

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
MARINE ARTISTS

Art We Love II: Len Tantillo, F/ASMA

“Woman in a Fur Hat” by Gretchen Rogers



You know the experience of visiting a museum and wandering through the galleries and having a painting so capture your attention that it resonates in your memory throughout your life? That's what happened to me when I first saw “Woman in a Fur Hat” by Gretchen Rogers at the Museum of Fine Arts. That was many years ago and to this day no visit to the Boston museum

is complete until I see this work once again.

There are many reproductions of the painting online. Very few come close to capturing the impact of the real thing. Gretchen's 30 by 25 inch self-portrait is mesmerizing. Her inquisitive gaze engages us to such a degree that we can feel the life-like vitality of the subject.

In trying to describe in artistic

and technical terms how Rogers manages to achieve her result I hope that in no way I diminish its beauty and magic. Her palette is harmonious. Hard and soft edges, carefully controlled, direct us to her face. Contrasting colors work together to further enhance the composition. I'm particularly taken by her use of moderately-toned cadmium yellow in the background directly behind

the head, played against the alizarin crimson and cadmium red of the hat's prominent rectilinear bow. The intensity of those colors moves our attention back and forth across her face and into that enchanting look in her shadowed eyes.

Daylight seems to illuminate the painting and yet, other than its atmospheric tone we have no clue that the subject is outside. It's the same soft warm light Vermeer used in many of his famous studio works. Interestingly this piece has been compared to Vermeer's painting "Woman with the Pearl Earring."

Gretchen Rogers was a gifted portrait painter. She studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, with Edmund Tarbell.

Tarbell is said to have called her, "the best pupil I ever had. A genius."

Gretchen struggled throughout her career and never attained the success and recognition she so obviously deserved. The American depression was a difficult time for her and seems to mark the end of her painting career although she lived another 30 years dying in 1967 at the age of 86. We are exceedingly lucky to have this magnificent work to remind us of her skill and humanity.

Rembrandt's portraits present us with living breathing people. It's what he is most famous for. His unquestionable skill is known and celebrated worldwide and has been for centuries. Gretchen's portrait, I be-

lieve, is on par with those invaluable works of art. I'm grateful for the attention the Museum of Fine Arts has given this piece allowing us to know and appreciate an amazing and underappreciated artist.

- Len Tantillo, F/ASMA