

A Portrait of Edith Maryon, Artist and Anthroposophist

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ABSTRACT

The lost and last portrait of Edith Maryon (1872-1924), presented in the present paper, was painted by the Italian/Australian artist Ernesto Genoni (1885-1975) at Dornach in 1924. Maryon was appointed by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) at the Christmas Conference of the Anthroposophy Society, December 1923, as the leader of the Section for Sculptural Arts (akna Fine Art). She was an English sculptor who worked with Steiner to create the massive timber sculpture, 'The Representative of Humanity', now on display in the Goetheanum, the headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society, at Dornach, Switzerland. Ernesto Genoni trained at the renowned Brera Academy of Fine Art in Milan. He first met Maryon in 1920 on his first visit to Dornach. Genoni returned to Dornach at about the time of the Christmas Conference, December 1923, he successfully applied to Steiner to be in the inaugural First Class of the School of Spiritual Science. Genoni remained in Dornach for most of the year 1924. Edith Maryon died on 2 May 1924 reportedly of tuberculosis (TB). Genoni left Dornach only after Steiner withdrew from public life and retreated to his sick bed (on 28 September 1924). Genoni took the art that he had created at Dornach back to Milan, Italy, and some of it went on to Australia when he emigrated in 1926. Genoni's portrait of Maryon has remained in the Genoni family in Milan since that time but with the subject long forgotten (or perhaps never known to the family). Genoni painted portraits of significant women in his life, including his sister Rosa and his niece Fanny (in Milan, Italy), and his partner Ileen Macpherson and his niece Anne Fiedler (in Melbourne, Australia). The portrait of this paper, is now identified as of Edith Maryon, thereby reuniting the artwork with its subject, and dating it in the last four months of Maryon's life (January to April 1924).

Keywords: *Anthroposophy, sculptor, Brera Academy of Fine Art, Milan, Italy, Dornach, Switzerland, Goetheanum, Australia, How-Old.net*

INTRODUCTION

Edith Maryon (1872-1924) was a sculptural artist attracted to the ideas and teachings of the Austrian New Age philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) and his spiritual movement, Anthroposophy. She was "one of the closest colleagues and pupils of Rudolf Steiner" (Halle & Wilkes, 2010, p.82). Maryon was appointed by Steiner as the leader of the Section for Sculptural Arts (akna Section for Fine Art) at the Christmas Conference of the Anthroposophy Society at Dornach in December 1923, a position which she accepted. Maryon was unanimously elected as the vice-president of the Anthroposophy Society at the General Assembly on 21 January 1924 (Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990). A previously unknown portrait of Maryon painted by the accomplished Italian/Australian artist Ernesto Genoni at Dornach

in the final year of her life is presented in this paper (Figure 1).

Maryon studied sculpture at the Royal College of Art, London and exhibited her work at the Royal Academy (Halle & Wilkes, 2010). In Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy she discovered her *raison d'être*.

Maryon wrote to Steiner that "for some years I have always felt there is something for me to do, and that sometime I shall meet the Master who will tell me what it is and explain some of the things that have puzzled me so much. For a long time I searched ... and when I saw you in Berlin I knew at last I was right about the Master ... is there really any definite thing for me to do ... if there is may I know now what it is?" (letter, 1 Jan 1913, reproduced in Raab, 1993, pp.231-2).

She later wrote to Steiner that: "I have quite definitely decided in my own mind, that when I

leave England in May, it will be altogether, and with your permission I hope to entirely cast in my lot with the Anthroposophy Society” (letter reproduced in Selg, 2006, p.37).

Months later, from Munich, Maryon wrote to Steiner: “I must find some definite work to do, or be forced to return to England. There is a feeling that perhaps there may be something for me to do here, so I will not go back unless absolutely obliged. You will see that it is necessary for me to come to a conclusion about the kind of work I will do during the rest of my life, and I do want some advice ... Your pupil, L Edith C Maryon” (letter, 10 Jun 1913, reproduced in Selg, 2006, pp.45-6). Maryon arrived at Dornach, Switzerland, in January 1914 (Halle & Wilkes, 2010). These were very early days for the project of relocating Anthroposophy headquarters to Switzerland. It was propitious timing since six months later the Great War would begin and engulf Europe and the world in catastrophe. Maryon was a trailblazer: “There was hardly any other artist coming to work in Dornach before her capable in the way Edith Maryon was of sacrificing - that is, largely giving up her own deeply rooted style, born out of the aesthetics of Greece, in favour of a new Mystery art” (Halle & Wilkes, 2010, p.74).

