

“Experiment with color, you will begin to see as never before.”

Polly King

Abbreviated Biography



Polly King is a riddle within an enigma, a many-faceted gem of an artist who can't be narrowed down to a single classification. Despite King's great diversity in both subject matter and technique, there is a consistent quality in her works—whether it leans towards realism or abstraction. She is never completely realistic or purely abstract for she tempers either extreme with the thoughts and emotions she was experiencing at that time, similar to musicians or poets.

Perhaps no American artist so completely epitomizes art in the 20th century as Polly King. Born at the turn of the 20th century in Wheeling, West Virginia, she painted and sketched through every decade until her death in 1993 at the age of 93.

Schooled at Carnegie Tech, The National Academy of Design, Cooper Union School of Art and the Arts Student League, she embraced many styles through her 93 years, from Classicism to Impressionism to Abstraction.

Her body of work, unequalled among other artists of her stature, completely covered the fabric and texture of the 20th century. For nine decades, Polly King painted the world around her, from her birthplace in Wheeling to her adopted home in Niagara Falls to the four corners of the earth.

She was an indefatigable traveler, visiting places throughout America, Europe, and the Middle East. And wherever she went, her sketchbook, easel, pens, and paints went with her. She left a legacy of images of the world that is unmatched. From the ruins of ancient Greece to the

construction of the huge factory plants that harnessed the power of Niagara, from Cezanne's studio to her backyard garden, from the minarets of Istanbul to majestic American mountain ranges, she painted it all, with an unflinching eye for beauty and color of her surroundings. Learn more at pollykingstudio.com.

Accompanying Programs

For more information about these programs, please visit castellaniartmuseum.org or discoverniagara.org.

Exploring Polly King's Artistic Legacy: Tracing Influences, Embracing Modernity, and Celebrating Women in Art
Speaker Series
Thursday, June 13 | 6 PM - 7 PM
Castellani Art Museum

Polly's Art School: Drawing 101
Art Express Workshop
Saturday, July 27 | 11 AM - 1 PM
Castellani Art Museum

Polly's Colorful Plein Air
Art Workshop
Saturday, August 24 | 1 PM - 4 PM
Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center

Colors Sing to Me: The Life and Art of Polly King
Public Tour
Saturday, July 13 | 1 PM - 2 PM
Castellani Art Museum

Exhibited Artworks

All works are courtesy of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area and the Don and Betty King Family.

A Young Woman, circa 1920s
oil on canvas, 29 3/4 x 25 9/16 in.

After the Work Day is Done, circa 1960s
watercolor, 11 1/2 x 11 in.

Alhambra in Granada, Spain, circa 1960s
watercolor, 23 1/2 x 29 1/4 in.

Almond Blossoms in Spain, n.d.
watercolor, 29 x 37 1/4 in.

Amsterdam Synagogue, n.d.
watercolor, 33 1/2 x 39 3/4 in.

An Artist's Space, n.d., oil, 40 x 28 in.

Beautiful Day, n.d., oil, 21 5/8 x 25 9/16 in.

Breakfast at Polly's, n.d.
watercolor, 22 1/4 x 29 7/8 in.

Cézanne's Studio in Aix-en-Provence, circa late 1960s, watercolor, 31 1/4 x 39 1/2 in.

Chaos, circa late 1950s, oil
46 7/8 x 48 1/16 in.

Chess, circa late 1950s, oil on canvas
40 x 52 in.

Children with Balloons, circa late 1960s
oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 31 1/4 in.

Color Explosion, n.d., watercolor
22 1/4 x 30 in.

DJK Favorite Still Life, n.d.
oil on canvas, 38 3/4 x 31 1/4 in.

Figure with Jug, circa 1920s
oil on canvas, 13 1/4 x 17 1/4 in.

Garden in Bloom, n.d., oil, 29 1/2 x 25 1/2 in.

