



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

Alice Lolita Muth (1887-1952)

Alice Lolita Muth was born Alice Helen Muth in Cincinnati, Ohio on February 27th, 1887. She was the third born of four daughters to Emma and Augustus E. Muth, a founder of the United States Baking Company. Her maternal great-grandfather, Frederick Frank, was a Swedish nobleman exiled by the king to New Orleans in the early 19th century. He taught dancing and painting there,¹ before moving to Cincinnati and becoming a portrait painter known for creating skillful silhouettes. In 1831, records show that Frank had established a painting gallery, and in 1839 he was the proprietor of a museum of arts and sciences. According to Muth, her great-grandfather opened Cincinnati's first art museum.²

In 1906, at the age of 18, Muth married Louis B. Rapp, a civil engineer, and the couple made their home in Missoula, Montana. The marriage was short lived, however, and the couple secretly divorced on December 11th, 1911.³ Less than a year later, on October 26th, 1912, Muth married John H. Keating, from Portland, Oregon, in a quiet ceremony at the home of her parents in Avondale, Ohio.⁴ Keating was a principal officer of the St. Charles Land Company and a former song writer. This marriage was also ill-fated, and Muth was granted a divorce from Keating on the grounds of extreme cruelty in 1914.⁵

It is unclear whether Muth received any formal artistic training but in November 1915 her work was included in an annual exhibition held by the Woman's Art Club in the Union Central Building in Cincinnati. The exhibit marked the first time women artists had shown their work downtown and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* regarded it as, "the largest and most creditable ever staged by the club".⁶ By the following November, the Woman's Art Club exhibition had become popular and was drawing large crowds. A critic in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* stated that Muth was one of a few artists "whose work shows the most interesting advance this year," and that she "has made quite a big jump in the right direction with several of her pictures. 'A Cloudy Morning in the Catskills' contains a sweep and beauty of line, as well

¹ "Zuloaga, Great Spanish Painter, Now Godfather...", *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York) Fri, Jan 23, 1925, p.3.

² "...How Frederick Franks Got His Name", *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) Sun, Jan 18, 1925, p. 94.

³ "Society Leader is Secretly Divorced", *The Washington Times* (Washington, District of Columbia) Sun, Apr 7, 1912, p. 1.

⁴ "Will Live in Portland", *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) Sun, Oct 27, 1912, p. 40.

⁵ "Divorce to Mrs. Keating", *The Coos Bay Times* (Marshfield, Oregon) Fri, Aug 7, 1914, p. 4.

⁶ "Big Exhibit", *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) Tue, Nov 2, 1915, p. 14.



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as pure colors that combine in a powerfully picturesque interpretation of that particular mood. A still life, ‘Tulips’, and her ‘Birch Trees Autumn’ are paintings full of fine decorative qualities.”⁷

In 1917, Muth lived in New York City and established an art studio on 8th Street in the heart of Greenwich Village. She returned to Ohio for the Christmas season bringing with her examples of Batik she had created in her New York City studio. The Batik work included decorative objects, household necessities and apparel. Muth herself wore one of her designs, described in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* as an “exquisite fabric dyed in tones of greens, browns and yellows.”⁸ Described as a “landscape artist of New York,” Muth exhibited her paintings at the MacDowell Club, as well as the Catherine Lorillard Wolf Club in New York, where she was awarded the 1918 landscape prize for “A Windy Day”⁹ and an honorable mention from the Architectural League and the Art Alliance of America.¹⁰

In 1919, Muth exhibited a still life titled “Le Serpent Amoureux” and a landscape with Gloucester in the distance at the Society of Independent Artists in New York.¹¹ Muth’s “extraordinary pieces of Batik” were much admired during the Fall Paris Salon in 1919. While traditionally Batik is produced using coarse cotton weaves, Muth’s work is “wrought on the sheerest of Chiffon.” An evening gown created by Muth and much admired at the Salon “is in jade and violet tints with the decorative effect accomplished by peacock feathers and yellow-orange roses shading into jades and purple blues”. A silk scarf stolen from Muth’s exhibit caused quite a stir among exhibitors and was never to be found.¹²

In 1921 Muth studied in Spain under Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945), an important Spanish artist known for his scenes of bullfighters and gypsies. Muth described their meeting at a Spanish summer resort as “fate” and considered Zuloaga her inspiration and critic, rather than her teacher. Zuloaga told Muth that “she uses her brush as a man, but that she must work,” and he visited Muth’s studio several times a week

⁷ “The Week in Art Circles”, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) Sun, Nov 19, 1916, p. 8.

