and flat blocks of color.<sup>27</sup> Eliza Gardiner's work reflects this new Japanese-inspired graphic style.

Gardiner was one of the first color block printers to achieve national recognition; her technique and subject matter caught the interest of many viewers. Some of her prints, which include children playing or people on holiday, were clearly inspired by Japanese woodprints. In *Girl Looking out the Window*, we can see the flat sections of color and off-centered composition.<sup>28</sup> A young child glances out a window and even though we only see the back of the child, she appears to have a somber aura and an expression of longing. The print's composition is asymmetrical, another common characteristic of Japanese prints. Gardiner's off-center framing of the child with repeating rectangular boxes is a creative adaptation of the “Japanese” woodcut aesthetic.

Although Grace Albee's earlier linocuts had the flattened space and bold contrasting black and whites of a Japanese-inspired print, her later wood engravings were more traditional.

Her print, *Entangled Tractor*, is a black and white wood engraving. In it, we can see a simple rural scene that could be of Pennsylvania. This genre print depicts a tractor overrun by bushels of leaves, a building in the background, and a few chickens in the foreground. Given that the tractor is covered in leaves and the back-wheel is broken, we can assume that it has been unused for quite some time. It has become part of nature, although the unseen hand of humanity is still present.

This engraving, as well as her other prints, is rendered flawlessly. We can see the attention to detail and pride Albee has in her work. The strong contrast of the white background against the crowded dark shapes is striking. Each white detail on the leaves stands prominently against the stark outlines. With that contrast, our eye goes directly to the area around the steering wheel. We move then to the tractor's front and back wheels whose circular shapes are clearly evident among the foliage. Those three circular, line-filled objects form a compositional triangle that helps the viewer grasp the meaning of the image.

If we compare Albee's work to Gardiner's it is easy to see the difference between each artist's adaptation of the Japanese aesthetic. While Gardiner's work had the obvious characteristics of Japonisme, Albee's shows more similarities with traditional drawings. Gardiner depicts the figure in an abstracted setting, while Albee represents seemingly traditional urban and rural landscapes. Nevertheless, Albee's work is also modern.

While Albee's prints are representational, they are hardly realistic. Given that modern artists emphasize visual formal elements, Albee's focus on line is clearly consistent with the modernists' celebration of form. Moreover her rejection of conventional academic realism in favor of the "new" woodcut is also consistent with aesthetic modernism. Though representational, Albee's images are not idealized country scenes, but are instead, landscapes in motion. She portrays a world where time passes; but, it is one in which the human hand is ever present in the rural landscape. That is, her work is consistent with the aesthetic principles of the Arts and Crafts movement.

In Albee's prints, we see her touch in the slightly flickering line and the delicate cross-hatched shadings. This individualistic expression is one of the most important aesthetic characteristics of modern art—and one, not surprisingly, that many women artists readily embraced. In a letter to Georgia O'Keefe, Anita Pollitzer stated:

*"I shook absolutely when I came to the serious part of your letter asking me what art is—Do you think I know? Do you think I'd think anybody knew? Even if they said they did? Do you think I'd care what anybody thought? Now if you ask me what we're trying to do that's a different thing—We're trying to live (& perhaps help other people to live) by saying or feeling—things or people—on canvas or paper—in lines, space and color. At least I'm doing that—Matisse perhaps cares chiefly for color—Picabia for shapes—Walkowitz for line—perhaps I am wrong—but I should care only for those things in so far as they help me express my feeling—To me that's the end always—To live on paper what we're living in our hearts & heads; & all the exquisite lines & good spaces & rippingly good colors are only a way of getting rid of the feelings & making them tangible—"*<sup>29</sup>

In this letter, we can see that women artists wished to communicate their hardships, their beliefs, and their "essence" to others. Like men, they wanted to visually write their story. They wished to express what they saw, what they believed, and who they "were." This self-confident expression of identity assisted other women as well. Undoubtedly, women artists' public presence and the public exhibition of their art reinforced women's claims that they were entitled to other political rights—including suffrage. Blanche Ames' political cartoons, for example, helped to cement public support for women's political rights. Ellen Day Hale's private instruction of young women artists was also part of this movement. Hale started an informal art academy and taught other women how to paint. Moreover, she also rejected many conventional gender roles—as embodied in the self-confident, somewhat cocky pose she strikes in her self-portrait in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Other artists such as illustrators Elizabeth Shippen Green, Jessie Willcox Smith, and Violet Oakley also

paved the way for future generations. With their illustrations, they publicly celebrated women's domestic lives. In doing so, these professional working women artists used their art to help women forge "virtual" visual communities.

Albee's work, although not expressively political, also reflected modernist values. While she was in Paris, she and her family traveled extensively. Albee recorded the places they visited in drawings that would later become the foundation for her prints. Furthermore, Albee's everyday life was full of creative exploration. Her son stated: "others have written at length of her visual perception, of her technical mastery, of her originality in composition, but I write of the cross-over from stark to reality to whimsy, to poetry, to tongue-in-cheek wood engraving fun."<sup>30</sup> Her work expressed who she was. When her sons cared for a small rabbit that later died, Albee and her husband held a small funeral procession. Percy dressed as a priest and chanted funeral jargon while her sons brought the rabbit to a small grave in the forest. Grace later immortalized the burial with her engraving of *Peter Rabbit's Brother Died*. In another particularly humorous engraving, she recorded a rather "cheeky" reference to a run-in she and her friends had with a rather unusual chemise.<sup>31</sup> Her work, *Unicorns and Tadpoles*, also shows just how creative she could be. In it, we see elegant long-horned unicorns prance through a forest. Small tadpoles, which come to meet them, effectively join in the dance. One of her rural engravings *Housing Problem* also showcases her humor. It depicts a couple of goats exploring the ruins of an old home—seemingly looking for their own in the process. Through her artwork, we can see where she lived and traveled. We also get to see her personality.<sup>32</sup>

Even though there were women who rejected modernist aesthetics, the lives they led exemplified the spirit of the modern "new woman." In essence, these working women artists rejected traditional gender values. The fact that they worked hard to achieve what success they could was in itself modern—even though some of them, such as Jessie Wilcox Smith and Elizabeth Green, employed conventional iconography. Although Grace Albee was more aesthetically adventurous than Willcox Smith, her work was still somewhat traditional. Nor was she a political activist like Blanche Ames. She did not create her work to fuel some sort of new world order. However, the fact that she worked and prevailed against the traditional sentiment that women could not be artists, proves that she was a modern woman—just like countless other professional female artists.

Grace Albee and Family, 1930  
Passport Photograph  
Private Collection



**Women Artists:**



**Grace Albee**

1890 – 1985



**Frances Allen**

1853 – 1941



**Theodosia Chase**

1875 – 1972



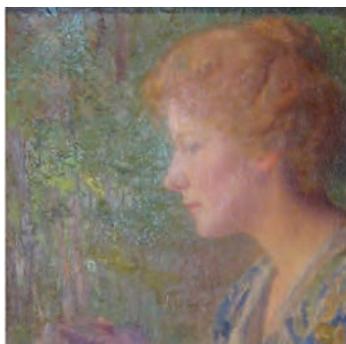
**Elizabeth Draper  
Gardiner**

1871 – 1955



**Elizabeth Shippen  
Green**

1871 – 1954



**Helen Watson  
Phelps**

1859 – 1944



**Jessie Willcox  
Smith**

1863 – 1935



**Alice Barber  
Stephens**

1858 – 1932



**Mary Allen**

1858– 1941



**Blanche Ames**

1878 – 1969



**Anna Richards  
Brewster**

1870 – 1952



**Ellen Day Hale**

1855 – 1940



**Lena Newcastle**

1866 – 1951



**Angela O'Leary**

1879 – 1921



**Emma Swan**

1853 – 1927



**Sara Wyman  
Whitman**

1842 – 1904



**Mabel May  
Woodward**

1877 – 1945

*Unicorns and Tadpoles, 1958*

Wood engraving. 13" x 26"

Private Collection

## Grace Albee

Grace Arnold Albee was a prolific wood engraver and printmaker. Though she exhibited widely during the first half of the twentieth century, today she is largely unknown. Albee was born in Scituate, Rhode Island in 1890 to Henry Cranston Arnold and Susanne Arabella Arnold. Her love of the arts began at a very young age. This is not surprising given that Albee's artistic "genes" came from both sides of the family. Her grandfather, Simeon Cranston Arnold was a poet whose illustrated books inspired young Grace. Her mother, Susanne Arabella Arnold, was an amateur oil and watercolor painter. Despite this artistic legacy, Albee's father did not approve of young Grace's desire to obtain an artistic education.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, she ignored her father's wishes and enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design and studied painting at RISD from 1910 to 1912. While there, she met mural painter Percy F. Albee, and eloped with him in 1913. Eventually she and Percy had five sons.<sup>2</sup> Although Albee had difficulty pursuing her professional career, she still continued to work on her art.

Albee eventually produced more than two hundred and fifty linocuts, woodcuts and wood engravings during a career that spanned nearly sixty years. Much of her art were "visuals" of everyday life. They "[recorded] her careful observations of her surroundings near the various locales in which she lived: Providence (1915–1928); Paris (1928–1933); New York City (1933–1938); Bucks County, Pennsylvania (1938–1962); Kew Gardens, New York (1962–1974); and finally Barrington and Bristol, Rhode Island (1974–1983)."<sup>3</sup> Though Albee's rural Pennsylvania landscapes of the 1940s and 1950s secured her professional reputation, her earlier Providence and European work provided the foundation for this later success. During this time, Albee mastered how to apply just enough pressure to the wood in order to create compelling three-dimensional scenes.

