

Masterpieces & Curiosities: Nicole Eisenman's Seder **Opens March 13, 2015**

Fourth Offering in Exhibition Series Exploring Works from the Jewish Museum

New York, NY – Showcasing a painting commissioned by the Jewish Museum in 2010, *Masterpieces & Curiosities: Nicole Eisenman's Seder* continues a series of exhibitions focused on individual works in the Museum's world-renowned collection. On view from March 13 to August 9, 2015, this exhibition presents Eisenman's painting *Seder* with over 25 seldom seen yet important portraits by such artists as Jules Pascin, Theresa Bernstein, Raphael and Moses Soyer, and Edouard Vuillard that help illuminate her painterly approach and chosen subject. The diverse breadth of techniques and styles used in these works will demonstrate how Eisenman looks to the past as inspiration for her unique narratives of 21st century life. Also included is a selection of Passover Seder plates from the Museum's collection, ranging from the 18th to 21st centuries.

The fourth show in the *Masterpieces & Curiosities* series, *Nicole Eisenman's Seder* differs from previous installations. Rather than analyze the content and subjects of the painting, the exhibition will look at the connections between this contemporary work and the portraits. These paintings represent different time periods, places, and styles, while also revealing the continuous exploration and evolution of Jewish identity. They detail the political and social history of the past hundred years through the portrayal of individuals ranging from the aristocrat to the anonymous burgher to the artist. Through this varied display of artworks in dialogue, *Seder* can be seen as responding to and advancing a storied visual and material tradition of Jewish culture.

In Nicole Eisenman's *Seder*, a crowd has convened for the traditional Passover meal. Open bottles of wine and half eaten food suggest pleasure and enjoyment as this group of dinner guests drink and socialize. However, a closer glance at the faces reveals a range of feelings in the room. Some people appear engaged and thoughtful while others look withdrawn or stare off into the distance. The viewer, suggested by the oversized, cartoon-like hands, sits at the head of the table, breaking matzah during the reading of the Haggadah.

The selection of portraits will be hung salon-style, emphasizing the depth and complexity of the Museum's collection. Works include Leon Kossoff's textural portrait of his mother; Leland Bell's anonymous *Seated Nude*; Theresa Bernstein's direct, confident young self-portrait; and Raphael Soyer's more ambivalent depiction of an aging self. Mingled with these straightforward portraits are some that test the limits of the category: Hyman Bloom's vividly colored, powerful *Female Corpse*, painted in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust as a metaphor for the artist's grief and his reflections on mortality. Also on view will be

depictions of families at Passover Seders by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim and self-taught artist Meichel Pressman.

Nicole Eisenman will also create two Seder plates for the exhibition, inspired by plates from the 18th and 19th centuries. Like Eisenman's painting, these plates will depict people attending a Seder, one from the unique perspective of above the table instead of at eye level. A selection of Seder plates from the Museum's collection will be on display, along with two Miriam cups, representing a recent feminist addition to the Seder, and three photographs of Seders by Arnold Eagle. Selected Seder plates, ranging from a 19th century example manufactured by the celebrated Hungarian porcelain company Herend to a contemporary plate by Israeli artists Johnathan Hopp and Sarah Auslander, feature vignettes of traditional Passover rituals.

Throughout her career, Nicole Eisenman has created canvases rich with art historical references. She layers each composition with figures and scenes influenced by the opulent Impressionist and Post-Impressionist luncheon scenes of Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Pierre Bonnard with a hint of Norman Rockwell's populist Thanksgiving tableau, *Freedom from Want*. Friends and family often appear in Eisenman's work and she frequently incorporates her own self-portrait in her paintings. Eisenman depicts the familiar and critiques contemporary culture with macabre motifs, imagined characters, and dark humor. Themes of love, anxiety, desire, and loneliness reoccur in her work as she aims to capture both a physical and emotional portrait of the people in her paintings.

Nicole Eisenman was born in Verdun, France, and received her bachelor's degree in fine arts from the Rhode Island School of Design. In 2005 she and A. L. Steiner cofounded Ridykeulous, an artist-run collective that focuses primarily on queer and feminist art and produces exhibitions, performances, and publications. Eisenman was awarded the Carnegie Prize in 2013. She lives and works in New York.

Over the course of the seven exhibitions in the *Masterpieces & Curiosities* series, which runs from 2013 to 2017, the Jewish Museum's curators are exploring objects that highlight the breadth and diversity of the collection, ranging from an iconic Alfred Stieglitz photograph, to a Moroccan wedding costume. These intimate exhibitions provide new insights into works from the Museum's collection – contextualizing, examining, and rethinking the piece on view by surrounding it with other artworks, documents, and source materials.

The *Masterpieces & Curiosities* series was organized by Jens Hoffmann, Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Public Programs, and coordinated by Daniel S. Palmer, Leon Levy Assistant Curator. *Masterpieces & Curiosities: Nicole Eisenman's Seder* is curated by Joanna Montoya Robotham, Neubauer Family Foundation Assistant Curator.

Related Program

On Thursday, March 26 at 6:30pm, Nicole Eisenman will speak with Joanna Montoya Robotham about *Seder*. This program is part of **Writers**



and Artists Respond, a series of thought-provoking discussions and performances led by artists, musicians, and writers in the Museum's exhibition galleries. The discussion is free with Pay-What-You-Wish Admission; RSVP Recommended.

About The Jewish Museum

Located on Museum Mile at Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street, the Jewish Museum is one of the world's preeminent institutions devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, offering intellectually engaging and educational exhibitions and programs for people of all ages and backgrounds. The Museum was established in 1904, when Judge Mayer Sulzberger donated 26 ceremonial objects to The Jewish Theological Seminary as the core of a museum collection. Today, the Museum maintains a collection of over 30,000 works of art, artifacts, and broadcast media reflecting global Jewish identity, and presents a diverse schedule of internationally acclaimed temporary exhibitions.

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 \$15.00 for adults, \$12.00 for senior citizens, \$7.50 for students, free for visitors 18 and under and Jewish Museum members. Admission is Pay What You Wish on Thursdays from 5pm to 8pm and free on Saturdays. For information on the Jewish Museum, the public may call 212.423.3200 or visit the website at www.thejewishmuseum.org.

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