

IT'S ALL ABOUT FUN! | BALTIMORE COUNTY
Serving Communities from Ruxton to Parkton

CELEBRATING
OUR
7TH
YEAR!

FREE MONTHLY • JUNE 2011

M A S O N - D I X O N
ARRIVE

Unique Places • Great Shopping • Home Décor • Interesting People • Regional Events

OUTDOOR
Living
Part 3

ART ALL AROUND

Metal Artist
CHRIS GAVIN

Gunpowder River Artfest

Sparhawk-Jones
Impressionist Artist

Mandolin Makers

BACKROADS!
Returning to Alexandria

Shades of Green
Unique Trees
Add a Tiki Bar

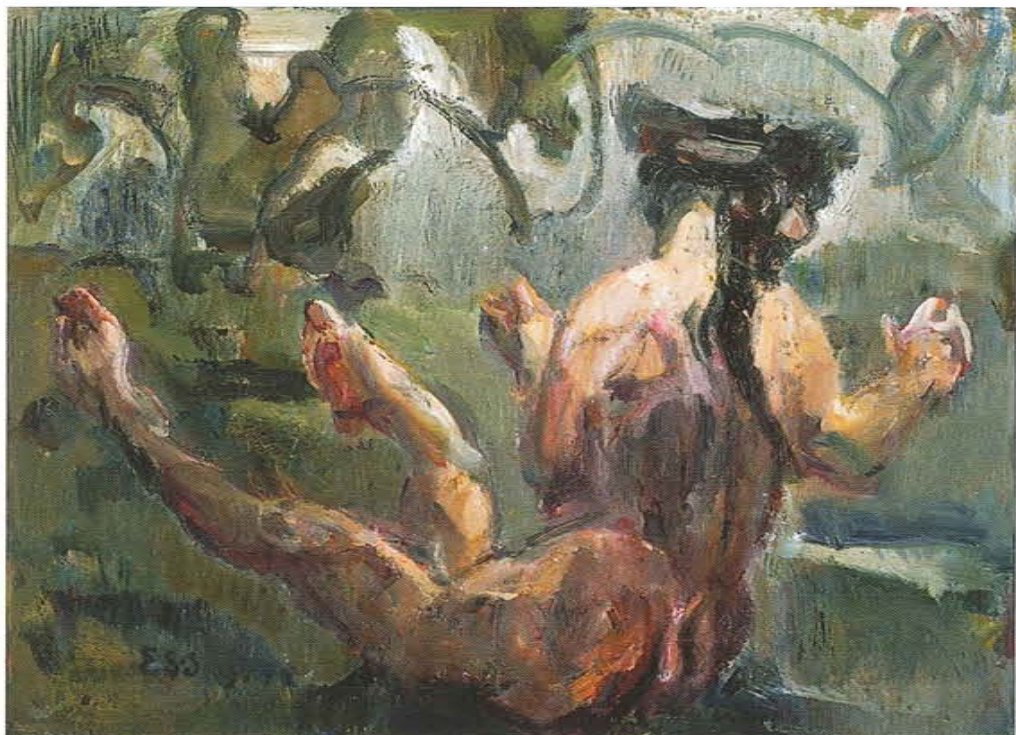
80,000 MONTHLY: 64,000 Direct Mailed to Qualified Homeowners; 16,000 in Strategic Locations

Ultra
Premium
Vodka
Drinks



RESORT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
EASTON PA

MASON-DIXON ARRIVE 1242 Paper Mill Road | Cockeysville, MD 21030



Searching for Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones



In a time in the American art world where young women rarely sold their work for a small fortune or shared the limelight with men when winning international awards, Baltimore-born painter Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones (1885-1968) did both, succeeding where few others had – and with no apologies. Rave reviews about her impressionistic style and works included the *New York Times* in 1908 declaring her painting “The Porch” as “the most unforgettable canvas in the show” and anointing her “the find of the year.” Art critics compared her bright brushwork and objective observation to that of master painter William Merritt Chase and wrote she “astonished the maestros of the wide brush.”

As the daughter of the Rev. John Sparhawk Jones, D.D., first pastor of the Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church in Bolton Hill, and Harriet Sterett Winchester, a granddaughter of Henry Hill Carroll who grew up on the 5,000-acre Clynmalira estate in northern Baltimore County, Elizabeth absorbed her parents’ advice to “follow her bent” toward art and that she did. In a scrapbook, next to an article about an award, the young artist scribbled a quote from poet Walt Whitman: “He only wins who goes far enough,” seeming to acknowledge that the spectacular was just within her reach. And then she disappeared.

