

The 26-by-46-inch "Two Pointers on Point in a Field" (1905) is a majestic example of Maud Earl's "Victorian style."

Masterworks by renowned artist and feminist trailblazer Maud Earl settle into a new home at New York City's AKC Museum of the Dog.

By Lisa Peterson

Maud Earl, *First Lady of Dog Painting*

FEATURE

Alice Maud Earl—a quintessential woman in a man's late 19th-century world—single-handedly brought impressionism, expression, and breed character into the stuffy old world of canine portraiture known for its classic standing, full-body profile poses. Maud Earl, as she liked to sign her artwork, was the daughter of accomplished sporting lifestyle painter George Earl. She became the first woman to paint portraits of the British royal family's dogs and to have had one-woman shows in London and Paris. Now, more than a century later, three of Earl's most famous purebred oil paintings will be featured at the [AKC Museum of the Dog](#) grand-opening exhibition, *For the Love of All Things Dog*, starting February 8 at the museum's new home at 101 Park Avenue.

HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER

Born in London's West End on March 26, 1863, Earl was an only child from her father's first marriage. Surrounded by her father and his fellow sporting artists whose stature rose with the popularity of dog shows and field trials in England, closeness to



"Rake," Irish Water Spaniel, by George Earl, c. 1870

horses and dogs filled her childhood. George Earl's most famous work, the *Champion Dogs of England* (c. 1870) features head studies of famous show dogs, including some extinct breeds such as the English white terrier. Maud Earl's uncle Thomas Earl, also a renowned painter, excelled more in the horse world, and her younger

half-brother Percy Earl focused on racehorses. But Maud was her father's daughter, best known for her portraiture of purebred dogs.

"She was the most accomplished woman painter of dogs. She even surpassed her father in canine art. Her inventiveness is what sets her apart from other painters," AKC Museum



Maud Earl, c. 1895

of the Dog Director Alan Fausel says. "Even while doing dog portraits, over and over again, she always managed to make it fresh each time."

By age 12, her father became her only art tutor, putting a pencil in her hand and asking her to spend hours a day sketching the skeletons of a man, a horse, and a dog. Helping her father raise setter puppies she gained extensive knowledge about dog behavior. George Earl kept his daughter's focus on the graphic arts, without color, and forbade her from using oils until she mastered drawing animal

anatomy. "It is for this reason that I have been able to hold my own place among the best dog painters—no one has ever touched me in my knowledge of anatomy," Earl said in a 1931 *Pure-Bred Dogs*, *American Kennel Gazette* interview.

EARLY SUCCESS

Canine art experts agree that Earl excelled in bringing a dog to life on canvas in a different way than her male contemporaries such as Sir Edwin Landseer or John Emms. "Maud Earl was the Georgia O'Keefe of the dog painting world," Fausel says. "She's very inventive in how she presented the dogs. Her paintings have satire and humor without being coy or anthropomorphic. She could capture a fleeting second of a dog's behavior through her observation." Art dealer, author, and historian William Secord of the William Secord Gallery in New York City who put together the first retrospective of Earl's work in the 1990s, said in the catalogue that her talents lie in, "her ability of capturing anatomy, coat texture, and her subject's individual expressions" like no other artist of her generation.

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In addition to receiving instruction from her father, Earl attended the Royal Female School of Art in London. One of her first works, “Irish Water Spaniel and Mallard” (1881), painted when she was 19 years old, already featured her signature loose brush strokes which added texture to a dog’s coat or lushness to a landscape. Following in her father’s footsteps, Earl first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1884 with “Red Deer—Early Morning,” which featured two stags in the mist. The painting was bought and exported to Australia when Earl was just 21 years old. She would exhibit a dozen more paintings at the Academy early in her career. Due to her family connections in the dog world, Earl started getting commissions from sportsmen, wealthy patrons, and reputable breeders. Her first commission—a painting of a driven grouse—came from the Squire of Vagnol. By 1897, she had her first one-woman show at London’s Graves Galleries, with 70 dog portraits representing 48 distinct breeds.

A photo from this era shows Earl in a matching long Victorian skirt and tailored jacket with a ruffled white blouse, a slim paintbrush held in her



“I Hear a Voice” (1896) depicts Eng. Ch. Frandley Stephanie, from a famous line of show dogs descended from the great Plinlimmon.

