





(above)
Buttoned and Stitched, 1952
Oil on canvas
25 x 35 inches
TH-1

The subject of *Buttoned and Stitched* is the Provincetown Coast Guard Station. The painting was exhibited at the Boston Arts Festival in 1955.

(lower left)
Study, Grass on Sand Dunes
Graphite and colored pencil on paper
9 x 12 inches
TH-59

(lower right)
Study, Sand Dunes
Graphite and colored pencil on paper
9 x 12 inches
TH-60

Cover:

Gladiola with Bee, ca. 1985 Pastel on black paper 26¼ x 20½ inches TH-17

Opposite page:

Self Portrait, ca. 1992 Charcoal on paper Private Collection

Poetry of Hand & Spirit

Paintings & Drawings by Polly Thayer (Starr)



September 14 to November 3, 2001



FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Polly Thayer enjoys the reputation of being one of Boston's most cherished and long-lived treasures. For more than seven decades she has produced artwork that traverses many worlds, from the traditional technique that characterizes the best of the Boston School painters to experimentation with modernist ideas that enabled her to penetrate through superficial appearance to get to the essence of a thing, be it a field of wheat, a flower or a face. Thayer has used her art to explore truth — the truth of appearance and the truth *behind* appearance. Her passion for both art and truthfulness, sometimes existing in uneasy alliance, imbues her works with an uncompromising integrity.

In 1932, after spending several seasons in New York and Paris, Thayer rented a studio at the Fenway Studio Building here in Boston and established herself as a portrait artist. She began to exhibit paintings in important annual exhibitions in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. In 1950 our grandfather, Robert C. Vose, invited her to have a one-artist show at Vose Galleries. Now, some fifty years later, we are honored to have the opportunity to work with her again. Thayer is the only living

artist represented in A Studio of Her Own: Boston Women Artists 1870-1940, currently on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Her contributions to that exhibition and to this current exhibition testify to her place in Boston's vital community of accomplished artists. We are especially delighted to announce that Poetry of Hand and Spirit: Paintings and Drawings by Polly Thayer (Starr) marks Vose Galleries' return to handling the work of living artists.

It has been a joy to work with Polly Thayer. Her intelligence, generous spirit and wit have graced each aspect of the exhibition's production. Dorothy Koval wrote the essay for the catalogue and our Director of Research, Nancy Allyn Jarzombek, coordinated the exhibition and catalogue. Thanks also go to Lynnette Bazzinotti, Michael Hindle, Courtney Kopplin, Julia Morgan, Elsie Oliver, Jason Pechinski, Elizabeth W. Vose and Siobhan Wheeler for their cheerful assistance.

Abbot W. Vose Robert C. Vose III Marcia L. Vose



Glory (also called Zinnias) Graphite on paper 13 x 19¼ inches TH-19

Poetry of Hand & Spirit

Polly Thayer (Starr)

by Dorothy Koval

I want to see with my whole being, and to communicate what I experience. William Blake called it seeing **through** the eye rather than **with** the eye: instead of superimposing my own expectations on a subject, I seek what the form will reveal of essence, what the visible will tell me of the invisible. It is an effort that requires intense, prayerful attention, but if the seeing is honest and the hand is well trained, a revelation will emerge. The reward is bliss.

—Polly Thayer (2001)

Polly Thayer's quest has been to see into the heart of things. For the better part of a century she has tirelessly sought to understand the nature and effects of seeing, as well as to coax her own highly-trained hand into locating and conveying what she calls the invisible within the visible, the enduring spirit within each expression of what we see as reality.

Born Ethel Randolph Thayer in 1904, Polly, as she has been called all her life,1 was raised in Boston's Back Bay when it was still so rural that her parents could go on daily horseback rides in the Fenway. Each spring the family moved by carriage to their farm in Hingham, where Polly, her brother Jim and sister Eleanor took boundless delight in the goings-on of the farm creatures and the offerings of nature. Her beloved father, Ezra Ripley Thayer, who was Dean of Harvard Law School, died when she was eleven, and her widowed mother, the former Ethel Randolph Clark, who came from a line of ministers, occupied herself increasingly with religious and charitable affairs. Noticing her daughter's fascination with a group of students drawing from casts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Mrs. Thayer arranged for her to take drawing lessons with Beatrice Van Ness, herself then a recent graduate of the Museum School. Polly threw herself into the activity with such enthusiasm that her teacher could hardly see the child for the charcoal.

