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MARY ROGERS— SISTER AND ARTIST BY CATHERINE ROGERS

Introduction by Artist Robert Henri

Mary Rogers' approach to nature was purely spiritual. Her technique in every instance was evoked by the spirit of the things she wished to express.

There are moments in our lives, there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual — become clairvoyant. We reach then into reality. Such are the moments of our greatest happiness. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom.

It is in the nature of all people to have these experiences; but in our time and under the conditions of our lives, it is only a rare few who are able to continue in the experience and find expression for it.

At such times there is a song going on within us, a song to which we listen. It fills us with surprise. We marvel at it. We could continue to hear it. But few are capable of holding themselves in the state of listening to their own song. Intellectuality steps in, and as the song within us is of the utmost sensitiveness it retires in the presence of the cold and material intellect. It is aristocratic, and will not associate itself with the commonplace, and we fall back and become our ordinary selves.

Yet we live in the memory of these songs which in moments of intellectual inadvertance have been possible to us. They are the pinnacles of our experience. And it is the desire to express these intimate sensations, this song from within, which motivates the masters of all art.

Mary Rogers was one of those who had the simple power to listen to the song, and to create

under the spell of it. She knew the value of revelation; and her spirit had that control over mentality which was the secret of her gift for employing at all times in her work that specific technique evoked by the song. She was master. Her work is a record of her life's great moments. Her statement is joyous and clear.

Robert Henri



Mary C. "Maizie" Rogers, *Untitled (Homage to Cézanne)*, watercolor

I have been asked to write an article about my sister's work, because it was thought that I could trace her development more clearly than anyone else, as Maizie worked for many years away from schools and influences and we were never separated, except during the time she spent in Paris as a young girl, living with our dear friends the O'B - s.

Those delightful nomads and their charming family life, together with the stimulating surroundings of the studios of the Latin Quarter, form the earliest background of Maizie's student days.

On her return from Europe she continued work, studying- at the School of Design, and the Art Student's League, in Pittsburgh, until we came to New York. Her first serious work was done under Robert Henri in the old Chase School in 57th Street, in an atmosphere which encouraged the free expression of all that was individual in the student.

In 1907 we spent a year abroad; part of the time in London, where she worked with Brangwyn; several months in Holland, again with Henri, and a winter in Paris. The year

marked a period of growth in Maizie's painting. In Paris, though she studied under no master regularly, she worked in many of the studios, taking criticisms from Lucien Simon, Blanche, and other Academic masters. But it was during this year that she came to know and love the work of Cezanne, van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse. I think there was always something unusual and of the modern spirit in her work, for I remember one of her first teachers saying: "You have a colour sense that is almost ugly. I don't know whether it is very ugly or very beautiful."

After that winter in Paris, Maizie worked practically alone : constantly experimenting, testing, discarding, in her search for her own expression - that search which a true artist can only make alone.

As I look back over the years that have passed since then, my milestones are the summers spent in Provincetown. Gloucester, California, the Berkshires, and another delightful six months spent in Italy, the Austrian Tyrol, and France. To make even more vivid my memories are the sketches and paintings done during our wanderings.

I think Maizie's strong individual expression began to assert itself in California, where we spent the summer of 1913. Such a picture as *Avalon Bay, Santa Catalina Island* is reminiscent of no one, and in its quality of pure beauty is unrivalled among her productions. In this, or rather in these canvases, she tried the experiment of painting first one, then another canvas from the same subject. I cannot recall now which was the original and which the final one. But from my knowledge of her later method I can say with a good deal of conviction that the more subtle, more delicate interpretation was the last.

The summer of 1916 we spent at a camp in the Adirondacks, where Miss Bentley had her classes of Rhythmics in the open air. There Maizie spent many hours drawing the girls as they danced. These are drawings of movement suggested sometimes with a single line. I think all of their spirit of motion is incorporated in the painting which is called *The Dancers* - not to be confused with the *Ballet* which was reproduced in the International Studio last month. *The Dancers* was painted in the fall of 1916, and exhibited in the first Independent Exhibition. Maizie was one of the founders of The Independents, and a director from its inception until the time of her death.

From this time on, my sister's work was very much interrupted; and in 1917 circum-

stances made it necessary for her to take a position designing advertising posters.

