



FLORENCE CARLYLE  
(1864–1923)

## Rising Young Woodstock Artist, 1864–1889

Florence Carlyle was born in Galt, Ontario, on September 24, 1864. Her family relocated to Woodstock, Ontario in 1871, as Carlyle's father, William, was appointed inspector of schools for Oxford County. It was in this community that young Florence's artistic talents were nurtured. Carlyle would later recall that while all of her six siblings enjoyed drawing, "when it came to the heads of the people and animals I always had to do it."<sup>i</sup> Emily Carlyle, Florence's mother, supported her daughter, even arranging "among her neighbours and friends for a class of art students and a teacher was brought from New York who gave regular instruction to the embryonic artists."<sup>ii</sup> Carlyle's first artistic triumph came in 1883 when H.R.H. Princess Louise purchased a piece by Carlyle from the Toronto Industrial Exhibition's Ladies Work Department. The royal purchase, a painting of "water lilies, on ebonized wood," was enthusiastically reported in the Toronto *Globe* and the Toronto *Daily Mail*, as well as Woodstock's *Sentinel Review*.

Carlyle, like her siblings, was educated at the local Woodstock College. She was a student there from 1878 until 1886. During her last year at the College, she studied portraiture and painting with Ida Joy (1860–1945). Joy, originally from Tillsonburg, Ontario, had spent eight years studying at the Académie Julian in France and was the first Canadian woman to exhibit a painting in the Paris Salon. She perhaps stirred Carlyle's desire to study abroad. By 1885, Carlyle had earned a Grade B teaching certificate in Art from the Ontario Ministry of Education. She taught painting classes in Woodstock and was the director of the summer school of art at Grimsby Park, a position she held for seven seasons. The *Sentinel Review* regularly reported on Carlyle's activities, describing her as a "rising young Woodstock artist."<sup>iii</sup> Later, Carlyle confessed to Madge MacBeth that although she taught painting, she "did not know the first thing about it!" But, as MacBeth noted, "the main thing is, however, that she saved up enough money to take her to Paris."<sup>iv</sup>

## A Woodstock Girl in Paris, 1890–1896

On October 30, 1890 the *Sentinel Review* reported that Miss Florence Carlyle was leaving for France: "She has been waiting for some weeks, for the return to Paris of Paul Peel, R.C.A. of London, in whose care she will be *en voyage*. Mr. Peel's father and sister accompany him."

Carlyle spent the next six years studying with notable teachers such as Adolphe-William Bouguereau (1825–1905), Auguste Joseph Delecluse (1855–1928), Jules Joseph Lefebvre (1834–1912), Tony Robert-Fleury (1837–1911) and Julius Rolshoven (1858–1930). During the summers and holidays she made sketching trips to Barbizon, Normandy, Italy and England. Carlyle became accomplished enough to have paintings exhibited at the 1893 and 1894 Paris Salons, quite an honour for the young artist. Her work also caught the interest of Lady Dufferin, the wife of Lord Dufferin, a former Governor General of Canada.



Carlyle travelled to England in 1893 and again in 1895. While in London she visited the newly open Carlyle House museum, the London home of her famous great-uncle, writer and philosopher Thomas Carlyle. She went on to do some illustrations for a book about the house and donated two paintings to the museum. The next year she established a studio in London and may have continued her studies.<sup>v</sup> Carlyle had some success; one of her works was included in the Royal Academy of Arts summer exhibit. However, she stayed in London for only a few months before returning to Canada just before her 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

## Miss Carlyle's Success, 1897–1912

While still in France, Carlyle had worked to establish a presence in Canada. Like many artists living abroad, she regularly shipped paintings back for exhibitions. From 1892 onwards she exhibited with the Art Association of Montreal. *La vieille Victorine*, first exhibited at the Paris Salon, was included in both the 1895 Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and the Art Association of Montreal Annual Exhibitions. The Montreal *Star's* critic wrote, "The painting is full of force; its strength is its strong point which appeals to one at once, but the painting is also full of tender feeling about the face and eyes."<sup>vi</sup> By 1897, she had been elected an associate member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and begun to exhibit regularly with the Women's Art Association and the Ontario Society of Artists. Carlyle supplemented her income by teaching in Woodstock and London, Ontario, as well as dabbling in commercial art.



