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BY ROBERT C. JACKSON, detail

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EDNA BOIES HOPKINS: STRONG IN CHARACTER, COLORFUL IN EXPRESSION

EDNA BOIES HOPKINS (1872-1937) WAS A WIDELY TRAVELED AND HIGHLY SKILLED PRINTMAKER. HER BODY OF WORK REFLECTS THE INFLUENCE OF ARTHUR WESLEY DOW AND THE AMERICAN ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT AS WELL AS EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN MODERNISM AROUND THE TIME OF WORLD WAR I. SHE HAS BEEN LITTLE KNOWN, HOWEVER, PARTLY DUE TO THE SHORTNESS OF HER CAREER, LIMITED BY CRIPPLING ARTHRITIS, AND HER SMALL BODY OF WORK. BUT THE WORKS THAT DO EXIST REVEAL A VIRTUOSO OF THE GOODCUT WHO PUSHED THE LIMITS OF HER CRAFT. THESE WORKS HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED INTO A NEW SHOW OVERSEEN BY DOMINIQUE H. VASSEUR, CURATOR OF EUROPEAN ART AT THE COLUMBUS MUSEUM OF ART.

Provincetown Art Association and Museum
460 Commercial Street
Provincetown, Massachusetts

June 13 through August 3

She was not a traditional printmaker," curator Vasseur explained. "She was almost more painterly in her experimentation. She did a lot of [color] overlays. She would combine

watercolors and oils." Unlike most printmakers, Hopkins often varied colors when pulling multiple prints. "She was very modern in her willingness to change colors, to experiment."

"Datura," a work from around 1909-1913, when Hopkins and her husband were living in Paris, is a fine example. In one version, Hopkins first printed the color field with a soft yellow. Over that, she printed pale violet to background the delicate handwork of the flower and leaves. Like original stamps from Japan, where Hopkins studied during her lengthy honeymoon in 1904, the composition is asymmetrical. The horn shaped flower descends across the page. Green leaves shroud a corner, the void used to detail their delicate capillaries. Green tendrils vein delicately into the flower's petals. The tonal softness is soothing, the result of hand pressure; Hopkins did not use the traditional Japanese barren or a mechanical press. The graceful lines are more astounding considering Hopkins worked in blocks of cherry, a hard wood that rendered the act of precisely cutting and chiseling that much more difficult.

In 1915, after returning to America, Hopkins began summering in Provincetown, doubtlessly drawn there by her friends from Paris who flocked to the art colony. During that summer, the whiteline print method, known as the Provincetown Print, was developed. Rather than cut a keyblock containing the outline of the image to serve as a guide for cutting other blocks, one

for each color, B.J.O. Nordfeldt cut a single block. It was, so to speak, an inverse keyblock, containing voids to separate the colors rather than ridges to serve as lines. White lines were produced on the final print to separate the areas of color printed from the single block. Hopkins worked in the traditional and the whiteline style for the remainder of her career.

At this time, as well, Hopkins departed from florals and began cutting landscapes and figure studies. "Mountaineer" is one such study, done in 1917 during a visit to Cumberland Falls, Kentucky. Her Provincetown peers focused on anecdotal scenes that tell a story, Vasseur noted, but in Hopkins' work "even her figures seem to be a part of a landscape. They are quiet, reflective scenes." The mountain man leads his mule back home as the afternoon sky silhouettes bands of trees and mountains. The regionalist subjects, like the works from Provincetown, are decades ahead of the movement that gained momentum in the '30s and '40s.

"She was way ahead of her time," PAAM Director Chris McCarthy said. "I feel like this will be a real Cinderella show that will blow people away by the quality of the work and the professionalism of how the show is presented." Taylor M. Polites



Edna Boies Hopkins