

First Major U.S. Exhibition in Over 20 Years Devoted to Artist Florine Stettheimer Opens at the Jewish Museum on May 5, 2017

New York, NY, April 25, 2017 – The first major U.S. exhibition in over 20 years focused on artist Florine Stettheimer (1871–1944) opens at the Jewish Museum on May 5, 2017, and will remain on view through September 24, 2017. ***Florine Stettheimer: Painting Poetry*** showcases over 50 paintings and drawings in addition to costume and theater designs, photographs, and ephemera, offering a timely reconsideration of this influential American artist with a sharp satirical wit, placing her centrally in the modern dialogue of high and mass culture. The exhibition is organized by the Jewish Museum, New York, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. After its New York City presentation, the exhibition will be on view in Toronto from October 21, 2017 to January 28, 2018.

“Stettheimer has sometimes been typecast as a lightweight feminine artist with a whimsical bent,” notes Stephen Brown, Neubauer Family Foundation Associate Curator, The Jewish Museum. “This view is belied by her powerful thinking of portraiture and her astute adaptation of European vanguard ideas, most notably Symbolism, to uniquely American imagery.”

Born to a wealthy Jewish family in Rochester, New York, Stettheimer studied at the Art Students League in New York City and then in Europe, where she encountered two profound influences: the Symbolist painters and poets, and the Ballets Russes. Stettheimer’s return to New York in 1914, as World War I began, was a turning point for the artist, who was then in her mid-40s. She made her New York art debut with a 1916 solo show at the prestigious Knoedler Gallery, but it proved disappointing, attracting lukewarm press and no sales. She and her sisters Carrie and Ettie, and their mother, Rosetta, then developed a stratagem for unveiling her new works, characteristic of the period: parties. Their elite salon attracted many of the leading lights of the artistic vanguard, including her close friend Marcel Duchamp, as well as Alfred Stieglitz, Carl Van Vechten, Georgia O’Keeffe, Elie Nadelman, Gaston Lachaise, and many others. Flamboyant and epicurean, Stettheimer was an astute commentator on her social milieu.

The exhibition presents Stettheimer’s work in the context of the social and intellectual environment of early twentieth-century New York, exploring the artist’s fascinating position as an American modernist whose work exuberantly reflects on the mass culture of her times. Over four decades of cultural development, from the Gilded Age to the Jazz Age, the exhibition examines Stettheimer’s unique artistic style, her position as a link between groups within the New York art world, and her continued influence on artistic practice today.

The works in *Florine Stettheimer: Painting Poetry* are drawn from all periods of the artist’s life, with *Head of a Girl* (1887–88), a pencil drawing Stettheimer made when she was just 16 years old, being one of the earliest works on view.

By 1918, Stettheimer articulated her unique style, typified in the painting *Picnic at Bedford Hills* (1918). The figures are painted in a miniaturized, self-consciously naïve manner that draws from folk art and Art Deco fashion illustration. Stettheimer’s family and friends, and herself, are the subjects of the painting: her sister Carrie and good friend Duchamp set out a picnic, and

sculptor Elie Nadelman is sprawled out near her sister Ettie.

Stettheimer's satirical wit shines in *Asbury Park South* (1920). The painting features brilliant yellow tones and the lively movement of the black and white beachgoers intermingling on the New Jersey beach, when, in reality, Asbury Park was a segregated beach. Again, Stettheimer depicts members of her inner circle, including Duchamp and writer Carl Van Vechten. Stettheimer includes herself in the festivities, just right of center, under a green parasol.

In 1933, Stettheimer created *Family Portrait II*. This iconic painting gathers many of the themes that preoccupied her throughout her career—her family, New York, and the theater. It also features some of her most distinctive artistic techniques: the use of strong colors, the mixture of a realistic setting with dramatic, even surrealistic elements; and an ornamental frame that calls attention to the artwork as an object.

In addition to her work as a painter, Stettheimer was active as a costume and set designer, as well as a poet. In these endeavors, she invested words, materials, colors, and scenes with mystery and symbolic value.

