



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

ADELAIDE BROOKS JOHNSON (1877-1959)

Adelaide Brooks Johnson, a painter specializing in seascapes, was born in Portsmouth, Virginia in 1877 to Eugene K. Brooks and Mary Delim Hodges Brooks. She married Charles Ransome Johnson on October 3, 1904. The couple's daughter, also named Adelaide Brooks Johnson, was born in June the following year. The daughter followed in her mother's footsteps and became a respected artist in her own right.

Little is known of the personal life of Adelaide Brooks Johnson senior. Census documents indicate that by 1920, Johnson was working as a ticket agent for the railroad, while her husband worked as a wholesale merchant in the lumber industry. By 1930, Johnson was widowed and worked as a clerk for the city civil court. Records documenting her artistic training and career remain elusive. However, a 1913 advertisement in the *Boston Globe* advertises two seascapes for sale by "A. B. Johnson" – *Surf Scene* and *Moonlight on the Ocean*.¹ By using her initials rather than her full name, a common practice for women artists working in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Johnson was able to conceal her identity as a female artist, thus making her work more marketable and ensuring it would be taken more seriously.

Her daughter, Adelaide Brooks Johnson, followed a similar model, referring to herself as "A. Brooks Johnson" throughout her professional career as an artist and instructor. A. Brooks Johnson's professional career is more well-documented. She graduated with a bachelor's degree from the North Carolina College for Women in 1926 and completed her master's degree at

¹ *The Boston Globe*, (Boston, MA), Oct. 5, 1913, p. 13.



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Columbia University in New York in 1927. Soon after earning her degree, Johnson moved back to Virginia to become an instructor in the Fine Arts department at the College of William and Mary.² In 1928, she traveled to Paris in order to teach at William and Mary's summer program in Europe.³ Evidently, she decided to remain in Paris at the end of the program in order to pursue her personal career as an artist. An April 1929 article in *The Flat Hat*, a newspaper published by the College of William and Mary, states: "Miss Adelaide Brooks Johnson, former instructor in the art department here, has had her work honored in Paris by a wood cut and portrait being accepted by the board of governors of the Paris Salon...Last July she went to Paris where she is continuing her study of art."⁴

² "22 Added to W & M Faculty for Term," *Daily Press* (Newport News, VA), Oct. 9, 1927, p. 24.

³ "Plans for William & Mary Summer School in Europe Are Being Made at College," *Daily Press* (Newport News, VA), Jan. 25, 1928, p. 9.

⁴ "Former Art Instructor Here Honored in Paris," *The Flat Hat*, (Williamsburg, VA), April 12, 1929, p. 6.