

William Somerville Shanks RSA

RSA Obituary, transcribed from the 1951 RSA Annual Report

William Somerville Shanks R.S.A., R.S.W. was born in Gourrock, in the year of 1864. At the age of 14 he entered the design department of a firm of tapestry and curtain manufacturers in Glasgow and attended evening classes at the Glasgow School of Art under the direction of Fra. H. Newbery. In 1869 he went to Paris and studied under J. P. Laurens and Benjamin Constant for three years. In 1897 he returned to Paris for one year.

He began to exhibit in 1892 at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, and from then on at the Academy and at most of the Scottish Exhibitions. He was a frequent exhibitor also at the Paris Salon and was awarded a médaille d'argent in 1902. In 1923 he was elected an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy and an Academician in 1933.

He became a member of the R.S.W. in 1925. He lived in Glasgow most of his life, but after his retirement from teaching he went to live in Stirling. In 1949 he returned to Gourrock, but following his wife's death in 1950 he came to Glasgow to be nearer his art friends.

His work was characterised by an amazingly skilful technique which distinguished all his subjects - still lifes, landscapes, interiors and portraits - by a fine sense of colour, and by its tonal qualities.

His best known pictures are "Pipes of Pan" in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow; "His Heritage" in the Paisley Art Gallery ; "Interior" in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; "The Visitor" in the Diploma Collection of the Royal Scottish Academy; "Fruits" and the "Red Parasol."

His best known portraits are "Archibald Kay, R.S.A.," "Tom Hunt, A.R.S.A," the property of Glasgow Art Club, "Professor John Glaister," "Sir James Knox" and "Ex-Provost Armour of Airdrie." Among his many watercolours mention may be made of "The Pink Sun Bonnet."

His personal character endeared him to all his friends by its charm and its modesty. He died in Glasgow on 30th July 1951.