

**NELLIE
ELLEN
SHEPHERD**
1877-1920



**EARLY
PROFESSIONAL
POTRAIT
ARTIST**

Nellie Shepherd was one of the earliest professional women artists in Oklahoma. She was known for Indian portraits, figure and landscape paintings, and her portrait of Chickasaw storyteller Te Ata Fisher, which hangs at the Oklahoma State Capitol.

Nellie Ellen Shepherd was born in Thayer, Kansas in April 1877. The family of six daughters and two sons moved to a homestead near Oklahoma City during the 1889 Land Rush. She graduated from high school and enrolled in the Art Academy of Cincinnati from 1900 to 1902, studying with Lewis Meakin and Caroline Lord, before studying in Paris from 1907 to 1910, where she lived a Bohemian life style, attended some art schools but was most influenced by Henri-Jean Guillaume Martin. Her interest was figures, and she painted Brittany, France fishermen in vibrant colors and modernist style. Family pressure caused her to return home to Oklahoma City in 1910.

Her most important, well-known painting from her years in Paris is a ¾ life-size portrait of her sister Lottie, which was one of 800 paintings by American artists selected to hang in Le Grand Salon in Paris in the spring of 1910, and was awarded an honorable mention.

In 1910, she helped form the Oklahoma Art League (OAL). Their dedication to preserving Oklahoma art later assisted in establishing the Oklahoma City Museum of Art. In honor of the centennial in 2011, OAL donated Shepherd's "Brittany Woman" (ca. 1907-11) and its companion piece "Brittany Fisherman".

In 1916, she took lessons at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Kansas City Art Institute. She was named to head the art department of the Oklahoma College for Women in Chickasha in 1917. The following year, she was elected president of the Oklahoma Art Association.

Shepherd was regarded as a very talented Impressionist painter. She worked primarily in oils and produced mainly portraits. During her career, she showed work in Kansas City, Chicago, and Denver. The Oklahoma City Museum of Art and the Santa Fe Railway Collection, Schaumburg, IL, hold paintings by Shepherd.

Her portrait of Te Ata Fisher hangs in the Oklahoma State Capitol. Te Ata was a student when Shepherd was head of the art department at Chickasha. The portrait was created less than one year before Shepherd's death in 1920. The unfinished painting was displayed for many years at the family homestead Shepherd Manor and, after restorative cleaning, was placed on permanent display on the second floor of the Oklahoma State Capitol building to commemorate the state's first cultural treasure, Chickasaw Storyteller Te Ata.

In addition to Nellie, sisters Leona and Nettie were also fine artists. The Shepherd Sisters Gallery exhibits the art and history of one of Oklahoma's pioneer families. Many of the pieces were recovered from Shepherd Manor and have not been previously displayed. The Shepherd Historic District near NW 23rd and Penn was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.

Shepherd suffered from poor health for some years, and after sojourns in Colorado and Arizona, she died in Tucson of tuberculosis in July 1920 at age 43.