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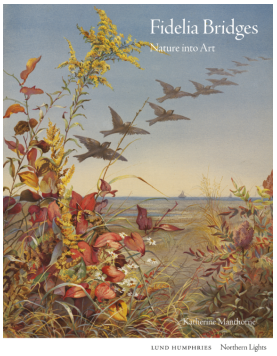
Fidelia Bridges: Nature into Art

Manthorne, Katherine



Fidelia Bridges. Cover.

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Fidelia Bridges (1834–1923) painted pictures that critics praised for their ability to exude the fragrance of field flowers and glow with the plumage of birds. Raised in Salem and long residing in Connecticut, she maintained a studio in New York City, where she exhibited her art for over forty years at the National Academy, American Watercolor Society and other prestigious venues. Transforming flower painting from a domestic outlet for female amateurs to a marketable commodity for professionals, she never wavered in her conviction that women had the right to shape independent careers on their own terms. She delineated both cultivated flowers and clumps of weeds with an intensity of focus unmatched by any other artist of her era. Often, she combined plants with local birds to convey a sophisticated understanding of their environmental interaction that encouraged others to appreciate and conserve nature. She made an extended European tour in the 1860s and regular trips to Great Britain in later years but preferred home nature.

Assembling a cross-section of her stunning oil paintings, watercolours, chromolithographs and

illustrated volumes for the first time, and analysing them against letters, diaries and periodical reviews, *Fidelia Bridges* combines a recovery of the artist's biography with close readings of her artworks. Living an outwardly conventional life, she embraced the bicycle and later the automobile as vehicles of female liberation, cultivated her garden with the skill of a horticulturalist, and left a lasting pictorial legacy to be found in US public museums and private collections nationwide. (Source: Lund Humphries)

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