

them as she sees them, with gentleness and sensitivity. We know that she had strong political opinions, but they did not drive her to social realism. As Reginald Marsh painted numerous works of Coney Island, so did Bernstein, but she used the forms and activities she found there to produce colorful and happy mood paintings of summertime. We know she frequented Harlem's jazz clubs with her good friend Stuart Davis, but she did not feel the need to abstract from the scenes she saw there, as did Davis. Instead, she produced lively paintings which document some of the performances she saw.

Because of their subject matter, many of Meyerowitz's and Bernstein's etchings and paintings now have an importance to those who seek to see how New York once looked. A glimpse at the lives of these two artists helps us to understand the richness of life for New York artists during the first three quarters of this century. When seen as a whole, the works of Meyerowitz and Bernstein represent two of the most popular characteristics of American art; the style is clear and representational and only occasionally swerves to reflect contemporary stylistic trends; the subjects, in general, are sensitive and often poignant depictions of American life.

## Checklist

Unless otherwise noted, all works are from the collection of Theresa Bernstein.

## Paintings by Theresa Bernstein

- Parade* 1914, watercolor on paper; 16 x 20" (Private Collection)  
*Coney Island* 1914, watercolor on artists' board; 15½ x 21½" (Private Collection)  
*Searchlights on the Hudson* 1915, oil on canvas; 27 x 36" (Private Collection)  
*In the Elevated* 1916, oil on canvas; 30 x 40" (Private Collection)  
*The Waiting Room—Employment Office* 1917, oil on canvas; 30½ x 40"  
*New York Public Library, Interior* c. 1917-1918, oil on canvas, 24 x 20" *coll. New York HIST. Soc.*

- Victory Parade* 1918, oil on panel; 11¼ x 16"  $\odot$   
*The Girl in Green, William's Niece* c. 1920s, oil on canvas; 29 x 35½"  
*Spuyten Duyvil* 1923, oil on canvas; 28 x 35" (Private Collection)  
*Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's Reception* 1924, oil on canvas; 29¼ x 36" *coll. New York HIST. Soc.*  
*Jazz Singer—Lil Hardin* 1933, watercolor on paper; 22 x 30" (Private Collection)  
*The Lunch Counter* 1937, oil on canvas; 30½ x 40½"  
*Portuguese Synagogue* n.d., oil on canvas board; 20¾ x 31½"  
*New York Gallery* n.d., oil on canvas board; 19¾ x 23½"  
*The Verdi Requiem* n.d., oil on canvas; 30¾ x 40"  
*Portrait of William Meyerowitz* n.d., oil on canvas; 30¾ x 20 ½"

## Prints by Theresa Bernstein

- Ticket Line* 1964, monotype; 8 x 10" (Private Collection)  
*New York Brownstone* 1941, monotype; 17 x 11" (Private Collection)

## Paintings by William Meyerowitz

- Plaza Cabbies* 1920, oil on canvas board; 14 x 22" *coll. New York HIST. Soc.*  
*The Ice Man* 1928, oil on canvas board; 17¾ x 22½" *coll. New York HIST. Soc.*  
*Hellgate* 1929, oil on canvas board; 9" x 12½"  
*Trio—Concert at The New-York Historical Society* 1968, oil on canvas board; 16 x 19½"  
*The Chase* n.d., oil on canvas board; 16 x 12"  
*Midtown Manhattan Skyscraper and St. Patrick's Cathedral* n.d., oil on masonite; 15¼ x 12"  
*Portrait of Theresa Bernstein* n.d., oil on canvas; 28¾ x 20½"

## Etchings by William Meyerowitz

Unless otherwise noted, all etchings are uncolored.

- Armistice Day, Victory Parade, New York, November 11, 1918* 9" x 7"  
*Knitting Mills* 1918, 9¼ x 7"  
*The Spinners* 1918, 7" x 9"  
*Wagon Wheels* 1918, 7¼ x 9¼"  
*Street Vendors* 1918, 7" x 9"  
*Children's Park* 1918, 7¼ x 9"