Stettheimer's poems were known only to a few friends during her life. Curious, funny, celebratory, always acute, the poetry comments on a range of topics—likes and dislikes, nature, food, people, moods—casting unexpected light on the artist and her milieu. Seven of her poems are featured on the gallery walls.

During the summer of 1912, while Stettheimer was living in Paris, she attended a performance of Claude Debussy's ballet, *The Afternoon of a Faun*, a production by the Ballets Russes. Stettheimer, then 40 years old, was inspired to produce a ballet of her own. From the fall of 1912, through 1916, she conceived libretti and drew, painted, and fabricated designs for the costuming of her original production, *Orpheus of the Four Arts*. The exhibition includes many of Stettheimer's sketches, maquettes, and sculptures of the designs from the unrealized ballet.

Also on view are more than a dozen costume and set designs by Stettheimer for the ground-breaking opera by Virgil Thomson (music) and Gertrude Stein (libretto), *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934), which featured an all African American cast. Rather than drawing sketches, Stettheimer conceived of the designs for the opera in three dimensions, using handmade figurines and miniature stages. High and mass cultures were joined in many ways; the production was staged on Broadway, rather than in an opera house, and Stettheimer utilized many unusual materials for her designs—cellophane, vaudevillian feathers and sequins, and coral. Photos of the original cast by Carl Van Vechten, as well as rare footage shot by prominent vanguard art dealer Julien Levy of the opera's 1934 dress rehearsal, are included in the exhibition.

Florine Stettheimer: Painting Poetry at the Jewish Museum is designed by Galia Solomonoff and Alejandro Stein of SAS/Solomonoff Architecture Studio. The designers took inspiration from photos of the Alwyn Court apartment (180 West 58th Street) where Stettheimer lived with her sisters and mother, and the artist's studio in Bryant Park (80 West 40th Street), which she occupied by herself after her mother's passing. Scenes from both of these residences show the tremendous care and attention that Stettheimer gave to designing and curating the different spaces of her home via the use of particular objects,



custom furniture, shimmering and reflective materials, as well as her own paintings in self-made frames.

Florine Stettheimer: Painting Poetry is organized by the Jewish Museum, New York, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The exhibition is curated by Stephen Brown, Neubauer Family Foundation Associate Curator, The Jewish Museum, and Georgiana Uhlyarik, Associate Curator, Canadian Art, the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Catalogue

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Jewish Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and Yale University Press have published a 168-page catalogue by Stephen Brown and Georgiana Uhlyarik. The illustrated publication has 150 color images, including many of the artist's extant paintings, as well as drawings, theater designs, and ephemera. It also highlights Stettheimer's poetry and gives her a long overdue critical reassessment. The essays—as well as a roundtable discussion by seven leading contemporary female artists—overturn the traditional perception of Stettheimer as an artist of novelties. Her work is linked not only to American modernism and the New York bohemian scene before World War II but also to a range of art practices active today. The hardcover book will be available worldwide and at the Jewish Museum's Cooper Shop for \$45.00.

Support

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About the Jewish Museum

Located on New York City's famed Museum Mile, the Jewish Museum is a distinctive hub for art and Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds. Founded in 1904, the Museum was the first institution of its kind in the United States and is one of the oldest Jewish museums in the world. Devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, the Museum offers diverse exhibitions and programs, and maintains a unique collection of nearly 30,000 works of art, ceremonial objects, and media reflecting the global Jewish experience over more than 4,000 years.

Location: 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, New York City
Hours: Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, 11am to 5:45pm; Thursday, 11am to 8pm; and Friday, 11am to 4pm.
Admission: \$15.00 for adults, \$12.00 for senior citizens, \$7.50 for students, free for visitors 18 and under and Jewish Museum members.
Pay What You Wish on Thursdays from 5pm to 8pm.
Free on Saturdays.
Information: The public may call 212.423.3200 or visit thejewishmuseum.org



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