



Squire, Maud Hunt (1873-1955) and Ethel Mars (1876-1956)

by Ruth M. Pettis

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American artists and life partners Maud Hunt Squire and Ethel Mars forged distinguished careers in book illustration, painting, and woodblock printing. Émigrées to France, they frequented Gertrude Stein's salons and, during World War I, were among the Provincetown artists working in new methods of printmaking.

Maud Squire was born January 30, 1873 in Cincinnati. Her parents encouraged her artistic training, though both had died by the time she was a young woman. At the age of 21, she enrolled in the Cincinnati Art Academy and studied under Lewis Henry Meakin and Frank Duveneck. At the academy she met fellow student Ethel Mars, with whom she would live and travel for the rest of her life.

Mars, born in Springfield, Illinois on September 19, 1876, was the only child of a railroad employee and a homemaker. From 1892 to 1897, she studied illustration and drawing at the Cincinnati Art Academy.

Squire began her career while still a student, traveling to New York to meet with publishers and exhibiting her work. By 1900 she and Mars were living in New York City, traveling to Europe, and collaborating on illustrating children's books, such as Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* (1901). By 1906 they had settled in Paris together.

Paris at the turn of the twentieth century had become a magnet for American women with artistic aspirations. As described by artist Anne Goldthwaite, Squire and Mars were prim "Middle Western" girls when they arrived in Paris. As such, they were expected to frequent institutions like Mrs. Whitlow Reid's "wholesome" club for young women, but as it turned out Squire and Mars found Paris's bohemian life more alluring.

Within a few months of their residence in the city, Squire and Mars had adopted the radical (for the times) use of flamboyant hair coloring and garish makeup. Mars soon sported "flaming orange hair" and both apparently enjoyed the gossip they generated. Goldthwaite felt that these were largely rebellious gestures of outrageousness and attempts to gain attention. Certainly, the young women reveled in the social freedoms that Paris offered.

However, it was their artistic accomplishments rather than their outrageousness that garnered them repeated invitations to Gertrude Stein's salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, where they met such luminaries as Picasso and Matisse. The connections they made at the home of Stein and her companion Alice B. Toklas contributed to the serious development of their careers.

By this time Squire was selling her work both in Paris and the U.S. She had perfected her skills in color intaglio prints and chalk drawings, using imagery from quotidian life in Paris and Brittany. As a member of the Société Salon d'Automne and the Société des Dessinateurs et d'Humoristes, she juried as well as exhibited at art shows.

Mars at this time was working in vibrant woodcolor prints, using women's everyday activities as her subject

matter. Her style was plain and strong, often drawing from a Fauvist-inspired palette. She exhibited her work at Société Salon d'Automne several times between 1907 and 1913 and was elected to its membership, as well as to that of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts.

Of special note is the fact that Squire and Mars were the subject of Stein's whimsical word portrait "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" (Squire's nickname was Skeene), written between 1909 and 1911. With characteristic playfulness, Stein in this piece spoofs young ladies who come to Paris to "cultivate something." Stein's incessant reiteration of the word "gay" at a time when its coded meaning was not in mainstream use is interpreted today as an in-group double entendre.

The Japanese tradition of printmaking had become a popular medium for young artists, especially women. Compared to etching, which involved potentially hazardous acids, and lithography, which required access to industrial equipment, woodblock printing was well suited to studio work. Mars's critically acclaimed 1913 exhibit of prints at Mrs. Whitlow Reid's club for young women prompted other artists--including Margaret Patterson, Ada Gilmore, and Mildred McMillen--to seek her assistance. Gilmore and McMillen would later join the Provincetown printmakers group.

At the beginning of World War I, Squire and Mars returned to the U.S. and eventually relocated to Provincetown, Massachusetts. The quaint fishing community at the tip of Cape Cod, with its old-world ambience and affordable rentals, had by this time become an artists' colony, and the international reputations of Squire and Mars attracted other artists to the town.

Among the Provincetown artists were several--including Bror Nordfeldt, Blanche Lazzell, and Edna Boies Hopkins--who had been experimenting with techniques to reduce the number of steps involved in traditional Japanese woodblock printing. Together they innovated the technique of using a single block for several impressions, separating the color fields by grooves that became white outlines in the finished image. The resulting "Provincetown Print" or "White-Line Woodcut" is an American amalgamation of Japanese technique and European aesthetics, incorporating influences from Cubism, Fauvism, and Abstract Impressionism.

Squire's work in this medium is characterized by vibrant colors, graceful control of line and shape, and subtle but effective intimations of texture. Unlike the other "Provincetown printers," she retained the use of a "key block" (master image) and did not necessarily rely on the white line technique they had developed for separating color fields.

In the 1920s Squire and Mars returned to Europe, eventually settling in Vence on the French Riviera. There Squire and Mars were active in an artists' community that included Marsden Hartley and Reginald Marsh. The couple continued to collaborate on children's book illustration and each again took up painting and drawing. Mars, who concentrated on modernist painting and gouache drawing, exhibited in Paris during the 1920s. Squire concentrated on large-scale watercolors of outdoor public scenes. The couple continued working until about 1930.

During World War II, Squire and Mars, then in their sixties, went into hiding near Grenoble. After the war, they returned to their home, La Farigoule, in Vence. Squire died in 1955; Mars in 1956. The two women are buried together in Vence.

Squire's work can be seen at the Herron Art Institute (Indianapolis), South Kensington Museum (London), the Corcoran Gallery (Washington, D. C.), and online from the Mary Ryan Gallery (New York) and the Smithsonian Museum. Mars's work can be seen online from the Smithsonian Museum, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Mary Ryan Gallery (New York).

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About the Author

Ruth M. Pettis is the Oral History Project manager for the Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project in Seattle and editor of *Mosaic 1: Life Stories*, a collection of stories from the project's oral history collection. She has contributed articles and fiction to a number of gay and women's publications. She has an A.B. in anthropology from Indiana University and an M.L.S. from Simmons College in Boston.

Maud Hunt Squire (January 30, 1873 – October 25, 1954) was an American painter and printmaker. She had a lifelong relationship with artist Ethel Mars, with whom she traveled and lived in the United States and France. Maud Hunt Squire. Maud Hunt Squire, 1920. Born. January 30, 1873. Died. October 25, 1954 (aged 81).