

National Gallery of Art

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March 15, 1995

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ARSHILE GORKY'S "BREAKTHROUGH" ART ON EXHIBITION

AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, MAY 7 - SEPTEMBER 17, 1995

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Major works that established Armenian-born American artist Arshile Gorky (1904-1948) as a pioneer of abstract expressionism are the focus of an exhibition in the National Gallery of Art's East Building, May 7 through September 17, 1995. This is the first exhibition to isolate works of the artist's mature years from 1941-1948 and document his critical role as a formative link between European surrealism and abstract expressionism, considered by many to be the high point of American art after World War II.

Arshile Gorky: The Breakthrough Years is organized by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in cooperation with the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, and the National Gallery of Art. After the exhibition of approximately forty paintings and drawings closes in Washington, it will be on view in Buffalo, October 13 through December 31, 1995, and Fort Worth, January 13 through March 17, 1996.

"This exhibition shines a well-deserved spotlight on a

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powerful period in Arshile Gorky's career. His new vision for painting had an indelible impact on the abstract expressionist movement and particularly on the early work of Willem de Kooning," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition and catalogue were supported by a grant from The Henry Luce Foundation, with additional funding from the T.J. Brown and C.A. Lupton Foundation, Fort Worth.

Exhibition organizer Michael Auping, chief curator, Modern Art Museum, and former chief curator, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, has written in the exhibition catalogue: "Remembered landscapes from [Gorky's] childhood home in Armenia fuse surrealist representation with the abstract plumes of color, anticipating the enigmatic symbols and expressive gestures that would be a hallmark of abstract expressionism."

The presentation will begin with a series of breakthrough drawings from the early 1940s and paintings from Gorky's well-known Garden in Sochi (1941-1943) series. Other works in the exhibition include the Tate Gallery's Waterfall (1942-1943), and all of the paintings from the artist's most celebrated exhibition at Julien Levy's gallery in 1945, including How My Mother's Embroidered Apron Unfolds in My Life (1944) from the Seattle Art Museum, Love of the New Gun (1944) from the Menil Collection, and One Year the Milkweed (1944) from the National Gallery of Art. Waterfall and One Year the Milkweed demonstrate how Gorky

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translated abstracted surrealistic forms into a highly personalized imagery that he described through rich veils of luminous color.

Additional important works include Charred Beloved I (1946) from a private collection, The Betrothal (1947) from the Yale University Art Gallery, and The Plow and the Song (1947) from a private collection, along with a small group of works from the Gorky estate. A highlight of the exhibition will be the artist's grand psychological landscape The Liver is the Cock's Comb (1944), a magisterial painting from the Albright-Knox Gallery which is rarely loaned and has not left Buffalo in more than a decade.

The period 1940-1947 was an exceptionally rich period of drawing for the artist. A selection of eighteen drawings will track Gorky's complex working methods throughout the 1940s.

Born in 1904 at Khorkom, Armenia, Gorky was profoundly influenced by his mother, who kindled in her son the desire to be an artist. After emigrating to the United States in 1920 Gorky settled in New York City, where he taught courses at the Grand Central School of Art, visited museums, studied reproductions, and copied the impressionists and cubists. Picasso's influence is reflected in his poignant The Artist and His Mother (c. 1926-1936), one of many portraits he painted throughout the 1920s and 1930s of himself, his imaginary companions, and his family. The painting is on view in the National Gallery's East Building.

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Inspired by surrealism, Gorky began in the 1940s to merge the ideas from that movement with his love of Miró and Kandinsky, "leading American painting into one of the most experimental periods in its history," according to Auping. The dramatic intensity of his later works in 1947-1948, such as Agony (1947), coincided with a series of disasters including a fire in his studio, an automobile accident in which he broke his neck and paralyzed his painting arm, and a separation from his second wife, Agnes, and their children. On July 21, 1948, Gorky committed suicide in his Sherman, Connecticut, studio at the age of 44. Agony, a painting from The Museum of Modern Art, New York, is in the show.

A full-color catalogue will be published by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in association with Rizzoli Universe and will be available in May in the National Gallery of Art shops for \$45 (hardbound) and \$29.95 (softbound). The essays will include Dore Ashton's overview of Gorky's appreciation of Miró and Kandinsky; English author and artist Matthew Spender's biography of Gorky, illuminating a number of new twists to a short and tragic life; and Auping's introduction, as well as his summary of the artist's iconographic strategies through an in-depth study of The Liver is the Cock's Comb. Spender, son of poet Stephen Spender, is married to Gorky's daughter Maro. Selected artist's letters, a bibliography, and listings of selected exhibitions and previews will complete the catalogue.

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Arshile Gorky, a 1982 documentary by Courtney Sale Ross and Charlotte Zwerin, will be shown in the Gallery's East Building auditorium, May 17, 18, and 19, at 12:30 p.m. The schedule is subject to change. For more information call (202) 842-6799 or inquire at the Gallery's art information desks.

The National Gallery of Art, at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, is open Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. For general information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at (202) 842-6176. For information on visitor services, call (202) 842-6690, weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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