



DRAWN FROM LIFE

The Art of
Mary Lane McMillan
(1883-1976)



Mary Lane McMillan
(1883-1976)

DRAWN FROM LIFE
The Art
of
Mary Lane McMillan
(1883-1976)

FOREWORD BY:

JENNIFER KRIEGER, MANAGING PARTNER

ESSAY AND CATALOGUE BY:

MEGAN BONGIOVANNI, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

HAWTHORNE FINE ART, LLC



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

MANHATTAN SHOWROOM, 135 EAST 57TH STREET, 14TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10022 (BY APPOINTMENT)

P.O. Box 140 IRVINGTON, NEW YORK 10533 (MAILING ADDRESS)

(212) 731-0550 • INFO@HAWTHORNEFINEART.COM • WWW.HAWTHORNEFINEART.COM



Fig 1. Mary Lane McMillan, c. 1907

FOREWARD

I am delighted to bring to the fore the outstanding Impressionist work of Mary Lane McMillan (1883-1976). As I have explored, conserved and researched a portion of the contents of her Estate, I have become more and more taken with not only her visual talent but also the particular way in which she embraced life's beauty. Although I was not expecting to find out this biographical fact, I am not surprised that Mary's father, a pastor, encouraged her to sit with fellow young congregant Helen Keller (1880-1968) during church to help guide her through his services. Mary demonstrated a very mature and poetic sensibility in her early life. We can see her sensitive and perceptive spirit in her childhood sketchbooks from her days in Tusculumbia, AL and Ringgold, GA. Thanks to Gary Hollingsworth and his late wife Sara Reid exemplary custodians of Mary's estate, her entire life's work including her first forays into the practice of art can be shared for posterity. Without Gary's eye and appreciation for Mary's work and years of committed research by Gary, Sara, former curator Michelle Harm and current curator Lauren Stump, this collection could not have been preserved. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Hawthorne's Researcher Megan Bongiovanni in piecing together all of the primary and secondary sources including exhibition reviews, interviews and ephemera and writing a wonderful comprehensive essay on Mary as well as creating this beautiful catalogue.

A critic in the 1920's described Mary's art as being "transfused with atmosphere splendid in composition and beautiful in color." These words resound throughout Mary's output. Through this exhibition, we can follow her from her studies at the National Academy of Design where she won a "Medal for Best Work" during her first year of matriculation to the continuation of her fine art education at the Art Institute of Chicago under Walter Marshall Clute (1870-1915) who said she "has held her own with the best of them" through to one of my favorite periods for her, her year of study with William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) in 1910 at Villa Silli where she became, as he acknowledged, one of his "gifted students in Florence." Praise continued for Mary when she returned to the United States and exhibited her Florentine work in Texas. A critic for the Star-Telegram in Fort Worth remarked that Mary's paintings of Italy possessed "a delicacy of coloring and a charming quality of aerial perspective....[her memory sketches] attract favorable comment from nearly every visitor to the exhibit." Her feeling for color and atmosphere continued to serve her particularly well during her mid-career compositions painted at the garden of her vacation home and summer school in Belgrade Lakes, Maine and into her later career as a watercolorist of landscapes in Eustis, Florida. This exhibition will also highlight Mary's talents as a successful portraitist, illustrator, teacher and gardener. I hope that you enjoy discovering her brilliant multi-dimensional legacy as I have done.

Jennifer C. Krieger, Owner
Hawthorne Fine Art, LLC



Fig 2. Mary Lane McMillan, c. 1907

ESSAY

Mary Lane McMillan was an accomplished artist, teacher, and illustrator whose career spanned more than half a century. She left her childhood home in rural Alabama to study at the National Academy of Design in New York City. After exhibiting her work for several years, Mary embarked on what would become a successful career in the male dominated field of illustration during the height of America's Golden Age. Her work appeared in books, in popular magazines and on numerous magazine covers. Mary's talent and dedication to her creative life and the lasting influence of her teacher, William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) are highlighted in this exhibition through a variety of media including oils, watercolors, pencil, and pastels.

Mary was born in 1883 in Ringgold, Georgia to Martha Cordelia Whitman Lane (1858-1940) and Rev. James Garland Lane (1841-1920). An 1862 graduate of Harvard, Rev. Lane served as a pastor in Georgia for five years before moving the family to Tuscumbia, Alabama in 1878. His congregation at Tuscumbia's First Presbyterian Church included the family of notable American Helen Keller (1880-1968). Rev. Lane baptized Helen as an infant and years later would encourage his daughter to sit with her during church services to soothe her.¹ Despite Helen's inability to see or hear, the two girls developed a friendship, a testament to Mary's kind, patient, and sensitive nature.