The next decade was a period of intense industry and creativity for the English sculptor, a period in which she found her life’s purpose. “Edith Maryon ... was helping him [Steiner] with the Goetheanum building and above all with the great wooden sculpture ... ‘Representative of Humanity’ ... Miss Maryon throughout those years was one of his closest collaborators ... the studio in which the work was going on became his study for a great part of the day. Here he received his visitors, and she was acting very largely as his secretary” (Adams, 1958, p.10).

George Kaufmann (he later changed his name to Adams, in 1940) related a visit to Dornach after the war: “We were received in the most friendly way by the Dornach members and above all by Miss Maryon herself. She gave us mallet and chisel and let us help with parts of the sculpture where there was much superfluous wood and

our unskilled hands could do no harm” (Adams, 1958, p.10).

Kaufmann relates that Steiner was “anxious for an English edition of the book [on the Threefold Social Order], and as no one else was at hand, Miss Maryon had undertaken to translate it. In style - like many of the attempted translations of Dr Steiner’s works in those days - it was impossible ... and we said so frankly. We were then invited to Dornach to go into the whole question” (Adams, 1958, p.10). Kaufmann went on to extemporaneously translate many of Steiner’s lectures, for example at Oxford and Torquay, as well as books, for example Steiner’s Agriculture Course (Paull, 2011a, 2011b, 2018)

Edith Maryon and Rudolf Steiner carried on an extensive exchange of correspondence beginning in 1912, when Maryon wrote to Steiner on 16 October from London. Steiner wrote to Maryon from his travels including from Ilkley, Penmaenmawr, London, Stuttgart, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Mannheim, Vienna, Prague, Amsterdam, Kristiania (Oslo), and The Hague. Steiner’s salutation to Maryon progressed in the course of 1919 to 1920 from “Mein liebes Fraulein E. Maryon” (My dear Miss E Maryon) to “Mein liebes Fraulein Edith Maryon!” (My dear Miss Edith Maryon) to “Meine liebe Edith Maryon!” (My love Edith Maryon!) (Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990).

Theirs was an artistic partnership: “Rudolf Steiner stood, day after day, beside his colleague in the high ceilinged sculpture studio. During this time they not only worked with their hands, but also conversed intensively on every imaginable subject - from art, through politics to things of the deepest concern. Over and above this his studio had become for Rudolf Steiner a refuge of inner peace in which - well protected from visitors by Edith Maryon - he could both do a lot of esoteric work and also relax” (Halle & Wilkes, 2010, p.82).

At the Christmas Conference of the Anthroposophy Society, December 1923, Rudolf Steiner appointed Maryon as the leader of the Section for Sculptural Arts - a position that she accepted. The following month, at the General Assembly of the Goetheanum, Maryon

was elected unanimously vice president (Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990).

In her will (of 2 Feb 1923) she describes Rudolf Steiner as “my best friend and revered teacher” (meinem besten Freund und verehrten Lehrer) (Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990, p.251). She died after an illness, said to be tuberculosis (TB), of more than a year on 2 May 1924.

In his memorial tribute, Steiner stated of Edith Maryon that: “When we began to build the Goetheanum, she was one of the first to devote herself to the work ... With a perfect control of her technique, her special gift was to give spirituality to stately form. This artistic skill she devoted entirely to the service of the Goetheanum ... earnestness showed itself in her appearance. One could ... see a person who had not been spoiled by the amenities of life, though she had been sorely tried by the hand of fate ... She participated most actively in all that went on at the Goetheanum. The spiritual contents of the Christmas Assembly and the Class lectures ... up to the last days of her life she pondered on how this Section [Sculptural Arts] should develop its activity in the right way... Her work for the this Society will always be remembered as being most earnest and devoted” (Steiner, 1924, pp.2-3).

