

## Mary Hackett tapes WOMR interview

Jay Critchley : Today our special guest is Mary Hackett, more lovingly known as Bubs to her friends. Mary has been a resident of Ptwon for 54 plus years. She's a jovial opinionated and self-taught painter, whose work reflects her surroundings and her intimate personal world. She is often referred to as a primitive painter. Her work recently featured in a retrospective at the Art Ass two years ago. She's been painting for 50 , or close to 60 years and was essentially unrecognised, although she did have a show earlier in the 70s in ptown, it was the show at the Art Ass tha brought alot of the attention and acclaim for her work. She has lived on Nickerson for 40 years. Welcome Mary

MH Thank you

JC. BEfore I met you I heard that you were a very interesting and entertaining person, but htat you had a critical feelings towards Ptown. I understand that you've become a born-again Provincetown lover. What's that about?

MH that's a good way of putting it. Well when I first came here, in 1928, when I first saw this place, i thought ahh, this is the most wonderful palce, this is where I want to live. and then we did come here, after that ,a dn lived here in the winter and summers and it was only in the last twenty years or so when it got so terribly overcrowded that I began to get this hate on it . This summer has been very very good for me. It has made a big difference in my feelings about Ptwon.

J. What happened this summer

M. Everything. everyting happened this summer. It's really been almost too much. i have this sort of feeling as If Im on my way out so everything is,

J. This is your swan song?

M. Yeah, its my going out party. Eveyrhting has worked out so terribly well. Especially this summer the show at Edwige, that susan Baker had a lot to do wiht. The two susams, That was a reallly lovely show! I didn't know anywhting about it until 2 Or 3 days ahead of it. I;d forgotten they had asked me to do a show in August. It was all veyr spontaneous! Susan B. chose the paintings that were differet than the ones that had been shown before.

J. I understand she found a couple of paintings that had to do with dogs.

M. Well no, not dogs

J .That one with the dog grave..

M. WELL the one called Standing in my own way. the two me's standing in

front of the other, I had this complex about dogs, about getting overly fond of dogs, also, trying to get over... well this figure, this one big figure of myself, standing in the way of the small, sort of pathetic one, and the pathetic one is being stopped on the way up this hill, by the big formidable one, and on the side of the road is this gravestone, that says Dog Died. And also, there's this empty whiskey bottle and cigarettes sticking out, all of these things that had been problems for me. And this big person who was interfering. Yes, Susan found that one. I just thought it was a joke, and never paid too much attention to it.

J. So she'd pick out some paintings you really hadn't shown publicly before.

M. Yeah, quite a few. and ones that I wouldn't have....well it's one of those mysterious things that happen in life, you don't really know why they happen, that these pictures needed to be shown. but Susan was the one that discovered them. I've had a lot of good things happen through Susan, she made me aware of Flannery O'Connor. The whole atmosphere of that place, the Edwige. the whole thing was very gay, and somebody brought me a balloon in the shape of a porpoise...and I invited all sorts of mixed up people. ...all kinds of people that wouldn't ordinarily come to an art show, like my plumber, Frank Herst and his wife, and my two priests from St. Peters, and it was very delightful and the porpoise hanging over everything. The paintings were very, they look well in that place. Edwige has an atmosphere of young people

There's been a whole lot of other things this summer. I changed my attitude. After all you can change your attitude, well I don't know if I consciously did it or not. just something happened to make it different. I began to see, to stop being so gloomy. One thing I changed is always complaining about that downtown, about how terrible it is, when you go down to that "meat rack" whatever they call it. So I started walking down there and sitting on the meat rack and bring a book and go to the bakery store, and sit there and watch the people go by...it's just fantastic down there! It's just great. a friend of mine in Wellfleet said that there was a very sort of somber man that would come and stay with them, and he would be all dressed up in city clothes and everyday he would come in and sit on that bench and watch the people go by and all of a sudden, I thought this is a great place!. you don't have to go to a show....there's a holy show going on right in front of your. people skating by, some of them you know, most of them you don't.

J. Everyone's looking at everyone else thinking they are strange.

M. Take a book and then that Bojo, or hojo or whatever it is, you could go

across there and get something to eat.

J. Mojo....laughs

M. Mojo.

J.....So you actually started hanging out on the meat rack this summer!!

M well I didn't do it as much as I would have liked to, but I really like it.

J. I discovered it a few years ago too, and it really was fun.

M. I mean there a lot of things like that in this town that are really funny, instead of always crappings about the corrupt politicians and so on, and how terrible town is, ....all of a sudden I found that its a funny place, it[s a lively place, its very cosmopolitan, you stay here and everybody that you ve ever known comes back, sometimes too much so. That's one things that's really bad. I learned some time ago, I went ot a psychoanalyst for a number of years, aand I said to him I don't know what to do about town, there's always these people who are coming and wanting to stay, my friends. and my childrens' friends and total strangers come and want to stay. and I used to be intimidated, il woul'ndt know how to get rid of them...I used to say excuses, there are no beds, and well, never mind, we;llk sleep on the floor. and he said, the thing to do, is just say no.. and never explain.. and made me write on a pad, the word no. and just hand it to the person. no, no, no.

J. and you did that..

M. I did, fiannalyy this summer, I have a blind friend who moved to Seattle and she was coming back to the east in august. I wrote and said Im not going to be able to see you if you come to town in august. and she was very persistent. and she got aptly on the cape and I said Im sorry I told you I coulndt see you and I meant it. and people said, oh couldnt you have her for a couple of days, a blind person? well blind people can be very, very, because of the fact that they're blind, they think that everybody owes them....I don't know why Im saying this about poor..I shouldnot be talking about her.... But I tell it only to say that you have to in this town, you have to be really tough...

J. So did she ever get in the door?

M. No, she didn't, I had it all mapped out that if seh came down here and somebody dropped her off in the car, I would say sorry, but I just....couldnt do it. My analyst said, he saw her a couple of times and he didn't want her to come back....because he said it was too distressing... Why am I going on about Marsha, probably because I have a guilty conscious....but I really don't. But it's a real, real trial to know what to do about people, that suddenly appear, and you just have to be tough about it. My daughter in law's mother is always trying to get down here. I managed to avoid that by

just never inviting her. But then she'd say things like can you get me a room at the Ptown inn, and I knew she could ill afford it. You just have to be brutally tough. and that's one thing I really....

J. you did that this summer...

M. WELL i did that, but also for the first time I really enjoyed my family when they came this summer. Ususally I get into a terrible state when my son, daughter in law, it's not that I don't care about htem, but I get too nervouse when they stay out until about 4 in themorning, I get really awfully difficult and horrible. This time it was just great having them. I found out the thing to do ....I was more relaxed, and so I acutally enjoyed them..

J. you mentioned earlier that you felt like this was your goign out show  
M well i hae a lot of things wrong with me, I had this dizzy way of walking, and other things, trouble with the eyes and everything. I had made up my mind not to come back from Florida, becuase I felt like I cou'dnt cope with the house, and all those things. THerefore I think there's a possibility, that possibley I won't ever come back when I leave inNovember.

J. you do have that feeling?

M. Oh yea, defintlyey

J Why is that"

M./ I just feel that the handwriting is on the wall. all of this is preparation for it, all these nice things that have been happending for me. My relationships with people are good now, and you know you really can be tough with people, its better to be tough than to be resentful. Marsha and I will be on perfectly good terms...she's a young woman in her thirties. She's not going to hold it against me. I think people do too many things that they don't want to do, that they feel like they should. I should do this, I should do that. That's a whole lot of nonsense. You get yourself into....I think people should do spontaneous type things. If you feel like doing something, but you think I have to have somebody to dinner because they invited me, this is a whole lot of nonsense, and I hae to do blah, blah, blah.

J. Have you always lived your life like that?

M. I think I feel a sort of a new freedom. This is why I feel as though Im going out into another dimension. Tha's why I have to do something different about my painting, too.

J. Wha'ts that?

M. I feel as though Im winding up things and going out with a bang in Prtown and maybe not coming back. and tha't will be good, and when I go

down to Florida, I almost feel as I am in the process of moving down there year round. I have this room that I keep all year. and I don't want anything to do with Ptown in that room down there. and last year I bought a painting, it was done by a priest, it was a watercolor of NYC. which was where I was born and really is my native place, and I have that one painting, a watercolor on the wall. It's a down town, Bowery of NY. I really like this painting. and I don't want anything from Ptown there. now I can't explain that, why.

