



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

Ella M. Wood (1889-1976)

Ella Miriam Wood was born in 1889 in Birmingham, Alabama to Ida Evelyn (Pettis) and Charles Widney Wood, a mining and civil engineer. A native of Pittsburgh, her father moved to New Orleans as a young boy. He attended Louisiana State University and received a diploma in civil engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. At the time of his death in 1911, he was employed by the Monongahela River Consolidated Coal and Coke Company and oversaw the company's coal elevator in Gouldsboro.¹

While little known today, Wood was a talented artist known for her portraits as well as the large murals she executed around New Orleans including at St. Augustine Church.² The *Daily Herald* called her, "one of the most distinguished women painters of the South..."³ Wood attended Newcomb College in New Orleans. In her final year, she was captain of the art school's basketball team. She also helped to edit the college yearbook, *The Jambalaya*.⁴ She graduated with a diploma from the Normal Art program in 1908.⁵ She was awarded a scholarship from Newcomb that allowed her to pursue a year of study in Philadelphia.⁶ In the fall of 1908, Wood began studying at the Pennsylvania Academy. Her instructors included Charles Hawthorne and Daniel Garber.⁷

In 1910, Wood created colorful studies of floats to be used in the Kovington Klub Parade. Wood was paid \$100 for her designs.⁸ During Mardi-gras, in March of 1911, the parade was comprised of nine floats designed by Wood that illustrated the history of St. Tammany parish.⁹ That same year, Wood designed a new basketball poster for her alma mater, Newcomb College.¹⁰ In 1913, Wood was one of three young women hired by Miss Effie Shepard to work on decorations for

¹ "Death Claims Charles W. Wood," *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana) Tue, Apr 4, 1911, 13.

² Peter Hastings Falk, *Who Was Who in American Art (1564-1975)*, (Madison, CT: Soundview Press, 1999) 692.

³ "Distinguished Artist Here," *The Daily Herald* (Biloxi, Mississippi) Sat, Jan 18, 1930, 2.

⁴ *Jambalaya*, Volume 13 (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1908) 117.

⁵ "Tulane-Newcomb Commencement; Richardson Memorial Dedication," *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana) Tue, May 19, 1908, 5.

⁶ "Social Events," *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana), Fri, Jul 2, 1909, 16.

⁷ Peter Hastings Falk, *Who Was Who in American Art (1564-1975)*, (Madison, CT: Soundview Press, 1999) 692.

⁸ "Sketches of the Carnival Good Work," *St. Tammany Farmer* (Covington, Louisiana) Sat, Dec 24, 1910, 1.

⁹ "Covington," *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana), Wed, Mar 1, 1911, 6.

¹⁰ "Newcomb Notes," *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana), Thu, Feb 23, 1911, 14.



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the Trianon Theater on Canal Street. A fellow artist, Shepard attended Newcomb several years ahead of Wood.¹¹

A member of the Mississippi Art Association, Wood's work was included among 16 acquisitions by the association that would form the foundation of what later became the Mississippi Museum of Art.¹²

In 1925, Wood was selected to paint a mural for the International Trade exhibition in New Orleans. The mural entitled *New Orleans Welcoming the Nations*, a major feature of the exhibit, was said to be "one of the largest paintings ever undertaken by a woman."¹³ Located on the ground floor of the exhibition building at Dauphine and Poland Streets the large-scale work, measuring 9 x 36 feet, allowed Wood to execute life-size figures depicted in native costume. The artist called on men and women from different backgrounds within the community to pose for her figures which represented the countries of the world. According to Wood, "America will be properly represented by Miss New Orleans, whose out-stretched arms will be indicative of welcome."¹⁴

In 1931, Wood was a juror for the 5th annual exhibition of the Gulf Coast Art Association. She served on the committee with Prof. Ellsworth Woodward, director of art at Newcomb College and president of the Southern States Art League.¹⁵ In 1934, Wood's portrait of Col. Arthur T. Prescott, the first president of Louisiana Tech, was presented to the college library during the school's commencement program.¹⁶ In 1935, Wood exhibited nine portraits at the Delgado Museum, today known as the New Orleans Museum of Art.¹⁷

From the age of 12, Wood often summered at Seashore Camp Grounds, a Methodist camp in Biloxi, Mississippi.¹⁸ Her Mother later owned a cottage at the Camp Grounds and Wood continued to summer there into the 1930's.¹⁹

¹¹ Mrs. Edith Brown Bailie, "Just As It Happens," *The Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana), Wed, Jan 22, 1913, 6.

¹² Florence N. Levy, *American Art Annual, Volume XIV* (Washington, D.C.: The American Federation of Arts, 1917) 159.

¹³ Distinguished Artist Here," *The Daily Herald* (Biloxi, Mississippi) Sat, Jan 18, 1930, 2.

¹⁴ "Miss Wood to Paint Welcome Motif for Exposition," *The Birmingham News* (Birmingham, Alabama) Thu, Nov 5, 1925, 22.

¹⁵ Art Exhibition to Open on Feb. 12." *The Daily Herald* (Biloxi, Mississippi) Fri, Feb 6, 1931, 2.

¹⁶ "To Honor First President of Louisiana Tech Today," *The Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana) Mon, May 21, 1934, 3.

¹⁷ *The Daily Herald* (Biloxi, Mississippi) Mon, Dec 31, 1934, 2.

¹⁸ "Society Notes," *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana) Sun, Jun 23, 1901, 17.



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In 1959, Wood's portraits depicting members of the Parlange family could be found in the Parlange Plantation House in Pointe Coupee Parish which was otherwise decorated with imported French art and furniture.²⁰

During her lifetime, Wood was a member of the New Orleans Art Association, New Orleans Arts and Crafts Club,²¹ and the Southern States Art League.²² She exhibited at the Delgado Museum, the Louisiana State Exhibition [Baton Rouge], Newcomb Art School, and the New Orleans Art and Craft Club.²³

Today, Wood's work can be found in the Mississippi Museum of Art.

¹⁹ *The Daily Herald* (Biloxi, Mississippi) Mon, Dec 31, 1934, 2.

²⁰ "Home, Garden Tour Sunday, April 5th in New Roads Area," *Pointe Coupee Banner* (New Roads, Louisiana), Thu, Apr 2, 1959, 10.

²¹ Peter Hastings Falk, *Who Was Who in American Art (1564-1975)*, (Madison, CT: Soundview Press, 1999) 692.

²² "Art League Sales Reach \$335 Total," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), Sun, Jul 3, 1927, 4.

²³ Peter Hastings Falk, *Who Was Who in American Art (1564-1975)*