



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

Mabel Pugh was born in 1891 in Morrisville, North Carolina to Mary Ellen (Collier) and James M. Pugh, a merchant and postmaster.¹ Pugh showed an early interest in drawing and painting. After high school, she attended the Peace Institute where she studied in the art department under the tutelage of Ruth Huntington Moore. Pugh graduated in 1911.² She worked as an assistant teacher of art at the Institute when in 1914 her etchings were published in a book titled “Ancient Albemarle” by Miss C.F.S. Albertson. The book was published by the Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution who appointed Pugh the “official illustrator” of the North Carolina chapter of the Society.³

The artists later moved to New York to study at the Art Students League. She spent five years at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where she was awarded the Cresson Traveling Scholarship 1919 and a Special Prize in 1920.⁴ She planned to use the scholarship to study in Italy, France and England.⁵ Pugh arrived in Paris in July, 1921.⁶ In 1926, Pugh was one of eight artists chosen to head the art program of the Woman’s Club and elected chairman of the exhibitions committee.⁷

In 1927, the American Federation of the Art organized an exhibition of original illustrations at the Raleigh Woman’s Club. The exhibition included work by artists including Maxfield Parrish, Jessie Wilcox Smith, N.C. Wyeth and Thornton Oakley. The exhibition also included 23 block prints by Pugh who had, “an enviable reputation as an artist in New York.”⁸ Two of Pugh’s block prints entitled “The Old Schoolhouse of Morrisville” and “The Church at Hillsboro” were accepted by the National Academy of Design.⁹

In 1931, the Woman’s Club held an exhibition of Pugh’s work that included oils, watercolors, block prints and sketches. All but one of the works represented North Carolina subject matter. Pugh’s oil painting entitled “Elizabeth and the Grapevine,” depicted the grand-daughter of the former Sheriff of Wake County. The painting had previously won the gold medal at the Plastic Club in Philadelphia. The *News and Observer* [Raleigh, NC] described the artists as a, “North Carolina celebrity whose talent is appreciated more widely in her adopted home of New York and elsewhere than in her native state.” Emil Fuchs, the portrait painter of Queen Victoria and Edward VII, praised Pugh as having, “the divine spark which distinguished genius...”¹⁰

¹ “Wake County Artist Has Notable Exhibit of Work Here,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sun, Apr 6, 1941, 39.

² “Dr. Robert P. Pell,” *Raleigh Times* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Tue, May 23, 1911, 2.

³ “Daughters of Revolution Maps Out Next Year’s Plan,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Thu, Dec 10, 1914, 6.

⁴ “Wake County Artist Has Notable Exhibit of Work Here,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sun, Apr 6, 1941, 39.

⁵ “Town Topics,” *Keyport Weekly* (Keyport, New Jersey), Fri, Jan 14, 1921, 8.

⁶ “Miss Pugh Arrives in Paris,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Thu, Jul 21, 1921, 6.

⁷ “Planning Club Work For Year,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sun, Aug 8, 1926, 17.

⁸ “Show 2 Exhibits at Woman’s Club,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sun, May 8, 1927, 25.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ “Art Exhibit Open At Woman’s Club,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Fri, Oct 9, 1931, 10.



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In 1922, Pugh was awarded first prize at the North Carolina State Fair.¹¹ In 1924, she won prizes for portrait and nature work at the Western Wake County Fair.¹²

In September of 1936, Pugh succeeded her late teacher, Ruth Huntington Moore, as head of the art department at Peace College.¹³ In December of the same year, an exhibition of Pugh's work was held at the college. Included among the paintings and block prints were more than a dozen books in which Pugh's illustrations were published.¹⁴ In 1938, the Printmakers Society of California loaned block prints by 20 modern artists to the Burwell Memorial Library at Peace Junior College. The loaned work was shown in tandem with block prints by Pugh. Several of the artist's block prints on display were illustrations for the book *Twelve Royal Ladies* by Sidney Dark.¹⁵

In 1942, Pugh received the first prize ribbon for painting, and the second prize and an honorable mention in the print category at the Exhibition of Southern Artists held at the Mint Museum of Art.¹⁶

During her lifetime, Pugh exhibited widely in the United States and Abroad including the World's Fair in 1939.¹⁷ The Library of Congress acquired two of her prints and her oil portraits of three former North Carolina congressmen hung in the House of Representatives. She exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the National Academy of Design.¹⁸ She had several one person exhibits in New York as well as at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.¹⁹

Pugh's illustrations appeared in popular magazine including *McCall's*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and the *New York Times Book Review*. In addition to illustrating books published by Century and Doubleday, Pugh authored an illustrated the children's book, *Little Carolina Bluebonnet*.²⁰

In 1941, the *News and Observer* [Raleigh, NC] said, "[Pugh] is an example of the rarely found painter who, after having spent many successful years working in the Big City, the Mecca of American artists,

¹¹ "Miss Mabel Pugh has Best Art Collection," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina) · Sat, Oct 21, 1922, 3.

¹² "Ribbons Given at Apex Fair," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sun, Oct 5, 1924, 47.

¹³ "New Art Teacher Joins Peace Faculty in Fall," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sat, Jul 18, 1936, 5.

¹⁴ "Alumnae Tea," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sat, Dec 12, 1936, 6.

¹⁵ "Peace College Shows Blockprint Collection," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sun, Mar 13, 1938 · Page 40

¹⁶ "Southern Art Exhibition Prize Winners Announced," *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina), Sun, May 3, 1942, 68.

¹⁷ "Art As Profession and Hobby Is Theme of Club Department," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Wed, Oct 31, 1951, 12.

¹⁸ "A Group Show of Seven at Conference Table," *Rocky Mount Telegram* (Rocky Mount, North Carolina) · Sun, Mar 13, 1960, 6.

¹⁹ "Art As Profession and Hobby Is Theme of Club Department," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Wed, Oct 31, 1951, 12.

²⁰ "Wake County Artist Has Notable Exhibit of Work Here," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), Sun, Apr 6, 1941, 39.



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prefers to return to her native environment to continue her work. It has been the ambition of Mabel Pugh to spend her talent and energies portraying the people and scenes of her home country.”

Mabel Pugh died in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1986. She was 94 years old.