2

A shift gradually takes place in Carlyle's work in this period, in her use of both colour and subject. The works completed in France or shortly after her return feature the tonal qualities, colours and "peasant" subjects typical of the Barbizon painters. *La vieille Victorine* even features one of the Barbizon painter Jean-François Millet's models. However, by 1897 the Impressionists' influence seems to seep into Carlyle's work. Her paintings gradually brighten. Alongside her exhibition pieces, Carlyle continued to paint commissioned portraits, landscapes and still lifes, as all three paid the bills. London, Ontario painter Eva Bradshaw joked that Carlyle taught her to paint her "potboilers," the popular floral still lifes that provided a much needed income for Bradshaw.<sup>vii</sup>



3

Carlyle briefly relocated to New York's Greenwich Village in 1899, perhaps to continue her studies. Yet she was back in Woodstock by the fall of 1900, where she was elected a member of the Ontario Society of Artists. The next year, Carlyle had a solo exhibit in Philadelphia and her painting *Golden Rod* won an honourable mention at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo. By 1902, she had a studio in London, Ontario and *The Tiff* (now at the Art Gallery of Ontario) won the Ontario Society of Artists' annual prize. Both the Toronto *Globe* and *Star* critics devoted an entire paragraph to Carlyle in their reviews of the Ontario Society of Artists exhibit. The *Globe's* Lally Bernard noted



that Carlyle work "not only attracts, but rivets the attention of artists and of that great Philistine mob, the public."<sup>viii</sup> Two years later, the *Sentinel Review* trumpeted "Miss Carlyle's Success"; the newspaper article went on to proudly announce, "Woodstock Artist Awarded Silver Medal at St Louis."<sup>ix</sup> When *The Tiff* won a coveted silver medal at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, it confirmed Carlyle as one of the foremost Canadian artists. That year she also won a \$500 prize at the Osborne Calendar Company of New York's artist competition. Perhaps more significantly, she received a \$5,000 commission from Osborne to complete 12 paintings for their calendars.

Over the next five years Carlyle had several New York addresses, including briefly sharing space with fellow Canadian artist Laura Muntz. Their landlady, Edith Moses, became a close friend of Carlyle's and was the subject of Carlyle's painting *The Jewess*. Carlyle began to be noticed in New York. Her work was mentioned in a *New York Times* review of the 1906 Women's Art Club exhibit, and it was likely American painter Arthur Bowen Davies who introduced her to his dealer William Macbeth.<sup>x</sup> Macbeth appears to have offered Carlyle an exhibition, but her commercial work was all-consuming. In 1906, Carlyle wrote

to Macbeth, "I have painted nothing this winter but commercial things, painted with set teeth, and gained my purpose – I have made the money to go to Italy and Spain for a year."

Carlyle and her friend Edith Moses returned to New York in December, 1906. Despite her travels, Carlyle's work appeared in several exhibits in 1906, but the next year she exhibited only at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE). Perhaps she chose the CNE because she was in Woodstock for her sister Maude's wedding. She wrote later that fall to Macbeth, reminding him that he had asked to see her work when she returned from Italy, declaring, "You can hardly think how eager I am to have your opinion – even the adverse." Yet in 1908, she again participated in only one major exhibition. *Lily of Florence* was shown at the New York Knoedler Gallery's *Exhibition of Paintings by Women Artists*. On April 13, 1908, Carlyle wrote to Macbeth, telling him her friend Edith Moses was very ill and that, "owing to the tense demand in my mind and the terrible anxiety, grief in my heart, no work has been possible. The winter that held out such possibilities for me has passed and has been the most painful one of my life." A few days later she reported to Macbeth that Edith Moses had died.





That summer Carlyle returned to Woodstock, where she met her young cousin Helene Youmans. The exuberant *Pippa Passes* was the first of many works for which Helene was the model. When in the fall of 1908 Carlyle received another contract from the Osborne Company, the two women set off for New York. Helene wrote that though Carlyle's "interest in commercial art was not great, her financial needs were, and an agreement was signed. Taking me with her to model for them, we found ourselves one gloomy, wet morning in late November climbing the first two flights of stairs that led to the room she had rented unseen."<sup>xi</sup> That fall and winter were productive. Helene recalled that Carlyle would often work on two paintings at once.



They returned to Canada the next summer, Helene to get ready for her upcoming wedding and Carlyle to care for her aging parents. Carlyle's studio was a corner of the barn behind her family home. Madge MacBeth described Carlyle's situation as "working against the most crushing odds."<sup>xii</sup> Yet despite this, Carlyle continued to produce significant works. In 1910, three of Carlyle's works were among the 113 paintings chosen to represent Canada in the Festival of Empires. Although the Festival was cancelled, the Canadian works were shown at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, England. The Glasgow *Herald Review* noted that "Florence Carlyle is generally regarded as one of Canada's best lady artists."<sup>xiii</sup> That same year, *Grey and Gold* was purchased by the National Gallery of Canada.

