

Vintage San Francisco

Christine Miller High: Watercolors

October 1, 2020 – January 15, 2021

Avenue 12 Gallery is proud to present: ***Vintage San Francisco***
Christine Miller High: Watercolors

Christine Miller High (1911-2010) was a fourth-generation San Franciscan who painted San Francisco street scenes in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The artist lived most of her long life in Marin County and San Francisco. She began her art education at Miss Burke's School, and continued at the Fashion Art School, in the Scottish Rite Temple, also in San Francisco, with the Baroness Maria von Ridenstein (1884-1970), who strenuously advocated realism to her students. High's work seems close in spirit to the landscape tradition of the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age or the Ashcan School of American painting a century ago or the Expressionist landscapes of the Depression. Her paintings are shaped by reality and emotion inspired by the motif rather than pre-existent symbolism or pictorial formulas.

High's career is outlined in Edan M. Hughes' monumental 1985 reference work, *Artists in California, 1786-1940*. Hughes cites 1910, just before High's birth, as the date when California women artists, formerly confined to decorative paintings, began to take their work seriously and compete with men. High, whose *plein-air* watercolors of local scenes were a far cry from delicate scenes of domestic tranquility, exhibited locally, joined the Society of Western Artists, and was scheduled for a 1941 one-woman show at the de Young Museum, a signal honor for an artist not quite thirty, but one which sadly never took place because of the onset of the war. But, as the saying goes, she persisted.

The seventy watercolors on paper that comprise *Vintage San Francisco* are, despite their years, surprisingly fresh-looking; they could have been painted yesterday, though High's subdued palette and fidelity to reality link her work to her formative years. There are four thematic groups:

- **Icons**, like the Golden Gate Bridge, Bay Bridge, Japanese Tea Garden, Lombard Street, and North Beach.
- **Neighborhoods**: the Octagon House, Telegraph Hill, Sea Cliff, the Produce Market, Temple Emanu-El
- **Views**: Lafayette Park, Inspiration Point, the Marina and Angel Island
- **Waterfront**: Fisherman's Wharf, Sausalito Houseboats, and the Embarcadero.

The works are undated, somewhat like traditional Asian artists, who, because of their cyclical notion of time, did not date their works in Western linear time. For High, working in series may never have been a concern; she painted what she encountered and wished to commemorate by participating in it sympathetically. The work's virtues, as documents of time and place, of nature seen through the artist's temperament, endure.

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Christine Miller High ***Washington Street Firehouse***
circa 1940s watercolor on paper 15" x 22"



Christine Miller High ***Chimneys***
circa 1940s watercolor on paper 15" x 22"