



CALIFORNIA ART CLUB NEWSLETTER

Documenting California's Traditional Arts Heritage Since 1909

JESSIE HAZEL ARMS BOTKE (1883–1971)

Bold and Beautiful

by Elaine Adams



Jessie Arms Botke (1883–1971)
Untitled mural from the east wall, The Coral Spa at The Oaks in Ojai, California (2)
Oil with gold leaf on canvas 82 1/2" × 173 1/2"
The Irvine Museum Collection at the University of California, Irvine

RARELY DOES AN ARTIST BECOME ASSOCIATED WITH MORE THAN ONE historical art movement. Yet, **Jessie Hazel Arms Botke** did just that. She was an integral part of the American Arts and Crafts Movement and an active member of the California School of Impressionism. Botke was a woman artist at a time when the art world was dominated by men. She was strong and outspoken, yet much of her work was gentle and demure. Through her paintings, she created her own unique world filled with peace, harmony, and beauty.



Jessie Hazel Arms Botke (1883–1971)



LEFT:
Albert Herter (1871–1950)
Woman with Red Hair
Smithsonian American Art Museum

ABOVE:
Albert Herter (1871–1950)
The Orient and Persia
Two of the seven mural paintings in the cafe at the St. Francis Hotel,
San Francisco

Beginnings

Jessie Hazel Arms was born in Chicago on May 27, 1883. Her parents were **Martha Cornell** and **William Aldis Arms**, both of English descent. Her father's family roots date back to 1630 Colonial America as among the earliest settlers in Massachusetts.

After graduating from **Lakeview High School**, Jessie Arms received a scholarship to **Chicago University**, but at age nineteen chose to attend the **Art Institute of Chicago**. At the Institute, she studied under portrait, landscape, and interior scene painter **John C. Johansen (1876–1964)**, who was trained under American academician **Frank Duveneck (1848–1919)**. Johansen also studied in Paris at the **Académie Julian** and **James Whistler's Académie Carmen**. Arms took a summer class in Ogunquit, Maine, where she studied with plein-air artist **Charles Herbert Woodbury (1864–1940)**, who was a graduate of **Massachusetts Institute**

of Technology (MIT), and had the distinction of teaching more than 4,000 students, in addition to being the youngest artist ever elected to the **Boston Art Club**.

The lure of the West attracted Jessie Arms when in 1906 the **Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway** offered her a round-trip passage to Arizona and California in exchange for paintings representing the West. Among her resulting works depicting Native American life and the California missions, those that the Railway acquired to promote commercial travel to the West were *Hopi Indian Life* and *California Missions*. The **Art Institute of Chicago Museum** exhibited several of her western genre paintings in their annual exhibition held in 1907, including the watercolours: *San Gabriel Bells*; *The Old Pepper Tree*; *Orange Grove, California*; *Mission House*; and *Eucalyptus Trees*. In 1909 she travelled to Europe for three months with her mother and a fellow student, **Dudley Crafts Watson**, who

organized a group to take the Grand Tour. When Jessie returned to Chicago she was inspired.

Herter Looms and the Development of a Refined Style

In 1911, Jessie Arms moved to New York City, where **Albert Herter (1871–1950)** hired her to work in his design firm, and it was then she began painting images of birds and became a specialist in tapestry cartoons. Albert Herter had studied painting at the **Art Students League in New York** and at the **Académie Julian** in Paris under **Jean-Paul Laurens (1838–1921)**. While in Paris, Herter met fellow American artist **Adele McGinnis (1869–1946)** and the couple were married in 1893. Albert Herter was a remarkable artist. His paintings received multiple medals, his illustrations graced the covers of many popular magazines and books, and he created several posters for the allied efforts in World War I. Together, Albert and Adele founded **Herter Looms** in

1909, a tapestry and textile design and manufacturing firm that specialized in elegant patterns for those with refined taste and financial means. Albert Herter was following in the footsteps of his father **Christian Herter (1839–1883)** and his uncle **Gustave Herter (1830–1898)**, who had founded **Herter Brothers**, the foremost cabinet-making, upholstery manufacturing, and interior design firm during La Belle Époque and the early Gilded Age, operating from 1864 to 1906.

Life in New York City suited Arms' independent and outspoken nature. In 1911 and 1912 she marched up Fifth Avenue passionately demonstrating in the Woman Suffrage Parade for women's right to vote. Her work ethic was also strong. She was a Christian Scientist who believed in the teaching that she is "entitled to express energy, vitality, and joy."

