

Art Gallery of Ontario

Finding Aid - Kathleen Munn fonds (SC105)

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Kathleen Munn fonds

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Summary information

Repository:	Art Gallery of Ontario
Title:	Kathleen Munn fonds
Reference code:	SC105
Date:	1912-[193-] (creation)
Physical description:	* 17 cm of textual records * 2227 drawings and prints * 8 photographs

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Kathleen Jean Munn (1887-1974) was a modernist Canadian painter active in Toronto between the World Wars. She was the youngest of six children born to a Toronto jeweler who died when she was four (of an infection caused by the impact from a champagne cork) leaving her mother to manage the family business. Her talent for drawing was encouraged by her maternal grandmother, an accomplished amateur painter, and she was sent to study at the Westbourne School with F. McGillivray Knowles from 1904 to 1907. Knowles encouraged personal expression and an understanding of the principles of art and Munn thrived in this environment. In 1909 she began to exhibit Barbizon inspired landscapes at the OSA, RCA and CNE exhibitions, moving through periods influenced by Whistler, Corot, Puvis de Chavannes and the post-impressionists. About 1912 Munn first traveled to New York to study at the Art Student's League and in 1914 she was awarded first prize at the Summer School in Woodstock NY. In 1915-16 she began a series of landscapes in which she showed a mastery of modernist techniques. Her association with the Art Student's League, whose teachers were early proponents of modernism, was an important influence. Her notebooks show that she was reading extensively and broadly in the areas of literature, philosophy and aesthetics. She studied Jay Hambridge's mathematical principles, the concept of 'dynamic symmetry' and Denman Ross's colour theory. She seems to have been drawn to writers who proposed an underlying system of order and logic as a basis for individual expression. She also toured Britain and the major art centres of continental Europe in 1920, accompanied by her sister, and this trip seems to have encouraged her quest for a means to express religious and spiritual themes in a contemporary fashion. She was ultimately uncomfortable with complete abstraction and believed that art should express a larger purpose, influenced by readings of Blavatsky, Blake, Whitman, and others. The Group of Seven shared her interest in the spiritual content of painting but she was intolerant of their nationalism; of her contemporaries she formed the closest bonds with Bertram Brooker and Lemoine Fitzgerald. Her studio, in a large room overlooking the ravine at the family home at 320 Spadina Avenue, was visited often by Brooker. The household consisted of three unmarried siblings: Will (Jr.), who ran the family business, May, a teacher who ran the household, and Kathleen. During the 1920's she began to work on a series of paintings that explored Christian themes and she devoted the 1930's to the subject of the Passion. Two major drawings from this series were purchased by the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1945. She exhibited a number of these drawings with Fitzgerald and Brooker at the Malloney Galleries in Toronto in 1935 but there as little critical response. Discouragement at her lack of critical success, combined with the death of her brother in 1935 and her sister's increasing disability, led to

the end of her artistic output around 1939. Most of her work remained in family hands. The Art Gallery of Toronto exhibited her Passion drawings in several group shows in the 1940's and the Willistead Art Gallery in Windsor included her Ascension in a 1954 show of drawings. She died twenty years later, in October 1974.

Scope and content

Fonds consists of nine notebooks kept by Kathleen Munn as a student at the Art Student's League in New York City and at the Summer program in Woodstock, NY. The books contain a meticulous record of her exposure to ideas about artistic theory, philosophy and art history. Undated drawings, prints and unbound notes are also included, and a group of 'arts-and-crafts' inspired decorative designs. The fonds contains more than 1800 pencil drawings executed as studies for her mature work on the subject of the Christian Passion. Photographs of eight of these completed drawings are included. Fonds is comprised of the following series: 1. Notebooks 2. Life drawings and studies 3. Studies for 'The Passion'

Notes

Restrictions on access

Open. Access to Special Collections is by appointment only. Please contact the reference desk for more information.

Conditions governing use

Copyright is held by the creator's heirs. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain permission to publish any part of the fonds.

Finding aids

A finding aid is available for this fonds.

Related material

Art books from the library of Kathleen Munn were donated to the AGO Library in 1976. A list of these titles has been maintained.

Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** published