



# Uncompromising Souls: The Lives and Work of Artist Helen West Heller and Husband Roger

*Larry Stanfel*

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She may not be a household name, but Helen West Heller was a pioneering artist—possibly the finest woodcut artist the United States has ever produced.

Born a poor Midwestern farm girl in 1872, Helen was determined to live the life of an artist. At the Ferrer Center and Modern School in New York City in 1912, after struggling for decades to support herself with her drawings, paintings, and poetry, she met the enigmatic Roger Paul Heller, a brilliant yet inept electrical engineer sixteen years her junior. With classmates that included the likes of Leon Trotsky and Emanuel Rabinowitz (a.k.a., Man Ray), the anarchist institute attracted many of the period's most prominent radicals.

Helen would later become a fixture of Chicago's modernist art scene, gaining exposure and respect, but not financial success. Her ingenuity and creativity shined brightest here as she brought the medium of woodcutting out of the realm of illustrating and into its own as an expressive art form.

As this fascinating in-depth biography illuminates the life and work of this little-known national treasure, *Uncompromising Souls* also examines the life of the artist's eccentric husband while shedding light on an intriguing chapter of America's story.

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