

LYONEL FEININGER

STRIDING THE WORLD A COLLECTOR'S VIEW

18 APRIL – 31 AUGUST 2015

MUMA - ANDRÉ MALRAUX MUSEUM OF MODERN ART – LE HAVRE (NORMANDY)

Despite being a major international figure in twentieth-century art, Lyonel Feininger (New York, 1871-New York, 1956) remains best-known in the USA and Germany, the two countries where he spent most of his life. A first American retrospective of his work was held during his lifetime, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 1944. But it was 50 years before the next solo exhibition of his work was held. In 2011, the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York, mounted a comprehensive retrospective that subsequently transferred to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. With the current exhibition, the André Malraux Museum of Modern Art (MuMa) in Le Havre (Normandy) in turn pays tribute to Lyonel Feininger. For many members of the French public, it will be an introduction to his work. From 18 April to 31 August 2015, MuMa will shed light on Feininger's oeuvre via

139 works (4 oil paintings, 24 watercolours, 22 drawings and 89 prints) spanning his entire career, from 1907 to 1949. This first solo exhibition of Feininger's work in France would not have been possible without the generosity of a devoted collector. Because they have been chosen by a collector, these works naturally reflect the life and tastes of an individual. There is a strong emphasis on graphic art and the dazzling series of wood-cuts made in the space of a few years, between spring 1918 and the end of 1920 at the Bauhaus. The artist behind this approachable, poetic body of work is revealed as a man who engaged with the issues of his time, who embraced contemporary utopian ideals, taking part in the founding of the Bauhaus, while exploring individual avenues that produced a lifetime oeuvre of exceptional coherence.



Maisons parisiennes (Old Houses in Paris - Pariser Häuser), 1919

Wood-cut on paper, private collection.
© Adagp, Paris, 2015

Lyonel Feininger (1871 – 1956) was born in New York. He came from a family of German musicians and spent much of his life in Germany, arriving in 1887 and returning to the USA in 1937. He began his career as a cartoonist and comic-strip artist for American and German newspapers. **From 1910 onwards he consolidated his reputation as a painter, mixing with European avant-garde artists in Paris, where he discovered cubism, and in Germany, where he encountered the members of the Berlin Secession, Die Brücke and the Blauer Reiter. The influences of cubism and German expressionism are discernible in his work.**

Lyonel Feininger helped the architect Walter Gropius found the Bauhaus school in Weimar (Germany) in 1919 and provided the cover illustration for the Bauhaus manifesto, a wood-cut (*Cathedral*) which features in the exhibition. He became one of the first teachers in the school, along with Gerhard Marcks and Johannes Itten. Shortly afterwards, he became the artistic director of the printmaking workshop. Although he gradually distanced himself from the school after its transfer to Dessau, then Berlin, and continued to pursue his own avenues of exploration, he remained loyal to its proponents.

Like many other artists whose work was labelled «degenerate» by the Nazis, Feininger fled Germany and returned to the USA 50 years after he had left it. After his return, he received commissions for monumental murals



IV B Manhattan, 1937

Pen and Indian ink and watercolour on papier
Private collection. © Adagp, Paris, 2015



Battle Fleet (Flotte de guerre), 1920

Oil on canvas. Private collection.
© Adagp, Paris, 2015 © Maurice Aeschmann

for the 1939 New York World's Fair. The following year, he began a series of pictures of Manhattan skyscrapers. Towards the end of his life, his compositions drew on earlier works, memories of his most valuable experiences, and his own photographs. He died in 1956.

Throughout his life, Feininger set great store by the motif. Whether it depicts Paris, where he spent several sojourns and rubbed shoulders with the fauvists and the cubists, the countryside of Thüringen, where he loved to go for walks, the shores of the Baltic, where he spent his summers from 1924 to 1935, or New York, where he spent the latter part of his life, **Feininger's predilection for urban and village scenes, architecture and the sea comes through in his work.**

Once he decided to devote himself entirely to his artistic career, his beginnings as a humorous press cartoonist led him to **develop his graphic work and experiment with printmaking (in the form of lithographs, etchings and wood-cuts) as well as painting.**

His work features numerous variations on leitmotifs using a range of techniques. Once he was back in the USA, Feininger frequently reworked his German subjects and drew on his own work for inspiration. **His works are often peopled by figures:** tall, flattened silhouettes that spring from his romantic imagination, always on the move and in a hurry, be they picaresque characters strolling along the seafront or the angular be-hatted profiles of the wood-cuts.