For Albee, her expatriate years in Paris represented an extraordinary period of artistic growth. They "encapsulate the pivotal moment when she shifted away from working according to amateur artistic standards and turned towards a model of artistic professionalism."<sup>4</sup> Grace Albee's artistic skills and career blossomed while she lived abroad. She refined her technical skills, produced new work and exhibited her engravings in the Parisian Salons. Her *pièce de resistance* was her one-woman exhibition at the American Library in Paris in March of 1931.

After her success in Paris, Albee moved to New York where she devoted all her time to her artistic pursuits. Eventually, she gained national attention and critical acclaim. As a professional artist and a woman, she was granted admission to the highly selective membership of the National Academy of Design in 1941. Albee became a National Academician in 1946, an honor that secured her place in the pantheon of accomplished American artists.<sup>5</sup> Given that she raised five sons while pursuing a professional artistic career, this public recognition of her artistic skill is truly noteworthy. Indeed, she was successful despite the hardships that women artists faced during this time. Grace Albee was a remarkable woman and an accomplished artist. Hers is a story that can certainly inspire anyone interested in pursuing a professional, artistic career.



Written by Monica Lopes

### Notes

1. Christina Weyl, "The Early Life of Grace Albee," *Print Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2007): 129-130.
2. "Grace Arnold Albee." National Museum of Women in the Arts, <http://www.tfaoi.com/newsm1/n1m441.htm> (Accessed Feb 26, 2015).
3. Christina Weyl, "The Professionalization of An American Woman Printmaker: The Early Career of Grace Albee, 1915 - 1934," Georgetown University Library, [www.library.georgetown.edu/exhibition/professionalization-american-woman-printmaker-early-career-grace-albee](http://www.library.georgetown.edu/exhibition/professionalization-american-woman-printmaker-early-career-grace-albee) (Accessed March 16, 2015).
4. Christina Weyl, "The Professionalization of An American Woman Printmaker," 139.
5. Christina Weyl, "The Professionalization of An American Woman Printmaker," 140.

# Frances & Mary Allen

*Photographers and Businesswomen*

Born 4 years apart, sisters Frances Allen (1853–1941), and Mary Allen (1858–1941), grew up on their family’s farm in Deerfield, Massachusetts. Because they resided in rural Massachusetts, the girls spent most of the time outdoors when they were not in school or taking piano lessons. This connection to and knowledge of the landscape would eventually inform some of their finest photographic works.

After graduating from the Deerfield Academy, the young women attended the State Normal School in Westfield, MA in order to receive a teaching certificate. In June of 1876, the sisters graduated, but before starting their careers, they visited the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Their visit to the exhibition’s photography hall transformed their lives. The hall included displays of camera equipment and work from English photographers, Julia Margaret Cameron and Henry Peach Robinson—both of whom helped “transform” photography into a fine art.<sup>1</sup> This trip catalyzed the sisters’ interest in art and photography.

After their return from Philadelphia, Frances and Mary began their teaching careers. However, between 1883 and 1892, both suffered some deterioration in their hearing and eventually had to give up their chosen profession. Edmund, Mary and Frances’ brother, introduced them to photography—a profession they pursued passionately and one in which they were remarkably successful (both financially and artistically).<sup>2</sup>

During this time, interest in photography surged in the United States due to the reduction in size and complexity of the camera and simplification of the production process. By the 1880s, with the appearance of the Kodak camera, women were drawn to photography in

**Bound Album, ca. 1910**  
Gelatin DOP print, 14.5" x 12.75"  
Courtesy of Special Collection  
and University Archives,  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst



the thousands. Like sketching or embroidery, picture taking was believed to be a congenial pursuit for women.<sup>3</sup> Many women chose photography because it was less time consuming and demanded (at least then) far less education than did painting, sculpture, illustration or engraving. Thus, they could still raise families and ultimately enter the field as professionals. Historian C. Jane Grover states that photography journals encouraged women to pick up the camera since “photography did not require nearly as much effort as did regular needlework.”<sup>4</sup> Others chose to enter the field because they were not constrained by the professional and aesthetic standards of other more established artistic professions. In other words, the representational and iconographic conventions that defined good art were absent from photography (at its inception). For many women this was liberating. Unlike studio painting, photography was initially considered to be easy to learn and thus an ideal pursuit for amateurs. Fortunately, it soon became an occupation for women who wished to become professional photographers.

The Allens, who chose to become photographers after their hearing began to fail, were successful, in part, because of their participation in the Arts and Crafts movement in Deerfield. Many visitors traveled to Deerfield to view traditional craft making—traditions that adherents of the arts and crafts movement upheld. Because they were astute businesswomen, the sisters sold “nostalgic” prints to their visitors. In doing so, they supported both the arts and crafts principles and their own burgeoning business. Although their work was deemed commercial, many art critics also applauded their efforts. The sisters garnered positive critical recognition in the US and Europe after they exhibited their work in the first American photography salon in Washington, D.C. in 1896.<sup>5</sup> Because of this opportunity to showcase their photographs, they also found a new audience. Soon, they were exhibiting their art in London, New York, Russia, Paris, Chicago and Philadelphia. The sisters also published their work in the leading periodicals of the day, including *The Craftsman*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Country Life in America*, and *The Garden Magazine*.<sup>6</sup>

Like the work of many early female photographers, Mary and Frances Allen’s art has failed to gain the attention of modern day museum curators. The Allen Sisters brought a business savvy approach to photography that allowed them to accumulate wealth for themselves and their entire family. With their education, business skills and keen interest in photography and the arts, they built a successful studio practice. In doing so, Mary and Frances Allen paved a path for other modern female photographers and commercial artists to follow.

## Blanche Ames

*Artist and Scientist*

Blanche Ames was born on February 18, 1878, in Lowell, Massachusetts to a progressive, well-established New England family. Her father Adelbert Ames and her maternal grandfather Benjamin Butler were Union generals in the Civil War, and spent time in political office. Her mother was a leading supporter of women’s suffrage and civil rights. During Ames’ childhood, both her parents played an active role in her education and encouraged the development of her liberal values regarding religion and politics. After graduating from high school, which was an unusual accomplishment at the time, Ames attended Smith College where she studied art history and painting. She graduated in 1899 as president of her class.<sup>1</sup>

Ames married Harvard botanist Oakes Ames (no relation) in 1900. Together they had four children. More importantly, she was his professional collaborator. She illustrated his critically acclaimed studies on orchids and other plant life.<sup>2</sup> Through the mid 1900s until the late 1910s, she also collaborated with her brother Adelbert Ames, Jr. on an inventive color system and new paintings techniques based on optical physiology. Even later in life, she maintained her interest in science. At her home in Easton MA, she may have designed one of the first “green” toilets.

Written by Colleen McClean

### Notes

1. Suzanne L. Flynt, *The Allen Sisters: Pictorial Photographers, 1885-1920* (Deerfield, MA: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, 2002).
2. Jane Gover, “A New Profession for Women,” in *The Positive Image: The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).
3. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image*, 7.
4. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image*, 6.
5. See Suzanne L. Flynt, *The Allen Sisters*, 6. Ibid.

Oakes and Blanche Ames also shared an interest in women's rights and were leaders in the Massachusetts Women's Suffrage League. Blanche Ames co-founded the Birth Control League of Massachusetts in 1916. Along with promoting birth control, the group supported medical research and organized debates with leaders of the Roman Catholic Church. At this time, Ames created political cartoons for suffragist publications. Though the work she did throughout her life was diverse, art was always her central focus.

Blanche Ames employed her artistic skills to support women's suffrage. She was not just an artist fighting the status quo. Her work reflected the time and place in which she lived. Ames, like many upper class women in New England was highly educated. In Boston, upper class women demanded more independence for all women. This demand was reflected in some of the new modern art—as exemplified by the gritty realism of the artists of the Ashcan school. Many of these artists contributed their work to publications such as *The Masses* or to the *Woman's Journal*, of which Blanche Ames was the art editor.

While working for suffrage, Blanche employed an artistic style that could be mass-produced for print publications (like the books on orchids she produced with her husband). While her early paintings have more in common with the Boston School of artists, her cartoon work is closer to that of activists in England and the United States.<sup>3</sup> Her political illustrations used sharp black lines to create simple clear renditions that could be easily—and quickly—read by the public. Many of her colleagues adopted this efficient style.

