

JANET SOBEL'S WORK

By Emily Genauer

NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM

Saturday, April 29, 1944

And still another woman painter is having an exhibition currently. She is Janet Sobel, at the Puma Galleries. Mrs. Sobel is a middle-aged woman who only recently took up her brushes. The results are rather extraordinary. This is not conventional primitivism in any sense of the word. Some of the works, to be sure, are the usual, childishly drawn escapist nudes in hush forests that somehow seem particularly to appeal to self-taught artists. Even these reveal an unusual flair for design and color. But far more interesting are compositions like *Retreating Horses* and *Heavenly Quarrel*, in which the artist has painted her subjects on glass, modeling her figures in calligraphic whorls, giving them a great feeling of movement and in general conceiving her pictorial structure with an astounding sophistication. Unfortunately not all of the pictures are...(illegible.) *The Burning Bush* and *Prophet*, for instance, are amorphic patterns concocted of tiny curved shapes that might have been inspired by swarming earthworms. E.G.

ART OF THE WEEK

By Carlyle Burrows

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

April, 31, 1944

An intuition wonderfully childlike and simple characterizes a show of paintings at the Puma gallery, where the works of Janet Sobel, Russian-born American self-taught painter are being shown for the first time. In nearly thirty exhibits the artist gives out with the infectious ardor of a twelve year old, plastering her canvases with the color of a thousand flower gardens in one, and introducing figures which, all things considered, are quite exotic and colorful as the abundantly tapestride backgrounds. There is a touch of sophisticated "white writing" here, but one is inclined to believe from the evidence at hand that the artist has never had a lesson in her life, nor been influenced in any conspicuous way. That is what makes her the painter she is!

ONLY HUMAN

By Emily Cheney

DAILY MIRROR

Wednesday, May 10, 1944

It's only the intensity in her (glance) that gives off any clue. Otherwise, Janet Sobel, buxom, pink cheeked, round-faced, and dressed in a neat cotton print, looks just like any other Brooklyn housewife. You picture her over a stove on a warm summer day, irritatedly shooing her grandchildren out of the kitchen, then relenting and giving them that mid-afternoon piece of cake.

Janet Sobel has lived in Brooklyn 20 odd years. Her husband is in the artificial pearl business. She has five children, ranging in age from 17 to 33, and four grandchildren. She's brought them all up, by turns scolded them, sympathized, encouraged, and urged them to get an education.

You might expect now, with one son in the Army and all but one other married and away from home, that she would settle down to pleasant old age of easier housekeeping, and doting on her grandchildren.

Married at 16

She expected to. But then, suddenly, five years ago she started scribbling little designs on scrap paper and occasionally in the evening she'd steal one of her son's paint brushes to fool around with.

She was very ashamed of that and didn't tell anyone. Why, she was just a housewife, with no schooling. She'd come to America from Russia as a child and had married at 16. Her children, now, they were the ones who knew about art and such things. Finally her son, Sol, who was the artist of the family, caught her painting and he sat up and took notice. He took some of his mother's work down to his old art teachers, and they thought it was good, too.

That was five years ago, and since then Janet Sobel has never been able to lead the lazy life she anticipated. When housework is pressing she just scribbles little sketches and ideas in odd moments. Then, when she really starts on a painting, she works 8 or 10 hours a day and often at night. She has never taken an art lesson.

She now has her own exhibition in New York, at the Puma Galleries, 108 W. 57th St. She also has work on exhibit in the Brooklyn Museum, and a picture in a traveling exhibit of

“Abstract and Surrealist Painting in America” out West. Hesitantly, still not in quite perfect English, but with a quiet intensity, she tries to explain how it all started.

“No, I never went to museums much. I didn’t have time and” –she apologizes-“I didn’t understand these things.”

“But always I read books, the Russians and then English, and I love music. At home, we have four rooms and four radios. I don’t think ever I would paint a picture without music to listen to. All humans must have something like that, that warms them inside.”

Housewife Neatness

“Then all these 20 years, I have Brighton Beach. The sand, the heat, the waves, and you see all those peoples and the colors and the sounds. I see too much peoples there in summer. But everything comes back, little bits and ideas, as I want it, and I use them later.”