Commissioners

David Butcher, art historian.

Annette Haudiquet, Curator of MuMa

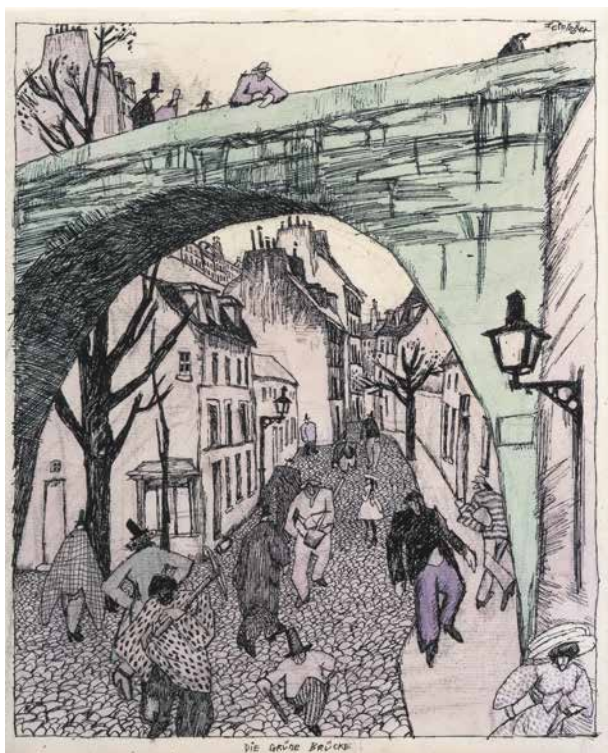
André Malraux Museum of Modern Art, Le Havre.

Catalogue

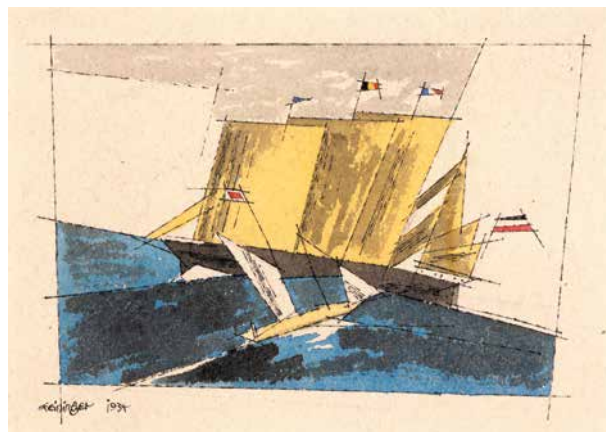
Catalogue Editions d'art Somogy

184 pages, 160 illustrations, €32.

Texts by Annette Haudiquet, David Butcher and Heinz Widauer (Curator of French art at the Albertina Museum, Vienna).



Die Grüne Brücke (Le pont vert/The Green Bridge), 1909
Pen and Indian ink and watercolour
Private collection. © Adagp, Paris, 2015 © Maurice Aeschimann



Goélette à trois mats (Three-masted Schooner), 1934
Pen and Indian ink and watercolour on papier. Private collection.
© Adagp, Paris, 2015 © Maurice Aeschimann

Perhaps more than Paul Klee, his friend and close companion from the Bauhaus school, Feininger belongs to the German romantic pictorial tradition. One senses this especially in his seascapes, which appear to be almost conscious reinterpretations of Caspar Friedrich's.

In Feininger as in Friedrich, the human figure is almost always shrunk to minute size, seemingly absorbed in contemplation of the mysterious light of north Germany, with its boats that, like ghost ships, head for ports that belong to a geography of the mind rather than the Earth. Nonetheless - and this is what distinguishes him from the romantic painters and from his contemporaries in the Die Brücke group (Kirchner, Heckel, Schmidt-Rottluff, etc.) who were responsible for the renewed popularity of wood-cuts from 1905 onwards, **Feininger has a tender world view which is reflected in the strange, poetic, fanciful quality that makes his work unique.** He himself referred to his world as joyful, weird, fantastical and childlike.

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Opening times and admission charges

11.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. on weekdays (except Tuesdays)
11.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays
Closed on Tuesdays and on 1 May and 14 July
Standard admission charge: €5 | Concessions: €3
Free for visitors under 26 and for all visitors every first Saturday in the month