



DRAWINGS & PAINTINGS BY
ARSHILE GORKY
MINA BOEHM METZGER COLLECTION

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2009, 6 PM



Whistler House Museum of Art
243 Worthen Street, Lowell, MA 01852
978.452.7641 www.whistlerhouse.org

Dates: September 16, 2009 through November 7, 2009

Contact: Sara M. Bogosian, Vice President Board of Trustees, Exhibit Chairperson
978-452-0260 SMBA2000@aol.com

LOWELL, MA.- This fall, the Whistler House Museum of Art will premiere a special exhibition by the internationally acclaimed artist, Arshile Gorky (1904 – 1948), known to be the Father of American Abstract Expressionism. The exhibit, entitled *Drawings and Paintings by Arshile Gorky - Mina Boehm Metzger Collection*, is named after a friend, patron and student of Gorky's. It presents 28 never-before-seen and rarely seen works of art and will be exhibited in the museum's Parker Gallery. The collection is significant in that it presents many of Gorky's earlier works and traces his progression as an artist, featuring the influence of such well-respected painters such as Paul Cézanne, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso. Included in this collection, which is made up of drawings and paintings, is the only surviving stone sculpture executed by the artist.

As part of its permanent collection, the Whistler House Museum of Art owns one of Gorky's few remaining works of the time, *Park Street Church, Boston* (1924), which was painted in a Post-Impressionistic style and has been exhibited at many museums, including the Smithsonian and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

An Armenian immigrant, Vosdanig Monoog Adoian, (better known as Arshile Gorky) was born in the village of Khorkom on Lake Van, in the Van Province of Armenia, on April 15, 1904. As a child, Gorky survived the genocide of the Armenian people by the

Ottoman Turks. While escaping to Russian-controlled Armenia, his family of three sisters and his parents were displaced and dispersed. Leaving his family behind, his father escaped the Turkish military draft by moving to the United States and settling in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1919, during a forced march in Yerevan, his mother died of starvation in Gorky's arms. (Her memory inspired a series of portraits.) In 1920, at the age of sixteen, leaving behind the war-ridden territory of the collapsed Russian empire, Gorky arrived at Ellis Island and then joined his father. He spent his early years in the United States in Providence, Rhode Island, Boston and Watertown, Massachusetts.

Arshile Gorky was mainly a self-taught artist prior to immigrating to the United States. Passionate about his Armenian heritage and love of art of the past, its shades were dominantly present in his work throughout his lifetime. In Boston, he enrolled in the New School of Design, which he attended from 1922 to 1924. During this period, Gorky was heavily influenced by the French Post-Impressionist painter, Paul Cézanne, emulating his Cubist style. On moving to New York, sometime in 1925, he began to follow the contemporary artistic style of Pablo Picasso's Synthetic Cubism and the innovative style of Spanish Surrealist painter, Joan Miró.

While in New York, Gorky began an artistic and personal friendship with such artists as Stuart Davis, John Graham and Willem de Kooning. He attended both the National Academy of Design and the Grand Central School of Art, where he also taught until 1931. It was at this time that he changed his name from Vosdanig Adoian to Arshile Gorky, claiming to be a relative of the prominent Soviet writer Maxim Gorky, who enjoyed considerable fame in the West. Seeking to make a name for himself in the art world, he felt justified in taking on a pseudonym, as did many of his colleagues of the time. He was determined to eventually reveal himself as an Armenian.

Gorky's body of work is a unique combination of Surrealist, Cubist, and Expressionistic artistic styles, mastering each of the highly diverse styles with equal ease. By the 1940s he was known as a surrealist painter and is considered to be the important bridge and direct link between European Surrealists and US Abstract Surrealists.

Gorky was one of the major forces behind the emergence of the Abstract Expressionist movement. It was a movement of artistic styles, during the mid 1940's, that involved complete freedom from all traditional aesthetic and social values. It combined abstract form and favored spontaneous, liberated personal expression. It is said to be America's most important contribution to Modernism. Gorky's work greatly influenced famous Abstract Expressionist such as Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, and Willem De Kooning.

