



Portrait of Laura Musser-McColm

Thomas Riss

Oil on canvas, circa 1907

Gift of Mary Catherine McWhirter & Mary Musser Gilmore, heirs of Laura Musser-McColm

Portrait of Laura Musser



Thomas Riss (1871-1959)

Born in Stams, Austria, Riss studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. Following three years of military service, he settled in Merano and painted portraits, landscapes and religious images. A portrait painting of an American couple led to an invitation to exhibit at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri. His painting earned a gold medal.

Laura Musser-McColm's brother-in-law, Charles Huttig, served as Vice President of the Exposition Corporation, an organization formed to create the World's Fair. Although the details are unknown, it is believed that Laura Musser-McColm, or other members of her family, met the Austrian artist at the World's Fair in 1904 and commissioned him to paint her portrait from a photograph.

Following the World's Fair, Riss became famous with some of his works being made into postcards. Two towns in Austria have named streets in his honor.

Collection Connection

The Muscatine Art Center's collection contains fine art and photographs of Laura Musser-McColm as well as numerous photographs of other Muscatine area subjects taken by Oscar Grossheim. Grossheim was born in 1862 in Muscatine to German-born parents. In 1887, Grossheim and his older brother Alexander opened a photography studio in downtown Muscatine. Grossheim opened his own studio in 1892 and was productive until his retirement in 1954. His work includes individual portrait studio sessions, group photos, documentation of the area's pearl button industry, and storefront displays. His body of work consists of approximately 55,000 glass plate negatives maintained by the Musser Public Library.

Oscar Grossheim
Laura Musser-McColm
Photograph, 1906

