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Emerging from the Shadows

Hundreds of unrecognized women artists working in California from 1860–1960 receive proper art history scholarship in new book series

Polia Pillin 1909–1992

Polia Sukonick was born on September 1, 1909, in Szenstochowa, Poland, the daughter of Joseph and Rifka (Paul) Sukonick. She was born into a family of artisans and craftsmen; her father was a coppersmith and her grandparents were accomplished weavers and potters who nurtured Polia's love of art from an early age. In 1924, at the age of fifteen, with the help and support of her family, she immigrated to the United States, settling in Chicago, Illinois.

While in Chicago, she worked in the garment industry during the day, allowing her to attend art school at night. Her art education there included studies at the Jewish Peoples Institute; the studio of Todros Geller; the Hull House Art Center; and the Art Institute of Chicago.

In Chicago, she met the poet Velvel Pillin (who later changed his name to William Pillin), and in 1938 the couple married in Los Lunas, New Mexico. Velvel had immigrated with his family to the United States from the Ukraine and had been living in Chicago. In New Mexico, the couple lived near Santa Fe on a sixteen-acre farm in the Espanola Valley. The farm was as primitive as the environment in which they had settled, requiring them to haul drinking water from several miles away, gather wood in the mountains for cooking and heating, and use kerosene lamps for light. While they were living in New Mexico, they made their first of many painting trips to California.

In 1940, after the birth of their son, the family left New Mexico and returned to Chicago. They remained in Chicago until 1948, when they moved permanently to California, settling in the Los Angeles area.

Beginning in the early 1950s, Polia became known for her stylized pottery; however, early in her career she produced an extensive body of non-ceramic work, including paintings, drawings, watercolors, and mosaics. Her oeuvre consists of Chicago street scenes, New Mexico and California landscapes, figurative, and abstractions, the latter of which would figure prominently in her pottery. She considered her pottery an extension of her work as a painter. Polia felt that a pot was a surface on which to project the mysteries of elongated maidens, birds, flowers, equestriennes, fisher-folk, and bird catchers. She regarded clay as something that becomes a medium for painting, the limit of which is defined only by the artist's own skill.

Polia was a member of the San Francisco Art Association, the California Watercolor Society, the American Ceramic Society, the American Crafts Council, and the Southern California Design Association. She exhibited nationally with the Oakland Art Gallery; Cincinnati Art Museum; New Mexico Museum, Santa Fe; the San

Francisco Art Association, 1939; the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco; the Oakland Museum, 1950; Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art; the Landau Gallery, Los Angeles, 1952; the Ryder Gallery, the Art Institute of Chicago, 1947–48; San Francisco Museum of Art, 1948; Wichita Art Association, 1947–49, 1951; Denver Art Museum, 1952; University of Maine; Long Beach Municipal Art Gallery; and numerous other museums and galleries across the United States.

Polia Pillin passed away in Los Angeles, California, on July 25, 1992.

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Biography by William M. Bilsland III. Courtesy of *Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960* and Maurine St. Gaudens.



Untitled (Abstract), c. 1955, mixed media on paper, 18.5 × 15 in., signed l/r. Collection of William M. Bilsland III. Photo: Martin A. Folb, PhD. Courtesy of *Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960* and Maurine St. Gaudens.



Untitled (Woman and Horse), n.d., crayon resist with ink on paper, 12 × 9 in., unsigned. Collection of William M. Bilsland III. Photo: Martin A. Folb, PhD. Courtesy of *Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960* and Maurine St. Gaudens.



Untitled (Mosaic - Two Figures, Bird, and Tree), n.d., colored glass mosaic on panel (with ceramic hands and eyes and glass bead accent on tree), 24 × 19.5 in., signed I/r. Collection of William M. Bilsland III. Photo: Martin A. Folb, PhD. Courtesy of *Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960 and Maurine St. Gaudens*.



Untitled (Pueblo - New Mexico), 1934, watercolor on paper, 9.5 x 11.5 in., signed and dated l/r: "Polia Sukornick, 1934." Collection of William M. Bilsland III. Photo: Martin A. Folb, PhD. *Courtesy of Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960 and Maurine St. Gaudens.*



Untitled (Landscape with Structures - New Mexico), 1940, watercolor on paper, 11 x 15 in., signed and dated l/r. *Courtesy of William M. Bilsland III. Photo: Martin A. Folb, PhD. Courtesy of Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960 and Maurine St. Gaudens.*



Untitled (Abstract), c. 1950, watercolor on paper, 11 x 16 in., signed l/r. Collection of William M. Bilsland III. Photo: Martin A. Folb, PhD. *Courtesy of Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960 and Maurine St. Gaudens.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maurine St. Gaudens grew up surrounded by art and creativity. She is the granddaughter of noted San Francisco jeweler, Maurice Saint-Gaudens, and the third-cousin of the esteemed sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Maurine's artistic background led to her career as a respected Fine Arts conservator and the establishment of the Maurine St. Gaudens Studio in Pasadena, California.

In conjunction with her professional work as a conservator, Maurine has served as guest curator for numerous art exhibitions throughout Southern California and as a consultant and manager to the estates of various artists.

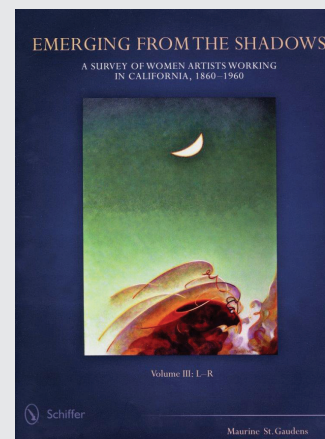
ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd. is proud to announce the release of the four-volumes of *Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California 1860-1960*. In more than 2,000 color images these four books trace the 100-year history of 320 women artists working in California as well as throughout the United States, Mexico, and Europe.

ABOUT THE BIOGRAPHER



William M. Bilsland III, was born, raised and resides in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He started collecting/dealing in American pottery and paintings at a young age. In 1986, Dick Bosworth, Kansas City pottery dealer, mentioned to him that he should look up artist Polia Pillin when next in California. They met and Bilsland purchased numerous items from her in the ensuing years. After Polia's memorial in 1992, William kept in touch with the family for over 17 years, and acquired many fine pieces from them. He met Maurine St. Gaudens near the beginning of this book project and contributed the chapter on Polia. He continues as a dealer in pottery and paintings.



Emerging from the Shadows –
Volume III: This hard cover book is 9" x 12", 320 pages and 500-plus color images. ISBN13: 9780764348860. \$59.99 – available at www.schifferbooks.com