

Carol, an iconic portrait of the Tudor Place collection

One object that never fails to attract the attention of visitors is the portrait of a stylishly dressed and attractive woman that hangs prominently in the Tudor Place Dining Room (**Figure 1**). The woman depicted in the portrait is Caroline Ogden-Jones Peter (1894-1965), the wife of Armistead Peter 3rd, the last private owner of Tudor Place. Visitors are often surprised to learn that Mr. Peter was a skilled artist and was responsible for this portrait of his wife and muse as well as others found throughout the house. Completed late in the summer of 1925, this portrait reflects both Armistead Peter 3rd's artistic abilities as well as the affection he felt for Caroline, whom he described in his book, *Tudor Place*, as "the one person in this world whom I loved and trusted completely."¹

He titled this portrait *Carol*, his preferred nickname for his wife (she in turn called him "Pete"), and the following year submitted it to the National Academy of Design in New York hoping it would be selected for the Winter Exhibition of 1926. The portrait was ultimately accepted for the exhibition and hung in close proximity to works by Childe Hassam and Guy Wiggins. The surviving archive of Peter family papers at Tudor Place provides important details about the creation of this portrait as well as its inclusion in the exhibition. Letters written during the summer of 1925, while Armistead was busily engaged in painting this portrait, provide a glimpse of his approach to portraiture. A naturally talented artist, he honed his skills through instruction at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and the Académie Colarossi during a year the couple spent abroad in 1921-22.

For Armistead Peter 3rd, the selection of his work by the National Academy was significant for two reasons: first, it was a sign of his artistic talent and success, and, second, it continued a family tradition of artistic excellence affiliated with the Academy. Armistead's maternal great-grandfather, William G. Williams (1801-1846), was an honorary member of the Academy and exhibited works in their exhibitions between 1840 and 1845. Sculptor Paul Wayland Bartlett, Armistead's artistic mentor and also his father-in-law, had been a student at the Academy and was later elected an academicien in 1917. Armistead Peter 3rd later noted that it was Bartlett who encouraged him to pursue formal artistic training in Paris.

And Armistead wasn't the first artist to be enchanted by Caroline's charm and timeless beauty. In 1905, George Desvallières painted a full-length portrait of ten-year old Caroline that he titled *Portrait de Jeune Américaine*, now in the Parisian collection of the Fonds de Dotation George Desvallières. When she was sixteen, Caroline sat for John McLure Hamilton, who completed a pastel and conté crayon portrait in 1910, and Cecilia Beaux painted an oil portrait of Caroline in Paris in the winter of 1920. The two previously mentioned portraits are in the Tudor Place collection.

Born in Paris on December 26, 1894, while her American parents were living abroad, Caroline had a childhood that was spent in both France and the United States. Her father Mahlon Ogden Jones, the scion of a wealthy Chicago family, suffered from tuberculosis, and the family moved to Dinard in north-western France where he died when Caroline was only six years old. Her mother, Suzanne Earle Ogden-Jones, was raised in Georgetown at a family estate just five blocks from Tudor Place. In 1913, Caroline's twice-widowed mother married American sculptor Paul Wayland Bartlett. From her bi-continental childhood, Caroline developed a sense of style and poise that was fashionably French yet uniquely American. She could speak and correspond in flawless French, and, during one childhood summer in Washington, she took judo lessons from Master Yamashita Yoshitsugu. During frequent return visits to Paris where her mother and stepfather resided, Caroline acquired couture gowns and accessories from

some of the leading fashion houses of 1920s Paris. Caroline became engaged to Armistead Peter 3rd in November 1920, and they married in New York City on February 14, 1921.

During their forty-three-year marriage, Armistead completed at least six portraits of Caroline, but this 1925 portrait was clearly his favorite. In his book, *Tudor Place*, he recalled that the portrait “looks very much like her and I am tremendously fond of it.”² *Carol* was the third portrait of his wife that Armistead completed. The earliest, a crayon study dated December 26, 1922, was finished just two months after the couple’s return from Paris. The second portrait completed in 1923 depicts Caroline in a black dress and red shawl. For this larger-scale oil on canvas portrait, Armistead had her pose in the Southwest bedroom of Tudor Place.³ He would complete at least three more portraits and two watercolor miniatures of Caroline before her death at age seventy in 1965.

