



Fig. 1: Martha Walter (1875–1976), *Grey Sunday Morning*, circa 1915. Oil on board, 14 x 18 inches. Courtesy of Jim's of Lambertville, Lambertville, PA.

Martha Walter

(1875–1976)

by Lisa Bush Hankin



Fig. 2: Martha Walter (1875–1976), *Picking Apples*. Oil on canvas, 38½ x 28 inches. Courtesy of Daphne Alazraki Fine Art, New York.

Following a retrospective exhibition in 2002 and a record-setting price at auction in 2004, activity has been brisk in the market for Martha Walter's work. Walter, who worked in an impressionist and postimpressionist style over her long career, was one of only a handful of American artists to have been given a solo exhibition in Paris. Though her paintings have recently broken the six-figure barrier, the majority still trade below that, allowing collectors to acquire examples at a relatively approachable price level.


The Philadelphia-born Walter studied under impressionist master William Merritt Chase (1849–1916) at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, as well as at his outdoor painting school at Shinnecock, Long Island. The spontaneity and painterly freedom Chase encouraged in his students is evident in Walter's work, as is her interest in the effects of sunlight and shadow. Like other aspiring artists of her day, Walter traveled to Paris for further instruction, and came to spend a large portion of her career painting abroad. The independent-minded Walter, frequently along with fellow artist Alice Schille (1869–1955), traveled widely in Eastern Europe and North Africa, considered exotic locales for women travelers in the early part of the twentieth century.

Walter's cheerful beach scenes (Figs. 1 and 4) have traditionally been her most sought after works. On her canvases

she captured seaside activities in locations that included Coney Island, Atlantic City, and Gloucester, Massachusetts, as well as overseas. But New York dealer Daphne Alazraki observes “there are fewer of these available and they have become more expensive.” According to Alazraki there are still interesting opportunities in subjects popular among painters in France at the turn of the twentieth century, as they reflect Walter’s French training as well as her American mode. These rustic scenes of apple-picking (Fig. 2) or farmers at work (Fig. 3) “are particularly reminiscent of the realist strain in French painting,” she says, “and are the types of works one can still acquire for reasonable prices. I do think they will only continue to appreciate.”

Noted scholar William Gerdtz, who wrote the extensive exhibition catalogue on Walter for the 2002 Woodmere Art Museum retrospective exhibition, commented that Walter’s work is particularly associated with the themes of childhood and femininity. A sizeable portrait of a woman sitting outdoors in summer sunlight brought \$141,900 at Christie’s New York in May 2004—a record price for Walter’s work at auction. Her large-scale images of women have more recently gained recognition, Daphne Alazraki notes, and “are indeed catching up to her better known beach and harbor scenes.”

Walter also painted floral still lifes and a series depicting immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, which were included in her solo exhibition at Galerie Georges Petit in Paris in 1922. Her indigenous subjects, many based on her encounters with people and places from her extensive travels, include the bazaars, streets, and shops of Morocco and Tunisia; the native peoples of Mexico and the American West; the markets and fishing boats of rural France; the canals of Venice; Parisian café scenes, and even the queen of Spain.

Walter has a growing list of auction prices exceeding the \$50,000 mark and major works have sold upwards of \$250,000 in galleries. In addition to her oils, she also created numerous works on paper in pastel and watercolor, and these offer collectors the opportunity to acquire her work at generally more modest prices. 

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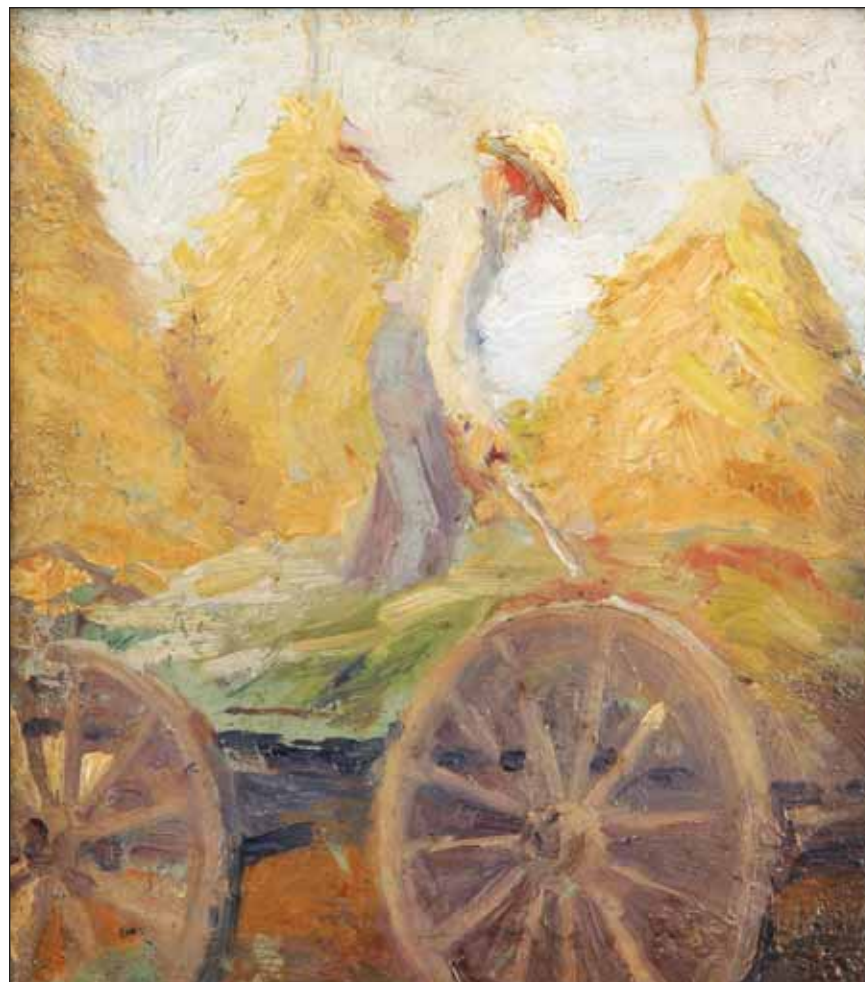


Fig. 3: Martha Walter (1875–1976), *The Haywagon, Shinnecock Hills*, 1899–1900. Oil on board, 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 6 inches. Courtesy of Daphne Alazraki Fine Art, New York.



Fig. 4: Martha Walter (1875–1976), *Beach Scene, France*. Oil on canvasboard, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Courtesy of Schwarz Gallery, Philadelphia.