



FEMALE SELF-REPRESENTATION and the PUBLIC TRUST
Mary E. Wrinch and the AGW Collection



Art Studio, Bishop Strachan School, Toronto, ca. 1915, where Mary E. Wrinch taught art classes from 1901 to 1936. Photograph courtesy Bishop Strachan School Archives

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(above) **Mary E. Wrinch**; *Spruce Tree on a Gray Day*, ca. 1939; oil on board
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

(right) **Mary E. Wrinch**; *Spruce Tree on a Gray Day*, ca. 1939
colour linocut on paper; Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

When outlining her artistic achievements in the opening pages of her biographical sketchbook, Mary Evelyn Wrinch (1877–1969) made the proclamation “Professional Name – Mary E. Wrinch.”¹ This identity would seem to state the obvious in contemporary culture where so much emphasis has been placed on autonomous forms of authorship but, following her marriage to noted artist-architect George Agnew Reid (1860–1947) in 1922, Mary Wrinch faced the difficulties of being identified as his wife, and for the next two decades was addressed by many as “Mrs. G.A. Reid.” Former Art Gallery of Windsor Director Kenneth Saltmarche was among those to follow this practice in a professional business letter where he addressed her professional name as “Mrs. G.A. Reid (Mary E. Wrinch).”² This parenthetical salutation was not a surprising one considering mid-century social roles for women and the expectation that they embrace dominant heterosexual marriage practices by assuming men’s surnames after marriage. However, this exhibition using the AGW’s collection underscores how she carried out her professional life as Mary E. Wrinch, and not as Mrs. G.A. Reid. Additionally though, the exhibit also considers how her marriage to Reid also





meant that representation of her art practice in public trust was postponed until after those of George Reid and his first wife Mary Heister Reid had been attended to. This reality has meant that attention to the scope and importance of Mary Wrinch's place in the development of visual art during the first half of the twentieth century in Canada has been delayed.

A painter of miniatures, larger-scale oil-on-canvas paintings, and maker of linoleum prints in black-and-white and colour, Mary Wrinch was an active member of the visual arts community in Toronto. Trained there as well as in London and New York, she was well-educated and early on committed to a professional life as an artist. She made the claim in 1940 in interview that, "I've always been a person with one idea: I had no other ambition than to become an artist. It was the only thing I ever wanted to do."³ Recognition for her work in painting came quickly when, in 1901, she was elected a member of the Ontario Society of Artists; in 1902, the American Society of Miniature Painters, and; in 1916, the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. It was also in 1901 that she was appointed Art Director at her alma mater, the private girls' boarding school Bishop Strachan School (B.S.S.), Toronto.

The Art Gallery of Ontario houses a modest collection of Wrinch's archival fonds but little can be found there regarding her personal life, her thoughts on art, and the challenges she would have encountered supporting herself as a single woman. Consistent with the experiences of many women of her day, however, she was fortunate to have steady employment at B.S.S. for 35 years. Between 1900 and 1922 she also worked closely with and studied under George Agnew Reid, the noted Toronto painter, muralist, architect and one-time Principal of the Central Ontario School of Art and Design (now OCAD University). Wrinch married Reid in 1922 soon after the death of his first wife, Mary Hiester Reid. Before and after marriage however, Mary Wrinch persisted in using her given names and this was just one sign of her commitment to maintaining the professional identity she had developed before marriage: consistently, she signed her works "Mary E. Wrinch."

Mary E. Wrinch; *Young Woman with Bonnet (Miss Alice Carter?)*, 1910; watercolour on ivory; Gift of Joan and W. Ross Murray, 1983

Soon after marriage, Mary Wrinch's life changed to reflect the impact of living with Reid's long list of accolades and the legacy of his first wife's also significant and durative art practice as a painter in the oil medium.⁴ Wrinch had long been associated with Reid's circle in Wychwood Park, Toronto, an artist's colony first founded by painter Marmaduke Matthews in the 1870s. Following Matthews' dream, Reid likewise envisioned Wychwood Park to be "a permanent sketching ground for the students of the College."⁵ Nestled on a forested hilltop with a pond overlooking downtown, the enclave offered aesthetically pleasing subjects for romantically-inclined landscape painters. The year 1906 marked the completion of Reid's self-designed grand manor house in the Elizabethan style known by the name "Upland Cottage." The property included a walled garden, terraced steps and pool. To ensure Mary Wrinch's continued presence in the Wychwood Park culture following his studies with her, Reid built her an independent home-studio in 1910 on Alcina Avenue, one block north from his and Mary Hiester's home at 81 Wychwood Park. Wrinch remained there until her marriage to Reid in 1922.

