

Cor de Gavere, Artist (1877–1955)

By Nikki Silva

Cornelia "Cor" de Gavere's early life had the aura of a tragic fairy tale. She was born in Java, where her parents were Dutch missionaries; by the time she was six years old, illness had claimed the lives of her brother and both parents. An aunt and uncle in north Holland took in the orphaned girl, and sent her sister off to boarding school.

Childhood was a lonely time for Cor: she was kept for a while in the stern atmosphere of her relatives' home, separated from her sister, and was then sent to boarding school herself, where close friendships were discouraged. Her developing interest in art during these years was frowned upon by her uncle. He prevailed upon her to take a position as an assistant pharmacist, although she continued to draw and paint whenever possible.

In 1907, at the age of 30, Cor made the decision to study art seriously, and she entered the Royal Academy of the Hague. During these years she established a lasting friendship with an elderly woman, Wilhelmina Van Tonnigen, who gave her the motherly encouragement and support that she had missed since early childhood. She subsequently worked for several years in a small Dutch artists' colony, and studied in Paris for three years. During World War I she served as a volunteer nurse in Paris.

After the War, at the age of 43, Cor moved to Seabright with Wilhelmina Von Tonningen, who had come to be near her brother in Santa Cruz. The two women were warmly welcomed by the local Dutch community, and Santa Cruz became Cor's paradise. She worked for many years...at both the Seabright and Garfield Park branch libraries, while establishing herself as a serious and prolific painter. She was active socially, painted almost daily, and—with Margaret Rogers—was one of the guiding forces of the Santa Cruz Art League for the 1920s to 1940s. Gentle, intelligent, proper, Cor maintained a youthful and positive attitude throughout her life.

Cor died in 1955 while visiting relatives in Holland, having enjoyed in her mature years a satisfying life of close friendships, community involvement, and creative accomplishment.



Cor de Gavere

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