

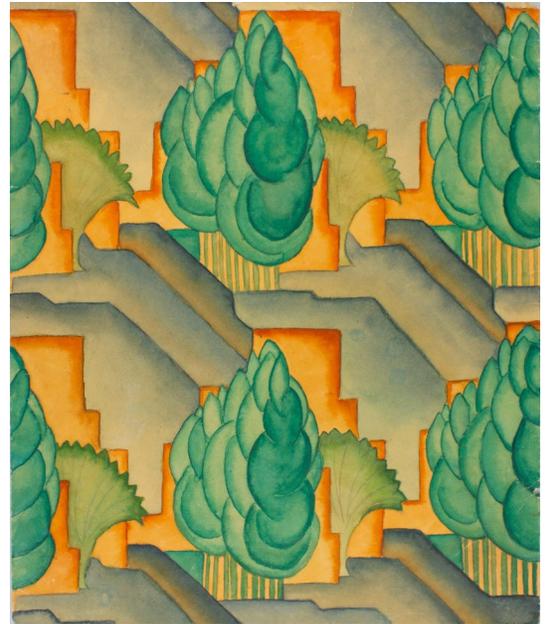
Isabelle Johnson



Isabelle Johnson was the first significant Modernist painter in Montana. Born in Absarokee, Montana in 1901, Isabelle's rich Montana heritage has enhanced her artwork throughout her career. After studying art on both sides of the country, she returned to Stillwater County in 1961 to continue painting and to ranch.

“Her drawings and paintings are essences of Absarokee, the home ranch and the magnificent Stillwater country of southern Montana. Her pictures are totalities of fragments of that great country: smells of cattle, grassland, sheep and river; sounds of the North Wind and the Chinook; documents expressive and factual living, growing things, knowing all is tempered by the coming of the winter of the land but never the winter of the spirit.” - Terry Melton

Isabelle had a career in art that spanned over sixty years. She described herself as a well schooled painter who ranched. She inspired and worked with other Montana artists such as Bill Stockton, Ted Waddell, and many others. Inspired by Paul Cezanne, a French post impressionist painter, she believed that he didn't teach her how to paint, but he taught her how to look with her eyes. She painted not only what she saw in the land but also how the land made her feel. Isabelle was also an educator, teaching in the Billings Public Schools and also later at Eastern Montana College (now known as MSUB). She retired from teaching in 1961 to permanently return to her home ranch to live and work alongside her siblings. Although Isabelle painted for herself and never for the market, she saw success as an artist. Her art is included in many of the collections in museums throughout Montana. She received the Governor's Award for the Arts in 1983. Isabelle Johnson died in May 1992. Her family's ranch is now part of the Tippet Rise Arts Center, as it continues to be a cultural destination, just as it was during her lifetime, for both the visual arts and music.



Untitled, circa 1920s, Isabelle Johnson, Watercolor on Paper, 17.5 x 14.75", Gift of Isabelle Johnson Estate (IJ1992.318)

- Isabelle Johnson : A Retrospective, Yellowstone Art Center, 1986