Industrial Scene, n.d., watercolor
12 x 17 7/8 in.

Industrial Sunset Scene, n.d., oil
49 x 30 3/4 in.

Just Apples, n.d., oil, 26 x 30 1/8 in.

Kathy's Day with Polly, 1970, oil, 29 x 25 in.

Male Showcase, circa 1930s - 1940s
watercolor and ink, 23 3/4 x 17 3/4 in.

Marketplace in the Shadow of the Church,
1950, watercolor, 15 1/8 x 11 in.

Masquerade, n.d., watercolor
33 1/2 x 27 1/2 in.

Mighty Niagara, circa 1960s
oil on canvas, 49 x 37 in.

*Monument to Miguel de Cervantes
in Plaza de España*, circa mid 1970s
watercolor, 39 x 30 1/2 in.

Moonsong, circa 1960s
oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in.

Moon over Alicante, 1967
watercolor, 22 3/8 x 29 7/8 in.

Niagara Falls City Market, Years Ago, circa
late 1960s, watercolor, 34 x 23 in.

Niagara Power Project Under Construction
circa late 1950s, watercolor
29 3/4 x 36 3/4 in.

Notre Dame, circa late 1960s
watercolor, 24 x 28 1/2 in.

One of Polly's Pollocks, circa late 1970s
oil, 26 1/4 x 15 in.

Peaches and Roses, n.d.
watercolor, 22 x 29 7/8 in.

Plaza de España in Seville, circa early 1970s
watercolor, 32 7/8 x 41 in.

Polly Paints Herself, circa early 1980s
oil, 23 1/4 x 19 3/4 in.

Polly's Construction in Black and White, circa
early 1970s, charcoal and ink, 38 x 29 1/2 in.

Polly's Lilacs, circa early 1970s
watercolor, 30 1/2 x 22 1/4 in.

Polly's Living Room, circa late 1970s
oil, 48 x 37 1/4 in.

Polly's Pantry, circa 1940s
oil on canvas, 26 1/2 x 22 1/4 in.

Polly's Self-Portrait, circa 1930s - 1940s
oil, 19 x 25 in.

Polly's Staircase, circa late 1950s
charcoal, 22 1/4 x 29 7/8 in.

Polly's Winter Playground, circa late 1960s -
early 1970s, oil, 31 7/8 x 42 in.

Prince of Wales in Niagara-on-the-Lake
circa 1960s, oil, 27 1/2 x 33 3/4 in.

Progress in Process, circa 1960s
ink and pastel, 17 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.

Rainbow Falls No. 1, circa 1930s
oils, 11 x 12 5/8 in.

Rainbow Falls No. 2, circa 1930s
oils, 11 x 12 5/8 in.

Sailboats at Youngstown Yacht Club, circa
1950s, watercolor, 28 3/4 x 33 3/4 in.

Simplicity, n.d., ink, 8 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.

Sister Anne Dolores, circa late 1950s
oil, 40 x 28 1/2 in.

Spanish Faces, 1979
watercolor and ink, 12 1/16 x 8 7/8 in.

Spanish Fair, circa early 1970s
watercolor, 22 5/16 x 32 3/8 in.

Spanish Harbor in Yellow, circa mid 1970s
oil, 31 1/2 x 43 1/2 in.

Spanish Soil as Paint, circa 1970s, clay soil,
watercolor, and conté crayon, 26 1/2 x 30 in.

Still Life with Fruit, circa 1920s - 1930s
oil on canvas, 22 1/2 x 18 1/2 in.

Strawberry Sunday, circa 1970s
oil, 52 x 34 1/4 in.

Sugar and Spice, n.d., oil
48 3/4 x 33 15/16 in.

The Color of Power, circa early 1960s
charcoal and watercolor
13 13/16 x 16 3/4 in.

The Cube by LAMIS, circa late 1970s
watercolor, 22 x 28 in.