J. You never did (want anything from Ptown there)?

M. Well this is just last year, when I went down there, I decided. I'm already partly moved from Ptown.

J. Do you paint down there?

M. Well I live in this extraordinary enormous, great big hotel, probably the largest wooden hotel in the world, it was started by John D. Rockefeller, it has these miles of porches, you look out over a wonderful river, and the sunset every night. I manage to do a lot more, I live a much more organized life. I haven't been really totally able to adjust to Ptown. I'm much more adjusted down there, except that the people in the hotel are very...that's a great... I don't have congenial people in the hotel, and so I miss my friends. The people are all sort of ....you know, you get spoiled from living here.

J. In what way?

M. Well these people are all very ancient, they're all about 90 years old. And I'm not much younger, but not very interesting. I don't find much in common with the people, therefore I have to live very much my own life, so I do a lot of reading down there. For some reason I find it very difficult to read in Provincetown. but the minute I get down there I immediately start reading and I did a lot of drawing and I didn't do any painting last year at all, but I did do some.... I don't know, I'm in a state of flux about the painting. I feel as though I'm about to begin an entirely new life. It might be daft, or it might be an entirely new life.

J. And it may not include painting, is that what you mean?

M. Uh...I think it's exciting, I feel like I have to wind up the Ptown thing, then I can be myself somewhere else. I don't know why I'm saying this, it's off the top .....

J. and Maybe not paint?

M. Well I'm not thinking about that, I'm just looking forward to something new happening. I feel as though I've done everything about Ptown, that that is sort of a closed book, and that I haven't done what it is I'm supposed to do yet in this world yet, and I need to get away from here because this is a

demoralizing atmosphere. But I have to get everything sort of wound up.  
J. Have you felt that way before portions of your life, where you felt like you wanted to make a major change?

M. Well it's becoming a gradual.....Im talking very much off the top of my head right now, and I really didn't know I was going to say anything like this, I really didn't even know I particularly felt this way. but I find you very easy to talk to and therefore, as we've been talking quite a lot previously, this has come out of that. You asked the question about the going out party. and I have that feeling, maybe Ill be back for ten years, maybe Ill end my days in ptown, its just a sort of a feeling.

J Its a much a state of mind as a place.

M. Well also , it's the state of my health, which is really bad. Therefore soemting tha seems bad turns out to be soemthing better. if my health was perfectly well, Id be bicycling around town the way I always have of course I went swimming evryday this summer. but I don't know how long Ill be able to do that. therefore, I have this feeling ther's somethign else I that I have to do in this life.

J. Is that exciting, how do dyou feel

M No, I feel very excited, this is great, but i hae to tie it all up neatly.

J you used the word demoralizing when you said Ptown...

M. It is, I find it very hard to get anything accomplished. i sleep an awful lot and I cant work.

J are there too many distractions

M. I don't know what it is that makes it difficult to feel completely at ease in this place. Well didn't I say some very nice things about Ptown to start with? laughs.. we started out that way, now we're coming down to the nitty gritty.

J. Have you always felt that way at bout ptown?

M. I've always had to get away from here in the summer. I mean sometimes in the middle of the night Ill get up and just leave., go to Boston. i used to have a place in Boston to go to, for twenty years. or maybe just up the Cape, when we were really hard up, and really could ill afford it, all of a sudden I'd have to go, usually to New Bedford and around that region.

J I don't think there are too many people for Ptwon who would want to visit New Bedford for a vacation.

M. Oh, yeah, New Bedford was great, cause ther were no tourists there, in Fairhaven, the minute lcould get away from PTwon, i would have remarkable recuperative faculties. The minute lget away form here. I dont' mean to say things about Ptwon, but it's true, the minute I could get

away from here, it was like the weight of the world would fall away from my shoulders. Then I could read, I could paint.

J. And you used to do paintings right out of your car.

M. Always I've used the car to paint from, I had to, because I have to sit on top of what I'm doing, and therefore I use the car..

J. and some of your paintings, you actually see the car in the painting.

M. Well in a couple of them, I mean you can't do that all the time, ....

J. I thought it was interesting to document the way you've worked..

M. One time, when I was in Washington, one painting I did was out in the front of the white house and a lot of people would come and bother me, while I was working, it was very difficult, but then I stopped being disagreeable when they would come up and ask me things, and tell them that anybody can paint if you want to, that I just took it up in my twenties, that I didn't do anything as a child, I think one of the explanations of my paintings is, that I never did anything at all as a child, nothing, and so when I did start to draw, in my twenties, it was like a child starting to draw, Childrens drawings are always good, until they get involved with older people that contaminate their influence.

J. This is part one of two part series, the next one will held two weeks.

Art Focus. hosted by Jay C.

## Part 2

J. Telling someone who was asking you paint that anybody could paint

M. Well anybody can draw at least, I think you have to start out by drawing. that was my method, I didn't know that I could. the first things I ever did was in Washington an old canal, by the B and O railroad, the canal, I thought I wanted to write in those days, I went off with a notebook to write and I wasn't getting anywhere with the writing, and I just happened to notice this tree that had fallen over the canal, and I started to draw it, and it was very mysterious, you know I had n't done anything as a child to draw, the way kids usually do,

J. No one ever said to you that you were an artist,

M./ Oh know, I was the worst one in the drawing class, I dreaded that, I was the worst one! My sister was the artist. I thought it would be wonderful to be an artist. but I attempted to draw just a line drawing of this tree that had fallen over the canal. That started me off. I have that notebook that has those first drawings, just simple line drawings. And the minute I saw that I could do that, I was very, very excited, it was just marvelous! Just anything,, I would draw anything, it was mainly interiors, I

had two small children at the time, and I could see that it was good, I recognized myself that these were good. It was extremely exciting. I was about 23 or 24. I didn't do anything but draw for 3 or 4 years, I was afraid of using any kind of color, I didn't want to, I didn't need it. I was just happy drawing. Just everything and anything. I've got some of those early drawings, I have slides of them too. That was really my method, to just draw.

J. And you didn't have any classes or anything

M. Oh, no, that would be ruinous. That would spoil everything. That would be totally ruinous for me. I think so many people have been spoiled. Of course if you're going to be a professional artist, I imagine you need some kind of background of studying, but I would have been lost. I can't... my palette is a total mess, I just arrange the colors in any old way, you're supposed to do it in a certain way. I mean if somebody told me I had to do anything, I couldn't do it at all, as far as the painting. That's one time that I really just can't be told.

J. So you feel fortunate you weren't ruined.

M. Well I wouldn't have done anything, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere.

J. Do you think that happens to many artists?

M. I don't know, I think most artists think if they have talent, they think they should study, and they go to the art league or something;

J. You didn't think of that?

M. Well I wasn't in the position to do it. I didn't take myself seriously. I just thought this was fun. I didn't think of myself as being an artist at all. It was years before I even said that I was an artist. I remember saying to John Dos Passos, who was a friend of ours, he was very systematic about working, I mean nothing interfered with that. He worked say from nine to twelve everyday, holidays included, and then he'd have the rest of the day free. I asked him whether he got any pleasure out of his writing, and he looked at me askance, and he said "Pleasure! I've long since gotten out of the amateur stage." and you don't have pleasure unless you're an amateur, I mean I got that message, and he said, no, it had gotten increasingly difficult, and you never were satisfied with what you'd done, and also Otto? Knaths told me the same thing about painting. He used to walk by my house. I asked him whether he didn't get blocked. He used to also work very regularly. And he said, oh course I get blocked. I'm blocked half the time but that doesn't stop me from working every day. Well I never worked in that way. I had long periods when I couldn't work at all. And ordinarily I can only work if I'm in a good mood. Sometimes I've worked out of a very



bad mood, and used the painting, I had to do something to get all of this feeling out and I put it into the painting you know I showed that one of the New Bedford church. But ordinarily especially with my early paintings, it was all very happy.

J. Have you had trouble in terms of people thinking of you as an amateur.

M. Very few people really respond to my work at all. They still don't. They just don't think that it's anything but an amateurish effort. The people that like my work, like it a lot, but they are very few and far between. Very often my paintings has been rejected ... they used to have a show in the public garden in Boston and I was rejected every single time for that. Paintings now that people think quite a lot of.