Thayer graduated from the Westover Boarding School in Middlebury, Connecticut and briefly considered a career in acting. She joined Harvard's *Cercle Français* and the Footlights Club in Jamaica Plain, acting in semi-professional productions of George Bernard Shaw's *Androcles and The Lion* and Molière's *Tartuffe*. But painting was clearly her passion and she decided to enter the School of Painting at the Museum of Fine Arts.

Before beginning classes, Thayer went with her mother and brother on a voyage to China, Korea and Japan. On September 1, 1923, as they were about to leave Yokohama, their ship "shivered like a human thing in pain," and suddenly the pier broke apart and was swallowed by the ocean. The greatest recorded earthquake in Japanese history had just struck, leveling Tokyo and Yokohama. In the ensuing days the *Empress of Australia* was converted to a hospital ship and the nineteen-year-old Thayer found herself tending the dead and



Polly Thayer, New York, ca.

dying. The experience remained with her as a measure of reality both in life and art.²

Directly after returning to Boston, Thayer entered the Museum School and took Anatomy and Life Drawing with Philip Hale.

You did a nude in a week, and you worked all day on it, each day . . . You established the form in the first two days, then you carved the detail for the next four. It was a regular system on every one . . . You were given a ruler and a piece of paper the size, as you held it up, of what you saw on the model stand. And you cut off that little strip of paper, thumbtacked it to your ruler, and then divided it into seven and a half heads. Then you reproduced that on your paper, so you were establishing your exact points . . . Your drawing would be as faithful as it could possibly be made, using the plumb line and diminishing glass and this ruler with the paper on it. That took quite a while.³

The next fall she enrolled in Leslie Thompson's class on portraiture, but soon became dismayed by what she believed was too simplistic an approach: "Paint what you see, like a child," he insisted. She later remarked,

It did not commend itself to me, when I got to thinking about it, that I should turn off processes that seemed to me important, such as the intellectual or the thoughtful . . . My difficulty from the start was to put together what the teachers were telling me to do — to copy exactly what I saw — and still to fulfill the desire I knew was in me to say something about it Painting, for me, was a way of $\ensuremath{\textit{understanding}}$ what I saw.^4

Upon learning that Hale was willing to give her private lessons, Thayer left the Museum School after a year and a half.

Under Hale, Thayer mastered the conventions of professional academic painting that were considered hallmarks of the Boston style, but she wanted to know more about color and composition. With an artist friend she rented a fish-house over the water in Provincetown for a summer to study with Charles Hawthorne.

Dorothy Koval lives with her artist husband, Dominic, in Vermont. She has researched the family papers of William Lloyd Garrison, Robert Grosvenor Valentine and Zoltan Haraszti. She is currently co-authoring Vanderbilt Scion, Memoirs of a Modern Knight-Errant, with Harry C. Cushing IV. A friend of the Starr family since childhood, she began working with Polly Thayer in 1997.



Woman in a Flowered Shawl (Sara Apthorp Thayer), ca. 1928 Sara Forbes Apthorp had married James Bradley Thayer, the artist's brother, in 1925. Oil on canvas 40 x 30 inches

33548

Hawthorne taught his students to capture large blocks of light and dark and had them paint in full sunlight with a putty knife. Thayer enjoyed the sense of *matière* she gained from the thick paint, and recognized that Hawthorne had keyed up her palette.

Over the next few years Thayer traveled extensively. She spent a winter with her mother in Paris, studying at the Académie Colarossi, and toured Italy with landscape architect Rose Nichols. In 1929, she sailed to Morocco. The trip was cut short by acute appendicitis, but not before she received word that the National Academy of Design in New York had bestowed the prestigious First Hallgarten Prize on her painting *Circles* (now in the collection of the New Britain Museum of Art). The next spring she followed the advice of Royal Cortissoz, art historian and critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, who had recommended that she study Velasquez at the Prado in Madrid. She learned much from Velasquez, but the voice that spoke to her most directly was that of Goya. She felt he painted what mattered, and copied his work many times trying to decipher its significance.

From Spain, Thayer moved on to Paris and sublet the studio of American painter Waldo Pierce, near the *Chambre des Députés*. She studied briefly in the atelier of cubist painter André l'Hôte

and then settled down to work on models of her own choice, with her newly-acquired Siamese kitten, Hunya, for company. She wrote back to the States:

I have met people in Paris who for the first time in my life make me realize . . . the riches a tradition and an older civilization can dower on society. Art, as I never dreamed it could be, is a daily and vital interest — it is more important than business, than politics, than eating even! You cannot think what the effect of it is when always among a group of my fellows at home I have had to keep my greatest interests hooded, or if I mentioned painting it was only to bore, as 'talking shop' or 'being precious.' 5

From 1930 to 1933 Thayer spent winters in New York City, where she began to struggle against the limitations of her Boston School training. "Wheels [John Wheelwright] took me around all Friday to exhibitions," she wrote to her mother. "I don't know what to think. . . . the new is harder to swallow than a large oyster." Eugene Speicher came to her studio just as she was beginning work on a large double nude in the Boston School manner. "Get out on the streets!" he exhorted. "Get into the subway! Get into the park! Get some life into it!" She went to wrestling matches and even asked a doctor friend to get her into an operating theater. "To see the living organs pushing up uncovered out of a woman's body . . . I forgot everything in the wonder of it."

