

Meet the Women Artists in the Malden Public Library's Art Galleries

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Did you know that Mary Diana Converse, wife of local businessman and philanthropist Elisha Converse, established a trust specifically to fund artwork for the Malden Public Library (MPL)? Mary wanted the Library to collect and display art for generations of Malden residents and visitors to enjoy. In her will, she left all her money – \$15,000 – to start a trust for the Library's art, while her husband, Elisha, set up a separate trust for the Library's upkeep, renovations and books. The couple also donated several pieces of art from their private collection to the Library.

Female Artists on Display at the MPL

Among the many female artists whose works are displayed at the Library is Perle Fine, a prominent [abstract expressionist](#) who grew up in Malden, where her family owned a small dairy farm on Alden Street. Perle found artistic support at Malden High School, where she won poster contests held during World War I. Before she finished high school, Perle enrolled in Boston's School of Practical Art, where she took classes in illustration and graphic design. The MPL features her 1944 work, "Carousel."

Another female artist from Malden is Constance Stella, mother of famed artist Frank Stella. She started painting later in life, taking art classes at Boston's Emmanuel College when she was in her sixties. Interestingly, she was 77 years old when she had her first one-woman art exhibit at the MPL's Ryder Gallery, where her stunning marine and landscape scenes remain on display today.

Also on display are works from Malden resident Gail Fulton-Ross, who became a famous portrait artist after studying at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. She has painted a variety of celebrities, politicians and athletes, including Justice Thurgood Marshall and Governor Michael Dukakis.

Other female artists with works on display at the Library include Irene Rice Pereira, Harriet Robinson, Virginia Williams, Yvonne Twining Humber, Louise Stokes, Doris Burdick, Marguerite Stuber Pearson and Juana Romani.

The Library's Impressive Art Collection

If not for Mary Diana Converse, the Library's art collection would not have been possible. Since she established the trust for the Library's art, generations of people have enjoyed the stunning, diverse collection. Today, the collection is so large that MPL can only display one-third of it at a time. The Library's Trustees are still acquiring artwork, thanks to the trust and private donations.

The art galleries are free and open to the public. MPL frequently hosts art exhibitions and tours, where visitors can learn more about the collection. MPL is located at 36 Salem St. in Malden.

As a private, nonprofit corporation, MPL utilizes a trust fund established by Elisha and Mary Diana Converse in 1885. This Trust – along with generous donations from individuals, families and private foundations – funds the building's maintenance, renovations, artwork and books. The Board of Trustees – nine Malden residents who volunteer their time – oversee the trust. For more information, visit <https://maldenpubliclibrary.org>.