Ernesto Genoni (1885-1975) met Edith Maryon in 1920 on his first visit to Dornach (Genoni, c.1955). He travelled from Milan via Lausanne. The occasion was the inauguration of the first Goetheanum. He also met Elizabeth Vreede and Steiner: “I was received by him with great warmth” (Genoni, c.1970, p.7). Genoni spent some days at Dornach; there is no record that he had his paints and brushes with him on this occasion, nor that he produced any artworks on that occasion.

Genoni trained as an artist at the renowned Brera Academy of Fine Art in Milan (from 1906-1910) (Paull, 2014). He subsequently spent several years labouring on his brothers' farms in Western Australia before enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) as a stretcher-bearer. He served on the Somme as a stretcher-bearer before being conscripted off the battlefield of the Western Front into the Italian Army. He refused to take the Italian oath of allegiance and spent the subsequent years of the

Great War in and out of Italian military prisons and serving as an orderly at a military hospital in Verona treating wounded Italian soldiers (Paull, 2014).

Genoni spent most of 1924 at Dornach. He applied successfully to Rudolf Steiner to join the First Class of the School of Spiritual Science. Under the tutelage of Rudolf Steiner, Genoni explored art in the Anthroposophic style. He recalled that Steiner “gave me some good advice concerning the new impulse in Art, especially in the field of painting” (Genoni, c.1970, p.8). Genoni migrated to Australia in 1926 taking some of his art with him and leaving some of it with the family in Milan (Paull, 2014). The suite of paintings in the Anthroposophic-style that Genoni produced during his year at Dornach have recently been the subject of a travelling exhibition (Paull, 2016).

METHODS

The painting which is the subject of this paper has been in the safekeeping of the Genoni family in Milan since Ernesto migrated to Australia in 1926. It is a work on paper of dimensions approximately 30cm by 40 cm. The portrait was represented to me as a portrait of Genoni's wife. Ernesto and Lydia Hillbrand (1898-1966), a young Austrian woman, were married in Milan on 24 February 1923 (Bettini, 2016). By January 1924 the marriage was over. The Milan family had no photos of Lydia, nor, at this distance in time, any living memory. At the inaugural Uriel Lecture in Melbourne the portrait was represented by the present author as being of Lydia (Paull, 2015).

On the basis of that presentation, I was subsequently contacted by a niece of Lydia's, who knew her well and who had lived with her in London. She stated that this was most definitely not a portrait of Lydia, that Lydia was blonde, that the age of the subject was quite wrong for Lydia who would have been in her early twenties during the brief courtship and marriage. She supplied photos of her aunt Lydia which most convincingly excluded Lydia from contention as the subject of the portrait.

Ernesto painted portraits of significant women in his life. In Milan he had painted portraits of his sister Rosa Genoni (1867-1954) and his niece Fanny Podreider. In Australia he painted

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portraits of his partner Ileen Macpherson (1898-1984) and his niece Anne Fiedler. (Curiously enough, the portrait of Ileen had, in the passage of time, also lost its association with its subject, and was also erroneously represented to me, by an Australian branch of the Genoni family, as a portrait of “Ernesto’s wife in Europe”).

So the quest was, who was this woman, significant in Genoni’s life in Europe, possibly as late as 1926, when he migrated to Australia, and possibly as early as 1919, when he was released from military prison in Italy?

The author had access to the (rather cryptic) memoirs written by Genoni, and visited the

Goetheanum Archives and the Rudolf Steiner Archives at Dornach, Switzerland. In the course of research, the author located dozens of paintings scattered amongst the extended Genoni family et alia and across continents. Genoni was not in the habit of writing the name or location of his subject on his artworks (neither on the front nor the rear).

Facial analysis software (How-Old.net) put the age of the subject at 56 years (Figure 2). An artist suggested that the subject depicted in the portrait was “pained”, “not happy”, “caught in a moment of tragedy, an emotional moment” (Hall, 2017).



