

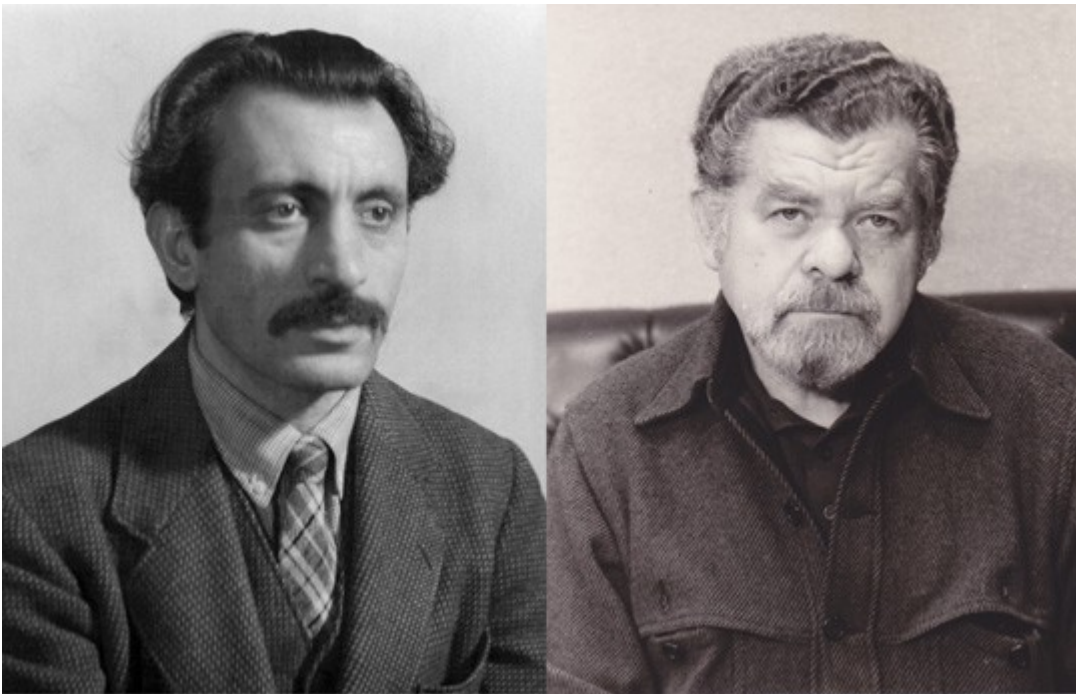
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American Art, 1900–1950

American Surreal: Arshile Gorky and Nathan Lerner

Ongoing

East Building, Ground Level, Gallery 106A



Left: Charles Von Urban, *Arshile Gorky*, December 10, 1936. Federal Art Project, Photographic Division collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; right: Unknown photographer, *Nathan Lerner*, 1980s. Courtesy of Kiyoko Lerner

Washington, DC—TSurrealism was a powerful force in American art of the late 1930s and 1940s due to the immigration of European surrealists, such as Max Ernst and André Breton, to the United States and a widely celebrated 1936–1937 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Painter Arshile Gorky (1904–1948) and photographer Nathan Lerner (1913–1997) were not full-fledged surrealists, but each took their own lessons from the movement to develop strikingly original work.

Gorky immigrated to America in 1920 and settled in New York City. He was a pioneer of abstract expressionism and a close friend and colleague of Willem de Kooning and Stuart Davis. Many of

Gorky's abstracted drawings suggest reclining nudes that have been turned inside out or feature organ-like shapes that have been liberated from bodies.

The son of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants, Lerner trained as a painter at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and began using a camera to hone his sense of composition. He often distorted the human figure, isolating body parts and twisting forms into wiry visions. At times Lerner would shoot his photographs in extreme close-up or through screens like textured glass or the water of a swimming pool. He used a long exposure to "draw" with moving light sources and designed a box to analyze the effects of light on objects suspended in space.

The installation is curated by Kara Felt, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Postdoctoral Fellow in the department of photographs; and Diana Greenwald, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Postdoctoral Fellow in the department of American and British paintings and the department of modern prints and drawings, both at the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

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