

WHITNEY

PRESS RELEASE

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MABEL DWIGHT: COOL HEAD, WARM HEART **CAPTURES LIFE IN NEW YORK CITY THROUGH THE** **WORK OF A PIONEERING AMERICAN** **LITHOGRAPHER**



Opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art on February 20, this exhibition traces a pioneering printmaker's vivid portraits of New York City life, featuring humor, resilience, humanity, and the Whitney's own downtown origins.

New York, NY, February 4, 2026 — The Whitney Museum of American Art presents *[Mabel Dwight: Cool Head, Warm Heart](#)*, opening February 20, 2026. Celebrating one of the most notable American printmakers of the 1920s and 1930s, this exhibition is Mabel Dwight's first solo museum exhibition and foregrounds her vivid and elegantly composed portrayals of New York's people, theaters, streets, and everyday rituals, rendered through a democratic print medium.

Born in 1876 and raised in Cincinnati, New Orleans, and San Francisco, Dwight came to New York at the turn of the century as an illustrator and painter, and soon became part of the downtown artistic community. She was an active member of the Whitney Studio Club in the 1910s and became the Studio Club's first secretary in 1918, working closely with its director, Juliana Force. The Studio Club served as a foundation for what would later go on to be the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1927, at the age of fifty-two, Dwight began working in lithography and quickly emerged as one of the most respected printmakers of the 1920s and 1930s. For Dwight, lithography offered not only aesthetic freedom but also political purpose. It allowed her work to circulate widely and inexpensively, aligning with her self-described "Socialist" vision of dignity across class divides.

Dwight's work has been part of the Whitney Museum's history since its founding; the Museum holds about a third of her lithographs. Nearly a century after Dwight published her prints, they stand as examples of how to capture the varieties of urban experiences with a keen-eyed affection for New York. Dwight, like her friend and contemporary Wanda Gág, also the subject of a recent exhibition at the Whitney, is an artist whose work offers an accessible but rigorous vision.

"Dwight was always careful to avoid the grotesque," said Dan Nadel, the Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Drawings and Prints, Whitney Museum, "preferring a gentler but no less sharp approach, rendering her subjects in rounded, solid forms, dignified and individual."

Dwight believed that her art should be made with "a cool head and a warm heart," so that it might become a "living influence on the world." That philosophy shaped both her working process and her subjects. She spent days wandering the City, from Harlem to Staten Island, often sketching in a notebook concealed inside her jacket. Back in her studio, she refined these observations before transferring them onto stone or zinc plates, producing prints that capture New York as a stage of human drama, humor, and quiet resilience.

"Seeing these works fresh in 2026 is a reminder that New Yorkers, and any city dweller, have always existed together as a community at play, work, and protest," Nadel continued, "and it is a pleasure to show visitors that Dwight's works and ideas are integral to the Whitney's collection and vision, from founding to now."

Dwight's bustling crowd scenes portray individuals with gently curving lines, dramatic lighting, and delicate highlights, each figure distinct yet inseparable from the whole. Whether depicting balloon sellers, subway riders, parkgoers, or theater audiences, Dwight imbued her subjects with what she called "the stuff of life"—an inner glow that conveys both vulnerability and strength. Her overtly political images are as theatrical as her scenes of entertainment, and her intimate portraits reveal faces alive with expression and psychological depth.

One of the exhibition's highlights, *Life Class*, exemplifies Dwight's sharp eye for body language, crowds, and likenesses. The lithograph portrays some of the Studio Club's regulars gathered

around the model in a figure drawing session. Dwight's placement of lights and darks pulls our attention all the way around the space, making us feel the intimacy of the crowd and concentration in the room. Her likenesses of artists, including Peggy Beacon and Edward Hopper, are affectionate and broad. Dwight's work was published widely in magazines as wide-ranging as *Vanity Fair*, *The New Masses*, and *Theatre Guild Magazine*, and circulated across the United States. Her lithographs reached a wide audience hungry for art rooted in everyday experience. At a moment when American artists were seeking new ways to connect art to lived reality, Dwight offered an enduring model of how humor, political awareness, and human warmth could coexist on a single printed sheet.

Mabel Dwight: Cool Head, Warm Heart is curated by Dan Nadel, Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Drawings and Prints, Whitney Museum of American Art, with Eli Harrison, Curatorial Fellow, Whitney Museum of American Art.

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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 of all ages every Friday evening from 5–10 pm and on the second Sunday of every month.

Image credit:

Mabel Dwight, *Toy Shop Window*, 1927. Lithograph, 10 13/16 × 14 1/8in. (27.5 × 35.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from The Lauder Foundation, Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Fund 96.68.86

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