HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

HELEN SEARLE (1834-1884)

Helen Searle, though little known today, was recognized in her time as one of the most well-trained still life painters of the nineteenth century. Searle was born in Burlington, Vermont in 1834. When she turned ten, her father, an architect, moved the family to Rochester, New York. She developed an early interest in painting and in 1863, she received accolades for six still lifes she exhibited at the Babies' Hospital Relief Bazaar in Rochester. The following year, she began to show fruit and flower pictures at the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy. These achievements contributed to her growing reputation, and she soon accepted a position as an art instructor at Mrs. Bryan's Female Seminary at Batavia, New York. However, Searle recognized that to advance her artistic career, she needed to pursue European training.

In 1866, Searle exhibited at the National Academy of Design in New York. The following year, she traveled to Düsseldorf, Germany to study under Johann Wilhelm Preyer, the preeminent still life painter. Through Preyer, Searle developed a style based on the principles of strong draftsmanship and clarity of form from the Dutch still life tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Her paintings were reproduced as chromolithographs in the United States by Ehrgott and Forbinger, Printers & Publishers in Cincinnati.

In 1871, Searle returned to the United states and established a painting studio in Washington, D.C. Five years later, she married James William Pattison, a landscape and figure painter, editor and art critic. Shortly after their marriage, the couple moved to Ecouen, an artist community just north of Paris, where their home became a gathering place for fellow artists and writers. While in France, Searle exhibited a still life of fruit at the 1879 Paris Salon under her maiden name, listing herself as a student of Preyer.

The couple soon returned to the United States and moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where Pattison accepted a position as the Director of the School of Fine Arts at the Jacksonville Female Academy. By this point in the late nineteenth century, Jacksonville had emerged as a thriving art community

with a dynamic Art Association. Meanwhile, Searle continued exhibiting at the National Academy of Design through 1883. Searle died in Florida in 1884.[1]

Searle gained notoriety in her lifetime as an established still life painter, and was recognized as "one of the finest fruit and flower painters"[2] of late nineteenth-century America. Her still lifes commonly feature a formal arrangement of fruit or flowers on a tabletop, rendered in clear light with a meticulous attention to detail.

Though much of Searle's work is now in private collections, it can also be found in renowned institutions, such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts.

[1] Biographical information from "Helen Searle," *askART*, accessed Sep. 14, 2017, http://www.askart.com/artist_bio/Helen_R_or_L_Searle/87651/Helen_R_or_L_Searle.aspx
[2] Gerdts, William H. *Art Across America: Two Centuries of Regional Painting*, vol. 1. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990): 197.