At Herter Looms, Jessie Arms was immersed in French academic painting skills and the burgeoning Art Deco style. Additionally, she was inspired by *Japonisme*, the aesthetics of incorporating elements of Japanese art, primarily Japanese screens (*byōbu*) and woodblock prints from the Edo period (1615–1868), into European design. Many of the original Japanese screens featured birds in nature with gold leaf backgrounds. Herter's artists were given the task of creating a peacock frieze for the dining room of the famous Broadway star **Billie Burke** for her magnificent estate **Burkeley Crest**, located in Hastings-on-Hudson, which she had purchased in 1910. In 1914, Burke married the Broadway impresario **Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.** of the **Ziegfeld Follies**, and in 1916 they made **Burkeley Crest** their



Jessie Arms Botke (1883–1971)
White Peacock – Spring, c. 1930
 Oil on canvas laid on Masonite panel 31.125" × 29.5"
 Rowe Collection
 Courtesy, American Legacy Fine Arts



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permanent home. Burke continued her acting career and later starred in numerous motion pictures, including *Dinner at Eight* (1931), *Topper* (1937), and *Wizard of Oz* (1939) in which she portrayed Glinda the Good Witch of the North.

Jessie Arms described how she was commissioned for the Burke assignment: "Mr. Herter came to me with the scheme for the dining room, it was to be in shades of blue and green and he wanted a peacock frieze using the same colours, with white peacocks as notes of accent. I didn't even know there was such a thing as a white peacock and went up to the **Bronx Zoo** to find out, and they had one. It was love at first sight and has been ever since." This was the moment when Jessie Arms' passion for birds was ignited, and particularly for white peacocks. She explained, "...the white peacock was so appealing because it was a simple, but beautiful white form to be silhouetted against a dark background, and the texture and pattern of the lacy tail broke the harshness of the white mass without losing the simplicity of the pattern. For a long time, I couldn't get away from white and near white birds, geese, ducks, and finally cockatoos?"

Albert Herter recognized Botke's particular skill at painting birds and in 1913 assigned her the project of painting all the birds for a magnificent commission for the dining room of the **St. Francis Hotel** in San Francisco. The seven-panel mural project was titled *Gifts of the Old World* (1913–1914). After completing the San Francisco project in 1914, Herter sent Arms to Santa Barbara to work on his home El Mirasol (The Sunflower). The original parcel of land for El Mirasol was purchased in 1904 by Albert Herter's mother **Mary Herter**, who built a home in the Mission Revival style, which Albert and Adele Herter decorated. After Mary Herter passed away in 1913, Albert inherited the estate and converted it into a resort-hotel named El Mirasol Hotel (it was re-dedicated in 1980 as **Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens**). Arms spent nearly one year on the project. On her return back east, she stopped in Chicago to visit her parents, and met the Dutch-born artist, etcher, and woodblock printmaker, **Cornelis Botke (1887–1954)**. Jessie Arms continued studying and working with

Albert Herter until 1915, the year she and Cornelis were married in Leonia, New Jersey, on April 15.

Love and Partnership at Screaming Peacock Ranch

Cornelis Botke had studied at the **School of Applied Design** in Haarlem and moved from Holland to Chicago in 1906, where he became an architectural draftsman, but he longed to be a fine artist. The couple began their married life in Chicago, and within a few months Jessie Arms Botke's unique talent presented her with a mural commission from the **Kellogg Company** in Battle Creek, Michigan. Cornelis assisted on the project with his wife and the two discovered that they worked well

together. In April 1916, their son and only child **William Arms Botke** was born. When William was one year old, they accepted a large mural project, *The Masque of Youth* (1918), for the **University of Chicago's** second floor theatre, **Ida Noyes Hall**, which took them nearly a year to complete. Mrs. Noyes was so delighted with their work that she tripled their pay. Jessie commented, "Though I got all the glory, Cornelis really did just as much as I did."

In 1918 and 1919, Jessie exhibited at the **National Academy of Design** in New York City, the **Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts**, and the **Art Institute of Chicago**. In 1919, the Botkes resided briefly in Manitou, Colorado, then in San Francisco, and settled in Carmel, where they purchased a house. In



ABOVE:
Cornelis Botke and
Jessie Arms Botke
Photo by George Hurrell
(1904–1992)
Courtesy, Carmel Art Association

LEFT:
Cornelis Botke (1887–1954)
Old Tree, 1931
Etching on paper 12 1/2" × 13 1/2"
Collection of William Orcutt

Carmel, Cornelis taught at **Carmel Arts and Crafts** and the couple worked on major commissions together as well as their own fine art. In 1921, Jessie's former work using gold metallics as a designer of tapestries, resulted in her completing what may be her first oil and gilt painting, *Peacock on Gold*.

From 1923 to 1925, the Botkes travelled in Europe studying art, painting, and sketching. In 1929, they purchased a ten-acre ranch in Wheeler Canyon, California, near Santa Paula. They eventually built two houses and converted the horse barn into an art studio. They also added several aviaries for Jessie's collection of live peacocks and pheasants and humorously called the compound Screaming Peacock Ranch. Life at the ranch was productive for the Botkes. Aside from keeping busy with painting and etching, they also farmed and raised their son, and eventually, their grandchildren there.