Living at "Upland Cottage" after marriage had its benefits for Mary Wrinch, given her affection for gardening and middle-class social stature, but it also maintained a hold on her life and servitude to George Reid's legacy. When she moved into Upland Cottage, the house contained countless works by him and those of his first wife. Wrinch played an instrumental role, for example, in the development of Mary Hiester Reid's Memorial Exhibition in 1922 containing 308 works.⁶ Although the show contained an impressive number of works loaned from private collections, 143 artworks were listed as being loaned "From the Studio" — that studio was of course the studio and home that Wrinch moved into after Mary Hiester's passing. It was in the context of these two artist-couple histories that the collection of her Mary Wrinch's paintings and prints were gathered to represent elements of her art practice in the public trust at the AGW. When building this collection, a then-spry Kenneth Saltmarche (1920–2003), the Gallery's first full-time Director-Curator, authored this comment: "I daresay you have long forgotten a wonderful Sunday afternoon in your house when I, and other OCA [Ontario College of Art] students — about 1943 — were entertained by you. I remember the occasion, your warm hospitality and that marvellous studio-house very well."⁷



Mary E. Wrinch; *Spring Landscape*, 1908; watercolour on ivory
Gift of Joan and W. Ross Murray, 1983

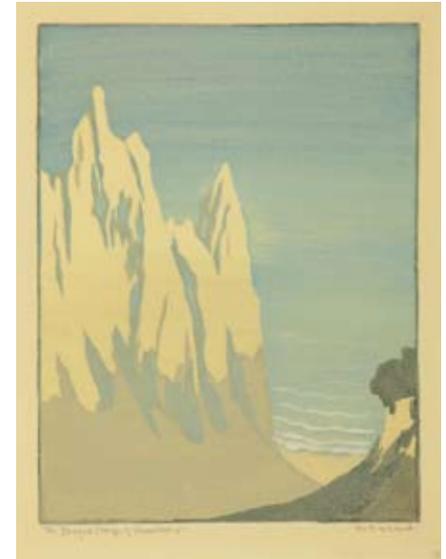


Mary E. Wrinch; *The Jagged Cliffs of Scarborough*, 1938; oil on board
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

The present collection of Mary Wrinch's works was assembled after Saltmarche had first attended to the formation of a collection of graphic works by George Reid, numbering 112 drawings, 12 etchings, 18 studies for his mural works and a modest selection of three works by Reid's first wife, Mary Hiester Reid. Formation of this collection was also mediated by artist, dealer and collector Gordon Conn (1888–1977), a mutual friend of the Reids and Saltmarche. With Kenneth Forbes, Conn co-founded the Ontario Institute of Painters and eventually turned over his studio in Wychwood Park to an exhibition gallery where he organized one-person shows of the Institute's members. Under Conn's direction in 1959, Mary Wrinch donated her important lumbering scene, *Sawmill, Dorset*, and both the study and enlarged version of *Chickens*. This gift was accompanied by the far more sizeable George Reid collection and three works by Mary Hiester Reid.⁸ The more significant of Wrinch's donations of paintings in 1959 was *Sawmill, Dorset*, a response to industrial expansion in the Muskoka region where Mary Wrinch had once maintained a splendid recreation property in the nearby Lake of Bays.⁹

It was in the conditions of the Mary Wrinch will that Gordon Conn followed up his work with Saltmarche to build the collection of linoleum block prints in black-and-white and colour methods by Wrinch; the trust gift also included three small oil sketches *Falling Leaves*, *Bathurst Street Ravine*, *Jagged Cliffs of Scarborough* and *Spruce Tree on a Gray Day*. Her representation in this public collection was thus largely posthumous. Only the two earlier paintings in the collection, *Spring Landscape* (1908) and *Young Woman with Bonnet* (1910) followed the 1970 bequest: these were the gifts of director, curator and author Joan Murray and her husband Ross Murray.

