



## HAWTHORNE Fine Art

### **Shirrell W. Graves (1884-1954)**

Shirrell W. Graves, a California artist known for his decorative floral watercolors, was born in Buffalo, New York in 1884 to Nellie and Samuel A. Graves, a merchant. Upon graduating from high school, Graves was awarded a one-year scholarship to study at the Art Students League in New York City.

Although scant information exists regarding the artist's career during the early part of the century, he worked as a salesman of marble interiors in 1910 while living in Cincinnati. The following year, he married Dorothy Downs (Moreland) in Louisville, Kentucky. The couple lived there with Dorothy's son from a previous marriage until 1920, when census records show them residing in Annapolis, Maryland and Graves working as an architect.

Graves's decorative paintings on silk and those by his wife were exhibited at the Art Center on East 56<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City in May of 1922. A *New York Times* article states, "For ten years Mr. Graves has tried to find a process by which an artist could paint directly on silk and achieve a result practical and lasting as well as beautiful. He thinks he has realized his ambition, and is now showing the results of his achievement."<sup>1</sup> Among the articles included in the exhibition were decorative translucent pictures, wall panels, pillows, draperies, and various ornamental works of art.

In 1929, the couple settled in San Francisco where they lived for the remainder of their lives. There they established Graves Gallery, an interior design shop and art gallery.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Decorative Paintings on Silk," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Sun, May 7, 1922, p. 103



## HAWTHORNE Fine Art

Graves's watercolors were exhibited at the studio of Dorothy True Bell in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1934 and included a series of flower arrangements. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* noted that "A few of the backgrounds are in color, but the majority show white groupings on white backgrounds relieved by green foliage. The effects obtained by this rather daring use of white on white is delightful."<sup>2</sup>

The *Star-Bulletin* also noted that Graves "is best known for his murals in the Flemish room at the Fairmont hotel and the new and very modern Hotel Maurice [both in Los Angeles]."<sup>3</sup>

In 1936, Gump's, a luxury San Francisco department store, displayed Graves's watercolors of magnolias, which *The San Francisco Examiner* called "placid clean decorations, some on a handsomely large scale."<sup>4</sup> The president of the University of Southern California purchased for the University one of the flower paintings after seeing them at Gump's.

Graves continued to exhibit his work in galleries throughout California, as well as at his own Graves Gallery, where in 1938 he created an exhibition, which included, according to the *The San Francisco Examiner*, "THIRTY KINDS of camellias."<sup>5</sup>

Shirrell Graves died on January 17, 1954 at the age of 70 in San Francisco.

---

<sup>2</sup> "Flower Paintings Are On Exhibition," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (Honolulu, HI), Sat, July 15, 1900, p. 9

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> "Record Set by Van Gogh," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), Sun, June 7, 1936, p. 31

<sup>5</sup> "Watercolor Show," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), Sat, April 30, 1938, p. 18