Carol was painted over a period of several weeks in the summer of 1925 while the family—Armistead, Caroline, and daughter Anne—vacationed at their farm in upstate New York. Caroline was 30 years old at the time of the sitting. During their time at the farm that particular summer, Armistead got into the habit of painting for several hours each afternoon, starting the portrait in late July.⁴ The sittings took place in July and early August, and it was completed by the middle of August. “Carol’s portrait is finished down to the signature,” Armistead noted in an August 14 letter to his mother-in-law in Paris.⁵ “I am so anxious to have you see it,” he continued, “It is on a canvas 25 x 29 [inches] quite large for me and is more or less like this...”⁶ Ever the artist, Armistead included a small pen and ink sketch of the portrait in the body of his letter (**Figure 2**). He also proceeded to describe for Mrs. Bartlett and presumably her husband, the colors used for each part of the portrait: “Green felt hat, brown wool coat, yellow silk dress, scarf red on this side and around neck, gray on the other side. Dark brown background, almost black in places, with just a faint glow throwing the chair into relief. [Caroline] has her arm over the back of the little black chair you gave us and which is on the porch usually. Incidentally, she is also sitting in the chair. I took a picture of it today and will send you. Everyone seems to like it. Carol says that the hand over the chair is beautiful which pleases me very much.”⁷

In his book, *Tudor Place*, Armistead Peter 3rd suggested one possible reason that Caroline wore a green hat while posing for the portrait was because of their popularity that year. In 1924, Michael Arlen published his wildly popular novel, *The Green Hat*. Women who read the novel began emulating its rebellious heroine, Iris Storm, by wearing green felt cloche hats. In the novel’s opening sentence, the narrator confesses that he named the novel after Iris’s hat because it “was the first thing about her that he saw: as also it was, in a way, the last thing about her that he saw.”⁸ However none of Armistead’s surviving correspondence from the summer of 1925 suggests a particular reason for the choice of the green hat. It’s equally possible that Caroline selected a green hat because it was a color that complemented her alabaster skin and dark brown hair. In terms of artistic composition, the green hat, like the red scarf, draws the viewer’s eye to the center of the portrait. The pose is also unique—Caroline sits at an angle, her right arm resting on the top rail of the chair and her left arm akimbo, hand on hip.

In October of 1926, Armistead learned that *Carol* had been selected for the National Academy’s Winter Exhibition. In a letter to his father, Armistead Peter Jr., then owner of Tudor Place, he noted that he received the “papers from the Academy.”⁹ By this time, the completed portrait was already at Tudor Place though Armistead and Caroline were in upstate New York. In the letter, Armistead requested that his father’s personal secretary, Lewis Oliver, make arrangements to have the portrait packed and shipped to New York. The shipping label survives in Mr. Peter’s papers and indicates that the intended

recipient was William S. Budworth & Son at 425 W. 52nd Street, agents who specialized in receiving paintings sent to New York for exhibition. Budworth & Son would ensure that the portrait was “delivered to the Academy, which they must do either the 9th or 10th of November,” Armistead noted in the letter to his father.¹⁰ On the afternoon of October 29, Mr. Peter’s secretary took the portrait to Verhoff Gallery for packing and shipment to New York.

On November 1, 1926, Armistead’s mother Anna W. Peter wrote to him from her Westchester County, New York estate, “I was delighted to hear that you had entered Carol’s portrait for the Exhibition of the National Academy,” she noted, going on to wish him “all the luck possible & hope it will be the greatest success—I am quite sure it will be.”¹¹

Chartered in 1825, The National Academy’s mission was to “promote fine arts in America through instruction and exhibition.” Artists Samuel F.B. Morse, Asher B. Durand, and Thomas Cole founded the Academy after they became dissatisfied with the American Academy of Fine Art, whose board of directors they believed to be unsupportive of artistic instruction. In contrast, the National Academy of Design, which they modeled after the Royal Academy in London, offered artistic instruction, provided studio space for student artists, and hung several exhibitions per year.

The 101st annual Winter Exhibition took place from November 27 to December 19, 1926. It was held at the Fine Arts Building, located at 215 W. 57th Street, the Academy’s headquarters at that time. *Carol* was displayed in the South Gallery, in close proximity to Childe Hassam’s *Virginia*, Guy Wiggins’ *Valley of the Var*, and Bruce Crain’s *Clouds on the Way*.¹² The Varnishing Day Reception, the opening event for the National Academy’s Winter Exhibition, was held on the evening of November 26. Armistead Peter Jr.’s invitation to the event still survives in the Tudor Place archives. Even though he didn’t attend the event, as a proud father he kept the invitation, writing at the top, “Portrait of Caroline hung at this exhibition—Armistead’s first picture!”¹³

Armistead’s mother Anna W. Peter visited the exhibition in early December 1926, writing to him the day after she and friend, Mary Duvall, went to see the portrait: “Yesterday Miss D and I went to the National Academy and saw the portrait. You can understand with what a feeling of pride & pleasure I had for it is charming in every detail,” she noted, adding “the hands are especially fine.”¹⁴

Following the close of the exhibition in December 1926, *Carol* was shipped back to Tudor Place. For the rest of the 20th century and to the present day, the portrait has hung in the Dining Room, either over the mantel as it is shown in one 1944 photograph or in its present location on the north wall.