The Reading, circa 1940s
oil on canvas, 29 1/2 x 35 1/2 in.

The Seven Candles, circa early 1960s
oil on canvas, 36 3/4 x 24 1/2 in.

Three Boats, circa mid-1970s
watercolor, 20 x 21 1/4 in.

Untitled, circa late 1970s, watercolor with
pencil and ink, collage 26 x 32 1/16 in.

View from the Window, circa early 1970s
watercolor, 25 9/16 x 20 1/2 in.

Yellow Flowers a la Van Gogh, n.d.
oil on canvas, 22 1/2 x 18 1/4 in.

Acknowledgements

This exhibition and its programs are sponsored by the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area in partnership with the Castellani Art Museum and the Don and Betty King Family.

For more information about this exhibition and accompanying programs, please visit castellaniartmuseum.org or discoverniagara.org.

Colors Sing to Me: The Life and Art of Polly King is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



Council on
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The Castellani Art Museum is a free admission art
museum. Donations welcome.

Colors Sing to Me

The Life and Art of Polly King

May 22 – September 1, 2024



CASTELLANI
ART MUSEUM
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY

NIAGARA FALLS
NATIONAL
HERITAGE AREA

Exhibition Statement

Polly King was a prolific artist, sculptor, and writer who resided in Niagara Falls, New York for most of the twentieth century. With a career spanning the early 1900s until her death in 1993, Polly King explored and excelled at a broad range of artistic styles, from Impressionism, including landscapes and still lifes, to portraiture and abstract works. She utilized countless artistic mediums such as watercolor, oils, charcoal, and mixed media.

For seven decades, from 1925-1993, Polly King witnessed vast transformations in Niagara Falls, from its industrial origins to its heyday as the Honeymoon Capital of the World, and to its present state as a Rust Belt city. She captured these important moments in her works, such as the construction of the Niagara Power Project and the thriving business district on Main Street, as well as the people who populated the city.

It is impossible to fully capture the essence of Polly King as an artist, as she was an inherently creative and curious individual. She saw art in everything around her, and expressed this inspiration through different styles and mediums. Her art did not just live on canvas: she created art and surrounded herself with it. She painted scenes on her bedroom window shades, and detailed motifs on her dressers and cabinets. Art permeated every aspect of her life and creations, serving as an essential element of her existence. Polly King believed in the inherent creativity that resides in all people, and worked every day to express her own.

This retrospective exhibition was curated by the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, with assistance from the Polly King Art Gallery and King family. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (NFNHA) is one of 62 National Heritage Areas in the United States. Designated by the United States Congress in 2008, its mission is to preserve, promote, and protect the diverse historic, cultural, and environmental assets of the Niagara region. In all of its work, the NFNHA places community needs and input at the forefront, developing collaborative strategies that celebrate our diverse region. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area facilitates partnerships between artists, public and private organizations, and community members and stakeholders to envision and create public art, impacting the cultural landscape with pieces that reflect and honor the history and legacy of Niagara Falls. To date, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area has facilitated over 40 public art projects in Niagara Falls.

Located in the former residence of Polly King, the Polly King Art Gallery houses the complete works of Polly King, from her artworks, photographs, and sculptures, to her journals and artist studio. The Gallery has loaned works to various organizations in Western New York, including schools, businesses, and government offices.

In partnership with the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (NFNHA), the Gallery is a nexus of research and art preservation. The experience of visiting the Gallery is always one of discovery, wonderment, and creativity. The King family has created a space that not only preserves Polly's legacy, but inspires all those who visit.

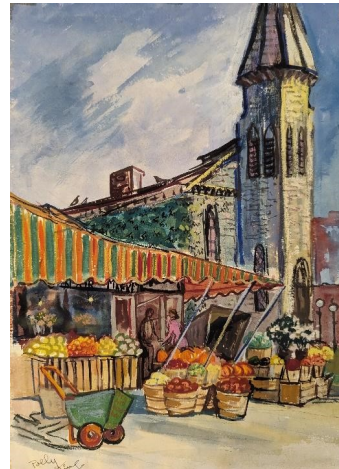
Image Credits: (cover) (detail) *Marketplace in the Shadow of the Church*, 1950; (above) (detail) *Mighty Niagara*, circa 1960s.



