

How do  
paintings tell  
stories  
about people  
and places?



Paintings of people and places—portraits, scenes of everyday life, and landscapes—provide a lens to explore and understand the forces that shape individual and collective identity. Some works of art depict a beloved family member engaged in an ordinary task, while others represent a notable figure in a surprising way. Some paintings speak to the comfort of home, while others picture people's lives outside their community. Despite differing geographical locations and time periods, images of people and places, whether known or imagined, can resonate deeply with the viewer.

Many of the artists whose paintings are on view expand the conventions of portraiture. These works move beyond a representational likeness to convey emotional depth and cultural meaning. Historical conditions and the experience of new beginnings are common in works by Jewish artists. Clothing, facial expressions, language, locations, models, objects, style, and other details create compelling narratives about the artists or the individuals and places they chose to portray.

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### Reuven Rubin

Born in 1893, Galați, Romania, died in 1974, Tel Aviv

#### Goldfish Vendor, 1928

Oil on canvas

Gift of Kitty and Harold J. Ruttenberg, 1985-227

Reuven Rubin depicts a fisherman in profile, monumentally constrained within the frame and set against a sun-drenched landscape. Rubin attended the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem before World War I, but left to study and exhibit in Paris and New York, returning to British-Mandate Palestine after the war. On his return, Rubin brought with him the stylistic influences of Expressionism, Henri Rousseau (1844–1910), and Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920), influences seen here in the luminous, expressive colors and flattened forms. Rubin combined modernism with local reference, endeavoring to find an artistic style in keeping with his surroundings. The *Goldfish Vendor* evokes this search and depicts the local Arab fisherman as a model of vitality, deeply connected to his environment.



### John Graham

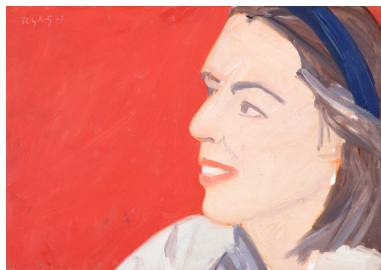
Born in 1886, Kiev, Russian Empire (now Kyiv, Ukraine), died in 1961, London

#### Elinor Graham, 1943

Oil on canvas

Gift of The Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation, 2018-36

John Graham was born Ivan Gratianovitch Dombrowsky in the Russian Empire. After the Russian Revolution, he immigrated in 1920 to New York and changed his name in 1927 after becoming a citizen. Graham studied at the Art Students League, working in a manner that combined classical and modern styles. Graham's marriage to Elinor Graham (née Gibson) ended in 1934. Elinor is painted in a brightly lit three-quarter view, which emphasizes the planes of her face. Deep shadow sharpens the lines of the painting, while alternating patches of light and dark create dramatic tension.



## Alex Katz

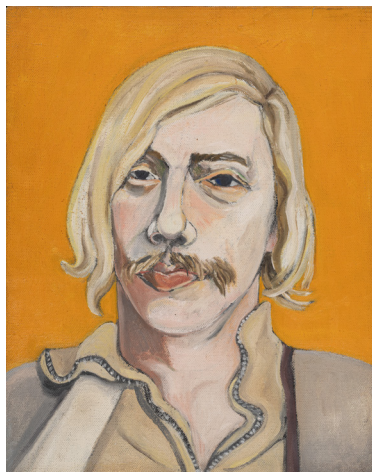
Born in 1927, Brooklyn

### Red Smile (Study), 1963

Oil on masonite

Gift of the Schupf Family, 1993-2

Alex Katz, born in Brooklyn to a Jewish family from Odessa (Ukraine), frequently portrays his friends, family members, and colleagues. *The Red Smile*, a study for a large painting now in the Whitney Museum of American Art collection, is one of at least 250 depictions the artist made of his wife, Ada del Moro (born in 1928). Katz traced the changing features of his muse over time—showing Ada as a woman in her twenties, a mother with child, an elderly woman—indicating his devotion to his wife and to portraiture as a genre. Here Ada is young and beautiful in a painting executed not long after they married in 1958. Katz's uniform tones and minimal detail create an instantly recognizable style based on direct observation and influenced by film and advertising. He uses Pop art idioms such as graphic simplicity and intense color but adapts the movement's focus, typically on surface and repetition, to a deeply personal theme.



