

# Jane Peterson Biography



**Jennie Christine Peterson - Class of 1894 - b. 1876 - d. August 14, 1965** - born in Elgin, Illinois, officially changed her name to Jane in 1909 following her first major American exhibition at the St. Botolph Club in Boston. As a child, she attended public school, but with her family's support and encouragement, Peterson eventually applied and was accepted at the prestigious Pratt Institute in New York. While there, she studied under Arthur Wesley Dow. Peterson's mother, proud of her daughter's talent, and keen for her to succeed as an artist, provided her with \$300 toward enrollment at the institute—a significant investment at the time for the family. After graduation in 1901, Peterson went on to study oil and watercolor painting at the Art Students League in New York City with Frank DuMond. By 1912, Peterson was teaching watercolor at the Art Students League and eventually became the Drawing Supervisor of the Brooklyn Public Schools.

Like many young people, especially artists, Peterson extended her artistic education by taking the traditional grand tour of Europe. For the rest of her life she would frequently return to travel on the continent. The grand European tour was one of the best ways for young artists to view specific works of art and to learn from the masters. Peterson studied with Frank Brangwyn in Venice and London, Joaquin Sorolla in Madrid, and Jacques Blanche and Andre L'Hote in Paris. Under their direction she gained a diverse and expert knowledge of painting techniques and composition. Studying in Paris, Peterson also became friends with Gertrude and Leo Stein, becoming a regular at the sibling's various gatherings where the guests included Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. During her time in Paris Peterson was surrounded by Fauvism, Expressionism, Impressionism, and the beginnings of Cubism. She was stimulated by the scrutiny of Impressionism being promoted by Picasso, Matisse, and Cézanne. When she first arrived in Paris in 1907 Picasso was already paving the way with innovative and experimental techniques, displaying Fauvist tendencies and going beyond them.

Jane Peterson used her raw and creative talent to combine the techniques and styles imbued in her by her teachers, and in so doing, distinguished herself as an original and influential American artist. Her work partakes of Impressionism, Neo- and Post-Impressionism, Art Nouveau, Nabi, and Fauvism without being strictly of one or the other schools of painting. We may trace the development of her unique style chronologically beginning in 1907. It was at this point that her style began to develop "a pitch of purity and clarity of color more abstracted in relation to the observed world." Critics note that by 1910, "Peterson's lines, colors, and designs were not as autonomous as the Impressionists had been, and she developed works which showed more self-awareness and emotional expression." From 1910 through 1916 Peterson became increasingly linked stylistically to fellow American, Maurice Prendergast. They shared similar interests in subject matter, and both had traveled and studied in England, Italy, and France. Peterson and Prendergast had comparable technical skills of astute observation and loved colorful subjects like seaside, parks, and crowded boulevards. Color and color-dominated visual effects took precedence over detailed drawing for both artists however, Peterson's linear movement is more aggressively flowing than Prendergast's, and she added continuously oscillating lines and color swirls. Gradually, they each developed a unique style.

# Jane Peterson Biography

In 1916, Peterson exhibited work, featuring scenes from the Pacific Northwest, which she had painted while traveling with Louis Comfort Tiffany. She completed many floral subjects, which were inspired by the gardens of her summer home in Massachusetts. Many of her beach and pier scenes were from painting trips to artist colonies along the Massachusetts coast. During World War I she painted war-oriented subjects for the benefit of Liberty Loans and the American Red Cross. In 1919 she embarked on a continental painting expedition in Louis Tiffany's private railway car. The artistic excursion began in the exquisite gardens at Tiffany's home at Laurelton Hall, Oyster Bay, New York, where the gardens themselves were often likened to Claude Monet's gardens at Giverny. Peterson's renderings of the gardens were very impressionistic, echoing Monet's technique in his paintings of Giverny. At the height of her career Jane Peterson's style may be described generally as "brightly hued painterly, Post-Impressionist." The artist was well known for her Gloucester harbor scenes, Venetian vignettes, New York subjects, and her exotic Orientalist paintings of North Africa and Constantinople.

In 1925, Peterson married Mortiz Bernard Philipp, a lawyer and art patron, who was twenty-five years her senior. At Rocky Hill, her summerhouse in Ipswich, Massachusetts, Peterson completed many floral, beach, and pier scenes. After her husband's death Peterson resumed her studies and travels abroad. In 1939 she married her second husband, James S. McCarthy, a prominent New Haven physician. They separated within a year, and then divorced. By the 1950s, Peterson's hands had become so crippled with arthritis that she was forced to paint much less frequently than in her youth. She spent the last five years of her life with her niece in Kansas, who took care of her until she died on August 14, 1965.

