



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

LYDIA FIELD EMMET (1866-1952)

Mother and Child in Garden

Pastel on paper

17 x 13 1/2 inches (sight size)

Signed lower right

Provenance:

Mary McLean

Anthony Armand Scornavacco, Minneapolis, MN

Exhibition History:

A Woman's Eye: Selected Works by 20th Century American Women Artists, February 23 – April 29, 2007.
Lighthouse Center for the Arts, Tequesta, Florida

The renowned portraitist Lydia Field Emmet is best known for her paintings of children. Born into a wealthy artistic family in New Rochelle, New York, Emmet was one of ten children. Her grandmother, Elizabeth Emmet Le Roy (1794-1878) was a portraitist, and her mother, Julia Colt Pierson, studied art with Daniel Huntington (1816-1906). Lydia's sister, Rosina Emmet Sherwood (1854-1948) and their cousin Ellen Emmet Rand (1876 - 1941) were also noted for their portraits. The artistic heredity continues today, with descendants of the Emmet family still painting. Lydia's family lineage can be traced back to the prominent Irish patriot, Robert Emmet.

Lydia's early informal endeavors in drawing were encouraged by her family, and eventually led her to become a highly successful professional artist. At seventeen, she accompanied her sister Rosina to Europe, where they both studied at the Académie Julian in Paris under the renowned painters William Bouguereau (1825-1905) and Robert Fleury (1837-1912). Upon her return to the United States, at the encouragement of her sister Rosina, Lydia enrolled at the Art Students League in New York, where she studied for six years under the tutelage of William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) among others. Chase would eventually produce a full-length portrait of Lydia in 1893, which is now in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum in New York.

In the 1880s, Lydia worked as an illustrator for *Harper's* magazine while also experimenting with watercolors and oil landscapes, as well as producing portraits in pastels and miniatures. During this time,



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she also created for stained glass window designs for Tiffany & Co. and produced some work for Candace Wheeler's Associated Artists.

By 1891, Lydia had reached artistic maturity and her considerable talent led Chase to put her in charge of the preparatory class at his summer school at Shinnecock Hills on Long Island. In 1893, along with Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) and other prominent women artists, Lydia was invited to paint a mural in the Women's Building at the Chicago Worlds Columbian Exposition, where she was paid \$500 and awarded a bronze medal for her mural, *Art, Science and Literature*. Throughout the 1890s, she exhibited 11 paintings at the National Academy of Design, at least several of which were portraits. She became an Associate of the National Academy of Design in 1909, earning the rank of full member and Academician, a rare honor for a woman, in 1912. Her Academy diploma piece, *Grandmother's Garden*, is now part of the permanent collection of the Academy. Lydia would continue to exhibit regularly at the National Academy and contributed works nearly every year leading up until 1947. She won awards in 1907, 1909 and 1918, and served on the Academy's Selection Jury in the 1920s.

In addition to the National Academy of Design, Lydia regularly exhibited her works at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts from 1898 until 1932. She also exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago (intermittently from 1894 to 1939), the Carnegie International (intermittently from 1904 to 1923, winning an award in 1912) and the Corcoran Gallery, among a number of other organizations. She frequently won prizes for her work and was regularly lauded for her skill as a portraitist.

Lydia developed a reputation for portraits of children in particular, and her work commanded high prices up to \$2,500 (an impressive sum for a lady painter in the late 19th and early 20th centuries). By 1929, she was earning \$60,000 per year. Though she maintained a permanent home in New York for the entirety of her life, she spent many summers at her home and studio, Strawberry Hill, built in 1905 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Never married, Lydia maintained an active lifestyle and rode horseback for many years, including long journeys between her two residences in New York and Massachusetts, where she would break up the trip with stops at the homes of friends along the Hudson River. She was also known to enjoy her yellow Model T Ford, nicknamed "Yellow Peril" because of the breakneck speeds at which she drove. Additionally, Lydia actively supported the women's suffrage movement through her membership with the Women's Political Union. Unencumbered by family commitments, Lydia was able to travel to Europe



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several times throughout her career, even participating in relief work in France during World War I. She spent some time in England with her sister Jane, who had married the artist Wilfred de Glehn (1870-1951).

Lydia's oil and pastel portraits are executed in a grand manner, reminiscent of John Singer Sargent (1856-1925). Her bravura technique also reflects the influence of her mentor, William Merritt Chase, who painted a number of portraits of children in a similar style. It is through this lively brushwork and dynamic drawing that Lydia is able to capture a sense of spontaneity that evokes the vitality of her sitters, as in *Mother and Child in Garden*. Here, a young boy playfully grasps a leafy branch as he stands before his seated mother, who loosely holds him by the waist. Sheltered by the shade of a vine-covered pergola, the pair gaze off into a lush green landscape near a lake, where a swan floats gracefully in the distance. Lydia's expertly captures the warm sunlight that falls on their pale faces and hands through her use of vibrant pinks and oranges and catches the play of light and shadow on their white summer garments through the use of cool blues and purples. The fully developed landscape in the background is similar in some respects to *Grandmother's Garden*, which suggests it may be an earlier work, perhaps dating from the 1890s or the early 20th century. Though the sitters in this particular work have not been identified, Lydia painted many prominent society figures, including Mrs. Herbert Hoover, whose portrait she painted once hung in the White House.



Lydia Field Emmet. *Grandmother's Garden*, 1912. Oil on canvas. 32 x 43 inches. National Academy of Design, New York.

Lydia Field Emmet painted up until the last few years before her death at the age of 86. While she was most noted for her portraits, she also painted landscapes in the early part of her career. Her works can be



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found in the collections of the New York Historical Society, Parrish Art Museum, the National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, among many other notable institutions.

Sources:

Tappert, Tara Leigh. *The Emmets: A Generation of Gifted Women*. New York: Borghi & Co., 1993.

McClellan, Lydia Sherwood. *The Emmets: A Family of Women Painters*. Pittsfield, Mass.: The Berkshire Museum, 1982.

Tufts, Eleanor. *American Women Artists 1830-1930*. Washington, D.C.: The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1982.