Figure 1. *Portrait of Edith Maryon, 1924, by Ernesto Genoni.*

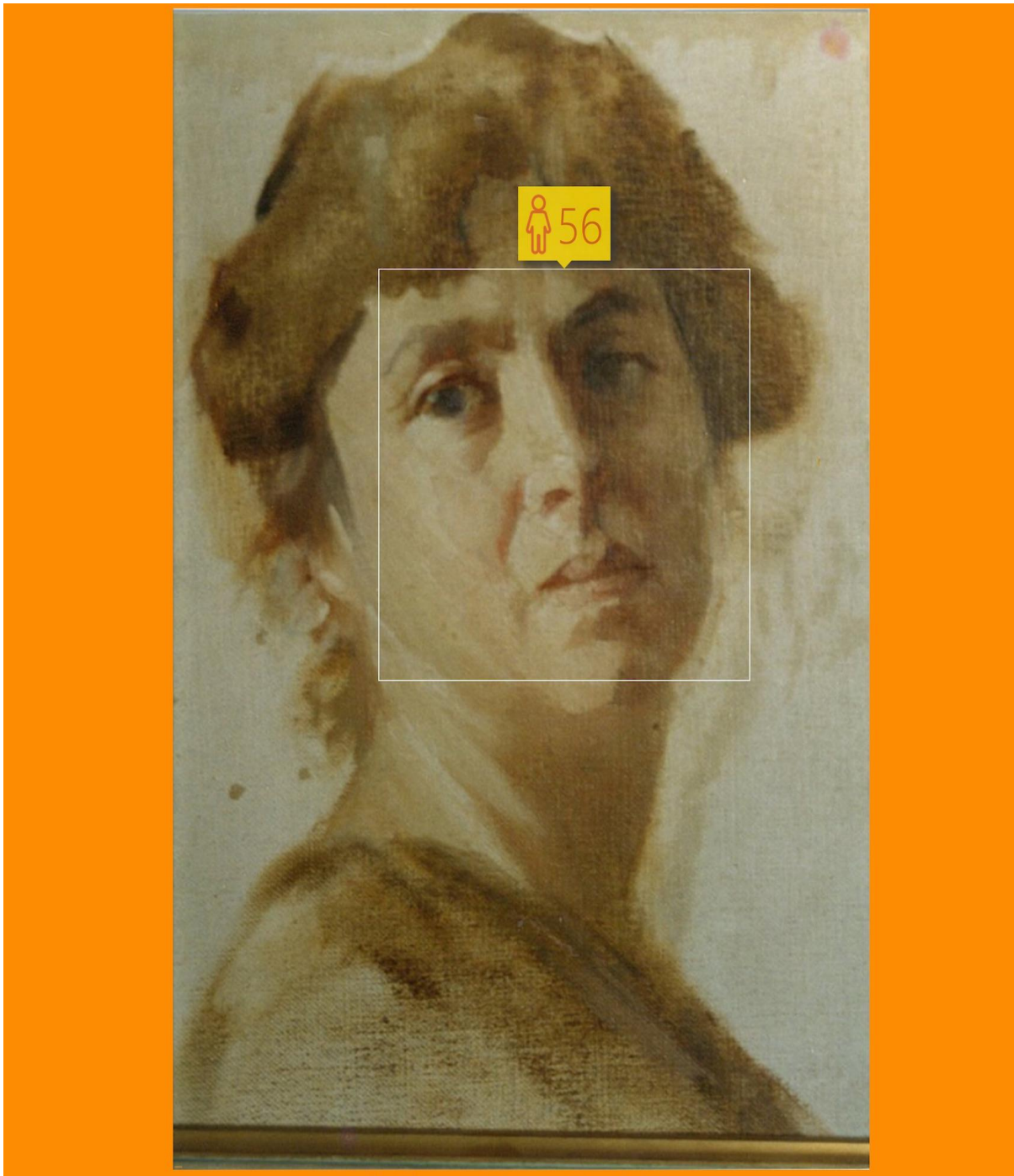


Figure 2. *The age assessment by How-Old.net.*

The portrait was compared to known images of Edith Maryon. The photo portrait of 1912, for example, is clearly the same woman (Figure 3) as in Genoni's portrait (Figure 1), the same facial features, the same gaze, and the same hair style. The archivist at the Rudolf Steiner Archiv, Dornach, advised that: "We also think that could be Edith Maryon on that painting" (Widmer, 2016). No self portraits of Maryon were identified (she was a sculptor not a painter). There are few photographs of Edith Maryon and fewer paintings. There are two portraits of Maryon by

Dorothea Templeton painted from photographs and reproduced in Raab (1993, pp, 20, 345).

