



Klumpke, Anna Elizabeth (1856-1942)

by Ray Anne Lockard

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Catinou Knitting (1887)
by Anna Elizabeth
Klumpke.

American born artist Anna Elizabeth Klumpke is best known today as the last lover of acclaimed French painter Rosa Bonheur, but she was an accomplished artist in her own right.

Klumpke was born on October 28, 1856 in San Francisco, where she demonstrated a gift for drawing as a young child. Her parents separated and moved their children to Paris when Anna was fifteen.

Her art education began in earnest when she enrolled in the Académie Julian in 1883. She debuted in the Paris Salon a year later. Her continuing acceptance in that important exhibition, numerous prizes, and the high praise her work received on both sides of the Atlantic ensured that influential people learned of her work.

Klumpke first met Rosa Bonheur (1828-1899) on October 15, 1889. This, the thirty-third year of Klumpke's life, was of major importance for her in many other ways. In addition to exhibiting in the Salon, one of her paintings received the bronze medal at the Universal Exposition in Paris, and she painted one of her best known portraits, that of American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She also became the first woman to win the Temple gold medal at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

Klumpke's artistic success led her to Boston in 1891, where she exhibited and developed a successful business as a portraitist and teacher. She secured a solo exhibition in the city during the following year.

In 1897 she wrote to Rosa Bonheur asking permission to paint her portrait. The two women met for the second time on June 16, 1898.

Klumpke was forty-three; her mentor, seventy-seven. While Klumpke worked on her first portrait of Bonheur, the two women became close friends.

One month later Bonheur asked Klumpke to join her in a personal and professional partnership for which a formal agreement was signed in August 1898. Bonheur also changed her will and made Klumpke her sole heir. Nine months later, on May 25, 1899, Rosa Bonheur died.

Klumpke painted three important portraits of Bonheur. The first, from 1898, depicted the artist at an easel wearing the men's clothes for which she had secured a license from the French government. The second portrait, from 1899, depicted Bonheur seated, holding her dog on her lap. Klumpke kept the third portrait of Bonheur, painted posthumously in 1902, for the Musée de l'Atelier de Rosa Bonheur that she established at By, near Fontainebleau, in 1904.

After Bonheur's death, Klumpke devoted herself to researching the biography Bonheur had asked her to write. It was published in 1908.

Klumpke continued to paint and exhibit her works in both Paris and the United States, but in 1914 she

established l'Hôpital de Rosa Bonheur at By, where she nursed wounded soldiers until World War I ended in 1918. Sometime later, she established the Rosa Bonheur Memorial Art School for Women Painters and Sculptors at By and continued to exhibit both her work as well as Bonheur's on both continents.

Klumpke was awarded the Legion of Honor by the French government in 1936. During the 1930s, she returned to San Francisco where she painted landscapes and portraits. She died in 1942 at the age of 86.

By choosing a career over marriage and opting for a committed relationship with another woman, Klumpke violated every late Victorian expectation of women. Her artistic work left a visual record of her life and times, including the brief time she loved and lived with Rosa Bonheur, one of the most famous French artists of the nineteenth century.

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About the Author

Ray Anne Lockard is Head of the Frick Fine Arts Library at the University of Pittsburgh. Active in the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), she was a founding member and the first chairperson of the Gay and Lesbian Interests Round Table of ARLIS/NA. She has also served as co-chair of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus of the College Art Association.