

OF SPECIAL NOTE...

Maud's Journey: A Life From Art by Maud Morgan. Berkeley: New Earth Publications, 268 pages, 24 black-and-white illustrations, \$14.95. Painter Maud Morgan's autobiography is a strange and amazing little book. Atrociously written but hard to put down, it is utterly candid, often poignant, funny, and full of improbable intersections with history. I catch myself at times thinking of Morgan as a sort of Yankee Forrest Gump: like Gump's, her life reads as a skewed primer on American history, or rather in her case, on the social history of American art. But her story is also a personal one, of a privileged tenacious woman who refused to stop growing up.

Born in 1903 to a wealthy New York branch of Boston's Cabot family, Morgan spent much of her youth in the picturesque wilderness of Quebec where her family owned lands that "operated on a more or less feudal system." Her mother, also Maud but called Mootzie, was a kind of maternal Teddy Roosevelt: she insisted that her daughter kill a moose before coming out in New York society. Obedient and unhappy, the younger Maud dispatched her moose, came out, graduated from Barnard and fled to Paris.

In expatriate Paris, Morgan had an intellectual, though not a sexual, awakening: she socialized with Hemingway and Joyce, took up painting and became part of a Platonic romantic triangle with two homosexual men. In 1929 one apex of this triangle, the only man Morgan ever loved, died under mysterious circumstances. The two survivors coped with their grief by marrying each other.

In the 1930s, the young, ominously ill-matched couple, through their Paris contacts and Hans Hofmann's classes, became part of the tiny circle of Modernist artists in New York. Morgan tells entertaining stories about "Sandy" Calder, Louise Nevelson, Salvador Dali, and Barnett Newman, among others. She exhibited at the Betty Parsons Gallery and became an associate member of the "Irascibles," the group that formed the nucleus of the Abstract Expressionist painters.

Then in 1940 Morgan's life took what amounted to a wrong turn: she moved to Andover, Massachusetts, where her husband had been given a teaching job. For the next twenty years, Morgan played the classic '50s double role of devoted mother and battered housewife—with a cameo as mentor to an exceptional phalanx of students that included Frank Stella and Carl Andre. Her painting sustained her through worsening marital difficulties, but without the stimulus of New York contacts her career languished.

Finally, at the end of the decade, Morgan left her husband. From this point on, her story becomes happier, racier, and more confusing. Like Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim, Morgan has a tendency to become "unstuck in time," and she talks about art, friends, travels, and a belated sexual awakening (including a memorable sauna episode at age 75!) with a slightly exasperating indifference to chronology.

Still, the basic outlines are clear, not to mention well-known to New England's art audience: Morgan continues to have, well into her 90s, an extraordinarily prolific old age. And her story, threading together various incarnations of the art world—from its elite origins to its fertile, if confusing present—focuses a fascinating lens on the long century we (and she) are leaving behind.

Privately printed, *Maud's Journey* is available in Boston and Cambridge bookstores, or through Barbara Singer Fine Art, Cambridge, Massachusetts. It deserves to be picked up by a larger publisher. ■



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