

Edward Hagedorn
MATRIX/BERKELEY 170

University Art Museum
Pacific Film Archive
mid July - late August 1996

Yon, 1930s



When Berkeley-based artist Edward Hagedorn died in 1982, few members of the Bay Area art-going public would have known of his work. Although he lived in the Bay Area for eighty years, after much early success the eccentric and idealistic Hagedorn, troubled by personal shyness, ceased to exhibit his work publicly in the late 1930s. Yet he remained obsessed with creating images of primal force. Despite living the last thirty years of his life as a virtual recluse—described by an artist colleague as “a walking question mark with no use for success”—he left behind him a remarkable body of work that is only now coming to be known. This work suggests that it is fair to appraise Hagedorn as the most important Expressionist artist to have come out of California.

Three significant art historical events in the early twentieth century can be said to have had a profound impact on Hagedorn's artistic development. The first was the Armory Show in New York in 1913, the seminal exhibition that first exposed most American artists to modernist European art movements including Impressionism, Expressionism, Futurism, and Cubism. The second was the Pan-Pacific Exposition of 1915, dominated by American Impressionism, that influenced the California movement known as “The Society of Six.” The third event—and the only one that Hagedorn, born in 1902, experienced directly—was the “Blue Four” exhibition held in 1926 at the Oakland Art Association (now the Oakland Museum), which brought the Expressionist work of Klee, Jawlensky, Kandinsky, and Feininger to the Bay Area's attention for the first time.

Born in San Francisco in 1902, Hagedorn enrolled at the San Francisco Art Association by the age of sixteen, and then around 1923 to 1925 at the California School of Fine Arts, where his teachers included artists who had been profoundly influenced by the Armory Show and

who had even participated in the Pan-Pacific Exposition. From the start Hagedorn exhibited a special fascination with German art, although some of his early landscapes betray an interest in the lyrical French mode of André Derain or Maurice Denis. Hagedorn must have found Hans Hofmann's brilliantly colored abstractionism, and his teaching in Berkeley, a challenge, too, augmenting for him the presence of so many German modernists who had been brought by Alfred Neumeyer to teach at Mills College in the 1930s, creating something of a German-East Bay modernist alliance.

Hagedorn publicly exhibited, most notoriously in 1927 at the Oakland Art Gallery, an event that provoked a brief scandal because of the “immoral” nature of his painting—a female nude, a genre in which he worked throughout his life. This was, however, the period of Hagedorn's greatest artistic production, from roughly 1925 to 1940, when he worked in an extraordinary range of graphic techniques, including etching, drypoint, linoleum cut, woodcut, lithography, and monotype. A number of his prints take maximum advantage of the sharp-edged contrast of black and white that is possible in linoleum cuts, featuring dramatically anguished single figures wrapped in chains or enveloped hopelessly in the darkness of a prison cell.

More importantly, Hagedorn's diversity at this time can be described on a second level, that of the imaginative wealth of his imagery in the service of profound, often neurotic, and politically astute content. Based in the violent and repressive politics of the 1930s and early 1940s, the best of these images engage with European Expressionism without blindly following the style's tenets, nor succumbing to the ironic detachment of the Neo-Expressionists of the 1980s. Instead, Hagedorn's images remain engaged, powerful, even forbidding. What can be termed the “anti-war images” drew on memories of the First World

War and were carried out against the context of the Spanish Civil War and the outbreak of World War II. Their monumentalizing quality is direct and arresting, and continues to feel surprisingly contemporary. Many feature the skeletal figure of Death, oddly suggestive of Bergman's vision of Death in *The Seventh Seal*, sometimes grinning as he views a line of faceless soldiers or stands guard over a tangle of dead bodies. Even in these images, however, Hagedorn's obsessions could be tempered by a morbid sense of humor: a thin skeleton may arch over an unsuspecting town like a rainbow, or stride around in oversized boots with an obscene insouciance.

Hagedorn continued to mine other artistic veins as well, carrying out important Expressionist-influenced landscapes, usually sharply drawn—landscapes of the imagination that often evoke the anthropomorphizing Surrealistic tinge of Max Ernst or Salvador Dali. Such work is charged (literally, in his ongoing use of motifs such as comets and lightning bolts) with a post-Freudian awareness, with organic forms seemingly drawn from deep in the artist's subconscious. Works such as these drawn from different media—preparatory studies, relief prints, and linoleum cuts—help make clear the artist's fascination with the emotive capacity of his materials, and his fascination with color.

