



Thelma Whaley Willibrand, '24

# Tribute To an Artist

By  
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ONCE there was a little girl, a happy little girl, who saw that the world was beautiful. So beautiful that she began to draw pictures of it. She grew to young womanhood, and always she was seeing beauty, and painting pictures, and teaching others, especially children, how to put into pictures the beauty which they saw in the fascinating world about them.

But to the artist—the sensitive person who transmutes the intangible into that which can be seen and touched and heard—that inevitable day comes when the manuscript lies unfinished; when music is silent; when colors and palette and brushes rest, and the picture stops, although it would seem that its strength and beauty and rhythm should flow on.

So it was when the life of Thelma Whaley Willibrand ended. Work, aspirations, love, were severed in the midst of fruition.

A woman or a man is fortunate who has grown to maturity in the atmosphere of a home possessing the factors that contribute to the making of a well-rounded character. Goodness of heart, high intelligence, and adequate financial means for the necessities and comforts of living, were characteristic of the home into which Thelma Whaley was born. She proved to be one of those human beings who, among favorable environmental influences, develop as naturally and as beautifully as the healthy plant grows. With her disposition for happiness, and with her gifts, Thelma Whaley made many friends. Later, success in her art work came to her as naturally as did friendships and love.

Thelma Whaley Willibrand, who was instructor in public school art at the University from February, 1935, until she resigned in the summer of 1936, was the wife of W. A. Willibrand, associate professor of modern languages in the university. She died September 2, 1937, after a three-weeks illness.

Thelma Whaley was born at De Leon, Texas, December 27, 1897. When she was six years old, her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Thomas Whaley, moved to Holdenville, Oklahoma. Here she attended the public schools, graduating from high school in 1915. In 1917, she moved with

her parents and two younger sisters to Miami, Oklahoma.

Very early, she revealed a love for music and art, especially for art. She was always sensitive to her surroundings, and during the years spent with her family in the mining areas of northeastern Oklahoma, she was receiving impressions that later found interpretation in her art, through water color paintings, crayon drawings, and block prints.

She graduated from Ward Belmont College, Nashville, Tennessee, she received a degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Oklahoma, she studied at the Chicago Art Institute, and received a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University, New York. Her teaching experience included one year of teaching in the public schools of Miami, Oklahoma; six years as art supervisor in the public schools of Austin, Texas; two and one-half years at Eastern Oregon Normal School, La Grande, Oregon; and one and one-half years in the University of Oklahoma.

Oscar B. Jacobson, director of the School of Art in the University, says of her:

"While she was an art student at our University, her personality loomed above the average crowd of interesting individuals. When she chose teaching as a profession, I watched her record very closely, and when a vacancy occurred, I persuaded her to 'come home' to take charge of the Art Education group of courses. She was also a distinguished creative artist. Rarely does one meet as fine a type of young woman."

In looking at the memorial exhibition of Thelma Whaley Willibrand's paintings, on display at the University from February 7 to 18, 1938, one felt, among other things, that her work was vigorous and stimulating. Yet the observer was conscious of a feeling of suspense, as if the artist herself knew the goal toward which she was striving, and knew also that she held potentialities for giving many more things to the world. In the unspoken expectations of the artist and woman, lies one of the tragedies of her death.

As an artist, Thelma Whaley Willibrand saw things in mass, and was not concerned with infinite detail. Having the genius to select the essential, she portrayed bare facts. Thus she was able to present her subject in all of its pristine strength. It is true of her design, just as it is of the old Chinese, "Not a line more than is necessary."

Because Mrs. Willibrand was so intensely a part of the world she saw beauty and meaning and inspiration in many objects that often pass as ordinary and commonplace, whether she painted zinc mining scenes of Oklahoma, a little German-American village, or mountainous landscapes of Oregon.

The work of Mrs. Willibrand, as a student and as an instructor, constitutes a vivid and lasting contribution to the wide influence of the University.



"Oklahoma Mine," one of Thelma Willibrand's interesting block prints



"Modern Madonna," a block print