Thayer won a gold medal from the Boston Tercentenary Exhibition mounted at Horticultural Hall in 1930 for her self-portrait *Interval*. In that same year her first solo exhibition opened at Doll and Richards Gallery in Boston. One reviewer declared that it "surely settles her status as one of the foremost painters in the country, especially notable in portrait painting but evidently gifted with that kind of genius which is not circumscribed." The exhibition brought in commissions for eighteen portraits, many of which were shown the following year at Wildenstein's Gallery in New York.

Stimulated by her success, Thayer took a course with Harry Wickey at the Art Students' League in New York, and reached, in her own words,

... a turning point Wickey took my first drawing and slashed into it. He marked it all over to show me plastic values — that there was something that went on between the outlines other than just dark and light. Suddenly to realize another dimension was very exciting. The heavens opened.⁹

Forms and spaces had become "not merely abstract relationships, but . . . powerful psychological currents which helped animate and unify the entire composition." Thayer realized that she had much both to learn and to unlearn. With renewed interest she studied the penetrating portraits of Thomas Eakins, which seemed to her next to Goya's in eloquence, and tried to integrate Wickey's formal lessons, as well as Eakins', into her own work.

Still seeking a more thorough knowledge of composition, Thayer spent the summer of 1932 studying with Jean Despujols in Fontainebleau. She was struck by his contention that an artist could not give equal weight to value, line and color. She explains:

There's a French saying, *tout dire, c'est ennuyer*. If you're saying everything, you're a bore. Things that you see aren't sharp against each other, they're blurred. You only sharpen the ones that you want

to look at. . . . If you want to make a statement, then you need to focus on some one point in it. I began to understand the importance

In her class the academy in Fontainebleau Thayer met Neyan Stevens, a young women who had been born in Egypt, studied magic with the Moroccans, and adventured around the world. Stevens elucidated for Thayer the paintings of Van Gogh which, "to a Boston-trained artist . . . looked wildly distorted." 12 Before returning home, Thayer spent a week at the 15th-century Abbaye de Pontigny, which had been converted to a retreat by a group of scholars. The week made a profound impression on her. Association with serious intellectual activity, she assured her mother, "helps work just like hearing good music." 13

Thayer returned to New York in 1933. Her subjects over the next decade included writers, poets, actors and artists, among them Judith Anderson, Jacques Barzun, Maurice Evans, Lewis Galantiere, Robert Hale, two generations of Howes¹⁴, May Sarton, John Wheelwright and Agnes Yarnall.

For some years Thayer had been close to Donald Starr, a Boston lawyer and man of many talents who had been at Harvard with her brother. In spite of their mutual attraction, she was hesitant to enter into marriage, unwilling to put less than her whole heart into either marriage or career, and uncertain as to how well the two could co-exist. She communicated her fears to him in a letter from Paris:

I have been working like a dog . . . and for the first time feel a power in me that, if I have the strength, I can make grow. . . . How much it amounts to I don't know and I fear, and sometimes it almost makes



Diana Crombie

Crombie's dramatic intensity caught Polly's attention in the early 1930s. She posed for Woman in Black, now at the Museum of Art at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and Diana, purchased by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Graphite and ink on paper 14 x 9 inches

TH-50



Polly Thayer, with her cat, Hunya. From "About People we Know," in Town & Country Magazine, Feb. 1, 1932.

me face abandoning it, that the handwriting on the wall reads that only what you are is what counts.15

In 1932 Starr resigned his post as Assistant Attorney General of Massachusetts to sail around the world with several friends in a schooner he had built for the purpose. 16 A year and a half later Thayer went to meet him in Genoa, Italy. She had deliberated long enough; the couple married and spent their honeymoon in Paris. Donald rejoined the Pilgrim to finish his circumnavigation, while Thayer, whose tendency to seasickness made her an unenthusiastic sailor, steamed home directly.

