

Pasadena Museum of History Exhibit Highlights the Strength of Female Artists

A new exhibition at the Pasadena Museum of History shows how some women artists kicked convention to the curb and created awe-inspiring works that rival that of their male counterparts.

By Donna Lugo, Images Courtesy Pasadena Museum of History (Published in Pasadena Mag in July/August 2018)

Earlier this year to coincide with Women's History Month, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art retweeted a challenge posed by the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. LACMA asked its followers a real noodle-scratcher: Can you name five female artists? Subtracting those who consulted a quick Google search before answering, the outcome resulted in many losing steam after Frida Kahlo or Georgia O'Keefe.

That type of underwhelming response is something that Pasadena-based curator and author Maurine St. Gaudens hopes to change after visitors take a walk through her latest exhibit, "Something Revealed; California Women Artists Emerge, 1860-1960," on view at the Pasadena Museum of History starting in September.

"You had all these men doing very exciting subjects and women were really relegated to children and more congenial scenes." St. Gaudens says. "What we have really strived for with the exhibition and with the books is to show what else they did."

Based on the extensive works featured in her four volume book, "Emerging from the Shadows; A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860- 1960," this exhibition will feature more than 200 pieces from a variety of women who were working in the

arts in California during the period, including American artist Bertha Lum, who is noted for bringing the woodblock print, endemic to Japan and China, stateside.

Even Pasadena royalty Eva Fenyes, who was independently wealthy and an astute businesswoman, was revealed to be an artistic recorder of history for her exquisite sketches and watercolor renderings of famous Southern California landmarks such as Chavez Ravine, Sunset Boulevard and the first railroad in Pasadena.

Loosely organized by themes, the exhibition will feature paintings, sketches, ceramics, metal works and sculptures in an array of styles. St. Gaudens' researcher/ contributor on the book project, Joseph Morsman, was particularly impressed by the combination of innate talent and drive to hone their craft these women possessed, even at great personal sacrifice to their seemingly predetermined roles in society.

"The level of determination was evident in these women as the opportunities for them to study art professionally was extremely limited," he says. "In speaking with their families, one thing that was universal was that they would say, 'Well, she was driven. She took her art seriously and did whatever she could do.'"

Morsman notes that many of these women, almost all of whom were married, shirked the usual domestic tasks such as housework and cooking in favor of tending to their artistry. "They wanted to be painting," he says. "They wanted to be creating. They wanted to be in that circle of artists that were really creating powerful works."

St. Gaudens hopes that this exhibition will help shine a light on some hidden gems of the art world. "I hope people will broaden their own view of what women are able to do and realize the equality of women," she says, "(and) see the world a little bit differently."

"Something Revealed; California Women Artists Emerge, 1860-1960" Sept. 29-March 17, 2019
Pasadena Museum of History www.pasadenahistory.org