

THE BIRMINGHAM SCENE
SELDOM-SEEN ARTWORK FROM THE 1930s AND 1940s



Artists & Their Work in *The Birmingham Scene* Exhibition

FEATURED ARTISTS

FRANK HARTLEY ANDERSON (1891-1947)

MARTHA FORT ANDERSON (1885-1968)

WORK EXHIBITED: Wood Block Prints, c.1934, from the collection of the Birmingham Public Library

From late 1935 through 1942, the Boston-born architect and landscape architect Frank Hartley Anderson operated the Southern Printmakers Society. He sought out the best prints and exhibited them at shows across the region at a time when few museums, art schools or galleries existed to show regional artists' work. He promoted prints as a low-cost art form accessible to a large public. Editors at the national *Art Digest* strongly supported his work.

Anderson began making wood block prints by 1934 when he was accepted into the first New Deal art program, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). This national program offered selected artists the standard white-collar federal wage to produce an agreed-upon schedule of work. Following the program requirements, PWAP art work was to be exhibited and held in public institutions. (Other WPAP-sponsored artists shown in this exhibit include Richard Coe, Hannah Elliott, Carrie Hill, and Roderick MacKenzie.)



The Perpetrator, Etching by Frank Hartley Anderson, c. 1934. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library.

For the PWAP, Anderson produced 23 wood block prints of American historical scenes as a study collection for the Birmingham Public Schools. His wife Martha Fort Anderson taught art teachers under another federally funded program, the Extension Program of the University of Alabama Art Program, which she had established in 1918. In addition to teaching, the Georgia native, who was trained in major American and European art schools, illustrated

books and painted portraits. Her work with her husband, especially on the 1930s wood block prints, was collaborative. She often designed the scene and sketched figures; he cut the wood blocks and prepared the prints. Exactly who did what will never be known, but their daughter Martha Fort (Prince) and newspaper accounts document Martha's role in composition and sketching of individual figures, including those in the award-winning *Church Supper* print. Emma, the Anderson's family cook, posed for Martha and her students (her studio was in the Anderson residence at 2112 11th Court South designed by her husband in 1922).

In late March of 1935, Frank and Martha Anderson organized a public exhibition of the PWAP and other prints, together with the work of Martha's students including that of their nine-year old daughter Martha. The two-week-long exhibition took place in the library gallery. Lucia Giddens, reviewing the library exhibition for *The Birmingham Post Herald* of March 13, 1935, noted that the prints of the woodcuts "show native scenes of homeliness, made beautiful." Prints and hand-lettered labels from this exhibition remain in the collection of the Birmingham Public Library and are now held by the Department of Archives and Manuscripts.

Anderson made quite a success of the Southern Printmakers Society. In late 1935, he organized a touring exhibition of more than 200 selected works that opened at the Birmingham Public Library and toured across the South and the Midwest. By 1937, the Society was sponsoring 15 touring shows. Anderson also published editions of selected works for catalog sale. Annually, a "presentation print" was distributed to members to thank them for their monetary support. *Church Supper* was the first presentation print distributed to society members in 1936. A year later, the Southern States Art League, an organization under the direction of William Woodward of Newcomb College in New Orleans that also developed and circulated juried exhibitions of the work of top Southern artists, awarded this print the 1937 Edward S. Shorter Prize. *Church Supper* was shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. The print toured with an exhibition of American prints to Scandinavian countries, and the National Museum of Stockholm

ABOVE, LEFT: *Jones Valley*, Martha Henderson Goings (1937), Courtesy Harold Goings

ABOVE, RIGHT: *Church Supper*, Wood Block Print by Frank Hartley Anderson, c. 1934. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library.

and the New York Public Library published copies. Anderson's *Negro Preachin* also won first prize in a national exhibit of more than 100 prints organized by the Wichita Art Association. The Andersons designed and painted a still extant series of historical murals at Lakeview School and the *Spirit of Steel* mural at the Fairfield Post Office. Despite the success of their prints and art work, in 1938, they could not pay the mortgage on their home and moved to Georgia, where Frank took a job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He enlisted in World War II and died shortly thereafter. Martha continued to teach and paint at her family home in Mt. Airy, Georgia which was run as an art colony.