By 1925, when Armistead completed this portrait, photography had largely overtaken portrait painting as the preferred medium for capturing a likeness. Whereas in the previous centuries, walls of grand homes were typically filled with commissioned family portraits by well-known artists, by the turn of the 20th century, photographs began to appear in equal frequency. Even during its infancy in the mid-19th century, the medium of photography made it possible to capture and retain an exact image of a friend or loved one, rather than an artist’s interpretation of that person. Photography was also a much quicker way to obtain a likeness—requiring a short time to develop film rather than days or weeks of sitting for an artist. However, a painted portrait has an air of permanence that a photograph lacks. Appropriately applied and varnished, an oil on canvas portrait will last for thousands of years. The colors will remain vibrant, and a painted image will continue to evoke the same reaction three or four hundred years after its completion as it did during the sitter’s lifetime. Just go to any museum and watch visitors interact

with and experience portraiture, whether it's a late 18th century Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington or Kehinde Wiley's 2018 portrait of President Barack Obama.

Armistead Peter 3rd must have been thinking about permanence when he placed this portrait in the Tudor Place Dining Room. Especially after Caroline's 1965 death, the portrait served as a visual memorial to her, the woman he loved, even giving her a presence at mealtimes in that room for the next eighteen years until his own death in 1983. He clearly wanted the portrait to remain here, as it has done, long after both he and Caroline passed away. He also wanted her portraits--including a later 1932 double portrait he painted of Caroline with their daughter--to join the portraits of the earlier generations of Peter family women at Tudor Place. Today, *Carol* continues to evoke the presence of the woman Armistead Peter 3rd acknowledged as the co-creator of the Carostead Foundation—now the Tudor Place Foundation. As he noted in his 1983 will, “this foundation should be regarded as created not only by me, but also by my late wife Caroline.”¹⁵

Caroline's stepfather, Paul Wayland Bartlett, once observed that an artist must possess three characteristics: “observation, synthesis, and then the power to put it on paper.”¹⁶ This statement is certainly applicable to Caroline's portrait. As an artist, Armistead Peter 3rd was able to capture a sense of his wife's personality and poise and translate it onto this canvas, and that's why this portrait remains such an iconic piece in the Tudor Place collection more than 90 years later.

-Grant Quertermous, Curator

¹ Armistead Peter 3rd, *Tudor Place* (1969), pg. 36.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pg. 54.

⁴ *Armistead Peter 3rd to Suzanne Bartlett, August 14, 1925.* Papers of Suzanne Bartlett, Ms 20 Box 2, Folder 9. Tudor Place Archives.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Michael Arlen, *The Green Hat*, Published by George H. Doran & Company, New York, 1924. The novel is available online at https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.27918/2015.27918.The-Green-Hat_djvu.txt

⁹ *Armistead Peter 3rd to Armistead Peter Jr. October 27, 1926.* Papers of Armistead Peter Jr. Ms 14, Box 17, Folder 6, Tudor Place Archives.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Anna W. Peter to Armistead Peter 3rd, November 1, 1926.* Papers of Armistead Peter 3rd, Ms 21, Box 9 Folder 1, Tudor Place Archives.

¹² Armistead Peter Jr.'s copy of the catalog for the 1926 exhibition is found in his papers. Papers of Armistead Peter Jr., Ms 14, Box 131, Folder 17. Tudor Place Archives.

¹³ Varnishing Day Reception Invitation, Papers of Armistead Peter Jr., Ms 14, Box 131, Folder 4. Tudor Place Archives.

¹⁴ *Anna W. Peter to Armistead Peter 3rd*, undated but presumed to be early December 1926. Papers of Armistead Peter 3rd, Ms 21, Box 9, Folder 3. Tudor Place Archives.

¹⁵ Last Will and Testament of Armistead Peter 3rd. Copy in the Research Files, Curator's Office.

¹⁶ As told to Armistead Peter Jr. A. Peter Jr. recorded this in his diary on January 6, 1924. Diary of Armistead Peter Jr. Ms 14. Papers of Armistead Peter Jr. Tudor Place Archives.