

BOZNAŃSKA – A GENIUS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PORTRAIT

There were numerous cultural events in Poland celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birthday of **Olga Boznańska**, including exhibitions in Cracow and Warsaw sponsored by the President of Poland and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. They exhibited hundreds of paintings of the sensitive Polish artist often named as one of the most talented Modernist painters in Europe.

Boznańska was born on April 15, 1865, in Cracow, the daughter of Adam Nowina Boznański, a railroad engineer, and Eugenia née Mondan, a French citizen. It was Olga's mother who inspired her to draw in childhood.

She continued her artistic education through private lessons and then participated in painting classes at the Adrian Baraniecki School for Women (This was an alternative artistic education for women who were not accepted as students at the Jagiellonian University prior to 1894).

From 1886 to 1890, Boznańska studied at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. She developed her skills by copying paintings of famous Old Masters. She was also active in a group of Polish artists staying in Munich which included Waclaw Szymanowski, Józef Brandt, and Alfred Wieruszkowski. She even opened her own art studio. Her paintings were presented at exhibitions in Munich, Berlin, Vienna, and Warsaw.

In 1892, Olga's mother died. To support herself financially, Boznańska became a full-time teacher and a manager at the Theodor Hummel Painting School. The Berlin journal *Bazaar* named her as one of the 12 leading female painters in Europe.

In 1894, she was awarded prizes for her portraits of Austrian Archduke Karl Ludwig in Vienna, and two years later for her portrait *Miss Marty Breme* she received recognition in London. After those successes, in 1896, she decided to move to Paris where she established her studio. That same year, the jury of Societe des Beaux-Arts in Paris accepted her paintings for exhibition.



Two Girls (1906)

Boznańska was recognized mostly as a portrait painter, but she also expressed her artistic talents in landscapes and still life compositions. In her early Paris period, she was influenced by the artwork of James Whistler and Wilhelm Leibl. But soon, she developed her own artistic style.

Broad brush strokes were characteristic in her portraits, used for defining blurry and misty backgrounds, and for rich facial details of the models she used “tiny brush strokes which seem almost to vibrate in skin tones.” Her works were exhibited internationally with the most famous French Impressionists, but she never considered herself as an Impressionist, specializing in psychological portraits, working in a studio, not outdoors, using

colors and light to define a portrayed personality instead of an “impression of light and mood.”

In 1905, Boznańska was awarded a gold medal at the international exhibition in Munich. Her works were exhibited in galleries in Munich, Berlin, Prague, London, Vienna, Amsterdam, and Venice. They were purchased by the French government for the national collection, and by kings and nobles.

But, in her private life, Boznańska was alone and often fighting with psychological issues. Her longtime relationship with her fiancé a Polish painter Józef Czajkowski was broken; her sister became psychologically unstable, and in 1906 her father died. Despite her artistic success, her main financial support was rental income from inherited real estate in Cracow.

It is worth remembering that Boznańska represented France with famous impressionists Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir at an exhibition in Pittsburgh, PA. By 1930, the popularity of Boznańska’s paintings declined. She even had trouble finding money to pay rent for her apartment. Artists from Poland tried to help her financially organizing fund raisers and asking the government and wealthy Poles for support.

In 1939, Boznańska won the Grand Prix at the Paris Expo, but her health deteriorated rapidly. Boznańska died on October 26, 1940, in Paris. She left over 1200 paintings. Many of her works were



Portrait of a Woman (1888)

posthumously displayed, according to the artist’s last will, and sent to a museum in Cracow. It is strange that for a long time Boznańska’s artistic works were more recognized internationally than in Poland.

An interesting online gallery of her work can be found at: www.artyzm.com/e_artysta.php?id=233



Self-Portrait (1893)



Girl with Chrysanthemums (1894)



Portrait of the Painter Antoni Kamiński (1899)