NEW

## Ethel Fisher

Born in 1923, Galveston, Texas, died in 2017, Los Angeles

### Paul Thek in New York, 1967

Oil on canvas

Gift of Margaret Fisher, 2022-44

Ethel Fisher painted her friend and fellow artist Paul Thek (1933–1988), known at the time of this portrait for wax sculptures and installations that pushed the boundaries of art and the comfort of viewers. Fisher and Thek became close while living in Miami in the 1940s, after which she depicted her friend numerous times. In this bright and lively portrait, Fisher captures his facial expression, rife with the contrary emotions of amusement and discernment. Thek died during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. This painting records his vitality and artistic career at its height.



**Abshalom Jac Lahav**

Born in 1977, Jerusalem

**Anne Frank, 2007, from the 48 Jews series**

Oil on canvas

Purchase: Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee Fund, 2008-214

One aspect of portraiture, whether in art, publicity, or politics, concerns the dissemination of a person's image, transformed by media into that of a celebrity. Abshalom Jac Lahav critically considers the concept of fame as universal and superficial, using both traditional techniques and photographs to create his portraits.

Lahav obscures the paradigms typically invoked by the image of Anne Frank: a victim, a Jew, a female, and an appeal to conscience and to consciousness. Frank, the German-born Jewish girl whose diary is one of the world's best-known books, is both a tragic figure and a celebrity. In the portrait, Lahav paints Frank as a blur, questioning the effects of collective historical memory.

▶ 600



**Moritz Daniel Oppenheim**

Born in 1800, Hanau, Prussia  
(now in Germany), died in 1882, Frankfurt

**Self-Portrait, 1814-16**

Oil on canvas

Purchase: Anonymous Gift in memory of Curtis Hereid; Esther Leah Ritz Bequest; Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee Fund; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. George Jaffin, by exchange; and Abraham Aaroni and Ruth Taub Bequests, 2008-137

Here a youthful Moritz Daniel Oppenheim appears in his studio, proudly holding his palette and maulstick and surrounded by objects of art that proclaim his vocation as a painter. He sports a tailcoat, high-waisted breeches, and a cravat tied around his neck, identifying him as an assimilated and fashionable member of German society.

Oppenheim was born into an orthodox Jewish family in the ghetto of Hanau in Hesse. The first German Jew to receive a formal classical education in the visual arts, he studied in Munich, Paris, and Rome. His life and work as a celebrated portraitist and art adviser show how German Jews adapted to mainstream culture, transitioning from traditional life to modernity. Sixty-three works by Oppenheim are in the Jewish Museum collection, including paintings, drawings, and prints documenting Jewish life in Germany.

▶ 601



NEW

## Alex Bradley Cohen

Born in 1989, Chicago

### Parents #4, 2022

Acrylic on canvas

Purchase: Milton and Miriam Handler  
Endowment Fund, 2023-76

Alex Bradley Cohen's paintings are windows into the artist's everyday life. In this picture, the kitchen table—frequently the site of family gatherings—connects to the outdoors. In the middle ground, the artist's father checks his cell phone, a gate to the wider world, while his mother waves. The picture is also a self-portrait, with the artist shown playing basketball alone. During the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–23), the home was a place of intense family interaction and increasingly the center of professional and social life—and it was a time when Cohen lived in the same apartment building as his parents. The artist explains that “staying home, and grounding myself and my work in one place, has helped me garner a sense of intimacy and personal perspective.” The story of family as a source of connection and identity is a frequent theme found in works from the Jewish Museum collection.

## Chantal Joffe

Born in 1969, Saint Albans, Vermont

### Hannah, Gertrude, Alice, Betty, Nadine, Golda, Susan, Claude, Nancy, Grace, Diane... series

Chantal Joffe uses portraiture to affirm the cultural contributions of twentieth-century Jewish women. The artist references existing photography to find the gesture, expression, or setting that best illustrates the significance of her subjects. She celebrates the feminine and focuses on a long and diverse history of heroines, idols, and icons. Joffe's series of portraits of notable Jewish women may have been inspired by the artist Andy Warhol's *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century* (1980), a print portfolio in the Jewish Museum collection.





### **Chantal Joffe**

Born in 1969, Saint Albans, Vermont

### **Hannah Arendt, 2014**

Oil on canvas

Purchase: Gift of the Kagan-Katz-Kivel Families, by exchange, 2016-13

To represent the distinguished philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Chantal Joffe mined photographs taken in the 1960s. Joffe crops the view to emphasize Arendt's head and eyes, searching upward in thought. The cigarette in her hand symbolizes contemplation and rebellion.

After receiving her doctorate in Germany in 1929, Arendt was arrested as a Jewish activist in 1931. She fled to Paris in 1933 and the United States in 1941. Hers was an experience shared by many Jewish intellectuals of her generation; their flight from the Nazis enriched the arts and sciences in the United States.

