

Review of show at Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1109 Geary, San Francisco, during the winter of 1993-94, printed in *The Journal of the Print World*, Winter, 1994, page 38.

Helen Ludwig

Life-long Artist/Peintre-gaveur

Helen Ludwig is a woman who has always stopped to look at, as well as sketch, many of the passing scenes of her life, accumulating a body of work that encompasses the better portion of the twentieth century. Born in 1911, and raised in Tolland, Connecticut, the sixth of eleven children, she has been an artist ever since she can remember. It may have been all of the lovely distractions along the half mile walk to school, or the big pond near her house, resplendent with water lilies, that first inspired her to paint flowers to please her mother. But at the age of eleven, she acquired her first set of oils, and thus began a long and productive career of capturing the images of her life and travels.

During the summer when she was seventeen, she received a scholarship to study ceramics with Bolton Brown in Woodstock, New York. While a student at the Hartford Art School, she taught two mornings a week at the Wilbraham Art Academy. In 1930, Helen graduated from the Hartford Art School and received the annual \$100 prize given to the most promising student.

In 1931, she went to New York City and became involved with the Art Students League, when, as she recalls, she ran out of money, and was taken in by a very nice lady. Everywhere she went during those days, she always took a sketch pad along, and whether observing nuns on the subway or watching men repair streetcar tracks, she would make sketches, many of which were later redone as etchings, paintings, or collages. Fishing villages along the New England coast were a constant inspiration, and the subject of several etchings as well.

During the New York years, she studied with Nicholaides, and at Greenwich House Pottery in the Village. Jobs were scarce, but she managed to land one with the WPA Mural Project, including a large mural with James Penney at the Fulton Street Market. She was the only woman so chosen. Later, she worked with the Teaching Project, at Riis House near Chinatown. After that, she was asked to supervise all art teachers in the Bronx. They had the first show of children's work on 57th Street.

In 1934, she saved \$400 and spent the summer sailing on a French liner with friends, and sketching and painting in Europe. She had shows at ACA, FAR, and Weyhe Galleries in New York City. She worked on the Art Project until 1938, when she married V.J. McGill, who was teaching philosophy at Hunter College. Helen remembers that because her husband had a regular income, she voted for her own dismissal when funds were being cut, to have more time to devote to her own work- painting, sketching, and print making. Silver jewelry, textile, designs, and ceramic tiles were a part of her busy schedule as well, and also designing backgrounds for Fifth Avenue windows on a freelance basis. In addition, she illustrated nine children's books on plants, animals, and microbes, which were written by Millicent Selsam.

Helen and her family moved to San Francisco in 1957, where her husband worked with Mortimer Adler on *Great Books*. His wife, Helen Adler, drove the newly arrived Helen Ludwig all over San Francisco looking for a house. In the process, she fell in love with the city, where hundreds of interesting vistas inspired her to do collages, popular items at the San Francisco Museum Rental Gallery in the early 1960s. She is also known for her long Sumi ink scrolls and many ceramic city scenes at Rena Utz's Ceramic Shop.

In 1970, she did a book of sketches called *Psychiatry for the Home and Garden*, which sold out at the Legion of Honor bookstore. Her art has appeared on the covers of public broadcasting guides, such as the *KPFA Folio* and *KQED Focus*. Her work is part of many collections, here and abroad.

In 1985, she produced a children's picture book of Golden Gate Park. Now at 82 years of age, she continues to teach and create.