

THE GALLERY OF

# EVERYTHING

## THE ART OF JANET SOBEL



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# EVERYTHING

In support of the people in Ukraine, The Gallery of **Everything** presents an installation of paintings and drawings by Janet Sobel.

Born in Ukraine in 1893, **Janet Sobel** was a self-taught painter, whose figurative and abstract art was championed by Sidney Janis, Peggy Guggenheim and William Rubin. Today Sobel is widely acknowledged as the real pioneer of all-over drip paintings.

Recent exhibitions include *Abstract Expressionism* at the Royal Academy, London (2016), *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (2017), and *Women in Abstraction* at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2021).

The Gallery of **Everything** will donate 25% of profits from the exhibition to UNHCR and other charities which support Ukrainian civilians and refugees. A publication about the artist is also available for £20, which will also be donated to charity.

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Born in 1893, **Janet Sobel** is one of the great unsung heroines of 20th century art. Her idiosyncratic and shape-shifting aesthetic was championed by collector Peggy Guggenheim, critic Clement Greenberg and William Rubin, director of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

**Sobel's** self-taught practice began humble circumstances in the late 1930s when, encouraged by her art student son, this Ukrainian immigrant began to sketch memories of her Jewish upbringing in Eastern Europe. These early works, reminiscent of Marc Chagall, delighted friends and family with their swirling faces and bright colouration.

The work from this period revealed an instinctive certainty of colour, shape and form. It spoke not just of **Sobel's** past, but of her identity in the new world. It also brought her to the attention of legendary gallerist and curator Sidney Janis, who included a painting by **Sobel** in his show *American Primitive Paintings* at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1943.

**Sobel** soon evolved a particular form of abstract expressionism, which in turn led to an enthusiastic reception by the great and the good of New York's art scene. **Sobel** found herself welcoming critic Clement Greenberg, artists Max Ernst and Jackson Pollock, and even the king of the surrealists, André Breton, to the family home in Brooklyn.

**Sobel** was exhibited at Norlyst Art Gallery by Max Ernst's son Jimmy in 1944; and her inclusion in *The Women* at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery (along with Louise Bourgeois, Irene Rice Pereira and Kay Sage) led to a solo show at the same venue in 1946.

Ad Reinhardt's insiders' art map of 1945, *How to Look at Modern Art in America*, locates **Sobel** alongside Mark Tobey, Arshile Gorky and André Masson; and it is widely accepted that her invention of so-called *drip painting* - whereby paint is dribbled and splattered across the canvas - was unashamedly borrowed by Jackson Pollock and revolutionised his trajectory.

Yet **Sobel** was not cut from the same cloth as her peers. She moved to New Jersey, stopped creating work and slipped out of the spotlight. Despite her stellar ascent, the uninformed denigrated her as a *primitive painter*, and worse still, a *housewife*. Even William Rubin's support and patronage, acquiring paintings for the Museum of Modern Art, were not enough for a society fixated on the art-educated Caucasian male gaze.

**Sobel** died in 1968; and it would be almost 50 years before her work was again singled out for its influence and innovation. Today her paintings and drawings are highly sought after and regularly included in exhibitions on female art, modernism and twentieth century abstraction, with advocates ranging from Lynne Cooke, chief curator of the National Gallery at the Smithsonian, to Alice Walton, founder of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

Janet **Sobel's** monumental painting, *The Milky Way*, is currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

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## Quotations

*I only paint what I feel.*

Janet Sobel

*Janet Sobel will be eventually known as the most important surrealist painter in this country.*

Sidney Janis, Gallerist and Curator

*Her work is extraordinarily free from inventiveness and from self-consciousness and pretence.*

John Dewey, Philosopher

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## Solo Exhibitions

*Janet Sobel*, Puma Gallery, New York, 1944  
*Janet Sobel Paintings and Drawings*, Swain's Art Store, Plainfield, New Jersey, 1962  
*Janet Sobel: Selected Works from the Artist's Estate*, Gary Snyder Fine Art, New York, 2002  
*Janet Sobel*, D.C. Moore, New York, 2005

## Selected Exhibitions

*American Primitive Painting of Four Centuries*, Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, 1943  
*27-30 Annual*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1943-46  
*Abstract And Surrealist Art in America*, Mortimer Brandt Gallery, New York, 1944  
*Janet Sobel*, Puma Gallery, New York, 1944  
*Abstract And Surrealist Art in The United States*, Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Santa Barbara Museum; Seattle Museum of Art and others, 1944  
*Chronicle of Our Elders*, Norlyst Art Gallery, New York, 1944  
*Art of This Century: The Women*, Peggy Guggenheim, New York; San Francisco Museum of Art and others, 1945  
*Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, Pennsylvania Academy of The Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1945  
*The Women*, Art of This Century, New York, 1945  
*Janet Sobel*, Art of This Century, New York, 1946  
*Recent Acquisitions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970  
*American Women Artists Part I: 20th Century Pioneers*, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, 1984  
*Peggy Guggenheim's Other Legacy*, Peggy Guggenheim, Venice; Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York, 1987/88  
*Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions*, Whitney Museum of Art At Phillip Morris, New York and others, 1989/90  
*Art of The Forties*, Moma, New York, 1991  
*Artist's Choice: Elizabeth Murrar: Modern Women*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1995  
*Vital Forms: American Art and Design in The Atomic Age, 1940-1960*, Brooklyn Museum of Art and others, 2002  
*Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning and American Art, 1940-1976*, Jewish Museum, New York, 2008  
*Approaching Abstraction*, American Folk Art Museum, New York, 2010  
*In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women in Mexico And The United States*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 2012  
*Abstract Expressionism*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2016; Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 2017  
*The Museum of Everything #6*, Kunsthall Rotterdam, Rotterdam, 2016  
*Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction*, Moma, New York, 2017  
*Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 2018; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 2018; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2018/19  
*The Museum of Everything #7*, Museum of Old And New Art, Tasmania, 2017/18  
*Women in Abstraction*, Le Centre Pompidou, 2021; Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 2021/22

