

Will-o'-the-Wisp



## Will-o'-the-Wisp, ca. 1900

### Into the Woods

While lauded for co-founding Newlyn Art School, **Elizabeth Adela Armstrong Forbes (1859–1912)** met resistance from a society that believed women shouldn't pursue careers. Forbes's life wasn't a fairy tale, but she depicted a few, as in this work and her children's book *King Arthur's Wood* (1904).

### Take a closer look

*Will-o'-the-Wisp* is a triptych—a work comprising three sections—with an elaborate frame. Follow elements like the intertwining trees, scampering mice, and lyrical language across the surfaces to piece together the story inspired by William Allingham's poem "The Fairies" (1850).

### Something to talk about

The artist's color choices affect the mood of her painting. How does this painting make you feel? Do you think this fable will have a happy ending?

### Who knew?

This painting is named after a natural phenomenon of phosphorescent light seen hovering over marshy land. It also refers to an elusive person or thing.

Elizabeth Adela Armstrong Forbes, *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, ca. 1900; Oil on canvas, 27 x 44 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photo by Lee Stalsworth