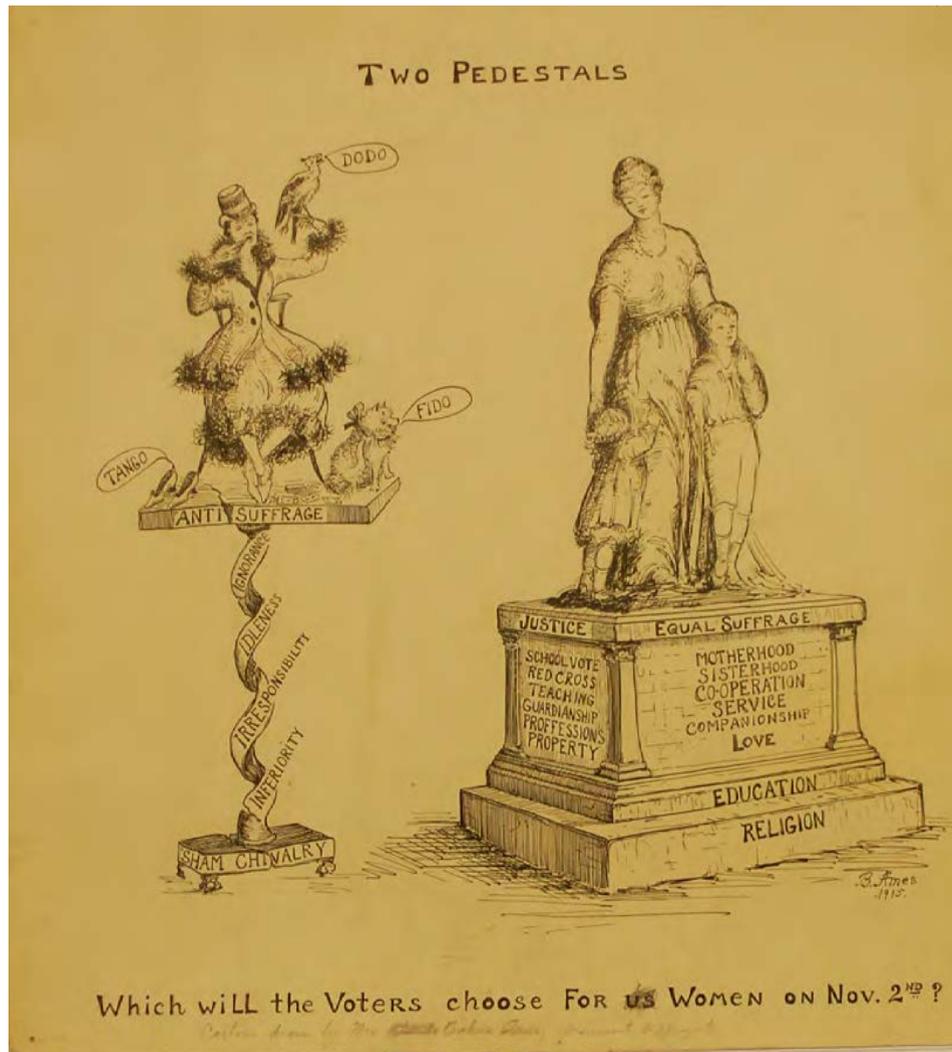
With the support of her husband and family, Ames joined many national discussions and used her art to effect social change. Despite her high profile life, Blanche Ames often spoke about her children, her family, and the suffragist cause rather than her art. She was a successful professional woman and a mother—and a role model for working mothers today.

Written by Derek Murphy

Notes

1. Much of the biographical information in this essay comes from **Anne Biller Clarke**, *My Dear Mrs. Ames: A Study of Suffragist Cartoonist Blanche Ames Ames* (New York and Washington: Peter Lang, 2001).
2. **Roy R Behrens**, "The Artistic and Scientific Collaboration of Blanche Ames Ames and Adelbert Ames II." *Leonardo* 31, no. 1 (1998): 47-54.
3. **Alice Sheppard**, *Cartooning for Suffrage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 95-114; 196-204.

**Two Pedestals**  
 Ink on paper. 18.5" x 17"  
 Courtesy of Sophia Smith Collection,  
 Smith College





*Armistice Day, New York City 1919*  
Oil on Canvas. 10" x 8"  
Private Collection

## Anna Richards Brewster

*Professional Artist and Mother*

Born in 1870 in Germantown, Pennsylvania, Anna Richards Brewster was an American Modernist painter who was born to William Trost Richards and Anna Matlack Richards.<sup>1</sup> Richards, the sixth of eight siblings in her family, was home-schooled by her mother who was a Quaker poet and teacher. Her father, a well-known American landscape painter, taught her how to paint. At the age of twenty, she won the Dodge prize at the National Academy of Design for best picture by a woman.

Brewster traveled to Europe to work and study for ten years. While there, she took painting and drawing classes from William Merritt Chase. At the Académie Julian in Paris, Brewster

studied with the well-known painter and stained glass artist, John LaFarge and with H. Siddons Mowbray. In 1895, Brewster set up her own studio in England. There, she worked with members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—who were key to her development as an artist. She painted on her travels to Spain, France, and Italy with Lady Kemp-Welch, a family friend. Collectors believe her best work was produced during the ten years she spent on the continent. Later, Brewster returned to the United States. In 1905, she married William Tenney Brewster an English professor and a friend of her brother.

Brewster began painting landscapes of Scarsdale, New York (where she settled down with her husband and had a son) as well as those near her summer home in Matunuck, Rhode Island. Eventually, Brewster traveled with her husband and painted landscapes from around the United States, Europe and the Middle East. Sadly, in the 1930's, her son died of pneumonia just before he turned five. After this tragic event, she stopped exhibiting her work. Brewster only displayed her paintings in Scarsdale, including the Scarsdale Women's Club, which was an association she helped to establish.

Despite the brevity of her career, Brewster's paintings have become a collector's item. Anna Richards-Brewster's Impressionist work pays subtle homage to the artists whom she admired—Turner, Rembrandt, and Van Gogh. Her style was primarily influenced, however, by her father William Trost Richards and by the Pre-Raphaelite painters with whom she studied: William Merritt Chase and John LaFarge. Brewster worked primarily with oil on canvas or with watercolor; her light, airy brushstrokes create atmospheric landscapes and grainy urban scenes. Many of her works employ a limited color palette of cool browns, blues, greys and greens. In her more vibrant paintings, she introduced warm reds and yellows. Other than a few portraits, most of Richards-Brewster's work consists of rolling landscapes from countries all throughout Europe and the Middle East, still-life paintings of flowers, and delicately rendered New York City streets and buildings.

Written by Joseph Tavares

#### Notes

1. Very little has been written about Anna Richards Brewster (at least by the academic press.) Material in this biography has largely been culled from **Judith Kafka Maxwell**, *Anna Richards Brewster, American Impressionist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

## Theodosia Chase

*Embracing Twentieth Century New Media*

Theodosia Chase (1875-1972), a New Bedford resident who trained at the Swain School of Design (later part of BU and now part of UMass Dartmouth) was a painter and working photographer during the early part of the twentieth century (her paintings are still sold at auction today).<sup>1</sup> To earn income, she created postcards for summer residents as reminders of their seaside visits to southeastern MA.<sup>2</sup> She was able to do so because of the 1906 invention of the "Folding Pocket Kodak." With this camera, photographers could shoot and develop their own photographs. Eventually, designers produced several different cameras that allowed the photographers to label the negative directly after the image was taken. Thus photographers such as Theodosia Chase could quickly produce the images that summer visitors desired.

In collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs concludes "that individuals required testimony and evidence of other people to validate their interpretations of their own experiences, to provide independent confirmation (or refutation) of the content of their memories and thus confidence in their accuracy."<sup>3</sup> Though Chase provided a material rendition of what these memories might be, she created images that are more than just souvenirs of moonlit summers by the sea. If we look closely at one of her photographs, we find that Chase created protected spaces that women can imaginatively inhabit. In *Schultz's Apponegansett* (1910), the artist depicts a trio of women in a rowboat, an activity generally reserved for men who may be accompanied by lounging female companions. Though the image is of a landscape, these women break the iconographic rendering of the nostalgic postcard photo of a "days gone by." Her images show us that there may be another "way of seeing," that our assumptions about



### Cozy, 1932

Rotogravure. 4.75" x 6.25"  
 Courtesy of New Bedford  
 Free Public Library

Written by Betsy Janus

#### Notes

1. See "Auction Results for Theodosia Potter Chase." [www.mutualart.com/Artist/Theodosia-Potter-Chase](http://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Theodosia-Potter-Chase) (Accessed, February 26, 2015).
2. Beverly Morrison Glennon and Judith N. Lund. *Greetings from Dartmouth, Massachusetts: A Postcard History* (Dartmouth, MA: Garrison Wall, 2003). Much of the information for this essay comes from this text. Very little research is otherwise available about this artist.
3. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated and with an Introduction by Louis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 48.
4. John Agrelo, "Theodosia P. Chase (1875 - 1974) - Find A Grave Memorial." <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-in/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=59549804> (Accessed Feb 12, 2015).

Progressive era gentility have been, so to speak, "exposed." The natural world enfolds rather than acquiesces to the perspectival controlling grid. With these landscapes, the artist creates gendered spaces that celebrate female community.

