

Peter Gibbard, formerly Chair of the Friends, writes about the life of Lady Victoria Patricia Ramsay and discusses her painting, In the Tropics, from the York Art Gallery collection, included in the exhibition 'Bloom'

This article is based on a talk given by Peter at the Friends' Artwork of the Month talk in October 2023.

Lady Victoria Patricia Ramsay (1886 – 1974)

About Her Art:

Writing in *Apollo Magazine* in May 1928, the modernist artist and critic R. H. Wilenski considered Patricia to be an amateur artist of genuine talent who was admirably capable of using paint and colour with delight and freedom. He was reviewing her solo exhibition at the Goupil Gallery, London, which included York Art Gallery's [*In the Tropics*](#) (YORAG: 430).

While Patricia had several teachers, Archibald Standish Hartrick (1864-1950), a Scottish painter best known today for his lithographic works, was a presence in her artistic life for almost 40 years. He taught at the Camberwell School of Art, contributed lithographs to the Women's Work series, commissioned by the British Government during WW1, and was a published author of a book about drawing and also his autobiography. Patricia, or 'Princess Pat' as Hartrick referred to her, was supportive of him, opening his 50 years of painting retrospective in London.

Throughout her life Patricia had dedicated studios, first at the Royal residences Clarence House and Bagshot Park, and subsequently in Dublin, at Rideau Hall in Canada, and at the marital home Ribsdon Holt, Windlesham, Surrey.

Her focus was on landscapes, still life subjects, and building interiors, painting in watercolours, oils, and gouache. She was a member of the Royal Watercolour Society, Royal West of England Academy, and the New English Art Club. Patricia exhibited at the associations of which she held memberships and at commercial galleries in London.

She travelled extensively in the UK and abroad, using these opportunities to sketch and paint. Patricia signed her art VP (Victoria Patricia) before her marriage, and VPR (Victoria Patricia Ramsay) following her marriage in 1919, but did not date her art. There may be hundreds of her paintings

and drawings in existence today, many with the Connaught family and other members of the British and Swedish Royal Families.

About the Painting:

[For copyright reasons we are unable to show an image of the painting, but one can be seen on the Art UK website [here](#).]

In the Tropics has been on display during 2023 in the exhibition *Bloom*. Conservation was funded by the Friends of York Art Gallery.

The exhibition label states that this painting probably dates from before 1911. It is signed VPR, for Victoria Patricia Ramsay, but she did not marry until 1919. After some research I can confirm that the correct date for this picture is 1927, and the setting is the Natha Devale Shrine complex, Kandy, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

Of relevance to dating and locating *In the Tropics*, Patricia travelled on the P&O liner Cathay to Ceylon in February 1927 to visit her husband, who was on duty with the Royal Navy. During this visit she completed four paintings which closely correspond to *In the Tropics*; in one case including the human figures and the temple structure we can see here. One of these paintings is [A Temple in Sri Lanka](#). It is from the estate of the late Countess Mountbatten of Burma, and it was sold at auction by Sotheby's in March 2021 for £4,788 (estimate £250).

These paintings were included with others from her travels in 1927 to Ceylon and Bermuda in a selling exhibition during 1928 at the Goupil Gallery, London. The proceeds from this sale went to a women's hospital charity. Patricia appeared on the cover of *The Tatler* issue dated 16 May 1928, which reported this selling exhibition, and there was a review by H. R. Wilenski in *Apollo Magazine*.

In the Tropics was donated anonymously to The Contemporary Art Society (CAS) in 1933, the year that Patricia opened the Society's annual exhibition of new acquisitions. *In the Tropics* was then allocated to York Art Gallery as recorded in the CAS Annual Report 1932/33.

Life and Times of the Artist:

Princess Victoria Patricia Helena Elizabeth of Connaught was born at Buckingham Palace on St. Patrick's Day, 1886, the third child of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. Her grandmother was Queen Victoria, and her uncle was the Duke of York, the future King George V.

Patricia was educated at home. In addition to excelling at art, needlepoint, and knitting, she was known for her equestrian skills, golf, tennis, swimming, and field hockey. She moved to Canada with her parents in 1911, where she added ice skating to her activities. She had a presence - a beauty of her day Patricia was an extrovert with a keen sense of humour.