MARTHA HENDERSON GOINGS (1911-2004)

WORK EXHIBITED: 1930s watercolors of Martha Henderson Goings from the collections of her sons Hubert and Harold Goings

Martha Henderson graduated from Phillips High School in 1927. She studied with Birmingham artists Carrie Hill and Hannah Elliott before entering Sweetbriar College. Then for three years she attended the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts (Parsons) in New York City. Returning to Birmingham in 1932, she established a studio at 3546 Altamont Road, back of her parents' 3451 Cliff Road residence. Here she painted and taught painting, drawing, and watercolor as well as commercial and decorative art and costume design to children and adults. Described by Margaret Gresham Livingston, a former teenaged student, as "fun and dynamic," the 5'2" instructor was serious about her work and that of her students, for many of whom she gained scholarships at Parsons. By 1934, due to her watercolors having been seen in Southern States Art League exhibits, *La Revue Moderne-Illustree-des Arts et de la Vie* of Paris, France solicited an illustrated biography for publication. In June 1936, Henderson married Hubert Goings of Glenwood, Alabama in the garden of her parents' residence. The couple took up residence in her studio. She continued to paint and exhibit her distinctive watercolors with the Birmingham Art Club and the Southern States Art League through at least 1940.

The artist's family members relate that she felt free to take her sketch pad and head anywhere she wanted to go to paint what she wished. In the 1930s, she most often painted in African American neighborhoods across the city and in nearby rural areas.

Trained at Parsons, she was imbued with the documentary ethic of her mentors, who were fluent with the Ash Can School, the loosely knit New York painters who had taken to the streets to record working class neighborhoods. While Ash Can work was often somber, Goings's style brought beauty and truth to her depictions of Birmingham scenes. They often depict the big house and the servants' house, reflecting the living arrangements of the artist's family and many other families and their servants during the Great Depression. The practice of industrial corporations building and maintaining company houses at their plants is another theme in her art.

A fluency in housing types and arrangements may have come to the artist through her upbringing. Her father, Harold Henderson, was a real estate appraiser, who served on Birmingham's first Zoning Real Estate Board of Adjustment in 1926 and 1927 and as president of the Birmingham Board in 1926. A May 29, 1935 *Birmingham Post-Herald* story by James C. Hutto presents Henderson's opinion on slum clearance. The appraiser recommended to his clients that they fix up their run-down houses and increase their rent rolls. In describing a successful project he inspired in Avondale: "an over-crowded jumble of filth and squalor" was "dressed" into new dwellings (that look much like houses in the artist's work). Her father believed this a far superior solution to the apartment type of low-cost housing project then being built over the country with federal funds. "It's a job that should be tackled by the property owners themselves, not only for its social significance but as sound business as well," Henderson said.



ERNEST HENDERSON (1906-1998)

WORK EXHIBITED: Etchings created for the Downtown Club, 1949 from the collection of Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark

Ernest Henderson's large-scale industrial scenes were commissioned by the Downtown Club, formed in 1947, of which he and the city's social and industrial elite were board members. These large, usually 4' by 8' and no smaller than 4' x 4' etchings on anodized aluminum celebrated Birmingham industry. Henderson also designed the "ultra moderne" furnishings and carpet for the new dining and conference areas in the club rooms that opened in 1949 in the basement of the Essex House then on the site of today's Energen Building. In 1954, Henderson designed a



Martha Henderson in her Altamont Road Studio. Photograph, c. 1932. Courtesy Harold Goings.



ORIGINAL CAPTION: "When members of the Birmingham Art Club gather for an "Italian Diner" Thursday evening, they will hear a program arranged by the three members pictured here. Left to right they are Mrs. Griffin Lampkin Jr., Mrs. William Archer Price and Mrs. Harold Goings. Mrs. Price is general chairman of the party to be held at the parish house of the Church of the Advent."

Photograph from an unnamed Birmingham newspaper, January 20, 1937. Courtesy Harold Goings.



Ernest Henderson's paintings, *Woodward Iron Company's Furnaces* and *Slag Dump at a Vulcan Materials Plant*, are displayed in this photograph of a club room at the Downtown Club. Photograph, 1949. Courtesy Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark.



Ernest Henderson presenting a hand-colored photograph for the Downtown Club to Carl Wittichen. On the wall hangs his aluminum painting of Alabama Power Company's Gorgas Power Plant. Photograph, c. 1949. Courtesy Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark.

mural panorama of Alabama history for an additional 85-person party room at the club. Architect Lawrence Whitten offered his services in helping work out perplexing difficulties for locating the club rooms in the basement space. The July 1954 *Downtowner* magazine described "our Club rooms" as "a show place for visitors to our City." This was where corporate Birmingham showed off its industrial might and its antebellum heritage through the media of Henderson's spectacular etchings.