Although she also worked as a librarian at the Southworth Library in Dartmouth, MA to support herself, in 1934 Chase established her own photography studio. She photographed over two hundred scenes of the south coast of Massachusetts. Theodosia Chase led a remarkably productive long life and worked as a commercial photographer until she was ninety. In fact, she continued to paint and sketch until the last two years of her life when her health started to fail. On January 4, 1972 Theodosia Chase died in New Bedford and is buried in the city's Rural Cemetery.<sup>4</sup>

## Eliza Draper Gardiner

*Master Printmaker*

Eliza Draper Gardiner was one of first artists to gain national recognition for her color woodblock prints. She was born on October 29, 1871 in Cranston Rhode Island and attended Friends School (Moses Brown School) in Providence Rhode Island. After her graduation, she taught art at Moses Brown while she continued her studies at the Rhode School of Design (RISD); a college founded by women and dedicated to the study of visual arts and design. Like many of her female contemporaries, Gardiner studied in Europe and England. In 1897, Gardiner accepted a teaching position at the Rhode Island School of Design and taught woodcut, watercolor and drawing until her retirement in 1939. Despite this impressive resume, she remains largely unknown.<sup>1</sup>

Gardiner was an active member in numerous artist circles in both New England and Pennsylvania. Several artists mentored her throughout her career. Like Georgia O'Keeffe, she studied with Arthur Wesley Dow, a member of the Arts and Crafts movement and an advocate of modern design principles. In 1895, Dow exhibited a group of woodcuts inspired by Japanese prints at the MFA in Boston.<sup>2</sup> Many art historians credit Dow as one of most

*Girl Looking Out the Window, ca. 1920*  
 Color woodblock print. 11" x 8.25"  
 Courtesy of Providence Art Club



important artist in the United States to spread the Japanese woodblock tradition. His work undoubtedly impacted Gardiner's. In her print, *The Girl Sitting in the Window*, the richly colored, darkly outlined shapes clearly reflect Japanese influences. Dow continued to teach and disseminate his newly formulated aesthetic principles. In 1899 he published the book, *Composition*, which provided students with a series of exercises that taught the manipulation of line, color, and tonal relationships within a composition. In 1903 he became head of the art department at Columbia University Teachers College in New York. Thus, he influenced the first generation of American modernist painters.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout Gardiner's career, she participated in many national and international exhibitions including exhibits held at the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston (1897), the Art Institute of Chicago (1919), the Detroit Institute of Arts (1919), the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris (1928), and the Brooklyn Museum (1933). She showed her work at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, N.M. Vose Galleries in Boston, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and the International Society of Printmakers in California.<sup>4</sup> Gardiner's 1922 exhibit at Goodspeed's in Boston, Massachusetts was very well-received.<sup>5</sup> W.B. Downs, Winslow Homer's authorized biographer, wrote the catalog for the show.<sup>6</sup> According to Downes:

*"Miss Gardiner has an agreeable sense of color and pattern and her medium, with its strong dark contours, puts a premium, as it were, on decorative pattern."*<sup>7</sup>

The editor Mary Fanton Roberts, editor-in-chief of *New Idea Woman's Magazine*, managing editor of *The Craftsman*, and creator and editor of *The Touchstone Magazine* and *Decorative Arts* magazine wrote the catalog foreword.<sup>8</sup> She describes Gardiner's work:<sup>9</sup>

*"I had never realized how much of the feeling of childhood, tenderness, contentment or sadness could be revealed in flat spaces of color until I saw Elizabeth Gardiner's woodblock prints. What more could any painting or carving express than she gives us in these excessively simple design?"*

Eliza Draper Gardiner died in 1955 in Rhode Island, but her accomplishments as an artist, teacher and contributor to the modernist conversation remain largely forgotten. She epitomizes the life of the modern woman of the early twentieth-century. She was a self-confident independent artist: a manager of her artistic pursuits and notable professional within her career.

Written by Allison J. Cywin

#### Notes

1. Peter Falk, *Eliza Draper Gardiner: Master of the Color Woodblock* (Newport: Newport Art Museum, 1987).
2. Terra Foundation for American Art. *Catalog Entry Biographical Summary*, Arthur Wesley Dow. [http://collection.terraamericanart.org/view/people/asitem/items\\$0040null:14/0?state:flow=633a2a14-0262-4bdf-be04-d744032225d1](http://collection.terraamericanart.org/view/people/asitem/items$0040null:14/0?state:flow=633a2a14-0262-4bdf-be04-d744032225d1) (Accessed March 23, 2015).
3. Smithsonian American Art Museum. *Arthur Dow Biography*, 2015 <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artist/?id=1325> (Accessed March 28, 2015).
4. Peter Falk, *Eliza Draper Gardiner: Master of the Color Woodblock*.
5. Eliza Draper Gardner, Mary Fanton Roberts and W.B. Downes. *Wood Block Prints in Color*. Boston: F.L. Coburn & Co. 1922.
6. *Brooklyn Public Library Bulletin*, (New York: Brooklyn Public Library, January 1912) 4: 2.
7. Eliza Gardiner and et. al. *Wood Block Prints in Color*. Boston: F.L. Coburn & Co. 1922.
8. Mary Fanton Roberts papers, 1880-1956. Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/mary-fanton-roberts-papers-8457/more> (Accessed March 23, 2015).
9. Eliza Draper Gardiner et al. *Wood Block Prints in Color*.

# Elizabeth Shippen Green

A “Red Rose Girl” and Professional Illustrator

Elizabeth Shippen Green (1871-1954) was born into a Philadelphia family whose family can trace its origins back to the city’s colonial period. Her father Jasper, a Civil War illustrator, encouraged his daughter’s interest in art. Under his tutelage, Green learned foundational artistic skills. He also used his connections at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts to secure his daughter’s admittance to the school. Jasper believed this training would help her find employment as an illustrator in the nineteenth century’s “new media”: the illustrated periodical.

During the Civil War, Americans clamored for visual information. With the advent of new technologies such as half-tone printing, the illustrated print publication industry expanded rapidly. Very soon, the illustrated periodical emerged as an important mode of communication. This occurred around the same time that women were entering art schools and joining the professional work force. Elizabeth Shippen Green, who worked tirelessly to find her place in this world, would soon become a “role model” for other working women artists and illustrators.

At seventeen, Green created a small studio in her bedroom where she perfected her art. When she was eighteen, she sold her first series of illustrations to the *Philadelphia Times*.<sup>1</sup> According to the editors: “They [the illustrations] are the work of Miss Bessie [Elizabeth] S. Green of Philadelphia who is only eighteen years old . . . the illustrations show wonderful talent. Indeed they would do credit to an artist much older and more experienced than Miss Green.”<sup>2</sup> During her college years, she submitted a weekly illustration to the magazine. But this was not enough for the enterprising young artist. Not content with one client, this ambitious young woman also pursued new opportunities. When she was nineteen, Green received a commission to produce the cover for *Jester*, a humor magazine. Within a few years, she was also working for *The Philadelphia Public Ledger*, the Strawbridge and Clothier department store and *The Ladies Home Journal*.<sup>3</sup>

Despite all these accomplishments, Green truly found her artistic voice when she began taking illustration classes with Howard Pyle, a renowned artist who taught many of the leading illustrators of the day. While in this class, Green made a connection with two other women: Jessie Wilcox Smith and Violet Oakley. The three women swore they would never marry (eventually they became known as “The Red Rose Girls”). For the next eight years, they supported each other—both personally and professionally. Each would go on to be successful professional artist. Green’s images in *Harper’s Weekly* would be the only images selected besides Pyle’s that would be printed in color.<sup>4</sup> Oakley and Smith would also receive several accolades for their designs. Indeed, the three proved that women could be independently successful, own property and still be fashionable, genteel women. Although they lived “progressive” lives, Green, Oakley and Smith’s art did reflect gendered conventions.<sup>5</sup> As the twentieth century progressed, other artists would take up the banner of the “new women”—Blanche Ames and the “businesswomen” included in this exhibit were just some of them.<sup>6</sup>

*Gizele, Harper’s Monthly Magazine, October 1908*

Magazine illustration. 9.625" x 6.75"  
Courtesy of W.E.B. DuBois Library,  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Written by Adrien Mercier

## Notes

1. Alice A. Carter, *The Red Rose Girls: An Uncommon Story of Art and Love*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 24.
2. Carter, *The Red Rose Girls*, 24.
3. Carter, *The Red Rose Girls*, 29 – 38.
4. Carter, *The Red Rose Girls*, 103.
5. Carter, *The Red Rose Girls*, 183.
6. Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press).





## Ellen Day Hale

*Master Printmaker*

Ellen Day Hale was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1855 to the renowned minister and writer Edward Everett Hale.<sup>1</sup> Her father was a strong believer in education and urged all women in his family to become accomplished. Though their family was not wealthy, the Hales were prominent and well respected. However, prestigious education was only accessible for a man in most parts of US and Europe. In order to fulfill her desire to become a painter, Hale enrolled at the Académie Julian in Paris, one of the few fine arts programs offered to women at the time. After perfecting her figure painting, Hale developed her own unique style, noticeable in her well-known self-portrait of 1885.<sup>2</sup>

Soon, Hale found herself joining the new generation of women wishing to transform traditional gender roles. They attempted to pursue higher education and establish professional careers. In fact, Hale went beyond proving an independent woman's capabilities when she supported herself throughout her life by painting and never marrying. She also rejected certain Victorian ideologies and lived amongst others like her. She found support through friendship with other unmarried, independent women artists.<sup>3</sup>

**Untitled (Oxen)**  
Oil on canvas. 41" x 51"  
Courtesy of Pettaquamscutt  
Historical Society

Ellen Day Hale was one of the most important artists of the mid to late nineteenth centuries (as evidenced by her extraordinary portrait owned by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston).<sup>4</sup> Though most of her fame stemmed from her beautifully painted portraits and landscapes, she was also a talented etcher. With her subtle and delicately placed brushstrokes, her work resembles French Impressionism. Hale often painted portraits of women in action—individuals performing various activities such as reading or playing an instrument, skills deemed impressive for a “household” woman. These paintings encouraged many young women, and others, to see the beauty of a powerful woman.<sup>5</sup>

In her later years, Hale had a significant impact on her community in Massachusetts. She offered private painting classes and created “art circles” that were specifically available to women. This simple support for female education inspired many young girls to pursue artistic education. Hale was also a part of many organized art groups including the Society of Washington Artists, the Washington Watercolor Club, and the Washington Art Club.<sup>6</sup> Membership in these organizations allowed Hale to lead an independent life.

