



# Jane Peterson: Rhythmic Arrangements

VOSE GALLERIES





**Jane Peterson (1876-1965)**

# Jane Peterson: Rhythmic Arrangements

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## INTRODUCTION

By Carey L. Vose

In 1925, Robert C. Vose mounted an exhibition of over fifty paintings depicting scenes of Constantinople executed by Jane Peterson (1876-1965) the year prior during an extended stay in Turkey. Championing women artists was not new to my great-grandfather. He began showing their work as early as 1913, and since that time Vose Galleries has presented nearly 100 one-woman exhibitions. Peterson's work has been a favorite of the past four generations of our family, especially my parents, who have owned a wonderful Gloucester street scene by the artist for many years.

Peterson was fearless and independent in both her work and her personality, expanding her studies abroad beyond the typical 'Grand Tour' of Europe to paint in exotic locales such as Turkey, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco. In a review of our 1925 show she explained her approach to painting: *"Each time I go abroad, I establish a new problem for myself, and proceed to work upon it as a basis. I do not paint merely to reproduce what I see, but to present it in terms of the fundamentals of balance and rhythm. Sizes, shapes, colors are thought out, arranged carefully to balance each other off, and established, and fit into the picture in a rhythmic arrangement."*<sup>1</sup> Her style has never been easily classified, as it blends impressionistic and early modernist techniques with bright colors in her tireless quest to translate the natural world onto the canvas in scintillating ways.

The majority of the paintings in our current exhibition come from a local private collection, which we have been appraising since 1974. In early August of 1966, the *Boston Globe* ran a classified ad by O. Rundle Gilbert Auctioneers. The estate sale of Jane Peterson was to be held at her summer home in Ipswich, Massachusetts, later that month, with paintings starting as low as \$20.00. The ad went on to state that, "if you miss this sale, you will miss one of the really great opportunities to acquire great art!" Luckily, our client heeded this warning and we are very pleased to offer these stellar examples, fresh to the market for the first time in over fifty years.

We are grateful to J. Jonathan Joseph for his extensive knowledge and years of scholarship on Jane Peterson, and for the use of the archival photographs from his 1981 monograph. The limited edition book remains a valuable resource for those fascinated by Peterson's life and work.

<sup>1</sup>Jane Peterson, quoted in "Jane Peterson," unidentified newspaper clipping about Vose Galleries exhibition, March 2, 1925 (Boston Public Library, Boston Art Archives/New England Art Information File)



**Jane Peterson painting, circa 1928**  
(Photograph by Underwood & Underwood Studios. Jane Peterson papers, 1907-1981. Courtesy of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

*"In the final analysis our only contribution down through the ages will be our record of the beauty of expression...let us carry on! Let the generations come to know that artistically as well as politically, we tried to find beauty!"*

-Jane Peterson<sup>1</sup>

Jane Peterson's (1876-1965) words during a 1941 interview perfectly summarize the zeal with which she pursued her chosen profession to become one of the most respected painters of her generation. From humble Midwest roots, this personal ambition, mixed with an extraordinary talent and bit of good luck, carried her to the center of New York art circles, to the enchanting capitals of Europe and North Africa, and finally to the walls of prestigious museums throughout the country.

Born and raised in Elgin, Illinois, Jennie Christine Peterson's inherent talents were encouraged by her parents and teachers at a time when the assumed roles for young women were usually limited to the household. In 1895, she left for New York with a \$300 loan from her mother and enrolled at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where she studied under Arthur Wesley Dow. Dow's philosophy broke from convention by stressing the use of line, form and color to compose one's paintings, planting the first seeds in Peterson's mind to think outside the box as she gradually developed her unique style. As a testament to her early progress, Peterson made ends meet by offering lessons to other students and selling paintings at the school's weekly exhibitions to well-heeled New Yorkers, one of whom, Alexander Hudnut, became a close friend and benefactor at this crucial time in her career. Upon graduation in 1901, Peterson took a position in Brooklyn as Drawing Supervisor of Public Schools, and continued her own education through classes at New York's Art Students League with Frank DuMond and Henry B. Snell. Additional teaching stints would follow, in Elmira, New York, and Baltimore, Maryland, allowing her to repay her \$300 loan and save enough money to travel to Europe.