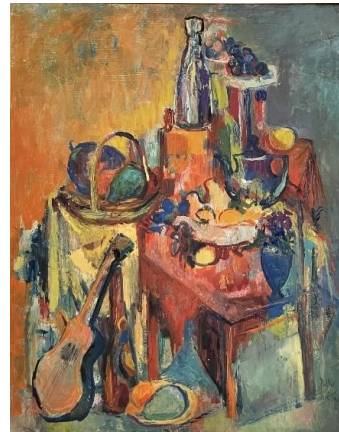
“Painting is so much more than what we see—although seeing itself is a very rare thing. Painting is all we see, all we know, and all we feel and that is why it takes not only a lifetime to become a fine artist but also a life lived.”

Polly King

Featured Images



Marketplace in the Shadow of the Church, 1950



DJK Favorite Still Life, n.d.

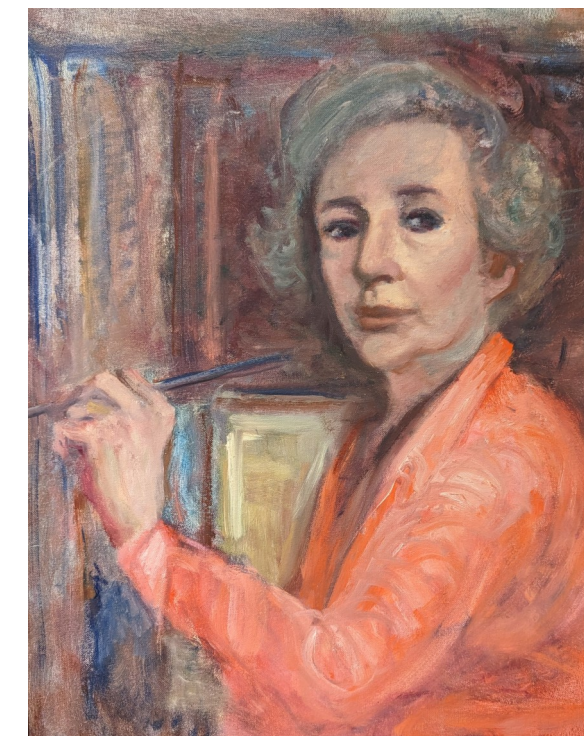


Male Showcase,
circa 1930s - 1940s

This small painting of a marketplace next to the First Congregational Church in Niagara Falls, New York captures a lively, bright scene of the city's North End. Painted in 1950, the artwork shows two figures engaging in conversation, surrounded by vegetables, fruit, and flowers. The church is the main focal point, its tall bell tower spanning nearly the entire length of the artwork. The marketplace is adorned with a cheerful awning, and the farmstead baskets are overflowing with goods. The viewer must look closely to see the simplified figures in the center of the painting, and despite their placement, it is clear that they are not the focus. The bright colors and brush strokes suggest a dynamic marketplace, and the presence of the church lends an air of serenity that prevents the image from seeming too busy. Polly King loved painting the life and world around her. This piece demonstrates her appreciation of the surrounding scenery, both built environments and natural landscapes.

In this large piece, fruit, bottles, and instruments compose a still life, a traditional style of painting whose modern origins date back to the 1500s. The composition and style of painting are reminiscent of Paul Cézanne, a prominent French Post-Impressionist painter known for his geometric figures and planes of color. Those influences can clearly be seen in this work, with its focus on form and structure over realistic detail. King traveled extensively and had a vast library of artist books that she referenced. When visiting France, she made a point to visit Cézanne's studio, and even created a watercolor of the space. Her use of color sets this still life apart from its inspiration. The riotous hues, which meld and transform across the canvas to create an almost explosive sense of transformation, show Polly King's skill as a colorist and cause the viewer's eye to dance across the canvas, creating a still life that is "still" in name only.

