

2017

Adolf Dehn Intro Panel

Fairfield University Art Museum

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ADOLF DEHN

Midcentury Manhattan



Painter, draftsman and printmaker, Adolf Dehn (1895-1968) was among the most prominent and acclaimed artists on the American scene in the years between the two World Wars and into the early 1950s. Born in Minnesota of a pioneering German family, he always retained his affection for the landscape of the American heartland. He traveled extensively through Europe's art capitals during the 1920s before returning to the United States in 1929 making Manhattan his home, and its landscape and cityscape his ever changing studio.

Dehn enjoyed an enviable exhibition record at the leading art galleries throughout the United States, and his works entered the collections of nearly every major museum in the nation. A feature story on the artist in *Life* magazine in 1941 signaled his prominent stature in the art world on this side of the Atlantic, while a charming and widely reproduced watercolor of Central Park in The Metropolitan Museum, on view here, has achieved the almost iconic status reserved for relatively few works of art throughout history.

Yet a survey of college textbooks and of recent exhibitions devoted to American art yields an unwavering result: Dehn is all but invisible. The reasons for this near-obscure are complex, but one obvious explanation is that his descriptive images of Manhattan by day and by night share in the precarious fate of all representational painting and printmaking at midcentury, eclipsed by the ascendancy of Abstract Expressionism and the avant-garde.

Like many figurative and representational artists of the last century who have suffered a similar dismissal, Adolf Dehn deserves a critical reevaluation. Focusing on his descriptive and lyrical depictions of the Manhattan skyline, Central Park and other familiar urban topography and vistas, this exhibition of nearly thirty paintings and works on paper generously lent by the Estate of Adolf and Virginia Dehn and other collectors and institutions is intended to initiate that process, and to promote a renewed appreciation of the artist and his place in the tapestry of twentieth-century American art.

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