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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NEW YORK

11 WEST 53rd STREET
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900
CABLES: MODERNART, NEW-YORK

SARAH NEWMAYER, PUBLICITY DIRECTOR

February 2, 1943.

TO Art Editors
City Editors

Dear Sirs:

You are invited to come or send a representative to

PRESS PREVIEW ~~of~~

AMERICANS 1943:

Realists and Magic Realists,

the second of a series of exhibitions inaugurated
by the Museum last year to provide a continuing
survey of the arts in the United States.

Tuesday, February 9
2 to 6 P.M.

at the Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street.

The exhibition will open to the public Wednesday, February 10.

For further information please telephone me at Circle 5-8900.

Sincerely yours,

Sarah Newmeyer
Sarah Newmeyer
Publicity Director

P.S. Unfortunately, there was a shortage of printed invitations.
One will be sent you later this week, however. This letter is
being sent immediately so that you will receive the information
in plenty of time.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION OF AMERICAN REALISTS AND MAGIC REALISTSOPENS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Americans 1943: Realists and Magic Realists, a large exhibition of paintings, drawings and prints by 43 artists, filling all the galleries on the second floor of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, opens to the public Wednesday, February 10, and will remain on view through Sunday, March 21, after which it will be sent on a tour of other cities throughout the country.

This is the second of a series of exhibitions inaugurated by the Museum of Modern Art in 1942 to provide a continuing survey of art in the United States. Last year's exhibition, Eighteen Artists from Nine States, excluded artists closely identified with New York in order to show the work of those less known here, but the present exhibition is not limited as to locality. The number of artists included, however, has again been kept small so that each can be represented by a group of pictures large enough to indicate style and personality rather than by a single example as is usual in a large group show.

Dorothy C. Miller, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture, is Director of the exhibition and has been assisted by Lincoln Kirstein, a member of the Museum's Advisory Committee. Miss Miller writes in the foreword of the catalog of the exhibition:

"The subject, Realists and Magic Realists, was chosen to demonstrate a widespread but not yet generally recognized trend in contemporary American art. This trend has appeared not as a concerted movement but spontaneously, in many parts of the country and among many different types of artists. The exhibition does not begin to cover all the varieties of painting which might be described by the term, realism. It is limited, in the main, to pictures of sharp focus and precise representation, whether the subject has been observed in the outer world--realism, or contrived by the imagination--magic realism. Magic realism has been defined by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. as 'a term sometimes applied to the work of painters who by means of an exact realistic technique try to make plausible and convincing their improbable, dreamlike or fantastic visions.'"

Although the exhibition is devoted primarily to the work of young contemporary American artists, it also includes an introductory section of Nineteenth Century paintings, one example each by Raphaelle Peale, Harnett, Audubon, Eakins, Homer, Bingham, Hicks, Field, Alexander, Cole, Goodwin, ~~Ventura and Mouni~~. As a short preface to the younger contemporary artists, several pictures by

Edward Hopper and Charles Sheeler are shown. Although still in their prime, these two artists were pioneers of the new direction twenty years ago. 26

Among the paintings designated as examples of magic realism are several which will no doubt prove of unusual interest to the public. In the Nineteenth Century section there is an extraordinary painting by Erastus Salisbury Field, entitled Historical Monument of the American Republic, done about 1876, to celebrate the centennial of the United States. It is a huge canvas on which is depicted in meticulous detail a series of graduated towers on which dozens of bas-reliefs illustrate the history of the United States. To explain this 120-square-feet of infinitely detailed patriotic fantasy the artist wrote a twelve-page descriptive catalog:

"The towers are connected with suspension bridges, and cars are going to and from the centennial exhibition, which is on top of the central tower... The cluster of columns above the Indians, denotes the rising States in the North, and the angels symbolise truth and righteousness... On the central or Number 4 tower President Johnson is operating on the government machinery with all his might, and the members of Congress at Number 5 are pulling the opposite way."

Also in the Nineteenth Century section is a picture by Harnett, Music and Good Luck, painted with such illusionist skill that the sheet of music, the violin and the flute, and even the horseshoe which hangs in one corner, seem to be actual three-dimensional objects capable of being picked up from the surface of the picture.

In the contemporary section examples of magic realism include pictures by John Atherton, Peter Blume, Louis Guglielmi, and Patrick J. Sullivan. In Guglielmi's Isaac Walton in Brooklyn a melancholy working man sits on a pile of bricks beside a bleak city street over which runs the elevated train. The workman holds a stick in his hand which, as it rises in the air, becomes a fishing pole with the line extending into the suggestion of a stream which flows through and partially obliterates the street pavement. The Persistent Sea shows one end of a typical New England living room with door open into a carpeted hall from which stairs rise; the sea has encroached upon this house and eaten away part of the hall, part of the living room floor, part of the walls and ceiling; sand with little tufts of beach grass extend into the room and a sailboat is beached where sand meets sea. The sea is not painted as flood water; and the room and stairs, although partly eaten away by sea and engulfed by sand, still maintain their New England neatness.

