

PRESS RELEASE

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Ilya Bolotowsky, *Untitled* (#37), 1954
oil on linen, 39 1/2 x 12 inches



Sentimental journeyman? Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *La Belle Indolente*, ca. 1765, an example of the artist's technical flair and penchant for romantic subjects.

Edgar Munhall, curator,
Frick Collection, New York

It's so depressing that Jean-Baptiste Greuze goes on being kicked around by the art establishment. The cliché that gets repeated over and over is that his subjects are sentimental. I think that's an oversimplification—he's definitely working on people's emotions and trying to elicit a powerful response to his subjects and to the way they're presented, but that seems to me a very modern phenomenon. I see him as a kind of proto-expressionist artist, an artist who was willing to deal with the most basic dramas of our lives: family feuds, death, innocence awakened by the experience of death. It's so easy to dismiss him as sentimental when in fact he's presenting some of the most basic issues of life through these subjects.

Technically, Greuze is an extraordinary artist—he paints like an angel. His drawings are fabulous. He works in many different media, and just on a purely esthetic level he should be appreciated much more than he is. A lot of connoisseurs, particularly collectors of drawings, have [always] appreciated him, and his drawings still fetch very high prices.

He was a phenomenal success from his debut in 1755 until his death in 1805. There were lapses, but for that stretch of time he was considered one of the major living artists. He was successful and made a lot of money; he disseminated his work through reproductive prints—that made him a lot of money, too. He had a famous fight with the Academy in 1769, when he decided to become a history painter instead of a genre painter. The Academy elected him but decided to keep him at the status of a genre painter. So he quit the Academy and never had anything more to do with it. When he left, he started exhibiting in his own studio and in the Louvre, sort of like Courbet. His career is an extremely exciting one to study in terms of the art scene of the 18th century.

Christopher Knight, art critic,
Los Angeles Times

Henrietta Shore and Agnes Pelton were both great painters who were roughly contemporary; Shore was born in 1880, and Pelton in 1881. They're both reminiscent of Georgia O'Keeffe in the type of work they did, but I don't want to stress that there's any direct relationship, because there wasn't. All three are artists who developed a specifically American version of European symbolism. Shore remained a realist throughout her life; Agnes Pelton was an abstract painter. And both were almost entirely forgotten after World War II.

Their work [is being] revived. There's a Pelton retrospective that originated at the Palm Springs Desert Museum and is traveling around the country. She was one of the few women invited to be in the Armory Show, and she lived on Long Island for a number of years. Shore lived in Los Angeles in the 1920s and then in Monterey. She died penniless in an asylum in San Jose. Her greatest painting is called *Gloxynia by the Sea*.

It's interesting that they're both women who took the promise of modernism as a means of inventing themselves through art.

Jeffrey Wechsler, curator,

Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, N.J.

Several years ago we did an exhibition of small-scale Abstract Expressionism, painters who didn't get as much attention as they deserved because they worked in smaller formats—such as Sal Sirugo, Charles Seliger, Ralph Rosenborg, and Rollin Crampton.

The critical tenor of the time was to promote large paintings, so they were ignored and neglected because they weren't testing the limits of scale. But, in fact, not only did better-known painters often work in more modest dimensions, there were those who routinely preferred a diminutive scale. Their particular vision was much more intense. Many of Sirugo's works are literally less than six by six inches; Seliger's work tends to be no bigger than 18 inches on a side. These artists were a revelation to many people who came to the show.

Harry Rand, senior curator, 20th-century painting
and sculpture, National Museum of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution

Isaac Witkin's metal sculpture ventures into the last great territory of modernism: the expressive and formal possibilities in the ductility of molten and semisolid metal. His sculpture is anathema to committees—today's usual patrons for large modern art—because his art is inimical to preconception, to models. Because he lacks his share of great pieces in commanding spaces, he is rarely seen to his best advantage. Witkin is a first-class artist who deserves to be looked at seriously.

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Ripe for Rediscovery

Almost every art lover has one—a sneaky passion, a private and enduring obsession, a sense of an injustice in need of correction. We asked a range of art-world professionals which artists deserved to be brought out of obscurity for another look, and got some interesting responses

ANN LANDI