

Press contacts: Anne Scher
or Alex Wittenberg
212.423.3271 or pressoffice@thejm.org

PRESS PREVIEW
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE SNOWY DAY AND THE ART OF EZRA JACK KEATS

Opens at The Jewish Museum September 9th

**First Major U.S. Exhibition
Pays Tribute to Award-Winning Author and Illustrator**

**Exhibition Marks 50th Anniversary of “The Snowy Day”
Which Paved the Way for Multiracial Representation
in American Children’s Literature**

New York, NY – *The Snowy Day and the Art of Ezra Jack Keats*, the first major United States exhibition to pay tribute to award-winning author and illustrator Ezra Jack Keats (1916-1983), whose beloved children’s books include *Whistle for Willie* (1964), *Peter’s Chair* (1967), and *The Snowy Day* (1962), opens at The Jewish Museum on September 9, 2011 and remains on view through January 29, 2012. Published at the height of the American civil-rights movement and winner of the prestigious Caldecott Medal, *The Snowy Day* became a milestone, featuring the first African-American protagonist in a full-color picture book. *The Snowy Day* went on to inspire generations of readers, and paved the way for multiracial representation in American children’s literature. Also pioneering were the dilapidated urban settings of Keats’s stories. Picture books had rarely featured such gritty landscapes before.

The exhibition features over 80 original works from preliminary sketches and dummy books, to final paintings and collages for the artist’s most popular books. Also on view are examples of Keats’s most introspective but less-known output inspired by Asian art and haiku poetry, as well as documentary material and photographs. The Jewish Museum exhibition is part of a wide-scale celebration of the 50th anniversary of the publication of *The Snowy Day*.

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Following its New York City showing at The Jewish Museum, *The Snowy Day and the Art of Ezra Jack Keats* will travel to the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, Amherst, MA (June 26-October 14, 2012); the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA (November 15, 2012-February 24, 2013); and the Akron Art Museum (March-June 2013).

To coincide with this exhibit, Penguin Young Readers Group has published *The Snowy Day: 50th Anniversary Special Edition* (Viking Children's Books; on sale August 18, 2011; \$19.99; Ages 5-8), an oversized edition of the beloved classic featuring eight pages of bonus material that include photographs of Ezra Jack Keats and some of Keats' early sketches for the book.

Ezra Jack Keats was born Jacob (Jack) Ezra Katz in Brooklyn in 1916. His parents were Eastern European Jewish immigrants and very poor. Although he briefly studied painting in Paris on the GI Bill after serving in World War II, Keats was primarily self-taught. He drew upon memories of growing up in East New York, one of the most deprived neighborhoods of New York City. Keats's experience of anti-Semitism and poverty in his youth gave him a lifelong sympathy for others who suffered prejudice and want. His work transcends the personal and reflects the universal concerns of children.

Keats used lush color in his paintings and collages and strove for simplicity in his texts. He was often more intent on capturing a mood than developing a plot. His preferred format was the horizontal double-page spread, which freed him to alternate close-up scenes with panoramic views. By the end of his life in 1983, he had illustrated over eighty books, most of them for children, twenty-two of which he also authored.

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The Snowy Day and the Art of Ezra Jack Keats explores Keats's multifaceted oeuvre in six sections preceded by an introduction and followed by an epilogue.

The introductory gallery presents a selection of works that can be construed as self-portraits of the artist. Throughout his career Keats often cast himself in his work posing as different characters, from the immigrant violinist János in *Penny Tunes and Princesses* (1972) to the exuberant junkman Barney in *Louie's Search* (1980).

"Coming of Age in Brooklyn" features seminal works inspired by memories of Keats's tenement childhood, including a selection of illustrations for *Apt. 3* (1971) showcasing some of his most painterly spreads. Also on view are final drawings for *Dreams* (1974), where color travels out of the Brooklyn windows and into the night as the tenement's inhabitants begin to dream and darkness turns into incandescence. Keats's combination of paint and marbled paper reaches a pinnacle in these illustrations. The artist's lengthy preoccupation with Louie, protagonist of some of Keats's most autobiographic stories, is examined in this section through a series of illustrations for *Louie* (1975), *The Trip* (1978), *Louie's Search* (1980), and *Regards to the Man in the Moon* (1981).

In "Bringing the Background to the Foreground," the artist's early identification with the downtrodden is reflected in his 1934 award-winning painting, *Shantytown*. Created by young Keats during the Depression, it is being shown along with other socially committed works. In order to express the significance of *The Snowy Day* within the history of American children's literature, an exhibition case is devoted to a brief survey of African-American representation in children's books throughout the 20th century.

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Illustrations for *My Dog is Lost!* (1960), coauthored by Keats and Pat Cherr, about a Puerto Rican boy named Juanito, are also on display. This is Keats's first attempt to correct the problems of representation in children's literature at the time and cast a minority child as protagonist. This pioneering move likely paved the way for his creation of Peter of *The Snowy Day* fame.

"The Snowy Day" section presents a wide selection of illustrations for the 1962 landmark book as well as for *Whistle for Willie* (1964) and *Peter's Chair* (1967) featuring Peter as he grows up. *The Snowy Day's* critical reception and debate sparked by its publication is also examined.

