



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

ISABEL M. ROSS (1857-1931)

Belle M. Ross was born in Buffalo, New York to Sarah (Moore) Ross and James J. Ross. She was educated in the local public schools and graduated from high school in 1875.¹ She began her artistic studies in Buffalo under Amos W. Sangster (1833-1904) and Ellen Becker (Thompson). In 1886, she continued her studies at the Art Students League under James Carroll Beckwith (1852-1917). She received a scholarship from the league which allowed her to study in Paris.² In 1888, Ross traveled to Paris to further study at the Académie Colarossi. In a letter to a friend, published in the *Buffalo Courier*, Ross described the academy's rigorous training and having to dedicate all her time to the atelier. Ross wrote:

“One has to work very hard here. Artistic training abroad is a very different thing than what it is in America. In the first place art is a recognized profession. Everyone understands it, and everyone sees the result in the public gardens and museums. Seven years is the allotted time for a Frenchman to study before exhibiting and the training is long and severe... You can therefore imagine that young women who come over here from America for only a year or two are, in the eyes of the French artists at least, somewhat superficial.”

Ross spent the summer of 1889 in Étapes-sur-Mer in Northern France before returning to Paris to continue her studies.³ When she returned to the United States in 1890, she exhibited three works at the 65th annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design.⁴ Ross resided in Toledo for a time where she served as superintendent of the art department at Miss Smead's School.⁵ While in Toledo, a fire destroyed many of her paintings.⁶

In 1893, she was among the first fourteen artists whose works were sold during an exhibition of the Buffalo Society of Artists.⁷ In the spring of 1894, she exhibited some of her Venetian studies from the summer prior at the Art Gallery in Buffalo.⁸ In 1894, while studying at the Académie Delécluse under Paul-Louis Delance (1848–1924), two of her works were accepted at the Paris salon.⁹ She received the Delécluse prize for the works, which was a scholarship for one year of study in Paris.¹⁰ In 1895, she

¹ “Woman's Work,” *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo, New York) Sun, Apr 29, 1888, 6.

² “Miss Isabel M. Ross, Noted Painter, Dead,” *The Buffalo News* (Buffalo, New York) Fri, May 1, 1931, 48.

³ “People with Ten Talents,” *Buffalo Courier Express* (Buffalo, New York) Sun, Jan 13, 1889, 10.

⁴ *Catalogue of the Sixty-Fifth Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design* (New York: National Academy of Design, 1890) 15-16, 35.

⁵ “Personal Mention,” *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo, New York) Mon, Mar 24, 1890, 5.

⁶ “There and Here,” *The Buffalo Enquirer* (Buffalo, New York) Wed, Jul 15, 1891, 4.

⁷ “Fourteen Pictures Sold,” *Buffalo Courier Express* (Buffalo, New York) Tue, Jan 17, 1893, 6.

⁸ *Buffalo Courier Express* (Buffalo, New York) Wed, Apr 25, 1894, 7.

⁹ “The Ross Exhibition,” *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, Michigan) Sun, Feb 7, 1897, 4.

¹⁰ “The Bohemian Sketch Club,” *The Buffalo News* (Buffalo, New York) Fri, Apr 27, 1894, 2.



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exhibited *The Church of the Salute* in Cleveland. A reviewer for *The Plain Dealer* wrote, “Miss Ross, an American girl, possesses rare talent; has spent much time to a purpose working Venetian scenes.”¹¹

In 1897, Ross had a one-person exhibition at the Detroit Museum of Art comprised of 51 oil paintings.¹² Around the same time she exhibited 42 oil paintings, including several Venetian scenes, at Guenther’s Art Store in Cleveland.¹³ Ross had made four extended visits to Venice including in 1898 when she had a studio in the Casea Scaramella. Ross first traveled to Venice in 1892 while studying under the Buffalo born expatriate artist Frank Edwin Scott (1863–1929). Upon seeing Ross’s work in Venice, a writer for the *Buffalo Courier Express* said:

“And looking over her work, beautiful in color and feeling as it is true and spirited in drawing, we felt that Miss Ross knows Venice as few artists know her. It seems strange that an American woman should appreciate and reproduce the subtle charm and varying moods when most of the Italian artists fall so signally...Here is San Maggiore on a “sirocco” day. There is a tender rosy light over land and sea. The great tower of the church shines in soft, pearly tints, the water shimmers with pinks, blues and violets, and the old walls seem to renew their youth in the softened misty atmosphere.”¹⁴

In 1899, Ross was among the American artists including James McNeil Whistler who exhibited at the Third International Exhibition of the City of Venice, known today as the Venice Biennale.¹⁵ The same year her painting entitled *The Spinner* was exhibited at the Paris Salon.¹⁶ In 1902, Ross traveled to Granada, Spain.¹⁷ In 1903, she exhibited works from her travels in Spain, Venice and Paris at the Twentieth Century Club and at Niagara Hall in Buffalo.¹⁸

While Ross traveled widely throughout her lifetime, she always returned home to Buffalo. She was a member of the Buffalo Society of Artists and the Town club. An authority on Spanish antiques, Ross presented her personal collection of Spanish antiques to the Buffalo Historical Society Museum in 1928. The Isabel M. Ross collection was prominently displayed in the Spanish room at the museum.

Ross continued to travel until the end of her life. She spent the winter of 1928-29 in Haiti. Isabel M. Ross died at home in Buffalo in 1931.¹⁹

¹¹ “General Review,” *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio) Sun, Feb 24, 1895, 4.

¹² “The Detroit Museum of Art Historical Report May, 1891,” (Detroit: John F. Eby & Co. Printers, 1891) 14.

¹³ “Art Exhibition,” *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio) Wed, Mar 31, 1897, 7.

¹⁴ “American Girls in Venice,” *Buffalo Courier Express* (Buffalo, New York) Sun, Mar 20, 1898, 5.

¹⁵ Nancy Mowll Mathews, *Prendergast in Italy* (New York: Merrell, 2009) 158.

¹⁶ “Miss Isabel M. Ross, Noted Painter, Dead,” *The Buffalo News* (Buffalo, New York) Fri, May 1, 1931, 48.

¹⁷ “Miss Isabel M. Ross, Noted Painter, Dead,” 48.

¹⁸ “Exhibit of Paintings,” *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo, New York) Sat, Nov 21, 1903, 5.

¹⁹ “Miss Isabel M. Ross, Noted Painter, Dead,” 48.