

ANNA PAGE SCOTT (1863 - 1925)

Sharing the Light

Miss Anna Page Scott's consignment to history will be within the first line of American Impressionists - those who flourished from about 1890 to 1910. It will also be favorably noted that she chose to pass on this new approach to seeing and expression as an instructor with the Mechanics Institute.

Her philosophy - indeed her passion - was in the firm belief that art should be for the masses; having access to nature and beautiful surroundings could only deepen the understanding of beauty in the human soul. "To this end," she declared in an article in "The Athenaeum" in 1912, "the best forms of activity are those which secure the greatest amount of happiness to the ones who engage in them, and we believe the study of Art, in its broadest sense, tends to make people live useful, well rounded lives. Not art in the detached sense, but art which gives the daily duties of life new meaning and turns them from drudgery into pleasurable forms of activity.... We see an appreciation of the beautiful in all walks of life developed: in the love of nature, in our city streets, in the choice of books, in music, in children, in the fresh impulse to lead the higher life - all this revealed through the study of Art, we believe it is one of the best means of lifting the race."

In 1857, Jonathon Pardee and Alice (DeWolf) Scott settled in the midwestern city of Dubuque, Iowa - at that time a semi-frontier town. There, Anna Page Scott, the second of five children, was born October 13, 1863. In addition to spending a typical childhood in the local schools, she attained proficiency in music and writing while spending much of her early years with sketch book in hand.

In the early 1880's, she began her art education at the Chicago Art Institute - spending nearly three years there - followed by a year at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Leaving for Paris, Miss Scott enrolled at the Colorossi Academy for two years of study under the celebrated artists Gustave Courtois and Pascal Dagnon-Bouveret. She supplemented this with attendance at the atelier of Charles Lasar, an American expatriate artist who had spent several years in the classes of Jean Leon Gerome. Lasar taught mainly women at his studio in the Montparnuesse section of Paris, including the Americans Cecelia Beaux and Violet Oakley. Miss Beaux gives insight into this artist's endearing techniques in her diary, commenting that, while Lasar gave criticism, he also used "perfect honesty and humorous illustration" in expressing opinion and theory. Having spent so many years on the fundamentals, Miss Scott later felt it was Lasar who finally freed her to be able to "see." She followed this with a year of sketching and study in Holland, possibly spending time with the artist George Hitchcock at his summer art school in Egmond. Hitchcock had established a reputation as a painter of landscapes, flowers and peasants, featuring the effects of bright light and shadow. She could not have passed up an opportunity to avail herself of a successful artist and new techniques.

Returning to the U.S. in 1889, Miss Scott settled in New York City where she began working for the Century Publishing Company. An excellent illustrator, her work was to be featured in such publications as Youth's Companion, The Churchman, Truth and St. Nicholas. Enrolling at the Pratt Institute in 1896, the artist sought additional instruction in composition from Arthur W. Dow and life drawing from Walter Shirlaw. Dow had been a student of Lasar in Paris and at the art colony of Concarneau so Miss Scott would have been familiar with him.

Dow felt strongly about the role of composition in art and his ideals of beauty for the masses were to be reflected in Miss Scott's own courses shortly thereafter. Dow asserted that "Neglect of composition checks creative effort in the artist and, more than that, it discourages an education of appreciation, for it demands that children shall begin by representing rather than learning to feel

beauty and to create it in simple ways." Miss Scott was to sum up these ideals in her book "Art in its Relation to Industry." Again she agreed with Dow who stated: "Teach the child to know beauty when he sees it, to create it, to love it, and when he grows up he will not tolerate the ugly."

In the summer of 1897, Miss Scott was hired by the Mechanics Institute in Rochester, New York, as an instructor of art. While Rochester was not considered a hotbed of American Impressionism, it was near enough to New York City itself to be heavily influenced. Miss Scott was hired to teach classes in drawing, composition, oil and watercolor painting. She was to become an integral part of the local art scene and to identify herself through her involvement in its civic life for the next sixteen years.

Although the artist seldom exhibited, she did enter several watercolors in the 1904 show at the Chicago Art Institute. In 1911 and 1912 she entered a number of her works of her year-long visit to California at the Rochester Art Club exhibit. Late in 1912 she experienced a one-person show at the inaugural exhibition of the Dubuque Art Association. In appreciation, the local newspaper stated: "Miss Scott is content to see with her own eyes, and while she has profited by the examples of others, she has never sacrificed her individuality on the altar of slavish imitation."

Resigning her position with the Mechanics Institute in the summer of 1913, she returned to Dubuque, Iowa, the home of her youth. After about four years of failing health, she died on October 13, 1925.

Her obituary celebrated her appreciation of nature and beauty and her endeavor-to share it, stating: "Perhaps her best work for art was her unceasing effort to bring it into homes, She believed in it as an absolute necessity, not as a luxury of life, and by writing, lecturing and teaching, she carried her theory to people everywhere."

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