**In 1938 the American Historical Society named Peterson the 'most outstanding individual of the year'. She was only the second woman to receive the honor. Jane Peterson was one of America's most innovative artists, and she was a remarkable woman who lived a life of independence and adventure that was not common among her contemporaries.** In her work, from landscapes to still-lifes, she blends traditional approaches to painting with the vanguard art of the Impressionists, Post-impressionists, Expressionists, and Fauves.

**1876** Born in Elgin, Illinois as Jennie Christine Peterson

**1895** Moves to New York to study painting at the Pratt Institute

Supports herself by teaching her fellow classmates, and selling her paintings in student exhibitions

**1901** After graduation continues her studies with painter Frank Vincent Dumond at the Art Students League

Works as Drawing Supervisor of Public Schools in Brooklyn

**1904** Works as a school teacher in Elmira, New York

**1905** Employed as Drawing Supervisor of Public Schools in Boston, Massachusetts

**1906** Works as an art teacher at the Maryland Institute School of Art and Design

**1907** Travels to Europe where she takes lessons from Frank Brangwyn at the London School of Art

**1908** Relocates to Paris where Jacque-Emile Blanche, Charles Cottet, and Claudio Castelucho are her teachers

Lives in Montparnasse and attends Gertrude Stein's Saturday evening salon gatherings with Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, André Derain, and Henri Rousseau

**1909** Has first solo American exhibition at the Botolph Club, Boston

Returns to Europe to study with Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida in Madrid

**1910** Takes solo painting trip through Egypt and Algiers

**1911** Paints at Louis Comfort Tiffany's estate, Laurelton Hall in Oyster Bay, Long Island

# Jane Peterson Biography

**1913** Becomes an instructor in watercolor at the Arts Students League, where she teaches for the next seven years

**1916** Travels with Tiffany's party on a transcontinental painting expedition through Alaska and Canada. Visits California, painting in Los Angeles and San Diego

**1917** Paints military portraits and patriotic scenes during World War One

**1922** Exhibits Toilette at the New York Society of Painters where judges describe it as an "outstanding picture"

**1924** Spends six months painting in Turkey

**1925** Marries Moritz Bernard Phillip (he dies in 1929)  
Moves into New York townhouse on Fifth Avenue, opposite the Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Focuses on flower painting (a subject that will predominately occupy Peterson's practice for the rest of her life)

**1938** Studies with the Modernist André Lhote in Paris  
Named most outstanding individual of the year by the American Historical Society for artistic achievement

**1945** Biography published in Prominent Women of New York

**1955** Arthritis affects hands so badly she can only paint occasionally

**1960** Last paintings are exhibited at the North Shore Show in Gloucester, Massachusetts  
Moves to Kansas to live with niece

**1965** Dies at age 88 - See more at: <http://www.questrayalfineart.com/artist/jane-peterson#sthash.XCs1XWMq.dpuf>

## From the Fox Valley Arts Hall of Fame:



Jane Peterson

1876 – 1965 Class of 2014 Visual Arts

Jane Peterson was born in Elgin, Illinois, on November 28, 1876, the daughter of an Elgin Watch Company employee and a homemaker. She started her life as Jennie Christine, but changed her name to Jane shortly after her high school graduation in 1894.

Jane learned about the Pratt Institute, a fairly new technical school, at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where she took an aptitude test for art. She enjoyed drawing and painting, but had not considered art before as a career.

With a \$300 loan, Jane traveled to New York after graduation and enrolled in the art department of Pratt Institute. Her art matured rapidly, and with the proceeds from sales of her artwork, she was able to pay back that \$300 her first year. She completed her studies at Pratt in 1901 and pursued art until arthritis in both hands ended her ability to paint in the mid-1950s. During her lifetime, Jane Peterson was featured in more than 80 one-woman exhibitions before her death on August 14, 1965.

# Jane Peterson Biography

Jane was an art instructor at schools and academies in Elmira, New York, the Maryland Institute in Baltimore, and taught watercolor painting at the Art Students League in New York City from 1914-1919. In addition, she served as Drawing Supervisor for the Boston Public Schools. By 1912, she had many rich patrons.



Jane had the good fortune to study with prominent European artists abroad, including the eminent Joaquin Sorolla (in both Madrid and New York). She was not afraid to travel alone and was especially drawn to the natural beauty of Venice, Chioggia, Italy, and the landscapes of France, Turkey, and Spain, as well as northern Africa. While in Paris, Jane attended Gertrude Stein's Saturday evening salons and rubbed elbows with Braque, Rousseau, and even Pablo Picasso.

certainly living her dream."