J. So your paintings really come from different place than a lot of other painters.

M. Well I had to do it, because I was really not too good as a housewife, I didn't care too much for that scene. This was, I could get away. When people say that they don't have time or they can't. that's ridiculous. If you really want to do something, you find a way of doing it. I never had the studio until long, long after my children had grown up. but I was constantly painting you know you find the time. it's no excuse to say, there's no time.

J. Why do you think people would look at them and say your paintings had no value ?

M. Because it's that I should take a few lessons or something. It's really true that maybe only about 2 % of the people like my work. And the ones that do like it, like it a lot. and they tend to say. ohhhh, she's a great genius! and that part I don't understand either. I mean they build me up why beyond what I think it's worth.

J. One thing about your work is that it's highly personal and autobiographical in terms of your life and surroundings.

M. Somebody was telling me the other day, the reason my work was good was that it wasn't influenced by other painters. But I don't think other painters, I mean look at Susan Baker's work. I mean how do you see influenced in other people's work, I don't get that at all. In fact I think of my work as being like illustrations, I don't see what's the difference between my work and an illustration. view of Nickerson street for instance. I'm trying to make a literal presentation of Nickerson street. Well this is an old painting of Hans Hofmann putting away his trash. And looking down the street. Now I'm trying to make it as accurate as I possibly can. I'm not trying to distort perspective, I've learned perspective the hard

way, I haven't studied it, so I only know what I've learned, and it's all cockeyed, the perspective is all wrong. But I'm trying to make it as literal as possible and it turns out totally different from the way it is. the street goes the wrong way,

J. Does it turn out the way you want it to?

M. I think it's just great the way it turns out. I like the way it turns out. The trouble with some of my more recent work is that it's gotten too literal, it's gotten so that now I know too much about perspective. But what I'm doing always is except in this work, is painting over old paintings. It gives me a much larger freedom, I'm tired of doing this niggling of looking at something and doing an exact representation of it, I want to be freer. I kept some old paintings, and I want to paint over them, using some of the underpinnings of that painting, to show through on something new. So that you're not wasting anything. '

J. Well one of the fascinating paintings, since you brought this up, is of Saint Teresa, that you had painted over a picture of your studio. You can see in a certain angle of light, you can see St. Teresa going through the painting.

M. Right, that's the kind of thing, I would really like to do. There's one painting I really did when I was in a terrible state. It was a snow scene. The agony that was put in that first painting of a snow scene was no good, but I painted something on top of it so the agony was underneath. And that's part of life, so you use the bad to make something better. And this can also apply to behavior. If you have bad behavior, you can use it in some sense....

J. There was another painting I saw which was of locomotives, you've painted a lot of locomotives, steam engines. These were standing on the track hissing and smoking but they weren't going anywhere.

M. That was me, that was a self-portrait. A portrait of myself, three steaming hissing locomotives with no place to go. (laughs.) I mean these things come out, but I really don't know what I'm talking about, I can't analyze it, I don't think it ...but I really for years and years have been very, very tired of.... When I said in the earlier taping that I wanted to get through with this, I showed you in the slides that the early ones are the ones that I like the best, the excitement at the beginning. Finally it became burdensome to paint, and it was an effort, it was hard..there was one horrible period when I was taking dexidrine, when in order to paint, I'd have to paint one of these pep up pills, and this was given to me by about five different doctors for depression, so I wasn't on to speed or anything, like that, but because I was a very depressed person, I was supposed to

take this stuff. So in order to get myself to paint, I'd take one of these things and then the painting wouldn't be any good. It just wasn't any good with any kind of false things like that.

J. Did you ever throw any paintings away?

M. I'd tend not to, I'd tend not to do that, because I'd keep thinking they could be used in some way by being painted over.

J. Have you painted over a lot of paintings?

M. Not too many, but that's what I'd really like to do. But I really can't tell what the future will hold, because my eyes are bad. That makes a big difference too.

J. You mentioned here in our last interview about seeing a psychiatrist and going to doctors. You were involved in therapy for a number of years. Yeah, for a great number. I mean probably my therapist is the more important person in my life, by all accounts I would say. He was a Jewish convert to Catholicism, and he was the most fanatical Catholic that I have ever seen in my life, I being a convert myself...

J. You're also a convert from..

M. The Episcopal church. I was kicked out of the E. Church, I've got to get that in, (laughs) so I landed at the Catholic church. But he was a fantastic, fantastic doctor. I went to him for several years, and I've kept in touch with him ever since. I started going to him in 1957, and it's almost 25 years now, and I still keep in touch with him.

J. What was going on with your work at the time.

M. I did a wonderful painting of his office, it was me sort of leaning over in a bedraggled condition, sort of like this, he's standing in the door, the way he used to look sort of fat without any face locked into him, and then the priest is coming dancing out of... cause he had a lot of priests and nuns as patients. He used to go to mass every single day at noon, and while he was away, I was making drawings in his office or waiting room. That was really an amusing painting that he had hung up in his waiting room, that was sort of incongruous to me, but that was the sort of man he was. In spite of all his holy, holy business, he also admired my work very much. He had a couple of other paintings hung up there. One day I got angry at something, I never could understand why. I think I wanted the frames back. I figured I didn't want them hung there anymore. So I said you can have the paintings but I want the frames. I think it was a little rude of me, but anyway you're supposed to say what's in your mind. (laughs) But then he wouldn't let me have this one back for the show, and I would have really liked to have it. And I did a lot of writing and a lot of drawing during that

period. During the period with the analyst I was writing poetry and all sorts of things. It was a tremendously productive period. I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for him.

J. Even for painting?

M. For everything, for my whole life. And when the point was reached when he felt he was through with me and he'd done what he could, he said at this point usually I shake hands and say goodbye to the patient, but in your case, you'll be coming back. and years later I asked him, how come you knew that? and he said Intuition. He was a very intuitive man and very religious. I think he had a private line to God. He used to get up at two in the morning and had millions of patients, and he is a fantastic person.

J. At the same time you converted to Catholicism..

M. Well before I went to him I converted, but I found out I needed more than just the church. I needed therapy as well. I chose him... My sister had been to all the greatest analysts in the whole world. She'd been Jung and to Reich? and to Fromm? and Rollo? and she turned out a hopeless mess. Her life was ruined by Jung, totally ruined, that's another story. I really feel violently opposed to Jung. So I was terribly opposed to any kind of therapy at this time. Therefore, but then I reached a point when I had to do something, because the church wasn't enough. I wanted somebody who had some sort of moral structure. I chose him because in first place he was a convert, and because he lived close to where I lived, on Commonwealth Avenue. The Paulist fathers gave me 3 different ones to choose from,

J. You mentioned for a lot of your life you've been depressed. It's sort of an image people have of artists, that they have a lot of struggle and they have lots of crisis and depression. How does that fit into creativity?

M. I don't know how it fits into creativity, but I'll tell you something funny about the analyst. I was trying to stop taking these pills, the dexadrine, for the depression, and I was also trying to stop smoking and also trying to stop drinking. So I went to the analyst one time and took him a whole bottle of the dexadrine, and handed it to him.. and he was like holy god, and so I now that's over, I've given that to you. So now I take him a package of cigarettes and handed him those, practically a full pack. One day I took him an empty half-pint of whiskey. and he said why are you giving me an empty bottle, I like whiskey too. And that pointed to the fact that he never talked... I'd go in and he'd say good morning and goodbye, that was all. and it was funny to me that he pointed out that I had given him a full pack of cigarettes and a full bottle of dexadrine, but an empty bottle of whiskey, so maybe I had a problem drinking.

J. Why paint. what's it for. What's the purpose of it.

M. Well, I don't think there's any ...I don't know, I feel. I don't think I can answer your question, I can only say I feel fine if im working, and if Im not, I['ve been having these really stale periods lately... I mean working around with these slides is just driving me nuts. These old paintings. I mean God, this is too much...Why paint? Why anything? I don't know. ....It just happens, and it wa s solution. I can't tie it up, I can't analyze it. I mean why paint, why write, why what, why live, I don't know... Those no answer to that.

J. It seems to be someting that makes sense to you?

M. I dont know... its not the only thing in the world. I can't answer your question. I just talk off the top of my head...a lot of this is not what I said before. It's like Im all churned up inside.. there's a lot chruning around. And this is really nice, because it's an opportunity. I really thak Provincetown for this opportunity. I know here everybody so terribly.... permits everything, that no matter what I say, nobody is going to hold it against me forever.

