



Albert Bloch

(1882–1961)

Menconi +
Schoelkopf

Albert Bloch

STACEY B. EPSTEIN, Guest Curator
of *Albert Bloch: Expressionist*

Albert Bloch gave visual form to the emotional, intellectual and spiritual substance of contemporary life in Germany and America in the first decades of the 20th century. His work resonates with a deep and abiding reverence for the concept of “humanity” in all its beguiling incarnations. From parodies to melancholy meditations—from the theatrical to the scriptural—from expressionist figures to visionary landscapes, Bloch was supremely gifted at capturing the fragility and spirituality of the modern world in flux.

Bloch was of German descent and living in a thriving German-American community in St. Louis, Missouri before venturing abroad in 1909 to spend his formative years overseas. He bucked the Francocentric trend among American artists and expatriated to Germany, then a hub of progressive cultural and artistic abundance. During Bloch’s Munich period from 1909–1921 he was an integral part of the vanguard German art scene and established a successful career exhibiting in pioneering exhibitions with leading avant-garde artists and friends including Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. Bloch enjoyed the distinction of having been the only American artist in the Blue Rider group, showing in their landmark 1911 and 1912 exhibitions. He achieved considerable acclaim for his soulful and innovative expressionist work. Bloch returned to the United States in 1921 and retreated from the limelight, deliberately choosing a more reclusive path, teaching and painting in comparative isolation. Bloch’s visionary art continued to evolve in deeply meaningful ways as he built upon the critical ideas and aesthetics that formed the foundation of his pioneering German work.

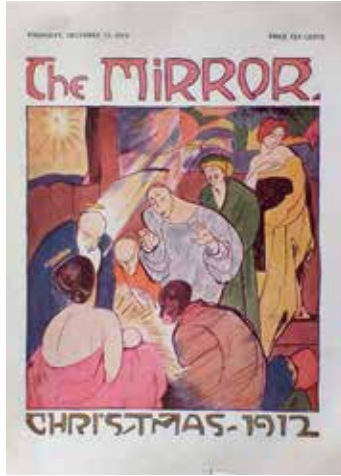
Throughout his career Bloch charted a course often comprised of paradoxes. He could be witty and also caustic. He could juggle exaltation and grief in tandem; he could navigate the subtle nuances between something sinister and something wistful; he could bring us to the edge of darkness and yet lead us to find the sublime beauty in that exact moment.

Bloch’s exquisitely crafted drawings and prints as well as his paintings offer poetic perspective on a world mysteriously suspended in a realm between reality and imagination. These transformative works are charged with polarities that usher the familiar into a new metaphysical, meditative and spiritual space. This imagery is richly layered with meaning and allusions that recontextualize seemingly obvious subject matter. Mortals are recast in metaphorical terms in the guise of Pierrots, clowns, harlequins and carnival figures. Haunting, apocalyptic and visionary landscapes and religious-themed compositions are cleverly refigured and reimagined to introduce otherworldly realms. These works are inspired by nature but only fully crystalize in the artist’s imagination to take their ultimate poetic form. They offer a lens through which to understand Bloch as an artist-philosopher whose evocative imagery exposed a twentieth-century world often trapped in historical periods of turmoil. Regardless of location, Munich or Lawrence, Kansas, the spirit of Bloch’s art lay in its remarkable ability to unveil and illuminate the humanity that lurks beneath the surface of subjects, people, places and objects.

Chronology

1882 Bloch is born on August 2 in St. Louis, Missouri.

1898–1900 Early art education includes St. Louis School of Fine Arts, now part of Washington University.



1900–07 Bloch works as a draftsman in various jobs in New York and St. Louis. His illustrations are published in William Marion Reedy's *St. Louis Mirror*, a political and literary periodical. Reedy encourages Bloch to travel abroad to further his career and offers him financial support.

1909 Bloch expatriates to Europe, settling in Munich where his artistic career flourishes and he becomes an integral part of the vanguard German art scene.



1911 Wassily Kandinsky visits Bloch's Munich studio and invites him to join the first exhibition of the German Expressionist group Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider) at Thannhauser

Gallery, along with Franz Marc and Gabriele Münter. Bloch stands out as the sole American to participate in this landmark exhibition, presenting six of his own works ranging from landscape, religious-themed and commedia dell'arte. The second Blue Rider exhibition in 1912 focuses on graphic works, and Bloch has eight works included.



1913 Kandinsky introduces Bloch to a well-known Chicago collector of modernism, Arthur Jerome Eddy, who purchases 25 of the artist's paintings.

1914–17 Bloch is offered numerous opportunities for single and group shows of his work in America and Europe including the most important exhibitions of Modern art at Der Sturm Gallery in Berlin. Activities of the Blue Rider artists cease around 1917 due to the outbreak of war and the death on the French front of Franz Marc, one of the group's founding members and Bloch's close friend.

1919 Seeking employment, Bloch returns to his hometown of St. Louis for one year. Due to challenging conditions in Munich after the war, Bloch moves back to America permanently in 1921.

1921 A solo show of Bloch's work is held at Daniel Gallery in New York. Bloch teaches briefly at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts.

1923 A turning point in his life and career, Bloch accepts a permanent teaching position as Head of Painting and Drawing at the University of Kansas which he holds for almost 30 years. He deliberately retreats from the art world at this time, preferring instead to paint in the quiet seclusion of his home studio in Lawrence, Kansas.

1949 Bloch's work is included in a growing number of Blue Rider exhibitions at home and abroad from around this time on, including a show at the Tate Gallery, London in 1960.

1955 A retrospective of Bloch's career is held at the University of Kansas, the first since the Daniel Gallery show in 1921.

1959 Bloch creates his last painting, *Impromptu* (34½ × 24¾ inches, private collection).

1961 Bloch dies at his home in Lawrence.

1997 The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City organizes a major retrospective of Bloch's work that travels to Lenbachhaus, Munich and Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.



ILLUSTRATIONS:

Albert Bloch, cover illustration for *The Mirror*, December 19, 1912. Albert Bloch Foundation, Kansas City, Missouri // Der Blaue Reiter catalogue, 1912. Albert Bloch papers, 1873–2014. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution // *Harlequinade*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 36 × 46½ inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo credit: The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY // Albert Bloch in his Lawrence, Kansas studio, 1932. Albert Bloch papers, 1873–2014. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Selected Public Collections

Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art, Saint Joseph, Missouri
Art Bridges Foundation, Bentonville, Arkansas
Art Institute of Chicago
Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio
Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio
Des Moines Art Center, Iowa
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
The Jewish Museum, New York
Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois
Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University,
Manhattan, Kansas
Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, New York
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Mulvane Art Museum, Topeka, Kansas
Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri
The San Diego Museum of Art, California
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, Indiana
Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas
Union League Club of Chicago, Illinois
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Wichita Art Museum, Kansas

TOP: *Duell (Duel)*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 50 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Art Bridges. CENTER: *Three Pierrots and Harlequin*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 53 $\frac{13}{16}$ inches. The Art Institute of Chicago, Arthur Jerome Eddy Memorial Collection, 1931.515
Photo credit: The Art Institute of Chicago/Art Resource, NY. COVER: Albert Bloch in his Munich studio, 1912. Albert Bloch papers, 1873-2014. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. All photos and paintings: © Albert Bloch Foundation.



For a full list and prices of available works by Albert Bloch, please contact:

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