



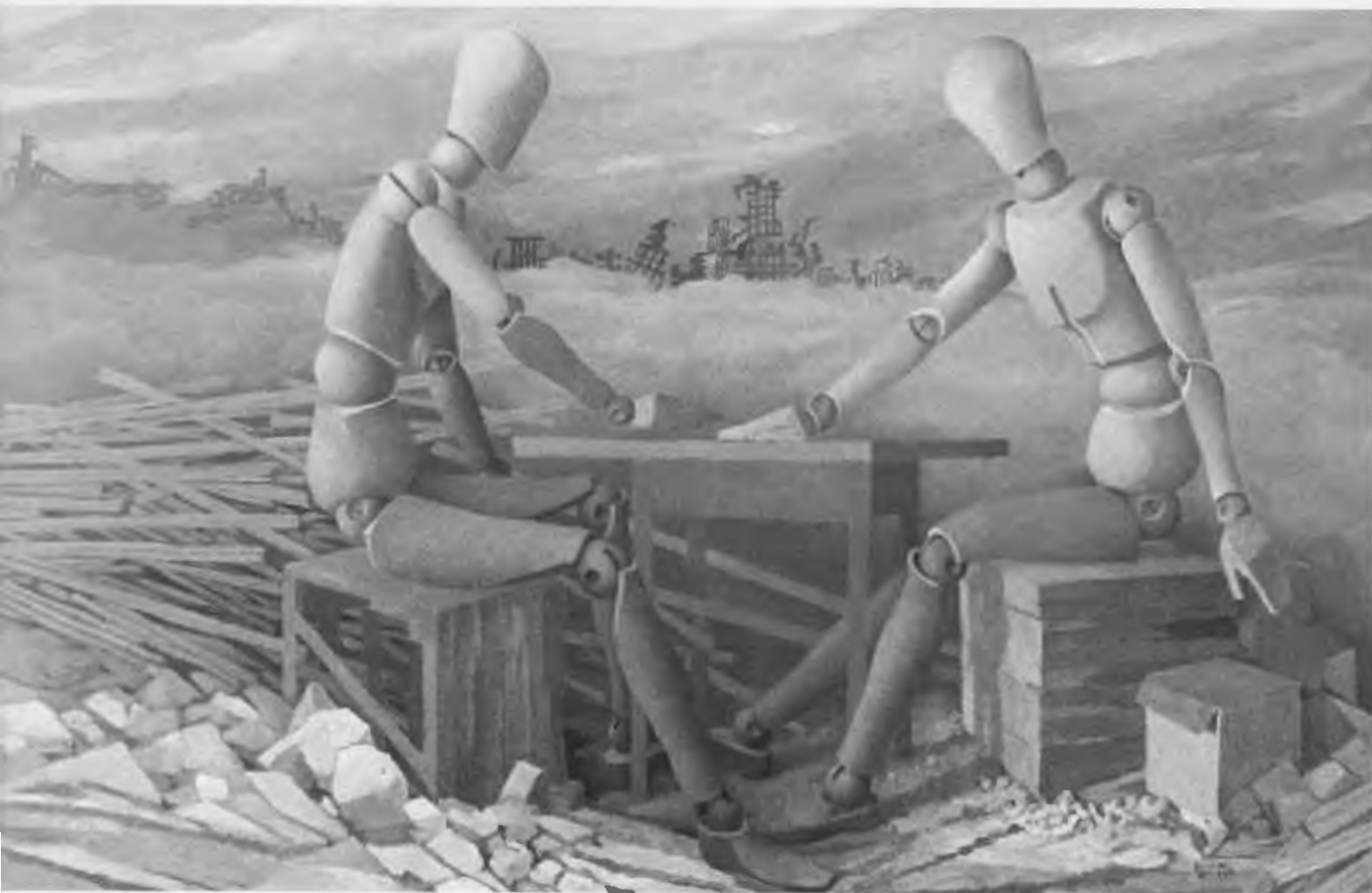
**BERNARDA BRYSON SHAHN**



Bernarda Bryson Shahn

Photographer: Brian J. Berman





**BERNARDA BRYSON SHAHN**

A Selection of Drawings, Paintings, and Prints  
from 1928 through 1998



Pictured here is an early etching, a self portrait of the artist at the age of seven. We see an obstinate and independent little girl, self-composed in her posture, with hair as determined as its owner.

