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GUSTAV KLIMT: *Baby (Cradle)* 1917. Oil on canvas. 43 3/4" x 43 1/2" (111 x 110 cm). Weidinger 253. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Gift of Otto and Franziska Kallir with the support of the Carol and Edwin Fullinwider Fund, 1978.

NEW YORK, NY (OCTOBER 2, 2019) – *The Expressionist Legacy*, an exhibition of important works by celebrated German and Austrian Expressionists, will open at the **Galerie St. Etienne** on October 22 as the third and final exhibition celebrating the gallery's 80th anniversary. The survey will feature some 56 works by Max Beckmann, Lovis Corinth, Richard Gerstl, Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Marie-Louise Motesiczky, Egon Schiele and others. Borrowed from museum and private collections, all were sold or shown by the Galerie St. Etienne during its storied history and played a part in solidifying the gallery's reputation as a champion of the movement.

When Otto Kallir established the Galerie St. Etienne in New York in 1939, Austrian and German Expressionism was largely unknown in the United States. A bias toward French formalism continued into the second half of the twentieth century, and an aversion to figural content led the American art world to embrace abstraction to the exclusion of almost all else. Over the last 80 years, the Galerie St. Etienne has consistently challenged this bias and in the process, broadened the public's understanding of twentieth-century art history.

In the years leading up to World War II, the Nazi regime labeled Expressionist paintings "degenerate," seizing such works from museums and shipping them abroad for sale. Persecuted Jews sometimes found a lifeline in their collections, selling the art to survive under Nazi rule and (if they managed to escape) to support themselves in exile. The outflow of Jewish refugee collectors, dealers, artists and art from Germany and Austria sparked new international interest in Expressionism and a concurrent surge in exhibitions. Works that had once belonged to German museums featured prominently in these exhibitions and were

acquired by any number of collectors and institutions, including New York's Museum of Modern Art. "The only good thing about the exile of such fine works of art from one country is the consequent enrichment of other lands where cultural freedom still exists," declared MoMA's director, Alfred Barr. Those who bought "degenerate" art in the 1930s and '40s often felt they were engaged in a heroic salvage mission. The press release for the Galerie St. Etienne's 1940 exhibition, "Saved from Europe," noted that the works on offer had "escaped destruction by air raid, fire or water, or at best, the 'honor' of wandering into some Nazi collection."

This increased interest in some corners of the art world did not, however, translate into widespread sales. With America's entry into World War II in 1941, perceptions of Expressionism were further complicated. In the U.S., German natives had to register as enemy aliens, while Austrians were seen as "Hitler's first victims." As a result, Austrian modernism was spared the effects of anti-German sentiment, but its artists also lacked the name-recognition enjoyed by many of their German counterparts. Kallir, who had arrived in New York in 1939 with much of the inventory from his Vienna gallery intact, saw the Galerie St. Etienne as an economic lifeline for the refugee community, but soon discovered that, with the exception of Kokoschka, Austrian art was virtually unsalable. Reviewing the gallery's "Saved from Europe" exhibition, the *New York Herald* stated that Kallir shouldn't have bothered with Klimt and Schiele.

Despite the initial reception, Kallir persisted in promoting these artists in the face of prejudice and ignorance for decades to come. The gallery mounted the first American one-person showings of artists such as Gustav Klimt (1959), Oskar Kokoschka (1940), Paula Modersohn-Becker (1959) and Egon Schiele (1941). The gallery was also instrumental in arranging the first American museum acquisitions of works by these artists (by such institutions as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Phillips Collection and the National Gallery of Art, among many others). In 1960 Kallir organized the first American traveling retrospective of Schiele's work, and in 1965 he collaborated on the Guggenheim's groundbreaking Klimt/Schiele show. Since that time, the Galerie St. Etienne has organized exhibitions focusing on one or more of the Austrian modernists for nearly a dozen museums in the United States, Italy, Austria and Asia. Through its extensive ancillary publication program, the gallery established a baseline for future scholarship, while forging links to contemporary artists with a humanistic orientation.

The National Gallery of Art in Washington, The Guggenheim Museum and the Morgan Library in New York are among the institutional lenders to *The Expressionist Legacy*.

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). The gallery is also known for its expertise on Käthe Kollwitz. St. Etienne was also instrumental in arranging the first American museum acquisitions of works by these artists, through sales and donations. 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. Firmly committed to scholarship, the gallery's directors have authored catalogues raisonnés on Richard Gerstl, Grandma Moses and Egon Schiele. The current director, Jane Kallir, has written more than 20 books and is the leading authority on Egon Schiele.

Galerie St. Etienne

The Expressionist Legacy

October 22, 2019 - February 29, 2020

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