Mary spent her childhood filling sketchbooks and received private art lessons. As a student at the National Academy of Design, she won the Suydam bronze medal in 1903 for her work in the "antiques" class as well as an honorable mention the following year.² In October 1904, at the age of 21, McMillan married George L. McMillan, a gifted musician from Missouri.³ They settled in Fort Worth, Texas around 1906 and began teaching at Polytechnic College. George was a professor of piano harmony and composition, while Mary was in charge of the art department. Around the same time Mary also began designing covers for various print publications, including Holland's Magazine and The Etude, a magazine for music enthusiasts.⁴

Mary spent the summer of 1909 studying under Walter Marshall Clute (1870-1915). An American artist and illustrator, Clute held a class for advanced artists at his "quaint and picturesque" villa in Park Ridge, Illinois. When Mary returned to Fort Worth in the fall, she exhibited 40 works comprised of oils, watercolors, and pen and ink, at Polytechnic College.⁵ The following summer, Mary and George travelled to Liverpool aboard the steamship *Lusitania* to visit art galleries in London and Paris before settling in Italy. There Mary studied under American Impressionist William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) at his Florentine villa, the Villa Silli, located in the hills of Fiesole.⁶

The 15th century villa, shrouded in climbing vines and a lush pink oleander bush, can be seen in Mary's *An Italian Garden, 1910*. (fig. 12). Two young girls are pictured at play in the garden, one cradling a doll in her lap and the other captivated by a radiant orange parasol, the colors of which are echoed in the garden flowers. The girls are very likely Chase's youngest daughters Helen Velazquez (1897-1965) and Mary Content (1904-1943) with gifts from their father. Chase had a fondness for giving young girls pretty dolls, even children other than his own. He would bring dolls to the children of the contadina, or farm woman that oversaw the villa each time he returned to Italy.⁷ Similar views

of the villa painted by Chase can be seen in *The Orangerie, c.1909* (fig. 13) and *Orangerie of the Chase Villa in Florence, c. 1910* (fig.14). When viewing *An Italian Garden, 1910* and *The Orangerie, c.1909* together, one can imagine student and teacher working in tandem at their easels just yards apart.

Chase's blonde haired daughter, Helen, would make a second appearance in *Young Girl with a Parasol* (fig. 11), in which a brilliant red parasol is set against a verdant backdrop. Indeed, parasols are a recurring theme in Mary's work. In a later work, *Young Woman with Parasol* (fig. 19), a young woman in a rowboat shades herself from the afternoon sun with one painted in vivid orange and lavender. The brightly colored parasol and heightened white of the young woman's dress is reminiscent of *At the Seashore* by Chase. Mary had a penchant for parasols and used them not only as brilliant accents of color in her compositions but also in life to protect her pale complexion.⁸

On excursions throughout Florence, Mary captured the scenic splendor of Italy in *Italian Monastery* (fig. 9) and *The Tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence* (fig. 7). In what she called her "Memory Sketches," Mary depicted people in their daily routines as in *An Italian Youth* (fig. 6).

In 1910, Mary began exhibiting regularly with the Fort Worth Art Association at the Carnegie Library. The following year, when Mary and two other women exhibited there, a critic for *The Fort Worth Record and Register* said, "...As a master of color, [McMillan] seems to be unexcelled. She is as true and masterful in her portrait work as she is in her landscapes, and her versatility with her brush is well demonstrated in the present display. And, contrary to the work of the average artist, it is hard to say wherein she excels..."⁹ Mary's work included a number of paintings completed while in Florence including *An Italian Garden*.

Red Window Sashes (fig. 10) is another superb example of Mary's mastery of color. The unique architectural work is a study in the interplay of primary color, light and shadow. Climbing vines with rich foliage painted in shades of green and yellow serve as a compositional framing device while adding natural elements to the architecture of the scene. Mary used vines in a similar fashion in *Young Girl with Parasol* (fig. 11) drawing our focus to the youthful figure. Trees enliven her subtle colored pencil drawings of Maine architecture such as *Stone Building* (fig. 36) and *Bridge* (fig. 35). In *Stone Building*, in particular, bare trees and coniferous greenery surround the structure with their moving organic forms animating the scene.

In 1913, The McMillans moved to New Rochelle, New York, and Mary began pursuing a career in illustration while continuing to exhibit her work. A member of the newly formed New Rochelle Art Association, Mary exhibited at the New Rochelle Public Library in 1914.¹⁰ She illustrated a story in the *Pictorial Review*, and her pen and ink drawings appeared in novels by Edna Turpin and Lucy Furman. In 1914, Mary's *Old Spinning Wheel*, included in an exhibition of American watercolors in Los Angeles was described as "exquisite in tone."¹¹ Her illustration titled *A Heavy Weight* appeared on the September 1915 cover of *Judge*, a weekly satirical publication. Regarding the illustration, *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram* noted that McMillan was "...rapidly attaining an enviable place in the ranks of American Illustrators."¹²

The following year McMillan's cover illustration for *Judge* titled *Reddy Maid Suits* was a favorite amongst readers. The magazine began offering full-color prints of the illustration along with another

favorite by James Montgomery Flagg. In 1917, Mary's picture appeared in the magazine beside her male colleagues, a sign that she had earned the respect of her peers.

In New Rochelle, Mary and George established The McMillan School of Fine Arts, with classes held from September to June. During the 1920's and 1930's, the school offered a summer session at the McMillans' summer residence in Belgrade Lakes, Maine. The beautiful lake setting provided the perfect backdrop for Mary's art classes and many of her paintings including *Summer Garden Sketch* (fig. 29) and *Lake in Maine* (fig. #17). The archway of flowering vines as seen in *View from Entrance to Vacation School (Belgrade Lakes, Maine)* (fig. #25) greeted students as they entered the school grounds, with the cool blue lake visible beyond the sun-dappled trees.

