



Media only: Laura Baptiste (202) 633-8494

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New Exhibition About 1940s America and Artist George Ault Opens March 11 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

“To Make a World: George Ault and 1940s America” will be on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., from March 11 through Sept. 5. Alexander Nemerov, the Vincent Scully Professor of the History of Art at Yale University, is the curator of the exhibition. Following its presentation in Washington, D.C., the exhibition will travel to two additional venues.

During the turbulent 1940s, artist George Ault (1891-1948) created precise yet eerie pictures—works of art that have come to be seen, following his death, as some of the most original paintings made in America in those years. The beautiful geometries of Ault’s paintings make personal worlds of clarity and composure to offset a real world he felt was in crisis.

“Historians have recorded the heroic accomplishments and sacrifices of the Second World War,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “But what were our families at home really thinking and feeling during those times? This exhibition and book delve below the surface of 47 paintings to understand deep emotional currents that help us understand those feelings. With exquisite precision—just like the precise art of featured painter George Ault—Alex Nemerov creates anew this world for all of us.”

This is the first major exhibition of Ault’s work in more than 20 years and includes 47 paintings and drawings by Ault and his contemporaries. It centers on five paintings Ault made between 1943 and 1948 depicting the crossroads of Russell’s Corners in Woodstock, N.Y. The mystery in Ault’s series of nocturnes captures the anxious tenor of life on the home front.

“It was this quality of darkened and haunted mystery—a lonely junction at night—that made me think Ault’s pictures spoke to their times,” said Nemerov. “Even so, Ault is not an obvious choice to anoint as the centerpiece of a show subtitled ‘1940s America.’ But viewed in retrospect, Ault’s isolation gave him a chance to speak broadly—to address the sorrow and moody loneliness others felt then too.”

Ault and the other 22 painters in the exhibition worked in isolated communities far from the

war-time turmoil of the cities. Yet they confronted the chaos and devastating uncertainty of the times through their paintings. Ault shows the intimate corners of his world, rendered with obsessive clarity and impeccable control that suggest a counterbalance to civilization at the brink during the war years. The exhibition includes artists as celebrated as Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth, while others such as Edward Biberman and Dede Plummer are scarcely known to today's art audiences. Taken together, their artworks reveal an aesthetic vein running through 1940s American art that has not been identified previously.

Publication

The accompanying book, co-published by the museum and Yale University Press, is written by Nemerov with a foreword by Broun. In his essay, Nemerov weaves references not only to historical events and artists, but also to poetry, drama and film to present a richly compelling narrative of the national mood during the 1940s and of the American artists who captured it. It will be available for purchase (\$45, hardcover only) at bookstores nationwide and through the museum's website and store.

Free Public Programs

Several free public programs are planned in conjunction with the exhibition, including a talk by Nemerov Friday, March 11, at 7 p.m. followed by a book signing, and a film series that presents a selection of 1940s films featuring themes of personal psychology, loneliness and struggle. Selected films include *Gaslight* Thursday, April 7, at 6:30 p.m., *It's A Wonderful Life* Thursday, April 14, at 6:30 p.m. and *The Seventh Victim*, Thursday, May 5, at 6:30 p.m.

Complete program descriptions are available online at americanart.si.edu. Additional programs will be scheduled for the summer. Details will be available on the museum's website.

Online Features

A podcast featuring a talk by Nemerov will be available on the museum's website and through iTunes. Information about the exhibition, programs and commentary about artworks on display can also be found on Facebook, the museum's blog Eye Level, and Twitter. A slideshow of selected artworks included in the exhibition, with interpretive text for many works, will be available on the museum's website.

Tour

The exhibition will travel to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Mo. (Oct. 15, 2011 – Jan. 8, 2012) and the Georgia Museum of Art at the University of Georgia in Athens (Feb. 18, 2012 – April 16, 2012).

Credit

“To Make a World: George Ault and 1940s America” is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum with generous support from Dolores and John W. Beck, Joan and E. Bertram Berkley, Diane and Norman Bernstein Foundation, Janet and Jim Dicke, Sheila Duignan and Mike Wilkins, Barney A. Ebsworth, Tania and Tom Evans, Kara and Wayne Fingerman, Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason Foundation, Joffa and Bill Kerr, Robert S. and Grayce B. Kerr Foundation, John and Gail Liebes Trust, Paula and Peter Lunder, Betty and Whitney MacMillan, Margery and Edgar Masinter, Oriana McKinnon, Susan Reed Moseley, and Betty and Lloyd Schermer. Additional funding is provided through the museum’s William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment Fund and Gene Davis Memorial Fund. The C.F. Foundation in Atlanta supports the museum’s traveling exhibition program, “Treasures to Go.”

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building is located at Eighth and F streets N.W., above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Follow the museum on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, iTunes, ArtBabble, Vimeo and YouTube. Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Website: americanart.si.edu.

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Note to editors: Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from the museum’s online press room at americanart.si.edu/pr. Email AmericanArtInfo@si.edu for the password.