The couple built a summer home on land which had been given them by Thayer's mother from the farm in Hingham. Donald, hoping to introduce his wife to the joys of cruising, took her on a sailing trip in 1936. After two weeks Thayer asked to be put ashore: "I wanted to kiss the ground. I'd never felt about the land as I did then I wanted to celebrate it, praise it."17 She settled herself at a small inn and painted landscapes for ten days straight. The same summer, Neyan Stevens and May Sarton visited the Starrs, and Sarton posed for both painters. Thayer's portrait, now owned by the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard, conveys the sharp intelligence of her sitter using a more modern idiom than she had used previously. She simplified the shapes of Sarton's clothes, and heightened the poet's gaze by keeping her face very pale with only a hint of shadows.

Back in Boston Thayer joined the Painters' Workshop, a group of artists who met to analyze techniques and materials. It was during the course of their professional discussions that she identified a technique she had been seeking for years: "Reubensian underpainting, in grisaille, and then glazing the color over it! That was how to get the luminosity of the shadows without losing the color."18 No longer would she blend adjacent pigments to form shadows that reminded her of mud. Instead, her darkness would reflect the light at the heart of the painting, through layers of modulated transparent glazes.

The demands on Thayer's time and energy increased. Her daughters Victoria and Dinah were born in 1940 and 1945. In 1942 she became a member of the Society of Friends, which, having no hierarchy, relies upon its members to devote many hours to their Meeting's activities. Moreover, she had a gregarious husband who loved travel, sports, and club life. Nevertheless, in a solo show at Vose Galleries in 1950 she showed thirty works including portraits, landscapes and several finely-detailed renditions of flowers and small animals. Over the next decade she had exhibitions in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

Around this period Thayer was given a jeweler's loupe. "It was a watershed," she recalled:

As a child I had been shown how to pat bees. It was always a thrill for me, and, to judge by the purr-like vibrations the stroking generated, for the bees as well. But I had no idea of the bronze wings' beaded hinges imbedded in the delicious fur jacket, or the jewelry of their articulation, until I studied them under the loupe's magnification. 19

She focused increasingly on elements of nature, fascinated by the construction of insects and plants. Although she was still accepting portrait commissions, her pursuit of meaning centered on flowers, which had become for her a direct bridge to the invisible.

In the early 1960s, the Starrs bought a summer house on Martha's Vineyard, conveniently situated for Donald's sailing. Donald too had begun painting, and they both enjoyed "Painters' Weekends" at Naushon Island where her cousin Edward Forbes had a summer home. Alternately they joined Charles Hopkinson at Sharksmouth, his home on the North Shore. Thayer continued to paint at Sharksmouth even after Hopkinson's death in 1962, often pairing the massive worn rocks with an almost calligraphic rendering of the delicacy of water that had shaped them.

Thayer learned in the early 1970s that she had glaucoma and macular degeneration. She would have to learn to see in ways she had not yet imagined. She reflected on the imperative of art in her life:

I find there are secrets, certain noumenous things, that seem to speak to me in a special sense, signaling in a language that compels decoding. To be faithful to this task demands absolute attention \dots ²⁰

In winter she drew white cyclamen blossoms, whose pristine recurved petals were sometimes splashed with red at the heart.



Spring Siesta, ca. 1950
This picture depicts the Charles River Embankment before the development of the Esplanade.
Oil on canvas board

9 x 12 inches TH-79



detail, *Study of Bees* Graphite on paper 12¼ x 9¾ inches TH-31

In summer she delved into irises and zinnias that bloomed in her garden. The graphite and charcoal of her early training gave way to rich pastels. Some flowers were fully formed and lavish, with pale golden throats and bees and vibrant backgrounds, and some were almost abstract in the simplicity of their lines and planes. At times Thayer's subjects underwent a kind of transfiguration:

A process takes over like automatic writing, impossible to describe, an entering into the person or creature or thing you are depicting. You feel you have succeeded if you have captured its essence, revealed its source in the ground of being. The object is transformed in the process — the Queen Anne's Lace becomes a burning bush, the cyclamen is seen leaping joyously toward the sun, the fish's eye is the eye of God.²¹

At the age of eighty-seven, when it was clear that her eyesight would not permit her to commit her observations to paper for much longer, Thayer undertook two of the most precise and poetic projects she had ever attempted. The first was a sequence of delicate drawings depicting the life cycle of the thistle. In the more than two dozen pieces that comprise it, all drawn directly from nature, no shadow falls between vision and reality; they are equally literal and metaphysical — unsentimental examinations of birth, growth and death, light and darkness, evanescence and recurrence. The second was a final portrait of herself. The physical skills she had challenged and honed for seven decades were at the command now not only of an eye, but of a soul which looked *through* the eye — and acknowledged both its own strength and its fragility.