This artwork showcases two aspects of Polly King that would become a large part of her signature style—the representation of the human form and the incorporation of colorful watercolors. This small piece features three men in the foreground appearing to pose for an art study. Of these figures, two are sketched in high detail, with the third having a less distinct, but still-defined form. There are two women in the image: one has her head down and seems to sketch the figures in front of her, while the other studies the men with intensity. This type of nude figural study has been popular in the Western tradition since the Renaissance, but this image features King's signature through its creation of a watercolor background. Her bold strokes of contrasting color draw attention to each of the male figures in turn—almost as if they were standing in front of colored spotlights. The exploration of male figure studies at this time (1930s-40s) challenged existing societal values, especially as King was a mother of two who lived in Niagara Falls. This work solidifies her bold and unique approach to creating art that reexamined gender roles.



“Art speaks the tongue of every land. Art unites all. Art softens the hardships of life. Sun colors flowers, art colors life. Art is vital to life. Art softens the blows of adversity. Art makes living better. Life is better with art.”

Polly King

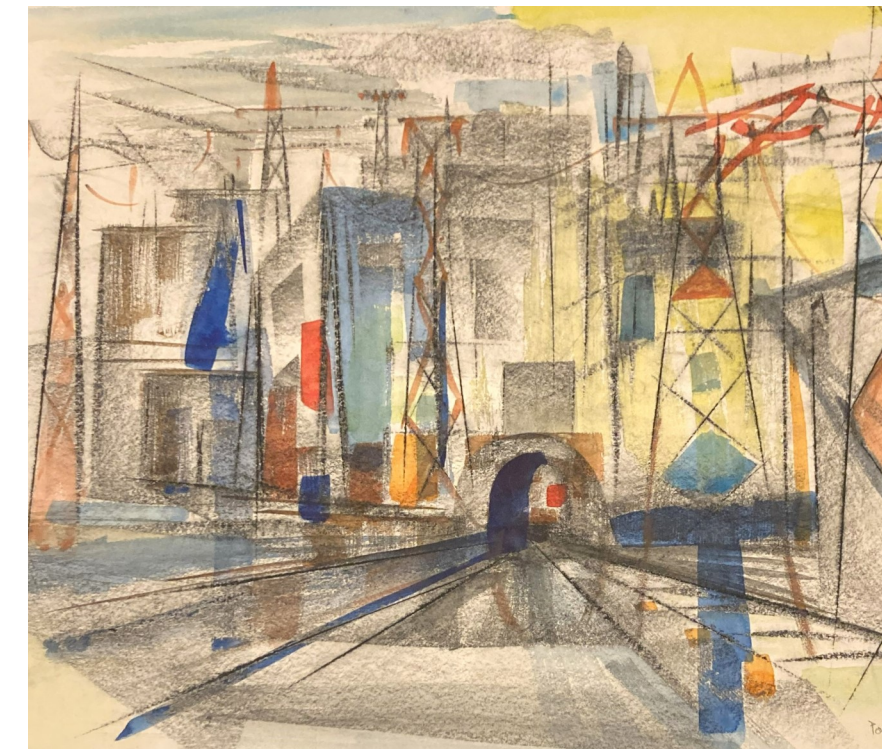


Image Credits: (center page from the top) *Marketplace in the Shadow of the Church*, 1950; *DJK Favorite Still Life*, n.d.; *Male Showcase*, circa 1930s - 1940s; (above-clockwise from top left) *Polly Paints Herself*, circa early 1980s; *Figure with Jug*, circa 1920s; *Garden in Bloom*, n.d.; *The Color of Power*, circa early 1960s.