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right hand. Earl, in her early 30s, topped with a straw hat sporting a wide black ribbon, appears confident and cognizant that she was becoming famous for her art.

“YOU CAN’T PAINT DOGS UNLESS YOU UNDERSTAND THEM”

Unlike some portraiture artists, she never used a camera to capture a subject, but instead sketched the dog’s anatomy in chalk in a variety of poses—lying down, sitting, standing, and moving about the studio. She developed her own method to capture a canine character. “You can’t paint dogs unless you understand them,” Earl said in an 1898 interview in *The Young Woman*. “I don’t mean merely the fancier’s point of view. You must know whether they are happy and comfortable, and if not, why not. You must know how to quiet them when they become excited and nervous. You must know all their little likes and dislikes, and this



“Ch. Christopher of Notts and Ch. Cackler of Notts” (c. 1900)

knowledge comes from long experience.” One canvas would require a two-day session with a dog, where she would pose it while sitting on a three-foot high table on casters. A servant would usually hold the dog on the leash and Earl could move the dog about the studio to capture different angles or reposition the dog should it shift on the table. Even with a live model some of her work was left to the imagination because, she said, “it is manifestly impossible to

pose two greyhounds coursing a hare in a studio.”

But as her popularity grew among the dog-show set and the nation’s top breeders, Queen Victoria—an avid purebred dog breeder and exhibitor—took notice and called Earl to her Windsor Castle kennels to paint one of her favorite Collies, Snowball. This began a long relationship with the Queen and other royal patrons included King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, who bred Wire Fox

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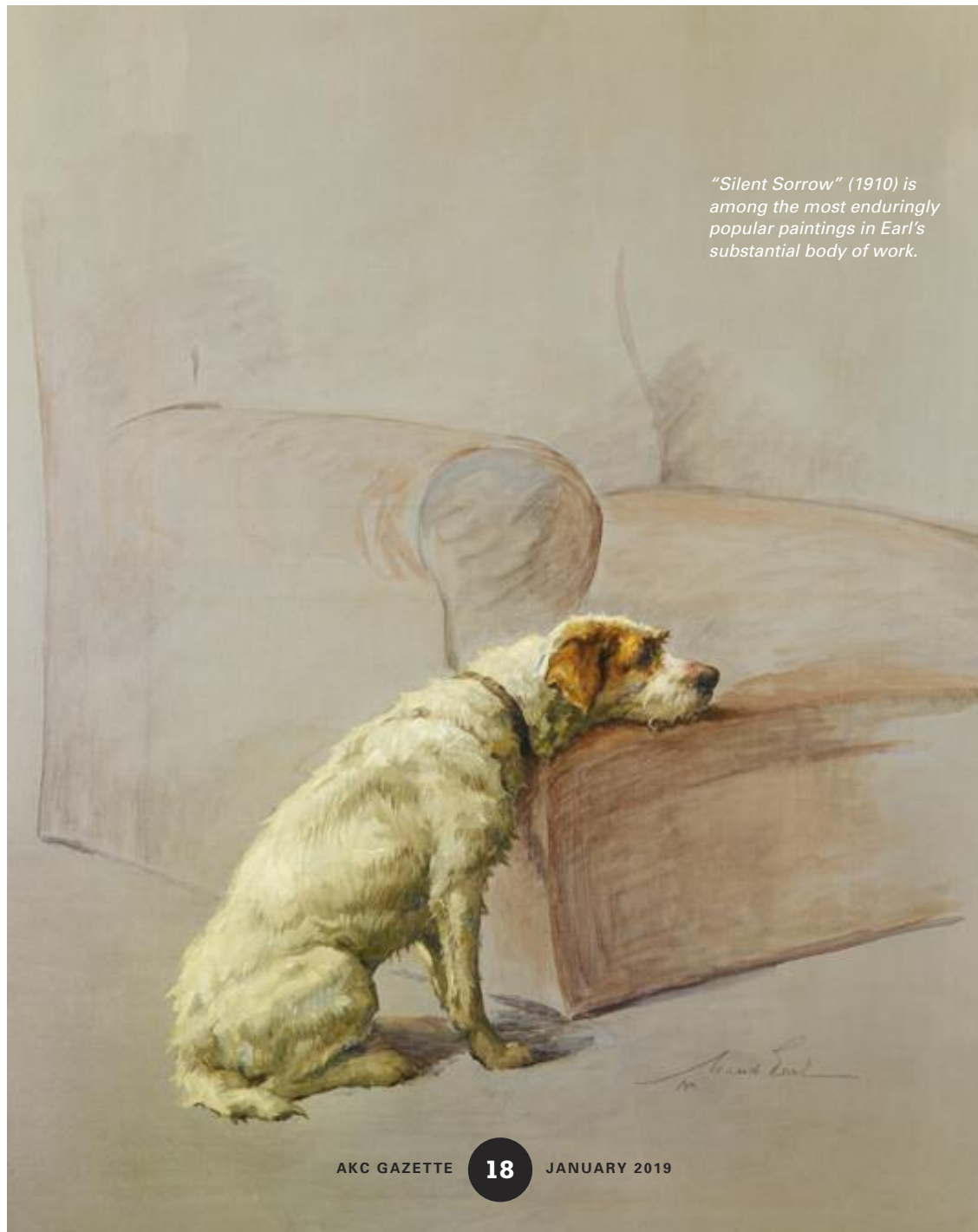
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Terriers and Borzoi. Earl's first portrait for the King was "Jack the Irish Terrier." The royal family even put her up in a special apartment in the palace when she painted her first portrait of Caesar the Wire Fox Terrier. Other famous dogs included Ch. Cackler of Notts, a Wire Fox Terrier owned by the Dutchess of Newcastle, also a top breeder of Wire Fox Terriers and Borzoi. Cackler was an important sire in his breed, in fact he was the father of Caesar, the King's constant companion until his death in 1910, when Earl painted her most moving portrait, "Silent Sorrow." For 19th-century dog breeders Earl's portraiture became a pedigree in oil, capturing generational types and traits of a family of dogs. Centuries later, modern breeders look to Earl's commissioned work from the royal family to see their breed's ancestors. "Her portraits were a way to record breed history before photography," Fausel notes.