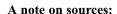
Thayer loves to quote the words of the Japanese artist Hokusai, written at the age of 75:

I have drawn things since I was six. All that I made before the age of sixty-five is not worth counting. At seventy-three I began to understand the true construction of animals, plants, trees, birds and insects. At ninety I will enter into the secret of things. At a hundred and ten everything, every dot and dash, will live.²²

Today, although Thayer's physical vision has diminished, her anticipation of insight is as keen as ever. "You never achieve what you want," she admits, "but you're always getting nearer to the essence And that's a search that is all important."²³



Polly Thayer (Starr), ca. 1975



Unless otherwise indicated, the manuscript materials referred to here are in the possession of Polly Thayer. The general tenor of this essay is the result of many discussions since 1997 in which I have been privileged to participate while working on Thayer's papers. In 1995 and 1996 Robert Brown interviewed the artist for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; a few quotations from these interviews have been amended by Thayer in the interest of clarity. Wendy Swanton has catalogued Thayer's work and is currently compiling the artist's exhibition history.

Abbreviations:

PT: Polly Thayer (before her marriage)

PTS: Polly Thayer Starr

ERT: Ethel Randolph Thayer, the artist's mother DCS: Donald C. Starr, who married Thayer in 1933

¹ Although named for her mother and sometimes referred to as Ethel in reviews or exhibition catalogues, she was always called Polly by friends and family. Eventually she legally changed her first name from Ethel to Polly. After her marriage she sometimes used the name Polly Thayer Starr in announcements and catalogues, but always signed her work *Polly Thayer*.

² Author interviews and ERT, "The Japanese Earthquake, September 1st 1923," autograph ms in Thayer's papers. The artist also kept a journal for part of the trip and there is an "Account of the Experiences of Miss Gertrude Cozad in the Earthquake at Yokohama," typed ms, in the artist's papers. See also *Official Report of Capt. S. Robinson, R.N.R., Commander of the Canadian Pacific S. S. Empress of Australia* (Canada, n.d.).

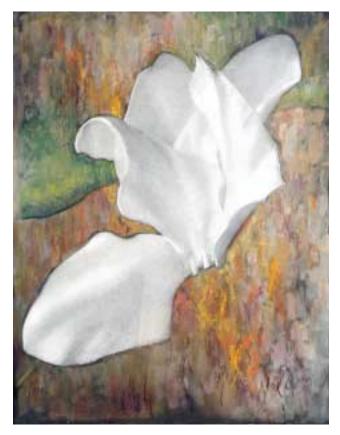
³ PTS to Robert Brown, May 12, 1995, Archives of American Art.

⁴ Author interview, January 26, 2001.

⁵ PT to DCS, July 12, 1930.



Explosion, ca. 1975
Pastel and wash on black paper 23½ x 20 inches
TH-23



White Cyclamen
Pastel and mixed media on black paper
25½ x 19¾ inches
TH-76

- ⁶ PT to ERT, ca. 1932. "Wheels" was the eccentric poet and social activist John Wheelwright, whose portrait PT was painting about this time.
- ⁷ PT journal entry, April 7, 1932.
- ⁸ "Exhibition of 17 Paintings by Ethel R. Thayer Here," *Boston Globe*, January 9, 1931.
- ⁹ PTS to Robert Brown, May 30, 1995, Archives of American Art.
- ¹⁰ Harry Wickey, *Thus Far* (NY: American Artists Group, 1941), pp. 70-71.
- ¹¹ Author interview, January 26, 2001.
- ¹² PTS to Robert Brown, May 30, 1995, Archives of American Art.
- 13 PT to ERT, Paris, 1932
- ¹⁴ Helen (writer and monologist), Quincy (news commentator and historian), Mark (law professor and historian), and their writer parents, Mark A. DeWolfe and Fanny Quincy Howe.
- ¹⁵ PT to DCS, September 6, 1932.

- ¹⁶ Donald C. Starr, *The Schooner* Pilgrim's *Progress* (Salem: Peabody Essex Museum, 1996). See also the website www.wellofstars.com/DCS.
- ¹⁷ PTS to Robert Brown, May 30, 1995, Archives of American Art.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. Thayer kept a book of painting notes which includes many technical notes and observations.
- ¹⁹ PTS, "On Seeing," typescript ms. of talk given at Brookhaven, Lexington, November 1997.
- ²⁰ PTS, "Why I Paint," undated typescript.
- ²¹ PTS to Dinah Starr, ca. 1955.
- ²² The quotation was sent to PTS by her friend, Dorothy Abbe, book designer and printer who collaborated with William A. Dwiggins. A biography on Abbe has recently been written by Ann Bromer, *Strings Attached* (publication date fall, 2001).
- ²³ PTS to Robert Brown, Feb. 1, 1996, Archives of American Art.