A fastidious gardener, Mary's Maine cottage was surrounded by several flourishing gardens connected by pathways.¹³ The countless hours spent tending to her gardens provided Mary with endless creative possibilities. She produced careful floral studies of individual flowers such as *Study 'Dainty Beso' Rose* (fig. 38) and many lively garden sketches in watercolor including *Flowers by the Stairwell, Maine* (fig. 28), *By the Lake in Maine* (Fig. 27), and *In the Garden* (fig. 26). The delight Mary found in her gardens can be felt in the colorful bloom-filled pathway and vine draped arbor in *The Garden Path* (fig. 32).

One of Mary's favorite sites was a towering elm tree beside a red farmhouse that stood a short distance from her cottage.¹³ In *Maine Farmhouse* (fig. 30) Mary captured the scene using a wet on wet watercolor technique resulting in soft, feathered areas of pigment and transparent pools of color. The spontaneous technique was also used to capture the expansive hillside and distant houses in *Maine Landscape* (fig. 31).

Just as Chase often experimented with pastels, Mary too found the dry media perfect for creating color and preparatory studies such as *Study for Vacation School* (fig. 24). In *Study for Nurse* (fig. 41), Mary quickly rendered the nurse that tended to her in sketchy strokes of pigment on toned paper.¹⁵ The finished work, *Portrait of a Nurse, 1967* (fig. 42), is more refined in its composition, line-work and use of subtle blending. Mary convincingly suggests the sitter's blouse and shoulders using just a few delicate lines. The addition of white pigment above the sitter's head adds further dimensionality to the work. Mary's skill as an illustrator blends with her impressionist style in works such as *Woman Looking Upward* (fig. 20) and *Fairy in Blue* (fig. 21), both full of color and light.

Mary's fondness for sketching trees gracefully arching over the water's edge can be seen in several works including *Lake in Maine* (fig. 17), *Reflections* (fig. 16), and in her sketchbook (fig. 49). When exhibited at the Carnegie Library in 1911, an art critic described *Reflections* as one of Mary's "most striking" images that "portrays one of those secluded nooks in a little stream where a tree leans gently over, casting deep shadows." According to the critic, Mary had selected for her subject "one of the prettiest nooks that was ever seen. There is something about *Reflections* that gets away from the stereotyped streamlet with a canoe in a covey [sic]."¹⁶ In *View of Penobscot Bay* (fig. 15), Mary alludes to the industrialization of the area. The forked tree in the foreground juts out from the river bank framing a smokestack at an industrial site in the distance. The site is likely the Bucksport Mill, a paper mill built in the 1930's across the river from Fort Knox.¹⁷

Around 1940, Mary retired from her career as a commercial artist and lived briefly in Mariana, Arkansas, to be near her mother. Following her mother's death, Mary moved to Eustis, Florida, and lived with fellow artist Catherine Stockwell (1885-1983). Stockwell was known for her impressionist depictions of Floridian landscapes and flowers such as *Cherokee Rose Floral Still Life* (fig. 34). Mary devoted her time to sketching and painting and continued each summer during the 1950's to visit Maine, where she created elaborate puppet shows for the local children.

During her lifetime, Mary contributed illustrations to a Campbell's Soup advertisement (1915) and numerous magazines, including the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *American Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *McCall's*. She died at the age of 93 in Mt. Dora, Florida, and is buried at Oakwood Cemetery in Tuscumbia, Alabama.



NOTES

¹ "Artist Given Birthday Surprise," *The Orlando Sentinel* (Orlando, Florida), September 8, 1974, 95.

² "Schools of the Academy," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), May 16, 1903, 9.

³ "Tuscumbia, Ala.," *Nashville Banner* (Nashville, Tennessee), October 15, 1904, 5.

⁴ "Literature," *The Houston Post* (Houston, Texas), October 28, 1906, 30.

⁵ "Poly Opens With Many Big Improvements This Season," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, Texas) August 23, 1909, 12.

⁶ "Society," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, Texas), July 6, 1910, 4.

⁷ Katharine Metcalf Roof, and William Merritt Chase, *The Life And Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1917) 225.

⁸ Interview with Harold Stevens conducted on April 25, 2008 in Winter Haven, Florida. Stevens was a gardener and maintained the McMillan's property in Maine.

⁹ "Art Exhibit is Well Attended...", *The Fort Worth Record and Register* (Fort Worth, Texas), December 10, 1911, 12.

¹⁰ "75 Years of Painting the Town," *Daily News* (New York, New York), August 20, 1989, 479.

¹¹ "Selected Water colors," *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California), August 23, 1914, 32.

¹² "New 'Judge' Cover Drawn by Former Ft. Worth Woman," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, Texas), September 18, 1915, 7.

¹³ Interview with Harold Stevens conducted on April 25, 2008 in Winter Haven, Florida. Stevens was a gardener and maintained the McMillan's property in Maine.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ The nurse attended Mary Lane during her stay in a nursing home in Eustis, FL. We do not have a record of her name nor the names or identities of any of Mary Lane's sitters.

¹⁶ "Art Exhibit is Well Attended...", *The Fort Worth Record and Register* (Fort Worth, Texas), December 10, 1911, 12.