Arendt's writings consider the political turmoil of her time by examining notions of power, evil, and freedom. In 1947–52 she was the director of the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR) organization, which redistributed unclaimed Jewish property from American-occupied Europe after the war. Important cultural works were rescued and came to the Jewish Museum through the efforts of the JCR.



### **Chantal Joffe**

Born in 1969, Saint Albans, Vermont

### **Susan Sontag, 2014**

Oil on board

Purchase: Gift of Wendy Fisher, 2016-10

The writer and cultural theorist Susan Sontag (1933–2004) became a cultural role model during the 1960s and 1970s, treating the issues that confronted women at the height of the feminist movement in the United States. Joffe's portrait repeats a relaxed yet pensive pose from a 1975 photograph by the artist Peter Hujar—a friend of Sontag's who perished in 1987 during the AIDS epidemic. Joffe emphasizes the figure's gender-neutral features, limiting her objectification a woman and acknowledging Sontag's questioning of the boundaries imposed on women.



**Chantal Joffe**

Born in 1969, Saint Albans, Vermont

**Gertrude Stein, 2014**

Oil on canvas

Purchase: Gift of the Kagan-Katz-Kivel Families,  
by exchange, 2016-14

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), the American writer, poet, and playwright, gained a reputation as the mother of modernism. Together with her brother, Leo, she hosted a salon—a gathering of influential artists, critics, and collectors—in Paris that provided fertile ground for the development of modern art and literature. In Joffe's portrait, Stein confronts the viewer surrounded by her collection of Pablo Picasso artworks, recognizable by masklike faces that are mirrored in the painting's subject.



**Chantal Joffe**

Born in 1969, Saint Albans, Vermont

**Claude Cahun, 2014**

Oil on board

Purchase: Gift of the Kagan-Katz-Kivel Families,  
by exchange, 2016-12

Claude Cahun (born Lucy Renée Mathilde Schwob, 1894–1954) was a French Surrealist known for photographing herself in various performed personas, here as a childlike yet malevolent-looking marionette. Cahun identified as feminine but considered her gender a fluid expression, a diversity that challenged traditional roles and threatened male viewers who saw her as an object.

Arrested on the island of Jersey in the English Channel during the German Occupation of France, she was condemned to death, though the sentence was never carried out. During her trial she coolly remarked that if she were to be executed, she would have to be shot at least twice—as both a fighter in the Resistance and a Jew.



### Chantal Joffe

Born in 1969, Saint Albans, Vermont

### Diane Arbus, 2014

Oil on canvas

Purchase: Gift of the Kagan-Katz-Kivel Families, by exchange, 2016-11

Diane Arbus (1923–1971) exerted a powerful influence on modern photography. Joffe portrays the artist from a distance—cropped, as in a photograph—and seated alone on a public bench. The photographer is best known for capturing her subjects using a direct, often disturbing approach to produce exceptional psychological intensity. Arbus made work that underscored her personal sense of alienation, which is evoked in Joffe’s portrait.



### Raphael Soyer

Born in 1899, Borisoglebsk, Russia, died in 1987, New York

### Dancing Lesson, 1926

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation, 2008-225

For the social realist painter Raphael Soyer, modern scenes of everyday life were frequent subjects. The 1920s in the United States were a golden age for youth and social dancing, as seen in this depiction of the artist’s sister Rebecca and twin brother, Moses, practicing, while his younger brother Israel plays the harmonica. The setting and clothing are informal and the scene, which has become a family spectacle, is full of affection and wit.

This picture illustrates the newfound leisure in the lives of first-generation immigrants to the Americas. Abraham and Bella (who holds a Yiddish newspaper), the father and mother of the family, preside over the Americanization of their children. The grandparents look on from the painting above, completing the intergenerational tableau. Change and continuity link the family’s past, present, and future.



### Stefan Hirsch

Born in 1899, Nuremberg, German Empire (now in Germany), died in 1964, New York

### Aline Meyer Liebman, 1927

Oil on board

Purchase: Nash Aussenberg Memorial Foundation Fund, Morris Fox Bequest, Hyman L. and Joan C. Sall Fund, and Rictavia Schiff Bequest, 1993-194

Stefan Hirsch depicts the patron Aline Meyer Liebman (1879–1966) in his restrained style of the 1920s, characterized by its defined shapes and balanced colors. Liebman's evening dress is loose and revealing for the time, her hair cut short, the outfit complemented by a string of pearls. She is the quintessential new woman (sometimes called a flapper) of the era. Liebman was a pioneering collector of American and European art and an exhibited painter who studied under Hirsch. Both were active participants in the growth of modern art in the United States between World Wars I and II. As an artist and a patron, Liebman befriended many of the artists whose works she collected.



