

Harvard / News Release Art Museums

Harvard Art Museums Announce Traveling Exhibitions of Works by Lyonel Feininger



Cambridge, MA
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The Harvard Art Museums present two traveling exhibitions devoted to underexplored aspects of the work of Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956), one of the major figures of European modernism. [Lyonel Feininger: Drawings and Watercolors from the William S. Lieberman Bequest to the Busch-Reisinger Museum](#) highlights an important recent acquisition of a stunning group of drawings and watercolors from the collection of the legendary curator. [Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928-1939](#), assembled primarily from Harvard University's Houghton Library, is the first to explore the artist's little-known photographic work. Drawing on vast but largely untapped resources and new research, the two exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues examine the aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of Feininger's achievements within each of these distinct media. Many of the works included have never before been exhibited or published and thus allow for a fresh assessment of this otherwise well-known figure.



Lyonel Feininger, *Untitled (Ghosties)*, c. 1954. Black ink and watercolor pencil on white paper. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Bequest of William S. Lieberman, 2009.100.85.

Lyonel Feininger, *Bauhaus, March 26, 1929*. Gelatin silver print. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of T. Lux Feininger, BR71.21.23.

[Feininger at Harvard: Drawings, Watercolors, and Photographs](#), which encompasses both exhibitions, will be presented in Germany at the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin from February 26 to May 15, 2011, and the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich from June 2 to July 17, 2011. [Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928-1939](#) then travels to the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles where it will be on view from October 25, 2011 to March 11, 2012. In Los

Angeles it will be complemented by a related installation of photographs by Bauhaus masters and students from the Getty's collection. The final venue for the photography exhibition will be the Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, from March 30 to June 2, 2012, where it will be accompanied by a selection of works from the drawings and watercolors exhibition.

Peter Nisbet, former Daimler-Benz Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum and current Chief Curator at the Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, curated the drawings and watercolors exhibition and authored its catalogue. The photography exhibition was curated by Laura Muir, Assistant Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Division of Modern and Contemporary Art, Harvard Art Museums. Muir is the author of the accompanying catalogue.

“Harvard University has had a long relationship with the art of Lyonel Feininger. The Busch-Reisinger Museum’s Feininger Archive, alongside Houghton Library’s holdings, constitutes one of the world’s most comprehensive collections of the artist’s work,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums. “It is our hope that the new research presented through these exhibitions, catalogues, and our website will provide a resource of great value to scholars, students, and other viewers worldwide.”

Lyonel Feininger: Drawings and Watercolors from the William S. Lieberman Bequest to the Busch-Reisinger Museum

The drawings and watercolors exhibition and accompanying catalogue explore drawing as a fundamental activity for Feininger. Throughout his early success as an illustrator and cartoonist to his final years when his paintings reached for a transcendental dissolution of his longstanding subject matter, Feininger devoted enormous energy to the exploration of his themes and the development of his style through drawing. Alongside the many thousands of so-called “nature notes” (small quick sketches from life), which have been the subject of extensive study, Feininger produced a rich but underexplored body of more elaborated, larger-scale drawings and watercolors that convey the full richness of his career and development. The Busch-Reisinger Museum, in addition to being one of the principal repositories of the nature notes, recently received a large collection of these more finished drawings and watercolors from the estate of William S. Lieberman, a remarkable trove from which this exhibition was selected.

“Feininger’s position within the history of modern art is still undecided and there is much to be discovered in his work,” said Nisbet. “The Liebermann bequest has provided unprecedented access to an impressive range of drawings and watercolors by the artist, and the new findings outlined in the exhibition and catalogue are intended to contribute to a fuller assessment of Feininger’s accomplishments.”

An example of his early work includes the caricature Big News! (Jan. 1, 1909), a drawing which depicts figures scurrying across a town square, engrossed in the daily newspaper and ignoring all else around them. Bicycle Race (1912) renders forward motion and purposeful energy in a dense charcoal and ink composition that shows Feininger’s engagement with futurism. Feininger’s exposure to cubism is seen early on in Untitled (Village with Church, probably Umpferstedt) (Jan. 9, 1914) and the subsequent development of his characteristic “prismatic” style is seen in Neubrandenburg Town Hall III (Apr. 14, 1923), which features splintery, broken, parallel pen lines that form a pattern of prismatic planes. Feininger’s repeated engagement with the subject of bathers receives a radical and enigmatic treatment in Untitled (Four Figures) (1935). His watercolors often have an ethereal, fantastical quality, and three examples of the whimsical Ghosties series (1940s–50s) appear alongside apparition-like female figures in “Feux Follets” (1940) and delicate colored washes in his nearly abstract Untitled (Clouds) (1953).

Over 75 drawings and watercolors from the bequest are on view in the exhibition. William S. Lieberman, a former curator at the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, received the works as a gift from the artist’s widow, Julia Feininger. Lieberman, who died in 2005, bequeathed his entire collection of over 400 works by Feininger to the Busch-Reisinger Museum. One painting from the Lieberman bequest, Avenue of Trees (1915), and three paintings collected by the Busch-Reisinger in previous decades, Bathers (1912), Gross Kromsdorf III (1921), and Bird Cloud (1926), will also be on display (Avenue of Trees will not travel to Munich).

Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939

The photography exhibition focuses on the rich and productive period between 1928 (when Feininger first took up the camera) and the late 1930s, when he was exploring an array of avant-garde photographic techniques and making his own prints. Despite his early skepticism about this “mechanical” medium, the painter was inspired by the enthusiasm

of his sons Andreas and T. Lux as well as the innovative work of his fellow Bauhaus master and Dessau neighbor László Moholy-Nagy. In the fall of 1928 the 58-year old Feininger began to conduct his own experiments, discovering in photography a new means of energizing and advancing his artistic program.

“Lyonel Feininger is celebrated as a master of caricature, figurative painting, and his own distinctive brand of cubism, but he also created an innovative body of photographic work that is strikingly modern yet deeply personal and virtually unknown,” said Muir. “This exhibition presents the first opportunity to assess this achievement and consider its relationship to Feininger’s work in other media as well as its place within the history of modernist photography.”

His first photographs were atmospheric night views of the Bauhaus campus and the nearby neighborhood, including Untitled (Night View of Trees and Streetlamp, Burgkühnauer Allee, Dessau) (1928) and Bauhaus (Mar. 26, 1929). In Halle, while working on a painting commission from the city, Feininger recorded architectural sites in works such as Halle Market with the Church of St. Mary and the Red Tower (1929–30), and experimented with multiple exposures in photographs such as Untitled (Street Scene, Double Exposure, Halle) (1929–30), a hallucinatory image that merges two views of pedestrians and moving vehicles. One of his Halle paintings, Bölbergasse (1931), makes an appearance in Untitled (Unfinished Painting in Studio, Halle) (1931), an image that explores the relationship between the canvas and the space in which it was created. During summers in Deep an der Rega, a small fishing village on the Baltic Coast (in present-day Poland), he returned to his longtime subjects of seascapes and bathers in photographs such as Untitled (Lux Feininger, Deep an der Rega) (1932), a lively snapshot of his son suspended above the water in a backflip. In the months after the Nazis closed the Bauhaus and prior to Feininger’s departure from Dessau in March 1933, he made a series of unsettling views of mannequins and reflections in shop windows such as Drunk with Beauty (1932). In 1937 the American-born Feininger permanently settled in New York City after a nearly 50 year absence and photography served as an important means of reacquainting himself with the city. The off-kilter bird’s eye view he made from his studio Untitled (Second Avenue El from Window of 235 East 22nd Street, New York) (1939) is a dizzying image of an American subject in the style of European avant-garde photography, and mirrors the artist’s own precarious and disorienting position between two worlds and the past and present.

Drawn primarily from Harvard’s Houghton Library, over 75 of Feininger’s photographs, as well as related works on paper and two of his early cameras, are on display. The exhibition and catalogue are based on new research on the collection of the artist’s negatives and slides in the Busch-Reisinger Museum’s Lyonel Feininger Archive, which has only recently been catalogued and digitized, making it fully accessible for the first time. Muir’s research also draws on Feininger’s extensive correspondence housed at Houghton Library and her interviews with the artist’s son, T. Lux. The majority of Feininger’s photographs, which he shared with only a few close friends and family, remained in his private collection until his death in 1956. In 1987 his son T. Lux donated them to Houghton Library. The exhibition also includes key loans from other US and German lenders.

Catalogues

A fully illustrated hardcover catalogue with a scholarly essay accompanies each exhibition. Published by the Harvard Art Museums and Hatje Cantz Verlag, the catalogues are due for release in February 2011 and are available in both English and German translations. The English-language catalogues will be available in the Harvard Art Museums shop; call 617-495-1440 or email am_shop@harvard.edu.

Online Research Tool

A web page dedicated to the photographic work of Lyonel Feininger will be launched on harvardartmuseums.org in conjunction with the exhibitions' opening in February 2011. The page will include access to a searchable database of more than 18,000 photographic objects housed in the Busch-Reisinger Museum's Lyonel Feininger Archive, providing a portal into this extraordinary new resource. The page will include image slideshows and information about Feininger's photographic themes, as well as a chronology of the artist's photographic history.

Credits

Lyonel Feininger: Drawings and Watercolors from the William S. Lieberman Bequest to the Busch-Reisinger Museum was organized by the Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in cooperation with the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

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The exhibitions, tour, and catalogues were funded in part through the generosity of the German Friends of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and the Dedalus Foundation, Inc.

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums, among the world's leading art institutions, comprise three museums (Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler) and four research centers (Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. The collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media, ranging in date from antiquity to the present and originating in Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the art museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and other visitors. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in this country.

In June 2008 the building at 32 Quincy Street, formerly the home of the Fogg and Busch-Reisinger museums, closed for a major renovation. During this renovation, the Sackler Museum at 485 Broadway remains open and has been reinstalled with some of the finest works representing the collections of all three museums. When complete, the renovated historic building on Quincy Street will unite the three museums in a single state-of-the-art facility designed by architect Renzo Piano.

Hours

Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-5pm. Closed major holidays.

Admission

Paid admission includes entry to the galleries, public tours, and gallery talks. General admission: \$9; seniors 65 and over: \$7; college students with valid ID: \$6. Admission is free for Harvard University students and affiliates, Harvard Art Museums members, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18 years of age. On Saturdays before

noon admission is free to Massachusetts residents with valid ID. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or harvardartmuseums.org.

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

For more information, please contact:

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