(right) **Mary E. Wrinch;** *The Jagged Cliffs of Scarborough*, 1938
colour linocut on paper; Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970



Given the staggered development of the AGW's collection of the artist's work, Mary Wrinch's practice is represented well for its inclusion of works in both printmaking and painting methods, including her miniatures. Her art practice began with paintings followed by the prints. She had sketched in oil regularly throughout the 1910s and 1920s, but when she discovered printmaking in 1928, she virtually ceased painting altogether and it was the prints to which she dedicated the last half of her art practice. As painter, Wrinch's training in the miniature tradition meant that she worked intimately with the medium on small scales. The move to larger scale oil painting, however, seems not to have been difficult for her. Her oil paintings explored subjects she found in the Muskoka Lakes region including industrial scenes and her interest in these topics was a full decade in advance of the parallel pursuits of her well-known successors in the male dominated Group of Seven. It has been in the print medium, however, that numerous curators have argued that her reputation rests most strongly in the critical record.¹⁰

In partial support of this point, the gift Mary Wrinch left in trust included examples of her best-known works in colour linoleum, including *Darwin Tulips*, *Morning Glories*, and *Nasturtiums* and also some of her best known prints in black and white, *Snowdrops in the Rain* and *Ontario Trillium*. It was author and family friend Muriel Miller who was witness to the procedural details of how Mary Wrinch combined her interest in printmaking with her training in painting by having access to the artist and her studio. Her description demonstrates that it may not be so easy to separate Wrinch's works in printmaking from those made with paint. She explained:

Her procedure is to do first a drawing of an actual scene or from one of her paintings. Then, with the original drawing before her, she begins to cut out of linoleum a key block which controls all the colour forms to be brought out in the final print. After the key block is done, she makes a succession of blocks in which different parts of the whole scene are reproduced, using approximately a block for each major colour. Each block is then painted with watercolour ink; the artist is deft and sure in its use, as it was the medium used in her miniature work.¹¹



(above) **Mary E. Wrinch;**
Darwin Tulips, 1932;
colour linocut on paper;
Gift of The Gordon Conn
– Mary E. Wrinch Trust,
1970



(left) **Mary E. Wrinch;**
Morning Glories, 1935;
colour linocut on paper;
Gift of The Gordon Conn
– Mary E. Wrinch Trust,
1970



Mary E. Wrinch; *Ducks on the Pond*, date unknown; linocut on paper
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

Wrinch's prints were thus a combination of her interest in the printing process and were finessed with additional painting.

The colour block prints conjoined several of Wrinch's interests, including her knowledge of Japanese woodcuts. A calendar from 1911 in her archival fonds containing images by such Japanese masters as Hokusai, Hiroshige and Utamaro ensures that she looked to these artists to develop techniques in block printmaking.¹² Her interest in floral subjects was a reflection of her love for nature and she was self-described as possessing an almost "encyclopedic knowledge of wildflowers." The beauty of Wychwood Park proper and the walled garden at Upland Cottage were environs she had been exploring for some time. The close-up views she made of various flora in her prints enabled her exploration of bold areas of colour through carefully articulated petal designs, as shown for instance in *Darwin Tulips*. The prints not only combined with painting methods, but also brought full-circle Mary Wrinch the producer of miniatures, since the prints mark her return to working on more intimate scales. She continued making prints of floral and landscape subjects until 1944 and then turned her attention finally to maintaining Wychwood gardens.

To be engaged in botanical image-making and writing was no new initiative for a female artist from her British background, but rather the continuation of a tradition well explored by Victorian women. Ann Shteir's study *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters in Botany in England, 1760–1860* explores this terrain through analysis of women's writing, and Jack Kramer's *Women of Flowers: A Tribute to Victorian Women Illustrators* explores women's botanical drawings.¹³

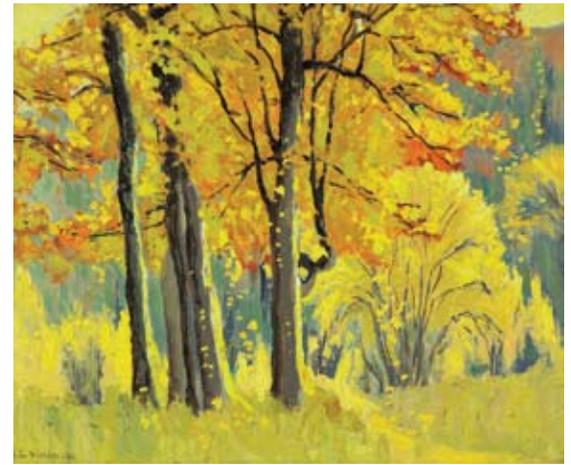


(right) **Mary E. Wrinch;** *Blood Root*, date unknown; linocut on paper
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