### Marcia Muth

Born in 1919, Fort Wayne, Indiana, died in 2014, Santa Fe, New Mexico

### The New Immigrants—1935, 1979

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of the artist, 1986-48

Previously a librarian, Marcia Muth was a self-taught artist who did not begin painting until she was in her fifties. She focused on people and places in a folk art style, present in this work's homely subject matter, emphasis on pattern, and nonrealistic perspective. Its nostalgia comes from the artist imagining such scenes from her childhood memory, informed by typical immigrant experiences of the 1930s and a dry sense of humor. Muth described this domestic scene as "the father still unemployed and looking in the newspaper for work, the mother sewing (the only one making money for the family), the grandfather reading the Jewish newspaper, and the two children studying their lessons."





NEW

## R. B. Kitaj

Born in 1932, Cleveland, died in 2007, Los Angeles

### Rousseau, 1990

Oil on canvas

Gift of Craig and Caryn Effron, 2020-6

Kitaj was obsessed with politics, literature, and the history of art. He executed his works in a personal, signature style with brutal graphic and flattening effects. He positions himself among the great painters of history, alluding to the work of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) in his use of green and ochre brown and the Fauvist painters Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and André Derain (1880–1954) in intense blues and reds.

The work's title invokes the eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and his final text, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, which records his musings in the park of his patron at Ermenonville, France. Famed for his introspective philosophy and revolutionary arguments on the primacy of nature and subjectivity, Rousseau exerted a crucial influence on the painter. Kitaj's intellectual interests thus reveal a man of culture and contradiction—he was a displaced American in London, a figurative artist in the age of abstraction, and a modernist heavy with the art of the past.

▶ 604



## Lee Krasner

Born in 1908, Brooklyn, died in 1984, New York

### Self-Portrait, c. 1930

Oil on linen

Purchase: Esther Leah Ritz Bequest; B. Gerald Cantor, Lady Kathleen Epstein, and Louis E. and Rosalyn M. Shechter Gifts, by exchange; Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee Fund; and Miriam Handler Fund, 2008-32

Lee Krasner portrays herself in nature, creating a painting she hoped would gain her a place in the life-drawing class at the National Academy of Design in New York. Her resolute expression and the strong sense of form, light, and shade in the composition suggest her resolve in her chosen career. As a young woman in the first half of the twentieth century, Krasner embarked on a challenging path toward professional success as an artist. Her work was overlooked for many years, overshadowed by her role as the wife of the artist Jackson Pollock (1912–1956). Only in the 1970s did Krasner begin to receive the recognition she deserved as a major modernist painter.

▶ 605



### Édouard Vuillard

Born in 1868, Cuiseaux, France, died in 1940, La Baule, France

### Lucy Hessel Reading, 1913

Oil on canvas

Purchase: Lore Ross Bequest, 2010-23

Édouard Vuillard's muse, Madame Lucy Hessel (née Reiss, died in 1941), was married to the art dealer and patron of Vuillard Jos Hessel (1859–1942). The artist frequently drew subject matter from his social circle. This painting—a depiction from inside the hostess's private domain—illustrates his close relationship with the Hessels. Lucy studies her books and papers with great concentration in her bedroom, probably at the Hessels' country house in Normandy. The elegant Postimpressionist style, seen in the informal composition and loose brushstrokes, puts a new spin on the long-established tradition of depicting women as readers. As the viewer's eye wanders around the room, at upper left a mirror suddenly appears in lush color, reflecting an open window, the discreet presence of the artist, and the garden beyond.



### Morris Shulman

Born in 1912, Savannah, Georgia, died in 1978, New York

### Tompkins Square Park, 1938

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Shulman, 1982-209

Morris Shulman exhibited at the New York World's Fair in 1939 and painted many New York views akin to this brightly colored rendition. The social realist representation of the humble urban neighborhood surrounding Tompkins Square Park also includes folk art elements, such as arrangement in registers and lack of naturalistic shadows.

Founded in 1850, Tompkins Square Park was created for the growing immigrant population of the Lower East Side in Manhattan, principally Eastern European Jews, many of whom worked in the garment industry. The artist recalled the park as a place of leisure, but that

*there were never enough benches . . .*

*New York could have a hundred times as many parks . . . In the dog days, families spend their evenings there, and various national groups discuss politics.*



### Lesser Ury

Born in 1861, Birnbaum, Prussia (now Międzychód, Poland), died in 1931, Berlin

### Untitled (Park Scene, or Man in the Gray Suit), 1913–18

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Felicitas Vogel, 1990–10

The city and the country, urban life and landscape, are major themes for modern artists. Here an elegant, well-dressed man and a seated lady take their leisure within a verdant public space. Pools of golden color filter through the leaves of the trees, illustrating the Impressionist interest in the effects of light. The close cropping of the composition is strikingly modern, suggesting the immediacy of a photograph.

