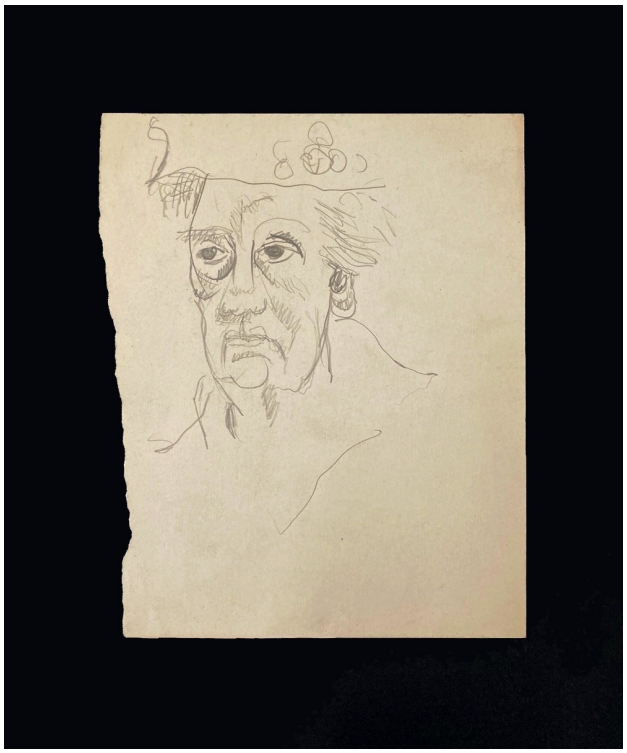
Edgar Miller (American, 1899 - 1993)
Untitled (Portrait of an Old Woman)
Graphite on paper
7 3/4 x 5 1/2 inches
#4811



Edgar Miller

Edgar Miller was born James Edgar Miller in Idaho Falls, Idaho in 1899. From the age of four, Miller had a desire to be an artist. In 1913, Miller traveled with his father and brother Frank to Australia to raise bees. Unfortunately, Australia was wracked with a crippling drought and the teen-aged Miller took some of his sketches to a Melbourne publishing company, hoping to make some money. Although his work was rejected, the publishers liked his work and asked him to come back in a year or two. At the age of 13, he entered his first art exhibition in 1914. Miller then won a scholarship to the School of the Mines in Ballart, but was uninspired and dropped out. For a brief time, he found a job at Tulloch and King Lithographers. In 1915, with the threat looming of being conscripted into the Australian army, Miller's mother scraped enough money together to get him back to the United States. Back in Idaho Falls, Miller resumed high school. His cartoons caught the eye of a school official, who then made arrangements for Miller to attend the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 1917, Miller arrived in Chicago and took a room at Jane Addams Hull House. WWI changed Miller's plans and he had to return to Idaho Falls to register for the service. He served briefly in the Army and then returned to the Art Institute in 1919. His tenure there was brief, as he and eight other students left that same year following a dispute with the the school's administration. Miller never received his degree and after art school, took a job as an apprentice in the design studio of Alfonso Ianelli. Ianelli introduced Miller to Chicago's top architects and businesses. Despite the lack of a degree, Miller taught ornament, interior decoration, drawing and design at the Art Institute of Chicago. Miller also exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, winning the prestigious Logan prize in 1920 for his work with batiks.

In the early 1920s, Miller opened an small art gallery called "House at the End of the Street" on Pearson Street in Chicago and became the city's authority for all things "Modern' and also one of Chicago's most notable artists. After his own gallery closed, he ran a gallery on the top floor of the notorious Dil Pickle Club, a meeting place for Chicago's intelligensia and radicals alike. The club's motto was "Step High, Stoop Low and Leave Your Dignity Outside". He married Dorothy Ann Wood in 1921 and they had three children. In 1929, Miller left Dorothy. By the mid-1920s, Miller began doing much architecture and interior design work. He also began working with stained glass. In the 1920s, Miller also began his partnership with artist Saul Kogan and architect Andrew Rebori, remodeling homes and apartments into artistic masterpieces. Though Miller's connection to Rebori, during the 1933 Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago, Miller became the 'artistic director' of the "Street of Paris" section of the fair. Miller painted murals and backdrops for the "Streets of Paris" and also owned the 'Life Class' concession where for a quarter, one could sketch a nude model. In 1937, Miller designed the famed Normandy House and Black Sheep Bar, which was located at 800 Tower Ct. (now 800 N. Michigan) in Chicago. In 1940, he met second wife Dale, with whom he had two sons.

Some of Miller's more notable public projects include murals at the Tavern and the Standard Clubs of Chicago. Miller died of a stroke in 1993. Sometimes called Chicago's Gaudi, Edgar Miller was a true Renaissance man, an eccentric and outspoken architect, painter, sculptor, designer and instructor. Many of his buildings are identifiable landmarks in the city today. A comprehensive book has just been published on his work, titled "Edgar Miller and the Handmade Home".