



Smithsonian
***Donald W. Reynolds Center for
American Art and Portraiture***
Smithsonian American Art Museum

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Media Preview: Tuesday, April 3; 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Smithsonian American Art Museum Presents “Saul Steinberg: Illuminations,” the First Comprehensive Examination of the Artist’s Career

Steinberg is best known for his work in The New Yorker magazine

Saul Steinberg (1914–1999), whose magical drawings lit up the pages and covers of *The New Yorker* magazine for six decades, is the focus of a major new retrospective organized by the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College. “Saul Steinberg: Illuminations” is on view from April 6 through June 24 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

“Saul Steinberg: Illuminations,” the first full-scale review of Steinberg’s career, features more than 100 drawings, collages and sculptural assemblages from the 1930s to the 1990s by the artist who is regarded by many as one of the greatest draftsmen of the modern era and as a comic genius. The exhibition includes never-before-seen sketches from the Saul Steinberg Papers at Yale University, rarely seen works from The Saul Steinberg Foundation and works from private collections. The presentation at the Smithsonian American Art Museum includes a selection of 18 sketches from the museum’s permanent collection that Steinberg made in 1967 while he was an artist-in-residence at the Smithsonian. These works are on view in Washington, D.C., only.

Joann Moser, senior curator for graphic arts at the museum, is the coordinating curator for the exhibition. Joel Smith, curator of photography at the Princeton University Art Museum and formerly of Vassar’s Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, is the curator of the exhibition.

“I am delighted the Smithsonian American Art Museum is presenting the witty and insightful work of Saul Steinberg this spring,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “This exhibition is a wonderful opportunity for museum visitors to discover new aspects of Steinberg’s career thanks to the insightful scholarship of Joel Smith.”

While Steinberg is best known for his work in *The New Yorker*—including his widely adapted 1976 rendering of a *New Yorker*'s view of the world—the exhibition also brings to light the prolific and diverse activity for which Steinberg was celebrated since the time he arrived in New York in 1942. The exhibition reveals new insights into Steinberg's influential role in postwar-American art and re-examines his works from the 1940s and 1950s, which were overshadowed by his popular work in recent assessments of his career. The subtitle of the exhibition, "Illuminations," plays on the idea that Steinberg was a modern day illuminator, who used words and images to make art for communication purposes.

"Few artists have created such memorable images as Steinberg's maps, faux documents, suggestive abstractions and witty caricatures," said Moser. "His combination of humor and social commentary, as well as his incisive line often disguised as a doodle, distinguish him as one of the most compelling artists of the 20th century."

"Saul Steinberg's last American museum retrospective, in 1978, reflected the priorities of a living artist who wanted to be sure the public saw his career as that of a focused, museum-worthy artist," said Smith in his 2005 book, "Steinberg at the *New Yorker*." "Today, what is most fascinating about Steinberg's art is the vast range he commanded, from high to low, from murals to magazines, from caricature to cartography. To look at Steinberg's career in its full duration, depth and variety is to catch a close-up view of the energies and contradictions of the 20th century. You might also find yourself smiling a lot."

About the Artist

Steinberg was born June 28, 1914, and grew up in Romania. He studied architecture in the early 1930s in Milan, Italy, where he gained early fame as a cartoonist. Steinberg arrived in New York City in 1942 and became a U.S. citizen the following year. In America, Steinberg worked as a propagandist, illustrator, fabric and card designer, muralist, fashion and advertising artist, stage designer and tireless creator of image-jammed books. Steinberg's sleek, barbed, inventive line was seen—and mimicked—everywhere from highbrow journals to Christmas cards, disseminating the look of modernism to an atomic-age audience. In the 1960s, he decided to concentrate his efforts on gallery art and *The New Yorker*. Steinberg died May 19, 1999, in New York City.

Public Programs

A variety of free public programs are planned in conjunction with the exhibition. Curator Smith will discuss Steinberg in a talk titled "Steinberg's Century: Art, Humor and the Middlebrow Avant-Garde" Sunday, April 15 at 3 p.m. Additional related programs include a ticketed concert, "Games People Play," Saturday, April 7 at 5 p.m. by the 21st Century Consort, featuring new compositions

inspired by Steinberg's work; a talk and book signing by Matthew Diffie, The New Yorker magazine cartoonist and author of "The Rejection Collection: Cartoons You Never Saw and Never Will See in The New Yorker," Saturday, May 12 at 3 p.m.; and an appearance by Bob Mankoff, cartoon editor at The New Yorker, Sunday, June 3 at 3 p.m. The improvisational troupe Now This! will perform "Sketchy Sketches" Saturday, June 2 (Part I) and Saturday, June 9 (Part II) at 3 p.m. For more information on these programs and other offerings, visit the online calendar at reynoldscenter.org.

Publications

The exhibition catalog, published by Yale University Press, is written by Smith with an introduction by poet and critic Charles Simic. It is available for \$65 in the museum store.

Credit

"Saul Steinberg: Illuminations" was organized by the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Mike Wilkins, Sheila Duignan and Rita J. Pynoos support the presentation at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Tour

"Saul Steinberg: Illuminations" debuted Dec. 1, 2006, to excellent reviews at The Morgan Library & Museum in New York City. After the exhibition closes in Washington, it will travel to the Cincinnati Art Museum (July 20 – Sept. 20) and to the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (Nov. 2 – Feb. 24, 2008).

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,000 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building, a dazzling showcase for American art and portraiture, is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. in the heart of a revitalized downtown arts district. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily. Admission is free. Metrorail station: Gallery Place/Chinatown (Red, Yellow and Green lines). Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Recorded information: (202) 633-7970. Web sites: americanart.si.edu and reynoldscenter.org.

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Note to editors: Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from <ftp://saam-press@ftp.si.edu>. Call (202) 633-8530 for the password. Additional information about the exhibition is available from the museum's online press room at americanart.si.edu/press.