Lesser Ury was born to a Jewish family in Birnbaum (now in Poland). After the death of his father, the family moved west to Berlin. Ury studied painting in Düsseldorf and traveled to Brussels, Paris, and Stuttgart, but he always remained connected with the German capital, the likely setting of this image.



### Eleanor Hepburn Small Fisk

Born in 1875, Hepburnville, Pennsylvania, died in 1949, New York

### View of Central Park from Warburg House, before 1937

Oil on canvas board

Gift of Mrs. Felix Warburg, U 7889

This cityscape was painted from the Warburg House, the Jewish Museum's home since 1947. Constructed around 1907 in a French Neogothic style, the building was formerly the residence of Felix and Frieda Schiff Warburg, who commissioned the artist Eleanor Hepburn Small Fisk to capture the mansion's exterior views.

From the upper floors of the house, Fisk represents Central Park, built during the 1800s, and its reservoir, looking toward distant Midtown Manhattan. The skyscrapers in the background—including the Empire State Building at far left and the El Dorado, with its pinnacled paired towers on Central Park West at right—shimmer in the morning light. The high-rise skyline contrasts with the autumnal tones of the orderly trees that flank Fifth Avenue, with its period-specific automobiles, capturing a moment in time and space.



### Roberto Burle Marx

Born in 1909, São Paulo, Brazil, died in 1994, Rio de Janeiro

#### Untitled (Porta d'Água, Recife), 1932

Oil on panel

Gift of Sami and Ernesto Moos, 2018-20

This painting illustrates Roberto Burle Marx's lifelong passion for Brazilian botany, which led to some fifty plants being named after him. Accordingly, the tropical palm trees and other riotous vegetation dominate the small buildings in the landscape. Porta d'Água, the location of the painting, is nestled along the Brazilian Capibaribe River. Here the production of sugarcane, seen in the foreground of this work, was first established during the colonial era.

Burle Marx later expanded his botanical interests by becoming a landscape architect, serving as the Director of Parks and Gardens for the state of Pernambuco. In his paintings and his gardens alike, Burle Marx aimed to express a specifically Brazilian aesthetic (as a part of a cultural trend of *brasilidade*, or "Brazilian-ness"), integrating light, water, color, and native plants to celebrate in public spaces the natural beauty of his country.



### Camille Pissarro

Born in 1830, Charlotte Amalie, Saint Thomas, Danish West Indies (now in United States Virgin Islands), died in 1903, Paris

#### The Louvre, Foggy Morning (Third Series), 1902

Oil on canvas

Gift of The Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation, 2018-51

Jacob Abraham Camille Pissarro was born into a family of Sephardic and French descent. Pissarro studied art in Paris and became a major participant in Impressionism. He and the other Impressionists, rather than centering historical or religious subjects, gravitated toward urban and country scenes that dignified the lives of common people. He produced this cityscape of Paris in a series, which allowed him to express variations of light and mood using the same subject. Created with sketchy, loose brushstrokes, the effect is of the city seen through the morning haze. The choice of subject depended on the artist's esteem for the one of the grandest artistic repositories of the world—the Louvre. Pissarro places the vast museum at the center of the collective life and industry of the city.





### **Abraham Manievich**

Born in 1881, Mstsislaw, Russian Empire  
(now in Belarus), died in 1942, Bronx

### **Landscape, 1914**

Oil on canvas

The Rose and Benjamin Mintz Collection,  
M 1001

In 1914 Abraham Manievich had just returned from a yearlong trip to France. Success in Paris included exhibiting with the Fauves (“wild beasts” in French), a vanguard artistic group that rejected naturalistic depiction. Manievich creates the expressive *Landscape* in this style, with spirited brushstrokes and colors typically unsuited to rustic wooden fences and houses.

The theme is one of Manievich’s favored subjects, the shtetl—the Yiddish term for a community of Ashkenazic (Eastern European) Jews under the Russian Empire. The artist was born in Mstsislaw (“little Vilnius”) in eastern Belarus, then an unincorporated community within the Pale of Settlement. The painter’s depiction of the shtetl in sunlight, with patches of snow still visible, exudes warmth and a sense of communal shelter.

Jewish Museum