



HAWTHORNE Fine Art

Olga Sorensen (1877 – 1963)

Born in Frederickshaven, Denmark in 1877, Olga Sorensen was raised in the United States when her family settled in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. She attended Nanticoke high school and began her art education at Drexel Institute of Technology (now Drexel University) in Philadelphia, before traveling to Europe to continue her studies.

Despite being brought to the United States as a child, Sorensen did not become a United States citizen until 1914, when she and her sister, Dr. Signe Margaretha (“Margaret”) Sorensen, an esteemed osteopathic physician, applied for United States citizenship, believing the country was on the cusp of granting voting rights for women. The sisters were both active in the Women’s Suffrage movement, and Signe was the president of the Nanticoke branch of the group who advocated for women’s voting rights in Luzerne County. Sorensen lived with her sister in Nanticoke and maintained a studio in the Coal Exchange Building in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where she gained local fame and offered lessons in china, watercolor and oil painting in the years leading up to her departure for France in 1920. Sorensen was also an active member of the Wilkes-Barre Camera Club.

In September of 1920, Sorensen traveled to Paris to advance her artistic studies at the Académie Julian. Specializing in oil portraits and miniature painting, she quickly gained a reputation as a skilled portrait painter, counting among her patrons some of the most prominent people of France, as well as Americans who were touring abroad. After only three years in Europe, her portrait of Helen Gould was exhibited at the Spring-Salon in Paris, a distinct honor for an American artist. Though Sorensen initially planned to limit her stay in France to one year, she ended up spending the better part of nine years in Europe, with intermittent trips home to visit her sister and brother-in-law (Ove C. Schlanbusch) in Pennsylvania beginning in 1924. During her initial years in France, she spent some time as a member of the artists’ colony on the Riviera along the Mediterranean. In the summer of 1923, Sorensen traveled extensively throughout France, notably producing several landscapes of the French countryside in Brittany and Normandy.

On one of her visits to the United States in 1928, Sorensen took the opportunity to paint commissioned portraits of several prominent local residents. Returning to the United States again beginning in July of 1930, Sorensen painted the portrait of a society matron in Springfield, Massachusetts, a woman whose daughter’s portrait the artist had painted in Paris the previous summer. Sorensen had with at least one other portrait commission in Massachusetts before returning to Paris at the end of September. The artist visited the United States at least one more time in 1935, before returning to her home state of Pennsylvania for the remainder of her life.

In addition to oil painting on canvas, Sorensen also painted on art glass windows, and her work could be found in private homes across the Northeast region, as well as in the Luzerne County, Pennsylvania court



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house, where she painted the art glass in the dome after a design by an Italian-American artist.¹ Sorensen also painted the *Soldiers' Memorial Window*, which was erected in a church in Maine. The church is likely the St. Savior's Episcopal Church in Bar Harbor, which houses forty-two memorial windows, including ten by Louis Comfort Tiffany.

Sorensen was a member of the Art Students League and the American Society of Miniature Painters, exhibiting with the group in Washington D.C. in 1935. She also exhibited her work at the World's Fair of 1939 in New York.

She died on February 24, 1963 at the age of 87 while residing at Sunnyside Convalescent Home, and is buried near Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. The oil paintings left in her possession were distributed through an estate sale the following month.

¹ The Italian-American artist is likely either Vincent Aderente (1880-1941) or V. Pastore, who both worked on the courthouse's interior decoration.