Hale was a modern woman. She rejected society’s gender roles, fulfilled family duties, and pursued higher education. Ellen Day Hale served as a role model for generations of young women. She inspired them to break the boundaries of gender conventions. Hale proved that being a sophisticated, professional artist could truly be a reality.<sup>7</sup>

## Lena Newcastle

*Painter of Modern Urban Landscapes*

Lena Newcastle (1866–1951) was a professional painter who supported herself teaching art, first in Pittsfield, and then for about 30 years in the New Bedford public school system beginning around 1902. She studied at Pratt and spent time in Europe as evident in the image below. She was a member of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors (now the National Association of Women Artists), the Society of Independent Artists, and the American Society of Watercolorists, which created the Lena Newcastle Memorial Award in her memory. She had a one-woman show at the Argent Galleries in New York in 1935.



### *The Market*

Watercolor on paper. 26.5" x 30.75"  
Courtesy of New Bedford Free  
Public Library

Written by Oskar Augustowski

#### Notes

1. “National Museum of Women in the Arts” Ellen Day Hale. <http://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/ellen-day-hale>. (Accessed February 4, 2015).
2. Brittany Bosch. “A Rebellious Tradition”: The Life of Ellen Day Hale. *Inked Impressions, Ellen Day Hale and the Painter-Etcher Movement* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Dickinson College, 2007), 10. <http://www2.dickinson.edu/trout/images/pdfs/InkedImpressions.pdf>
3. Berna Onat, Ellen Day Hale and Artistic Training for Women in America, *Inked Impressions, Ellen Day Hale and the Painter-Etcher Movement* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Dickinson College, 2007). 20. <http://www2.dickinson.edu/trout/images/pdfs/InkedImpressions.pdf>
4. Brittany Bosch. “A Rebellious Tradition,” 11.
5. Berna Onat, “Ellen Day Hale and Artistic Training for Women in America,” 18.
6. Brittany Bosch. “A Rebellious Tradition,” 15.
7. Linda Docherty, *Women as Readers: Visual Interpretations*. (Worcester MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1998), 335-88.

Written by Janice Hodson

Curator of Art  
Special Collections Department  
New Bedford Free Public Library

*South Main Street, ca. 1915*  
Watercolor on paper. 15" x 11"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club



## Angela O'Leary

*American Impressionist*

Angela O'Leary was an American born watercolor artist from Providence, Rhode Island. She was one of three daughters of Timothy O'Leary, a Major in the Civil War. Unlike Angela, her two sisters moved away from their hometown in Rhode Island. One sister moved to Maryland; while the other moved to New York.<sup>1</sup> Angela presumably decided to remain in her hometown in order to study with Sydney Burleigh at the Rhode Island School of Design under.<sup>2</sup> Her paintings, which clearly show her mentor's influence, are also a tribute to the city in which she was born.

O'Leary had a studio workspace in the Fleur De Lys Studio on 7 Thomas Street. Built in 1885, the building's studio spaces were designed by Burleigh and Edmund R. Willson. The structure is now a historic landmark. Rumor has it, according to the Providence Art Club "oral history," that Burleigh, though a married man, engaged in multiple affairs while living at the studios. The most notable was with Angela O'Leary. The two allegedly carried out an affair that ended poorly and resulted in her suicide. O'Leary was found in her studio on a cold winter's night with a gas tube in her mouth. A kink in the cord had prevented asphyxiation and she was taken to the hospital. Unfortunately, she did not survive.<sup>3</sup>

In a number of her paintings, she depicts the city streets and shops around South Main Street in Providence. Her colors are often muted with fine details blurred. O'Leary's paintings are also quite similar to Claude Monet's impressionist urbanscapes. Though they work in different media, both artists have a distinct, colorful, muted style. Both employ aerial viewpoints and turn their pedestrians into amalgamations of color rather than distinct individuals. In O'Leary's watercolor, titled *European Canal Street*, the fence and buildings create a narrow path for the viewer to enter the pictorial plain. This spatial demarcation is the only distinct mark in the image. In particular, the artist does not add distinctive features to her pedestrians. Rather, her figures become abstract masses of color that dissolve into the cobblestone building. They are reminiscent of Monet's haystacks that seem to evaporate as one draws near. Like the French artist, O'Leary's work is distinguished by a sharp geometrical sensibility. Unlike Monet, she uses clean edges with defined areas of color and shape to break apart the picture. This allows the viewer's eye to travel around the page very systematically—to follow the strong angles and bold, if somewhat muted colors.<sup>4</sup>

According to one critic, "Her work was distinguished by its charming sentiment and for the artist's unusual success at painting peasants and quaint people in their native settings, with a feeling for place and character that was a distinct asset to her success as a painter."<sup>5</sup> Her work possessed an introverted quality that created a sense of intimacy although it was hard to define. Often, the figures in her paintings were everyday working class folk. Because O'Leary includes no personal detail, facial features or expression, the figures fade into the architecture—a rather melancholic premonition of the artist's own later life.

Written by Gabrielle Sullivan

### Notes

1. Providence Art Club Archive. Also see George Leland Miner, *Providence Art Club: 1880-2005* (Providence RI: Providence Art Club, 2007).
2. "Bert Gallery," *Bert Gallery RSS*. 10 Feb. 2015.
3. Rory Raven, *Haunted Providence: Strange Tales from the Smallest State* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2007), 85.
4. Providence Art Club Archive.
5. Providence Art Club Archive.

# Helen Watson Phelps

*A Singular Artist and Teacher*

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, as the advertising and demand for well-designed manufactured goods began to increase, American and British middle class women (and those who aspired to be) increasingly entered the work force. One of the avenues opened to those who wished to remain “respectable” was the world of art and design. Despite their absence from art history textbooks, evidence of the increase in the number of working women artists in the art field is clear. In 1880, officials in Providence, Rhode Island added “artist” to its professional listings in the city directory. A quarter of those listed were women—and that number doubled by 1905.

To become a professional artist, one had to enter an art academy. After training at schools such as the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (opened 1844), female artists could obtain employment as designers, illustrators, and occasionally as painters. Nonetheless, they were severely restricted as to what kind of subject matter they could employ and what classes they might take. Hence, many women traveled abroad—especially to France—to obtain the artistic education that would allow them to become professional working women artists.

Helen Watson Phelps, a painter from Attleboro, Massachusetts, was one of the many American women to study art at the Académie Julian in Paris.<sup>1</sup> Like her contemporaries, she wished to receive the same foundational artistic training as her male counterparts. Unlike most American art schools, the progressive Académie curriculum included life drawing classes for women—an important component of any artist’s training.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the Académie Julian charged female students double what males were charged (100 francs per month, instead of 50).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the women’s course of study was also far less demanding than the men’s. In some fields of art, success is contingent upon certain factors: namely, education and encouragement or support.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, even though the Académie supported their American women expatriates, women’s social and cultural achievements in the arts were clearly affected by this discrimination. Thus, Phelps’ professional success is indeed noteworthy.

After her studies, the artist continued her education (albeit with private lessons) at Raphael Collin’s Studios. Ultimately, Phelps developed a mastery of color and control of the human form. She was particularly skilled in producing vivid color combinations in her paintings and received several awards for her work.<sup>5</sup> She exhibited her paintings in Boston, New York and at the Salons in Paris—a notable accomplishment for a young American female artist.

Women artists such as Phelps clearly made the transition from amateur “dabbler” to professional painter and educator. That is, she represented the new professional woman—one who helped to redefine gendered cultural conventions in the early twentieth century. Her professional success led to her teaching position at RISD—a role in which she could function as a mentor to other young artists. Her large studio in the Hoppin Homestead Building was both a workplace and social gathering site. Visitors came to the studio to admire her work and progress or to spend leisurely hours with her. Phelps, who was known for her mastery of technique, should also be remembered as a singular teacher and mentor to countless young men and women from southern New England.



**Newspaper Boy, 1887**  
Oil on canvas, 35.5" x 21"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

Written by Johnus Derby

#### Notes

1. John Russell, “Art View; An Art School That Also Taught Life,” *The New York Times*, (March 19, 1989), <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/19/arts/art-view-an-art-school-that-also-taught-life.html?page-wanted=1>. (Accessed, February 25, 2015).
2. Much of the biographical material for the life of Helen Watson Phelps comes from the [Providence Art Club Archive](http://www.providenceartclub.org/).
3. See the [Bert Gallery Website](http://www.bertgallery.com) [www.bertgallery.com](http://www.bertgallery.com/exhibits/archive/on_exhibit/paris_essay2.php) and especially [http://www.bertgallery.com/exhibits/archive/on\\_exhibit/paris\\_essay2.php](http://www.bertgallery.com/exhibits/archive/on_exhibit/paris_essay2.php) (Accessed February 25, 2015).
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# Jessie Willcox Smith

*Celebrating Women's Domestic Spaces as Art*

Jessie Willcox Smith, an American illustrator whose creative output rivaled Norman Rockwell, was especially known for her popular *Good Housekeeping* covers and children's book illustrations. Her work was also included in *Ladies Home Journal*, *Harper's* and the *Mother Goose Series*.<sup>1</sup> To some critics, Smith is one of the greatest children's book illustrators. Other critics dismiss her work as sentimental and aesthetically conservative (some of Mary Cassatt's mothers and children have also been labeled as such).<sup>2</sup> But, if we regard her well-executed, albeit idealized images as social platforms—as shared communal spaces where modern women recognized the lives that they led or hoped to lead—then we might regard these images of mothers and children as material catalysts which could bind women into political change agents. As Laura Prieto asserts: women were “attempting to dismantle the structural exclusions based on sex, and articulating a vision of feminine professionalism that connected or adapted the process of making art to ideologies of womanhood. . . . These women [artists] simply did not acquiesce to a basic conflict between womanhood and art. They sought a place for themselves in the intersection of these competing ideals.”<sup>3</sup>

For *Good Housekeeping*, Smith designed approximately two hundred cover images over a period of fifteen years.<sup>4</sup> Although she had intended to become a kindergarten teacher, she stated: “Pictures had always had a wonderful fascination for me.”<sup>5</sup> Rather than instruct young children in the classroom, Smith eventually chose to portray their likenesses on the covers of the journals their mothers prized. The artist regarded her “idealized motherhood and childhood” representations as models of how a happy family might appear. In her work, “the dresses and playsuits the [children] wore helped shape the dressing habits of a generation of children.”<sup>6</sup> Directors of *Good Housekeeping* regarded Smith as the only artist who understood that the magazine embraced, “the highest ideals of the American home, the home with that certain sweet wholesomeness one associates with a sunny living-room and children.”<sup>7</sup> Although she created aspirational, idealized families in her images, they were immensely popular. Arguably, Smith's work and the illustrated periodicals in which they appeared, were the material cultural components that shaped and defined a kind of virtual female community—a community in which women's creative, domestic lives would be celebrated.