J. So maybe you'll be back?

m. I probably will end my days here. laughs I can see that too. I can see that.. listen I ve been doing all kind of things to the house, varnishing the kitchen floor, fixing this that an dthe other thing Why am I doing all that, at the same time Im telling you I m on my way to god knows where. So there are these 2 opposing people. I think everybody is several different people. Im Bubs and Mary and I dont' which is what.

(interview is undated)

# Mary Hackett, a unique

By Jarie Stedman

Mary Hackett, a Provincetown artist who developed an intriguing personal style without formal training, died Friday at the Liberty Commons Nursing Home in Chatham after a long bout with cancer. She was 83 years old.

Mrs. Hackett was born in 1906 in New York City, daughter of Mary Lusk Moffett and Cleveland Moffett, a journalist and writer. She attended Brearley and Lincoln schools and enrolled for one year at Cornell University, "reluctantly," according to her daughter, Wendy Everett of Provincetown.

In 1926, she married a Washington, D.C. lawyer, Chauncey Hackett, in Paris. They settled in Washington where Wendy and sons Thomas and Patrick were born.

The Hacketts first came to Provincetown on a fling in 1930 to attend the artists' ball, sponsored by the Provincetown Art Association. Wildly costumed artists paraded through town, then later danced all night at Town Hall. The Hacketts were enchanted.

With the onslaught of the Great Depression, they returned to Provincetown in the early '30s not only because they fell in love with the town, but also because the living was cheap.

They rented various houses, finally settling at 5 Nickerson St., where they entertained the literati of the day, such as John Dos Passos and Edmund Wilson.

Even though times were hard, the Hacketts threw Bohemian-type parties, "behaving as though it were still the roaring '20s," Everett said. Mr. Hackett died in 1963.

At 23, "Bubs," as she was known by her childhood name, began to draw. As a girl she never took art lessons. She was told by her parents that her sister was the one with talent.

But Bubs was encouraged by her husband. After three years of drawing, she began to paint.

"Her early paintings were primitive, but amazing for someone with no



Artist Mary Hackett as a young woman during World War II

lessons," Everett said. Mrs. Hackett painted what she knew, the kitchen stove and sink, Wendy's bedroom, the houses on Nickerson Street. She had an uncanny knack for choosing just the right details, from a photograph on a bedside stand to the neighbors' trash barrels.

Her wry humor was evident not only in the comments she penciled on the back of her canvases, but also in the domestic scenes she painted: a pot left on the stove, a heap of dirty clothes, a stuffed rocking horse.

According to Everett, Mrs. Hackett was more of an artist than a mother.

Although she was interested in cooking, she was "not much in the cleaning department," she said.

Household help ameliorated the problem and allowed her to travel. She would take off for places like the West Indies and France by herself.

Mrs. Hackett also loved to play tennis and swim. Until last summer, when she became too ill, she went to the beach by Sal's Place for a dip on hot summer's days.

During World War II, Mrs. Hackett served on the Red Cross Motor Corps and drove a taxi for Leno P. Dutra, the only job she ever had. "It was a lark for her," said Everett.

After the war, Don Witherstine, who operated the Shore Studio out of his home in the West End, began to carry Mrs. Hackett's work. He was a "demon salesman," according to Mrs. Hackett, and sold her work for prices ranging from \$50 to \$100. She was immensely successful.

She began showing work at the art association in the '30s and was given a one-person show at Jackson Gregory's studio on Nelson Avenue in 1971, and a retrospective at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum in 1981. She was a featured artist in Long Point Gallery's "75: A Celebration" this past summer.

Mrs. Hackett invented her own style. Although she has been called "primitive," her work is outside of any tradition or school. In fact she was afraid of art schools, afraid they would ruin her.

Ann Wilson Lloyd, in the catalogue for "Contemporary Provincetown," a show now at the Provincetown Art Association & Museum, writes of Mrs. Hackett: "Self-taught and self-directed, Mary Hackett embraces wonder as her religion. In celebration, she venerates the throbbing vitality that surrounds her, turning the ordinary and domestic into the timeless and universal.

"Her paintings have become her personal visual diary, often annotated years

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A group of 12 abutters has written to state and federal agencies strenuously opposing Cabral Enterprises's proposed marina that is planned to accommodate more than 200 boats.

The abutters, who all own property along the beach to the west of Fisherman's Wharf, have sent their list of concerns to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and to the state Department

## Mary Hackett

(Continued from page 3)

later in penciled script on the back, yet they generously share her knowledge of the sustaining solitude that's available to us all.

Her eye for form and color, her intuitive grasp of life's reality and her ability to distill the emotional essence of ordinary settings give her paintings their life's breath."

Mrs. Hackett, an Episcopalian, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1956. Although devout, she continued to confront priests about prescribed practices and beliefs, questions they accepted with respect and good humor.

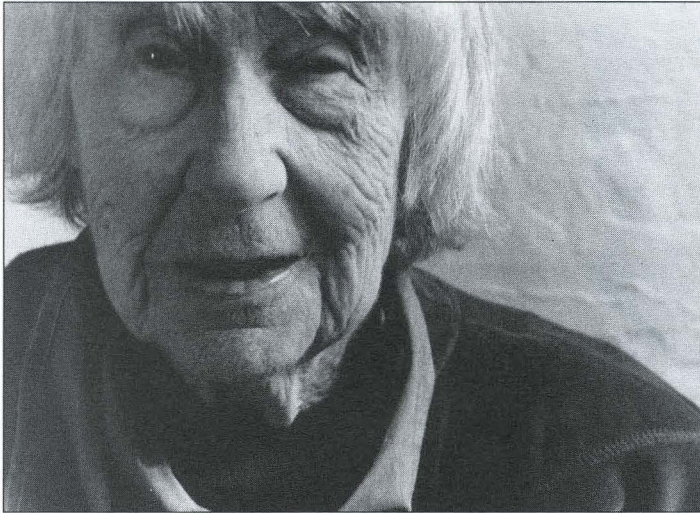
"She got along well with priests," Everett said. "She was an indomitable woman."

Mrs. Hackett lived alone in her home on Nickerson Street, somehow negotiating the stairs to sleep in her second-floor bedroom until she became ill this past June.

"I don't know how in thunder she did it," Everett said.

Besides Everett, she is survived by two sons, Thomas T. Hackett of New York and Patrick Hackett of Berkeley, Calif.; and five grandsons, Tim Everett of Hartford, Conn., Michael Everett of Philadelphia, Toby Everett of Provincetown, Aaron Hackett and Lucas Hackett of Berkeley.

A memorial mass will be held at St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in Provincetown Saturday at 9 a.m. The family requests that donations be made to charities of choice. Burial will be at Woodlawn Cemetery in New York.



photos by Ariel Jones

### MARY MOFFETT HACKETT 1906 – 1989

The granddaughter of an Episcopal minister and from a family of privilege, Mary Moffett Hackett wielded her way through a world which hovered between lightness and darkness. While her conversion to Roman Catholicism shocked her friends, it provided her with the fodder and the context for her peculiar slant on existence. Here was a religion which vividly spoke to her, which also reveled in the mysteries and paradoxes of life and the mythic battles between good and evil. While her paintings clearly included objects and rooms familiar to her world, they sometimes, when closely examined, revealed ethereal apparitions peering through windows, or faces erased or partly covered up.

Her view of the world could as easily be seen through the window of her beloved car as from the waters of Provincetown Harbor, or eating lunch at her favorite no-fuss eatery, Dairyland, or through her vision of St. Ann and her daughter hovering in the sky over Provincetown, as depicted in one of her paintings. And her view of Provincetown could only be considered schizophrenic: it was either “simply odious” on the one hand, or “simply delirious” on the other.

Just like in her favorite poem, the “Hound of Heaven,” all Mary really wanted was to be free—for everyone to be free. Her inscription on the back of a painting of Abraham Lincoln which she painted in 1973, reads:

“He freed the slaves, so likewise, all my life  
a slave, I also now feel free . . .”

