

The Urban Scene: 1920 – 1950

AMERICAN ARTISTS of the early twentieth century sought to interpret the beauty, power, and anxiety of the modern age in diverse ways. Some turned to abstraction borrowed from European modernism, but those represented in this gallery took a realistic approach, manipulating light and shadow to create scenes imbued with vitality and imagination. These artists employed precise detail and descriptive clarity to characterize experience, suggest meanings, and convey a narrative. The representation of twentieth-century urban life provided them endless opportunities to probe the modern human condition.

The urban panorama offered unprecedented vistas. Skyscrapers, bridges, and other technological marvels projected wealth and opportunity, while the city's towering forms invoked the sublime. Simultaneously, the streets and dwellings of the metropolis hosted life's theater. Depictions of harmonious communities and workers suggest a utopian vision, whereas scenes of crowding, poverty, and hunger point to society's ills and failures. The same buildings glorified from one perspective could be interpreted from another as blocking light, deepening shadows, and heightening a sense of enclosure and confinement.

Artists chose their subjects, arranged their compositions, and scrutinized details to convey particular aspects of urban life. They used line to capture the specific features of a face or the unique character of a building, and tone to mimic the play of light – from great shafts of morning sunshine spilling onto avenues to the poetry of the city's riverside at night with reflections in the water. By selectively emphasizing certain elements and minimizing others, images were distilled to their atmospheric or narrative essence. The best artists balanced specificity with ambiguity, drawing our attention to the fundamental while leaving open to interpretation the implied, the hidden, and the undefined.

During the past decade, the Gallery has added extraordinary collections of prints and drawings to its holdings, from the Reba and Dave Williams Collection to the Corcoran Collection and works donated and promised by Bob Stana and Tom Judy. This exhibition highlights some of these acquisitions and reveals how the Gallery's American print holdings continue to develop, incorporating new artists as well as works that expand our view of printmakers already represented in the collection.

DEX 1

Martin Lewis

American, born Australia, 1881 – 1962

Quarter of Nine – Saturday's Children

(New York), 1929

drypoint

Gift of Addie Burr Clark, 1946

DEX 2

Mabel Dwight

American, 1875 – 1955

The Clinch

(New York), 1928

lithograph

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Paul Cadmus

American, 1904 – 1999

Shore Leave

(New York), 1935

etching

Reba and Dave Williams Collection, Florian Carr Fund,
and Gift of the Print Research Foundation, 2008

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Reynold Weidenaar

American, 1915 – 1985

Locomotive Shops

(Grand Rapids, Michigan), 1947

etching and aquatint

Corcoran Collection (Bequest of Frank B. Bristow), 2015

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Benton Spruance

American, 1904 – 1967

The People Work - Evening

(Philadelphia), 1937

lithograph

Rosenwald Collection, 1943

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Reginald Marsh

American, born France, 1898 – 1954

Tattoo - Shave - Haircut

(New York), 1932

etching and engraving

Corcoran Collection (Gift of Olga Hirshhorn), 2015

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Clare Leighton

American, born England, 1898 – 1989

Breadline, New York

1931

wood engraving

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Millard Sheets

American, 1907 – 1989

Family Flats

(Los Angeles), 1935

lithograph

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Martin Lewis

American, born Australia, 1881 – 1962

Building a Babylon, Tudor City, N.Y.C.

1929

etching and drypoint

Gift of Bob Stana and Tom Judy, 2016

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Victoria Hutson Huntley

American, 1900 – 1971

Lower New York

1934

lithograph

Gift of Bob Stana and Tom Judy, 2015

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Lawrence Kupferman

American, 1909 – 1982

Victorian Mansion

(Boston), 1938

drypoint

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Martin Lewis

American, born Australia, 1881 – 1962

Yorkville Night

(New York), 1947

drypoint

Corcoran Collection (Bequest of Frank B. Bristow), 2015

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Stow Wengenroth

American, 1906 – 1978

Quiet Hour

(New York), 1947

lithograph

Corcoran Collection (Bequest of Frank B. Bristow), 2015

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John Taylor Arms

American, 1887 – 1953

West Forty-Second Street, Night

(New York), 1922

aquatint and etching on yellow laid paper

Donald and Nancy deLaski Fund, 2010

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Armin Landeck

American, 1905 – 1984

View of New York

1932

lithograph

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Gerald Geerlings

American, 1897 – 1998

Civic Insomnia (New York)

1932

aquatint

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Louis Lozowick

American, born Ukraine, 1892 – 1973

Allen Street

(New York), 1929

lithograph

Gift of Jacob Kainen, 2002

DEX 23

Gerald Geerlings

American, 1897 – 1998

Grand Canal, America

(Chicago), 1933

drypoint

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Asa Cheffetz

American, 1896 – 1965

Monday (The American Scene)

(Holyoke, Massachusetts), c. 1932

wood engraving

Gift of Bob Stana and Tom Judy, 2016

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Howard Cook

American, 1901 – 1980

Looking up Broadway

(New York), 1937

lithograph

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Isac Friedlander

American, born Latvia, 1888 – 1968

3 A.M.

(New York), 1934

etching

Rosenwald Collection, 1943

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Samuel L. Margolies

American, 1897 – 1974

Men of Steel

(New York), c. 1939

drypoint

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Thomas Nason

American, 1889 – 1971

Louisburg Square

(Boston), 1930

wood engraving

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008

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Robert Riggs

American, 1896 – 1970

Germantown & Cheltenham

(Philadelphia), c. 1950

lithograph

Reba and Dave Williams Collection, Florian Carr Fund,
and Gift of the Print Research Foundation, 2008

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Edward Arthur Wilson

American, born Scotland, 1886 – 1970

Untitled (Laying Pipe in New York City)

1941

lithograph

Reba and Dave Williams Collection,
Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008