

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Grandma Moses, *Apple Butter Making*. 1947. Oil on pressed wood. Signed, lower right.
19 1/4" x 23 1/4" (48.9 x 59.1 cm). Kallir 654. Private collection.
© Grandma Moses Properties Co., NY

NEW YORK, NY (FEBRUARY 25, 2019) – *Looking for America*, a group exhibition of important 19th and 20th century self-taught artists, will open at the **Galerie St. Etienne** on March 19, 2019 with a reception from 6–8 p.m. The first of three exhibitions celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Galerie St. Etienne, the show features artists with extensive histories at the gallery, including **Henry Darger**, **Edward Hicks**, **Morris Hirshfield**, **John Kane**, **Grandma Moses**, and **Joseph Pickett**. The exhibition will run through July 3, 2019.

After founding New York’s Galerie St. Etienne in 1939, Otto Kallir, an Austrian art dealer who had been forced into exile by the Nazis, was looking for art that embodied the country that had saved his life. He was attracted to the authenticity of America’s folk tradition and in 1940 presented *What a Farm Wife Painted*, the first gallery showing of works by Grandma Moses. Subsequent exhibitions of self-taught artists included the *American Primitives* exhibition of 1948, featuring paintings by Edward Hicks, John Kane and Joseph Pickett.

This egalitarian approach to American art practice was, at the time, promoted by such august institutions as the Museum of Modern Art. With the rise of Abstract Expressionism, however, America’s artistic destiny came to be identified with a comparatively rarified formalist doctrine. While many among the elite of the art establishment jettisoned the so-called “naïves,” Grandma Moses went on to become one of the most celebrated painters of the era.

The anti-establishment ethos of the 1960s and ‘70s spawned a reexamination of art created outside the American mainstream. Augmenting its representation of Grandma Moses, in the last quarter of the 20th

century the Galerie St. Etienne established relationships with the families of Hirshfield and Kane, and with the estate of the self-taught master Henry Darger. The embrace of “outsiders” such as Darger paved the way for today’s more inclusive reformulation of the American art-historical canon.

About the artists

Henry Darger (1892–1973) is in many respects the prototypical "outsider" artist: a recluse who created a startling imaginary world in his rented room, unbeknownst to anyone but himself. By inserting innocent-looking children into often grisly battle scenes, he created jarring juxtapositions that unwittingly expose the hypocrisy of mid-20th century American popular culture. **Edward Hicks** (1780–1849), a Quaker minister and coachmaker, combined his roles as a craftsman and preacher when he took up the brush, focusing exclusively on the subject of the Peaceable Kingdom described in the bible, which he depicted more than 60 times in highly refined paintings. **Morris Hirshfield** (1872–1946), born in a small Polish town and eventually rising to become a successful slipper manufacturer in New York City, took up painting only after he retired in 1935. His paintings most often featured animals and women surrounded by dense ornamentation. Although only four of his artworks are known to have survived, **Joseph Pickett** (1848–1918) is considered one of the foremost American self-taught artists of the early 20th century, painting the world he saw around him in New Hope, Pennsylvania. **John Kane** (1860-1934) immigrated to America from Scotland as a young man and occupied a number of hard labor jobs in the Pittsburgh area. It wasn't until losing a leg during a train accident that Kane discovered painting. Living in poverty his entire life, he came to the art world's attention in 1927, when he was admitted to the *Carnegie International* exhibition: the first self-taught artist to be so honored. **Grandma Moses** (1860–1961) did not begin painting until she was in her 70s, yet she earned widespread acclaim during her lifetime and today is regarded as a cornerstone in the self-taught tradition.

About Galerie St. Etienne

Founded in 1939 by Otto Kallir, the Galerie St. Etienne is the oldest gallery in the United States specializing in Austrian and German Expressionism as well as in the work of self-taught artists. The gallery mounted the first American one-person shows of Erich Heckel (1955), Gustav Klimt (1959), Oskar Kokoschka (1940), Alfred Kubin (1941), Paula Modersohn-Becker (1958) and Egon Schiele (1941). St. Etienne was also instrumental in arranging the first American museum acquisitions of works by these artists, through sales and donations. Firmly committed to scholarship, the gallery's directors have authored catalogues raisonnés on Richard Gerstl, Grandma Moses and Egon Schiele. The gallery is also known for its expertise on Käthe Kollwitz. The current director, Jane Kallir, has written over 20 books and is the leading authority on Egon Schiele. The Galerie St. Etienne developed a commitment to the work of self-taught American and European artists after discovering Grandma Moses, who had her first one-person show at the gallery in 1940.

Galerie St. Etienne

Looking for America

March 19 – July 3, 2019

24 W. 57th Street, #802, New York, NY 10019

FOR MEDIA INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT

Adam Mrlík or Abby Addams

+1 212-675-1800

adam@bluemedium.com / abby@bluemedium.com