Since the Memorial Exhibition given to Maizie by the Independents, where the oils and water-colours were shown in separate groups, there has been a great deal of discussion as to their relative significance. When people ask me which I like best I usually say that to me the water-colours are her last message, her swan-song, and something more, perhaps, her revolt against a condition which she found extremely distasteful. Nine to five in an office was prison to a spirit as free as Maizie's.

These water-colours were produced at odd times, on Saturdays and Sundays, on long summer evenings, on short summer vacations, and form the bulk of her output during the last three years of her life. The first were painted in New Hampshire in 1918. She seemed to have an innate feeling for the medium. These early sketches are as fluid, as uninfluenced, as lyric, as her later work. And so these lovely things flowed from her brush, delicate, sensitive, suggestive, full, brilliant, daring. A dozen adjectives suggest themselves to me. for she expressed many moods in many ways. But three things I think most unusual about them - her absolute mastery of the medium upon first handling it, the great number that she produced in the short time, and their uniformly high standard.

These, the water-colours, naturally arrange themselves in groups. One group painted along the Palisades recalls many delightful days spent together, when Maizie painted and I ate the lunch. Another, the still life, ranges from the robust realistic presentations to the frail slight things that seem rather the soul of flowers than flowers themselves. But, though there is a remarkable uniformity of standard among them (due doubtless to her severe self-censorship, and the destruction of many), the later pictures done in the summer of 1920 at Falls Village, Connecticut, where she spent the last months of her life, seem to have gained in their power to suggest with the least possible line and stroke that which she wished to express. There is an elimination in them which, together with the fact that they were produced within so short a time of her death, endows them with an unearthly, spiritual quality.

Maizie's appeal was a universal one, and it seems strange that with the deep affection people had for her, and the very enthusiastic appreciation of those artists who knew her work, she had not the satisfaction of a wider recognition during her life. But Maizie had

two great gifts : one for her art, and one for friendship. Her contact with people was always the human one, interested in others always more than in herself, and never in any way looking toward the advancement of herself as an artist. It seems perhaps a peculiar thing to say, but I have often thought that during her life, Maizie, the generous, outgoing personality, Maizie the friend, obscured Maizie the artist. Even now. when so many people are coming to her studio, drawn there by the pictures themselves - people who never knew Maizie while she lived - I have been startled to hear them almost invariably say, before they go, that they feel they have met Maizie herself, so strongly still does her personality seem to persist.

I wish I could bring my sister before you - a character so vivid and fine. She was certainly the most charming companion, humorous and gay, but sensitive to every beauty and every sorrow.

I remember one lovely night last June when she and I looked out together on an orchard bathed in the most unearthly moonlight that I have ever seen. And there she recalled to me a story of de Maupassant's "Moonlight," the tale of an old priest who went forth to upbraid his young niece. But upon seeing her walking with her lover - amid the beauty of such another night - he withdrew in reverence.

The next full moon shone upon a new made grave, and a disciple of beauty lay beneath it.

In her work, always executed swiftly, there seems to be a sense unrealized of the necessity for haste. Especially is this true of the last few months of her life. We went away, how happily, with how little thought of shadow in the spring. Maizie worked unceasingly. "I have so little time." She wearied us all with her haste. But all too soon the evening of her life had come. The end came quickly, and she met it gaily and bravely as she had lived.

Within a few days of her death, with what remaining strength she had, she went over her summer's work. I brought them to her bedside. And as I placed them before her she selected those she wished to be preserved. She made her decisions swiftly, definitely, destroying one after another those with which she was dissatisfied, and signing with a simple "M R" the comparatively few that passed her mysterious censorship. When we protested at the destruction of so many - almost two-thirds of all of them - she said, "I know which ones to keep." and we were silent after that.

While many times during her life she caused us to suffer in this way, destroying many things that we had come to love, it is a source of satisfaction now to know that everything that remains has the stamp of her approval.

Much has been done for her since her death, and I acknowledge it with gratitude. Especially to the Society of Independent Artists do I wish to express my thanks. The tribute which they paid her in giving the Memorial Exhibition I value more than I can say. And to the public which is so generously responding in appreciation and interest, I wish also to express my gratitude.

Catherine Rogers