A catalogue from the Art Institute of Chicago lists 87 of Jane Peterson's oil paintings on exhibit from December 6 to 27, 1910, which were painted during her two-years of travel overseas.

The internationally known writer and astronomer, Percival Lowell, sponsored Jane's first exhibition in Paris. She also exhibited at the 1915 Pan Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco as part of the women's suffrage exhibit. During World War I, Jane's war-oriented paintings were displayed, sold, or donated to promote Liberty Loans and the American Red Cross.

Jane had the good fortune to travel with Louis Comfort Tiffany and paint with John Singer Sargent, Childe Hassam, and Maurice Prendergast. She held numerous professional memberships in such groups as the Allied Artists of America, the American Watercolor Society, the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, the Washington Watercolor Club, the New York Society of Painters, the Audubon Artists, and the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts.

During the 1920s, when Jane was at the height of her popularity, she married Moritz Bernard Philipp, a man almost 30 years her senior, whom she had met at the opera. Sadly, he died only 4 years later. The couple lived in a 5-story home, with a sky-lighted studio for Jane on the top floor, located on Fifth Avenue in New York City, across the street from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Jane was married again in 1939 to a New Haven doctor, but divorced within a year.)

After losing her first husband, Jane focused on painting flowers, zinnias being her favorite subject. Jeffery White noted the artist's comment about flowers, "I paint flowers because they are my friends and I love them. They have personalities just as animals, birds and people (do), and are very sensitive to kindness, attention and to their surroundings."



## Jane Peterson Biography

Despite the versatility in the subjects she chose to paint, Jane may be best known for her paintings of flowers, because she authored an instructional book on that topic entitled *Flower Painting* in 1946.

Jane earned first prize in watercolor at the American Exhibition in the Girl's Club of Paris, France, in 1916, the Noel Flagg memorial prize for best oil painting at the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts exhibition in 1917, the Pettingale Prize for watercolor at the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors in 1927, and first prize for best flower picture in the annual exhibition of the Florida Federation of Arts in 1937.

Jane's painting "Toilette" received rave reviews at the New York Society of Painters in 1924. By this time, she had been named a Fellow at the National Academy of Design. In 1925, the New York Times named Jane Peterson "one of the foremost women painters in New York." In 1938, she was named the "Most Outstanding Individual of the Year" by the American Historical Society, only the second woman to be so honored.

According to her biographer, J.J. Joseph (Jane Peterson, American Painter, 1982), Jane's oils and watercolors covered a wide range of subjects. She created colorful, post-impressionistic landscapes of Gloucester streets, the harbor on Cape Ann, palm trees along Florida's coasts, and street scenes in Paris, Istanbul, New York, Italy, and other picturesque cities.

One of Jane's last nationally recognized efforts occurred in 1944, when her portraits of four U.S. servicewomen – a Wac, a Wave, a Spar, and a marine – representing each of the armed forces in which women served during World War II, raised \$211,000 in War Bonds for the creation of a permanent memorial. During that period, Jane often accepted War Bonds in lieu of full payment for her artwork.



Her artwork is represented in numerous permanent collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, where she was a board member, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the Baltimore Museum of Fine Arts. One of her most famous pieces, "Glimpse of the Grand Canal," is held at the Art Association of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Locally, the Sears Gallery at the Elgin Academy in Elgin, Illinois, the town where Jane began her life, has among their collection a painting entitled "A Busy Street" (gouache on paper, 17-1/2" x 23"),

which was a gift donated by the artist some time before 1949. The Academy described her style as, "tapestry-like watercolors, made up of dabs of strokes in vibrant colors...place her in a movement somewhere between Impressionism and Post-Impressionism."

Her painting, "The Pier at Rocky Point, Gloucester," was posthumously selected for the July 4, 1980, cover of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Up until April 20, 1964, the covers of the

## Jane Peterson Biography

weekly JAMA publication featured only a table of contents. With that issue began the tradition of decorating the journal covers with well-recognized and newly appreciated reproductions of great art. In the 1970s, Dr. Therese Southgate became the guardian of this tradition, believing that the covers provided doctors with a refreshing pause in their busy day. The selection of Jane's art for the 1980 cover put her among the honored company of such renowned artists as Winslow Homer, Andrew Wyeth, Monet, Manet, Renoir, Van Gogh, and Cezanne, etc.

Although Jane Peterson's art brought her into the company of motion picture actors, design entrepreneurs, and European royalty, she passed away while living out her days quietly with her niece in Kansas. After her death on August 14, 1965, her estate was valued in excess of \$1 million. Her art remains highly valued today. In 2012, her painting "Canal Venice" sold at auction for more than \$130,000. As Jeff White so aptly emphasized, "Even in death, Jane's dream lives on."