Lawrence Dennis, 1933 Oil on canvas 20% x 16% inches TH-73

(left)

Donald C. Starr, 1934

Oil on canvas

Boston Athenaeum



Olivia Chambers, 1933 Oil on canvas 34 x 20 inches TH-64 (top right)

Mary Elizabeth (Sears) Baring-Gould,
ca. 1945

Graphite and charcoal on paper
14 x 12 inches
TH-52

(bottom right)
Esmee Brooks (Mrs. Shepherd Brooks)
Oil on canvas
30 x 25½ inches
TH-8

Thayer painted Olivia Chambers in New York in 1933. "I am thrilled over her," she reported to her mother, "if only she does not get tired of it in the middle, as unprofessionals will."

Concurrently she was copying Goya's portrait of Dr. Perez at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and had been interested in his use of so much black. She wrote, "For a good colorist it is surprising that as he matured he used not only more and more black but almost exclusively black, which is anathema to most painters as the killer of color."

She worked on the problem by wrapping Olivia in a black shawl. She then used the blue of the background, the delicacy of the sitter's face and expressive turn of the body to balance the expanse of black, creating an enigmatic calm within the picture.











(top left)

Design in Winter, ca. 1960

Casein or tempera on prepared panel 12 x 15 inches

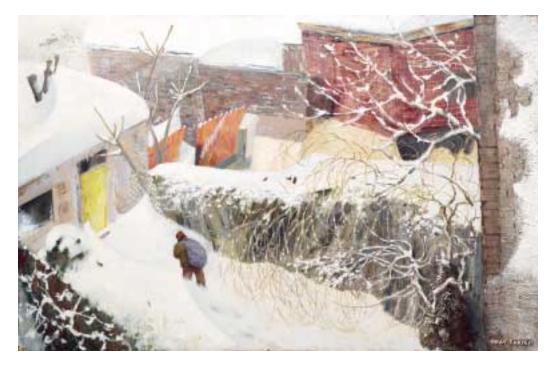
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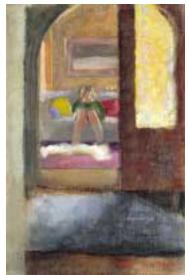
(top right)

Lost in Fleeces

Watercolor, gouache and graphite on paper
20 x 30 inches
TH-38

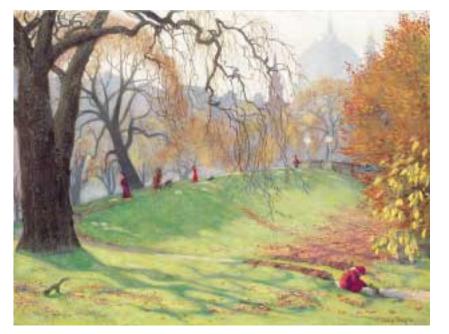
(bottom)
White World
Oil and silver leaf on pressed board
32½ x 40¼ inches
TH-2











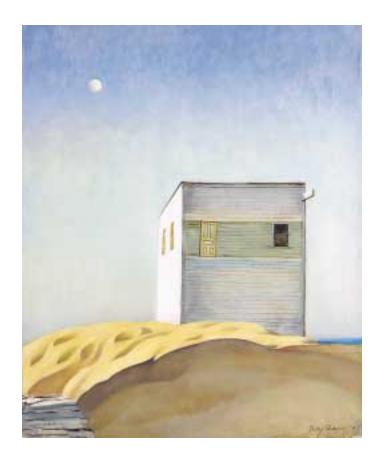
(top left)
Winter Patterns, ca. 1960
Oil on board
24 x 36 inches
TH-40

(middle left)

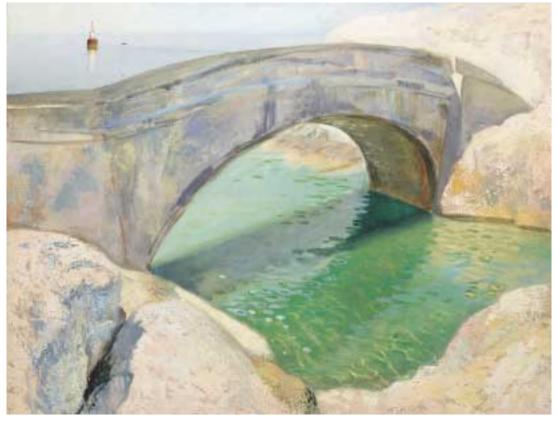
On the Public Garden Bench, ca. 1955
Oil on canvas board
9 x 12 inches
TH-69

