

= Eleanor Norcross =

Eleanor Norcross , born Ella Augusta Norcross (1854 ? 1923) , was an American painter who studied under William Merritt Chase and Alfred Stevens . She lived the majority of her adult life in Paris , France as an artist and collector and spent the summers in her hometown of Fitchburg , Massachusetts . Norcross painted Impressionist portraits and still lifes , and is better known for her paintings of genteel interiors .

Her father provided her a comfortable living , under the proviso that she would not sell her paintings . With a life mission to provide people from her hometown the ability to view great works of art , Norcross collected art , made copies of paintings of Old Masters , and systematically documented decorative arts from the 12th through the 19th century . Her funding and art collection were used to establish the Fitchburg Art Museum .

In 1924 , her works were shown posthumously in Paris at the Louvre and Salon d 'Automne , where Norcross was the first American to have had a retrospective . Her works were also shown the following year at the Museum of Fine Arts , Boston .

= = Early life = =

Ella Augusta Norcross was born in Fitchburg , Massachusetts , about 50 miles (80 km) west of Boston , to Amasa Norcross and Susan Augusta Norcross . Her father was an attorney , Fitchburg 's first mayor , state senator , and United States representative . Her mother , Susan , had been a school teacher in the Fitchburg area and during the Civil War was a leader of the Ladies ' Soldiers Aid Society , which provided clothing , blankets , and other supplies to soldiers from Fitchburg and other locations in the state of Massachusetts . In 1863 , her three @-@ year @-@ old brother Nelson died of scarlet fever , and when she was 14 , her mother died of consumption . Norcross and her father , the remaining household members , had a close relationship .

Norcross was afforded a privileged education that was not available to many young ladies of her generation . At 16 years of age , she graduated from Fitchburg High School , and , beginning in 1870 , she attended Wheaton Female Seminary , now Wheaton College . When she was 16 and 17 years old she wrote essays for Rushlight , the school 's literary journal . The nature of her essays provide insight into the woman she would become : one who would successfully operate in a male @-@ oriented society , had an interest in bettering the plight of others , and appreciated historical things . She graduated in 1872 . Frances Vose Emerson was a classmate at Wheaton , good friend from childhood , and ultimately a trustee for the Fitchburg Art Museum .

= = Education and early career = =

Norcross studied at Boston 's Massachusetts Normal Art School , now the Massachusetts College of Art and Design , to prepare to teach art . Living in Fitchburg , she commuted by train to the school in Boston . Norcross earned her teaching certificate by 1876 and taught drawing in the Fitchburg schools for a year . Norcross moved with her father to Washington when he was elected to the House of Representatives . A " witty and lively conversationalist " , she acted as his hostess in the capital and beginning in 1878 , Norcross studied art in New York City under William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League of New York for up to five years . In June 1883 , she sailed for Paris to study with Alfred Stevens at Chase 's suggestion . She and a few other women studied with the Belgian artist during the winters of 1883 and 1884 .

= = Career = =

= = = Father 's influence = = =

Her father provided financial support that allowed Norcross to live comfortably . She exhibited her

works in salons , according to the agreement with her father that she would not sell any of them ; he believed that women should give their works away and not enter into the male @-@ oriented business world . Any paintings that she wanted to give away , Mr. Norcross offered to have " handsomely framed " .

She lived in Paris for 40 years , and traveled throughout Europe . Her father lived with her during the winters after his retirement and until 1898 , when he died . Joined by his daughter , Amasa Norcross spent his summers in Fitchburg .

= = = Style and paintings = = =

Norcross painted portraits and still lifes , and she made copies of Old Masters . Her portraits and later interiors were executed with " delicate brush strokes " . She had an adept sense of color and the ability to portray reflections and textures , like metal 's gleam , satin 's sheen , and velvet 's texture . The compositions of her interiors are positioned in a way that leads the viewer to consider what might be through a door or around a corner , as in *Carpeaux Sevres* .