"My great grandfather had come to Ohio from New Hampshire and bought 650 acres of land for \$500. He was nineteen years old. He walked out there and settled and his sons added more land over the years. It was a wonderful place! At the back of our house, there was first a field and then a wonderful rocky outcropping of sandstone. I loved to get up early and walk through the field with the grass wet on my feet and then I'd climb up that rock. Sitting on those rocks, the pink-orange sun coming up behind me, I could see the valley with the flat areas and the mist, and then through openings in the mist I could see Sunny Creek and the islands in Sunny Creek. I would sit there and think to myself 'Someday I'm going to travel in the world and I'll find islands everywhere I go! That place meant so much to me, so every once in a while it creeps into a picture.'" \*

\*All quotes are from interviews with the artist conducted in Autumn, 2001 by Nancy Einreinhofer at the artist's home and studio in Roosevelt, NJ.

## Introduction

Bernarda Bryson Shahn was born March 7 1903 in Athens, Ohio. Her mother taught Latin at Ohio University and was also a serious musician. Her father was the publisher of The Athens Morning Journal. Bernarda Bryson was born into a home where a love of music, literature, and language was assured and where current events were passionately debated. Bryson credits her parents for her education, her social conscience, and her enthusiasm for life and learning. After graduating in 1925 from Ohio University, where she studied liberal arts, philosophy, art history, and painting, Bryson went on to the Cleveland School of Art to study painting and lithography from 1925 until 1929. By the time she relocated to New York City in 1933, Bryson was considered to be a highly accomplished artist and expert lithographer. In 1934 Bernarda Bryson was invited to Washington, DC to set up the lithographic shop for the U.S. Government Resettlement Administration.

It was during this period that Bryson produced the lithographs for "The Vanishing American Frontier" later published by Jake Wien. Her social and political concerns are evident here and will continue to find form in the many prints and drawings to come. It was also during this period that she married the artist Ben Shahn and started her family. In the years to follow, Bryson would work as an illustrator for many important publications of the day including Fortune, Harper's, and Scientific American. She would also become well known and respected as the author and illustrator of the children's books "The Twenty Miracles of Saint Nicholas" "Gilgamesh" and "The Zoo of Zeus" and illustrator of the Emily Bronte classic "Wuthering Heights". Following the death of her husband, Bryson returned to oil painting. Represented in this exhibit are selections in that medium from the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's.

I wish to gratefully acknowledge the artist's son, Jonathan Shahn, and his wife Jeb for their kindness in providing access to the works of art, and offer a special thanks to the artist's granddaughter, Amanda Slamm, and to my colleague, Marion Archer, for their help in organizing this exhibit.

Nancy Einreinhofer

Director, Ben Shahn Galleries





**Scoville Avenue** lithograph from The Depression Series,  
1928-29

The artist's life-long fascination with the human form, expression, and attire, as well as social and political issues, is evident in the early lithographs and etchings.

"Scoville Ave. S. E." 1928 lithography 16 x 13.25"

**Night Figures** etching with aquatint from The  
Depression Series, 1928.



"Night Figures" 1928 etching 14.5 x 14.5"



**The Dragon from the Zoo of Zeus, 1964**

This is The Dragon if you please  
Supposed to guard the Golden Fleece  
Who dozed and as you know, at dawn  
Awoke to find the fleece was gone.

"The Dragon" 1964 12 x 15.5"



**Cerberus from the Zoo of Zeus, 1964**

This is the dog called CERBERUS  
A breed no longer known to us  
That guarded with sextuple stare  
The gloomy gates of you-know-where  
I would not want to meet him there!



"Cerberus" 1964 12 x 15.5"



**Cover Illustration for *Wuthering Heights*, 1963.**

One of the artist's favorite novels, the brooding Gothic tale is made visible through Bryson's elegant draftsmanship.

"Cover" 1963 14 x 17"

**The Funeral**, an illustration for *Wuthering Heights*.



"Funeral" 1963 13.5 x 16.5"



"Passage" c.1978 o/c 65.5 x 43"

"**Passage** is to me a very moving picture. I had been a lithographer, etcher, drawer for many many years. But after Ben died, I decided to go back to painting. Passage was one of the first paintings I made. The Metropolitan was deaccessioning some old casts and they gave some to Skohegan. One ended up in my studio. It was so ugly! So, I threw a sheet over it and suddenly WOW! I liked the drama of the folds and the shadows, so I started painting it. Later I set up a ladder and put a ceramic head on top and draped a sheet over it. It was so graceful, I loved it. It was spring and the world was just beginning to burst out and that was part of the feeling. The drapery thing got into my system once I saw that sheet. I thought of so many potentialities." \*BBS