— from a eulogy by Jay Critchley

## Poets Remember Painters

### FOR MARY HACKETT

The most beautiful thing  
is a year:  
its green, gold, and white wheel  
turned by the wind and rain,  
by the breaths of strangers  
in a crowd beside you,  
kept spinning by hands  
lifted off of beds in unseen  
benedictions of farewell.

Dry ice bubbling in the lake;  
late summer, the brown water  
boiling at the end of the dock.  
Lost hours, watching a sunfish  
defend a rock and a stalk of algae  
from a school of cruising bass.  
Days left empty as the pages  
in an angel’s diary.

And the long winds of fall,  
which are the sighs  
of people in the city,  
cooling breaths that dry  
the words scraped  
on the stiff crepe of a corn husk  
by a pin dipped in blood.

Then snow fine as dust  
clapped from erasers  
falls through the air  
sparkling, coating  
the ground like gesso,  
with the slow, steady sound  
of brushstrokes.

— Keith Althaus





# Arts & Entertainment

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## Hackett's art teeming with life's details

By Sue Harrison

BANNER STAFF

Mary Hackett (1906-1989) was never content to live just one life, or at least never a one-dimensional life. She was wife, mother, artist, traveler, thinker, former Episcopalian-turned-Catholic and always like a cup with room for one more ounce of experience. The Fine Arts Work Center presents the first major show of Hackett's work in 10 years. The show, curated by Keith Althaus, begins with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m. on Friday and runs through July 17. Althaus will also present a slide lecture at 8 p.m. this Sunday, July 1.

Hackett, nee Moffett, a New York native, never intended to be an artist. She said her sister had all that talent in the family. She attended Brearley and Lincoln schools and did a year at Cornell University before meet-

ing and marrying the charming Chauncey Hackett. The couple lived in Washington, D.C. where Chauncey practiced law. Children soon came along (Wendy Hackett Everett, Thomas Hackett and Patrick Hackett). It was a mere chance that started Hackett on her lifetime of painting. She had gone out walking with a notebook, intending to write and chanced upon an interesting scene and started to draw instead. Her work, she later said, was very childish since she had never drawn before. She realized quickly that whatever artistic vision she had expressed itself best in its rawest form and wisely decided never to study formally though she was surrounded by artists and art schools for most of her life. For years she only drew, teaching herself about perspective and the art of seeing. When she later moved to painting, her

"View Down Nickerson Street of Hans Hofmann Emptying his Trash, 1946," by Mary Hackett.

■ HACKETT continued on page 34

■ **HACKETT** continued from page 33

work still retained much of the feel of drawings, with clear lines delineating the objects. Her work could be called primitive but certainly not naïve.

Hackett seems to have been very particular about including odds and ends like electrical cords, stains on the floor or postcards tucked into the edges of a mirror. Her canvases are full of detail that shape the viewer's experience of the work.

Mirrors often appear, and Hackett herself is frequently seen looking into her own reflection. In those paintings, there are sometimes mirrors on the wall behind the artist creating a series of endless reflections of reflections of reflections.

In addition to living in D.C., the Hacketts made their home in Provincetown. Throughout her life, though she loved to travel, she returned to Provincetown, a place she first loved, then hated, then, at the end of her life, loved again.

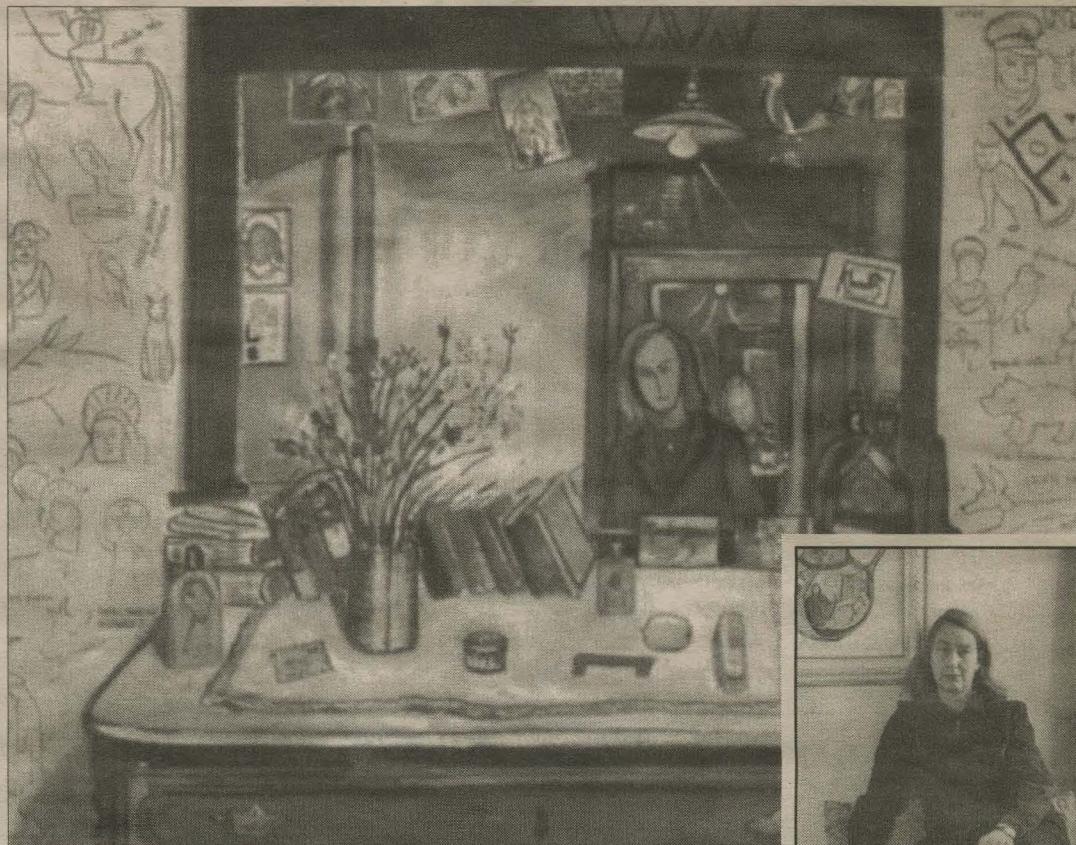
In her paintings she sometimes put in newspapers or other reference points to actual times and places. In her painting "Art Association, 1945" one sees the room and feels the familiarity despite the 56 intervening years. The piano — the same one that's there now? — stands sentinel in the center of an empty room, a broom leaning against the keyboard. The paintings on display alternate the traditional and abstract, reflecting the division in the art world at the moment.

A year later she painted "View Down Nickerson Street of Hans Hofmann Emptying his Trash." A fishing boat sits at anchor and the street is tranquil with roses trailing over a white picket fence. A corner vegetable garden grows and a child's playhouse sits in the back yard. Hofmann, a big deal in the art world of that time, is just a guy who happens to be taking out his trash.

She painted the interior of her house at 5 Nickerson St. in many canvases, memorializing the big wood stove, the green kitchen, the slightly askew record player spinning an unheard tune. A painting on the wall is crooked — a manner of hanging she favored. A broken high chair sits by the kitchen door.

In 1970 she painted her house viewed from outside. A Provincetown Advocate is tossed on the hedge denoting the place, and a sign posted inside the front window declares "The Vietnam War Continues" and gives the date of April 1970. The sign gives the most up-to-date death count of both Americans and Vietnamese along with the draft count being called for in May. Sharing the window is an American flag which raises all sorts of questions. Also, a child's rocking horse can be seen inside the window. In all, it is a touching commentary on patriotism, war, the death of a country's young men and perhaps the loss of American innocence.

It is possible, and desirable, to spend much time looking into a Hackett painting.



"Pensione Bertolini, 1953"

PHOTO GEORGE YATER  
Mary Hackett, 1950



Whether she actually set some things up, added things or left things out, the level of detail leaves no doubt that she knew when the right set of objects would say what she was feeling.

Althaus, who is curating, is also a Hackett collector along with his wife, Susan Baker. It was through Baker that he met Hackett. Baker had a show at FAWC and during its run found a little old lady painting the exhibition. They hit it off. Althaus and Baker now own about 30 Hackett paintings, nearly 10 percent of her lifetime output.

Althaus says he feels so fortunate to be surrounded by the

work, "like a ditchdigger surrounded by Cezannes," he says. "She draws beautifully, the color is fabulous. It's quirky, understated, very inviting but strange. I think there is some magical quality about her work."

