

In November 1925, Lavery, accompanied by his wife, Hazel, and secretary, CR Chisman, set sail for New York to attend the opening of the painter's solo exhibition at the Duveen Galleries on Fifth Avenue. Their arrival signalled the start of an 'American Campaign' that had been being planned since the summer. The Duveen show was being scheduled to tour to selected galleries in the United States, throughout the forthcoming year, and portrait commissions from wealthy Americans were in train.¹ Since his Glasgow days, Lavery's reputation in the United States was solid. The award of a gold medal at the first Carnegie International exhibition in Pittsburgh, in 1896, was followed by regular submissions to its exhibitions. These led to a special feature display of 36 paintings in 1912 – effectively a discreet retrospective - some of which toured to Chicago. After the Great War, the Pittsburgh submissions continued, but now, his presence in the United States would be greatly enhanced by portraits and interiors delivered *in situ* to prominent Americans.² Portrait sittings were held in a suite in the Ambassador Hotel overlooking Central Park, and two of these were for the portraits of Mrs JF McGuire and her daughter, Julia.³

Mrs McGuire, née Julia Folger MacGregor, was the daughter of John MacGregor and Harriette Elizabeth Folger. Her father was a lawyer practicing in Cleveland, Ohio. In her teens, she attended Lake Erie Seminary for young women between 1886 and 1888, before her marriage to John Francis McGuire in September 1897. Her husband, who hailed from Hopkinton, Massachusetts, was descended from the McGuires of Bruff, county Limerick. He graduated from Yale University in the 'Class of 1890' and ascended to an executive position in the BF Goodrich Company before becoming President of the Republic Rubber Co of Youngstown, Ohio, in the heyday of rubber tyre and hose production for the automotive industry. Rapid expansion of both companies ensured the family's considerable fortune, enabling McGuire to retire to rural New Hampshire in 1911.⁴ By this stage, the McGuires had two daughters, Harriette, later Mrs Lloyd H Fales, and Julia, later Mrs Francis L Blewer (fig 1).⁵

Up to this point Lavery had of course, painted numerous portraits of mothers and daughters, sometimes on the same canvas.⁶ He recognized that while youth often attracted attention, age

¹ Letters to Homer Saint Gaudens, Director of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh (Archives of American Art). Saint Gaudens, son of the sculptor, had taken the position of director following the retirement of Lavery's friend, the founding Carnegie director, John W Beatty.

² Reports in *The Art News* 17 & 24 October 1925, quoted in Kenneth McConkey, *John Lavery, A Painter and his World*, 2010 (Atelier Books), p. 172, note 103.

³ The Laverys initially intended to stay at the Gotham Hotel, but in order to facilitate portrait commissions, were advised to transfer immediately to the Ambassador (see John Lavery, *The Life of a Painter*, 1940 (Cassell), p. 225; quoted in McConkey 2010 p. 172. A note accompanying the Adam's sale catalogue in 2018, indicates that 'two typed letters, dated March and December 1926, from John Francis McGuire to Mrs. Lloyd H. Fales (Harriette), in which reference is made to Sir John Lavery and the portraits done by him of the McGuire women - Mrs. J.F. McGuire and Miss Julia McGuire' were accompanying the picture. These have not been seen by the present author.

⁴ McGuire (1864-1932) retired to Sugar Hill, near Franconia, New Hampshire. A member of the influential Grolier Club of New York, he was also member of three Boston clubs, including the Algonquin; see *Yale Obituary Record* 1931-2, 1932, pp. 78-9; 'John McGuire rites are held in East', *The Akron Beacon Journal*, 21 March 1932, p. 15.

⁵ Lavery's portrait of *Miss Julia McGuire* was sold Sotheby's New York, 23 May 1990, lot 313.

⁶ Julia McGuire's portrait returned to the London with the painter, to be shown at the Royal Academy in 1926 (no 163); see McConkey, 2010, p. 239, note 107.

and experience had its own beauty – as his haunting portrait of Hazel Lavery as *The Gold Turban* 1929 (Private Collection) indicates. Mrs McGuire, (fig 2) in this respect, has a formidable presence that draws out the finer aspects of Lavery’s handling.



Fig 1 John Lavery, *Miss Julia McGuire*, 1926, 101.2 x 76.2, Private Collection



Fig 2 John Lavery, *Mrs JF McGuire*, 1926, the present picture

Mastery is revealed in the rapid notation of beads and pearls, and in the treatment of fine silk gauze that falls from Mrs McGuire’s shoulders. It is however in her simple stare that this pillar of the *Social Register* commands the room.

Lavery found New York exhilarating. He tapped into its energy. He declared when he returned to London that he had done eight months work in the four months he was there and in Boston.⁷ He was keen to return the following winter, 1926-7, by which time his touring exhibition had reached Palm Beach, Florida, where more commissions awaited. In anticipation of this second foray, he had spoken of his impressions of life, art and architecture in the United States where its men were ‘keen’ and ‘alert’, and its women, ‘charming’.⁸ But, ‘you must behave as though money were no object’, he had been told on first arrival. When it was said that he had sold out to American money, he disingenuously dismissed the claim saying that sitters like the McGuires were ‘just ordinary millionaires’ and you needed to be a multi-millionaire to be recognized.⁹ As is clear from the present portrait, painting Mrs McGuire was not just about money.

Kenneth McConkey

⁷ ‘Work and Weather’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1926, p. 6.

⁸ ‘American Art and Artists – Sir John Lavery’s View ...’ *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 October 1926, p. 12.

⁹ Unidentified press cutting, Eddie Clenaghan’s scrapbook, quoted in McConkey 2010, p. 176.