## Selected Collections

American Folk Art Museum, New York  
 Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville  
 Hirshhorn Museum And Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles  
 The Menil Collection, Texas  
 Museum of Modern Art, New York  
 Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, Philadelphia  
 San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego  
 The Museum of **Everything**, London  
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

## Bibliography

*Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, Sidney Janis, Arno Press, New York, 1944  
*Janet Sobel*, John Dewey, Puma Gallery, New York, 1944  
*Paintings by Janet Sobel*, Sidney Janis, 1944  
*Art and Culture*, Clement Greenberg, Boston, Beacon, 1947  
*Modern Art Looks Ahead*, Fernando Puma, Beechhurst Press, New York, 1947  
*Confessions of an Art Addict*, Peggy Guggenheim, Hopewell, Echo Press, 1960  
*Out of This Century Confessions of an Art Addict*, Peggy Guggenheim, New York, Universe Books, 1979  
*Originals American Women Artists*, Eleanor Munroe, Da Capo Press, New York, 1979  
*Jackson Pollock*, Elizabeth Frank, New York, Abbeville Press, 1983  
*Peggy Guggenheim Collection: Venice*, Angelica Zander Rudenstein, Abrams, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 1985  
*Peggy – The Wayward Guggenheim*, Jacquelin Bograd Weld, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1986  
*Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimension; An Introduction to Small Scale Painterly Abstraction in America, 1940-1965*, Jeffrey Wechsler, Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, 1989  
*Art of the Forties*, Riva Castleman, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1991  
*Abstract Expressionism Other Politics*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997  
*Art of This Century: The Women*, Siobhan M. Conaty, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 1997  
*Janet Sobel*, American National Biography, Deborah A. Goldberg, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999  
*Art in Review: Janet Sobel*, Roberta Smith, New York Times, 2002  
*Northwest Mythologies: The Interactions of Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan and Guy Anderson, Tacoma*, University of Washington Press, 2003  
*Eyesight Alone*, Caroline Jones, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2003  
*Inside Out: Selected Works by Janet Sobel*, Janet Sobel and Gail Levin, Gary Snyder Fine Art, New York, 2003  
*Janet Sobel: Primitivist, Surrealist, and Abstract Expressionist*, Gail Levin, Woman's Art Journal 26, no.1, 2005  
*The Museum of Everything #7*, The Museum of Everything, UK, 2018



THE GALLERY OF

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*untitled (c 1944)*  
gouache on paper  
35.6 x 20.9 cm  
14 x 8 1/4 "



*untitled (c 1941)*  
gouache on paper  
29 x 22 cm  
11 3/8 x 8 5/8"



*untitled (c 1942)*  
gouache on cardboard  
29.5 x 14 cm  
11 5/8 x 5 1/2"



*untitled (c 1942)*  
gouache on board  
30.8 x 22.9 cm  
12 1/8 x 9"



*untitled (c 1942)*  
gouache on board  
22.5 x 30 cm  
8 7/8 x 11 3/4"

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The Gallery of **Everything** is a platform for alternative, neurodiverse and non-academic art-makers. Its roster includes contemporary and historic art brut, so-called outsider artists, and vernacular objects from the 1800s to the present day.

The gallery engages with a wide network of institutions, artists and curators to place material into major private and public collections. Proceeds support The Museum of **Everything**, a non-profit organisation and the world's only itinerant institution for artists and makers beyond the cultural mainstream.



THE MUSEUM OF **EVERYTHING**  
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The Museum of **Everything** opened in London in 2009 and has welcomed over a million visitors to its large-scale installations in Britain, Europe, Russia, America and Australia.

As the UK's leading advocate for non-academic and private art-making, the museum functions as an international exhibitor, archive and activist, collaborating with artists, curators, writers and institutions. These include Tate Modern (UK), Hayward Gallery (UK), Pinacoteca Agnelli (Italy), Kunsthal Rotterdam (Holland) and Garage (Russia).

The Museum of **Everything** is a lobbyist for the inclusion and display of all forms of *non-canonical* art. In 2013 it partnered with the 55th Venice Biennale, during which it was profiled by the BBC in Turning the Art World Inside Out. The museum is also known for its immersive installations, which it designs, curates & installs, most recently presented at Mona in Australia in 2017/18.