

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
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PRESS RELEASE

THE WHITNEY EXPLORES THE WHIMSICAL WORLD OF ARTIST, ILLUSTRATOR, AND CHILDREN'S BOOK AUTHOR WANDA GÁG WITH NEW EXHIBITION OF SELECT PRINTS



Wanda Gág's World is on view on the Whitney Museum of American Art's seventh floor from March 28 until December 2024.

New York, NY, April 17, 2024 — Visionary artist, illustrator, and children's book author Wanda Gág (1893–1946) is having a long overdue moment at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

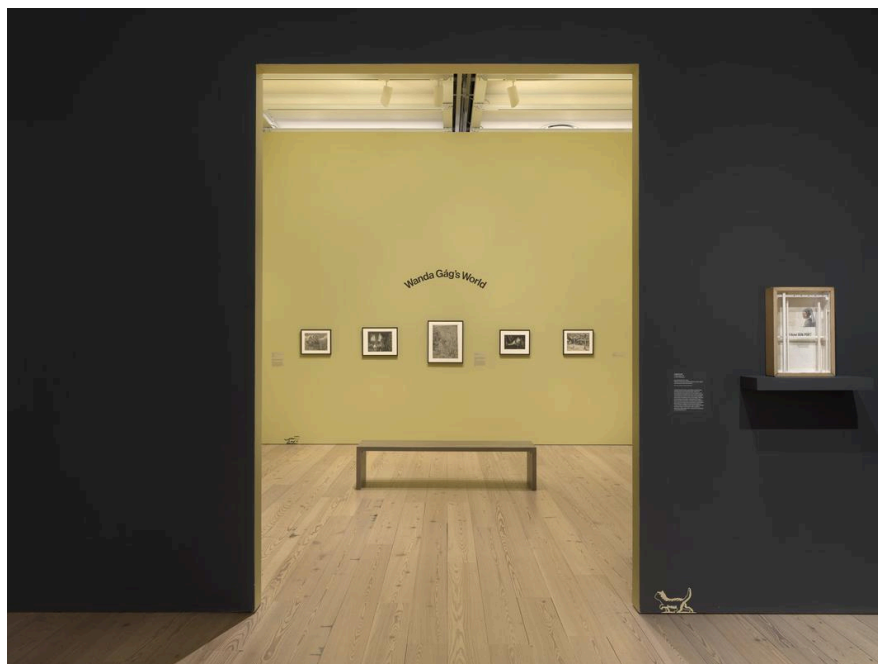
On display on the Museum's seventh floor from March 28 until December 2024, the small survey *Wanda Gág's World* features 18 prints and two first editions of her children's books, including *Millions of Cats* (1928), the longest-running continuously in-print American picture book. This exhibition offers visitors a unique window into the world of Wanda Gág, featuring works that have not been displayed since the 1990s. The exhibition is also one of the first solo in-person museum presentations of Gág on the East Coast in decades. Drawn entirely from the Museum's permanent collection, the works on view reflect Gág's long history with the Whitney, including as a member of the Whitney Studio Club and her participation in six Whitney Biennials and Annuals between 1933 and 1941.

The prints included in the exhibition span the most substantial years of Gág's career, from the mid-1920s, when she began receiving recognition for her work, until her death in 1946. They record the world as she experienced it, a place where landscapes move rhythmically and inanimate objects hum with life. Although Gág also painted, the graphic arts were her primary mode of working.

Today, Gág is primarily known as a children's book writer and illustrator—her innovative approach to design and illustration was influential, with Maurice Sendak and others expressing admiration for her work. The exhibition includes two of her first-edition children's books from the Whitney's special collections: *Millions of Cats* (1928) and *The ABC Bunny* (1933). Gág was also a prolific writer about her life and work, and excerpts from her letters and diaries accompany the prints on view as exhibition didactics.

Wanda Gág's World is co-curated by Roxanne Smith, Senior Curatorial Assistant, and Scout Hutchinson, Curatorial Fellow.

"We're thrilled for the chance to introduce new audiences to the enchanting and deeply original world of Wanda Gág," said Smith. "Though her popular legacy is through children's books, this show spotlights her own artistic practice. Gág is an important figure within the underrecognized history of American women graphic artists working in the early 20th century. We hope this show at the Whitney gives our visitors an appreciation of her particular vision."



Born in Minnesota to first- and second- generation immigrants from German Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), Gág came from a modest upbringing and arrived in New York in 1917 to study at the Art Students League, where she immersed herself in the city's modernist art scene. Adhering neither to abstraction nor social realism—the dominant artistic movements at the time—Gág forged her own approach to figuration. Over the course of her career, she found

modest success selling her prints and produced several popular children’s books. She also held odd jobs like designing crosswords and puzzles.

Gág was a member of the Whitney Studio Club, which operated from 1918 until 1928 and notably created exhibition opportunities for women artists. Its director, Juliana Force, encouraged members to make prints and works on paper that were more accessible to a wider array of collectors. Gág did just that, and the Whitney Museum has three works by Gág that were acquired as part of the Whitney’s founding collection.

Gág’s works and writings have whimsical, energetic, almost psychedelic qualities to them, “a free-spirited way with words and drawing,” said Smith. A NYC-based artist who spent warmer months in rural areas in Connecticut and New Jersey, Gág would spend entire days alone drawing the fields and hillsides and farm equipment—what she called “the rambly up and downy land.”

Gág—who, according to Audur H. Winnan, author of Gág’s catalogue raisonné of prints, often said she had three passions: art, sex, and growing things (she was a gardener)—shared incredible stories of lovers and friends and life in her writing. She once declared her personal motto to be: “Draw to live and live to draw.”

In fact, the title of the exhibition is taken from the artist’s own writing. “It comes from a letter Gág wrote to her gallerist Carl Ziegler,” explained Hutchinson. “She recounts a vivid dream she’s had after a particularly intense day of drawing. In this dream, she’s inhabiting the space of her drawings—where the landscape is in constant motion and perspective shifts this way and that—and she describes it as a ‘Wanda Gág world.’”

The exhibition is the inaugural installment of a new initiative by the Whitney to rotate rarely seen works from the Museum’s permanent collection in a dedicated area on the seventh floor. The exhibition is marked by a vinyl cat—adapted from *Millions of Cats*—on the wall, guiding visitors in a playful manner to this special dedicated gallery.

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ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning “island of many hills.” The Museum’s current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan (“tobacco field”). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region’s original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum’s Land Acknowledgment, [visit the Museum’s website](#).

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE. The Museum offers FREE admission and special programming for visitors every Friday evening from 5–10 pm and on the second Sunday of every month.

Image credit:

Wanda Gág, *Spring in the Garden*, 1927. Lithograph, 11 3/8 × 13 3/4in. (28.9 × 34.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from The Lauder Foundation, Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Fund; purchase, with funds from The Lauder Foundation, Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Fund 96.68.108

Installation view of *Wanda Gág’s World* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 28–December 2024). From left to right: *Spring in the Garden*, 1927; *The Forge*, 1932; *Upright Landscape*, 1926; *Evening*, 1928; *Winter Twilight*, 1927. Photograph by Ron Amstutz

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