



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**FACT SHEET**

**Ellen A. “Nellie” Knopf (1875-1962): Modernist painter and art educator**

**BIOGRAPHY**

Born in Chicago in 1875, Knopf came to Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1900, shortly after graduating with honors from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. During a 43-year teaching career there, she rose to become director of the Art Department of Illinois Women’s College (later MacMurray) College. She was awarded a doctorate in arts by the college in 1935.

A hearing-impaired and independent woman, Knopf was a determined artist and educator who never let her deafness interfere with her career. To avoid biases against female artists, she began signing her works as "N. A. Knopf" in the 1920s.

As a college professor, Nellie Knopf drove herself by car from coast to coast – well before the advent of interstate travel – to paint during the summer months and sabbaticals. To save money for her travels, Knopf lived in college dormitories and took her meals in the campus dining hall. She painted landscapes and seascapes in Maine, Massachusetts, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, California, Canada (Quebec), France, and Mexico.

One former student offered this colorful portrait: *“She was square, with shoulders and hips aligned, wearing a corset that rigidly supported her figure and a somewhat ample upper torso. With a short figure, thin legs and tiny feet in mis-sized shoes, she moved erectly across campus in penguin meter. Her stature belied her forcefulness. She wore wigs, in rust or amber, and often on tilt. Her clothes were of the same vintage but had an artistic flair. Jewelry, furs and hats gave her a prominent look.”*

Upon her retirement from MacMurray, she continued her travels in the West and spent time in Mexico. She died in Michigan in 1962, where she had moved to be near her nephew.

**ARTIST QUOTES**

*“The world is here to be painted and I am here to paint it.”*

*"With a name like mine, I'll never get the recognition I should have."*

*"I find it an almost unbelievable beauty, mountains of marvelous form and color, lifting snow-capped walls into the sky, and such lovely mountain lakes that one is wholly gripped with enchantment."* (in a letter from Glacier National Park, summer 1925)

*"I have done miles of paintings, some of them very good."*

## INFLUENCES AND STYLE

- Studied under John Vanderpoel and Frederick Free at the School of the Art Institute.
- Studied landscape painting with Charles Woodbury (Boston School) during summers from 1910-1917 in Maine.
- studied in 1922 with Sven Birger Sandzén and John Fabian Carlson at the Broadmoor Academy in Colorado Springs.
- Modernist style with bold colors, loose brush work and heavy impasto.

## OUTPUT

Knopf left a body of 600 oil paintings and 150 watercolors.

## UPCOMING SALES

A rare collection of Knopf's work from MacMurray College will be sold at auction by Hindman Chicago. Sixteen of Knopf's most significant, larger-scale work will be offered during a Sept. 30 live auction beginning at 10 a.m. CDT, and available online. The paintings, Lots 65-80, can be viewed at:

<https://hindmanauctions.com/auctions/788-american-and-european-art?page=1&layout=grid&per=50>.

The following day, Oct. 1, more than 40 additional paintings and drawings (Lots 91-134) will be sold in an online auction that will begin at 2 p.m. CDT. These works can be viewed at:

<https://hindmanauctions.com/auctions/825-american-european-art-online?page=1&layout=grid&per=50>

## SELECT LIST OF PAST EXHIBITIONS

- Annual Exhibition of Works by Chicago and Vicinity Artists, Art Institute Chicago, 1914, 1920-1922, 1925-27, 1930, 1937
- Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia 1925, 1927, 1929
- National Academy of Design, New York City, 1926
- Detroit Institute of Art, Michigan, 1942, 1943
- Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 1929, 1935
- Broadmoor Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Chicago Galleries Association (solo), 1938
- Posthumous retrospectives at MacMurray College, Jacksonville, IL, 1987, 2010

## WORKS HELD

- Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art, Colorado
- Colby College Museum of Art, Maine

### *About MacMurray College:*

*MacMurray College was an independent, four-year college with a strong liberal arts tradition located in Jacksonville, about 30 miles west of Springfield. Founded in 1846 by Methodist clergy as the Illinois Conference Female Academy, MacMurray College was one of the oldest institutions of higher education originally for women in the United States and one of the oldest private liberal arts colleges in the State of Illinois prior to its formal closure in August 2020.*

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### Media Contacts:

Jim Prescott  
c/o MacMurray College  
[jprescott@prescottgroupplc.com](mailto:jprescott@prescottgroupplc.com)  
708 717 2110 (mobile)

Joseph Stanfield  
Hindman  
[josephstanfield@hindmanauctions.com](mailto:josephstanfield@hindmanauctions.com)  
312 280 1212