In the spring of 1911, Carlyle and her mother travelled to Italy and then on to England to visit her brother William. While there she met Juliet Hastings, who would become her lifelong companion. Carlyle's father's sudden death caused mother and daughter to cut short their trip and return to Woodstock. The next summer Juliet Hastings visited Carlyle in Woodstock. The two women attended the 1912 Alpine Club of Canada's summer camp at Vermilion

Pass. In June of 1912, Toronto *Globe* writer Florence E. Deacon wrote a feature on Carlyle, commenting that in Canada "governments, artists, the press and lay public alike have shown her warm recognition."<sup>xiv</sup> The broad appeal of Carlyle's work, especially her genre paintings, was and still is based on a combination of her technical skills, such as her use of colour and exquisite handling of light, married with her uncanny ability to capture the ambiguous moment. The ambiguity both draws one into the painting and demands the viewers flesh out the narrative for themselves.

## A Cottage in England, 1913–1923

In December of 1912, Carlyle's mother, Emily Carlyle, passed away, and the family home in Woodstock was sold. The next spring, Carlyle travelled through Italy with Juliet Hastings. The two women eventually settled down in Yew Tree Cottage in East Sussex.

Carlyle continued to send works back to Canada. *Afternoon, Venice* was purchased by the National Gallery of Canada while *The Guest, Venice* and *Son and Heir*, both featuring Julie Hastings as the model, were shown at the 1914 Ontario Society of Artists exhibition. Carlyle also had paintings in the Royal Academy of Arts exhibition in London, England.

However, by this time the First World War had begun. A bright point for Carlyle was when she and Helene (Youmans) Keys were reunited. Helene was living in London, England, with





11

her in-laws while her husband Harold served with the 148<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Helene spent a great deal of time with Carlyle and Hastings. Carlyle regularly contributed paintings to support the war effort and all three women volunteered for war work, but Carlyle especially found the physical demands gruelling.

In the spring of 1918, Carlyle was commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund to paint a portrait of Lady Drummond, Assistant Commissioner of the Red Cross. Carlyle continued to paint throughout the war years, even sending some work home to Canada, but a dearth of art supplies and, more alarmingly, her gradually fading eyesight began to limit her production.

On November 11, 1918, Carlyle and Hastings had arranged to meet Helene in London and the women became part of

the jubilant celebrations that marked the end of the Great War. Helene wrote that "all we seemed to say to each other consisted of the same four little words, "the war is over, the war is over."<sup>xv</sup>

Helene and Harold returned to Canada and Carlyle concentrated on her writing, as her eyesight was making painting more difficult.<sup>xvi</sup> In 1921, with financial help from Juliet's father, the two women were able to travel to Italy and France, where Carlyle had an emotional reunion with her former teacher Delecluse. The next year, Carlyle visited Canada; however, this time Juliet had to stay in England to care for her aging parents.

Carlyle herself began to have regular bouts of illness, but she kept working and completed a short story, *Mary's Child*, which she sent off to a number of publishers. On February 17, 1923, Juliet Hastings wrote to Carlyle's brother Russell: "You will have had Carl's letter telling you she must have an operation – she came through it well, yesterday, but alas, I have the saddest news for you. The growth was found to be malignant and so far gone that very little could be done." Florence Carlyle died of stomach cancer on May 2, 1923, in Crowborough, England, with her sister Maude and Juliet Hastings by her side. Her death was widely reported in Canada. The *Toronto Globe* stated, "Canadian Painter of the Front Rank Ends Distinguished Career." In November, her story *Mary's Child* was published by the British weekly *Time and Tide*. A memorial exhibition of nearly 90 of her paintings was held in the summer of 1925 at the Jenkins' Art Galleries in Toronto. Again, Carlyle's work was met with positive reviews, but it was clear that her art was considered to belong to a bygone era.

In 1967, the Oxford County Art Association decided to celebrate Canada's centennial with an exhibition of the paintings of Florence Carlyle in the brand new public art gallery in Woodstock. Since that exhibition, there has been a renewed interest in Carlyle, both in Woodstock and further afield. The Woodstock Gallery is now home to more than 40 paintings by Florence Carlyle, archival materials including letters and photographs, and research papers of early Florence Carlyle historian Marion MacCausland.

