



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

EMMA CHEVES WILKINS (1870-1956)

A Savannah native, Wilkins was a descendant of the Cheves family of South Carolina who owned plantations along the Savannah River.¹ She inherited her artistic talent from her mother and namesake, Emma Cheves Wilkins, and her maternal grandmother Charlotte McCord Cheves. Her mother was known for her floral studies and her grandmother for her work in miniature.² Wilkins began her formal art training at the Telfair Academy under its first director, the German American artist Carl L. Brandt. During the summer of 1895, she studied in Paris at the Academie Colarossi under Gustave Courtois and Louise-Auguste Giradot while residing at the American Girls Club.³

During the 1890's and early 1900's, Wilkins and her mother operated an art school, offering lessons in drawing and watercolor to local women. Wilkins supervised the weekly sketch class. The Wilkins's displayed their work and the work of their pupils in annual exhibitions held in their home on Jones Street. In 1896, Wilkins exhibited works she executed as a student at the Telfair Academy as well as works she executed while in Paris.⁴

While still a student, Wilkins exhibited in local Savannah retail shops including Theus Bros., a jewelry store on Broughton Street. In 1894, the store displayed a marine scene and a still life by Wilkins.⁵ In 1897, her painting depicting golden rod and autumn leaves in a basket was lauded by the community.⁶ In 1901, Wilkins was awarded a \$25 premium at the Georgia State Fair for best collection of oil paintings.⁷

In 1901, the Wilkins's held their annual exhibition at St. John's Parish Hall. The student work in the exhibit numbered in the hundreds. Wilkins contributed copies of works found in the Louvre and the Musée du Luxembourg. Executed in Paris in 1899, the copies included Millet's *The Gleaners* and Corot's *Souvenir d' Italie*. Other works by Wilkins included watercolor sketches of Parisian parks. The artist's mother was represented with her watercolor studies of New England

¹ "Story of Previous Trouble," *The Macon Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia) Sun, Apr 3, 1927, 9.

² "Society," *The Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia) Sun, Apr 26, 1896, 12.

³ Pamela D. King, *Looking Back: Art in Savannah 1900-1960* (Savannah: Telfair Museum of Art, 1996) 76, 106.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ "Three Fine Pictures," *The Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia) Thu, Feb 8, 1894, 8.

⁶ "The Week in Society," *The Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia) Sun, Nov 7, 1897, 12.

⁷ "Miss Wilkins' Art Award," *The Savannah Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia) Mon, Nov 18, 1901, 8.



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and miniature paintings on ivory.⁸ In 1903, Wilkins returned from a summer of study in Paris to head the art department at Miss West's School for Girls on Taylor Street.⁹

In 1930, Wilkins contributed several oil paintings to the first annual exhibition of Georgia artists. The exhibition opened at the Telfair Academy before traveling to Macon and on to the High Museum in Atlanta.¹⁰ In Macon at the Washington Memorial Library, Wilkins still life entitled *A Bright Bowlful* was praised by *The Macon Telegraph*.¹¹ The following year she was awarded the Savannah Chamber of Commerce prize for her still life entitled *Playing with Reds*.¹² In 1935, she contributed a work entitled *Yellow Jasmine* to the 44th annual exhibition of the Society of Washington Artists at the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

A founding member of the Savannah Art Association,¹³ Wilkins exhibited regularly with the Association of Georgia Artists. She was well-known for her portraits of prominent Savannah citizens and for her still life paintings. Today, her work can be found in Savannah at the Telfair Museum of Art and at Georgia Southern University–Armstrong Campus, and in Augusta at the Morris Museum of Art.

⁸ "To View Art Works," *The Savannah Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia) Thu, Feb 14, 1901, 10.

⁹ "Miss West's School for Girls," *The Savannah Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia) Sun, Sep 27, 1903, 12.

¹⁰ "Georgia Artists Highly Praised for Exhibit Here," *The Atlanta Journal* (Atlanta, Georgia) Sun, Mar 16, 1930, 10.

¹¹ "Paintings by Savannah Artists are on Exhibit at Washington Library Here," *The Macon Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia) Mon, Feb 17, 1930, 9.

¹² "Art League Show of Pictures Opens," *Chattanooga Daily Times* (Chattanooga, Tennessee) Wed, Oct 7, 1931, 6.

¹³ Pamela D. King, *Looking Back: Art in Savannah 1900-1960* (Savannah: Telfair Museum of Art, 1996) 13.