



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

CHARLOTTE BUELL COMAN (1833-1924)

Born in Waterville, New York, Charlotte Buell Coman was a prominent late 19th, early 20th-century landscape artist known for her Tonalist* paintings, especially with misty blue coloration. She was a key painter in bringing the Barbizon* tradition from France to America.

This style and method emanated from a group of painters, led by Jean Corot and Charles Daubigny, who frequented the French village of Barbizon and did plein-air* painting in realist style of bucolic subjects such as shepherd girls herding their flocks. It was a revolutionary departure from studio painting and from prescribed academic subjects.

Coman was born in Waterville, New York to a family that ran a tannery and shoe factory. She married early and moved to the frontier town of Iowa City, Iowa where she became a pioneer housewife. However, her life became complicated because her husband died several years after their marriage, and she became deaf, something she jokingly said later was an advantage because she couldn't hear the scathing remarks of critics.

She returned to Waterville and determined that in spite of her trouble, she was not going to be idle. At age forty, she committed herself to a career in art. Her first teacher was James Brevoort, a landscape painter of New York City, and she continued for another ten years abroad, first in Paris where she exhibited at the Paris Salon* and studied with Harry Thompson and Emile Vernier, and then six years in Holland. A studio fire destroyed the output of these years.

In France, she was greatly influenced by the Barbizon painters and their attention to contrasting light and atmosphere and the working in a broad-sweeping manner without attention to detail.

In the early 1880s, she returned permanently to New York City where she had already been exhibiting at the National Academy of Design*. In 1876, her painting *A French Village*, had earned her much praise at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition*, and critics compared her work to Corot.

However, she later turned away from European subjects and devoted herself to the American landscape, using the Tonalist approach and suggesting spirituality with misty effects achieved with dominance of subdued blues and greens. Frequently her vantage point was looking down into a valley from a high point, a panoramic view on a small to medium size canvas.

With her paintings she strove to achieve a sense of quiet, something that many of her artist peers, including George Inness and Alexander Wyant, were doing to counter the crass materialism of the 'Gilded Age'* of industrialism.

Coman received much positive attention including election in 1910 as an Associate to the National Academy of Design, but well-aware of discrimination against women artists by male jurors, she always signed her work C.B. Coman. She continued painting almost to her death at age 89. Her reputation lapsed



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into obscurity until the mid-1970s when a renewed interest in feminine artists brought new appreciation to her work.

Source:

Charlotte Rubinstein, *American Women Artists*

Biography courtesy of Askart.com