

LOUIS SCHANKER (1903-1981)

A native New Yorker, Louis Schanker was a teenager when he left school to join the circus. In 1920 he returned to New York and studied at Cooper Union, the Art Students League, and the Education Alliance School of Art. In 1931-33 he traveled and studied in France (he attended the Académie de la Grande Chaumière) and Spain, and in 1933 he had his first one-man show at the Contemporary Arts Gallery, NY. By 1935 Schanker made his first woodcut, finding the medium and establishing a pattern of experimentation that would figure prominently throughout his career.

Schanker was on the mural division of the New York Works Progress Administration. He made murals for the lobby of the WNYC radio station at the New York City Municipal Building, the Neponsit Beach Children's Hospital, and for the Science and Health Building at the New York Worlds Fair, 1939. He also served on the WPA printmaking project where he was a supervisor of the relief printing division. He was member of the American Artists Congress and a founding member of the American Abstract Artists group. In 1935/36 he exhibited with The Ten Whitney Dissenters who showed their work at galleries in New York and Paris. (The Ten Whitney Dissenters were: Ben-Zion, Ilya Bolotowsky, Adolph Gottlieb, John Graham, Louis Harris, Earl Kerkam, Ralph M. Rosenborg, Marcus Rothkowitz [Mark Rothko], Louis Schanker, and Joseph Solman.)

In 1943 Schanker began to teach at the New School for Social Research, NY, where he worked with Stanley William Hayter at the New York location of Atelier 17. In 1949 Schanker started to teach at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, where he stayed until his retirement.

In the 1940s and 50s works by Schanker were regularly included in the annual printmaking exhibitions of the Brooklyn Museum and were featured there in one-man shows in 1943 and 1974, as well as at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1954/55, Associated American Artists, NY, in 1978 and 1986, The Art Students League, NY, 2009, and The Pollock-Krasner House, East Hampton, NY, 2018. In 1960 his work was included in the landmark '21 etchings and poems' portfolio published by the Morris Gallery, NY.

Work by Schanker was in numerous exhibitions including the now legendary 9th Street Art Exhibition, 1951; In Pursuit of Abstraction: American Prints 1930-1950, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986; the Patricia and Phillip Frost Collection: American Abstraction, 1930-1945, the National Museum of American Art, Washington, DC, 1989; A Spectrum of Innovation: Color in American Printmaking, 1890-1960, and The Second Wave: American Abstraction of the 1930s and 40s, both at the Worcester Art Museum, 1991; and Images from the Federal Art Project, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, 1996. Additional shows are The Allure of Paper, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX, Artists at Work, American Printmakers and the WPA, Asheville Art Museum, NC, and Splendor of Dynamic Structure, Herbert F. Johnson Art Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, all three 2011; and About Prints: The Legacy of Stanley William Hayter and Atelier 17, Syracuse University, 2016.

At the Susan Teller Gallery, his work was shown in Circa 1950, December, 1991-January, 1992, Contemplating Cubism, 1995, American Modernist Unique Works on Paper, 1924-1956, 1997, Louis Schanker, American Modernist, 2000, and Louis Schanker, Modernist Drawings and Prints, 1938 to 1955, 2005.

In addition to those institutions mentioned above, work by Louis Schanker is in the New York Public Library, and Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Newark Museum; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Allentown Art Museum; Cincinnati Art Museum; Cleveland Museum of Art; Detroit Art Institute; Art Institute of Chicago; University of Kentucky Art Museum, Lexington; and the Library of Congress.

In 1960 Schanker married the actress and singer Libby Holman. Together they were active supporters of civil rights and were long-time friends of Dr. Martin Luther King and his wife Coretta.