Smith studied with Howard Pyle, who founded the School of Illustration at Drexel Institute. Like many other female artists (including Elizabeth Shippen Green and Violet Oakley), she benefitted a great deal from his teachings.<sup>8</sup> After graduating from Drexel, her career flourished. In addition to magazine covers, Smith illustrated close to forty children's books. These include: *Little Women*, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and *The Water Babies*. She also produced advertisements for major consumer companies (such as her charming images for Procter & Gamble's Ivory Soap brand). Smith earned up to one hundred twenty-five to one hundred thirty-five dollars for each of her illustrations. Eventually, her *Good Housekeeping* covers commanded three thousand dollars each. Smith was, in fact, the highest paid illustrator of her time.<sup>9</sup>

By proclaiming the home as a space of power, Jessie Willcox Smith, along with Alice Barber Stephens, Elizabeth Shippen Green among others, altered the public cultural discourse and created gendered communities that eventually challenged the dominant power structure. For the consuming public of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these professional women illustrators elevated the family and familial spaces to empowered places.

Written by Amanda Pacheco

## Notes

1. Helen Goodman, “Women Illustrators of the Golden Age of American Illustration,” *Women's Art Inc.* 8, no. 1 (1987): 13-22.
2. See Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of the Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 136-159.
3. Laura Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6-7.
4. See The New England Museum of American Illustration <http://www.americanillustration.org/artists/smith/smith.html> (Accessed March 15, 2015).
5. Quoted in Edward D. Nudelman, *Jessie Willcox Smith: American Illustrator* (Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 1990), 39.
6. See Helen Goodman, “Women Illustrators of the Golden Age of American Illustration,” 13-22.
7. See Nudelman, *Jessie Willcox Smith*, 30-39.

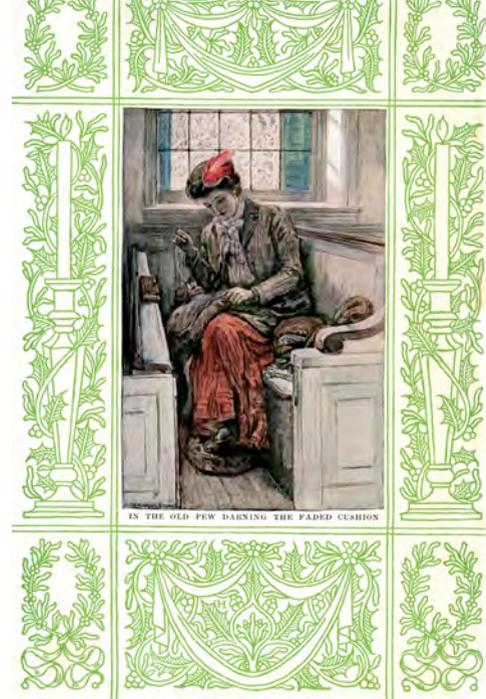
*Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater, The Jessie Willcox Smith Mother Goose, 1914*

Book illustration. 8.5" x 11"

Courtesy of Boston Public Library



*The Old Peabody Pew, 1905*  
Book illustration. 8.75" x 6"  
Courtesy of Claire T. Carney Library,  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth



## Alice Barber Stephens

### *Working Mother and Illustrator*

Alice Barber Stephens is an American engraver, painter and illustrator, chiefly remembered for her children's book and periodical illustrations, especially those she created for *the Ladies Home Journal*. As one of the first women to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, she served as a role model for other women who also wished to receive an art education and become professional artists.<sup>1</sup>

Stephens was born in Salem, New Jersey, into a Quaker family. At age fifteen, her family moved to Philadelphia where she enrolled in the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, today the Moore College of Art. In 1876, Stephens began attending the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA). While at PAFA, the artist studied painting with Thomas Eakins, who was one of the few instructors to encourage women to participate in all academic pursuits—including the study of the male nude.

At PAFA, Stephens joined a number of women who petitioned for more access to life drawing classes. They had been barred from them because administrators believed that women were far too delicate and sensitive to study the male nude. Because they were forbidden from studying human anatomy, female artists could not fairly compete for commissions or academic positions. PAFA's administration eventually relented and added a separate life drawing class for women (taught by Thomas Eakins).<sup>2</sup>

Given this experience, Stephens along with fellow female painter and engraver Emily Sartain, founded the Plastic Club for Women in 1897. This club sponsored exhibits, arranged lectures and provided the resources that would have been denied to many women. The Plastic Club, which is still operational, is the oldest art club for women in existence—something that would have undoubtedly pleased Stephens. As of 1991, its membership also included men.<sup>3</sup>

Stephens chose the more lucrative career of illustration over painting. She created images for the period's leading publications. She also illustrated the 1903 edition of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, a special edition of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *the Marble Faun*, and works by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Arthur Conan Doyle, and many others.<sup>4</sup>

Stephens received a prize for *Women's Life Class*, an illustration that appeared in *Scribner's* magazine in 1879 (this was also her first published image credit). This image represents a group of female student artists who are studying and sketching the nude female figure. This evocative image illuminates the partial success Stephens and other female students attained: while they could "draw from life," they could only do so if the model was a woman.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these limitations, Alice Barber Stephens became an extremely successful artist. For the *Ladies Home Journal*, she depicted women who slyly subvert gendered norms and artistic conventions. Stephen's modern woman purposely strides unaccompanied through the public square or visits a department store to confer with neatly attired female workers. In these illustrations, Stephens created a virtual space that reached out to enfold the female viewer and reader—much like the Plastic Club, which embraced female community over differences in style or class.

Written by Miranda Phelan

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3. Plastic Club Records, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, [https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/migrated/findingaid3106plasticclub](https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/findingaid3106plasticclub)
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5. Tobey, "Alice Barber Stephens: Emerging Ways of Living & Working."

# Emma Swan

*Artist of Nature*

Emma Swan, a Rhode Island painter, was born in Providence, Rhode Island. Like many other aspiring women artists, her father taught his young daughter to draw and instilled in her a love for art. In 1882, Swan became a member of the Providence Art Club where she displayed her work to local acclaim. Nevertheless, Swan chose to pursue formal artistic education. She studied with Abbot Thayer, a leading American artist and teacher. Swan's "truth and purity of color" is thought by critics to be a direct result of her training with the older artist,<sup>1</sup> as both used saturated color to capture the essence of their painted objects. Although Swan learned a great deal from Thayer, she decided to travel to Germany and Holland to perfect her skills. She traveled alone, despite the difficulty for a woman to do so at the time.<sup>2</sup> Her desire to become a successful artist superseded any fears she had about flouting convention.

Swan is best known for her still life and flower paintings. Like Manet's luscious fruit, we can almost smell Swan's delicately rendered, fragrant flowers. In her work, her multi-hued white roses and violets appear to come to life. Though she preferred to depict flowers, she also painted many commissioned portraits. Nevertheless, Swan still managed to incorporate floral landscapes or motifs in them (sometimes as part of the room décor).

Despite her early success, Swan remains largely unknown.<sup>3</sup> Although she was a successful artist, her decision to accept portrait commissions may have impacted her artistic standing. She also disappeared from the local art scene because she chose to care for her father, who had been stricken with paralysis five years before his death. Swan did not, however, see art as the avocation that supplemented family life, but as a profession that deserved her undivided attention. Emma Swan remained a sometime practitioner, but always a devoted follower of the arts until the end of her life.