In 1907, Peterson embarked on a study-tour of the Continent with Snell and his wife, visiting artists' enclaves along the Cornish coast, in Holland, and in Italy at Lake Como and Venice. Peterson hoped to remain abroad when the Snells returned to America, and Hudnut, a firm believer in her talent, granted this wish. With the finances settled, she was free to complete her education as she saw fit, first working under noted British artist Frank Brangwyn in London before moving on to Paris and the studio of portrait painter Jacques-Émile Blanche. While in Paris, Peterson exhibited at the Société des Artistes Français and caught the attention of Percival Lowell, the famed American astronomer, who helped organize her first American solo show at Boston's St. Botolph Club in January 1909. To prepare, Peterson returned to Venice for inspiration and made another fortunate

acquaintance with expatriate painter Francis Hopkinson Smith. They sketched together in the historic city and, following Peterson's successful Boston debut, Smith arranged for her to study with Spanish Master Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, whose influence would make the largest impact on her mature painting style. Signifying her evolution as a professional artist, Jennie changed her name to Jane, and in the summer of 1909, traveled to Madrid where she was immediately embraced by Sorolla and his family. Working alongside Sorolla from dawn to dusk, Peterson's work ethic was cemented while her palette brightened, her brushwork grew more spontaneous and gestural, and she finally achieved the dynamic technique she had been searching for.

With renewed confidence in her skills, the intrepid Peterson journeyed to North Africa, having no reservations about exploring unfamiliar places on her own. She made friends easily, including prominent Chicagoan Mrs. Theodore A. Shawe, whom she met in Egypt and whose connections eventually led to a major one-person show of Peterson's work at the Art Institute of Chicago in December, 1910. The eighty-seven pieces featured in the exhibit captured scenes of everyday life painted during her travels throughout Italy, England, France, Holland and North Africa, and the favorable reviews focused on the strength of her brushwork and color: "[Peterson] has without doubt achieved satisfactory results and, since she has an excellent technique, broad ideas of the effective in composition, and is a brilliant colorist, her future gives the brightest promise both for herself and the art loving public."<sup>2</sup> Sorolla came to Chicago and, impressed with what he saw, invited Peterson to the Long Island estate of Louis Comfort Tiffany, whose portrait he was commissioned to paint. Tiffany welcomed Peterson to stay on and continue painting his impressive home and gardens. Here she embraced her love of flowers, one that began during her youth and would inform the majority of her work after 1925.

Peterson taught watercolor at the Art Students League from 1913 to 1919, working alongside notables Robert Henri and her one-time instructor Frank DuMond. While in Paris the previous year, she had mastered the use of gouache, a portable fast-drying opaque watercolor that allowed her to work quickly while retaining a freshness of expression and color, as seen in both *Market Day at Plougastel, Brittany, France* (p. 21) and *Old House, Bursa, Turkey* (p. 23).

Peterson joined a number of watercolor clubs locally and nationally, sent both oils and works on paper to exhibitions at the National Academy of Design, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Corcoran Gallery, and had a second show at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1914, featuring gardens she had painted while abroad as well as at the grand estates owned by Tiffany and his friends. As a testament to her standing in the art

world, the Chicago exhibit was comprised of seven concurrent one-man shows, with Peterson's radiant landscapes hanging near examples by her prominent male colleagues, including George Bellows, Robert Vonnob and Charles H. Woodbury. Peterson also aligned herself with the important women's associations of the day, including the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors and The Group, a circle of six established women artists who exhibited nationally between 1917 and 1919. These organizations offered fellowship and vital exhibition space during a transformative period in American history, as women aided the war effort and led the struggle for women's suffrage. During her career, Peterson earned praise for painting *unusually strongly for a woman* and with a *masculine vigor*, yet she endeavored to have the work speak for itself: "*The prime requisites for being a fine painter are natural gifts and hard work. Sex has nothing to do with it at all. Art is one activity where being a woman is neither a help nor a hindrance. Even a woman's intuition means nothing when she is facing a canvas.*"<sup>3</sup>

With her foreign travels curtailed during World War I, Peterson found plenty of summertime sketching opportunities in the 1910s and early 1920s in the Massachusetts artists' colonies of Gloucester and Rockport. Working in both oil and gouache, she captured the region's bustling wharves, picturesque winding roads and calm inlets, and exhibited these lively paintings in New York and Boston, as well as in Gloucester at Gallery-on-the-Moors and the North Shore Arts Association. Reviewers were impressed with the "knock you down fashion"<sup>4</sup> of her dock scenes, and the four illustrated in this catalogue demonstrate the perceptive design sense, brilliant palette and fearless brushwork that earned her so many admirers. Alternating between a fully-loaded brush to render the ships and fishing shacks, and willowy strokes of dark pigment to delineate the rippling current, Peterson brings bold design, heightened by rhythmic brushwork, to her waterfront subjects while retaining the atmospheric glow of a Cape Ann summer.