The *Mina Boehm Metzger Collection* contains works that span his artistic career, showcasing Arshile Gorky as a seminal figure in the movement toward abstraction that ultimately transformed American art as we know it today. Along with museums all over the world, including the Tate Gallery in London, his works can be found in most major American museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney Museum of American Art, and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

Gorky was an enigmatic and intense character, but a man of great poetic spirit. Although achieving personal success and fame, his final years were full of melancholy, loneliness, and a yearning for his homeland of Armenia. At the height of his creative success, he experienced cancer, a failed marriage, a broken neck due to a car accident and a fire, which destroyed many of his new works. In 1948, at the age of 44, he committed suicide.

Mina Boehm Metzger, for whom the collection was named, was born in 1877 in Vienna, Austria, “under the American flag”. Her father was an inventor who in his youth had explored the American west with Buffalo Bill. Later he became a noted architect in New York City where he headed up his own firm.

In 1898, she married David Metzger, a young, successful New York business man, and the following year had twin daughters. For many years she led a busy life often accompanying her husband on business trips to Europe where she had the opportunity to visit many museums. This was the beginning of the stimulating age of Impressionism. These experiences left a lasting impression on her artistic spirit.

Although she studied art as part of her early education, she did not have any formal training until the 1930s. In New York City, where Mina Boehm Metzger lived, the Grand Central Art School offered a class in beginning painting in which she enrolled. It was there that she met Arshile Gorky, the teacher. She was not only his student, but one of the first to recognize his genius. She and her husband became his patrons at a time when the aftermath of depression made life almost impossible for young artists.

Metzger, along with her daughter, Margaret Vandercook, a sculptor, and Gorky had adjoining studios in Union Square in New York City. All three were part of the exciting art revival in New York at that time. The collection contains several important images of Metzger in the form of drawings that Gorky gifted to her.

In October 2009, The Philadelphia Museum of Art will present a major retrospective exhibition on Gorky, entitled *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective*. It will open in Philadelphia and travel to Los Angeles and London. It will be the first full-scale survey of Gorky’s work since the retrospective held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1981. This occasion will introduce Gorky’s work to a new generation of viewers, and for the artist’s longtime admirers, will celebrate his singular importance within the history of art. The Whistler House Museum’s *Park Street Church, Boston (1924)* will be a part of the important traveling exhibition.

The Whistler House Museum of Art, located in Lowell, Massachusetts, is the historic birthplace of the famous American artist, James McNeill Whistler. Established in 1878, as the Lowell Art Association Inc., it is the oldest incorporated art association in the United States. It is known internationally for its distinguished collection of 19th and early 20th century New England representational art. The Whistler House hosts many exhibits, lectures, educational programs, concerts and an array of social events.

The *Mina Boehm Metzger Collection* is a significant addition to the Whistler House Museum of Art. The museum is proud to have this important collection on permanent loan. After the premiere exhibition, the collection will be on display in the historic house. A catalogue, *Drawings and Paintings by Arshile Gorky-The Mina Boehm Metzger*

Collection, will accompany the exhibition. This special exhibit has been made possible through a grant from the Theodore Edson Parker Foundation, the Lowell Cultural Council and the legal support of Gallagher and Cavanaugh LLP.

RELATED SPECIAL EVENTS:

PREVIEW PARTY

Sunday, September 13, 2009 6:00 PM

Donation \$50.00 per person
 \$35.00 for WHMA Members

A premiere of the works of Arshile Gorky, featuring the cuisine and music of his Armenian homeland.

For reservations contact: Whistler House Museum of Art
243 Worthern Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852
Phone: 978-452-7641
Email: jdymont@whistlerhouse.org

EXHIBIT OPENS TO PUBLIC

Wednesday, September 16, 2009 11:00AM

Museum Admission \$5.00 Adults

PUBLIC RECEPTION

Saturday, September 19, 2009 2:00 – 4:00 PM