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# FROM TRASH TO TREASURE

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**I**f one person's trash is another person's treasure, then Albany has been truly enriched from things hauled out of the Falls Village, Conn., municipal dump.

Some of it has ended up in a museum — which the University Gallery at the State University at Albany officially is. There it is a small part of an exhibit of the works by one of the best-kept secrets of Albany art, Dorothy Pulis Lathrop.

Dorothy Lathrop, born 100 years ago, grew up and lived much of her life on South Allen Street. Her prosperous family raised animals, for in those days there was little except open country between South Allen Street and the Helderbergs.

She was no farm girl, however. Her mother, Ida, was

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a talented artist and Dorothy and her sister Gertrude attended the leading art schools of the day. Gertrude became a sculptor while Dorothy, who was to become the better-known artist, turned her tremendous talent to working as an artist, illustrator and author of literature for children.

In 1937, she won the first Randolph Caldecott Award ever given for her illustrations for the book "Animals of the Bible." She also was founder of the Print Club of Albany.

In his catalogue essay for "Dorothy P. Lathrop: A Centenary Celebration," William C. Clarkin calls her "one of America's foremost artists, an artist of

whom Albany can be proud."

However, for the most part, she is an artist of whom Albany is totally ignorant.

Marijo Dougherty, associate director of the University Gallery and curator, says the artist is "unknown" in her own hometown.

Although her lyrical watercolors of fairies and children's fantasies and her lively woodcuts of animals have been published around the world, according to Dougherty, the exhibit at the University Gallery is only the third one-artist show Dorothy Lathrop has ever had.

And the first was in 1909.

Dougherty speculates that the artist saw herself as a workaday illustrator, not as one whose works were des-

A hundred years later, a famed Albany artist is virtually unknown in her hometown. But now, her papers have been saved from the dump, and a new exhibit sheds light on her work.



tined for an exhibition hall. Another inhibiting factor has been a paucity of works available in any one collection.

When Albany grew up around them, the Lathrop sisters relocated to rural Falls Village, Conn., and advancing age slowed their work. (Dorothy's incomplete final woodcut is on display at SUNYA, with the poignant note written on the base that she was physically unable to finish it.)

Both sisters entered a nursing home, and Dorothy died in 1980. Their home/studio was boarded up and put up for sale by their estate.

The paintings and original works were sold, but many of the sisters' papers — they were indefatigable letter-writers, corresponding with many leading lights of the day — and water-damaged books were hauled off to the Falls Village dump.

Dump-picking in the name of art, however, some of Lathrop's neighbors rescued a portion of the discarded material.

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Photos courtesy of University Gallery

**ALBANY ART** — Among the works of Albany native Dorothy Pulis Lathrop on display at the State University at Albany are, above, a watercolor/gouache illustration for the book "The Fairy Circus" (1931) and, at right, the frontispiece watercolor/gouache from the book "Silverhorn" (1924).



# Lathrop Sisters owned the Komdat Cottage

## VISUAL

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Dougherty became aware of this while putting together an ambitious retrospective version of the 1982 annual show "Artists of the Mohawk Hudson Region," which coincided with Albany's 1986 Tricentennial celebration. The idea was to exhibit the work of an appropriate artist for each of the 50 years of the regional show.

Dorothy Lathrop's woodcut "Jaaps and Ma," a self-portrait with a monkey perched on her shoulder, was selected for the regional. But when Dougherty went to Falls Village and the collection was in the process of dispersal, she decided it would be a "diservice" to choose among the Lathrops. The three female Lathrops — Ida, Gertrude, Dorothy — then became a miniature exhibition-within-an-exhibition.

This show also spurred the curator to more investigation on the artists. It was Charles Semowich, president of the Print Club of Albany, who approached the university with the idea of co-sponsoring a centenary celebration.

The print club had obtained some of Lathrop's manuscripts at auction — several file drawers' worth — some of them from that dump.

Most of the show, however, has definitely *not* been mixed with the trash. It comes on loan from the Albany Institute of History and Art, the Print Club of Albany, the Albany Public Library, the Stockbridge (Mass.) Library Association and several individuals' collections.

In the course of her investigations, Dougherty also learned about a Massachusetts gallery owner who had obtained some 200 gouache paintings and 800 prints from the estate.

Those works are not in the SUNYA show, but represent a "treasure trove."

And, if loan arrangements can be made, that trove may be tapped in a few years by the Albany Institute of History and Art, which is planning an exhibition within three years of the works of all three Lathrop women.



**THE FAIRY CIRCUS** — One of Dorothy Pulis Lathrop's illustrations for a book published in 1931.

Dougherty's catalogue statement ends by saying "Welcome Home Dorothy, and Happy Birthday."

To which one can only add, come back soon, and bring your relatives.

Not so fast. To get to "Dorothy Lathrop, a Centenary Celebration" you have to pass through the gallery's annual faculty exhibition. Knowledgeable people call this the best show in memory by the SUNYA faculty, a group that has left an imprint on the region's art by training many faculty members at

other institutions.

Not to single anyone out, but two former art department chairmen are among the noteworthy exhibitors.

■ William Wilson, who showed some similar works in this year's regional, gets unsettling results by blending the grotesque and the erotic with a style derived from 17th century Dutch realism.

■ Richard Callner exhibits striking abstract watercolors. Callner is resigning, so this will be his last faculty show. He was department chairman from 1975 to 1981.

"Dorothy P. Lathrop: A Centenary Celebration" will continue at the University Gallery at the uptown campus of the State University at Albany through Sunday, Oct. 27. "Art Faculty Exhibition" will continue through Monday, Nov. 25.

Childhood imaginings form the basis of a two-day show of ceramic art by Kenieigh Nelson at Artists for a New Politics, 172 Madison Ave., Albany. The exhibit, concluding today, runs from 1 to 5 p.m.