RESULTS

The portrait (Figure 1) is of Louise Edith Church Maryon, who was known as Edith Maryon, the English sculptor, born on 9 February 1872 and died on 2 May 1924, who devoted her life to Rudolf Steiner, the Goetheanum and Anthroposophy. It was painted by Ernesto Genoni in the first few months of his 1924 sojourn at Dornach and in the last several

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months of Maryon's life (viz. January to April 1924).

Maryon was 52 years of age at this time, as compared to the facial recognition software that put the age of the sitter of the portrait at 56 years.

Genoni had met Maryon on his first visit to Dornach in 1920. It was a visit of just a few days. There is no indication that he had art materials with him at that time. Steiner welcomed him warmly: "Unfortunately he was speaking in German which I did not know, but by his long handshake and smiling expression of his face I could feel his sincere welcome" (Genoni, c.1970, p.7). As a fellow artist and an English speaker, of which there were then very few resident at Dornach, Maryon was a logical association at the time, and subsequently.

When Genoni arrived again at Dornach, at the beginning of 1924, Maryon was by then the head of the Section for Sculptural Arts. In 1924, as previously, there were few English (or Italian) speakers resident at Dornach, and short of learning German (which he did in the course of the year), the opportunities for association were linguistically restricted. Maryon was by this stage of her life quite ill. However with art and the English language in common, and Maryon bearing the responsibility for advancing the section for the arts, she and Genoni were natural allies.

Genoni recorded that art was a subject of discussion with Steiner: "on this second visit I could speak to Dr Steiner in the French language. On the first visit I was unaware that Dr Steiner could speak [French]" (Genoni, c.1970, p.8). Art was important to Steiner and he would have ensured these two artists were in communication.

Genoni had spent the years 1916 to 1919 intermittently nursing the sick and dying (at the military hospital in Verona, between bouts incarcerated in military prisons) and also caring for his sister Rosa and family when they were laid low with the Spanish flu in 1918. He was by then very familiar with dealing with the ill and the dying, and faced with an ill (and in fact dying) Edith Maryon, he could face the situation with understanding and may have offered comfort in the circumstances.

Dornach offered Ernesto the time and the opportunity to paint Maryon, he had his art materials in Dornach, he produced a portfolio of artworks during his stay, and it was characteristic of Ernesto to produce a portrait of women significant in his life.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The portrait of Edith Maryon, 1924, by Ernesto Genoni is almost certainly the last portrait of Edith Maryon. It reveals a somewhat pained and strained yet brave and resolute woman facing her, nearby, date with destiny.

Maryon was a close and trusted colleague of Rudolf Steiner. The period 1913 to 1924 which they shared was a decade of intense work for them both in which Maryon helped Steiner reify his visions of art and architecture. Less than five months after Maryon's death, Steiner himself retreated from public life (in September 1924) and six months later he was dead. The decade they shared was the most intensive burst of creativity and achievement for Steiner, it was the decade that gave us the remarkable Goetheanum, the wonderful Anthropop architecture of Dornach, Waldorf education and biodynamic agriculture.

Maryon has left an enduring legacy. Foremost is the massive sculpture 'The Representative of Humanity' (9.5 metres high) but also are the many sculptural features, both great and small, that grace the Goetheanum. In life, she once saved Steiner from a potentially fatal fall from scaffolding (Halle & Wilkes, 2010; Steiner, 1924), and in death she has ensured an enduring legacy of sculpture, architectural sculptural features, and architecture.

Ernesto Genoni, the talented but modest artist has left us a fine portrait of Edith Maryon. It is a worthy tribute to an important Anthroposophist artist who dedicated her skills to advancing the vision of the man she described as her best friend and revered teacher, Dr Rudolf Steiner.

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Figure 3. Photograph of Edith Maryon, 1912 (widely published, e.g in Raab (1993), Selg (2006), Halle & Wilkes (2010).

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