

PRESS RELEASE



WILL BARNET AT 100 ***A Coming of Age as Artist, Printmaker, and Instructor*** ***Receives First New York Museum Retrospective***

Taught in New York for Nearly 40 Years, Still Painting Today



New York, NY, September 13, 2011 – One-hundred years in the making, *Will Barnett at 100* – the artist's first New York museum retrospective – opens at the National Academy Museum, September 16 and continues through December 31, 2011.

Will Barnett has worked in virtually every main museum in the United States, and his figurative and abstract paintings and prints continue to advance the fine arts. During a career that has spanned over 80 years, Barnett has been a printer for major artists, including Louise Bourgeois, a teacher of Eva Hesse, James Rosenquist, and Tom Wesselmann, and he remains a colleague and source of inspiration to hundreds of artists, curators, and collectors. An

Academician since 1982, Barnett lives in New York City and celebrated his 100th birthday on May 25, 2011.

Will Barnett at 100 consists of 43 paintings and prints that range in date from 1935 – five years after he moved from Beverly, MA to New York City at age 19 – through 2008. The loan exhibition, which includes works from numerous public and private collections, is organized by Bruce Weber, Senior Curator, Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Art, National Academy Museum, and will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue.

In related programming, the museum hosts *Will Barnett in Conversation* on October 12, 2011, when Barnett joins Weber in a discussion of the retrospective and his career, and *Will Barnett at 100 – A Symposium* on November 5. The day-long symposium includes a

Will Barnett: *The Blue Robe*, 1962 Oil on canvas 50 x 54 in. Private Collection, courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York

series of lectures by art historians on different aspects of Barnet's life and work, as well as a panel discussion including artist Philip Pearlstein that illuminates Barnet's place within the context of American art. The retrospective, talk, and symposium are among the National Academy Museum's reopening events.

Barnet was born in Beverly, MA in 1911. He moved to New York in 1931 and embarked on an 80-year career as an artist, printmaker, and instructor. Barnet taught at the Art Students League (1941-1979) and Cooper Union (1945-1967) in New York and at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1967-1992) in addition to shorter term appointments. He also continues to conduct workshops and critiques at the National Academy School, which he has done since 2001.

The works in the exhibition trace Barnet's explorations of figuration and abstraction, including WPA-tinted realism, Hard-Edged abstraction, and Indian Space painting, with its fields of color and imagery inspired by indigenous art of North and South America. An impassioned student of the visual arts of many cultures, Barnet's investigations have been informed by old and modern masters, Byzantine art, Hopi bowls, geometric patterns found in ancient Peruvian textiles, and American folk art.

The arc of Barnet's work runs from realism in the 1930s, when he worked primarily as a graphic artist and printer, to increasingly abstract work in the 1940s, full abstraction in the 1950s and early 1960s, and a figurative style in the 1960s through 2003, when he returned to abstraction.

- Highlights of the exhibition include *Idle Hands*, from 1935, in which a deflated man is seated, his elbows resting on his knees and arms crossed as his torso slumps forward. With a cap covering his downcast face, the figure illuminates the Depression-era plight of millions of people unable to find work.
- By 1946, when Barnet completed *Soft Boiled Eggs*, he had entered the realm of Modernism. In the painting, Barnet's wife and three children surround a kitchen table. In sharp contrast to *Idle Hands*, all of the flatly rendered elements in the painting are brought to the foreground without any hint of depth or pictorial illusion.
- The 1959 *Singular Image* is a purely abstract work "prompted by a glimpse of his shadow as it intersected cracks in a city sidewalk," as Weber notes in the exhibition catalogue, *Will Barnet at 100*. Barnet has explained that the cross-like form outlined in white and floating against a dark background expresses "the idea of modern man being ... pushed in by all kinds of forces."
- In the early 60s, Barnet returned to figuration in paintings of his family, friends, and associates. The 1972 painting, *Woman and the Sea*, was inspired by a moment when he saw the silhouetted figure of his second wife, Elena, leaning against a

porch column in a summer house in Maine and looking out across the ocean. As Weber notes in his catalogue essay, “The picture alludes to New England days of the past and the countless women left behind by men who went to sea... For Barnet, the woman was a universal symbol of strength, home, and endurance in the face of life’s mysteries.”

- In 2003, Barnet returned to abstraction to explore form, space, and color anew. *Strolling*, from 2008, has a lighter palette and freer and more open sense of composition than many of his earlier abstract works.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACADEMY

Founded in 1825, the National Academy Museum and School is the only institution of its kind that integrates a museum, art school, and honorary association of artists and architects dedicated to creating and furthering a living history of American art. The Academy promotes American art and architecture through exhibition and education and continues to play a critical role in fostering the visual arts in America.

FUNDER CREDITS

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Exhibition: ***Will Barnet at 100***
Dates: September 16 – December 31, 2011
Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11:00 AM – 6:00 PM
Closed July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas Day and New Year’s Day

ARTalks: ***Will Barnet in Conversation***
 October 12, 2011, 6:45 PM
 Will Barnet at 100 – A Symposium
 November 5, 2011, Hours: 9:30 AM – 5:00 PM

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

1083 Fifth Avenue at 89th Street

Admission: Adults: \$12; Seniors (65+) and students with valid ID: \$7,

Children under 12, members, and students of the National Academy School: free

PRESS CONTACTS:

Heidi Riegler, Director Marketing and Communications
National Academy Museum and School
212.369.4880, x 214
hriegler@nationalacademy.org

Andrew Decker:
Andrew Decker Com.
212.222.4688
decker06@gmail.com