¹⁷ Location information provided by Lauren Stump, Director, Hollingsworth Fine Arts



Fig. 3

Lady with Hat

Pencil on paper

4 ³/₄ x 3 ⁵/₈ inches

Signed verso



Fig. 4

Women Sewing, 1904

Watercolor on paper

3 x 6 inches

Signed and dated 1904, lower right



Fig. 5

Woman with Basket, c. 1910

Watercolor on paper

12 x 9 inches

Signed lower left



Fig. 6

An Italian Youth, c. 1910
Watercolor on paper
7 ³/₄ x 3 ¹/₂ inches
Estate Stamp Verso

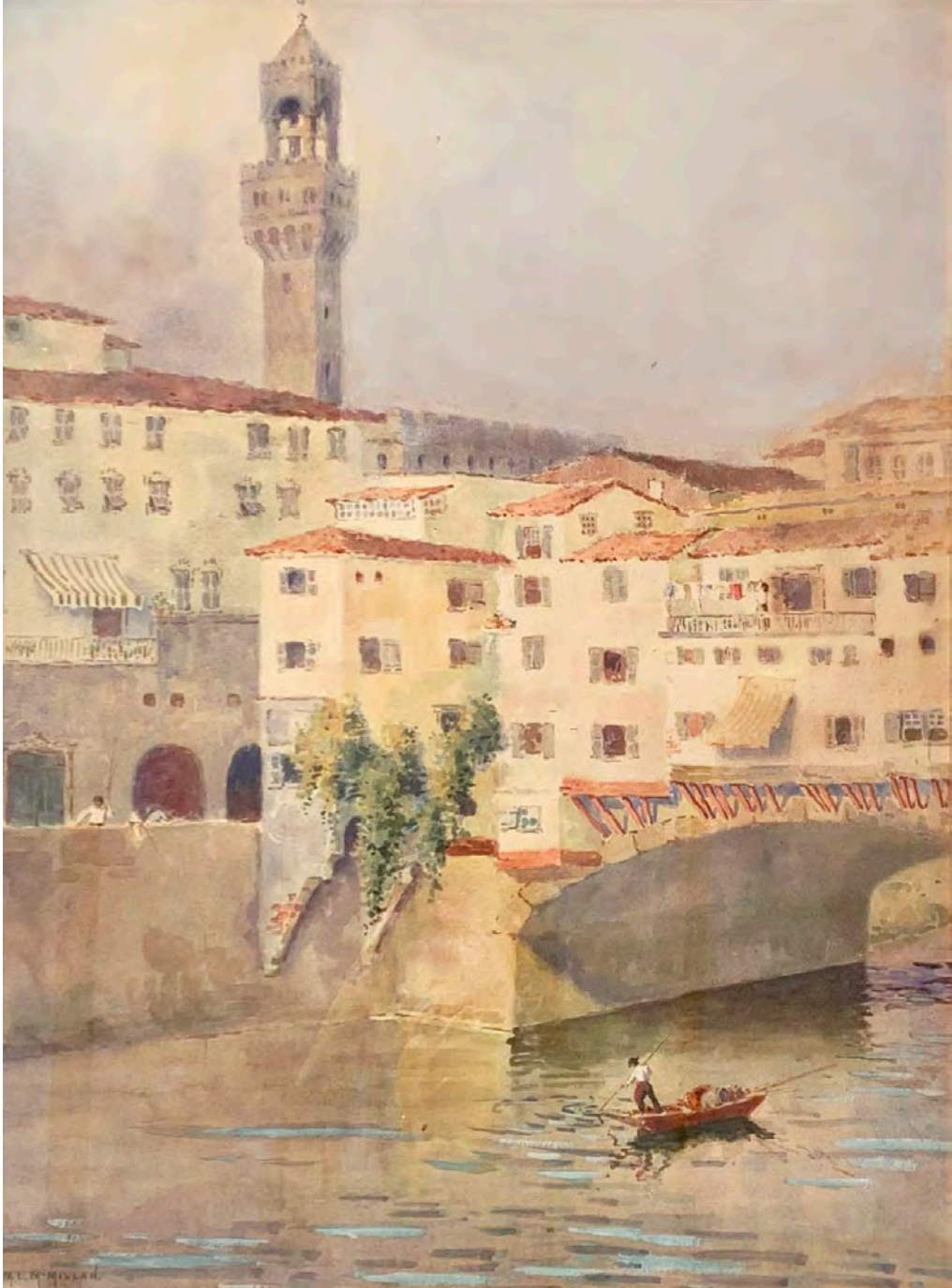


Fig. 7
The Tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, c. 1910
Watercolor on paper
25 x 19 inches
Signed lower left



Fig. 8
San Francesco Monastery, Fiesole, Italy, 1910
Watercolor on paper
9 x 12 inches
Signed lower right



Fig. 9
Italian Monastery, c. 1910-1912
Oil on canvas
16 x 12 inches
Estate stamp verso