Initially she drew the most complex things she could find, he says, like car engines or the riggings of boats, as a way of training herself. She needed several years of stark black and

white before she was ready to add color. As her work evolved she gained a following and showed in several galleries as well as the Art Association. For those who have not had the chance to see her work, the FAWC show will be a revelation.

"I have had some of her pictures for 15 years and I never tire of them," Althaus says. "She was quite bold in her own smallish way. I think this show will open people's eyes." □

# On **MARY HACKETT**: Two Paintings and a Note

by Keith Althaus

Open almost any book of "folk art" and you find an obligatory disclaimer about the inadequacy of the terminology and definitions of the field. We can dispense with that. "Self-taught," "eccentric," or whatever, Mary Hackett was a profoundly original artist. Her work, over half a century, will stand beside any. Though there is debate whether we should call the work of certain societies "art," either because they were not intended as such, or because there may not be such a designation within that culture, its power is undiminished. We can learn from that: better to look at the pictures.

## "Khrushchev When He Got Booted"

What draws me first into this inspired painting is the pathos, even humor, of the situation. But what holds me there is its powerful psychological atmosphere, unleashing several unnerving emotions not confined to the title drama. One is that peculiar sensation, due perhaps to association with search and interrogation, or with helplessness and the inherent danger and threat of being in the path of a car's headlights. A man in a suit in the woods at night is similarly disconcerting. One can't help but feel a suit is poor protection from the cold, and that however powerful our light, eventually the dark prevails. This little painting abounds with feelings of powerlessness and inevitability.

This picture is both unique and typical of Mary Hackett. Propelled by a scene, incident, or event, she casts it in its fullest implication, yet it remains in some way personal, nothing is inflated, there is no reaching. This "knowing" its place in the order of things is a kind of precience not uncommon to the self-taught, the eccentric, or the visionary artist. While others seek discovery, or solutions to self-imposed questions, or even revelation in the painting process, these artists have no inclination to experiment but are concerned with faithfully recording, and with execution. On the backs of her paintings, where she often made pointed observations and revisionist commentary, she sometimes complained of her lack of skill but



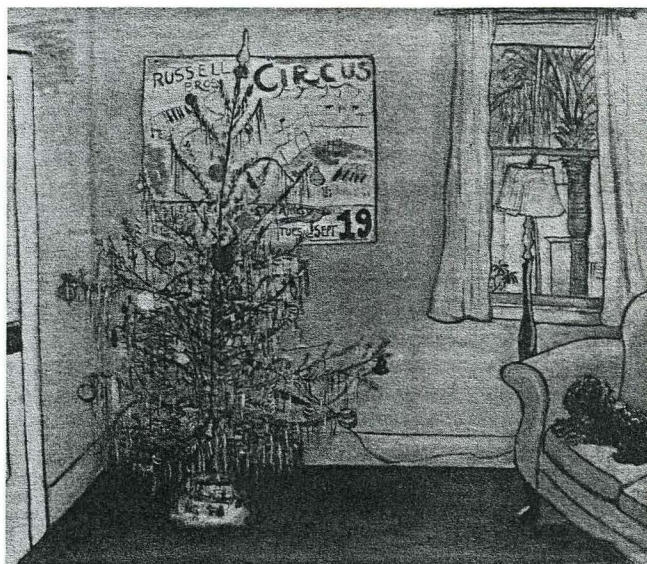
not her vision. In the beautiful painting of her father reading in an armchair, her father has no legs, because as she remarks on the back she "couldn't get them right." Those whose work is a composite of consciously chosen influences with a mandatory effort at newness can hardly compete for directness and natural power with those to whom an authentic vision has been granted. Those with a vision are charged with presentation rather than interpretation. Their truth is a given.

## "Christmas on Bridge Street" 1939, Ft. Lauderdale

This painting is about joy. Inexplicable joy, that fills us for no reason. A balmy day outside the window, and you are alone in the house at Christmas. The dog has climbed onto the sofa, and then, as Yeats says:

*My body of a sudden blazed;  
And twenty minutes more or less  
It seemed so great my happiness,  
That I was blessed and could bless.*

This is a secret the artist shares with us: while everyone was out I felt this. Peace, serenity, bliss: words from the vocabulary of religious experience describe it best, but it doesn't resemble the ecstasy of mystic revelation, more a messageless acceptance. Rather than a transporting, it represents a returning, back to this body, this room, this afternoon, away from the distractions of desire and concern. Mary Hackett's paintings have always had a mild hallucinatory quality: her isolation of objects, clock, stove, typewriter,



in a spare environment raises their status to that disassociative level Tennyson sought when he would stand in front of the mirror and repeat his name 50 times. Her wavering yet solid line sometimes seems, not impossibly, the border of world; the austere, almost monastic walls heighten the effect. Her colors, neither gaudy nor jewel-like, have the harmony of another world: a minor chord, her haunting palette, resembling the colors of Indian corn.

There is an unquestioning quality about her work. We are spared "effort" and "effect." We feel everything she painted was important to her, at least in that moment. And because that obedience to what mattered, as opposed to fads and trends, guided her, most of her work "stands up" over 50 years. It convinces utterly and effortlessly. And with that saved effort we are able to expend our energy exploring and savoring the details, and the mysterious currents just

below the surface. Her work is generally devoid of the qualities that distinguish the well-known "memory" painters of our time: sweetness and sentimentality. She shares with them a certain charm, an almost obsessive faithfulness to detail, a narrative directness and truth, and a lack of trickery and deception. She differs from them mainly in the complexity and the quality of her feelings. This painting for instance does not pretend to resolve the numerous contradictions and tensions within it: loneliness contrasted with the sociality of the season, the secular with the sacred, sparseness with clutter, interior with exterior worlds (even in this calm backwater one senses the dark historical moment). But all are overridden, reduced to background noise, chatter down below, small and insignificant as voices in jars. A grand harmony drowns such "minor" discords. There is a place from which all things, even the most opposing, as Breton said, "cease to be perceived as contradictory." In such a place, often, and in many locations, Mary Hackett set her easel.

### Note

I was moved by a photo in the local paper of her wonderful painting "Western School," 1941, whose faceless children led me to think about that recurrent image of emptiness and about her comfort with the absent. I have chosen to write about two paintings which represent ends of a wide spectrum. One is entirely imagined, prompted by the public announcement of the ousting of Soviet Premier Khrushchev. The other, the interior of a house in Florida, with her beloved dog Muffy Chargo on the sofa, comes from the artist's life. Disparate as they are, each is imbued with a special quality, one of the hallmarks of her work: they are at once intimate and mysterious. Although she worked in essentially the same style all her life, amid the ferment of the lively Provincetown art colony, she brought to her work a freshness and freedom, surpassing novelty, of conception and execution.

Mary Hackett was perhaps as singular and remarkable in her person as in her art. And for many the two were inseparable. When I see her quiet "Angel in the Public Garden," or the gorgeous "Statue of E.E. Hall," exhibited briefly at the Provincetown Art Association last fall, I suppress a smile, remembering this was the woman who liked to paint statues because "they stand still." I fell in love with these paintings years ago. Now if I fail to convince others of their beauty I will assume that the chemistry or the moment was wrong, and, because in a labor of love there is no tiredness, like a determined suitor I will try again. ■

**KEITH ALTHAUS** is the author of a book of poems, *Rival Heavens*, published by the Provincetown Arts Press.



MARY HACKETT, C. 1950. PHOTO BY GEORGE YATER. COURTESY SHIRLEY YATER AND PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM

## Magic Mary Hackett

BY ROSALIND BAKER WILSON

When I wrote to Keith Althaus about his superb piece, "On Mary Hackett: Two Paintings and a Note," which appeared in *Provincetown Arts* last summer, he suggested I write a little memoir. My place in Mary Hackett lore is that she gave me her very first painting. It was of her old-fashioned wood-burning kitchen stove, which I lost. She reproached me for this on many occasions and on her death had her son, Thomas Truxtun Hackett, put through a call to me. She said she was dying of cancer and happy at the thought of dying, and reproached me again for losing her first painting. "I'm quite the thing now," she said. In spite of the reproach, it was an affectionate call.

She had forgiven me enough to give me another painting of hers, circa 1954, "Pensione in Florence." It depicts herself and a man at separate tables. Another client, a woman with a poodle, is reflected in a mirror over the fireplace. The writer, Dan Wakefield, upon seeing it in my apartment, said, "That's a novel."