Mrs. Sobel never sketched particular people, and she never paints from a scene or model. In the way of materials, she uses almost everything-sand, sea shells, shingles, glass. Once...(illegible)

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 1945.

CHIEFLY MODERN IN IDIOM

By Edward Alden Jewell

“The Woman” Again

Repeating a previously piquant experiment, Peggy Guggenheim has again brought forward at Art of This Century a group show titled “The Women.” Thirty artists of what Marcel Vertos would call “the stronger sex” have been summoned into collaboration, each represented by a painting, a construction or a piece of sculpture. Needless to say, everything is “modern,” and the assembled work is for the most part abstract.

There is nothing save the catalogue to indicate that these artists are women. The work might just as well have been produced by “The Men.” And while individuality sometimes stands out, derivations are as perceptible. Visitors will no doubt find themselves asking once more the now dog-eared question: When does an object cease to be an object? But pretty often quandary is lightened by plain recognition of the fact that if perchance a natural object served as the artist’s point of departure it is seen to have become completely transmogrified as the journey through space and paint proceeded.

Among the most coherent of the present pictures are those by Kay Sage, Janet Sobel, Dolia Lorient, Hedda Sterne, Alice Trumbell and Anne Neagoe. Pearl Fine builds you up a big, boldly intricate non-objective pattern. Virginia Admiral and McKee (that’s all there is to her name in the catalogue) work more simply, concocting non-objective designs that depend instead upon the use of a few large bright shapes. Charmion Wiegand seems to have taken Helion’s new style apart and put a handful of the pieces, well shuffled, back into abstract currency, while Jacqueline Lamba’s canvas is somewhat, if a shade pallidly, reminiscent of earlier Mattas.

Although Gypsy Rose Lee, Loren McIver and Lenore Krassner are listed as participants in this vehement June gambado, work by them could not be secured, so their names must, with regret, be crossed off.

ART OF THE WEEK

By Carlyle Burrows

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

Sunday, June 17, 1945

Woman artists working in advanced and experimental styles of painting are participating in a group show at the Art of This Century subject matter in almost all instances is abstract. Though research is shown with recognizably primitive forms, and several fantasies may be seen to interpret the psychological aspects of surrealism. The handling of paint with superior subtlety and poetic understanding is achieved by several of these artists, most particularly to be remarked on that account- among them Peter Miller, Pearl Fine, Fannie Hillsmith and Janet Sobel. The exhibition (through July 7) winds up the current season's program, the gallery closing on that date for the summer.

BLESS THEM

By Ben Wolf

ART DIGEST

July 1, 1945

Art of This Century currently offers an exhibition titled "The Women." Ranging in approach from pure abstraction to the semi-abstract and thence to surrealism, the overall trend is in the direction of vigorous color and sharply delineated forms.

Ronnie Elliot offers a romantic surreal canvas notable for its handling of well modulated greens, while a considerable sense of design and feeling for pattern is displayed by Annie Harvey's successful semi-abstract. Black, white and brown are agreeably balanced in an arrangement of forms by Fannie Hillsmith. Leonora Carrington shows a Freudian emetic depicting dogs with all too human attributes, concerning which, the less said the better. The Matta influence is more than slightly evident in Jacqueline Lamba's abstraction.

Anne Neagoe's entry shows a color kinship with Arthur B. Carles' palette, and speaking of color, Janet Sobel is responsible for one of the most joyous chromatic expressions seen this season. A well integrated abstract is offered by Alice Trumbell Nason, while Kayo Sage manifests thoughtful percipience.

Gypsy Rose Lee, versatile daughter of Eros, originally scheduled to strip her soul in the above company, was removed from the roster of exhibitors at the last moment to this admirer's disappointment. Exhibition continues until July 7.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

January 6, 1946

By Edward Alden Jewell

Janet Sobel, at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century, began as a "primitive" and is now an abstractionist. Whether her primitivism was ever genuinely such or from the start sophisticatedly "pseudo," may be debated. There seems, at any rate, less self-consciousness in the abstract work of 1945. Some of her fancies are rather weird, but the impression created is as a rule pleasantly decorative. Color possesses often a singing quality. "Music," with its stylized notes and puzzle-faces, is intricately delicate.

