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**MISS NINA HAMNETT**

**BOHEMIAN ARTIST**

Miss Nina Hamnett, sculptress, painter, and authoress, died in hospital in London yesterday at the age of 66. On Thursday she had fallen from the window of her flat in Paddington.

It is an open question whether the world gained or lost by the partial sacrifice of Nina Hamnett the painter of portraits and landscapes and illustrator, to Nina Hamnett, the Bohemian, but readers of her book of remembrances; *Laughing Torso*, will have no doubt that in the latter role she contributed to the gaiety of nations. Her friends will know something more; that whatever she might have done ultimately in painting if she had stuck to it more closely, Miss Hamnett was a complete success as a person; generous, good-humoured, loyal, and witty. There are several sorts of Bohemian, of different heights of brow, and she was of the robust kind more likely to be encountered in London "locals" that at cocktail or sherry parties in Chelsea or Bloomsbury. One effect of her genial personality was to reconcile differences, and she was equally popular among artists of generally hostile camps. Thus, Miss Hamnett painted Sickert, and she was the subject of one of the most successful portraits by Roger Fry.

Nothing could have been more conventional than her start in life. A daughter of Colonel George Edward Hamnett, she was born at Tenby, South Wales, on St. Valentine's Day, 1890, and educated at the Royal School of Art and the London School of Art, where she won a silver medal. Her first opportunity to exhibit was with the Allied Artists' Association, founded by Frank Rutter, at the Albert Hall, and she was one of the young artists inspired by Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibitions at the Grafton Galleries. For a time she joined the Fry circle of decorative designers at the Omega Workshops.

Her first one-man show in London was held at the Claridge Gallery in 1926. It consisted largely of portraits, which seemed to show that her general attitude to humanity was that of amused boon-companionship. Apparently she had no illusions

and few prejudices, and such as she had found sub-satirical expression. A sort of wondering tolerance appeared to be characteristic. Her exhibition at the Claridge Gallery the following year contained drawings of the Crystal Palace and illustrations to a first novel, *The Silent Queen*, by Mr. Seymour Leslie. A comment on these drawings was that satirical was not quite the right word for them, and that they expresses rather a glad astonishment that such things as the subjects could exist.

## LONDON STATUES

Probably her happiest artistic experience was her collaboration with Sir Osbert Sitwell in *The People's Album of London Statues*, published in 1928, the drawings for which were exhibited at Tooth's Gallery in the same year. The sympathetic humour of her work was well suggested by Sir Osbert Sitwell's remark that "translated in to the medium of drawing many of these statues manifest a charm that has been overlooked, and he who came to scoff may yet stay to bless." The general approach was that of affectionate awe, and some of the monuments, the Foundling fountain in Guilford Street, for example, were drawn with real tenderness. Apart from illustrations her artistic remains are rather fragmentary. For the Canadian War Memorial she painted a portrait of General Lindsay, and other eminent people painted or drawn by her were W. R. Sickert, W. H. Davies, the poet, and Sir Edmund Gosse. For a time she taught at the Westminster Technical Institute.

In 1932 Miss Hamnett published *Laughing Torso*, reminiscences of her Bohemian life in London and Paris. Her own adventures are frankly told, and the book is full of amusing anecdotes of celebrated or notorious people, gaining in effect by the apparent artlessness of the writing. The publication of the book had a sequel which caused great excitement in literary and artistic circles. Aleister Crowley brought an action for libel against Miss Hamnett and her publishers and printers for the statement that he had a temple at Cefalu, in Sicily, where he was supposed to have practised Black Magic. On the fourth day of the hearing before Mr. Justice Swift the special jury stopped the case and returned a verdict for the defendants. Mr. Crowley brought an appeal, which was dismissed. She brought her autobiography up to the present decade with the publication last year of *Is She a Lady?* This book, too, was filled with lively reminiscences.