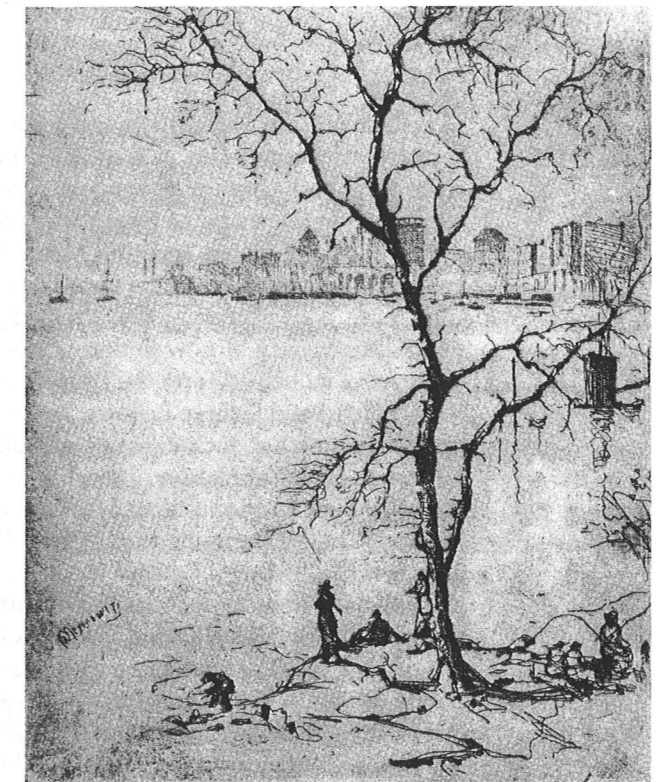
- The Philosophers* 1918, 7" x 9¼"  
*The Immigrant* 1919, 7" x 5"  
*On The Hudson* 1919, 4" x 3" (Collection of The New-York Historical Society)  
*Grant's Tomb* 1919; 2 x 3¼" (Collection of The New-York Historical Society)  
*Three Women* 1919, 7" x 9½"  
*Passing the Arch of Victory* 1919, 7¼ x 9"  $\odot$   
*Reminiscence* 1922, 5¼ x 7"  
*On The Gardens, Central Park* 1922, 7" x 9¼"  
*The Lake, Central Park* 1923, 7" x 9¼"  
*Structures of New York* 1923, 11¼ x 9¼"  
*Central Park Glade* 1925, 10¼ x 7"  
*Spring, Central Park* 1925, 7¼ x 9¼"  
*The Sherry Netherland From Central Park* 1927, 10¼ x 7"  
*Horseback Riders, Bridle Path, Central Park* 1929, 12¼ x 5¼"  
*Horseback Riders, Central Park* 1929, 7" x 9"  $\odot$   
*New York Skyscrapers* 1929, color etching, 9¼ x 7¼"  
*New York Skyscrapers* 1929, 9¼ x 7¼"  
*New York #1*, 1931; 11¼ x 9¼" (Collection of The New-York Historical Society)  
*New York Steel and Iron* 1932, sepia tone, 11¼ x 9¼"  
*Manhattan—Central Park, New York* 1932, sepia tone, 11" x 9¼"  
*Manhattan—Central Park, New York* 1932, color etching, 11" x 9¼"  $\odot$   
*The Lake in Central Park* 1933, 7" x 9¼"  
*Modern New York* 1933, 11¼ x 9¼"  $\odot$   
*Bridge Over the Bridle Path, Central Park* 1933, 7¼ x 9¼"  
*Central Park with United States Tire Building* 1933, 10¼ x 8"  
*Central Park with United States Tire Building* 1933, color etching, 10¼ x 7"  
*Hellgate Bridge* 1935, etching with color wash, 10¼ x 11¼"  
*Hellgate Bridge* 1935, 10¼ x 11¼"  
*Juilliard Quartet* 1938, color etching, 8 x 10" (Private Collection)  
*Midtown Manhattan Skyscrapers and St. Patrick's Cathedral* n.d., color etching, 9¼ x 7"  $\odot$

*Two to Sat. Sun to 5 PM*  
*Rose Rose Tom Meyerowitz*

The New-York Historical Society  
 170 Central Park West, New York, NY 10024  
 (between 76th and 77th Streets)  
 (212) 873-3400

*Prolonged to APRIL 29<sup>th</sup> 1984*

# New York Themes: Paintings and Prints by William Meyerowitz and Theresa Bernstein



The New-York Historical Society

5 October 1983 - 26 February 1984

# New York Themes: Paintings and Prints by William Meyerowitz and Theresa Bernstein

The late William Meyerowitz and his wife, Theresa Bernstein Meyerowitz, who is still painting, depicted life in New York City for over seventy years. They were very much in the center of New York's community of artists. Between winters spent on Manhattan's Upper West Side and summers at the famed artists' colony in Gloucester, Massachusetts, they crossed paths with an astonishing variety of now famous American artists.

Meyerowitz helped form the People's Art Guild with Robert Henri and George Bellows, and counted among his friends artists of such different schools as Oscar Bluemner, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Jan Matulka, Mark Rothko, and John Sloan. Bernstein knew Childe Hassam, Charles Demuth, and William Glackens in Gloucester, dined with Edward Hopper, went to Harlem's jazz clubs with Stuart Davis, attended exhibitions with Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keefe, and served on a political committee with Max Weber. Louise Nevelson took art classes from Meyerowitz and Bernstein in New York. The couple exhibited their works together with those of their good friends William and Marguerite Zorach in a "couples" exhibition, and attended Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's soirees, so popular among many of their fellow artists.