It was in 1911 aged 25 years that Patricia came to public attention on an international scale, perhaps comparable to Princess Catherine today. Her father had been appointed Governor General of Canada. Her parents were already very popular in Canada, having been the first members of the Royal Family to travel across Canada coast-to-coast in 1890-91 and to engage with people from all walks of life during that landmark trip.

From about 1906 there was speculation in British society and the press about whom she would marry. Her social engagements were reported; she appeared in news films, and was photographed at every turn. While her older sister Margaret married the future King of Sweden, Patricia revealed no apparent interest in matrimony. Instead she travelled to Canada, and was quickly seen to be her father's hostess and travelling companion in the absence of her mother, who was in declining health. Also, Canada was welcoming the first Governor General who was a Prince, and thus a member of the Royal Family.

The Duke of Connaught was unlike his predecessors since 1867, the year of Canadian confederation, in that he went to his office in the parliament buildings daily, accepted meetings which had business and political agendas, and took an active interest in the issues of the day. While Prime Minister Robert Borden found him to be meddlesome and to exceed his constitutional authority on occasion, the Duke quickly became popular on a celebrity scale with the public.

Looking back to this period Princes Patricia was the first modern princess, an assessment by the Canadian press today. The Duke and Patricia logged many thousands of miles of travel, ranging from visits to fishing communities in the Maritimes to a harvest festival in the Yukon and the

first Calgary Stampede. She took a personal interest in women's issues such as raising standards for maternity care and furthering the suffragette movement through staff employment.

Canadians recognised her popularity by naming ships, buildings, geographic locations, and a highway in her honour, most of which remain in place today. Her image appeared on the Canadian one-dollar bill (1917-1926).

Canada was struggling to meet its commitment to the war effort, as there was no army in readiness nor did they have the weapons and ammunition. Among several personal contributions, a Canadian businessman Andrew Hamilton Gault undertook to recruit and equip an infantry regiment. His offer was promptly accepted by the Conservative Government. Recognising that it would be a volunteer force and could benefit from a high-profile recruitment activity, Gault approached the Duke with a request that Princess Patricia become the Colonel-in-Chief of the regiment to be named in her honour, the Princess Patricia Light Infantry. The Duke acceded to this request.

Early in 1915 the troops began departing Ottawa by rail to Nova Scotia, some 600 miles away, and then they sailed for England. Patricia would continue as Colonel-in-Chief until her death in 1974, attending troop inspections, reunions, and awards ceremonies in Canada and England. She was also active in welfare fund-raising.

Her engagement to Commander Alexander Ramsay (1881-1972), her father's aide-de-camp in Canada, took society by surprise. He was a commoner, the third son of the 13th Earl Dalhousie. Royal consent took two years, simply due to opposition, but her mother's wish as she lay dying moved King George V to give consent. The Royal Family attended the wedding at Westminster Abbey on 27th February 1919, the first royal wedding there in almost 500 years and the first public royal wedding. The crowds in London were vast, it was covered by film crews, and some of those films are still accessible via the internet today. Photographs and press reports covering most of her adult life are also easily accessible.

Images for Talk:

Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, KINCM:2005.5290, [Green Apples](#)

Robert Perera Fine Arts Limited, [Amaryllis Lilies and Interior](#)

Grundy Art Gallery, G157, [Coast of British Columbia](#)

Robert Perera Fine Arts Ltd., *Interior*

Sources:

- 'Royal Artists From Mary Queen of Scots to the Present Day' by Jane Roberts (1987)
- Royal Collection Trust www.rct.uk
- 'Princess Patricia: The First Modern Princess' www.macleans.ca
- Princess Patricia's Light Infantry www.ppcli.com
- Apollo Magazine, 16 May 1928 review by R. H. Wilenski www.apollo-magazine.com
- The Scotsman, 28 June 1927 page 8 and 02 May 1928 page 10
- The Tatler 16 May, 1928 Cover Image of VPR and also exhibition, page 3
- Northern Whig, 01 February 1927, travel information page 8
- 'Amaryllis Lilies' and 'Interior' images from the website of Robert Perera Fine Arts Ltd. www.art-gallery.co.uk
- 'A Painters Pilgrimage Through 50 Years' by Archibald Standish Hartrick (1939)

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