

# PEYTON WRIGHT

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## Dorothy Eugenie Brett

(British-American Painter, 1883-1976)



Photograph courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

Dorothy Brett was born to an aristocratic London family and educated in the court of Queen Victoria. She attended the Slade School of Art and University College. For some time, she occupied a studio on the estate of Lady Ottoline Morrell, where she became a part of the artistic and literary Bloomsbury group. There, she became acquainted with many prominent English figures, such as Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Wolff, George Bernard Shaw, and D.H. Lawrence, several of whose portraits she painted.

In 1924, Brett traveled with D.H. Lawrence and his wife to visit Taos, New Mexico at the invitation of the prominent Taos society figure Mabel Dodge Luhan. The Lawrences came to New Mexico with the intention of starting a Utopian commune, but they returned to England after a short time. Brett, however, stayed in Taos. She became a United States citizen in 1938 and remained in New Mexico until her death.

In Taos, Brett became a close friend of the well-known art patron Millicent Rogers. Rogers played a significant role in Brett's artistic career, buying and arranging exhibitions of her works. Rogers was responsible for Brett's first solo exhibition in New York at the American British Art Gallery in 1950. Later that year, one of Brett's works was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Though Brett had a formal artistic education, she abandoned academic and landscape painting upon her arrival in New Mexico and began to paint Indian subjects. Brett had been fascinated by Indian dances and ceremonies since attending Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in London at the age of five. She traveled with Millicent Rogers to view and paint Indian dances. Her works are romantic and symbolic in nature, emphasizing her impressions of the Indians' mysticism and

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spirituality. In her works, she sought to “paint the...Indian’s attitude towards life and the world around him. The Indian as he thinks and feels about himself..., the spirit of a Race, the Life behind the Life of a people” (Porter et. al. 1998: 295). According to Brett, her destiny was to “come all this way from England to find and give the Red Indian his hidden life on canvas” (Ibid).

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