

McLane, Myrtle Jean

## Mother and Child – Evening

Judy Sullivan – May 2010

This oil painting on panel was created in 1907 by Myrtle Jean McLane, an American artist born in Chicago in 1878. She died in Canaan, Connecticut in 1964. She first studied with John Vanderpoel at the Art Institute of Chicago. Next, she was a student of Frank Duveneck in Cincinnati, Ohio. Finally, she moved to New York to study with William Merritt Chase. Chase was the first to purchase a painting of her early works.

McLane became noted for her portraits of women and children. In 1931, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her portrait of actor William Gillette hangs at the Academy.

McLane and her husband, artist John C. Johansen, helped found the National Foundation of Portrait Painters in 1912. In that same year McLane was invited to paint the Allied Leaders of World War I. McLane provided the only female subject, Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. This painting now hangs in the National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. Also in 1912, McLane was elected associate member of the National Academy of Design and a full academician in 1926.

Public Collections: Museum of Art, Toledo; Art Institute of Chicago; San Antonio Museum, Texas; Syracuse Art Museum, New York; National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. .

Jean McLane's home in Chicago furnished her with a variety of rich resources to stimulate her talents. In her mid-teens, the World's Columbian Exposition and its Woman's Building, featured murals by Mary Cassatt and Mary Fairchild MacMonnies. At the Art Institute, impressionism was being taught in the school, and would remain the basis of her styles.

Nearly all of the painters of their era made portraits, which provided their livelihood. McLane combined her role of wife, mother, and artist quite successfully. She is quoted as saying she wished for 3 lives to devote to children: "one in which to supply their every need, one in which to be entirely free to paint them, and one just to bask in the miracle of them!"

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While the KIA Library had no file on this painting, and the research I was able to find did not specifically speak about this particular work, there are references to McLane's work in general in some of the literature I did find. The following are comments made about McLane's work:

"Looking at pictures by Jean McLane makes people feel good. All the intellectual elements abound to transport the connoisseur: flawless draftsmanship, vibrant colors, and ingenious composition. Beyond that, however, goes the exuberance she brings to painting her subject matter..... So genuine is her pleasure that she convinces (observers) that it can be beautiful and new. "

"Duveneck's dutiful disciple adopted the dramatic realism derived from his Munich training. Reminiscent also of the illustrations of N.C. Wyeth, these pictures almost tell a story."

"By necessity her portraits could not wander too far a field, yet her passion to arrange figures into decorative compositions reached dizzying heights in her personal painting. From her early genre work she progressed to pure beauty. "

## Aesthetic Scanning

*In reviewing the art elements, the artist uses secondary and tertiary colors in browns and blue-greens, and one primary color of low intensity yellow to denote the evening and perhaps the shade cast by a tree branch. The lines are light, short, mostly vertical, and curved for the most part. The shapes are rounded, oval, and organic overall in this piece. The texture implied in the painting is smooth and soft as one observes the skin, the fabric of the clothes, and the soft blue sky in the background (negative space).*

In looking at the design principles, the painting may be slightly asymmetrical but has a feeling of stability. The emphasis in the piece is on the baby, and then the mother, as these figures fill the foreground (positive space). The faces are emphasized using color and shading, and the body of the child with the movement in the hand also draws the viewer's eye to that area of the painting first. There is repetition in the use of color, line, shape, and texture for the most part. There is a stillness and calm feeling to the piece with only the movement of the child's hand. The baby's features seem to be given greater proportion in the foreground, again to give emphasis. Unity is achieved with the blending of color, and the repetition of shapes and line create a harmony and tranquility.

### Questions to be used with Groups:

What do you see when you look at this painting?

What else might the artist be telling us with this painting?

How does this work make you feel?

What colors and textures do you see?

How important are details and being realistic to this artist?

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