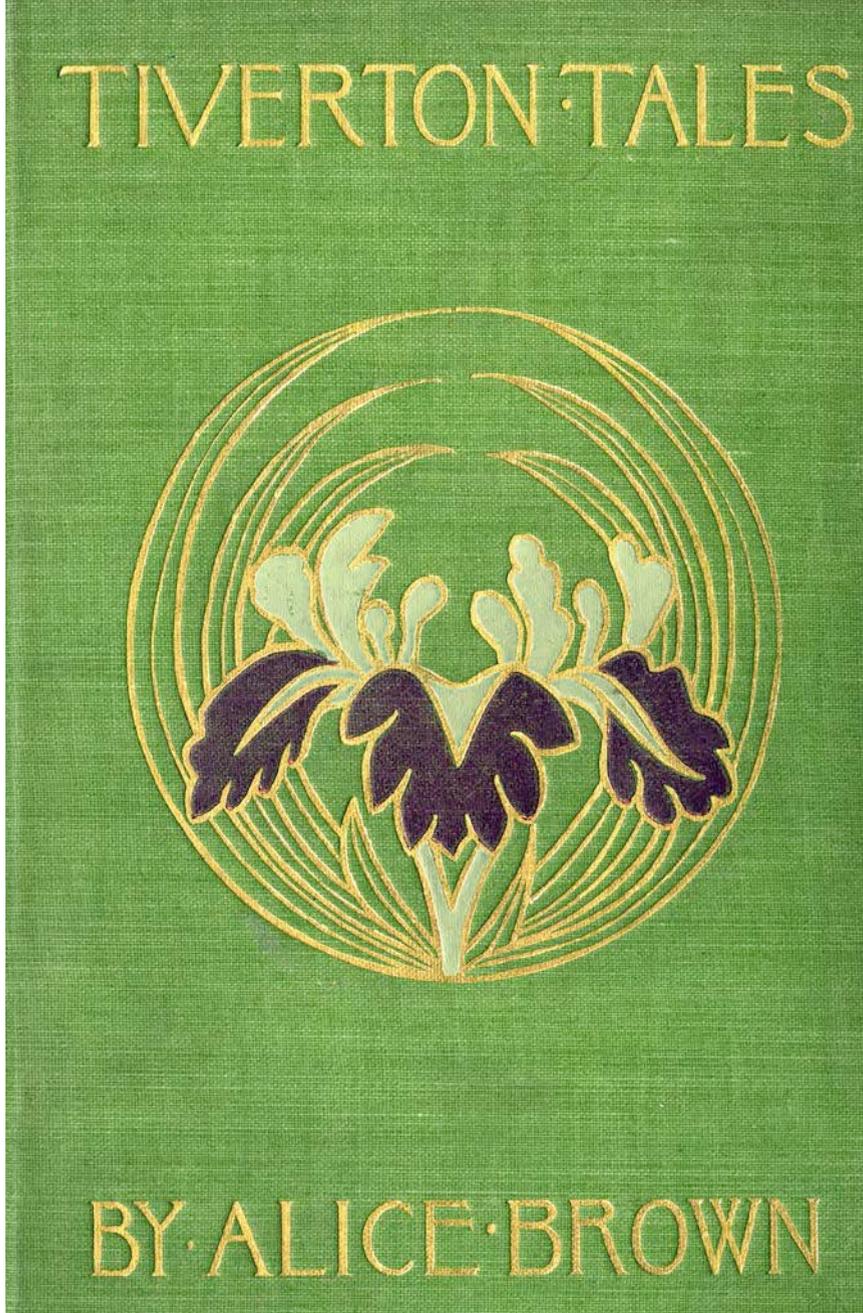


**Still Life of Roses, ca. 1890**  
Oil on canvas, 39.25" x 19"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

Written by Rachael Stillman

#### Notes

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2. Laura Prieto, *At Home in the Studio* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 151.
3. Much of the information recorded here comes from the **Providence Art Club Archive**.



*Tiverton Tales* (Alice Brown), 1899  
Book cover, 7.5" x 5.25"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

## Sarah Wyman Whitman

*Making Beautiful Objects for Everyday Use*

Sarah Wyman Whitman was born in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1842 to banker William Wyman and Sarah Amanda Treat. At the age of twenty-four, Wyman married Henry Whitman, a wealthy wool and dry goods merchant. The couple lived on Beacon Hill and socialized with many of the leading cultural and social figures of the day. Although Whitman could have had a leisurely life, she chose one filled with remunerative and valuable work. She became a professional artist and designer. Once she found her passion—to create beautiful objects that adhered to the principles of the arts and crafts movement—she encouraged and taught others to do the same.

Very much a public personality, Whitman was a painter, designer of book covers, stained glass artist, interior decorator, author, poet and teacher.<sup>1</sup> She believed in bringing art into everyday life and to everyday objects. We can still see her stained-glass windows in many landmark buildings today (the Parish House at Trinity Church in Copley Square, Boston and the Memorial Hall at Harvard University.<sup>2</sup>) Whitman's art was not only a staple of the Arts and Crafts Movement, but her legacy lives on in the Boston's Society of Arts and Crafts (of which she was a founding member).

Rather than enroll in a professional art school, Whitman studied with William Morris Hunt from 1868 to 1871.<sup>3</sup> Hunt was a socially prominent and successful artist, who began accepting women as students. As a leader of the Arts and Crafts movement, he believed that all objects should be both beautiful and useful. That is, each item we own should adhere to an aesthetic principle that unifies form and function. For the rest of her life, Whitman adhered to this principle. To further her education, Whitman had to travel to France since few educational opportunities existed in the U.S. While there, she studied with Thomas Couture, Hunt's teacher as well. Thanks to Whitman (and some of the other artists included in this exhibition), this changed at the end of the nineteenth century.

Whitman began showing her paintings in the 1870s. She received quite a few accolades for her portraits, still lifes and landscapes. Whitman's first solo show was at the Boston Doll and Richards Gallery in 1882.<sup>4</sup> In 1900, Whitman was inducted into the Society of American Artists in New York, a well-deserved encomium for her work.

Though Whitman's painting subjects were critiqued as traditionally "feminine," she was also highly productive in the applied arts, and in industries (or media) that were considered as "masculine." Beginning in the 1880s, she produced book covers (included in this exhibition), stained glass windows, and interior design layouts.<sup>5</sup> Many of her friends were authors for whom she would design elegant book covers. Whitman created over two hundred covers in a period of twenty years. She was the first professional woman artist regularly employed by Boston based publisher, Houghton Mifflin. Whitman reduced book decoration to the essential. Although she designed "special" editions in vellum with gold stamping, the majority of her work for the mass market employed two colors of cloth and a single color of ink for stamping, generally done in gold press.

Sarah Wyman Whitman continued to work into her later years. She built studios for Lily Glass Works: one on Boylston Street and a second location on Mount Vernon Street. For thirty years, she lectured, exhibited her paintings and led women's Bible classes. She was the founding member of Boston's Society of Arts and Crafts and was also involved with the Copley Society of Boston (the latter changed its name from the Boston Art Students Association in 1901).<sup>6</sup> Throughout her career, Whitman was a benefactor of Radcliffe College, Howard University, and Tuskegee Institute, and a generous patron of the arts.<sup>7</sup> Whitman was not only a supporter of the arts and a key artist in the Arts and Crafts Movement, but she empowered women. She supported education and societies that encouraged women to learn about the arts and, more importantly served as role model and mentor for emerging young women artists and designers.

Written by Anna Maravalli

#### Notes

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2. **Erica E. Hirshler**, *Women Artists at Trinity: Sarah Wyman Whitman and Margaret Redmond*, 152-173. In *The Makers of Trinity Church in the City of Boston*, edited by James F. O'Gorman, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2004).
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4. **Bonnie Hurd Smith**, *Sarah Wyman Whitman*.
5. *Beauty for Commerce: Publishers' Bindings 1830-1910*, Sarah Wyman Whitman, University of Rochester. River Campus Libraries. [www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?page=3350](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?page=3350) (Accessed February 15, 2015).
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# Mabel May Woodward

*Modern American Landscape Artist*

Mabel Woodward, a well-known American impressionist, painted landscapes and beach scenes in which ordinary people pursued everyday activities. Although a New England native famous for her New England landscapes, Woodward's work also reflects her travels around the United States and Europe. Like many women artists of this time, she did not marry. Rather, Woodward lived with her sister, Minnie Sumner Woodward, in North Providence. With her sister, she visited Charleston, South Carolina where the artist painted scenes of the local marketplaces and streets—reminiscent of the European street scenes included in this exhibition.<sup>1</sup>

The artist matriculated at the Rhode Island School of Design where she received the first prize scholarship for “ability, industry and conduct” ever offered.<sup>2</sup> After graduating from RISD in 1897 (as one of the school's first students), Woodward studied with artists William Chase, Frank Duveneck and Kenyon Cox at the Art Student's League, in New York City.<sup>3</sup> In 1900, she became an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design. Woodward continued her career at RISD for the next twenty-five years and established “action classes.” In these classes, she taught students to view the human figure as a machine as opposed to an idle entity, which was a relatively novel concept in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Despite her interest in the natural world, her images are not idyllic representations of a primeval nature (like those of the Hudson River School). In her paintings, Woodward depicts the interdependence between humanity and nature. Rather than the landscapes of Albert Bierstadt, her work can be compared to Gertrude Fiske's or John Sloan's. Although she employed an “impressionist” style, Woodward depicted the ordinary life of everyday individuals. Like Sloan, she painted the life and events of the people she met. More importantly like Fiske, Woodward's bold, painterly style reflected a modernist sensibility—one in which the natural world was partially abstracted and translated into lively geometric forms.

One could also argue that her paintings point to the temporality of life. Woodward reveals the connection that links humanity and nature through her soft and lively colors, and contrasting light and shadows. Her textural brush strokes activate her quiet scenes and suggest a balance between change and fixity. Woodward's positive view of humanity and love for nature is noticeably reflected in her warm picturesque beaches. Her paintings maintain a sort of dynamic vibrancy, though they are still and peaceful. That is, she depicts a seemingly unchanging nature that is slowly growing and evolving—and one that envelops us in its gentle embrace.

Woodward was considered to be a part of this “turn of the century” group of modern women artists whose work, like that of Mary Cassatt's, “should be applauded by feminists.”<sup>5</sup> With her many accomplishments both at school and in the gallery, the artist represents the consummate modern professional artist. Along with establishing one of the first “action classes” in the country, she also became the first female president of the Providence Art Club.<sup>6</sup> Hers was a prominent and important voice in the modern American art world.

