



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

JOSEPHINE MILES LEWIS (1865-1959)

The American Impressionist artist Josephine Miles Lewis was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1865 to Julia Coley and Henry G. Lewis. Her family was well-known throughout the community, as her father served several terms as the town's mayor. Lewis spent her formative years in New Haven and studied at the Yale School of Fine Arts, one of the few schools at the University open to women, beginning in 1883. She received a certificate from the school in 1887 and continued on to earn the first ever Bachelor of Fine Arts degree awarded by Yale in 1892. Among her teachers at Yale were John Ferguson Weir (1841-1926) and John Niemeyer (1839-1932). Lewis was the second woman to graduate from the University overall.

Upon the completion of her degree, Lewis and her sister Matilda traveled to France in 1893 to study painting at the Académie Julian. Inspired by her exposure to Impressionism, Lewis and a number of her artist cohorts made the pilgrimage to Giverny, where Claude Monet (1840-1926) kept his home and studio. She was one of several young artists from wealthy backgrounds who stayed at the middle-class Baudy Hotel near Monet's home in order to simulate a more bohemian lifestyle. While in France, she studied under the tutelage of Frederick MacMonnies (1863-1937) and Edmond Aman-Jean (1860 - 1936). In 1897, Lewis exhibited her work at the prestigious Paris Salon. She remained in France for five years before returning to the United States to open a studio in New York City.

While living in America, Lewis split her professional life between her family home in New Haven, her studio in New York City, and her summer home shared with her sister in the artists' colony in the seaside town of Scituate, Massachusetts. Among the community of women artists who had studied in Paris together and reconvened each year in Scituate, including Theodora Thayer (1868-1905), Mabel Stuart (b. late 19th century) and Alice Beckington (1868-1942), Lewis achieved the most professional success.¹ She was most recognized for her genre scenes and portraits of women and children, for which she received no shortage of commissions. Her degree of professional success could be due to the fact that she never married, which allowed her more time and freedom to take on commissions. The artists in Scituate became known as the "Bawdy House Set" for their time spent at the Baudy Hotel in Giverny, as well as

¹ Daisy Thompson, "I Remember Scituate," Scituate Historical Society, accessed Oct. 23, 2018, <http://scituatehistoricalsociety.org/i-remember-scituate-by-daisy-thompson/>.



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for their elaborate costume balls and ostentatious theatricals.² The group would soon grow to include other graduates of nearby Boston art schools.



**Josephine Miles Lewis, *A Rainy Day*,
before 1917. Oil on canvas, 36 x 30
in. Mattatuck Museum.**

Lewis was one of the original members of the New Haven Paint & Clay Club, where she exhibited oils and watercolors regularly from 1900 onwards throughout her life. In 1916, the National Academy of Design awarded Lewis the Julia A. Shaw Award for her painting *A Rainy Day*, which the Academy rated as “the most meritorious art produced by an American woman.”³ Lewis continued to exhibit widely throughout. Her painting, *Isabel*, won a prize from the New Haven Paint & Clay Club in 1941 and was subsequently purchased by the Club. Still painting at the age of 90, Lewis held a solo exhibition in Boston in 1955. Her work can now be found in several prominent collections throughout the United States, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, and the Yale University Art Gallery.⁴

² “The Bawdy House Set: A 19th Century Art Colony at Scituate, Massachusetts, 1889-1910,” 19th Century Art Colony, accessed Oct. 23, 2018, <http://www.19thcenturyartcolony.org/>.

³ Judith Schiff, “The First Female Students at Yale,” *Yale Alumni Magazine*, Sep./Oct. 2009, accessed Oct. 23, 2017, <https://yalealumnimagazine.com/articles/2558-the-first-female-students-at-yale>.

⁴ General biographical information from AskArt.com.