A graduate of Phillips High School and the Academy of Fine Arts in Chicago, Henderson worked at *The Birmingham News* for 23 years, eventually as art director. From 1927 through 1933, he created syndicated cartoons about World War I experiences and boys in love with flying.

In 1928 with three instructors, he opened the Southern School of Art. They taught commercial and modern art, newspaper art, painting, art appreciation, and kindergarten art. By 1940 Henderson was teaching at Birmingham-Southern College, where one of his students was Charlie Brooks, who later became the longtime political cartoonist for *The Birmingham News*.

Henderson illustrated children's books and designed covers for poetry collections, several of which remain in the Birmingham Public Library's collection. He also purchased an art gallery and ran it as Henderson's Fine Arts, a gallery and frame shop in the city center that continues as today's Village Framers in Mountain Brook Village. Artist John Demotte who works there today hangs exhibitions in the Library Gallery.

Henderson worked from black and white photographs of the industrial scenes to create his works for the Downtown Club. Etching his designs directly into the metal and applying lacquer with an airbrush, he produced striking, translucent works that often seem to glow and shimmer like the fiery industries they depict. In addition to the work for the Club, Henderson produced a few paintings that went directly to the local industries. In 1965, the Downtown Club moved and the Henderson paintings were put into storage. About 1985, Randall G. Lawrence, the first director of Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, acquired several of the works for the Sloss collection and, with Gail Andrews of the Birmingham Museum of Art and then Sloss curator Robert Casey, organized Sloss' first art exhibition, for which Birmingham Historical Society published Andrews' essay.

OTHER ARTISTS WHOSE WORK IS SHOWN IN THE EXHIBIT

RICHARD BLAUVELT COE (1904–1978)

WORK EXHIBITED: *No Nox* from the collection of Patrick Cather

A Selma native, Richard Coe first studied architecture at the University of Cincinnati prior to his art studies at the Grand Central School of Art in New York with George Elmer Browne and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He won a traveling scholarship for two years of European study. After bicycling about Europe, he came to Birmingham during the period 1934 to 1938. At this time, he served as the Alabama director for the Works Progress Administration art program, of which he was a staunch advocate, and painted the Woodlawn High School mural that surrounds the proscenium in the main auditorium. Primarily a painter, he later studied and taught in Colorado, Maryland, and upstate New York.

DELLA DRYER (1867-1951)

WORK EXHIBITED: *Landscape*, 1930s, from the collection of Patrick Cather

Della Dryer, who trained in New York with William Merritt Chase and Robert Henri and also studied abroad, was among amateur painters who studied with Montgomery painter and educator Kelly Fitzpatrick at The Dixie Art Colony, established in 1933, near Wetumpka, Alabama. Fitzpatrick's initiative offered superb educational opportunities for artists for whom few nearby opportunities were then available. Dryer instigated the founding of the Birmingham Art Club in 1908.

SARAH GREER (1879-1969)

WORK EXHIBITED: *Pour of Slag at Sloss Furnace*, n.d., from the collection of Patrick Cather

A native of Denver, Colorado, Sarah Greer came to Birmingham in 1923 and lived here for 46 years. Her obituary describes her as a "retired artist." Her brother Grady Greer also lived in Birmingham in 1969.

HANNAH ELLIOTT (1876-1956)

WORK EXHIBITED: *Floral*, 1930s, from the collection of Patrick Cather; *Historic Map of Alabama*, 1942, from the collection of the Birmingham Public Library

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Hannah Elliott studied with private art teachers in Vicksburg, Kansas City, and Memphis and at the Academie Colarossi in Paris. Best known for her hand-painted miniature portraits, Hannah Elliott exhibited these tiny gems recording the likenesses of the city's and the state's elite across the South, at the Pennsylvania Society of Miniature Painters, and the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Elliott began wearing her "uniform"—the classic black dress, hat and neck ribbon, and tennis shoes—in the early 1930s when she also began concentrating on landscapes. Through classes at her Five Points home and in private girls' schools, and her Saturday afternoon salons, she helped train new generations of artists and patrons.

