



Frances Strain (American, 1898 - 1962)  
Untitled (Landscape with Bridge), 1930  
Oil on Masonite  
20 x 24 inches (framed 24 1/4 x 28 1/4 inches)  
Signed and dated Frances Strain 1930, lower right  
#22884



## Frances Strain

Frances Strain was born on the west side of Chicago in 1898. Strain's father was 51 years old at the time of her birth and he died when she was just nine years old. Strain's sister from her father's first marriage, who was 20 years her senior, supported the family as the death left her mother bereft. Strain's older sister eventually moved Strain and her younger sister to Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. A childhood interest in art, led her to her enrolling in the Art Institute of Chicago during WWI. There she studied with such Ashcan School luminaries as George Bellows and Randall Davey. Davey invited a group of students to paint with him and fellow Ashcan School artist John Sloan in New Mexico for the summer and a romance bloomed with fellow student and artist Fred Biesel. At the end of the summer, Strain and Biesel followed Sloan to New York and lived and worked with him for over a year. Sloan, president of the Society of Independent Artists, espoused the philosophy of freedom of personal expression. The couple returned to Chicago in 1922, where they opened an art studio in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood, creating both commercial and fine art. The couple married in 1926. In 1922, Strain exhibited in a show called "The Salon des Refusés", which consisted of paintings rejected by the jury of the Art Institute of Chicago. Those that were not Caucasian or from a certain social class often found it difficult to find inclusion into The Art Institute of Chicago exhibitions. Thus, in 1922, the Chicago No-Jury Society of Artists was born and Strain and Biesel were founding members. Modeled on the Society of Independent Artists in New York, any artist who wished to participate could do so. Paintings were also hung alphabetically to avoid favoritism. Strain and Biesel remained active in the organization throughout their careers. Strain also exhibited with the Society of Independent Artists in New York, the Whitney Museum, New York, NY, the Newark Museum, Newark, NJ and the Art Institute of Chicago, among others. In 1928, she and Biesel, along with fellow artists friends, Frances Foy, Gustaf Dahlstrom, V.M.S. Hannell, founded a group called "10 Artists of Chicago", based on Modernist ideals. During the depression, she worked with the easel division of the Illinois Art Project of the WPA. From 1941 to 1962, she was the director of Exhibitions for the Renaissance Society of the University of Chicago. Her talent as an administrator and curator brought many important exhibitions to the City of Chicago during this time. Her work can be found in the collection of the Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso, IN. She died in Chicago in 1962.