The earlier (1941) "Summer" contains, as one of its "primitive" forms, a gigantic self-portrait, which intimates that the artist is a lady of strong will and very decided views. Could be.

LOCAL REVIEW, NEWSPAPER UNKNOWN
PLAINFIELD, NJ 1962

PLAINFIELD ARTIST EXHIBITS 'CHALLENGING' PAINTINGS

By Joan Sherako

The works of Janet Sobel of Plainfield, which she is exhibiting at Swain's Art Gallery, 317 Front St., form a wonderfully imaginative and uninhibited group in the realms of surrealism and primitivism.

Her art is undoubtedly controversial, but just as certainly challenging. One of the most engaging paintings here is "Spring Festival," a primitive woods scene filled with figures, done in bright red, yellow and green.

In contrast to this, both in color and in feeling, is "Chronicle of Our Elders," created in somber tones with blood red highlights. The artist contains within her canvas the heart of the religious-historical meaning of her subject matter.

Without Brush Stroke

There are works here done either completely or largely without brush stroke, such as "Hiroshima". The mushroom cloud of the bomb explosion rises in the foreground, surrounded by devastation. The artist, through her delicate designed lines of paint, suggest the structure of the oriental city which is disintegrating. In the top most part of the painting, the face of God the Father, is seen.

Another work with deep emotional suggestion is "Death," showing the human face as through painted on a broken piece of pottery, about to be obliterated by a black flowing mass.

Varied Techniques

The artist's collection encompasses not only varied techniques, but the mediums of paint, watercolor and crayon.

Janet Sobel is a self-taught painter. She has exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy, The Chicago Arts Club, the Brooklyn Museum and Peggy Guggenheim's, "Art of the Century." She has had one-man shows at the Puma Gallery and the Sidney Janis Gallery. Mrs. Sobel is included in the book, "Abstract and Surrealistic Art in America." She resides at 1171 Woodland Ave.

Mrs. Sobel's exhibition will continue through March 23 from 9 am to 5:30 pm each day and on Thursdays until 9pm.

LOCAL REVIEW, NEWSPAPER UNKNOWN
PLAINFIELD, NJ 1962

By Michael Lenson

We reluctantly admit that the work of grandmother Janet Sobel which suddenly materialized in an exhibition at the Swain Art Gallery in Plainfield, is new to us. Yet the inspired imagery of this belatedly self-taught artist has been enjoying quite recognition in New York's Puma and Janis Galleries and in national exhibitions. Additionally, Mrs. Sobel has been honored with a full page color reproduction in a book on Abstract and Surrealist Art in America, along with Dali, Chagall, Pollock and the rest.

The reference to the last two is not fortuitous. There is an explosive use of flowing lava color in Mrs. Sobel's painting "Hiroshima" (and others) that suggests the color rituals of Pollock. And the mystic folk lore quality observed in such works as "Chronicle of Our Elders" and "The Widow" denotes a strong affinity (though not in draftsmanship) with Chagall.

But above all it is the ingenious humanity and heart and an extraordinary sense of color which converting each painting into a rare bouquet, endow Mrs. Sobel's with it's unique appeal. Almost completely innocent of formal draftsmanship, she nevertheless populates a flower carpeted woodland with allegorical figures to achieve an enchantingly primitive "Spring Festival." Included in this is a crude figure of one of Mrs. Sobel's admirers, the philosopher John Dewey, whom the artist painted in the nude "to lay his soul bare."

Reputedly living alone with her paints and memoires, the venerable Mrs. Sobel's fantasies and reminiscences devolve into such striking paintings as "The Last Dance of Pavlova", an anguished "Hitler's Hell," "Music Through the Night," "Death," "Disappointment," and a suddenly gay "Tarantella." Seen as a whole, the Janet Sobel show at the Plainfield Swain Gallery is not merely another exhibition. It is an event.