The prints Wrinch made served a wide range of purposes — exhibition, sale, exchange and seasonal greetings — and throughout this production she maintained her pre-marital identity, signing her works Mary E. Wrinch.¹⁴ Between the 1920s and 1940s, despite the shift she had made to printmaking, Wrinch continued to exhibit her paintings and she took pride in doing so, maintaining a presence in such prominent showings as *British Empire Exhibition* at Wembley Stadium, London, England in 1924, *A Century of Canadian Art*, Tate Gallery, London, England in 1938, and *Canadian Art* at the New York World's Fair in 1939. Her presence in exhibitions of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and Ontario Society of Arts continued and she allowed paintings made earlier in her career to continue representing her at home and abroad. For example, *Sawmill, Dorset*, the AGW's important industrial scene that she painted in oil, was shown in the 57th annual exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1936.

In the years ahead, after having ceased making art altogether in 1944, Wrinch was honoured with two solo exhibitions in the postwar years. The first of these was with commercial dealer Jerrold Morris in 1966, and the second was with Joan Murray who in 1968 curated her first solo show in a non-commercial and public institution, the Art Gallery of Ontario. During these of her most senior years, it was the ongoing care of Upland Cottage, the gardens, and the still remaining issues surrounding the disposition of George Reid and Mary Hiester Reid's works to which the last two decades of her life were devoted: the securing of her creative legacy was the final priority in this layered chapter of artist-couple histories. To be sure, hers was a life of bourgeois privilege, for her access to formal education, continuous employment and the numerous women's communities she surrounded herself with, including her time at Bishop Strachan School. Throughout, she maintained a vital and productive female identity that was and is "Mary Evelyn Wrinch." A richer archive yet of her life can be written with further attention to the work housed in the Art Gallery of Windsor's collection and in other collections who were beneficiaries of the Mary Wrinch Trust.

Catharine Mastin, PhD
Director, Art Gallery of Windsor



Mary E. Wrinch; *Falling Leaves, Bathurst Street Ravine*, ca. 1910–28
oil on board; Gift of the Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970



Mary E. Wrinch; *The Stream*, ca. 1929; linocut on paper
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

(right) **Mary E. Wrinch;** *Boulders*, date unknown; linocut on paper
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

Endnotes

1. Mary Wrinch Scrapbook, Art Galley of Ontario Library and Archives, Toronto.
2. Kenneth Saltmarche to Mary Wrinch, 20 June 1959, Art Gallery of Windsor Registration Files.
3. Muriel Miller, "Famous Canadian Artists: Mary E. Wrinch, ARCA, Landscapist in Oil, Block Print Artist and Miniaturist," 1940, Artist's File, Art Gallery of Ontario.
4. For an outline of George Reid's accomplishments see Christine Boyanoski, *Sympathetic Realism; George A. Reid and the Academic Tradition* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1986) and Muriel Miller, *George Reid: A Biography* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1987), and for an outline of Mary Hiester Reid's accomplishments see *Quiet Harmony: The Art of Mary Hiester Reid* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2000).
5. Muriel Miller, *George Reid: A Biography* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1987), 158.
6. Anonymous, *Memorial Exhibition of Paintings by Mary Hiester Reid, A.R.C.A., O.S.A.* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1922).
7. Ken Saltmarche to Mary Wrinch, 20 June 1959, Accession File, Art Gallery of Windsor
8. Wrinch worked with Conn to plan her will and other collections including the Art Gallery of Ontario and National Gallery of Canada were to benefit from donations from the Mary Wrinch Trust.
9. A photograph of this property is included in the Mary Wrinch Scrapbook, Art Gallery of Ontario Library and Archives, Toronto.
10. Patricia Ainslie, *Images of the Land: Canadian Block Prints, 1919–1945* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1984); Chris Dickman, *The Prints of Mary Wrinch* (Durham: Durham Art Gallery, 1980); Andrew Oko, *The Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers in Retrospect* (Hamilton: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 1981).
11. Muriel Miller, "Famous Canadian Artists: Mary E. Wrinch, ARCA, Landscapist in Oil, Block Print Artist and Miniaturist," 1940 (Artist's File, Art Gallery of Ontario)
12. Mary Wrinch Fonds, File 1–10, Gordon Conn Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario Library and Archives
13. Ann Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters in Botany in England, 1760* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Jack Kramer, *Women of Flowers: A Tribute to Victorian Women Illustrators* (New York and San Francisco: Welcome Books, 1996).
14. The print *Wychwood Pond*, depicting swimming ducks, was used as a greeting card. See the Artist's File, Art Gallery of Ontario, where one of these cards is placed.