Hagedorn exhibited frequently throughout the late 1920s and '30s with members of the “Society of Six,” even winning honors from the Brooklyn Museum and the Pennsylvania Academy, sharing their Fauvist-influenced, Expressionist aesthetic. However he resisted frequent overtures from dealers and curators that might have brought him increased acclaim. Enabled in part by the inheritance of substantial means from his maternal family, Hagedorn abruptly ceased to show his work publicly in the late 1930s. The spirit went out of much of his work from about 1940, and although Hagedorn

continued to make art throughout most of his life, it often devolved into trivializing depictions of the female nude. At his death, intestate, in 1982, he left the bulk of his early work—along with an estate of close to a million dollars in cash—in boxes in the attic of his Woolsey Street home.

James Steward
Curator

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Works in MATRIX:

All works are lent by Denenberg Fine Arts, San Francisco.

Defiance
about 1925
Relief print on paper

Lightning
about 1925
Relief print on paper

Study for On Guard
about 1925
Ink and brush on paper

Landscape/Grove of trees, Sonoma County
about 1925-28
Pastel and tempera on paper

Marin landscape
about 1928
Pastel on paper

Brachial Tree
about 1930
Soft graphite, ink and watercolor on heavy wove paper

Cliffs with setting sun
about 1930
Linocut on wove paper

Desperate Conflict
about 1930
Relief print on paper

Hand of Fate, Four Victims
about 1930
Brush and ink on wove paper

On Guard (Death Gloating Over Dead Soldiers)
about 1930
Watercolor and ink on wove paper

Man of the Hour Reviewing Troops
about 1930
Ink and watercolor on paper

The Rainbow
about 1930
Linocut on wove paper
Self-portrait with cigarette
about 1930
Black and white pastels on paper
Skull-like organic form, green sky
about 1930
Soft graphite, ink and watercolor on
Bristol board
The Sower
about 1930
Linocut on wove paper
You
about 1930
Linocut on laid paper
Organic forms, blue sea, purple mountains
1934
Soft graphite, ink and watercolor on
Bristol board
Battlefield
about 1935
Etching with drypoint on paper
Bayonet Attack
about 1935
Brush and ink on tan wove paper
Celebration
about 1935
Etching and aquatint with drypoint and
burnishing on laid paper
Chains
about 1935
Linocut on wove paper
Death, Victim, Bayoneter
about 1935
Relief etching on paper
Emissaries
about 1935
Drypoint on paper
Green hooded figure/Three mountains
about 1935
Watercolor, chalk and ink on paper
Hammer
about 1930
Relief print on paper
The Herd
about 1935
Drypoint on paper
Lavender tree trunks in landscape
1935
Soft graphite, ink and watercolor on laid
paper
Lightning and Mountains
about 1935
Linocut on wove paper
The Man of the Hour
about 1935
Etching on paper
Marching On
about 1935
Drypoint on paper

Mountain Peaks
about 1935
Tempera on heavy paper
On Guard
about 1935
Etching with drypoint on paper
Palisades
about 1935
Tempera on heavy paper
Prisoner
about 1930
Relief print on paper
Seated figure
about 1935
Tempera on paper
Stormy Night
about 1935
Linocut on wove paper
Study for *Chains*
about 1935
Graphite on wove paper
Study for *Entanglement*
about 1935
Brush and ink on wove paper
Study for *Prisoner*
about 1935
Brush and ink over graphite on paper
Sword Swallower
about 1935
Etching on paper
Nude torso
1936
Tempera on paper
Caught in Barbed Wire (early state)
about 1937
Drypoint on laid paper

Public Programs/Gallery Talks

Robert Conway
Sunday, July 21, 3 p.m.
Sunday, September 29, 3 p.m.
Gallery 1

Robert Conway, consulting curator of the Mills College Art Gallery, will present special gallery talks on Hagedorn, drawing on his substantial research into the artist's career. Conway's talk will be informed by his survey of the artist's extant work, his review of critical responses to Hagedorn, and his extensive interviews with Hagedorn's friends and colleagues.