

THE GALLERY OF EVERYTHING



Press Release: Janet Sobel: I Am A Surrealist

Art Basel Paris [P08], Grand Palais, Paris
16th October to 20th October 2024

Born near Ekaterinoslav in Russia (now Dnipro in Ukraine), **Janet Sobel** (1893 - 1968) is one of the 20th century's most extraordinary talents.

After emigrating with her family to the United States in 1908, **Sobel's** self-taught practice began in her home in Brighton Beach, where she began to sketch memories of her Jewish upbringing in Eastern Europe.

The imagery revealed an instinctive certainty of 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 encompassed the canvas in an *all-over* composition, with paint spatters and boundless lines. Today, it is widely accepted that it was her version of this so-called drip painting - whereby paint is dribbled across the canvas - that was unashamedly borrowed by Jackson Pollock and went on to revolutionise his trajectory.

While **Sobel** was welcoming artist Max Ernst and surrealist André Breton to her family home in Brooklyn, she was also exhibiting at Norlyst Art Gallery with Ernst's son Jimmy, and by Ferdinand Puma at his eponymous New York space. Her inclusion in *The Women* at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery (along with Louise Bourgeois, Lee Krasner and Nell Blaine) led to a solo show in 1946 at the same illustrious venue.

Yet **Sobel** was not cut from the same cloth as her peers. In 1947 she moved with her family to New Jersey and slipped out of the spotlight. Despite her stellar ascent, art history labelled her a *primitive painter*. Even curator William Rubin's support and patronage, acquiring paintings for the Museum of Modern Art in 1968, were not enough for a society fixated on the art-educated male gaze.

Sobel died in 1968. Today her paintings and drawings are highly sought after and regularly included in exhibitions on female art and abstraction - with advocates ranging from Lynne Cooke (chief curator of the National Gallery) to Alice Walton (founder of Crystal Bridges Museum).

Sobel's painted works feature in the collections of MoMA (New York) and Centre Pompidou (Paris) amongst many others. Her achievements were most recently celebrated in *Abstract Expressionism* (2017) at Royal Academy, (London), *Outliers* (2018) at National Gallery of Art (Washington DC), *Elles Font L'Abstraction (Women in Abstraction)* (2021) at Centre Pompidou (Paris), *Action, Gesture, Paint* (2021) at Whitechapel Gallery (London) and a retrospective - *Janet Sobel: All-Over* (2024) at the Menil Collection, Houston.

At Art Basel Paris 2024, The Gallery of **Everything** presents an overview of works spanning the artist's career, including works on paper, paintings, and other material from both her classical and more experimental phases. The stand also features works owned and exhibited by Peggy Guggenheim and a sister piece to a painting acquired by the Centre Pompidou in 2023.

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Sobel's "freedom" is free-floating; nothing is being rejected, there is no ground of aesthetic conflict, and so she is not the conscious agent of her own aesthetic liberation. The result is that her work falls outside the chain of artistic inheritance; it is too original.

Natilee Harren, Artforum, 2024



Janet Sobel
untitled, c 1947
gouache on paper
45 x 30.5 cm, 17 3/4 x 12 in



Janet Sobel
Three Vases, c 1943
enamel on canvas
61 x 91.5 cm, 24 x 36 1/8 in



Janet Sobel
untitled, c 1941
gouache on board
43 x 35.5cm. 14 x 14 in

Selected Collections

American Folk Art Museum (New York)
Crystal Bridges (Arkansas)
Centre Pompidou (Paris)
Hirshhorn Museum (Washington DC)
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)

Selected Exhibitions

Janet Sobel, Puma Gallery (New York), 1944
Chronicle of Our Elders, Norlyst Art Gallery (New York), 1944
The Women, Art of This Century (New York), 1945
Janet Sobel, Art of This Century (New York), 1946
American Women Artists Part I: 20th Century Pioneers, Sidney Janis Gallery (New York), 1984
In Wonderland, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles), 2012
Abstract Expressionism, Royal Academy of Arts (London); Guggenheim (Bilbao), 2016/17
Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction, MoMA (New York), 2017
Outliers and American Vanguard Art, National Gallery of Art (Washington DC); High Museum of Art (Atlanta); LACMA (Los Angeles), 2018/19
Women in Abstraction, Centre Pompidou (Paris); Guggenheim (Bilbao), 2021/22
Action, Gesture, Paint, 1940-70, Whitechapel Gallery (London), 2023
Janet Sobel All Over, The Menil Collection (Houston), 2024