Jane Peterson (second row, second from left) with Arthur Wesley Dow's normal class, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, circa 1899



The summer of 1924 found Peterson abroad again, this time in Turkey where she painted among the bazaars and cafés of Constantinople (now Istanbul) and Bursa, regardless of the risks posed to an American woman traveling alone: “Isn’t it strange—here I am alone, going to the most fanatical town in Turkey, can’t speak a word of the language, on a cheap boat to an unknown port, and I am not the least bit afraid!”<sup>5</sup> She cherished her time engaging with the locals and studying the culture, and upon her return had enough material for two exhibits in 1925, first at Ehrich Galleries in New York in January, and the second at Vose Galleries from February 24 through March 7 in their newly built four-story gallery. A contemporary review of the Vose show noted: “Although the mosques and street scenes and rivers—merely painted as they are in a realistic fashion—are picturesque enough, Miss Peterson goes further by translating the image into definite terms of color and light. There is a logical scheme in all her work, a planing, a scheme worked out.”<sup>6</sup>

Just a few weeks after the close of Vose Galleries’ show, Peterson married widower Moritz Bernard Philipp, a prominent New York lawyer twenty-five years her senior, who asked that she cease her foreign travel. Now nearing her fiftieth year, Peterson had toured the globe and won accolades as a celebrated member of the art world, yet she agreed to his request and found consolation in the impressive top floor studio he provided her at their Fifth Avenue home, across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Speaking decades later of their union, Peterson remarked: “To this day I wonder why Mr. Philipp wanted me for his wife. I liked people and parties. He didn’t. He loved music and his work. After driving in the park in the morning we had the rest of the day for work, he at his desk, I at my easel. The routine drove me to painting in dead earnest.”<sup>7</sup> She remained engaged with the art community and poured herself into floral still lifes composed with blooms often grown and plucked from the garden at their summer home in Ipswich, Massachusetts, allowing her to explore relationships of color, shape, light and surface texture.

When Philipp passed away in 1929, Peterson became a very wealthy widow and resumed her European travel, but her flower portraits brought her the most joy at this time and comprised many of the pictures she submitted to future exhibitions. In 1946, she published an instructional guide, aptly titled *Flower Painting*, in which she explains her devotion to the subject: “I paint flowers because they are my friends and I love them...I am especially fond of zinnias and they love me. I have cultivated them, lived with them, played with them, studied their likes and dislikes and have been pleased to see how quickly they respond to love and attention.”<sup>8</sup> The breadth of color in the three floral pieces in this exhibition, from the regal blue-purple larkspur to the sunshine yellow and blazing red-orange zinnias, embody the unshakable spirit and pursuit of beauty that defined both Peterson and her immensely prolific career.

Peterson spent the rest of her life dividing her time between New York, Ipswich, Europe and Palm Beach, Florida, still painting but also inspiring others through her lectures on “Beauty and Art” and her continued involvement with various art associations. During World War II, she gave afternoon teas for servicemen and accepted war bonds as payment for her work, in addition to completing portraits of female members of the military which were auctioned and raised over \$200,000 for the cause. By the late 1950s, arthritis forced Peterson to put down her brush and she eventually moved in with her niece in Kansas, where she passed away in 1965. While her individual paintings earned numerous prizes at exhibitions throughout her career, Peterson’s personal contribution to the advancement of American art was celebrated by the American Historical Society in 1938, when they named her ‘outstanding individual of the year’ (only the second woman to be so named), and by the Allied Artists of America, who presented her with the Testimonial Award in 1952.