**CARRIE L. HILL (1875-1957)**

WORK EXHIBITED: *Trussville Furnace* from the collection of Patrick Cather, *Off the Coast of Florida* acquired by the Birmingham Public Library for the future museum, and *Alabama Pines* and *Zinnias* from the collection of Julius Linn Jr.

Born in Vance, Alabama, Hill moved to Birmingham in 1891. She studied with Elliott Dangerfield in North Carolina, Arthur Friedlander on Martha's Vineyard, and George Elmer Browne in Provincetown and Europe. Her works were exhibited in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, The New York Art Students League, the 1928 Paris Salon, and throughout the southeast in shows of the Southern States Art League. She joined the Birmingham Art Club in 1908 and remained active throughout her life as a strong advocate for an art museum in Birmingham. A member of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, Hill was the only Alabama woman to receive WPA painting assignments, including the storybook mural for the children's reading room in the East Lake Library, still extant.

**JOHN RODERICK DEMPSTER MACKENZIE (1865-1941)**

WORK EXHIBITED: *Steel Mill Interior*, 1932, a pastel from the Collection of the Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark

Roderick MacKenzie, born in England, immigrated with his parents to Mobile, Alabama in 1872. Following the death of his mother, he lived at Mobile's Episcopal Church Home where teachers recognized his artistic abilities and provided scholarship funds for him to attend the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School, from 1884 to 1886. Subsequently, he studied in Paris and qualified for admission to the prestigious l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Following marriage, he and his wife moved to Calcutta, India, where the English Viceroy and Indian government commissioned him to record the official arrival of Edward VII as Emperor of India, a monumental painting that led to his acclaim as the best artist in Asia. Remaining in India for 14 years, MacKenzie painted also in Pakistan and Afghanistan, before returning to Paris in 1907 and then to London in 1908. As World War I approached, he returned to Mobile, founded an art school, and sought commissions.

Following the death of his wife in 1920, he joined the American Federation of Arts and was appointed to the Alabama Art Commission. Fascinated with the steel industry in Birmingham, he created 43 amazing pastels during 1921 and 1922. He primarily painted at night at the Tennessee Coal Iron and Railroad (TCI-US Steel) plants in Ensley and Fairfield. Working at night in the plant, MacKenzie used black paper and pastels that would not attract dirt and dust to capture the intense heat and flames of the smelting process. These remarkable works of art were exhibited in Birmingham, in New York, and then in 1925 at the Alabama section of the Southern States Exposition. During "Alabama Day" at the exposition at New York's Hotel Astor, MacKenzie, Helen Keller and others were inducted into the Alabama Hall of Fame. He created in 1932 a series of additional steel mill pastels and large lithographs. In 1937, he prepared additional pastels for a retrospective exhibition of 54 works at the Birmingham Public Library Gallery. MacKenzie subsequently was commissioned to paint the eight murals in the Alabama state capitol dome.

**ROSALIE PETTUS PRICE (1913-1986)**

WORK EXHIBITED: *Coke Ovens and Quarters at Sloss' North Birmingham Furnaces*, c. 1938, from the collection of the Birmingham Historical Society

Price, the artist, exhibited watercolors and oils regionally and nationally. She was also known as an art educator, teacher and lecturer and for her leading role in the establishment of the Birmingham Museum of Art in the early 1950s.



Two Girls and Two Umbrellas, Arthur Stewart (1938), Estate of Hannah Stewart, Courtesy Birmingham Museum of Art.

ARTHUR STEWART (1915-2001)

WORK EXHIBITED: *Two Pencil Sketches*, 1938, from the Estate of Hannah Elliott, courtesy the Birmingham Museum of Art

Arthur Walter Stewart Jr. was born in Marion, Alabama. He began painting at age 6.

Stewart received a degree from Marion Military Institute in 1935 and then continued studies at Auburn University, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Dixie Art Colony. After military service during World War II, travel in Europe and Mexico and a residency in California, Stewart moved to Birmingham in 1952. He painted portraits, florals, and scenic landscapes that hang today in more than 1,000 public and private collections worldwide. He presented over 35 one-man shows from New York to California and won over 30 national awards.

**WALTER H. SWETTMAN (1906-1994)**

WORK EXHIBITED: *Wood Block Print*, c. 1933, from the collection of Patrick Cather

Swettman grew up in the anthracite coal town of Hazelton, to the north of Philadelphia. A 1928 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he served as an architectural design instructor at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn) from 1930 to 1932.

