Colista Dowling (1881-1968)

Primarily known for her watercolors and book illustrations, Colista Dowling was a successful commercial artist in Portland for sixty years. Born in Waverly, Kansas, in 1881, Dowling was classically trained at the Art Students League in New York, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia. When she moved to Oregon in 1890, she continued her art training at the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, and the Museum Art School in Portland. In 1914, she won the prize for best poster in the Rose Festival contest among fifty-one competitors. Her poster featured "a woman, symbolic of the festive spirit, standing on Portland and scattering roses over the Pacific Northwest."

Dowling was an illustrator for *The Pacific Monthly* (which later became *Sunset* magazine), and she contributed to the caricature book *As We See 'Em* (1906), published under her maiden name, Murray. Her work can also be seen in the illustrations reproduced from her pen drawings for *Ox Bows and Bare Feet* (1952), by John Leach, and in several children's books and bookplates.

Dowling was a charter member of the short-lived Society of Oregon Artists in 1912. She then joined the Oregon Society of Artists, where she participated in exhibitions and won awards; she served as an officer for the Society in 1929 and 1940. She also belonged to the Attic Club, originally established by newspaper and commercial artists, and was president of the Women's Press Club. Her work was exhibited at both the Portland Art Museum and the Seattle Art Museum.

Dowling painted small city scenes and coast landscapes, as well as large murals for clubs, hotels, and churches, including *The Lord is My Shepherd*, a mural for St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Portland. Dowling’s floor-to-ceiling murals in the Woman's Club building on Southwest Taylor in Portland (now owned by the First Baptist Church) were painted in pastel colors to evoke a feeling of classical architecture and nature. Her portrait of John McLoughlin is owned by McLoughlin High School in Milton-Freewater, and *The Philosopher (Wm. J. Standley)*, now in a private collection, was at one time owned by Portland Public Schools.

In her later years, Dowling continued to work as a commercial artist and exhibit her work, most notably with the Oregon Society of Artists, but she also participated in the American Artists Professional League exhibitions. She died in Portland in 1968. Her work was included posthumously in shows at the Oregon Historical Society in 1990 and at the Clatsop County Historical Society in 1994, and her paintings can be found at the Oregon Historical Society and in private collections.

Written by Ginny Allen

Further Reading:

Allen, Ginny and Jody Klevit. *Oregon Painters the First Hundred Years 1959-1959.* Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999.

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