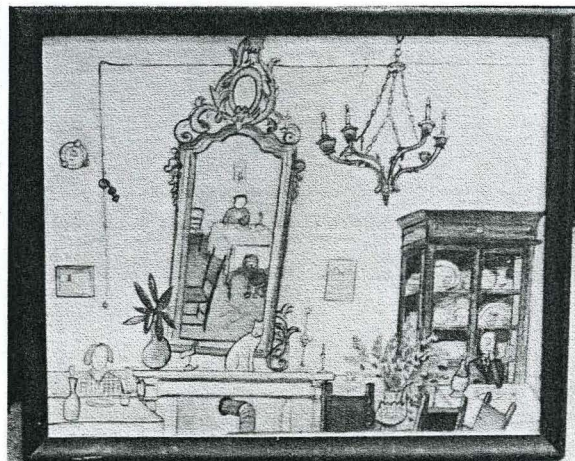
Of the magical people surrounding my childhood and interwoven with my adult life, Mary (Bubs) and Chauncey Hackett were among the most captivating. Chauncey had been a law clerk to Justice Holmes, a successful Washington lawyer, married with two children. He had met Mary at a dance. They eloped when she was 18. He was some years older, with a brilliant mind, a rapier wit and more charm on the hoof than any man should have. Mary was tall, fair-skinned, with dazzling red hair. Over the years, each had tendresses for other people upon occasion, but they stayed together and

produced enormously bright and attractive children.

A tendresse of Mary's was for Coulton Waugh and *tendresse* is le mot juste. Coulton Waugh, with a boyish manner, thick blond hair, and expert sailing skills, was married to a very pretty woman, Elizabeth, a would-be painter, whose mother lived with the Frederick Waughs. Elizabeth had a fling with my father, who in true manner boasts of it in his diaries. Why didn't word get out? Don't sack up with Wilson — he kisses and tells for posterity. My best friend, Jeannie Clymer had another close friend, a beautiful Japanese girl, Toshi, who married Pete Seeger. Coulton played the guitar beautifully and sometimes alternated with Seeger at parties. Coulton's forte was sea chanteys — "When I was a little lad / My mother told me / You've got to hug and kiss the girls / Or your lips will grow moldy / Away, Joe, away, haul away, Joe." He was a romantic figure who turned the heads of myself and my girlhood friends. And gave Mary Hackett's head a spin or three.

Mary's father, Cleveland Moffet, was a high-profile journalist, writer of mysteries and children's stories, from Boonville, New York, five miles from where my father, Edmund Wilson, has his summer home in Talcottville, New York. He was some 30 years ahead of my father, had been editor of the *Paris Herald*, and also at one time of the *New York Sunday Tribune*. The pages which deal with him in *The Dictionary of American Biography* emphasize his fame for pointing out our unpreparedness for World War One.

I used to love to take my various beaux around to the Hacketts'. Very often Chauncey was there by himself, sitting at the far end of



MARY HACKETT, "PENSIONE IN FLORENCE" C. 1954, OIL ON CANVAS

the sitting room at 5 Nickerson Street on a small Victorian sofa with a table with a chess board painted on it in front of him. The walls were filled with Mary's pictures, some of them cock-eyed, as Mary felt pictures shouldn't be hung straight. His favorite was a picture of some trains. He was a train man. He would send us out for ice cream cones or on occasion mix us some wondrous cocktail from outlandish combinations of juices and liquor. We would play chess and listen to his brilliant monologues. If he had a cold, he'd refer to *The Enormous Rheum*, a la

E.E. Cummings' *Enormous Room*.

In later years, the age discrepancy changed the Hacketts' lives. He went into a retirement home, she converted to Catholicism and went into analysis. I used to kid Mary and say she'd converted too passionately. But her faith was totally sincere. She learned braille and taught it and always had some person from Catholic Charities she was helping.

She eventually had an apartment in The Fenway Studios in Boston and commuted between there and Provincetown with side trips to Europe and the White Sisters of Mary in Saint Anne de Beaupre, where she stayed for long periods of time. She was bilingual in French and English. She gave them a white canary as she said that's what they looked like. After much soul searching, they accepted it as it was a communal canary, not a personal one.

An aunt gave her a minuscule island in the middle of a lake in Guilford, Connecticut, which she loved. She tripped to Boonville, her father's birthplace, where she discovered the enchanting little Catholic church and, Mr. Althaus says, painted some cows "in Edmund Wilson land."

Over the years any arrangements between the Hacketts and my father always resulted in confusion. In those days people occasionally went out on the fishing boats from North Truro with the fishermen to the traps early in the morning. You had to get up at two in the morning to breakfast and get out there. My father and I and the Hacketts and Chauncey's two elder children by his first marriage overslept or mis-met for a whole week before correlating ourselves and were wrecks as a result.

How did Mary's first picture disappear in my hands? She had painted the picture in a rented cottage on the West End of town, called "Way Up-Along" in the early '30s, while I watched her. I was 10 or 11. Jeannie Clymer was the daughter of the artist Floyd Clymer and granddaughter of the highly successful marine painter Frederick Waugh, who was also known as Wizard Waugh. The Wizard's paintings sold for enormous prices. Her uncle, the aforementioned Coulton Waugh, did Dickie Dare and was later to become a successful painter. *Life* magazine did a piece, "Waugh Fils and Pere." The Frederick Waughs lived in what was to become Hans Hofmann's house, a house then full of Chippendale furniture and silver tea sets and a studio full of marine paintings. You felt as if the waves were going to roll in on you and there so they represented people. The garden had plaques around it with pieces of sandwich glass he'd picked up at the old factory and in-laid. Coulton and his wife, Elizabeth, ran a hooked rug shop in the oldest house in Provincetown, almost next door, and lived in another house diagonally across Commercial Street from the parents. Floyd Clymer also lived in a house in a similar position to the Hacketts. The whole outfit was known far and wide as Waughsville as opposed to the East End of town

occupied by the Dos Passos's, my father, who intermittently rented the house, and Susan Glaspell.

Until my early 20s, my second home was with the Waughs or Clymers, wherever they might be, with the result that I often left my things there or had them there. And the Waughs and Clymers eventually moved to New York City after the Wizard's death and then to Newburgh, New York. Naturally, wherever they went there were canvases moving with them. I had the painting with me in my room all through Bennington but some time after that it disappeared amongst the Waugh-Waugh and Clymer canvases. Could Elizabeth Waugh, in an intuitive fit of jealousy over Mary and Colton, perchance have purloined Mary's painting, as it was stored with the myriad other canvases?

Mary Hackett's "Pensione in Florence," exhibited at the Provincetown Art Association in 1954, has lasted well. I have looked at it sporadically while writing this, and there is something new every time. The pictures in the pictures on the walls of the pensione, the dishes in the side cabinet, the flowers in the vases. It is a novel, as well as a painting, and brings back Mary, a woman of extraordinary innocence, humor and talent and fundamental reactions, never destroyed by the sophisticated milieu in which she lived.

*Rosalind Baker Wilson is the author of Near the Magician: A Memoir of My Father, Edmund Wilson, published by Grove Weidenfeld in 1989.*

## Further Notes on Mary Hackett

BY KEITH ALTHAUS

1

One reason Mary Hackett's paintings have the feel of "novels," as Rosalind Baker Wilson reports, is because they are full of suggestions and hints, plots and sub-plots, characters, and dramatic situations. In her landscapes a man walking a dog can assume great proportions and become a source of mystery or symbol of melancholy. Beyond this her works are novelistic because each is a full statement, made with extraordinary concentration and concision. They have an aura of completeness, wholeness, resolution. Here, we feel, is beginning, middle, and end. They are "big" in an unassuming way. They have a calm about them I am not sure the painter ever felt. But that peace is what she strove for. Camus' great line, "To create is to live twice," is subject to many interpretations. One implies that what we seek but cannot achieve in one life we may achieve in the other. For many art is an intellectual or emotional appendage, an added room in which to play or act out. But for others

like Mary Hackett it is the same room in which they live transformed, or hopefully transfigured.