"Peter's Neighborhood" includes a rich selection of images for three of Keats's greatly loved books: *A Letter to Amy* (1968), *Hi Cat!* (1970) and *Pet Show!* (1972), featuring Peter on his way to becoming a teenage boy, as well as his friend Archie, who takes on more of a central role as Peter grows older. The selected illustrations are filled with Keats's signature elements – abandoned old doors, overflowing garbage cans, trashed umbrellas, and graffitied walls; the background elements the artist was committed to bringing to the foreground in his books. A reading room for visitors of all ages inspired by Peter's neighborhood and Brooklyn tenement brownstone stoops complements this section.

Keats's most introspective work is the focus of the "Spirituality, Nature, and Asian Art" section. On display are illustrations for *In a Spring Garden* (1965), an anthology of haiku poems, with silhouetted animals set against skies of marbled paper; and his sumptuous art for *Over the Meadow* (1971), combining watercolor and collage. A preparatory drawing for *The Giant Turnip*, a Russian folktale that Keats chose to illustrate as a Japanese story, is also on view. The book was nearing completion at the time of the artist's death in 1983.

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In “Keats at Work,” Keats’s actual palette, brushes, materials used in his collages, and samples of marbled paper he created for his illustrations are displayed. In addition, visitors can view a film in which the artist demonstrates the technique of creating marbled paper, and other illustrators and authors who knew Keats comment on his wide-ranging influence.

The exhibition ends with concluding illustrations for four Louie books first examined at the beginning of the show. These books, done by Keats late in life, bring him back full circle to where it all began: his old Brooklyn neighborhood. The four spreads provide a moving epilogue to the show, including the last illustration from *Regards to the Man in the Moon* (1981), published two years before Keats’s death, the first and only known instance in which he cast himself as an artist, brush in hand.

The exhibition has been organized by Claudia Nahson, Curator at The Jewish Museum. The exhibition installation design was created by Barbara Suhr. Kris Stone designed the reading room and a theatrical backdrop.

Exhibition Catalogue

In conjunction with the exhibition The Jewish Museum and Yale University Press are co-publishing *The Snowy Day and the Art of Ezra Jack Keats*. The 104-page catalogue includes 80 color and 3 black-and-white illustrations, essays by Claudia Nahson and Maurice Berger, and an illustrated timeline by Emily Casden and Ms. Nahson. The hardcover book will be available worldwide and at The Jewish Museum’s Cooper Shop for \$27.50.

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Sponsorship

The Snowy Day and The Art of Ezra Jack Keats is organized by The Jewish Museum from the collection of the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, The University of Southern Mississippi. The exhibition is funded through a generous grant from the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Joseph Alexander Foundation, the Alfred J. Grunebaum Memorial Fund, and the Winnick Family Foundation.

Related Programs

On Monday, October 17 at 11:30 am, a lecture, **In Focus: Ezra Jack Keats**, will be given by Caldecott Award winning illustrator **Jerry Pinkney**, sharing his reflections on Ezra Jack Keats's work and the role of diversity in children's literature. Tickets: \$15 general public/ \$12 students & over 65/ \$10 Jewish Museum members. Tickets: 212.423.3337 or www.thejewishmuseum.org

On Sunday, November 13 from noon to 4 pm, The Jewish Museum will present **Ezra Jack Keats Family Day**, a fun-filled afternoon in celebration of the author and illustrator of *The Snowy Day*, *Whistle for Willie* and other storybook favorites. Families will enjoy mural-making and storytelling by drama and visual arts students from the **Harlem School for the Arts**, as well as live music, art activities and exploring the exhibition with special gallery hunts. Ages 4 and up. Free with Museum admission.

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About The Jewish Museum

Widely admired for its exhibitions and collections that inspire people of all backgrounds, The Jewish Museum is one of the world's preeminent institutions devoted to exploring the intersection of art and Jewish culture from ancient to modern times. The Jewish Museum was established in 1904, when Judge Mayer Sulzberger donated 26 ceremonial art objects to The Jewish Theological Seminary of America as the core of a museum collection. Today, the Museum maintains a collection of 26,000 objects – paintings, sculpture, works on paper, photographs, archaeological artifacts, ceremonial objects, and broadcast media. The collection is among the three largest of its kind in the world and is distinguished by its breadth and quality. It is showcased in the vibrant, two-floor permanent exhibition, *Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey*, examining the Jewish experience as it has evolved from antiquity to the present. The Jewish Museum organizes a diverse schedule of internationally acclaimed and award-winning temporary exhibitions as well as broad-based programs for families, adults, and school groups.

General Information:

The Jewish Museum is located at 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, New York City. Museum hours are Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, 11am to 5:45pm; Thursday, 11am to 8pm; and Friday, 11am to 4pm. Museum admission is \$12.00 for adults, \$10.00 for senior citizens, \$7.50 for students, free for children under 12 and Jewish Museum members. Admission is free on Saturdays. For information on The Jewish Museum, the public may call 212.423.3200 or visit the website at <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org>.

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