

## Harriet Fitzgerald 1904-1984

Miss Harriet Fitzgerald, a Danville native, and the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. H.R. Fitzgerald distinguished herself as an artist, exhibitor, and a much sought-after lecturer.

Born in 1904, she attended Stratford Hall in Danville and went on to graduate from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Much of her training as an artist came in two and a half years of study at The Art Student's League of New York, principally in the class of John Slogan, and in the private classes of Maurice Stern and the cubist painter Ambrose Webster. This formal training was supplemented by a period of independent study in Europe during which Miss Fitzgerald studied the chief art galleries there.

With the Great Depression of 1929, the artist in Harriet Fitzgerald was touched by a concern for the social significance in human relationships. Thus, she returned to Danville where for three years she painted, working out her own individual technique and theories.

In 1938, she came into her own when she won an award in a competition sponsored by the American Artists' Congress. As a result of this award, ten of her paintings were hung in a three-man exhibition at the A.C.A. Gallery in New York. Her paintings were soon seen also in group exhibitions at Milch and MacBeth Galleries. In 1942 The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts presented an exhibition of her work, and in 1944 the Charles Barzansky Gallery of New York gave her a one-woman show. Since that time, this gallery has handled her work, exhibiting it regularly in the group exhibitions of its artists and holding for her four more one-woman shows: 1946, 1947, 1950, and 1954. Other one-woman shows of Miss Fitzgerald's work have been held at Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Randolph-Macon College, the Asheville Museum of Art, and the Birmingham Public Library, among others.

Since 1948 Miss Fitzgerald has directed the Abingdon Square Painters in New York City, a position which has led to her being in great demand by colleges throughout the country. From 1955-1964 and from 1967-1969, she served as a lecturer for the Arts Program Association of American Colleges; in the late 1940's, early 1950's, and early 1960's she was involved with the lecture program of the Virginia Area University Center; and since 1957 Harriet Fitzgerald has been a visiting lecturer at Stratford College and a member of the faculty without rank.

While her works are represented in numerous public and private collections, she, herself, held membership in Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Gamma Mu, the Women's Press Club of New York City, and Artists' Equity of New York City; she is listed in *Who's Who in American Art*, *Artists/USA*, and *Who's Who of American Women*.

Perhaps it is unfair to draw out one single aspect of a multi-faceted life such as that of Miss Fitzgerald, but a study of this woman shows that the impact she had on individuals, carrying art to them, and explaining the impact of art as an expression of daily life, strikes an enduring impression. The President of Randolph-Macon College commented, "I believe she is unsurpassed in her ability as the director of a forum period on subjects having to do with art and art appreciation...Miss Fitzgerald has been able to

implant in our students the desire to continue their studies of the works of the masters of art.”

“It seems to me that one of the most significant roles of an art expression in a college curriculum is that it offers a means for self-discovery, perhaps self-knowledge,” wrote Harriet Fitzgerald in the *Stratford Magazine* in the spring of 1973. She prefaced her observation by questioning, “Who am I? A person who bangs strong blue at red and black, adding a little orange? Or someone who reaches for the quiet, peculiar sensation of pale yellow splintered along a surface of silver grey? How can I be myself unless I know who I am? How can I find out who I am?” For Miss Fitzgerald, one finds all these answers through art: the study of it and the expression of it. She was, as she had been since the age of eleven, searching for a new way of looking at things. She admitted in early 1968 to being deeply concerned about understanding the new trends in society such as pop and minimal art. “To see them from the angle of today’s generation, one would have to have grown up in the 1950’s and 1960’s. It’s a challenge to try to comprehend what lies behind these works.”

It is this spirit that Harriet Fitzgerald conveys in her paintings and her lectures: a challenge of interpretation, of feeling the human expression.