Fig. 10

Red Window Sashes

Oil on canvas

12 x 16 inches

Estate Stamp Verso



Fig. II

Young Girl with Parasol, c. 1910-1915

Oil on canvas

20 x 16 inches

Estate stamp verso

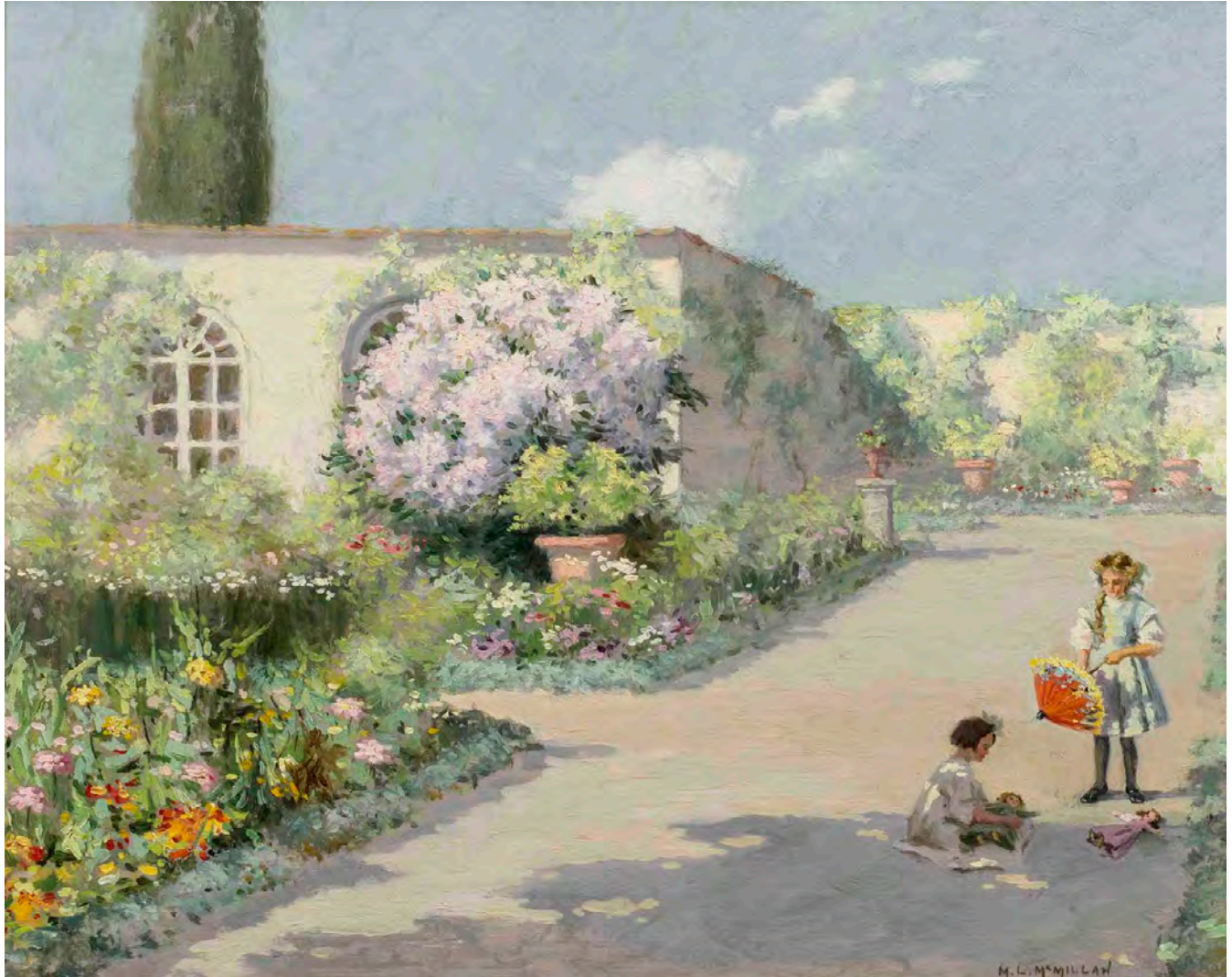


Fig. 12

An Italian Garden, 1910

Oil on canvas

16 x 20 inches

Signed lower right



Fig. 13

William Merritt Chase (1849-1916)
The Orangerie, c. 1909
signed 'Wm. M. Chase' (lower left)
oil on paper laid down on canvas laid down
on panel
23½ x 33¼ inches
Private Collection



Fig. 14

William Merritt Chase (1849-1916)
Orangerie of the Chase Villa in Florence, c. 1910
Signed Wm. M. Chase (lower left)
Oil on canvas
19 x 13¾ inches
Private Collection





Fig. 15
View of Penobscot Bay
 Oil on panel
 14 ⁵/₈ x 10 ³/₄ inches
 Signed verso



Fig. 16
Reflections, c. 1910
 Oil on canvas
 7 ¹/₂ x 10 ¹/₂ inches
 Estate stamp verso

Fig. 17
Lake in Maine
 Pastel on paper
 10 ³/₄ x 18 ³/₄ inches
 Signed verso



Fig. 18

Girl with Fan, c. 1911
Watercolor on paper
11 1/2 x 9 inches
Signed lower left



Fig. 19

Young Woman with Parasol, c. 1925

Pastel on paper

7 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches

Estate stamp verso



Fig. 20

Woman Looking Upward, c. 1920
Pastel and pencil on paper
5 x 4 inches
Estate stamp verso