THREE TO SEE AT THE AKC MUSEUM

Earl's early work from the 1890s to 1915—her Victorian style—was painted in her native England prior



"Silent Sorrow" (1910) is among the most enduringly popular paintings in Earl's substantial body of work.

to moving to the United States during World War I. Three paintings from this period—"I Hear a Voice," "Two Pointers on Point in a Field," and "Silent Sorrow"—will be part of the opening exhibition, which will feature highlights from the museum's entire collection. By now, impressionist influences from Monet, Gauguin, and Renoir can be seen in her brush strokes, vivid colors, and free, uncluttered backgrounds. Secord says Earl's highest quality paintings come from this era because of the depth of color and the dog's expression "exemplifies the nature of the breed."

I Hear a Voice (1896)

One such impressionist example is "I Hear A Voice," from 1896. This large canvas, 48 by 60 inches, depicting the Saint Bernard English champion Frandley Stephanie, features Earl's sweeping brush strokes, bold colors of impressionism, and diffuse backgrounds. Plus, this famous show dog is seen in nature doing what it's bred to do—listening for lost travelers in the Swiss Alps—an expression of breed character. "She also engaged in 'hiding the fours' meaning that she concealed the feet in her paintings,"



"Great Dane Standing at the Shore"
 Inset: a corner of Maud Earl's studio, c. 1895

Fausel says. "She knew that criticism from the fancy would not be the front end of a dog, but rather the feet." Breeders would object most to incorrect feet when it comes to depicting breed type, and Earl knew this from gaining knowledge from top breeders, so she hid them mostly in grassy landscapes, snowy scenes, or thick heather moors. Earl instead focused her observer's eye on the coat's texture, the lines and curves of the body, and the unique expression of each breed.