Roberta Grosland  
WAG Head of Collections

## End Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Florence E. Deacon, "Representative Women: Miss Florence Carlyle," *Toronto Globe*, 8 June 1912, 4.
- <sup>ii</sup> Blanche B. Hume, "Florence Carlyle, A.R.C.A.," *Woodstock Sentinel Review*, 10 July 1925, 1.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Sentinel Review*, 29 January 1887, 1. In the earliest reports, Carlyle is referred to as "Miss Birdie Carlyle."
- <sup>iv</sup> Madge MacBeth, "Canadian Women in the Arts," *Maclean's* 27, no. 12 (October 1914): 24.
- <sup>v</sup> In the Biographical Data for the Records of the Art Museum of Toronto dated December 4, 1912, Carlyle indicates she studied in Paris, France, London and New York.
- <sup>vi</sup> "The Spring Exhibition Opened at the Gallery Last Night," *Montreal Daily Star*, 7 March 1895, 5.
- <sup>vii</sup> Pep Doc, "Fame Finds Local Artist in Garret," *London Free Press*, 14 December 1923. The definition of a "potboiler": a work of art produced merely to make the artist a living by catering to popular taste.
- <sup>viii</sup> Lally Bernard, "Driftwood," *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1902, 5.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Sentinel Review*, 9 December 1904, 1.
- <sup>x</sup> Florence Carlyle mentions a Mr. Davies in an undated letter to William Macbeth. A series of letters between Macbeth and Carlyle are part of the Macbeth Gallery Records in the Archives of American Art.
- <sup>xi</sup> Helene Youmans Key, "Reminiscences of Florence Carlyle," unpublished typescript, c. 1979.
- <sup>xii</sup> Madge MacBeth, "Canadian Women in the Arts."
- <sup>xiii</sup> Susan Butlin, *The Practice of Her Profession* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 160.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Deacon, "Representative Women: Miss Florence Carlyle," 4.
- <sup>xv</sup> Key, "Reminiscences of Florence Carlyle."
- <sup>xvi</sup> One manuscript is semi-autobiographical and recounts the adventures of a young artist from the fictional town of Woodville who finally has the opportunity to study art in France.

## Selected Bibliography

- Butlin, Susan. *Florence Carlyle*. Woodstock, Ontario: Woodstock Public Art Gallery, 1993.
- Butlin, Susan. *The Practice of her Profession: Florence Carlyle, Canadian Painter in the Age of Impressionism*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.
- Murray, Joan. *Florence Carlyle: Against All Odds*. London, Ontario: Museum London, 2004.

## Illustrated Works

Photo credits: John Tamblyn. All works part of Woodstock Gallery Permanent Collection. Dimensions in cm height x width.

### Cover Image

*Self Portrait*, ca.1901. Oil on canvas, 43.5 x 33.2. Gift of Florence Johnston.

- 1 *Une dame hollandaise*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 61.2 x 44.7. Bequest of Florence Johnston. First exhibited at the 1893 Paris Salon.
- 2 *La vieille Victorine*, 1893. Oil on canvas on hardboard, 72.4 x 59. Bequest of Florence Johnston.
- 3 *Golden Rod*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 48.2 x 41.3. Purchased with funds from the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture and the Volunteer Committee, 1990.
- 4 *The Jewess*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 76.5 x 36. Gift of Florence Johnston, 1976.
- 5 *A Lily of Florence*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 99 x 76.4. Gift of Wingate's Raiders Chapter, I.O.D.E., 1977.
- 6 *Pippa Passes*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 69.1 x 69.1. Purchased with funds donated by the Volunteer Committee and Wintario Grant, 1979.
- 7 *Sea Breezes*, c.1908. Oil on canvas, 103.8 x 48.8. Donated by the London Public Library and Art Gallery. This work featuring Helene may have been painted to be reproduced on a calendar.
- 8 *Joy of Living*, 1910. Oil on canvas on masonite, 88 x 61.5. Purchased with funds from the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Woodstock Art Gallery Volunteer Committee, 1991. This painting was one of the three Carlyle pieces exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery exhibition in Liverpool, England.
- 9 *The Guest, Venice*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 38. Gift of Lenora McCartney, 1986.
- 10 *Son and Heir*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 59.1 x 51.4. Gift of the Woodstock Art Gallery Volunteer Committee.
- 11 *Florence Carlyle*, c. 1912. Bequest of Florence Johnston.