Several artists have written about their work in the catalog

of the exhibition. Ivan Le Lorraine Albright, of Chicago, whose super-realism shocks as many as it fascinates, writes:

"I have painted herrings that changed from purple to an orange oxide, women whose torrid flesh folds resembled corrugated mush, lemons and imitation fur, purple glazed leaves that exuded a funereal odor, and tawdry costume rings ... I have painted keys that were of brass and calla lilies that drooped from their overload of paraffin... But all things, whether a blue bottle fly or red flying hair, have had their points and counterpoints."

Harari, who admires Harnett and the little Dutch masters, writes:

"How far could one go toward ultimate super-realism, to attain the illusion of the third dimension on two-dimensional canvas? This question, plus admiration for the artistry of Ter Borch, Harnett, and the Index of American Design artists, led me to painting in this style.

"The subject matter of these paintings is of importance to me because I must love those things which I paint. The eye caresses the object, the craftsman's hand refines the surface of the canvas to create a new object of intrinsic beauty. Employing the close-up view reveals the delights inherent in flyspecks, dust, cracks, scalings, rips, dents. etc. I like best to paint early Americana, because they mean so much to me in every way."

In conjunction with the exhibition the Museum is publishing a 68-page book illustrated with 61 halftones. Lincoln Kirstein has written the introduction to the catalog, which is in part as follows:

"The painters represented here have chosen and developed a technique in drawing and handling paint the aim of which is to create images capable of instantaneous identification. By a combination of crisp hard edges, tightly indicated forms and the counterfeiting of material surfaces such as paper, grain of wood, flesh or leaf, our eyes are deceived into believing in the reality of what is rendered, whether factual or imaginary. Magic realism is an application of this technique to the fantastic subject. Magic realists try to convince us that extraordinary things are possible simply by painting them as if they existed...

"Historically, this kind of painting stems from the Low Countries and from Italy. In the north there were realists like the van Eycks and magic realists like Jerome Bosch. The line descends through Quentin Matsys and Bruegel to the Dutch and French of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries... Throughout the nineteenth century the Dutch tradition was strong in North America, from Raphaele Peale to Harnett. In fact there is something peculiarly northern or at least Protestant about this attitude. There is emotion, but the feeling runs narrow and deep rather than violent or accidental. It is a puritanical artifice wherein a termite gusto for detail is substituted for exuberance...

"The painters included here do not constitute a school, and there are many others who conceivably might have been added. They have been selected chiefly for the intensity and quality of achievement in the chosen direction. It is no new direction in North American painting... Peale with stiff sheet and shy feet, the sleight-of-hand honesty of Harnett's everyday furniture, Mount's dead November sun, Cole's stupendous jewelry and Eakins' harsh, athletic glare.

"When we come to living artists, we have immediate forbears who are more strictly North American than perhaps any other of our painters. Indeed, throughout Latin America they have the dubious distinction of being known as the

Frigidaire School--Sheeler with his slide-rule conquests and Edward Hopper's lonely capture of our monotonous urban nostalgia...

"It is a frank, cool art, hardly ever soft or dusky. It is also popular, as the wide public for Sheeler's industrial series testifies... But also frequently there is a willful awkwardness, as in Guglielmi's ironic social landscapes, or an elegant archaism, which in Jared French has an obscure but fundamentally ethical source. However, the chill of exact delineation is not necessarily harsh. There is often a tenderness of the surgeon's capable hand, an icy affection acquired from a complete knowledge of the subject."

In addition to Hopper and Sheeler the contemporary artists shown in the exhibition are:

Peter Blume, GAYLORDSVILLE, CONNECTICUT
John Atherton, RIDGEFIELD, CONNECTICUT
Ivan Le Lorraine Albright, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
Zsissly, WARRENVILLE, ILLINOIS
Lawrence Kupferman, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
Fred Papsdorf, DETROIT, MICHIGAN
Ben Shahn, HIGHTSTOWN, NEW JERSEY
Andrew Wyeth, CHADD'S FORD, PENNSYLVANIA
Clarence Holbrook Carter, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
Audrey Buller, LITTLE COMPTON, RHODE ISLAND
Patsy Santo, BENNINGTON, VERMONT
Z. Vanessa Helder, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
Patrick J. Sullivan, WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA

NEW YORK CITY:

Paul Cadmus
Ferdinand Cartier
Jared French
Louis Guglielmi
Hananiah Harari
Louis Lozowick
Charles Rain
Miklos Suba
Stow Wengenroth

In U. S. Army:

Peter Hurd, SAN PATRICIO, NEW MEXICO
Edmund Lewandowski, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN
Theodore Lux, NEW YORK CITY
H. D. Rothschild, NEW YORK CITY.