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“Two Pointers on Point in a Field” (1905)

Earl benefitted from the tutelage of some of the greatest breed experts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. William Arkwright, considered the father of the modern-day Pointer, mentored Earl on the breed and asked her to illustrate his mammoth tome, *The Pointer and His Predecessors*. A few years later she painted “Two Pointers on Point in a Field” in 1905, an oil on canvas, 24 by 46 inches, with bright yellow grasses, lavender skies, and stunning Pointers exercising their innate talents. Fausel points out that Earl is a master of layering paints to create texture in coats and the use of glazes to make a dog’s coat shine. “Edwin Landseer has the best examples of this,” Fausel says. “And Maud Earl no doubt studied his techniques.”

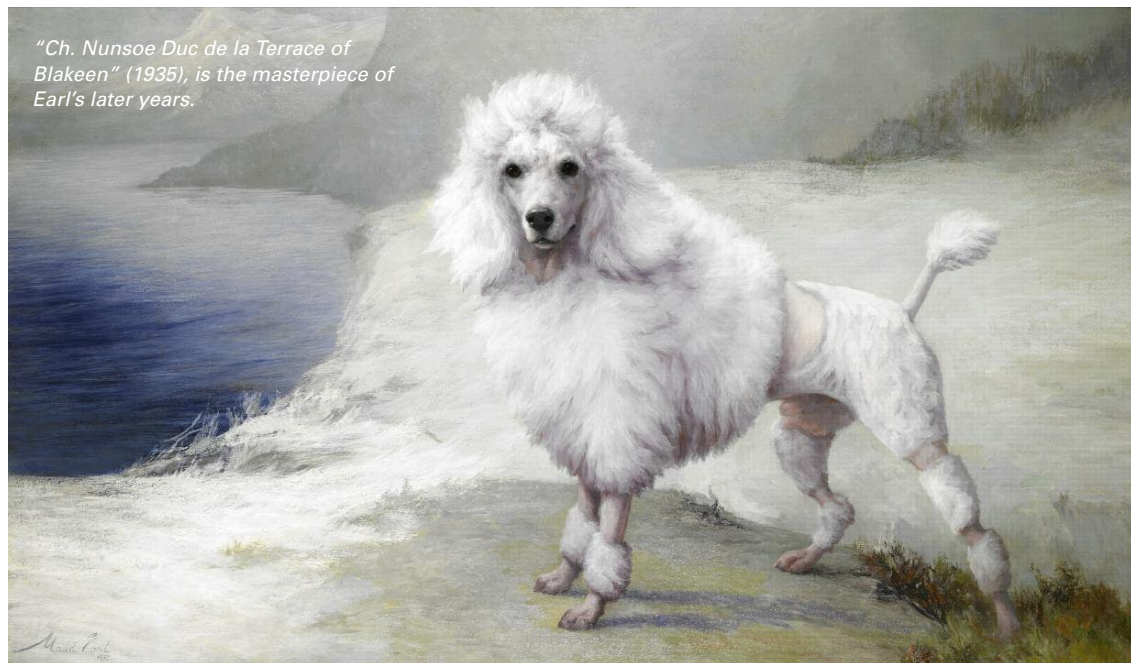
“Silent Sorrow” (1910)

Caesar was King Edward VII’s constant companion and Earl painted him twice, first in *Caesar, I Belong to the King* and after Edward VII’s death. The little Wire Fox Terrier was so beloved by the King, that the royal family had him march in the funeral procession. Earl described the final

portrait as, “a study of the dog with his head resting on the seat of a large easy chair, that of his dead master.” This painting filled a double page in the *Illustrated London News* on May 21, 1910, after the King’s funeral. This oil was turned into a popular print says Fausel, “because at its essence it depicts the canine-human bond and that’s what it’s all about.”

THE AMERICAN YEARS

By 1916, Earl’s settings and landscapes almost disappear completely from her paintings, just as she disappeared to America at the height of her popularity in England. Earl could sense the end of a way of life during the Great War, the royal patronage and the sporting commissions, and left England to discover a new lifestyle. Earl arrived in America and established two studios at a suite at the Volney Hotel at 23 East 74th Street, overlooking Central Park. The American dog fancy embraced her immediately with commissions from breeders in Tennessee and North Carolina. There are no known diaries or archives from Earl as she had no children or family to pass down such personal papers, but some correspon-



“Ch. Nunsoe Duc de la Terrasse of Blakeen” (1935), is the masterpiece of Earl’s later years.

dence with Mrs. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, an acclaimed artist and sculptor in her own right, survive from 1916, just after Earl came to America. In the first letter dated November 17, Earl has heard from Mrs. Whitney about painting a portrait of a police dog. Earl writes back to say the dog “would look splendidly on one of the gold backgrounds. But I would want you to see them first.”