Today Peterson’s spirited depictions of her favorite painting grounds and beloved flowers can be found in museum collections across the country, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Pennsylvania Academy, the San Diego Museum of Art and Chicago’s Terra Foundation for American Art. In the fall of 2017, *Jane Peterson: At Home and Abroad*, the first museum retrospective exhibition of the artist’s work in over forty years, will open at the Mattatuck Museum in Mattatuck, Connecticut, and travel for the next two years to the Long Island Museum of Art in Stony Brook, New York, the Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, South Carolina, the Hyde Collection in Glens Falls, New York, and the Hunter Museum of American Art in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

<sup>1</sup>1941 interview with Sarasota Broadcasting Station (as cited in Joseph, J. Jonathan. *Jane Peterson, An American Artist* (Boston, 1981), p. 42)

<sup>2</sup>“Eastern and Western Painters Exhibit in Art Institute; Work of Young Illinois Woman is Highly Commended,” by Fred W. Sandberg. *The Chicago Sunday Tribune*, December 11, 1910

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Joseph, p. 43

<sup>4</sup>*Art World*, March 1917 (as cited in Joseph, p. 32)

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Joseph, p. 35

<sup>6</sup>“Jane Peterson,” unidentified newspaper clipping, March 2, 1925 (Boston Public Library, Boston Art Archives/New England Art Information File)

<sup>7</sup>Interview in *World Telegram*, 1956 (as cited in Joseph, p. 38)

<sup>8</sup>Peterson, Jane. *Flower Painting* (New York: Art Books for All, 1946)



Jane Peterson painting Gloucester wharves, circa 1915

*“There is an athletic dash and swing to most of her paintings that is stimulating and captivating...Miss Peterson has ideas, she has talent, has studied here and abroad and then proceeded to do her own work exactly to her individual tastes.”*

*-Christian Science Monitor, January 23, 1909  
(as cited in Joseph, Jane Peterson, An American Artist, p. 27)*





*Gloucester Harbor*  
Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 1/4 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON



**Gloucester Harbor, circa 1930**  
**(Photograph by Eleanor Parke Custis. Courtesy of the Cape Ann Museum)**

***“The artist has found all sorts of subjects here and abroad that have been  
happily expressed by her debonair brush.”***

-“Jane Peterson,” unidentified clipping about Casson Galleries (Boston) exhibition, March 11, 1924  
(Boston Public Library, Boston Art Archives/New England Art Information File)





*Fishing Boats at Gloucester*  
Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 1/8 inches, signed lower right: JANE PETERSON





**Gloucester Harbor, circa 1930**  
**(Photograph by Eleanor Parke Custis. Courtesy of the Cape Ann Museum)**

***“Miss Jane Peterson uses strong colors and a broad brush to give the facts about docks and fishing craft and harbors in a somewhat knock-you-down fashion.”***

*-Art World, March 1917*  
(as cited in Joseph, *Jane Peterson, An American Artist*, p. 32)



*Boats in Harbor, Gloucester*  
Oil on canvas, 29 1/2 x 39 1/2 inches, signed lower right: JANE PETERSON



East Gloucester, telephone poles and wharfs, circa 1920s  
(Courtesy of the Cape Ann Museum)

*“Jane Peterson, one of the most clever and versatile of younger American women painters, is to the fore with two of her familiar dock and old warehouse studies, well composed and bright in color...”*

-“A Good MacDowell Show,” *American Art News*, Vol. 16, No. 26 (April 6, 1918), p. 2





*Summer, Late Afternoon*  
Oil on canvas, 23 1/8 x 29 inches, signed lower right: JANE PETERSON



Jane Peterson in her New York studio, circa 1928

*“When a friend who knows me well wishes to give me a real thrill, he has only to whisper, ‘I know of a new garden where you may paint.’ I adore gardens! They are the most elusive art of a nation.”*

-Jane Peterson, quoted in *The Garden Magazine*, September 1922  
(as cited in Joseph, *Jane Peterson, An American Artist*, p. 106)





*Larkspur*  
Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 32 1/8 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON





*Summer Bouquet*

Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 32 1/8 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON



*Zinnias*

Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 32 1/8 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON



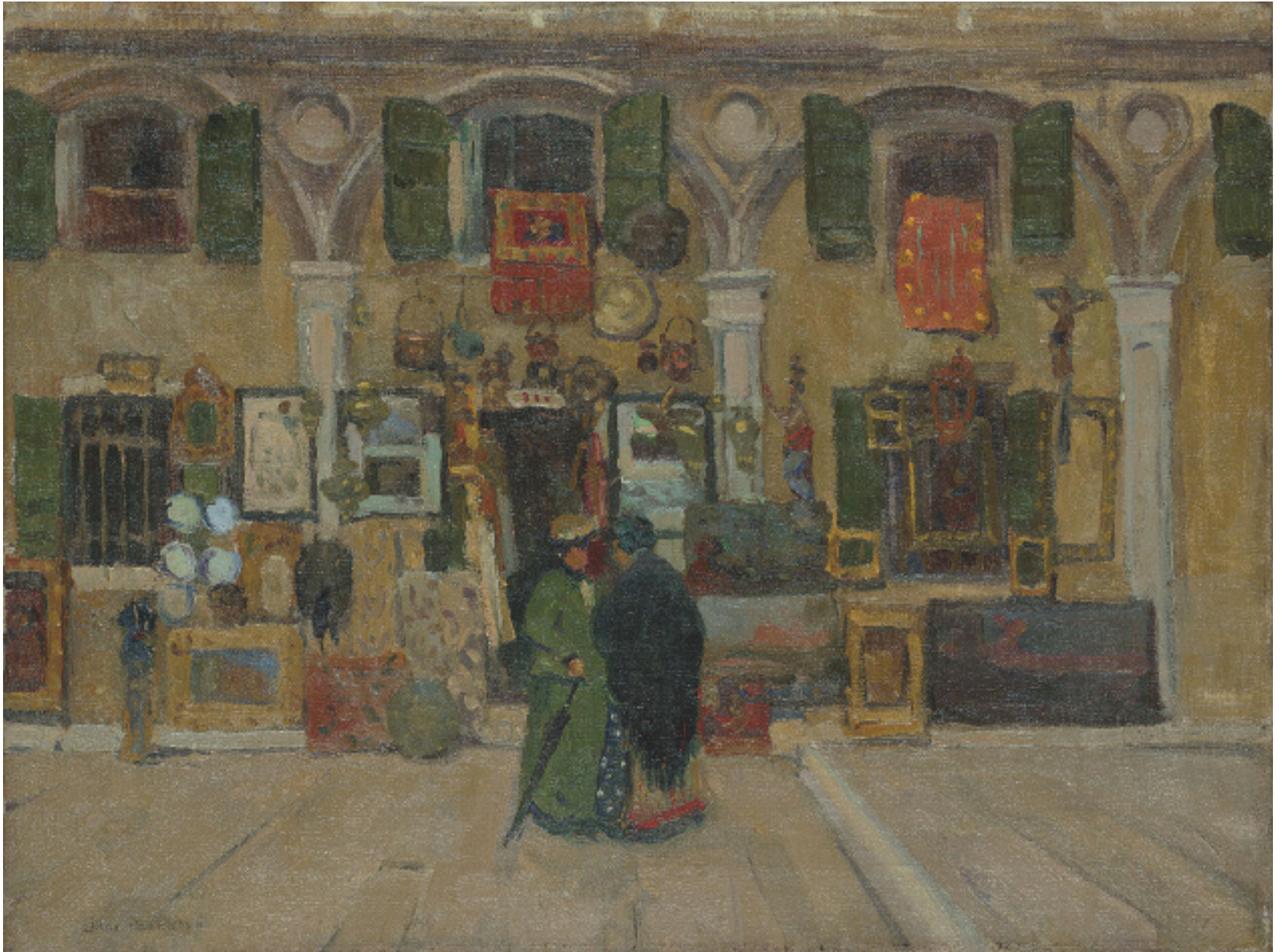


Jane Peterson, with artist Arrah Lee Gaul in Constantinople, circa 1924

*“Like so many others, I was stung by the European bug...I wanted to view the works of the Masters and visit and study in the locale where much of the history of art was made...I found myself in Europe, Asia, Africa...living, working under every conceivable condition...During my career I have lived on the Continent, a year or two here, and two or three years there...a cosmopolite!”*

-Jane Peterson, 1941 interview with Sarasota Broadcasting Station  
(as cited in Joseph, *Jane Peterson, An American Artist*, p. 42)





*Antiques Shop, Venice*  
Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON



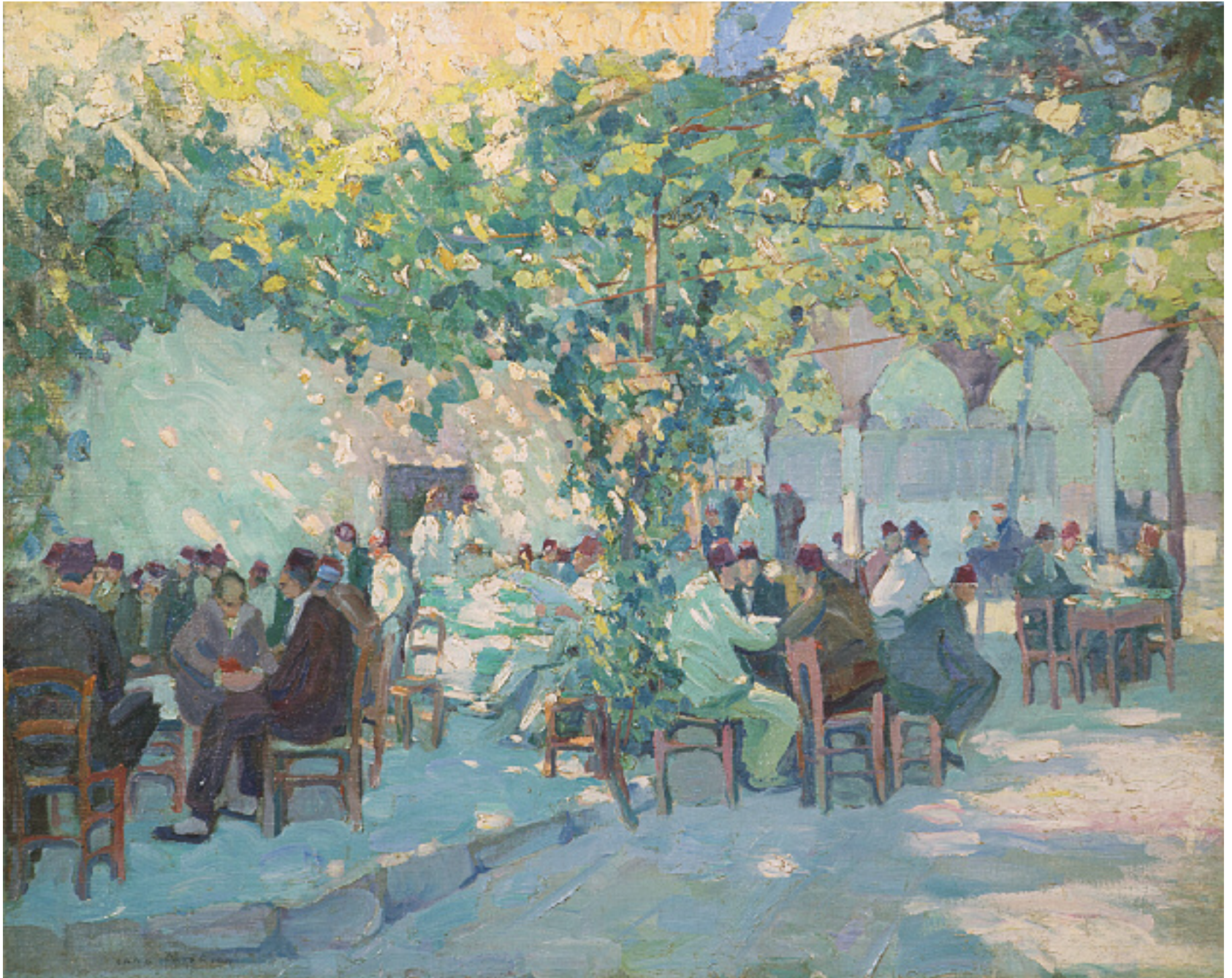


*Canal, Venice, Italy*  
Oil on canvas 40 x 30 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON, circa 1907



*Market Day at Plougastel, Brittany, France*  
Watercolor, gouache, and charcoal on board, 18 x 23 7/8 inches





*Outdoor Café, Constantinople*

Oil on canvas, 24 1/4 x 30 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON





*Old House, Bursa, Turkey*  
Watercolor, gouache, and charcoal on paper, 18 x 23 7/8 inches, signed lower right: JANE PETERSON





*Three Pelicans and Sailboats*

Watercolor and gouache on board, 22 x 29 3/4 inches, signed lower left: JANE PETERSON

**Front Cover:** *Gloucester Harbor (detail)*, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 1/4 inches, signed lower left: *JANE PETERSON*

**Back Cover:** *Larkspur*, oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 32 1/8 inches, signed lower left: *JANE PETERSON*

Editor: Marcia L. Vose; Catalogue Design: Elizabeth Vose Frey; Art Photography: Puritan Capital; Writing: Carey L. Vose, Courtney S. Kopplin  
Additional Research: Catharine L. Holmes, Tyler M. Prince, Nora A. Owens, Sarah R. Levy, Yubai Shi  
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238 Newbury Street · Boston · MA · 02116 · Telephone 617.536.6176 · Toll Free 866.862.4871  
info@vosegalleries.com · www.vosegalleries.com