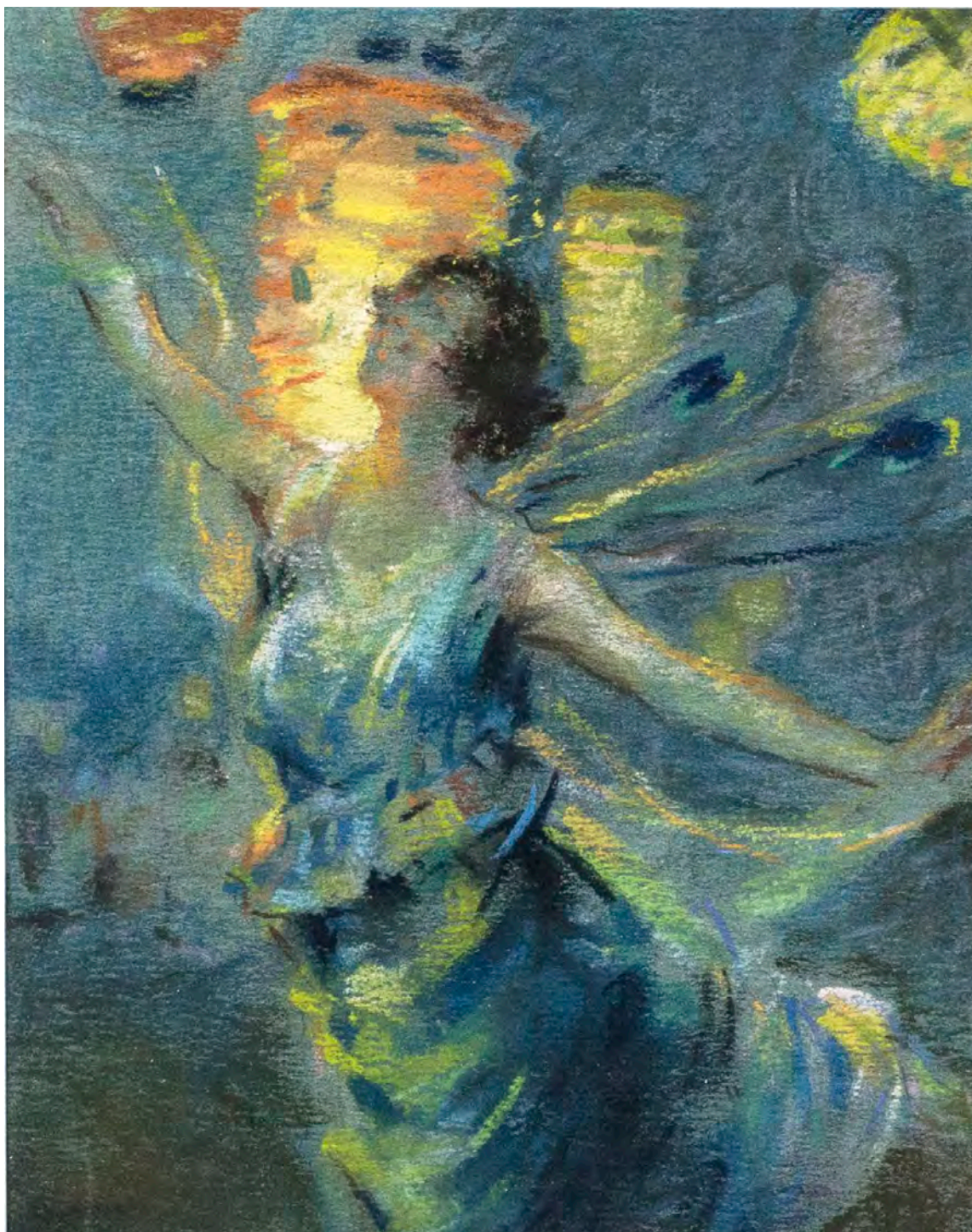


Fig. 21

Fairy in Blue, c. 1920
Pastel on paper
6 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches
Estate stamp verso



Fig. 22

Resolved, c. 1925

Pastel and pencil on paper

5 x 4 inches

Estate stamp verso



Fig. 23

"None-So-Pretty" My Cat, c. 1940

Mixed media on paper

4 1/2 x 7 inches

Signed and titled lower left



Fig. 24

Study for Vacation School

Pastel on paperboard

12½ x 9½ inches

Signed lower left and verso



Fig. 25

View from Entrance to Vacation School (Belgrade Lakes, Maine), c. 1930

Oil on canvas

20 x 16 inches

Estate stamp verso

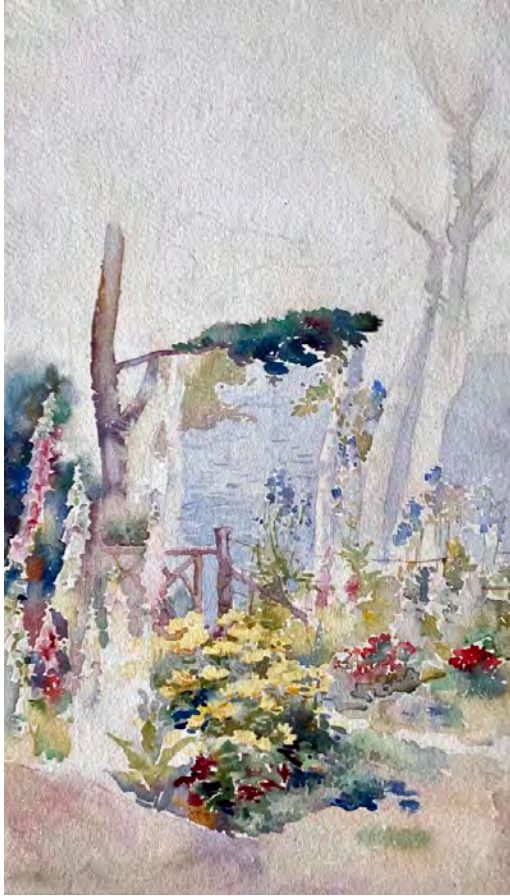


Fig. 26

In the Garden
 Watercolor on paper
 17 x 9 ³/₄ inches
 Estate stamp verso

Fig. 27

By the Lake in Maine
 Watercolor and pencil on paper
 17 ⁷/₈ x 12 inches
 Estate stamp verso