⁸ “In Society”, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) Mon, Dec 31, 1917, p. 3.

⁹ “Well-Known Artist Here”, *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California) Sun, Jan 12, 1919, p. 33.

¹⁰ “Zuloaga, Great Spanish Painter, Now Godfather of Beautiful U.S. Divorcee”, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York) Fri, Jan 23, 1925, p. 3.

¹¹ “The Week in Art Circles”, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) Sun, May 11, 1919, p. 68.

¹² “Remarkable Creations in Batik Work...”, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York), Sun, Dec 21, 1919, p. 33.



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providing criticism.¹³ In January of 1922, Muth exhibited her batiks and paintings at the Hotel Gibson [in Cincinnati,] followed by a show in New York City where she had been invited to show by the Architectural League. Her painting “Medieval Gypsy” dominated a wall at Traxel’s Gallery [in Cincinnati] during a 1923 Woman’s Art Club exhibition.¹⁴ The A.B. Closson Jr. Company in Cincinnati displayed Muth’s painted tapestries, and 22 oil paintings completed in Renteria, Spain, largely consisting of landscapes as seen from her studio window.

Muth continued to live in Renteria, Spain for several years. There she immersed herself in the Spanish culture and adopted the faith, customs, and dress of Spain. She was described in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* as a “beautiful blonde woman, with big blue eyes, set in black lashes, and a wealth of golden hair , which with her creamy skin, make the black lace mantilla she usually wears particularly becoming.” In describing her new home Muth stated, “I love Europe, particularly Spain, because it has traditions.” She continued, “You feel wherever you go in Spain that interesting people have been there, that interesting things have taken place there. This is the atmosphere which inspires me.” Muth converted to Catholicism, and with Zuloaga as her godfather she was baptized Lolita at the ancient church in Fuentatodes from the same font as Francisco de Goya (1746-1828) nearly 180 years earlier. She became known in the town of Renteria as Senora Lolita Muth and described her baptism as her “most exalted moment--it was more thrilling than being a bride.”¹⁵

In January 1925, Zuloaga sponsored a joint exhibition with Muth and his friend Pablo Uranga (1861-1934) at Ralston Gallery in New York City. Muth’s work included landscapes and tapestries that clearly showed Spanish influence and with almost exclusively Spanish subjects. Her painting titled “The Spanish Coast” was the first work in the exhibit to sell.¹⁶

In the spring of 1926, Muth traveled to Tunis, North Africa. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* stated that Muth “produced some exceptional paintings during her residence abroad, these including many landscapes painted during the extensive travels which recently took her to Tunis for several weeks.” Muth moved her

¹³ “Zuloaga, Great Spanish Painter, Now Godfather of Beautiful U.S. Divorcee” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York) Fri, Jan 23, 1925, p. 3

¹⁴ “The Week in Art Circles”, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio), Sun, Nov 18, 1923, p. 87.

¹⁵ “Zuloaga, Great Spanish Painter, Now Godfather of Beautiful U.S. Divorcee”, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York) Fri, Jan 23, 1925, p.3.

¹⁶ Ibid



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studio from Renteria to a villa outside of Paris. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* said her painting titled “After the Banquet” was “especially colorful and interesting, with an unusual landscape in the background, [and] won special acclaim” at the winter Paris Salon. She exhibited with American artist Ruby Boardman at the Paris Salon.¹⁷

Muth married Georges Couroux in Paris on December 30th, 1929. Although there are few records of this period of Muth’s life she was likely widowed. In 1939, Muth was living in Tunis, North Africa, a place she had visited some years earlier, and she lived out the remainder of her life there. In 1952, she married her fourth husband, Hedi Ben Othman Ben Maacha. Alice Lolita Muth Ben Maacha died just months later at the age of 65. A year after her death, Ben Maacha following his wife’s final wishes, donated her portrait, painted by Zuloago, to the Museo del Prado in Spain.¹⁸

¹⁷ “In Society”, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) Wed, Aug 11, 1926 , p.11.

¹⁸ Museo del Prado. “Muth Ben Maacha, Alice.” [museodelprado.es](https://www.museodelprado.es).

<https://www.museodelprado.es/aprende/enciclopedia/voz/muth-ben-maacha-alice/784a4d17-3bb5-42f1-b328-aa3cdc4b0044> (accessed August 20, 2019).