(bottom left) My Balbec, ca. 1955 Charcoal on paper 19¾ x 26½ inches TH-30 (top right)
Interior, 1952
Oil on canvas board
8 x 12 inches
TH-35

(bottom right)
Feeding the Squirrel, Boston Public Garden,
ca. 1950
Oil on canvas
19 x 25 inches
TH-68







(top left)
After the Hurricane, 1939
Oil on canvas
26 x 20 inches
TH-39

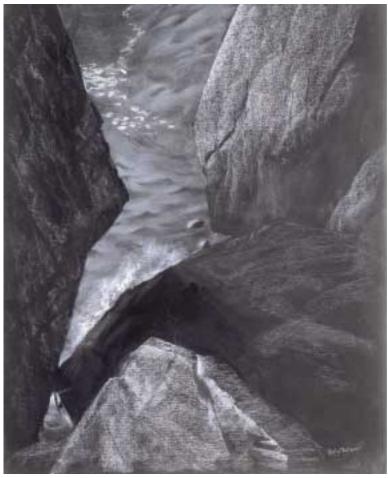
(bottom)

Rocks and Bridge, Cohasset, ca. 1959
Oil on canvas
24 x 30 inches
TH-37

(top right)

Dunes at Sunrise, ca. 1960
Oil on canvas board
12 x 18 inches
TH-41







(bottom left)

Crevice in Rocks, Sharksmouth

Charcoal and white on paper
24½ x 20 inches

TH-27

(top)
Surf on Rocks, Sharksmouth
Pastel, gouache and charcoal on black paper
20 x 30 inches
TH-47

(bottom right)
Steps to the Sea, King Caesar's Road, Duxbury,
ca. 1958
Oil on canvas board
9 x 12 inches
TH-46







This Page:

(top) Gull's Corner, 1958 Oil on pressed board 12 x 30 inches TH-12

(bottom left)
Old Bugeye, Duxbury, ca. 1958
Oil on canvas board
9 x 12 inches
TH-66

(bottom right)

Duxbury Marshes, ca. 1958
Oil on canvas board
12 x 16 inches
TH-67

Opposite Page:

(top)

Palm Tree, Fence and Gate, St. Kitts, ca. 1960

Watercolor and ink on paper

16 x 20 inches

TH-57

(center left)
Fields in St. Kitts, ca. 1960
Graphite on paper
14 x 20 inches
TH-55

(center right)

Hills and Mountain, St. Kitts, ca. 1960

Graphite and ink wash on paper

16 x 22 inches

TH-56

(bottom)

Palm Trees, St. Kitts, ca. 1960

Watercolor on paper
16 x 22 inches
TH-58

In 1936 Thayer made the first of many trips to Caribbean islands. Thrilled by the intensity of color and light she wrote,

"The sun burns and heals and shines either in full blaze or through thin clouds that diffuse its light so delicately it seems a world of mother of pearl. . . . Today for the first time it is raining in the daytime. It is really dark but so *warm* the damp smells deliciously. I feel like an earthworm. The rain rattles on the palms like hail. Everything in the tropics is so extravagant! It appeals to me temperamentally right down the backbone."

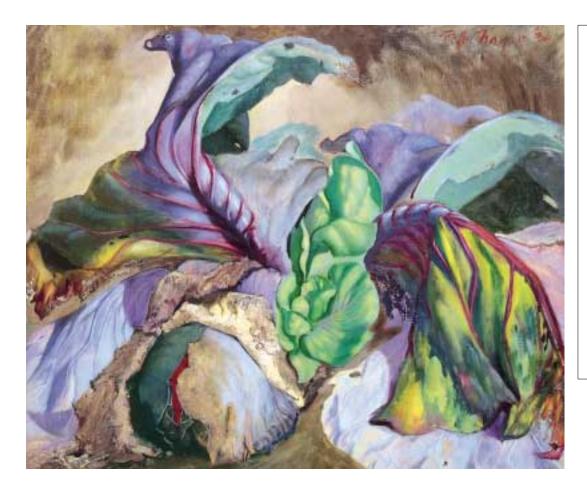
— Polly Thayer to May Sarton, Nassau, March 16, 1936











"The cabbages are turning out well. They show a bit of temperament for a change... Could you write a poem about "Spare us the beauty of cabbages" or is the word unusable even in this day & age in poetry? I think I shall go back to them & do some more. The world is stained & glittering in the last 24 hours so that the painter feels as impotent with color as in the face of Chartres glass with the sun behind it so I shall play away at the possible."