Selected References

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- _____. *The Prints of Mary Wrinch*. Durham: Durham Art Gallery, 1980.
- Donegan, Rosemary. *Industrial Images*. Hamilton: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 1987.
- Foss, Brian and Janice Anderson. *Quiet Harmony: The Art of Mary Hiester Reid*. Toronto: Art of Ontario, 2000.
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- Murray, Joan. “Mary Wrinch: Canadian Artist,” *Canadian Antiques Collector: a journal of antiques and fine arts* (September 1969), 16–19.
- Oko, Andrew. *The Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers in Retrospect*. Hamilton: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 1981.
- Saltmarche, Kenneth. “The Highs, Lows of Art,” *Windsor Star*, August 16, 1969
- Sisler, Rebecca. *Passionate Spirits: A History of the Royal Canadian Academy, 1880–1980*, Toronto and Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1980.
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Mary E. Wrinch; *The Lake*, 1931; colour linocut on paper
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970



Mary E. Wrinch; *The House in the Woods*, ca. 1928–29; linocut on paper
 Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

Mary E. Wrinch — Biography

- 1877 Mary Wrinch was born, the daughter born of Leonard and Elizabeth Cooper Wrinch of Kirby-le-Soken, England, a genteel farming family. Leonard Wrinch passed away early in Mary's childhood
- 1885–87 The family moved to Bronte, Ontario where three of Elizabeth Cooper Wrinch's sons had settled after migrating from England to establish rural farms
- 1887–88 Mary Wrinch returned briefly to England with her mother
- 1889–92 Returned to Canada with her mother who enrolls her at Bishop Strachan School, Toronto where she is a boarding student for four years
- 1893 Began attending Central School of Art (present-day Ontario College of Art and Design University), Toronto, where she studied under Laura Muntz, Robert Holmes and George Agnew Reid
- 1894 Exhibited at the Ontario Society of Artists exhibition for the first time
- 1895–97 Undertook private studies with George Agnew Reid at his studio
- 1897 Studied at Grosvenor Life School, London under Walter Donne and Alyn Williams where she developed skills in portraiture, figurative imagery and miniature painting in watercolour
- 1899 Studied miniature painting at the Art League (aka Art Students' League), New York under Alice Beckington
- 1901 Began teaching at Bishop Strachan School where she served as Art Director for the next 35 years
 Elected member of the Ontario Society of Artists
 Exhibited one of her miniatures at the Society of Miniaturists, New York
- 1902 Became a member of the American Society of Miniature Painters
- 1906 Began painting in the Muskoka Lakes Region north of Toronto
- 1910 Built a summer home and studio at Kingwood, Lake of Bays where she spent summers sketching, canoeing and furthering her interests in the wilderness and industrial landscapes, as well as recreations communities which formed today's "Cottage Country"
 George Agnew Reid assisted Wrinch by building her a studio in Wychwood Park, Toronto where she lived until 1922
- 1914 Travelled to Italy briefly but her trip was cut short by the outbreak of the First World War in September
- 1916 Elected an Associate Member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts
- 1917 Presented miniature paintings of Miss Acres and Miss Grier to Bishop Strachan School for its 50th Anniversary
- 1922 Married George Agnew Reid (1860–1947) soon after the death of his first wife, Mary Heister Reid (1854–1921)
- 1924 Exhibited work in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium, London, England
 Became Vice-President and Treasurer of the Ontario Society of Arts and was the first female artist to be elected this position in the Society
- 1926 Exhibited at the Art Gallery of Toronto in a group-artist exhibition
- 1928 Began making her first black and white prints using the linoleum block print process

