

Villa Monterey Neighbors You're Invited!

LIFE'S WORK OF "SCOTTSDALE ART ROYALTY" DISCOVERED AT SCOTTSDALE'S HISTORIC VILLA MONTEREY *Hundreds of Mid-Century Works Unseen for Decades*

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA (April 3, 2025) – A Scottsdale home packed with hundreds of works of art, sat vacant for years after the passing of the husband and wife artists.

“By chance, I stumbled upon this sanctuary of Scottsdale art royalty and was stunned at this massive body of beautiful works”, said neighbor Liz Boyle. As a Scottsdale native and small-time collector of Mid-20th Century Scottsdale artists, Boyle immediately recognized the importance of the collection.

“I'm a neighbor, and while chatting with the home's caretaker outside one day, he mentioned the names of the deceased artists. I gasped, and upon my recognition, he ushered me into a home with trails leading from one vast body of artwork to another.” A clearing in the living room is where artist Jessie Benton Evans Gray spent her final days surrounded by her late husband's masterworks, his large self portrait at the foot of her bed.

“When the caretaker mentioned Jessie Benton Evans Gray, I was thrilled. She and her great-grandmother, Jessie Benton Evans, were Scottsdale art royalty. I had coveted their works for years, but they were out of my price range”, said Boyle, “When I learned more about Jessie's artist husband Don Gray, I realized the body of work, unseen for decades, was even more significant than I imagined.” I knew I had to help in getting this important collection the attention it deserves.

Jessie grew up in the 1940's and 50's at the foot of Camelback Mountain, walking distance to her great-grandmother's Italianesque villa, The Jokake Inn. “Mother Evans”, as Frank Lloyd Wright addressed her, was the most significant female artist during Scottsdale's earliest days. Jessie started painting with her great-grandmother as a small child.

Both Arizona natives, young Jessie and her husband Don Gray, moved to New York City in the early 1960's. There, in a cramped walk-up apartment in Greenwich Village, Jessie and Don pursued their careers in art.

Don Gray's first big break came in 1965 when Domino Sugar heiress, Mrs. Frederick C. Havemeyer saw one of his works at the Vanderbilt Estate, and became a collector and benefactor. That winter, Havemeyer featured Gray's works in the nationwide exhibition of her collection.

East Village collector Arthur Kouwenhoven, a designer for Maison Jansen, the Parisian design firm favored by Jacqueline Kennedy, arranged for Gray's work to be featured at NYC's famed Winter Show in 1965, which brought Gray's art into a number of sophisticated and international art collections.

Boyle said, "The critics loved him, he had glowing write-ups from The Christian Science Monitor, The Philadelphia Enquirer, and Art News, among others." The New York Times praised Gray's "compelling intensity". Author Kurt Vonnegut was a fan.

"Jessie was less prolific an artist, as her main priority was supporting Don", said Boyle. "Elaine de Kooning called her, "One of the Ten Best American Women Artists".

Upon Jessie's death in 2017, the Gray's heirs found the house packed with the art of Don Gray and Jessie Benton Evans Gray, where it sat undisturbed for years.

"I feel like I was destined to walk into that house that day; it felt like a sacred experience. Since then, I've been compelled to get both these artists' life's work shown and appreciated, for the first time in decades," said Boyle.

The neighbors in the Historic District of Scottsdale's Villa Monterey have been charmed by the discovery of what they call, "The Art House", and are planning a showing of Gray's and Evan's work at the clubhouse at 7667 E. Northland Drive on **April 24th from 1-5pm.** It will be free and open to the public.