Meyerowitz was born in Russia in 1886 and immigrated to New York with his family in 1908. He studied at the National Academy of Design from 1912 to 1916, and devoted himself primarily to the art of etching. His work was first seen in a public exhibition in 1918, when

examples were included in the Brooklyn Museum's third Annual Exhibition. In 1923, he had a one-man exhibition of his black and white and color etchings at the Smithsonian Institution's United States National Museum. Meyerowitz was the etcher featured in the Fox Film Company's 1925 film called, "The Magic Needle," the first educational film about etching ever produced. Until his death in 1981, Meyerowitz's work was included regularly in group exhibitions, and he had frequent one-man shows.

Meyerowitz was immersed in classical music. While a student at the National Academy of Design, he helped support himself by singing in the chorus of the Metropolitan Opera. "My musical education was of considerable enlightenment in my understanding of the relationship between music and painting," he said. "The artist improvises with paint on canvas much the same as the pianist finds expression with the keyboard of his instrument." Perhaps because of his love for and understanding of music (which he shared with his friend Isaac Stern), Meyerowitz's works often received praise for their lyrical qualities and their careful composition.

Theresa Bernstein was born in Philadelphia and studied at the Philadelphia School of Design; she also studied at the Pennsylvania Academy with Daniel Garber, who had been a pupil of Thomas Eakins. She moved to New York with her family c. 1910, and studied with William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League. While thus schooled in the traditions of two of America's most academic and famed artists, she has always claimed that it was the practice of painting that taught her how to paint. She soon developed a confident and sensitive style of painting. In 1919, she and William were married. They lived first in the artists' studio building on West 67th Street before moving to an artists' studio building on West 74th Street. Together with William, she regularly taught private classes in painting and etching, both in New York and Gloucester. Recognition by her peers has resulted in a long list of awards and prizes.

Both Meyerowitz and Bernstein were accomplished portraitists. They frequently painted self-portraits and portraits of each other. Meyerowitz etched a series of portraits of Supreme Court Justices, including Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. Bernstein can remember paint-

ing a portrait of her husband and Stuart Davis as they sat over a game of chess in their Gloucester studio. Both husband and wife produced portraits of Professor Albert Einstein.

In their personal lives, Meyerowitz and Bernstein embraced contemporary political, economic, and religious issues with a depth of concern that makes them very much of their own time. During the Depression, Meyerowitz painted murals in Connecticut post offices as part of the Federal Arts Program. Bernstein was a member of the American Artists Congress (of which her friend Stuart Davis was national chairman in 1937), a political organization which advocated government art programs, government support for art unions, a concern for minority rights, and a boycott of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

Throughout their careers both husband and wife drew inspiration from their religious lives. Works with Jewish themes appear in both of their *oeuvres*. Judaism was not treated politically, but with a simple and

philosophical appreciation for the traditions of their faith. Meyerowitz retained ties with other artists who were Russian Jews, such as Mark Rothko, Max Weber, and William Zorach.

To what degree do the works of Meyerowitz and Bernstein reflect contemporary artistic issues? In 1913, the Armory Show caused a major sensation among New York artists and art lovers. In the following decades a number of "isms" entered the vocabulary of contemporary American artists: modernism, cubism, dadism, regionalism, social realism, expressionism, and abstract expressionism. Abstracting from nature was an important characteristic of modernist painters. Meyerowitz, who visited the Amory Show, can be described as a gentle modernist. While his early etchings display an atmospheric mood similar to the works of James Abbott McNeill Whistler (*Grant's Tomb*), he experimented with the fracturing of forms in a cubist manner in some of his New York cityscapes (*New York, No. 1*). At the same time, expressionism, the transmitting of the artists' feelings into their works without concern for the representation of actual physical forms, was of interest to him, though his works never completely abandon recognizable forms. His love of music must have contributed to his interest in expressionism. From 1940 to 1945 he taught painting and etching at the Modern School of Self-Expression in the Bronx.

Bernstein's work, on the other hand, shows no trace of any of the "isms" of her time. She developed an independent, representational style, and her love of people and their day-to-day activities determined her choice of subject matter. Certainly, her choice of ordinary New York City scenes followed within traditions established by Robert Henri and his Ashcan School (so named because this group of artists did not shy away from painting pictures of so simple—and in some people's eyes so ugly—a subject as city ash or trash cans). While some of the themes she chose to paint were commonly found within the *oeuvres* of social realists (*The Waiting Room—Employment Office*), Bernstein's style did not emphasize the harshness and injustice of life in the 1930's and 1940's (as in the works of Ben Shann) or the loneliness of city life (as did Edward Hopper) or the overcrowded raucousness of city life (as depicted by Reginald Marsh). Bernstein loves people, and paints

*The Girl in Green, William's Niece* c. 1920's, by Theresa Bernstein. Oil on canvas, 29 x 35 1/2". Collection of the artist.

