



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

HORTENSE TANENBAUM FERNE (1889-1976)

Activity: Lower Manhattan, New York City, c. 1935
Oil on canvas
18 x 23 inches
Signed lower left

Provenance: Questroyal Gallery, New York, 2005

Exhibition History:

National Association of Women Artists, New York, 1962

Hortense Minnie Tanenbaum Ferne was born in New York City on December 14, 1889 to Moses Tanenbaum, a wealthy art collector who left two paintings to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She completed her artistic training in New York City, studying at various institutions including the Art Students League of New York, the National Academy of Design School, and Columbia University. Though she had several prominent teachers, such as Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975), George Elmer Browne (1871-1946), William Auerback-Levy (1889-1964) and Hugh Breckinridge (1870-1937), Charles Hawthorne (1872-1930) and William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) proved to be the most influential for Ferne, who found inspiration in their brightly-colored Impressionist style landscapes.

While Ferne established her permanent residence in New York, she traveled extensively and maintained secondary residences in Philadelphia from 1930 and Westport, Connecticut from 1959. In 1906, she married Herman Weiler Fernberger and the couple soon adopted their first son, Benjamin Kirkland. Their second son, Henry Fernberger II, was born in Pennsylvania in 1909. The couple would often shorten their name to Ferne but would not legally change it until 1940.

Ferne's first exhibition in New York was held in January 1929 at the Art Center. Throughout her life she exhibited with many organizations including the Salons of America, the Society of Independent Artists and the National Association of Women Artists. In 1975, the National Association of Women Artists gave her an award to recognize her fifty years of dedicated service to the organization and began issuing the Hortense Ferne Memorial Award for Printmaking to promising artists showing potential in the medium. In addition to her group exhibitions with prominent arts organizations, Ferne also held numerous solo exhibitions in cities across the Northeast and Midwest in cities such as, Westport, Albany, Scranton, Rochester, Buffalo, Utica, Nashua, Philadelphia, Topeka, Amherst and Milwaukee. She is also recognized



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for founding the Philadelphia Society of Etchers. In June 1973, Ferne mounted one of her final exhibitions at the June 1 Gallery of Fine Art in Washington, D.C. This show featured prints and pastels depicting circus scenes (it was reported that she once lived among circus people), as well as an etching titled *Activity*, which could possibly be a New York City scene similar to the painted oil version here.

Ferne frequently depicted New York City's bustling harbor, filled with the dark forms of steamboats puffing smoke into the air against the backdrop of the lower Manhattan skyline. Many such scenes, including numerous watercolor sketches and the *Activity: Lower Manhattan, New York City* oil from 1925, are painted from a similar viewpoint looking onto the East River and the Financial District from what is now Brooklyn Bridge Park. From this perspective, Ferne was able to capture the energy of the thriving metropolis and paint the rapidly changing skyline and its newly emerging skyscrapers. When the Woolworth Building was completed in 1913, seen here to the right of the composition, it was the tallest building in the world until the construction of 40 Wall Street, seen here on the left, which wrenched away Woolworth's claim to the title upon its completion in 1930. The two buildings are distinctive for both their height and their distinctive spires.



Hortense Ferne, *Harbor [Untitled]*, c. 1935. Watercolor on paper. 3 5/8 x 5 3/16 inches.

In 1985, Ferne's son honored her memory by established the Hortense Ferne and Henry Ferne II Memorial Art Library in the Hortense and Henry Ferne II Memorial Fine Arts Room in the Wiscasset Public Library in Maine. The library allows for the circulation of art books as well as fine art reproduction prints.



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Ferne's works can now be found in prominent institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., among others.

Sources:

Roger Novak, Ph.D., for research
Wiscasset Public Library