

# Edna Boies Hopkins (1872 - 1937)

by Dominique H. Vasseur

Edna Boies Hopkins is best known for her floral woodblock prints which range from delicate Japanese-inspired stylizations to boldly colored and increasingly Modernist works. In her brief twenty-year career, she produced seventy-four known woodblock prints, including figurative work, landscapes, and flower compositions.

Born in Hudson, Michigan, Hopkins attended the Art Academy of Cincinnati from 1895 to 1898. While there, she met a young Ohio artist, James Roy Hopkins, whom she eventually married. In 1899 she took classes with the influential artist

Arthur Wesley Dow, an early advocate of Japanese art, especially "ukiyo-e," or woodblock prints. Following the marriage of James and Edna in 1904, the couple settled in Paris, where he painted and she produced prints.

The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 prompted many American artists living in France to return home. Edna and James Hopkins were among those to come back to the United States to continue their careers. Through two good friends and fellow expatriates, Ethel Mars and Maud Squire, Edna learned of the growing colony of printmakers in Provincetown, at the tip of Cape Cod. In the summer of

*Edna Boies Hopkins: Strong in Character, Colorful in Expression* is on view through June 1, 2008, at the Springfield Museum of Art, 107 Cliff Park Road, Springfield, Ohio, 45501, 937-325-4673, [www.springfieldart.museum](http://www.springfieldart.museum). Organized by the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio, a 136-page soft-cover catalogue published by Ohio University Press accompanies the exhibition. It will travel to the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Massachusetts, June through August 3, 2008.

1915, Hopkins joined her friends, along with Ada Gilmore (Chaffee), Mildred "Dolly" McMillen, Juliette Nichols, and





All color woodblock prints are oil or water-based ink or paint on paper. The impression number is stated in parentheses.

ABOVE: *Rooftops*, (2), about 1915-16, 9 1/16 x 10, private collection.

RIGHT: *Trumpet Vine* (also known as *Trumpet Flower*), (3), about 1915, 9 x 8, private collection.

BELOW RIGHT: *Eucalyptus*, (lettered "A"), about 1910-14, 11 x 7 1/4, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

BELOW FAR RIGHT: *Acacia*, about 1906-7, 11 x 7 3/8, Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Ralph and Barbara Voorhees American Art Fund.

LEFT: *Fig Leaves*, about 1910-13, 11 1/2 x 7 3/4, Springfield Museum of Art, Ohio, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Hunt.

FAR LEFT: *Purple Asters* also known as (*Asters and Chrysanthemums and Asters*), (20) about 1910-13, 10 3/4 x 7 3/16, Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, Thomas Ewing French Collection of Prints, bequest of Janet French Houston.



Bror Julius Olsson Nordfeldt. Together, they were the core of a group later to be called the Provincetown Printers.

The group's most important technical development was the so-called white line, or single block method. Nordfeldt is usually credited with its invention. Impatient with the need to carve individual blocks for each color, as was the custom of traditional Japanese printmakers, these artists cut grooves into a single block, thereby creating separate areas of color. In contrast to a traditional color woodblock print in which black lines printed by a key block define the different areas of the composition, prints made by the white-line method feature a

narrow, unprinted (therefore white) space between colors. Besides being innovative,

the technique's results appeared refreshingly clean and modern.



ABOVE: *Mountain Women* (also known as *Two Women in White on a Hill*), (7), 1917, 10 1/8 x 9 1/8, Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum purchase.

LEFT: *Sunflower Arrangement*, (5), about 1920-23, 16 1/4 x 14 1/8, private collection.

BELOW LEFT: *Garden Flowers*, about 1915, 8 x 9, Schumacher Gallery, Capital University, Columbus, Ohio.



In the summer of 1915, while Edna was working in Provincetown, James visited the Cumberland Falls region in southern Kentucky. Since the late nineteenth century, this area had been a popular getaway for tourists and artists seeking a healthy, unspoiled, and rural atmosphere. Until 1927, the primary way to reach Cumberland Falls was by twelve-mile mule-drawn wagon, a ride that took nearly four hours.

In 1917, the couple traveled to Cumberland Falls and stayed at the Brunson Inn, where they were befriended by the inn's handyman, Andy Vanover. The appeal of Vanover as a subject for their artwork is easy to understand: a onetime preacher, spinner of tales, journeyman, and jack-of-all-trades, he had the serious demeanor and lanky physique of the quintessential Kentucky mountain man.

During that summer Edna produced some of the strongest figurative and most engaging prints of her career. Using Vanover and members of his family as her subjects, Hopkins produced works like *Kentucky Mountaineers* and *Mountain Women*. The appeal of these Kentucky subjects was immediate, and they have remained among the most engaging of all of Edna's works.



ABOVE: *Kentucky Mountaineers* (also known as *Two Women Walking* and *Women of the Cumberland*), (6), 1917, 10 1/8 x 9 1/8, Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum purchase.

ABOVE FAR RIGHT: *Yellow Sunflower* (also known as *Orange Sunflower*), (3), about 1915-16, 9 x 8, private collection.

RIGHT: *Houses and Blue Fence*, (2), about 1915-16, 8 1/8 x 8 7/8, private collection.

Edna prints appear deceptively simple, suggesting that she made them spontaneously and easily. The truth is much more complicated. She made many studies in pencil, and sometimes watercolor, working from broad sketches to finished drawings that she transferred to a woodblock for cutting. Edna preferred a cream-colored European wove paper with medium absorbency over Japanese mulberry, or "rice," papers. All of her prints were made on a small wooden armature that held her carved woodblocks. The absence of rubbing marks on the backs of prints indicates that she used hand pressure rather than a Japanese barren or a silver spoon preferred by her colleagues in Provincetown.

Conventionally a print is an image that is created in multiple numbers, each print being identical to the others in its series. The fact that Edna's prints were created by hand may have encouraged her to be more experimental and to avoid the uniformity



adhered to by most printmakers.

Hampered by severe and painful arthritis, which made the process of hand-carving woodblocks arduous and painful, Edna gradually abandoned printmaking. She in-

stead focused on teaching, lecturing, and exhibiting her prints throughout the country. She died in Detroit, Michigan, of cancer, and her ashes are thought to have been strewn over Lake Michigan.