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MARY LILLIAN FENN (March 1, 1867 – September 14, 1950)

A.K.A. “Mary L. Fenn”

Landscape painter in oil and watercolor, pastellist. Born in Bloomfield, New Jersey, the daughter of Mary A. Thompson (b. 1842) and Henry “Harry” Fenn (1837 – 1911). Her father, Harry, was one of the most famous American illustrators and printmakers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As a child she was raised in Montclair, New Jersey.

Fenn almost certainly received her initial art instruction from her famous father and then likely studied in one of the art schools associated with the greater New York City region. By 1900 she was already listed in the census as an “artist,” as was her brother, Walter (1862 – 1961), both of whom were still residing at that time with their parents in Montclair.

She appears to have first visited the San Diego region of California in 1911 when she is listed among the guests of the U. S. Grant Hotel. Fenn moved permanently to California around 1915, and in 1920 had settled in San Diego, where she resided as a boarder in the home of Cassius McCarroll, a civil engineer, on Cedar Street. That year her oil *Wild Hillsides* was exhibited at the San Diego Art League where the work was noted as being “a distinguished little canvas.”

By 1930 she was residing in “Reyinita Cottage” on Prospect Street in San Diego and would remain in the San Diego region for the remainder of her life. Her last known address in San Diego was at 1744 Second Avenue.

Marly L. Fenn died in La Jolla, California on the 14th of September 1950 at the age of eighty-three years. In her obituary she was noted as being a “retired artist.” Her services were arranged by the Bonham Brothers Mortuary and she was cremated, with no known burial location.

As painter, Fenn was known for her bright, impressionist oils of California, some of which depicted the beautiful coastline of the state. She also painted views done in New England including at Gloucester, Massachusetts. Her titles are usually descriptive, such as *Along the Shore Line, Caves, La Jolla, Laguna Mountains, La Jolla from Torrey Pines, Natural Arch, La Jolla*, etc. In homage to her father, Fenn was known to sign her paintings “M.L. F - - -,” which mimicked her famous father’s monogram.

Mary Fenn was a charter member of the La Jolla Art Association and a regular exhibitor with



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many of the San Diego area art organizations. It was not unusual to find her showing her works alongside her older brother, Walter, who relocated to California in 1921. In addition to her paintings and pastels, Fenn was also known to have decorated craft items and even worked in woodworking (in 1919 she is listed as having studied furniture construction with Clyde Warne in San Diego).

Though there are undoubtedly other exhibitions in which Fenn participated, those presently known include the following: La Jolla Women's Club, La Jolla, CA, 1919 (solo), 1920 (solo); La Jolla Art Association, La Jolla, CA, 1921-22, 1923 (twice), 1924, 1925 (three times, spring, summer, autumn), 1927, 1930-32, 1934 (twice); San Diego Art Guild, San Diego, CA, 1920, 1923-24; La Jolla Library Art Exhibition, La Jolla, CA, 1928; Spanish Village Art Exhibition, San Diego, CA, 1938.

It is not known if any of her works are held in the collection of public institutions. However, her works do reside in private collections throughout the United States.

Biography researched, compiled, and written by Geoffrey K. Fleming, Executive Director, Huntington Museum of Art, Huntington, WV.

Sourced from Askart.com