Settling into the art community, Jessie Arms Botke became Secretary on the Board of Directors of the **California Art Club (CAC)** in 1929. She exhibited several of her paintings in club exhibitions, including: *Dabouet* and *Bretagne* at the club's **Hollyhock House** headquarters in Hollywood (August 31 – September 30, 1927). She also exhibited in several of CAC's Gold Medal Exhibitions held at the **Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art** in Exposition Park (now, **Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County**), including: *White Herons* (18th Gold Medal Exhibition, November 1927); *Old Pelican* (19th Gold Medal Exhibition, November 1928); *Deep Sea Garden* (20th Gold Medal Exhibition, November 1929); and *Harlequinade* (21st Gold Medal Exhibition, November 1930).

In the January 4, 1931 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, art critic **Arthur Millier** described Jessie Arms Botke's character as "ample, warm, motherly; her mind vigorous as a well-rooted oak, Rabelaisian chuckles in her throat." The article also described the artist as "...a unique figure among American decorative painters. She paints panels filled with white peacocks, geese, pelicans, and fish, with a rare combination of glowing imagination, exact and loving observation and meticulous craftsmanship."



Jessie Arms Botke (1883–1971)
Cockatoos and Easter Lily Vine (Beaumontia), 1961
Oil on panel 24" × 30"
Rowe Collection



Jessie Arms Botke (1883–1971)
Crowned Pigeons, c. 1925
Oil on board 32 1/8" × 26"
The Irvine Museum Collection at University of California, Irvine



Jessie Arms Botke (1883–1971)

Macaw & Cockatoos, 1926

Oil and gold leaf on canvas, mounted on panel 25" × 30"

The Irvine Museum Collection at the Jack & Shana Langson Institute & Museum of California Art, University of California Irvine

In addition to using her birds at Screaming Peacock Ranch as models, Jessie Arms Botke also made excursions to the **San Diego Zoo** to make sketches of the rare birds. She had learned to utilize zoos as her source of living reference first in New York at the Bronx Zoo.

An article that appeared in the *Oakland Tribune* on December 31, 1933, encouraged a visit to Jessie Arms Botke's exhibition of paintings held at **Courvoisier Galleries** in San Francisco: The article said, "They delight the eye; they give rest after the day's turmoil. ...I suggest you drop in and view them [and] take yourself for a time out of the day's difficulties. You will like well those two white peacocks perched among magnolia blossoms. The two geese, with [a] background of houses and hills, will shut off the noises of streets and soothe your nerves. And there are others, beautifully done, to give peace to mind. Don't forget, when you are there, to ask to see Mrs. Botke's portfolio of sketches. All her birds of the air and fishes of the sea are drawn from life."

An Exquisite Legacy

Jessie Arms Botke held successful exhibitions in the important art centres of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City. In Los Angeles she was represented by **The Biltmore Galleries**, in San Francisco her work was shown at **Gump's Galleries**, and in New York City she was represented by **Grand Central Gallery**, where in 1937 she exhibited eighteen of her paintings of birds and flowers.

During the 1950s, as Jessie Arms Botke's career flourished, sadness came when on September 16, 1954 Cornelis Botke passed away from complications of acute diabetes. The unique dynamics between the couple as husband and wife and as art partners cannot be overstated. They provided mutual career support as well as constructive criticism of each other's work. However, Jessie persevered and continued creating beautiful work.

In addition to her involvement with the California Art Club, Jessie Arms Botke was a member of the **Chicago Society of Artists, Chicago Society for Sanity in Art, Women Painters and**

Sculptors, California Water Color Society, American Watercolor Society, National Association of Women Artists, and Foundation of Western Art. Her works are held in important collections throughout the United States, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts; **Mills College, Oakland; The Irvine Museum Collection at UCI Langson IMCA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and San Diego Museum.** Botke won numerous awards for her work, including high distinction from the Art Institute of Chicago. She passed away in Santa Paula, California on October 1, 1971.

Jessie Arms Botke was one of the most admired decorative painters and muralists of the early twentieth century. No other artist could equal her bold sense of two-dimensional design or her accuracy and elegance in interpreting nature's appeal. Her most celebrated subjects depict various exotic birds in Edenic settings, conveying beauty, elegance, tranquillity, and a sense of her own idea of paradise. 🌿

Notes:

Elaine Adams is Executive Director and CEO of California Art Club, as well as the Editor-in-Chief of the California Art Club Newsletter.

The exhibition, A Fanciful World: Jessie Arms Botke, at Laguna Art Museum from November 5, 2021 to February 13, 2022.

Research Sources include: Daniela Ionescu, Director of California Art Club Library and History Research Center.

Birds, Boughs, and Blossoms by Patricia Trenton, Ph.D. and Deborah Epstein Solon, Ph.D. published by William A. Karges Fine Art, Produced by Whitney Ganz, Los Angeles, circa 1995.

The Peacocks Are Gone, but Artist Staying Close to the Family Nest by David Kelly, Los Angeles Times, February 16, 2002.

Botke Paintings Go To New York Art Exhibition, Piru News, March 4, 1937.

Artist Studies Bird Life at San Diego Zoo, Coronado Citizen, May 8, 1941.

Collecting California: The Gardena High School Art Collection Is on View Once Again, Southwest Art Magazine, September 17, 2019.

AskART.com.