About 15 years ago when I accidentally discovered Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones’s scrapbooks left in an attic on St. Joseph Medical Center property, the pages stopped here, around the year 1913. I didn’t know then about her father’s depression that caused him to lose his position at Brown Memorial and forced a family move to Philadelphia, or about the hereditary thread that would transform Elizabeth from this golden girl of the art world to an insane asylum patient and then back to glory in the 1940s. When my casual research



Opposite page: *Startled Woman*, c. 1956 by Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones (seen at bottom with palette). Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Above left: *In Rittenhouse Square*, c. 1905 by Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones, Oil on canvas 32x32-in., courtesy of Private Collector. Above right: *The Porch*, c. 1907, by Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones, Oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 30 1/4-in., Courtesy of Private Collector.

began, I had no expectations about who Sparhawk-Jones was or what she had achieved as an artist. I had newspaper clippings she'd saved including the international acclaim from the Carnegie Institute's international competition in 1908 where she'd been the only American to win an honorable mention and the only woman to win anything, but I had no context. But now I must agree with what "American Artist" magazine wrote about her in 1944: "Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones is something of a phenomenon in the world of paint."

In that same article, a critic is attributed with writing, "Strange, that she is not recognized far and wide as one of the ablest, most distinguished women painters in the United States." People now debate the reason why she's been neglected more than ever and there are many compelling theories, including her breakdown and/or her subsequent recovery, her aversion to public relations, her domineering mother, and her penchant while ill to burn her paintings, making her collection smaller. Townsend Ludington, an academic and veteran art biographer wrote that he blamed the "glass ceiling that many women artists of her time encountered." Supporting this view of bias is *Village Voice* art critic Jerry Saltz, who among other studies recently surveyed a census from 1879 to 1969 of woman-created art that was added to the Museum of Modern Art's permanent

collection and found it was just five percent of the pieces. But strikingly, within this five percent was a contribution of the painting "Startled Woman" by Sparhawk-Jones.

When I share the story of finding the scrapbooks, it's amazing how many Baltimoreans remember the history of La Paix (pronounced La Pay), a home on the 26-acre property owned by Bayard and Margaret Turnbull that became the grounds of the St. Joseph Medical Center. The L-shaped, Queen Anne style rambling home with brown shingles built in the 1920s had in its heyday housed a series of poets and writers as part of the Johns Hopkins lecture-ship program founded by the Turnbull family. My literary first love, F. Scott Fitzgerald, became a friend of Margaret Turnbull's when he rented another home on the land and he frequently visited her. I used to revel in the fact that he finished editing "Tender Is the Night" just a few hundred yards from where I wrote the medical center's press releases 40 years later.

I loved working in that old home. Margaret Turnbull's passion for the literary inspired me as I spent hours imagining Scott Fitzgerald roaming the estate along with his 11-year-old daughter Scottie and little Andrew Turnbull, Margaret's 9-year-old son, in their tennis garb; picturing the "big" writers of the time discussing their works and

each others while having a cocktail in the large living area. When the hospital board finally decided to tear down La Paix, it was only after we began spending more time evacuating the house, which was increasingly prone to gas leaks, than working in it and the repairs were just too costly.

As a small act of protest, I asked the demolition men if I could write about them for a feature story and falling for my ploy, they posed for photographs in front of the half-ravaged home. Instead of celebrity glory, their picture – along with the words, "La Paix Killers" – was tacked in my office for the rest of my years working there. But I soon discovered that these workmen somehow mixed up items from the attic meant for the incinerator with my new office, causing them to save, and effectively transfer, four boxes from the attic into my possession. (And yes, I eventually realized the irony that these men actually *saved* an important piece of La Paix.) The boxes, of course, belonged to Margaret Turnbull's sister, Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones.

As I pieced together Sparhawk-Jones's life over the next 17 years, I was swept into a wonderland of sorts, complete with its own eccentric characters: American master painter and PAFA teacher William Merritt Chase sending notes of encouragement and collecting her work; her fellow PAFA student and

first love, Morton Schamberg, the innovative Precisionist who altered the course of Sparhawk-Jones's career; American painter and friend Marsden Hartley, with whom she shared a five-year correspondence; film star Claude Rains, who collected Sparhawk-Jones's art while his wives confided their secrets in her ear; and the love of her life, the three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Edwin Arlington Robinson, as complicated a man as he was a poet.

When "American Artist" magazine described her surrealist, abstract later style, which she called "painting on the pulse", in the 1960s, they wrote: "For she is first of all an emotional painter. Her art is spiritual, her brush answers inner urges, it is a subconscious voice that

strives to translate deep meanings into the language of paint. Few of her pictures reflect the world as seen by worldly eyes." Sparhawk-Jones seemed to agree, telling them, "After awhile, painting a picture is like a conversation with someone in trouble, and you must listen with the eye and try to help the picture out of its difficulties."

Four years before her death in 1964, Sparhawk-Jones told an interviewer from the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, "I was always a lonely person." A surprising confession coming from an artist usually described as having robust humor and a confident wit, and whose works had already been acquired by some of world's finest museums like the Metropolitan

Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as held in the country's best private collections. Recently a painting in private collection was valued in the range of \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Today on a hillside cemetery in northern Baltimore County, Sparhawk-Jones is buried alongside her parents and near her sister and other extended family. Etched into her grave are the words, "Sing heart, again, in the dew of morn." ❀

Barbara Smith is the author of "Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones: The Artist Who Lived Twice," which is available at several online retailers, as well as Greetings & Readings in Hunt Valley. For more information, visit elizabethsparhawkjones.com.