

Before the Song



Painted in 1930 with its elegant linear flat forms *Before the Song* exemplifies MacRae's most beautiful works. MacRae was fortunate to have the freedom to paint as she wanted and developed a distinct and singular style of painting that was wholly her own and which the Boston Globe critic in April 1935 described as "a sort of trademark of Emma Fordyce MacRae". The critic was writing about small areas within a composition where MacRae had taken back the paint to an underpaint or the gesso mistaken by some as areas of paint loss rather than a deliberate act by the artist and likened to old murals. Patricia Sydney writing about MacRae in "*The Philadelphia Ten. A Women's Artist Group 1917 – 1945*" mentions MacRae's trip to the southern coast of Italy in April 1928 and that she was impressed by the wall paintings. On top of the gesso ground, MacRae sketched in her composition using chalk or pencil and these underdrawings are sometimes visible as outlines in the final painting, often even reinforced, as in *Before the Song*.

MacRae placed the three women preparing to sing across the canvas blending them into a figured background reminiscent of a fresco of paler colors showing the underpaint or gesso and treating other parts of the composition with additional layers of thin paint as in the hair of the woman on the right in which a lighter tone has been applied on top of the rich rust color.

This quiet moment is poignantly recorded as MacRae successfully creates an image that embraces the scene in its most beautiful and picturesque form. The colors and patterns of *Before the Song* make this a masterpiece of her work. As many of her paintings *Before the Song* is not varnished.

Exhibited: 1930 - Roerich Museum; 1931 - National Academy; 1931 - Grand Central Art Galleries; 1935 - Currier Museum; 1935 - Boston Art Club; 2008 - Cape Ann Museum.

Before the Song
Oil and pencil on canvas on board Signed Framed
32 x 40 inches
Emma Fordyce MacRae 1887 – 1974