



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

MINNIE RANKIN WYMAN (1871-1963)

Minnie Rankin Wyman was born in Nova Scotia, Canada in 1871. She spent her formative years in Boston, Massachusetts where she studied at the Boston Normal Art School. Her summers were spent painting the seaside of nearby Gloucester, where she became a member of the Gloucester North Shore Association. While living in Boston, she belonged to the Copley Society and earned a reputation as a portrait painter. Wyman later received specialized training in drawing at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington D.C., before moving her studio to New York City to study under Robert Henri (1865-1929) at the Art Students' League.

In 1903, she married Joseph Wyman, who was the mayor of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. After honeymooning on his yacht, she developed a love for boating and went on to become one of the first women to become a licensed steamboat pilot. Sadly, her husband died soon after their marriage.

Newly widowed, Wyman spent the following years traveling extensively. In addition to spending time in Italy studying the old masters and sketching the warm glow of the Spanish landscape, Wyman also traveled to Jerusalem and later to Egypt where she painted the pyramids and ancient ruins with Boston artist Robert Bacon.¹ In reference to her adventures, Wyman once said, "I have worked hard, but I have had lots of fun."¹

In 1923, Wyman moved to Rochester, where she became an active member of the Rochester Art Club, exhibiting with the group regularly from 1926 through the early 1940s, also aiding in the organization's development. Wyman began teaching drawing and watercolor painting at the Athenaeum of the Mechanics Institute (which later became the Rochester Institute of Technology) from 1930 to 1947. She had great pride in the work of her students, and once she started teaching, she said "Now my greatest thrill is not in my own success, but in the progress and success of my pupils."²

Throughout her travels, Wyman painted numerous energetic landscapes, most of which had an uninhibited quality and featured the type of exuberant, spontaneous brushwork often associated with oil sketches. However, her portraits and still lifes exhibit a more studied and restrained quality, reflecting her expertise in draftsmanship that balanced her vibrantly-colored compositions. She said, "A bright bit of flowers or sunshine in a painting makes me comfortable, happy, and brings me joy." Wyman had a preference for floral still lifes, which she executed in

¹ Mildred Bond, "Along the Promenade: Passing Knowledge On to Pupils Artist's Big Ambition," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY). July 1, 1934, p. 52.

² Ibid



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oils and watercolor. She kept her studio stocked with colorful objects, such as pieces of pottery, brass trays, and animal figurines, all of which she frequently incorporated into her still lifes to add depth and complexity to her work. Despite the growing trend toward modernism, Wyman preferred to work in a more traditionalist style, saying “There always will be room for the conservative, or call it photographic if you will, in art. It is a matter of appropriateness, of good taste and choice.”³

However, her conservative style did not prevent Wyman from experimentation. She enjoyed the imaginative quality and spontaneity of water oils, a process where drops of oil paint of varying hues and tints are dropped on the surface of a pan of water. When moved, abstract forms appear on the water’s surface, and a piece of paper is quickly laid on top, transferring color onto the paper. The abstract design then serves as inspiration for the final composition, which the artist brings out by using layers of watercolor washes until the desired effect is achieved. Wyman also painted figurative landscape miniatures on milk glass as a hobby.

Upon her death at the age of 92 in 1963, the newspapers identified Wyman as one of the most influential figures in the Rochester art world, dubbing her the “Dean of Rochester Artists” – an accolade that inspired the title of a 1988 retrospective exhibition of her work at the 1570 Gallery at Valley Manor in Rochester, which was organized by Wyman’s grandniece, Kathy Seidel. The exhibition included *Ancient Ruins*, executed by the artist in Egypt in 1911 and many other works from her travels.⁴

During her lifetime, Wyman’s works were not only exhibited widely in Rochester, but also in Boston, New York, Washington D.C., as well as other major cities.

References Consulted:

Avery, Ralph H. “Local Artists Exhibit at Rundel: Work of Trio is Pleasant in Variety.” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY). Feb. 18, 1940, p. 82.

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Netsky, Ron. “Exhibit recalls ‘Dean of Artists’: Gallery spotlights work of Rochester teacher, painter.” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY). Nov. 6, 1988, p. 56.

³ Ibid

⁴ Netsky, Ron. “Exhibit recalls ‘Dean of Artists’: Gallery spotlights work of Rochester teacher, painter.” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY). Nov. 6, 1988, p. 56.