

The Portrait and the Subject

Fran Cappelletti, Jose Moya del Pino Library/Ross Historical Society

At the Jose Moya del Pino Library/Ross Historical Society, we are accustomed to seeing many old portraits of people who left us long ago. Yet there is the rare occasion when the art comes alive. We recently had the honor of meeting Ann T. Morrison of Belvedere. She has a wonderful painting by Moya, that of herself.

A surprise gift for her mother, Eleanor, it was commissioned by her father, Joseph Morrison. Ann was in her 20's, but the project was inspired by an earlier portrait completed on the East Coast when Ann was a child. It, too, is still part of her art collection. As Ann recalls, both parents had a mutual interest in antiques and art.



Ann T. Morrison

Ann sat for her portrait in the early 1960s with Moya in his Ross studio, over several Saturdays. As she recalls, there was little conversation as the artist went about his work, focused on the task at hand. It was near the end of a long and successful career that included hundreds of portraits. As he noted in a 1964 interview, he painted King Alfonso XIII of Spain as part of a tour to bring Spanish art to the United States. Once he reached San Francisco, financial and political difficulties stranded him in America with no money for support. He found prominent clients, such as Mrs. Alfred Sutro, Miss Peggy Pillsbury, Dr. Emile Holman at Stanford, and even Miss Europe one year. In our Library, we have several portraits, from a self-portrait and his wife to the famed Caroline Livermore. Even today, we hear from collectors who find portraits by Moya of subjects known and unknown. In addition to portraiture, Moya completed murals, landscapes and an early project to reproduce 41 Velasquez masterpieces, the very paintings that brought him to America and changed his life forever.

The portrait of Ann had many homes over the years as the family moved to various homes. It became a part of Ann's personal collection after her parents passed away. Ann recalls that the dress was made by her mother and she still has the pin she wore on it.

On a beautiful Sunday morning, I accompanied Tina Kun, daughter of Moya del Pino, and Gary Scales, fellow trustee of the Moya Library, to see Ann and the portrait in person. There is no mistaking her likeness and it was an honor to hear recollections of her experience and of the inspiration for the portrait. In the present day, fewer people sit for painted portraits, but this tradition continues and it is worth seeing such a lasting method of preserving the past as a work of art.