

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE COLLECTION

## Ella Ström-Grainger at the Ferargil Gallery



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Myself, idealized*  
Painted ceramic tile  
8" x 8"

Ella Ström-Grainger's *Exhibition of Decorative Tile Portraits and Tile Designs* opened at the Ferargil Gallery in New York City on November 10, 1930. It included 39 works on tile, many of which are in the collection of the Percy Grainger House in White Plains. The tiles date to the 1920s, with examples from both before and after Ella married Percy in 1928. Note the variation in her signature, "ES", "EVS", and "EVSG".



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Queen Alexandra*  
Painted ceramic tile  
6" x 6"

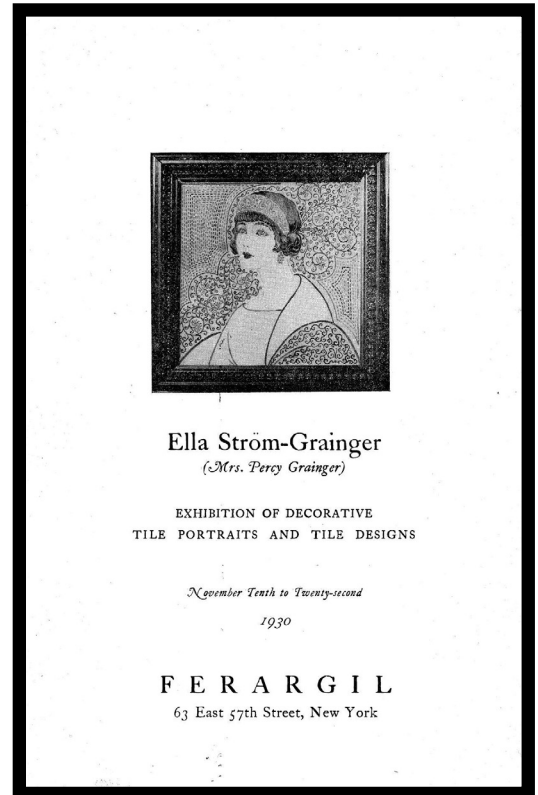
Ella, (b.1889, Stockholm), studied art at the Slade School of Art in London, Althin's School of Painting in Sweden, and at the studio of André Lhote in Paris. In the 1920s, experimenting with applying paint to white glazed ceramic tiles, she developed a new style of portrait making. She called these works "Tile Drawings", a technique she continued to develop and explore, later creating series of "Rime Tiles", integrating her poetry together with her portraits and designs.



As a painter, Ella was interested in wall decoration and had tried fresco painting in addition to her oil on canvas works. She began painting on tiles, in part, as a way create works of art as she moved and was away from her studio. As she explained in the forward of the 1930 exhibition brochure:

*“The lustrous surface of tiles had always attracted me as being one of the most beautiful and enticing fabrics imaginable. Their luminous texture seemed to resemble the satiny texture of a woman’s skin, so I became absorbed in the idea that the surface of tiles could easily do justice to female beauty. I tried out my idea in my “Knightly Series” and these were so much to my satisfaction that I soon started experimenting with portraits. But my portraits were allegorical and symbolistic rather than realistic. The nature of the shiny tile and the difficulty of applying paints to its surface restricted me to portrait making in quite a new style. I had to arrange the face of my model into a sort of pattern, making free use of the sitter’s features without being too much concerned with actual likeness. My aim was a type-likeness rather than a detailed portrait likeness. For this reason allegorical and symbolical expressionism served the purpose.”*

Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
**Princess Mary**  
Painted ceramic tile  
6“ x 6”



For the exhibition, Ella divided her works into four categories:

- Decorative Portraits*
- Decorative Tile-Designs*
- Knightly Series*
- Decorative Groups*

The adjacent tiles are part of her “Knightly Series”.



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Masterful Knight*  
Painted ceramic tile  
8“ x 8”



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Knight in armor*  
Painted ceramic tile  
6“ x 6”





Gisken, depicted here with a book in her hand, was a writer and a close friend of Ella's. She was married to the Norwegian poet Herman Wildenvey.

Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
**Gisken Wildenvey**  
Painted ceramic tile  
6" x 6"

*"The idea of portraits in tiles was inspired by the decorative tiles set round Swedish stoves, and the Dutch tiles, which bear attractive pictures."*

**Portraits on Tiles**, an illustrated article in *The Sun* (London) Sunday May 9, 1926.



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
**La Dame aux coeurs brisées**  
Painted ceramic tile  
8" x 8"



After initial sketches, Ella would create a copy on tissue paper to be used to transfer the design onto a tile. She sometimes made multiple tiles with the same tile design. Her *Decorative Portraits* included both family, friends and people she admired and didn't require models to sit as in a traditional portrait. Her *Decorative Tile Designs* were often allegorical as seen below in the three tiles, *Temptations*.



1



2



3

Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Temptations*: A set of three tiles:  
*Pride* (1), *Vanity* (2), and *Nicotine* (3)  
Painted ceramic tile  
6" x 6" (each)



Ella's daughter Elsie is shown in the portrait below. Elsie was living with Percy and Ella, and working in White Plains, around the time of the exhibition.



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Young Puritan*  
Painted ceramic tile  
6" x 6"



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Elsie with Powder Puff*  
Painted ceramic tile  
6" x 6"



Grainger, Ella Viola Ström  
*Turkish Lady*  
Painted ceramic tile  
6" x 6"



Percy Grainger kept detailed records, often with photographs, throughout his life. The collection at the Percy Grainger house includes black and white negatives of many of Ella's tiles. (Above and below: Photographs attributed to Frederick Morse, Tiles by Ella Grainger.)



*Ella and Percy Grainger*  
Photograph negative of painted ceramic tile



*Girl with Dog*  
Photograph negative of painted ceramic tile



*San Amant*  
Photograph negative of painted ceramic tile