2

So many of Mary Hackett's greatest fans and collectors are fellow artists. She has a special appeal for them because they are in a position to recognize and appreciate the risks she took. Her boldness and sense of freedom exhilarate those daily faced with similar constraints and limits. In an age of great scale and deliberate shocks it is easy to overlook the fresh approach she continually exhibited in ostensibly conventional canvases. We are struck by her quirky content, her daring use of blank space, which can be as difficult and disconcerting as silence, the common touches that are so true they make you wonder why you only see them in her work. Where else have we seen so many dangling cords and electrical outlets! Often eccentricity and idiosyncracies lend credulity, since people assume, "It must be true because nobody would make that up!" In quiet but telling ways, and on a modest scale, much of the detail in her portraits and landscapes act to reinforce our impression of truth.

3

The growing interest in what lies beyond mainstream studio and academic art represent a hunger for authenticity and power. Our increased sophistication is measured by our knowledge of how we are being manipulated, by the our consciousness of the artist's intentions toward us. There is therefore special beauty and power in these works of a self-taught artist that were also to a large degree self-pleasing and whose motivation must remain a mystery to us. Their authenticity derives from their lack of self-consciousness. Their power is the gift of vision. Long after we have seen them, Mary Hackett's paintings resonate and occupy us. Stanley Kunitz says a good poem is one which never lets its energy leak out, no matter how many readings. Mary Hackett's paintings yield so much upon first "reading" it feels it will be forever before we've read all that is there. Even her most spare and simple canvases reverberate, reminding us how quickly combinations of a few numbers compound themselves, growing exponentially, approaching infinity.

4

It is always best to return to the work. In this case very little is readily available for public viewing. Today that is due to the fact that those who have her picture love living with them and are reluctant to part with them. Earlier I think she was under-appreciated. In the heated milieu of successive waves of art movements and their followers, she followed her own vision and was a perennial outsider. Working in Provincetown her

work was essentially unchanged from her earliest paintings through her last ones, though Robyn Watson remarked that toward the end she used her oils almost like a wash, "as if she were running out of paint." In a less hierarchically rigid moment there comes time to consider her. Then, now, happily, after such neglect, we can invoke another sense of Camus' "To create is to live twice."

## Paintings by Mary Hackett in Public Collections

THE PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION and Museum has an oil, "Nickerson Street." It is a view out of the front window of her house in Provincetown on a somewhat dreary fall or winter day. One of her favorite themes was either looking out of windows and doors or inside through them. This painting often appears in variously curated shows or in PAAM's satellite shows at local banks. Open yearround.

The Heritage Museum has a large painting, "Tom Hackett Walking Along Commercial Street Past the Delight Delight Delight House" (1938). The title refers to a house in the West End into which the carpenter had fashioned those words. With the fish factory in the background, the painting captures a view of Provincetown that no longer exists. Open summers only.

In the Parish Hall of St. Mary's of the Harbor there is, appropriately, a painting of the interior of the church. It looks down the center aisle toward the altar, from the back of the empty church. Open by appointment.

In the Rectory of St. Peter's is a somber painting of the graveyard in Provincetown with the Pilgrim Monument looming at the crest of the hill on the left and the top of St. Peter's on the right. At the center right of the painting a seated figure, leaning against a headstone, is reading a newspaper. The great gloom and seriousness of this painting may be traced to the paper's headline which we can read: "Paris Falls." Open by appointment.

In Provincetown Town Hall there is a mysterious painting of a rider on horseback headed toward Provincetown on Route 6A. One can see across to cars along Route 6 and beyond to Pilgrim Lake and the dunes. This painting hangs in a rather obscure spot: above the door in the large room at the end of the hallway where certain offices are located. Open business hours. ■

*Keith Althaus is the author of a collection of poems, Rival Heavens, published by Provincetown Arts Press in 1993.*

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## Further Notes on Mary Hackett

BY KEITH ALTHAUS

1

One reason Mary Hackett's paintings have the feel of "novels," as Rosalind Baker Wilson reports, is because they are full of suggestions and hints, plots and sub-plots, characters, and dramatic situations. In her landscapes a man walking a dog can assume great proportions and become a source of mystery or symbol of melancholy. Beyond this her works are novelistic because each is a full statement, made with extraordinary concentration and concision. They have an aura of completeness, wholeness, resolution. Here, we feel, is beginning, middle, and end. They are "big" in an unassuming way. They have a calm about them I am not sure the painter ever felt. But that peace is what she strove for. Camus' great line, "To create is to live twice," is subject to many interpretations. One implies that what we seek but cannot achieve in one life we may achieve in the other. For many art is an intellectual or emotional appendage, an added room in which to play or act out. But for others

like Mary Hackett it is the same room in which they live transformed, or hopefully transfigured.

2

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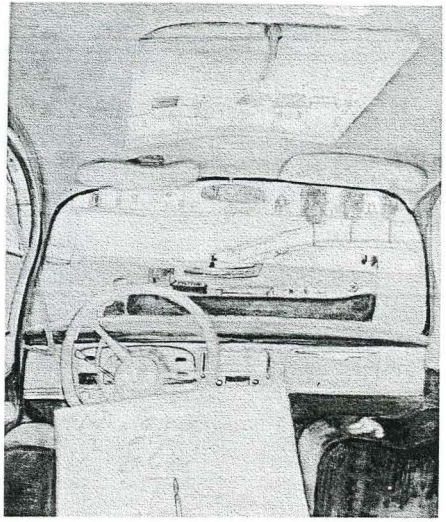
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MARY HACKETT, "VIEW FROM INTERIOR OF PEUGEOT AUTO IN PARIS LOOKING OUT AT THE SEINE, 1961, WITH M.H. IN PROCESS OF TRYING TO PAINT A SAINT RATHER THAN A SCENE"

## Mary Hackett

BY KEITH ALTHAUS

Let us look at one work, "View from Interior of Peugeot Auto in Paris Looking out at the Seine, 1961, with M.H. in Process of Trying to Paint a Saint Rather than the Scene." This painting, with its characteristically wry and useful title, contains many of the best features of Mary Hackett's work: her subdued palette, "the colors of Indian corn"; her telescoping of great and small, down to the tiniest detail, like the serial numbers on the key; her unique perspective and oblique approach, as here, from the back seat of a car (she loved cars, I'm sure partly because they represented freedom), where the artist is beginning to paint a religious picture; the drawing, boldly inventive, with loving details, which as in many paintings are rendered in that half-drawing, half-painting style she created to satisfy her desire for both clarity and atmosphere.

What an odd painting this is, a strange comment on the everyday and the spiritual. A painting one could ostensibly do anywhere, yet here we are in Paris on a beautiful day, warm enough to have the sunroof open, looking out on a scene where the natural and manmade compliment each other's beauty, even as the artist expresses other concerns. For such seemingly open and uncalculated paintings, Mary Hackett's have an uncanny way (I say this because it is only after seeing these qualities crop up again and again that we become aware of them) of conjuring second meanings, often references to her own spiritual quest, verifying the impossibility of keeping the artist's life and concerns out of even the most seemingly unrelated subjects.

Always straightforward, even blunt, her title tells us the work is about "painting a saint not the scene." Uniting by the unusual device of the frame of the car, she shows us the panorama through the windshield, including the view through the sunroof and a miniature self-portrait in the rearview mirror, like a Renaissance aside. We see the 19th-century houses along the quay, the barges and water, sky of the same color, and the incomplete painting, just begun yet already clearly defined as a saint by the lines of the halo.

An exhibition opening September 22 at the Cape Museum of Fine Arts in Dennis will cover more than five decades of work by this self-taught Provincetown artist. Mary Hackett began drawing in the early 1930s, when she was 23 or 24, avoiding taking any lessons, seeing even then "it was really very good." She continued drawing exclusively for several years before taking up painting. Some of these first drawings are included in the show, as well as dozens of paintings, made from the mid-'30s through the '80s. They do not form a clear progression or development although her first paintings employ a cruder line than her later work. Throughout drawing was an important component of her painting. The '40s through the '60s were perhaps the peak of her technical achievement, her style becoming looser and freer afterward. The thread of her quirky intelligence and sincere striving runs throughout her work. While she always attempted faithful representations of what she saw, it pleased her that her results often turned out quite differently. She remarks with pleasure and surprise, in an interview with Jay Critchley in 1983, how a painting of the view down her street to the bay has the road turning the wrong way. As she gained more technical expertise the results were more literal, and to her, less admirable. This may have contributed to her later, looser, and more spacious style.