Who was Mary Greene Blumenschein? The benefits of representing marginalized experience at museums

ISSUE: History museums and sites misrepresent the lived experiences of women, children, and people of color.

What is lost in gendered, raced and stereotyped representations?

- Diversity
- Complexity
- Accuracy
- Authenticity
- Intersectionality
- Relevance

SOLUTION: Broaden the narrative, reach a bigger audience, and create more meaningful visitor experiences.

A. Contextualize the historic moment
B. Focus on first-person narrative
C. Display detailed facts
D. Include and examine untold stories
E. Use thought-provoking questions
F. Share interpretive authority

ISSUES at the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum

Mary is framed as a homemaker at the Museum

Mary devoted herself to providing a beautiful and comfortable home for her husband and daughter — her art took a back seat to the needs and desires of her family. . . . the home is an important expression of her personal aesthetic and design sensibilities.

E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum Text Panel, Room 6

Why is Mary described as purely domestic?

In most museums and historic places, “woman” becomes the background against which ‘man’ acts. These representations are formed around idealized and stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity...the roles of women are relatively passive, shallow, undeveloped, muted and closed...’His’ existence and ascendence depend on ‘her’ presence and subordination.

Together, they provide a thread for museums in the histories and narratives which they make.


Mary Greene Blumenschein had many roles and experiences

- Third American woman to win medals at the Paris Salon, 1900 & 1902
- One of the first female members of the National Academy of Design
- Popular illustrator for magazines and books, 1909-1919
- Resident of Brooklyn, Paris & Taos, New Mexico
- Spouse of Ernest L. Blumenschein, Taos Society of Artists founder
- Mother of and primary parent for Helen Greene Blumenschein
- Subject of the E.L. Blumenschein House and Museum

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MARY GREENE BLUMENSCHIEHN
1919
Resident of Brooklyn, Paris & Taos, New Mexico
allow Mary and her art took a back seat to the needs and desires of her family. . . . the home is an important expression of her personal aesthetic and design sensibilities.

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On single parenting and working — 1919

Helen has been bursting through coats lately, to a horrifying extent largely due to mamma being busy painting & not thinking to have her change to second best at play time.

Why don’t you come home for a month after you get this Academy picture off — & then go back again... I should be so glad to see you and Helen would almost bust with joy! ... I am sorry you are not here to help enjoy things too ... to help wipe dishes — as Helen does, to set the table & make the bed.

On living in a hotel and not managing a household — 1922

Am now in one room & bath with Helen which is what I have had to wait for here in hotel... as reasonable an arrangement — with good food and a sunny room — as I could find... the table is good in fact excellent and at the Pratt there is a very good cafeteria for lunch so the feeding problem is very simple.

D. & E.: Untold stories & thought-provoking questions

How did domestic help — caretakers and cooks — allow Mary and Ernest to paint and create?

What were the Blumenschein family’s relationship with those who worked for them? And who were Jim Romero and Poptshlee Mirabel Romero on their own terms?

Excerpt of a letter from Helen to Ernest, Jan. 7, 1921. Helen included a picture of a boat with this message for her father to deliver to his friend, model and handyman.

Tell Jim [Romero] that the workmen are building a break water that keeps the tide from washing the town. Here is a picture showing them building it. The derack [sic] lifts the stone off the cars and puts them in the water. Tell Jim every word.

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