

In 1909 the formation of the Island Arts Club was welcome news for a number of British lower middle class educated women with arts school training, who had emigrated to Vancouver Island around the turn of the 19th century. Amongst this group was Margaret Kitto, who, although like the others a typical traditionalist watercolour painter, was the most professional. She was also destined to make a distinct contribution to this newly formed organization in other significant ways.

One of a family of six children, Margaret Elizabeth Kitto was born in Islington, London, England in 1873, where her father was a book publisher. She studied art before coming to Victoria with her family in 1891.

Kitto was a member of the Sketching Club (1900-1909) in which, along with Josephine Crease, she led sketching parties to local scenes. She was a charter member of the Island Arts Club, later the Island Arts and Crafts Society, serving on the executive committee 1911-1917, as second vice president 1918-1919 and vice-president in 1925.

From 1922, as a painter and sculptor she operated the Deco Art Studio with fellow artist Lillian Sweeney, producing various art and craft creations for sale. She became well-known for her watercolour paintings of local scenes, reproduced on cards. Kitto, unusually for a local woman artist at this time, was able to secure a modest living from these sales, supplemented by teaching at the Sacred Heart Convent School, the Western Art Studio and evening courses organized by the school board.

Among her pupils at the Western Art Studio in the early 1920s, was Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, later to be friend, painting colleague and biographer of Emily Carr. In a 1981 publication Edythe recalled Margaret affectionately as "a warm, out-going, frail person, who was able to pass on her infectious enthusiasm for painting to her many young charges."

Although involved in mural painting and decoration, ceramics and textiles, Kitto operated primarily in watercolour, and she was specially known in this media for depictions of Mount Baker and vibrant local scenes of sun-yellow broom. Her work can be found in the collections of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV), the BC Provincial Archives and in archive locations in Quebec and Ontario.

More recently, she featured in a 2016 exhibition, *Water + Pigment and Paper*, at the AGGV. (at right: *The Lions*, by Margaret Kitto)

The Society spent fifteen years working on Margaret Kitto's original and persistent idea of establishing a permanent art gallery in Victoria. Her dedication to this notion seemed to have reached fruition when the Canadian Pacific Railway provided accommodation attached to the Crystal Garden in 1925, sadly the same year as Margaret's passing. She was interred in the Ross Bay Cemetery.

.~John Lover

