

Art & Artists in Exhibition: Vancouver 1890 - 1950

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Mary Riter Hamilton (m. Alexander H. Hamilton)

1873 - April 5 1954

Island Arts and Crafts Society

Mary Riter Hamilton was born Mary Riter in Teeswater, Bruce County, Ontario in 1873. She married Alex Hamilton at age 18, but she was widowed five years later. She travelled to Europe to study art, and began her studies in Berlin in 1896. She spent a year and a half in Berlin, then travelled to France, Italy, Spain, and Holland. She painted and exhibited in Paris for some years before returning to Canada first for a year in 1906. She was a pupil of Amelie Blance, Mercon, Gervais, George Reid, and Wyly Grier, Toronto. She returned to paint and live in France again before moving back to Canada around 1912, living first in Eastern Canada and then in Victoria.

In 1912 Hamilton was living in Winnipeg, and that year exhibited nine paintings with the [Art Association of Montreal](#) in the spring exhibition.

By this time Hamilton was a renowned Canadian artist, having had numerous paintings hung in European salons starting in 1905. The outbreak of World War One and the subsequent devastation of her beloved French countryside had a major effect on Hamilton's life. She was unable to return to France during the war, and traveled there as soon as she could after it ended. In perhaps one of the most amazing stories of artistic and human willpower in Canadian art history, Hamilton stayed there for the next three years - amidst the devastation, pestilence, gangs of looters and marauders, rotting corpses, unexploded ordinance, barbed wire, flooded trenches and shellholes - and painted the smashed countryside of France as it began to recover from the destruction.

Hamilton subsequently donated 219 of those paintings to the National Archives as a permanent record of what she'd seen, and what the armies had done to each other and to the land around them. Hamilton exhibited her work at the San Francisco World's Fair in 1913-14.

In 1920 the first Vancouver exhibition of her battlefield work was held in the Navy League Hall, consisting of pictures commissioned as illustrations by the *Gold Stripe* magazine. Hamilton was still in France, and was having difficulty raising enough money to return to Canada with all her artwork. Fund-raising efforts by friends at home eventually helped her travel home in 1926.

In 1929 the [Art, Historical and Scientific Association](#) of Vancouver was proud to announce that the City Art Gallery had purchased their first "salon" painting - Hamilton's, "Les Pauvres". The Society published an article by Mrs. W. Garland Foster titled "["Les Pauvres" and Its Artist](#)" in the June 1929 issue of *Museum and Art Notes*. The article includes a brief history of the Society's collection and an "incomplete" list of pictures sold by Hamilton, and their owners at that time.

She received the Palmes Academique, Paris 1922, and a Gold medal in the British Section, Exposition Internationale et Industrielle Moderne, Paris, 1924-25. She exhibited one painting in the 1930 [Spring Exhibition](#) of the [B.C. Society of Fine Arts](#), a portrait of the Lieutenant-Governor Patterson in pastel.

She had a solo exhibition at the [Vancouver Art Gallery](#) in 1938, with thirty works on display, including watercolours, drawings, and oil paintings. She had a solo retrospective exhibition from January 18 to February 6, 1949, with eighteen works on display.

Hamilton died at Essondale, B.C. in 1954, at the age of 84.

Also, per card file at [Vancouver Art Gallery](#) Library:

[Island Arts and Crafts Society](#): 1913 - 1917.

Exhibitions

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

| DATE | EXHIBITION | LOCATION |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1938 Aug. 9 - 17 | Solo show | Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1949 Jan. 18 - Feb. 6 | Solo show | Vancouver Art Gallery |

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

| DATE | EXHIBITION | ARTWORK |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| 1929 May 18 - June 8 | BCSFA 21st Annual Exhibition | The Terrace, Victoria Gardens Sunlight, Victoria Garden Olympics Lake Louise |
| 1929 Nov. 16 - 30 | BCSFA Winter Exhibition | The Poet The Monk A Study in Yellow |
| 1930 May 31 - June 14 | BCSFA Spring Exhibition | Portrait of Lt.-Gov. Patterson |
| 1930 Aug. 6 - 16 | VanExh Oil Paintings & Water-colours | Bernard McEvoy, Esq. The First Gift Maternity |
| 1932 May - July | VAG All Canadian Exhibition | Maternity |
| 1932 Oct. 5 - 30 | VAG 1st Annual B.C. Artists | Reflections |
| 1933 Sept. 22 - Oct. 15 | VAG 2nd Annual B.C. Artists | Miss Isabel Cousier |

References - BIBLIOGRAPHY

Refer to [BIBLIO](#).