> — Polly Thayer to May Sarton, 1936



(top) Cabbages, 1936 Oil on canvas 21 x 25 inches TH-20

(lower left)
Wild Mushrooms, ca. 1960
Oil on prepared board
5 x 8 inches
TH-36

(lower right)

The Infinite, a Sudden Guest
Oil on canvas
28 x 20½ inches
TH-21







(lower left)
Tree Branches, ca. 1960
Graphite and charcoal on paper
20 x 14 inches
TH-65



(top)
Wherein God's Ponderous Mercy Hangs...
Pastel, watercolor, gouache and ink on paper 14 x 24 inches
TH-48

(bottom right)

The Heart of the Matter
Graphite on paper
9 x 8 inches
TH-33







(top left)

Gladiola with Blue Background, ca. 1980

Pastel on black paper

26½ x 20½ inches

TH-16

(bottom)

Gladiola, White on White, ca. 1985

Pastel, charcoal and graphite on paper 14 x 25 inches

TH-45

(top right)

Gladiola with Bee, ca. 1985

Pastel on black paper
26¼ x 20½ inches
TH-17





Hydrangeas and Bee, ca. 1965 Watercolor, gouache and pastel on paper 15 x 25 inches TH-43

Queen Anne's Lace Charcoal and ink on paper 12 x 16 inches TH-44







(top left) White Iris, ca. 1970 Pastel on grey paper 25 x 19 inches TH-77

(bottom)

Iris

Graphite and collage on paper
14 x 20 inches
TH-42

(top right) Iris, ca. 1958 Graphite on paper 17½ x 11¾ inches TH-25

Polly Thayer (Starr)

(b. 1904)

EDUCATION

School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 1923-1925 Private Study with Philip Hale 1925-1928 Charles Hawthorne, Provincetown ca. 1925 Académie Colarossi, Paris Atelier André l'Hôté, Paris Art Students League, New York, 1931, 1932 The Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts, France 1932 Hans Hoffman, Provincetown, 1933

Carl Nelson, Boston, 1948

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

First Julius Hallgarten Prize, 104th Annual Exhibition, National Academy of Design, New York, 1929 Gold Medal, Boston Tercentenary Exhibition, Horticultural Hall, 1930

Burton Emmett Memorial Exhibitor, Contemporary Arts Gallery, New York, 1941

First Honorable Mention, 25th Annual Members Exhibit, Springfield Art League, Springfield, 1953

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA
Art Complex Museum, Duxbury, MA
Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA
Boston Public Library, Department of Prints and Drawings,
Boston, MA
Brown University, Providence, RI

De Cordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA Eliot House, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA Langdell Library, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA Museum of Art at Brigham Young, Provo, UT

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, MA Mystic Art Association, Mystic, CT

New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Cambridge, MA

Sweetbriar College, Sweetbriar, VA Williams College, Williamstown, MA Westbrook College, Portland, ME

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Solo

Doll and Richards Gallery, Boston, MA, 1930, 1935 The Boston City Club, Boston, MA, 1931 Wildenstein & Co., Inc., New York, NY, 1932 Guild of Boston Artists, Boston, MA, 1932 Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, PA, 1936
Grace Horne Galleries, Boston, MA, 1938
Contemporary Arts, New York, NY, 1941
Vose Galleries, Boston, MA, 1950
Childs Gallery, Boston, MA, 1955, 1963
Sessler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, 1956
Pietrantonio Galleries, New York, NY, 1964
Chilton Club, Boston, MA, 1965
Boston Public Library, Boston, MA, 1969
Copley Society of Boston, Boston, MA, 1981, 1994, 1996
Latrelle Brewster, Locust Grove, GA, 1997
Friends Meeting Center, Cambridge, MA, 1995, 1996
Brookhaven at Lexington, Lexington, MA, 1997

GROUP

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
National Academy of Design, New York, NY
National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors,
New York, NY
Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts, Hartford, CT
Springfield Art League, Springfield, MA
Copley Society of Boston, Boston, MA
Guild of Boston Artists, Boston, MA
Boston Art Club, Boston, MA
Boston Institute of Modern Art, Boston, MA
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO
Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences, Norfolk, Virginia
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

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Jarzombek, Nancy Allyn. *Mary Bradish Titcomb and her Contemporaries: The Artists of Fenway Studios*. Boston: Vose Galleries of Boston, Inc., 1998.

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Sweet Peas
Pastel on black paper
26½ x 20½ inches
TH-18