Written by Danielle MacNeil

## Notes

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3. Ibid.
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*Beach Scene, ca. 1920*  
Oil on Canvas. 15.75" x 19.5"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club





# Notes

## The Modernist Woman

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3. See Michelle Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
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17. Roy R. Behrens, "The Artistic and Scientific Collaboration of Blanche Ames Ames and Adelbert Ames II." *Leonardo* 31, no. 1 (1998): 47-54.
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## Blurring Boundaries

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18. Christina Weyl, "The Early Life of Grace Albee," 132.
19. Christina Weyl, "The Early Life of Grace Albee," 132.
20. Christina Weyl, "The Early Life of Grace Albee," 132-133.
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28. "Eliza Gardiner," Bert Gallery, [www.bertgallery.com/gallerycollection/bios/gardiner.php](http://www.bertgallery.com/gallerycollection/bios/gardiner.php).
29. Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio*, 186.
30. Percy F. Albee Jr., *Grace Albee: Anecdotes of Her Search for the Renown She Achieved*, 2-3.
31. Albee Jr., Percy F. *Grace Albee: Anecdotes of Her Search for the Renown She Achieved*, 3-6.
32. See Eric Denker, *Grace Albee: An American Printmaker*.

# List of Works in Exhibition

## Grace Arnold Albee American 1890-1985

*Unicorns and Tadpoles (Artist's Proof)*, 1958  
Wood engraving and graphite on paper. 13" x 26"  
Private Collection

*Trees*, 1922  
Woodblock print. 5" x 4.25"  
Courtesy of Bert Gallery, Providence, RI

*Collector's Items*, 1945  
Wood engraving. 5.25" x 5"  
Courtesy of Bert Gallery, Providence, RI

*Three Kings – Flight Into Egypt*, 1943  
Wood engraving. 7" x 9"  
Courtesy of Bert Gallery, Providence, RI

## Frances Allen American 1853-1941 and Mary Allen American 1858-1941

*Photographic Album*, ca. 1910  
Gelatin DOP print.  
14.5" x 12.75"  
Courtesy of Special Collection and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst

\*[*Street Scene*]  
Reproduction  
14.5" x 12.75"  
Courtesy of Special Collection and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst

\*[*Street Scene*]  
Reproduction  
14.5" x 12.75"  
Courtesy of Special Collection and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst

## Blanche Ames American 1878-1969

*The Next Rung*, 1915  
Ink on paper. 23.25" x 17"  
Courtesy of Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, Northampton, MA

*Meanwhile They Drown*, 1915  
Ink on paper. 23.25" x 17.75"  
Courtesy of Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, Northampton, MA

*Sketch of a Female Figure on a Crucifixion*, ca. 1895  
Graphite on tracing paper 17" x 12"  
Courtesy of Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College

## Anna Richards Brewster American 1870-1952

*Armistice Day, New York City*  
1919  
Oil on canvas. 10" x 8"  
Private Collection

*Clovelly Village, England*, ca. 1895  
Oil on board. 13.5" x 9"  
Courtesy of Bert Gallery, Providence, RI

## Theodosia Chase American 1875-1972

*Clifford Ashley*, 1920  
Rotogravure. 5.75" x 4"  
Courtesy of New Bedford Free Public Library

*Ernest Ipsen, Artist*, 1920  
Rotogravure. 6.3" x 5.75"  
Courtesy of New Bedford Free Public Library

*Cozy*, 1932  
Rotogravure. 4.75" x 6.25"  
Courtesy of New Bedford Free Public Library

\* Reproductions

## Eliza Draper Gardiner American 1871-1955

*Catching Mummies*, ca. 1920  
Color woodblock print  
11.25" x 8.75"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

*Girl in Blue Holding Child in Orange*, ca. 1920  
Color woodblock print  
10" x 8"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

*Girl Looking Out the Window*, ca. 1920  
Color woodblock print  
11" x 8.25"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

*The Little Yachtsman*, 1923  
Color woodblock print  
8" x 10.25"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

## Elizabeth Shippen Green American 1871-1954

\**She Stood Staring to What She Had Done. Harper's Monthly Magazine*, September 1906  
Magazine illustration  
9.625" x 6.75"  
Courtesy of W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst

*Miguela Kneeling Still, Put it to Her Lips. Harper's Monthly Magazine*, November 1906  
Magazine illustration  
9.625" x 6.75"  
Courtesy of W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst

*A Pony Ride, Harper's Monthly Magazine*, December 1907  
Magazine illustration  
9.625" x 6.75"  
Courtesy of W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst

\**Gizele Harper's Monthly Magazine*, October 1908  
Magazine illustration  
9.625" x 6.75"  
Courtesy of W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst

## Elizabeth Bigelow Greene American 1837-1915

*White Roses*  
Oil on canvas. 34.5" x 14.5"  
Private Collection

## Ellen Day Hale American 1855-1940

*Untitled (Oxen)*, ca. 1880  
Oil on canvas. 41" x 51"  
Courtesy of Pettaquamscutt Historical Society

## Lena Newcastle American 1866-1951

*The Market*  
Watercolor on paper  
26.5" x 30.75"  
Courtesy of New Bedford Free Public Library

## Angela O'Leary American 1879-1921

*South Main Street*, ca. 1915  
Watercolor on paper. 15" x 11"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

*European Scene*, ca. 1900  
Watercolor on paper. 9.5" x 7"  
Private Collection

*Waiting for Customers*, ca. 1915  
Watercolor on paper. 14.5" x 10.75"  
Private Collection

**Helen Watson Phelps**  
**American 1859-1944**

*Head of Young Woman*, ca. 1915  
Oil on canvas. 21.75" x 17"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club  
*Newspaper Boy*, 1887  
Oil on canvas. 35.5" x 21"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

**Jessie Willcox Smith**  
**American 1863-1935**

*Good Housekeeping*, March 1931  
Magazine illustration  
11.75" x 8.625"  
Courtesy of W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst

*Good Housekeeping*, May & June 1932  
Magazine illustration  
11.75" x 8.625"  
Courtesy of W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst

*Little Miss Muffet, The Jessie Wilcox Smith Mother Goose*, 1914  
Book illustration. 8.5" x 11.5"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

\**Little Bo-Peep, The Jessie Wilcox Smith Mother Goose*, 1914  
Book illustration. 8.5" x 11.5"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

\**Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary, The Jessie Wilcox Smith Mother Goose*, 1914  
Book illustration. 8.5" x 11.5"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

*Boys and Girls of Bookland* (Nora Archibald Smith), 1923  
Magazine illustration  
12.25" x 9.25"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

**Alice Barber Stephens**  
**American 1858-1932**

*Ladies Home Journal*, September 1897  
Magazine illustration  
16.25" x 11"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

*Harper's Monthly Magazine*, July 1906  
Magazine illustration  
9.625" x 6.75"  
Courtesy of W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst

*The Old Peabody Pew*, 1905  
Book illustration. 8.75" x 6"  
Courtesy of Claire T. Carney Library, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

\**The Story of Thyrsa*, 1909  
Book illustration  
Courtesy of the Smith College Library

*Under the Christmas Star*, 1913  
Book illustration. 8.75" x 6"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

**Emma Swan**  
**American 1853-1927**

*Still Life of Roses*, ca. 1890  
Oil on canvas. 39.25" x 19"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

*Iris*, 1900  
Oil on canvas. 27.5" x 19"  
Courtesy of Daniel Mechnig

**Sarah Wyman Whitman**  
**American 1842-1904**

*Before the Curfew, and Other Poems* (Oliver Wendell Holmes), 1888  
Book cover. 7.125" x 5"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

*A Rambler's Lease* (Bradford Torrey), 1889  
Book cover. 7.125" x 5"  
Courtesy of Providence Athenaeum

*Tiverton Tales* (Alice Brown), 1899  
Book cover. 7.5" x 5.25"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

*Cape Cod* (Henry David Thoreau) 1896  
Book cover. 7.5" x 5.5"  
Courtesy of Providence Athenaeum

*Spring Notes From Tennessee* (Bradford Torrey) 1896  
Book cover. 7.125" x 5"  
Courtesy of Providence Athenaeum

*Dorothy Q, Together with A ballad of Boston Tea Party & Grandmother's Story of Bunker Hill Battle* (Oliver Wendell Holmes) 1893  
Book cover. 8" x 5.5"  
Courtesy of Providence Athenaeum

*Such As They Are: Poems* (Thomas Wentworth Higginson) 1893  
Book cover. 7.5" x 5.5"  
Courtesy of Providence Athenaeum

*A World of Green Hills* (Bradford Torrey), 1898  
Book cover. 7.125" x 4.875"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

*The Song of Hiawatha* (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow), 1891  
Book cover. 9.25" x 6.25"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

*Poems of Nature* (John Greenleaf Whittier), 1886  
Book cover. 11.75" x 8.75"  
Courtesy of Boston Public Library

\**Roses-Souvenir de Villier le bel*, ca. 1877  
Oil on panel. 18" x 9"  
Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts Boston

\**Floral medallion, stained glass*, ca. 1895  
Stained glass and lead  
17.75" x 17.75"  
Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts Boston

**Mabel May Woodward**  
**American 1877-1945**

*Selling Wares in Rome*, ca. 1925  
Watercolor/gouache. 10" x 13"  
Courtesy of Bert Gallery, Providence, RI

*Beach Scene*, ca. 1920  
Oil on canvas. 15.75" x 19.5"  
Courtesy of Providence Art Club

*Bath Iron Works, Bath Maine*, ca. 1920  
Oil on canvas. 24" x 30"  
Courtesy of Daniel Mechnig





