

## Janet Sobel and Pearl Blauvelt

January 11 – February 22, 2020

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to present concurrent solo exhibitions for **Janet Sobel** (1893-1968) and **Pearl Blauvelt** (1893-1987), two female self-taught artists born in the same year. Though both women were making art in the 1940s, they came from vastly different backgrounds and achieved art world recognition in the opposite manner. Sobel received critical attention during her lifetime at the epicenter of New York cultural circles, while Blauvelt created in complete anonymity, her drawings only discovered years after her death. Both artists currently have work on view in the recently completed rehanging of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Janet Sobel was born in a small town in the Ukraine, emigrating to New York in her teens. It was only later in life, as a housewife, after having raised a family in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, that she took up painting. According to New York Times art critic Roberta Smith, Sobel's work evolved from "primitivist figuration that recall[s] early Chagall and presage[s] early Dubuffet," to an abstract mode, including a drip technique she devised that influenced Jackson Pollock and arguably "help[ed] to invent Abstract Expressionism." Sobel's work was championed by surrealists André Breton and Max Ernst, as well as by gallerist Sidney Janis. In 1945, Peggy Guggenheim included Sobel in the group exhibition "The Women" at her Art of This Century gallery and gave her a solo show the following year. It was there that critic Clement Greenberg and Jackson Pollock first saw her work. Greenberg later acknowledged Pollock's artistic debt to Sobel.

Pearl Blauvelt's Dutch ancestors settled in the Hudson Valley in upstate New York and helped found the First Dutch Reformed Church in that region in the late 1600s. At some point during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the artist moved with her father to a house in a small town in northeastern Pennsylvania where she would spend most of her adult life, about which little is known. In the 1970s she was moved to a mental facility outside of Scranton where she would continue to draw until her death in 1987. Artist couple Donna and Dennis Corrigan discovered a box filled with about 800 of her drawings after they purchased the house, which had been long abandoned, some 50 years after the artist last lived there.

Blauvelt's colored pencil drawings on lined notebook paper appear to serve as the imaginative recollections of a woman who lived a humble life on the margins of mainstream society. They depict everyday subjects like people strolling along country lanes, horse-drawn carriages, railway tracks, banknotes, front porches, furniture, women's undergarments and other clothing from mail-order catalogs. Her characters are often set in fictionalized scenes from the Bible. While her determination to accurately capture the proportions, shapes and surface textures of her varied subjects evokes a somewhat childlike approach, Blauvelt's pictures are also marked by unexpected sophistication as she exaggerates certain details and reveals multiple perspectives with peculiar, X-ray-like, see-through views into the interiors of buildings.

The Janet Sobel works selected for this exhibition are oils and gouaches from the 1940s. Colorful evocations of Russian-Jewish *shtetls*, many of these pictures are densely packed with

renderings of peasants, soldiers, flower gardens and floating heads set against watery backgrounds. Over time, Sobel's lyrical work became more dreamlike and technically more inventive, exemplified in the 1943 painting, *Disappointment*. Her art evolved from early folkloric representational images, to abstract-figurative and then all-abstract creations.

Sobel later moved to New Jersey, stopped painting, and was for a time largely forgotten. Over the last two decades her work has been rediscovered with gallery shows at Gary Snyder (2002, 2010), D.C. Moore (2005) and James Barron (2016, 2018). In 2016, Sobel was included in "Abstract Expressionism," curated by David Anfam at the Royal Academy of Arts (London) that later traveled to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. In 2018, three paintings (among them *Pro & Contre* from 1941 which will be on view in this exhibition) were included in the National Gallery of American Art's (Washington DC) exhibition "Outliers and American Vanguard Art." In 2021, the Pompidou Center (Paris) will feature Sobel in the exhibition "Women in Abstraction."

Janet Sobel's art is included in the permanent collections of the American Folk Art Museum (New York), The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Bentonville, AK), the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington D.C.), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art (New York), and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).

Pearl Blauvelt's drawings were recently featured in "Flying High: Women Artists of Art Brut" at the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien in Vienna and in "You Can't Win: Jack Black's America" at the Fortnight Institute in New York. Her work is currently on view in the exhibition "Memory Palaces: Inside the Collection of Audrey B. Heckler" at the American Folk Art Museum. Blauvelt's art is held in many notable private and public collections including the Museum of Modern Art (New York), The Museum of Everything (London), Collection abcd (Paris) and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (Philadelphia).

This show has been organized in cooperation with Gary Snyder Fine Art, and James Barron Art / Ashley Shapiro, the Granddaughter of Janet Sobel.