

Arthur Dove | Arthur Dove: Watercolors

May 13 through June 23, 2006

Benefit Reception at Alexandre Gallery on Wednesday, May 24th, 5:30 to 7:30pm

Traveling to the Heckscher Museum of Art July 11 through September 3, 2006

The gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of Arthur Dove (1880—1946) watercolors. Conceived as a jewel-like survey of the best available examples of this seldom seen and still lesser understood aspect of Dove's work, the show will include works from 1930, the year in which he both took up the medium in earnest and made it an intrinsic aspect of his artistic endeavor, through the mid-1940s, when failing health slowed his output, but not his creative spirit and stylistic innovation. The show will represent the largest and most comprehensive gathering of these drawings to date.

Including more than fifty-five watercolors, the full range and scope of Dove's interests and achievement will be on view. All works will be borrowed from either private collections or museums, including The Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University (Dove's alma mater), the Heckscher Museum of Art (which includes the recently founded Newsday Center for Dove/Torr Studies), and The Phillips Collection (which holds the largest single collection of Dove's work). Late sketchbook pages will be represented by The Arkansas Arts Center and The McNay Art Museum, both of which were among a handful of institutions to receive gifts from the Dove family. Also included will be a select group of works never before seen in public on loan from the Dove Estate.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an eighty page illustrated catalogue with texts by Debra Bricker Balken and Anne Cohen DePietro. Balken, a leading scholar of the first generation American modernists, was the lead curator of the 1997—98 Dove retrospective, which traveled to the Whitney Museum, among other venues. DePietro is founding Project Director of the Dove/Torr Study Center at the Heckscher Museum, to where the exhibition will travel in July.

Small in scale (usually measuring 5 x 7 inches, and later 3 x 4 or 4 x 5 inches), Dove's watercolors achieve radiance and use the translucent color to describe conditions of light and space. Common motifs include the sea, sun, wind, and the many rhythms and cycles of nature. Often using the fluid black line of a fountain pen to delineate form within the color, Dove's imagery moves increasingly toward abstraction in the late 1930s and early 40s. Usually intended as studies for larger paintings, it is through these watercolors on paper that Dove first forged his most inventive and far-reaching expression.

Balken writes, “. . . watercolor became (beginning in 1930) a routine staple of his output. In fact, the medium represented a new formal challenge for Dove, its temporal dimension a metaphoric match for the mutable characteristics of nature.” She continues, “his formal language alternated between organic and quasi-geometric forms; nature now (after 1938) became construed as a dynamic yet wholly unknowable and mysterious structure.”

Even at his most abstract, however, Dove's subjects and imagery are rooted in direct observation and deep understanding of the natural world. DePietro writes, “Throughout his life, even as he moved steadily toward abstraction, his work retained discernable elements that eloquently convey the spirit and geography of the rural communities in which he lived.”

Arthur Garfield Dove was born in 1880 in Geneva, New York, the son a successful contractor and builder. After graduating Cornell University in 1903, Dove defied his father and set-off for New York where he briefly pursued a career as a commercial illustrator to support his art. Following a trip to Europe to visit Alfred Maurer, Dove is credited as the first American—perhaps first international—artist to create wholly abstract paintings (1910—11). After living in then rural communities (including Westport and Noroton, Connecticut) around New York City in the teens and early 1920s, Dove and his companion (later to be his second wife) Helen Torr, purchased a 42 yawl in 1922. They made their home on this boat for five years before settling in Halesite on the North Shore of Long Island. In 1933 Dove and Torr returned to Dove's childhood home of Geneva to settle his parents' estate. Five years later, in 1938, they returned to Long Island Sound and made their final home in a cottage on a tidal inlet in Centerport, New York (now the Dove/Torr Cottage).

During his life, Dove exhibited his work regularly at the galleries of his dealer and patron Alfred Stieglitz. He is considered a core member of the “Stieglitz Group,” which includes artists such as Marsden Hartley, John Marin and Georgia O’Keeffe. Following Stieglitz’ death, also in 1946, Dove’s Estate was represented by Edith Halpert’s The Downtown Gallery, and then later by Terry Dintenfuss. Major traveling exhibitions of Dove’s work were organized in 1974 by Barbara Haskell (then at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), and in 1997 by Debra Balken (for the Addison Gallery of American Art).

In 1998 Dove and Torr’s final home was acquired by the Heckscher Museum of Art with assistance of the Times-Mirror corporation and the New York State Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. This site is being restored to its condition at the time that Dove and Torr lived there together (1938 – 1946). The Newsday Center for Dove/Torr Studies is a founding member of Historic Artists’ Homes and Studios, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 2002 the cottage was named to Save America’s Treasures, a White House Millennium Council initiative focused on “protecting America’s threatened cultural treasures.” Charles C. Eldridge, former director of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, writes of the site, “I can think of few properties with as singular an importance for the rich history of modern art in America.”

On Wednesday, May 24 (5:30 to 7:30 pm), Alexandre Gallery will host a benefit reception for the Heckscher’s Dove/Torr Cottage and Study Center. Both Debra Balken and Anne DePietro will be present and make brief presentations on Dove’s work and life.