

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SAUL STEINBERG Drawings, Constructions & Objects

July 20 – August 26, 2018



Medaglia D'oro Still Life, 1952, ink on paper, 14 1/2 x 23 inches



Cabinet, 1970, canvas with ink, metal drawer handle, porcelain knob, metal plaque, rubber stamps, pencil, & gouache on incised wood  
15 1/2 x 20 1/8 x 1 1/4 inches

"I am the writer that draws."<sup>1</sup>

Opening July 20<sup>th</sup> and running through August 26<sup>th</sup>, The Drawing Room is pleased to present **SAUL STEINBERG: Drawings, Constructions & Objects**, in collaboration with The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York. The exhibition catalogue features an informative interview, *Influence and Connection: Saul Steinberg, considered and remembered by Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman*. Françoise Mouly, the art editor at *The New Yorker* since 1993, describes working with Steinberg. Art Spiegelman shares his thoughts on Steinberg's enduring influence on cartoonists and artists.

The exhibition comprises works in wood and on paper from the artist's own collection. Cityscapes and still lifes from the 1950s and 60s, composite watercolor skyscapes, cubistic drawings with collage, and wood constructions from the iconic 1970s and 80s *Table Top* series highlight Steinberg's originality and refracted humor, as well as his particular world view. This selection of works from his expansive oeuvre sheds light on the inventive clash of techniques and modes of representation in his work.

Growing up in Bucharest, Saul Steinberg became fascinated with the production and printing of images through his father's business as a printer, bookbinder and cardboard box manufacturer. The very materials and processes of reproduction excited the young artist. His early success was in Milan where his anti-fascist cartoons in magazines expressed his philosophical vision for his art. In 1936 he wrote, "*In Fascist Italy, where the controlled press was predictable and extremely boring, the humor magazines were a way of knowing other aspects of life, which, by the nature of humor itself, seemed subversive.*"<sup>2</sup>

Immigrating to New York in 1942, Steinberg drew for American magazines, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Life*.<sup>3</sup> After enlisting in the Navy during the war, in 1943 he was sent to China where his drawing and printing skills were put to good use. His responsibilities included creating propaganda materials to be dropped over occupied territories, drawing "funnies" to humor the officers, and drawing critical maps for airmen.<sup>4</sup>

In 1959 Steinberg bought a house in the Springs, East Hampton, where he would spend his most productive years in the studio across the street from his longtime friends Ruth and Costantino Nivola. They had met in 1933 at the Politecnico Facolta di Architettura in Milan. Steinberg wrote that year, "*The study of architecture is a marvelous training for anything but architecture. The frightening thought that what you draw may become a building makes for reasoned lines.*"<sup>5</sup>

In fact, his training in architecture would influence his work in all media. Lauded with exhibitions in galleries and museums throughout Europe and America, he became one of the most popular artists of his time. The earliest drawings represented are *Highway Traffic* (1953) and *New York Brownstone* (1953), in which Steinberg's enchantment with American cars turned them into potatoes or challah bread on wheels. The still life, *Medaglio D'Oro* (1952), is an ink drawing of favorite brands and belongings: a tin of Altoids, a set of keys, a can of Italian coffee, a cigarette pack, and bottles of ink. The nonchalance of personal objects strewn across the page is energized by the quick quill line.

*Louse Point* (1969) is a rare oil painting of Steinberg's favorite cove in the Springs where he biked to swim and fish. The calm nectarine light on the inlet contradicts the curious presence of a makeshift contraption (an oil rig?) installed on the beach. Fascinated by architecture, landscape and people, the characteristics of place, their affinities and contradictions, Steinberg traveled constantly for assignments, commissions, and exhibitions. Visiting 48 states in America, the Romanian émigré's art is that of an outsider: hyper-aware, missing nothing. Steinberg stamped and sealed most of his artworks with faux-forged bureaucratic certification, the Jewish refugee's assertion of his survival and self-authority in post-war America.

He drew from airplanes, buses, cars and trains. *Japan Bridge* (1969), the largest "landscape" on view, is an invention of geography accessed from a bridge leading to a vast distance of receding watercolor washes. The smaller watercolor skylscapes, which he framed together in groups, have a beautiful and existential air.

In the 1970s Steinberg explored cubism in flat and constructed techniques. His drawings of offices and abstractions of desktops preceded the innovative series of three-dimensional wood *Table Tops*. In works on paper such as *Office* (1972), the architectural space is a parody of Art Deco design, with the boss at the desk and the woman in a mini skirt recruited into the geometric realm. In *Lucette Still Life* (1968), Steinberg's obsession with paper souvenirs, labels, post cards and envelopes - he received constant fan mail - merge into a cubistic collage of memorabilia.

Moving to a three dimensional exploration of cubism in the *Table Top* series, Steinberg carved, whittled and colored a "ready made" inventory of wood objects: his beloved art supplies, pencil boxes, rulers, books by his friends, personal journals, his Schwinn bicycle logo and Art Deco architectural models. All were raw materials to lay out and glue down in formal arrangements. Making rulers out of lathe and painting measurements meticulously he mastered the art of *Trompe L'oeil*. The exhibition presents an important collection of drawings, constructions and objects by Saul Steinberg whose art sharpened our own understanding of America and what it means to become an American artist.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Deirdre Blair, *Saul Steinberg*, 2012, p 591.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Steinberg Chronology, Harold Rosenberg, *Saul Steinberg*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978, p. 235.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Blair, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenberg ,p. 235.



*Louse Point*, 1969, oil and rubber stamp on Masonite, 14 x 18 inches