Her painting , *Woman in a Garden* , reflects influences of Chase , Monet and French Impressionism combined with the skill to draw with a paintbrush learned from Alfred Stevens . Reminiscent of Chase 's en plein air paintings , the dark background contrasts with the enigmatic , illuminated woman . *My Studio* (1891) ? which depicts her father in a room with " elaborately patterned textiles " , antique and oriental furnishings , and flowers ? is " the most impressive " of her works at the Fitchburg Art Museum . It was also her image of an " ideal home " . Of it , Ann H. Murray writes :

... the painting itself is reminiscent of Chase in the informality and candidness that pervade the composition . The vacant chair , the mirror reflecting spaces not directly perceivable , and the abundance of rectangular units that impose a geographic organization on the wall ? all these features occur also in Chase 's paintings , as well as in those of Degas and Cassatt who were , along with Monet , Renoir and Rodin , among her personal acquaintances .

She exhibited from 1887 until her death in *Champ de Mars ' Société Nationale des Beaux @-@ Arts* , which was made possible through her close friendship with Puvis de Chavannes . Her works were also shown in Boston , Chicago , and New York City . Norcross shared a studio with Alix d 'Anethan , whose paintings , influenced by Puvis , were of pastoral and contemporary life .

Norcross began to collect historical European artwork , particularly to be shown in public places in or near her hometown . After 1905 , she made copies of paintings by great artists , like Hals , Velázquez , and Botticelli . At roughly the same time , she began making paintings of French decorative art from 12th century Gothic art through the 19th century that she saw in galleries , including interior scenes of the Louvre . Norcross 's interiors provided insight into European decorative arts :

Her gift was for mellow , loving , quiet observation of cozy spaces that close out the rest of the world . She wasn 't merely recording decor , though . Her surfaces are loose and brushy , clearly influenced by Impressionism .

The 1914 *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* (in the Louvre) was to have exhibited her works , but the show was cancelled due to the commencement of World War I. She was known for being welcoming to art students from the United States and lived in the *Rue de Bellchase* the final 12 years of her life .

= = = Collection = = =

She began purchasing art objects with the intention of sending them to America , so that people that were not afforded the luxury of traveling to Europe could view good works of art . Norcross collected furniture , textiles , porcelains , and other objects during visits to quiet French villages .

Works from her collection were given to Wheaton College in 1922 during her 50th @-@ year reunion , including an oil sketch by Alix d 'Anethan and a seascape by Alfred Stevens . She loaned her paintings to the Worcester Art Museum , and the Fitchburg Public Library was a beneficiary of photographs , prints , engravings , textiles , dishes , and furniture . She was involved in the

placement of art at the library so that visitors to every department would have the opportunity to view the works of art , including European prints and rare engravings that span several centuries .

= = Museum = =

To implement her plan to establish a cultural center in Fitchburg , Norcross shipped works of art from her collection to her hometown and left \$ 10 @, @ 000 or \$ 100 @, @ 000 in her will , with the provision that the town raise an equal amount to provide a healthy endowment , otherwise the monies would go to Wheaton Seminary .

[Norcross] was an artist , collector , and philanthropist who sought to inspire , educate , and improve society through cultural enrichment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries .

Friends Frances Vose Emerson and Providence art teacher Sophia Lord Pitman were identified in the will as trustees for the museum . An old brick stable was purchased in 1924 and was remodeled by Howe , Manning & Almy , Inc . , a Boston firm of women architects , into a French Provincial building . In 1929 , the Fitchburg Art Center opened , it was later renamed Fitchburg Art Museum . Most of the collection and the building were destroyed in a fire in 1934 . The museum now has 20 @, @ 000 square feet of exhibition space over four buildings and works of art from the pre @-@ Columbian era to the 20th century . The works of art ? which include paintings , prints , illustrated books , drawings and photographs ? originated in Europe , the Americas , Asia , and Africa . The Fitchburg Art Museum has a collection of Norcross 's work , along with works of John Singer Sargent , William Merritt Chase , and other American and European artists . Traute M. Marshall , author of Art Museums Plus , said , " [S] he stands up well against the more famous competition . "

= = Death = =

Norcross died of kidney failure on October 19 , 1923 .

= = Posthumous exhibitions = =

Shows of her paintings were held after her death . The memorial exhibition at the Louvre , opened by American ambassador Myron T. Herrick , included 53 of her paintings in 1924 . The Louvre retained two paintings Norcross made of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs 's interior . Sixteen of her works were exhibited at the Salon d 'Automne the same year ; Norcross was the first American to have had a retrospective of her work there . A show was also held at the Museum of Fine Arts , Boston in 1925 .