



**ANNA RICHARDS BREWSTER (1870—1952)**

*Miss Fidelia Bridges at Miss Brown's, Canaan, Connecticut, ca. 1903*

8 ½ x 13 inches

Oil on canvas laid to board

Initialed lower left: ARB

Born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, Anna Richards Brewster was the precocious and talented daughter of landscape painter William Trost Richards (1833-1905). When she was only fourteen, her painting, *White Horses by the Sea*, was exhibited at the National Academy of Design. At age twenty, she received the Academy's Dodge Prize for the "best picture by a woman." Brewster's father was her first teacher, but she continued her artistic training at the Cowles School of Art in Boston, the Art Students League in New York, and at the Académie Julian in Paris. She also studied under John LaFarge and William Merritt Chase.

Brewster moved to England in 1896, where she pursued her artistic career for nine prolific years. Following a period of painting along the Devon coast, she established her own studio in London. While abroad, Brewster moved in Pre-Raphaelite circles and sold her work to collectors both in Europe and in the United States. In 1905, she married William Tenney Brewster, a professor at Barnard College, and moved to Scarsdale, New York, where she founded the Scarsdale Arts Association. The couple traveled widely, and Brewster continued to paint throughout Europe, Egypt, Palestine, and North Africa.

Brewster was a member of a close circle of women artists active at the turn of the century; *Miss Fidelia Bridges at Miss Brown's, Canaan, Connecticut* is a visual document of this relationship. Brewster most likely met Fidelia Bridges (1834—1923), an artist acclaimed for her watercolors of birds and flowers, in 1860 after Bridges attended a series of lectures



HAWTHORNE  
Fine Art

given by Brewster's father.



Fidelia Bridges, *Bird's Nest in Cattails*, ca. 1875, watercolor and gouache on light brown wove paper, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Bridges became personal friends with the Richards family afterwards, and often accompanied them on painting vacations to the countryside in Connecticut. This picture, painted over forty years after their first meeting, is a testament to the enduring nature of Brewster and Bridges' friendship.

Brewster depicts her friend strolling through the fields in Canaan, Connecticut, to where Bridges had retired after a lifetime of travelling and working in New York and Europe, taking up residence in a small cottage that overlooked a meadow. Bridges continued to



## HAWTHORNE Fine Art

paint, finding inspiration from the nature around her and settling into a quiet rural life. She rarely showed her work, preferring to spend her time socializing with a small group of female friends such as Brewster, who must have painted this work during a trip to visit her. Other members in Bridge's social circle were Anna and Ella Brown, for whom Bridges had cared as children as a mother's helper, and whose family had largely financed her artistic education. The sisters moved to Canaan to be close to their former caretaker; one of these sisters is most likely the "Miss Brown" referred to in this painting's title.

Frederic A. Sharf describes Fidelia Bridges in *Notable American Women, 1607—1950* as follows: "She soon became a familiar village figure, tall, elegant, beautiful even in her sixties, her hair swept back, her attire always formal, even when sketching in the fields or riding her bicycle through town. Her life was quiet and unostentatious, her friends unmarried ladies of refinement . . . whom she joined for woodland picnics and afternoon teas." Brewster skillfully captured the sophistication for which her friend was known, her cultured attire offering a counterpoint to the fields through which he is walking, yet makes her seem at one with her surroundings by casting her in colors that mimic those of the nature around her. Bridges was significantly older than Brewster, and one can sense the admiration the artist had for her elder, accomplished friend who perhaps served as motivation for her to pursue her own artistic career.

Brewster was a member of both the National Association of Women Artists and the American Watercolor Society, and she exhibited at London's Royal Academy, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Today, her work is in the permanent collections of the Butler Institute of American Art, the New Britain Museum of Art, Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Georgia Museum of Art, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art, amongst many others.

### **Selected Bibliography:**



HAWTHORNE  
Fine Art

Hill, May Brawley. *Fidelia Bridges: American Pre-Raphaelite*. New Britain, Connecticut: New Britain Museum of American Art, 1981.

Sharf, Frederic A. "Fidelia Bridges." In *Notable American Women, 1607—1950*, 122—23. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971.