Fig. 28

Flowers by the Stairwell, Maine
 Watercolor on paper
 14 x 10 ¹/₂ inches
 Estate stamp verso

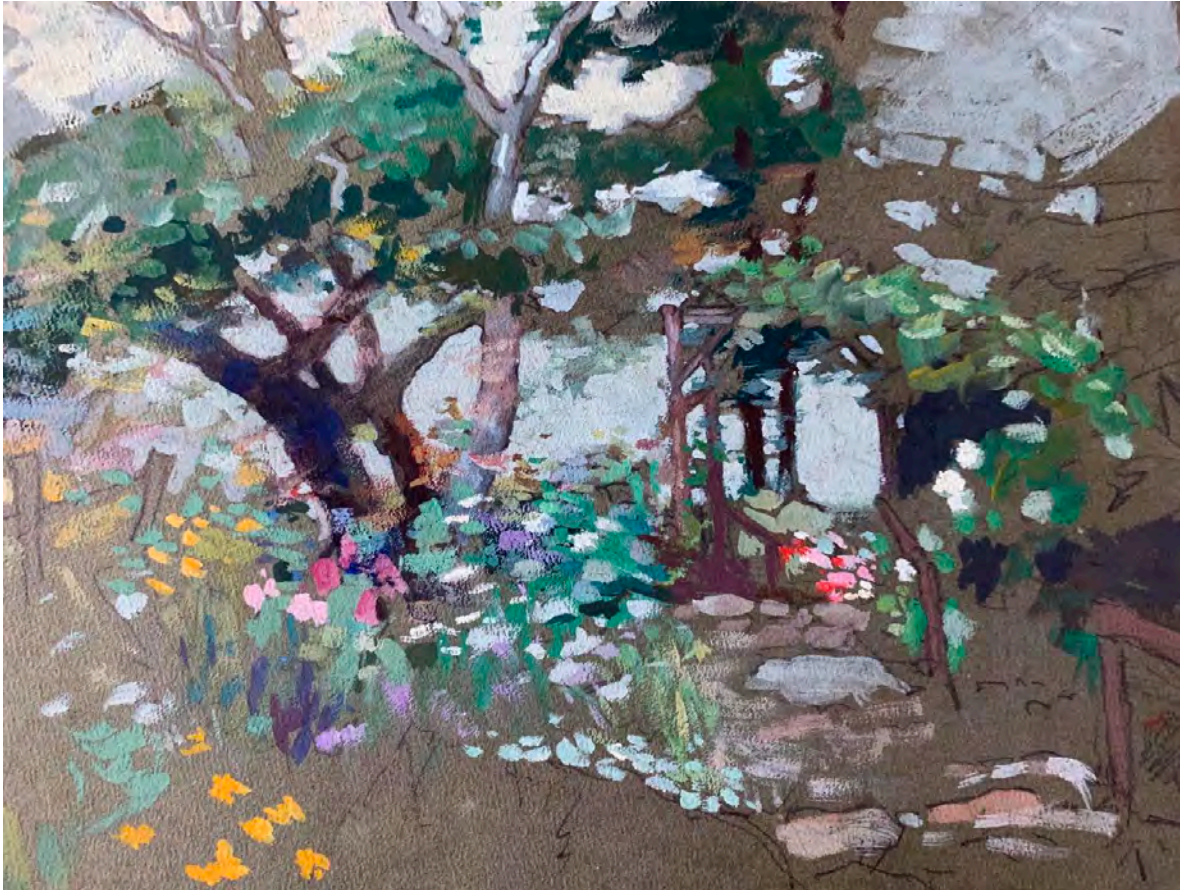


Fig. 29

Summer Garden Sketch

Gouache on paper laid down on board

9 x 11 1/2 inches

Estate stamp verso



Fig. 30
Maine Farmhouse
Watercolor on paper
6 x 8 inches
Signed and dated 1930, lower right

Fig. 31
Maine Landscape, c. 1930
Watercolor on paper
9 x 12 inches
Estate stamp verso