This may be one of the earliest mentions of her new style—painting her art on silver- and gold-painted backgrounds of wood and canvas.

By May 23, 1917, Earl writes about “birds painted on panels” being finished and “blocked in” and how she would like to come visit Mrs. Whitney once the panels are installed. Sporting Art Expert Brook Chilvers, writing about Maud Earl in *Gray’s Sporting*

Journal, said that when Earl cut back on her dog portraits, she entered her “very successful ‘Chinese period’ painting large silk panels and screens with colorfully plumaged birds—blue herons, pink-crested cockatoos, macaws, silver pheasants—against silver or gold backdrops. Not surprisingly, some exotic Asian breeds of dogs started to make their way into these decorative panels and screens.

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Even with the success of her bird panels and screens, Earl said she was “begged to return” to painting dog portraits, and continued to do so well into the 1930s. One of the most beautiful, a return to her classic canine portrait “in a landscape,” is the 1935 Westminster Kennel Club Best in Show winner, “Ch. Nunsoe Duc de la Terrace of Blakeen.” The dog’s owners, Mr. and Mrs. Sherman Hoyt, commissioned the 35 by 60-inch canvas to commemorate their famous standard Poodle, the first of his breed to win the coveted award at Westminster. Earl painted it when she was 72 years old. Fausel notes that not only did her use of white increase but, “her signature long, lush, brush strokes, became more diffuse and sweeping with age.”

THE SLIM GENTLEWOMAN

Maud Earl died at 80 in 1943 and according to her *New York Times* obituary: “She was a slim gentlewoman of determination who knew the great and near great of Great Britain in the pre-World War days. She went about her art quietly and worked for women’s suffrage. Hugh Wapole and H.G. Wells were

among her friends.”

Secord wrote that she was “interesting” as a single woman who struck out on her own in Victorian and Edwardian times, when woman just didn’t do those things. She is buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery beneath a simple stone which reads:

MAUD EARL
NOTED BRITISH PAINTER
BORN IN LONDON
DIED IN NEW YORK
JUNE 1943

Modern-day dog fanciers have Maud Earl to thank for the hundreds of canine portraits she created during a 50-year career. Her prolific paintings not only provided a historic record of famous show dogs, important breeding stock, and cherished pets, but enhanced contemporary knowledge of purebred dogs and their ancestry. But her biggest accomplishment may be that she did so as a single woman in a man’s sporting world. When the AKC Museum of the Dog opens her work will hang among her numerous male contemporaries. When gazing at her brush strokes, her startling colors, or the canine-human bond that jumps off the can-

The Portfolios

In 1902, with Earl’s reputation growing as a result of many royal dog portraits, she published the first of several portfolios, *British Hounds and Gun Dogs*, with two dozen photogravures depicting mostly dog heads in profile. A photogravure is a painting first, then a photograph, then made into a copper-plate for the copying, and then sepia or color added to the final reproduction print.

The *Hounds and Gun Dogs* portfolio with all its disembodied heads, features three Borzoi owned by the Duchess of Newcastle, an important patron of Earl’s. In it, one can see the alert expressions, the lines of the head, and the coat textures against a neutral background. These portfolios contain some of her best breed representations. Here the shift from Earl’s Victorian period paintings “in a land-

vas and licks your face, take the time to soak up her art style but also to appreciate who she was up against in order to get there.



scape” transitions to where the background fades away and the dog is loosely sketched. This is the beginning of her middle period from 1900 to 1915.

In her 1903 portfolio *Terriers and Toys*, Earl used the original paintings as part of her second one-woman show at the Graves Gallery in London. Many of the originals are in the AKC Collection. Earl has embraced the negative space in these paintings using mostly creamy whites, pale grays, or soft lavenders as backdrops. The Berlin Photographic



“Jack the Irish Terrier”

Company reproduced dozens of paintings from her portfolios and some single works such as King Edward’s “Jack the Irish Terrier.” —L.P.

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