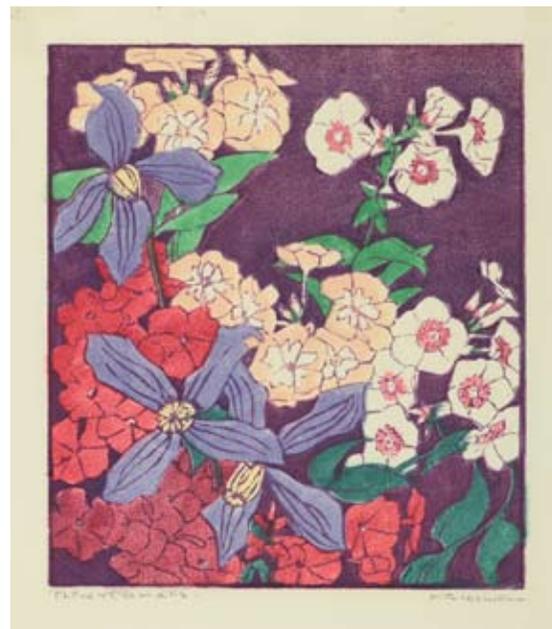
- 1930 Began making her first colour prints using the linoleum cut relief print process
Presented a painting of the interior of Bishop Strachan School Chapel to retiring Headmistress, Miss Walsh
Exhibited in a three-artist exhibition with Clara Hagarty and Marion Long
- 1935 Presented Bishop Strachan School Headmistress, Miss Nation with a miniature painting
- 1936 Retired from teaching at Bishop Strachan School after thirty-five years
Exhibited "Sparling Waters" in *Contemporary Canadian Painting*, The National Gallery of Canada exhibition arranged on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation of New York for circulation in the Southern Dominions of the British Empire through 1939
- 1938 Exhibited artwork in A Century of Canadian Art, Tate Gallery, London, England
- 1939 Exhibited artwork in the Canadian Art, New York World's Fair, New York
- 1940 Muriel Miller wrote the first article on Mary Wrinch's art and biography
- 1947 Elected Academician, Royal Canadian Academy of Arts
- 1954 Made her last print, Northern Bloodroot for the CPE Honorary Membership Series
- 1943 Solo-Artist retrospective exhibition of forty prints at the Art Club, Toronto
- 1947 Husband George Reid passed away after 25 years of marriage
- 1966 Solo Exhibition, Paintings by Mary Wrinch, Jerrold Morris Gallery, Toronto
- 1969 August-October, Solo Exhibition, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, curated by Joan Murray
19 September, Wrinch passed away at Wychwood Park, Toronto
Artist and Friend, Gordon Conn appointed to lead the Mary Wrinch Trust
Joan Murray authored the essay "Mary Wrinch: Canadian Artist" for *Canadian Collector: a journal of antiques and fine arts* which is one of the first serious considerations of Mary Wrinch's art
- 1978 Exhibited in Canadian Classics, The Morris Gallery, Toronto
- 1980 Chris Dickman organized the exhibition and catalogue *The Prints of Mary Wrinch*, Durham Art Gallery, Ontario
- 1987-88 Exhibited artwork in *Industrial Images*, Art Gallery of Hamilton, and touring to Vancouver Art Gallery, Edmonton Art Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Glenbow Museum and Mount St. Vincent University Art Gallery

Additional Professional Memberships (association dates unknown)

Society of Canadian Painter-Etchers and Engravers
Canadian Society of Graphic Art
Women's Art Association of Canada
Canadian Handicrafts Guild

Important Accomplishments (varying and unknown dates)

Exhibited in two-artist showing of 100 works (50 by each artist) with Mary Heister Reid at 241 Yonge Street, Toronto
Sketched with George Reid in Algoma, Temagami, Bruce Peninsula and Ottawa Valley
Designed the Chapel Interior at Bishop Strachan School including possibly a large stained glass window



Mary E. Wrinch; *Phlox and Clematis*, date unknown; colour linocut on paper
Gift of The Gordon Conn – Mary E. Wrinch Trust, 1970

Mary E. Wrinch and the AGW Collection

April 7 – June 10, 2012

Curator Catharine Mastin, PhD

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Cover

Mary E. Wrinch; *Sawmill, Dorset*, ca. 1936; oil on board
Gift of the artist, 1959

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