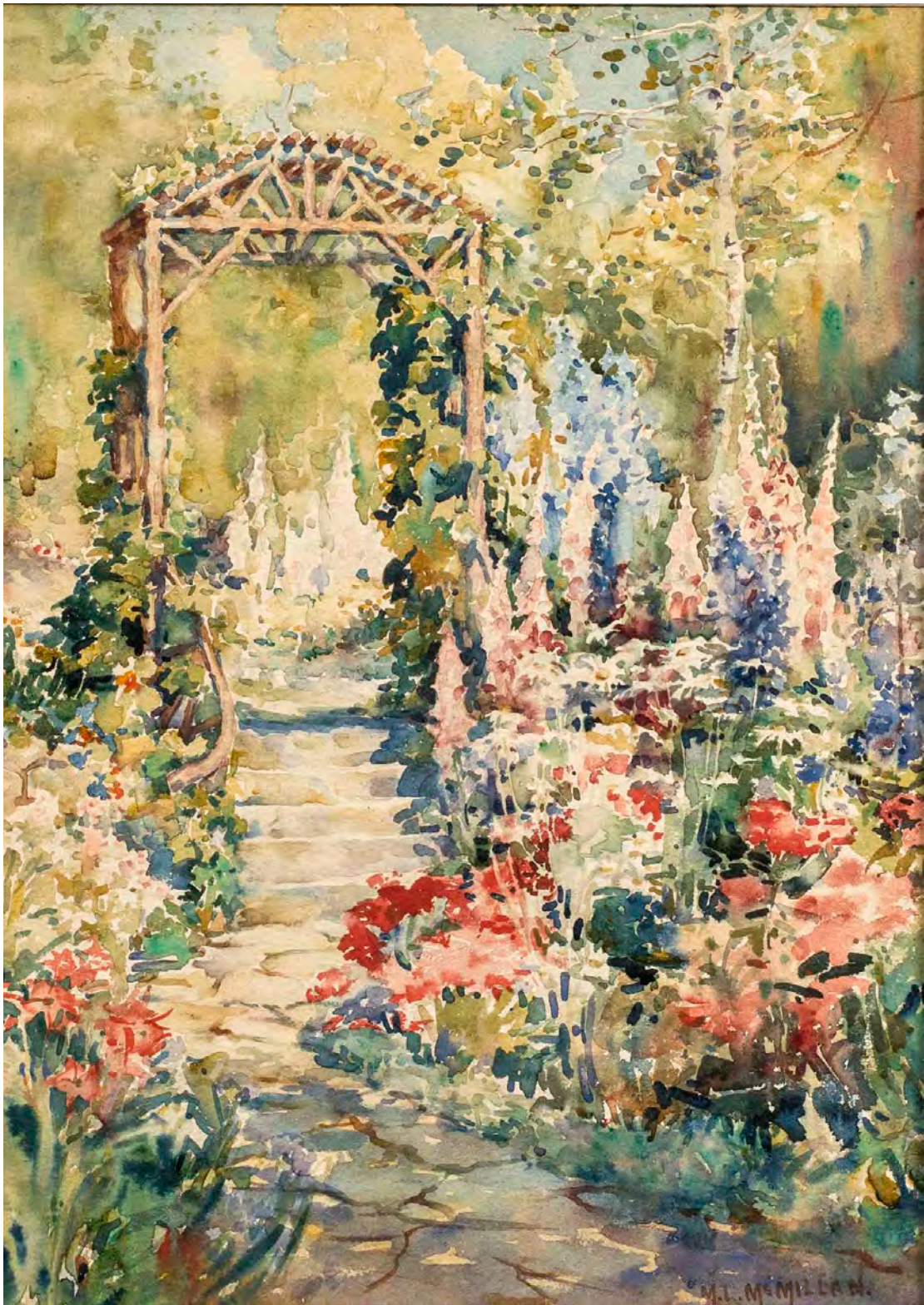


Fig. 32

The Garden Path

Watercolor on paper

16 x 11 inches

Signed lower right



Fig. 33

Florida House, c. 1950
Watercolor on paper
10 ½ x 14 inches
Estate stamp verso



Fig. 34

Catherine Stockwell (1895-1983)

Cherokee Rose Floral Still Life

Oil on canvas board

20 x 16 inches

Signed lower left: C/Stockwell



Fig. 35

Bridge, c. 1931

Colored pencil on paper

11 1/2 x 18 inches

Estate stamp verso



Fig. 36

Stone Building, c. 1931
Colored pencil on paper
8 1/2 x 10 3/4 inches
Signed lower left



Fig. 37
Rose Study, c. 1965
 Pastel on paper
 7 x 8 inches
 Signed upper right and verso



Fig. 38
Study 'Dainty Beso' Rose, 1967
 Pastel on paper
 12 x 18 inches
 Signed and dated lower right,
 titled lower center



Fig. 39
Sunflower in an Oriental Pot
Pastel on paper
12 x 17 inches
Estate stamp verso

Fig. 40
Coleus Sketch, c. 1951
Watercolor and pencil on paper
11 ³/₄ x 8 ⁵/₈ inches
Signed on verso



Fig. 4I

Study for Nurse, c. 1967

Pastel on paper

12 ³/₄ x 10 inches



Fig. 42

Portrait of Nurse, 1967

Pastel on paper

16 x 11 inches

Signed and dated lower right



Fig. 43
Interior Scene with Painting and Open Book
Watercolor on paper
14 1/2 x 10 inches
Signed lower left



Fig. 44
Interior Scene with Fern
Watercolor on paper
14 1/2 x 10 inches
Estate stamp verso

Fig. 45
View from Studio Window, c. 1930-60
Watercolor on paper
8 1/4 x 8 inches
Estate stamp on verso



Fig. 46
The Artist's Studio, c. 1930-60
Watercolor on paper
9 x 8 inches
Estate stamp verso





Fig. 47

Interior of Artist's Home, c. 1955

Mixed media on paper

16 x 10 inches

Estate stamp verso



Fig. 48

Young Girl with a Net
Watercolor on paper
8 x 8 inches
Estate Stamp verso



Fig. 49
 Childhood Sketchbook, 1899
 Mixed media; pen and ink

Fig. 50
 Sketchbook, c. 1955
 Mixed media

Front and Back Cover:

Mary Lane McMillan,
An Italian Garden, 1910
 Oil on canvas
 16 x 20 inches
 Signed lower right

Inside Front Cover:

Mary Lane McMillan
 Rome, Maine 1933



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

MANHATTAN SHOWROOM, 135 EAST 57TH STREET, 14TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10022 (BY APPOINTMENT)
P.O. BOX 140 IRVINGTON, NY 10533 (MAILING ADDRESS)
(212) 731-0550 • INFO@HAWTHORNEFINEART.COM • WWW.HAWTHORNEFINEART.COM