Rachael Griffin (1906-1983)

Rachael Griffin is recognized for encouraging local artists, for fostering public appreciation of art, and for serving seventeen years as curator at the Portland Art Museum (PAM). Her first association with PAM was as an eight-year old, attending Saturday morning classes at the museum, which was then located at Southwest Fifth Avenue and Taylor Street.

After studying two years at the University of Oregon, Griffin transferred to the Museum Art School, where she graduated in 1929. She also studied art history at Reed College (1930-1931) and was a student at the Carnegie Foundation program at the University of Oregon and the Portland Extension Center. A sculptor and painter, Griffin received a commission from the Public Works Art Project in the early 1930s to paint a portrait of George H. Himes, curator and director of the Oregon Historical Society. The portrait is currently in the Society's collection. She later created drawings for coloring books on different cultures.

Griffin taught at Riverdale School (1932), St. Helen's Hall (1936), Reed College, Gabel Country Day School (today's Catlin Gabel School), Pacific University, and the Portland Extension Center. Her tenure at the Museum Art School included teaching Saturday children's classes in 1933-1936 and 1939-1940, and classes in sculpture in 1948-1951. She also helped develop an "Understanding of Art" course for the Portland Public Schools in 1961.

In 1950, Griffin was hired as an information assistant for the Portland Art Museum. She was appointed curator of education in 1957 and curator of collections in 1960. In 1955, she created a local radio program, "At the Art Museum," which was broadcast for twenty years.

Griffin frequently wrote about Oregon art and artists, and her pieces appeared in *The Oregon Artist*, a quarterly bulletin of the Museum Art School. In 1957, she called the first meeting of the Northwest Poets, a group that published a series of eight folders on poets, each illustrated by an Oregon artist. Starting in 1969, she created a series of eighteen exhibits on Oregon artists and prepared accompanying brochures. Among several major exhibitions she organized were *West Coast Now* (1968); *BodyCrafts*, a show of wearable art (1974); and *Masterworks in Art* for the Bicentennial in 1976. She retired from the museum in 1974 as curator emeritus.

After retirement, Griffin became a founding board member of Friends of Timberline (1975) and created the Friends' powerful Art and Restoration Committee. Griffin also served as a member of the Oregon Committee for Art in Public Places and the Boys and Girls Aid Society and was on the boards of Albina Arts Center, the Contemporary Crafts Association, and the Portland Dance Theater. She was a founding member of the Northwest Film Study Center in 1971.

In 1977, Lewis & Clark College honored Griffin with the Aubrey Watzek Award for contributions to the community. Portland State University presented her with a distinguished service award in 1978, and she received an Oregon's Governor's Art Award in 1982.

In a lecture at Willamette University in 1979, Griffin explained to her audience that "contemporary art is not only a vital aspect of our lives...but is also a paradigm of life...complex, inexplicable, troubling, sometimes absolutely luminous. Both offer an almost boundless multiplicity....Both are fraught with changes which are improbable and unheralded....Both are characterized by wide swings of the pendulum, clearly visible in art, but often inward in our lives. And finally, we never fully understand either. The ultimate meanings seem to be always beyond our reach."

Griffin died in Portland in 1983. The Rachael Griffin Historic Exhibition Center at Timberline Lodge was named in her memory, and a bronze bust in the exhibition center was created by Oregon artist Manuel Izquierdo to commemorate her life and work.

Written by Sarah Munro

Further Reading:

Griffin, Rachael, and Sarah Munro., eds. *Timberline Lodge*. Portland, Ore.: Friends of Timberline, 1978.

Griffin, Rachael. "Masterpiece on the Mountain." In *Stepping Out Northwest*, Sept. 1977.

Munro, Sarah Baker. *Timberline Lodge: The History, Art, and Craft of an American Icon*. Portland, Ore.: Timber Press, 2009.

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