References - GROUP EXHIBITIONS

ISLAND ARTS & CRAFTS CLUB 5th ANNUAL EXHIBITION (refer to [IACS14](#))

100 YEARS OF B.C. ART (refer to [VAG58](#))

BRITISH COLUMBIA WOMEN ARTISTS 1885-1985 (refer to [AGGV85](#))

References - GENERAL

THE GOLD STRIPE - VOLUME TWO

1919, May. Published by the Amputation Club of B.C., Vancouver
220 pages (including text, advertisements and photographs)
5 illustrations by Hamilton and a [biographical article](#).

THE GOLD STRIPE - VOLUME THREE

1919. Published by the Amputation Club of B.C., Vancouver
Colour and black & white illustrations of Hamilton's work.

"LES PAUVRES" AND ITS ARTIST

1929, June; by Mrs. W. Garland Foster
Museum and Art Notes, published by the [Art, Historical, and Scientific Association of Vancouver](#).

WHO'S WHO IN NORTHWEST ART edited by Marion Brymner Appleton

"A Directory of Persons in the Pacific Northwest Working in the Media of Painting, Sculpture, Graphic Arts, and Handicrafts".

1941; published by Frank McCaffrey, Seattle Washington.
Short reference to Hamilton.

ISLAND ARTS AND CRAFTS SOCIETY - LIST OF EXHIBITORS

MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS formerly Art Association of Montreal Spring Exhibitions 1880 - 1970

1988, Evelyn de R. McMann, University of Toronto Press, ISBN 0-8020-2650-8
418 pages; 4 pages of *works cited* referenced to over 3,000 Canadian artists
An excellent finding aid for information on Canadian artists.

HAMILTON, MARY RITER

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists, Volume 2, G - Jackson, 3rd Ed. 1989
Colin S. Macdonald, Canadian Paperbacks. ISBN 0-919554-04-0

BY A LADY, CELEBRATING THREE CENTURIES OF ART BY CANADIAN WOMEN by Maria Tippett

1992, Viking, ISBN 0-670-84458-6
226 pages, illustrated in colour and b&w, list of illustrations, index
Biographical information on Hamilton, work illustrated pages 47 and 59

BIOGRAPHICAL INDEX OF ARTISTS IN CANADA

2003, Evelyn de R. McMann, University of Toronto Press, ISBN 0-8020-2790-3
250 pages; 9 pages of *works cited* referenced to 8,800 artists
6 references cited for Hamilton including *MM* and *WWNA* above, but not Macdonald.

TAMING THE FRONTIER: ART & WOMEN IN THE CANADIAN WEST 1880 - 1920

July 2005; by Virginia G. Berry, copyright Margaret Berry and Julie Berry Melynk.
188 pages softcover; illustrated, footnotes, bibliography, index
Centered on Winnipeg, but has early references to Hamilton.

"A WOMAN'S PLACE", edited by K.A. Finlay

Art and the Role of Women in the Cultural Formation of Victoria, B.C. 1850s-1920s
2006; ISBN 1-55058-288-7; 130 pages, softcover, illust. in colour and black and white
Published by Maltwood Museum and Gallery, University of Victoria
Includes information on numerous early B.C. women artists, including **Hamilton**

INDEPENDENT SPIRIT - EARLY CANADIAN WOMEN ARTISTS by A.K. Prakash

2008; ISBN 978-1-55407-417-4; hardcover, 410 pages
Published by Firefly Books, Richmond Hills ON. Extensively illustrated
Includes biographies, index of early Canadian women artists, list of illustrations, index
Includes information and works illustrated for [Emily Carr](#), [Sophie Pemberton](#), **Mary Riter Hamilton**.

Clippings

"Mary Riter Hamilton comes out well in her picture "Les Sacrifices" - a girl with geese who is apparently saddened by the thought of their prospective fate. In harmonious tone and drawing this picture attains a large measure of success."

From "[Local Work is on View](#)" by [Bernard McEvoy](#)
Vancouver Daily Province, October 2 1919

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