**"The World Egg** was sheer fun! That meeting house is in Skohegan. It's a lovely little building and has a fresco in it. The house I have in Skohegan has a terrace around the back and side and a railing runs all the way around. One day, somebody set an egg on that bannister. I watched that egg in different lights and finally decided to paint it. That was the first egg painting." \*BBS



"The World Egg Over the South Solon Meeting House" c.1980 o/c 41 x 62"





"Evening Game" c.1995 o/c 38.75 x 82 75"

"I consider the paintings **Evening Game** and **Prospect** to be exclamation points about what I think. I'm always informed about politics. I thought of doing a painting of New York City, of Fifth Avenue, and put every building in ruins. 'Prospect' is the essence of that idea. It's an industrial and business background, decayed. Now it seems prophetic." \*BBS



"Prospect" c.1998 o/c 40 x 47"

## BERNARDA BRYSON SHAHN

### Education

1921 - 1925	Ohio University, Liberal Arts Degree.
1925 - 1929	The Cleveland School of Art, Post Graduate Lithography with Russell Limbach.
1926 - 1929	Cleveland, OH: Commercial Art: Higbee Company, "Institutional" drawings; Lezius-Hiles Printing Co., accurate perspectives of midtown Cleveland; Interviews and pencil portraits with visiting celebrities: William Butler Yates, poet; Count Von Luckner, "The Sea Devil"; James Stevens, novelist.
1929 - 32	Columbus, OH: Teaching and art column, Wrote art reviews for The Ohio State Journal; etching, lithography, The Columbus Gallery of Fine Art; Interviewed Diego Rivera in NYC; met Ben Shahn.
1933 - 34	New York City: Founding member and first secretary of The Artists Union; PWAP (Government Art Project), employed as lithographer. Work exhibited at the Whitney Spring Show, distributed by government.
1934 - 36	Washington, DC: Invited to set up Lithographic Shop, U.S. Government Resettlement Administration. Series: "The Vanishing American Frontier" Originals now in Library of Congress. Made small book of watercolors about runaway slaves now in Library of Congress.
1935	Roosevelt, NJ: Assistant to Ben Shahn, fresco mural in the Roosevelt School.
1938	Bronx, NY: Post Office mural in egg tempera. Won competition jointly with Ben Shahn. Completed thirteen 18 ft. panels.
1940	Roosevelt, NJ: Wrote, illustrated "Mrs. Roosevelt's Other Leg"
1949 - 1965	Illustrator for Harper's, Fortune, Scientific American and other journals.

## Books Written and Illustrated

- 1955 - 1965      "THE TWENTY MIRACLES OF SAINT NICOLAS" Little, Brown and Company.  
"GILGAMESH" Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers.  
"THE ZOO OF ZEUS" Grossman Publishers.

## Books Illustrated Only

- 1959's            "CALENDAR MOON" by Natalia Belting, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers.  
"THE RETURN OF THE TWELVE" by Pauline Clark, Coward McCann, Inc., Publisher.  
"PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" by Jane Austen, Macmillan, Publisher.  
"THE WHITE FALCON" by Charlton Ogburn Jr., Houghton-Mifflin, Publishers.  
"BRIGHT HUNTER OF THE SKIES" by Herbert Best, Macmillan, Publisher.  
"MR. CHU" by Norma Keating, Macmillan, Publisher.  
"THE OLD MAN" by Norma Keating, Macmillan, Publisher.  
"ALPHABET FOR JOHANNA" by Horace Gregory, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers.  
"THE RIVER OF LIFE" by Rutherford Platt, Simon and Schuster, Publishers.  
"THE STORY - TELLERS PACK" by Frank R. Stockton, Scribners, Publisher.  
"LIVES IN SCIENCE" by 18 Scientists, Scientific American.  
"WUTHERING HEIGHTS" by Charlotte Bronte, Macmillan, Publisher.  
"THE SUN IS A GOLDEN EARRING" by Natalia Belting, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers.  
"SHEPHERD OF THE SUN" by Benjamin Appel, Obolensky Publishers.
- 1971 - 1972      Wrote book "BEN SHAHN" Harry N. Abrams, Publisher.
- 1980    1992      Exhibited oil paintings at the Midtown Galleries, in one person and group shows.

## Works Included in the Exhibit

Drawings for Wuthering Heights	1963	
1 "Cover"		14 x 17"
2 "The Story Unfolds"		13.5 x 13.5"
3. "The Guest is Led Upstairs"		12.5 x 15"
4 "Heathcliff as a Child"		12 x 13"
5. "Increasing Hatred (Man Holding Child)"		11.5 x 15.5"
6. "Funeral"		13.5 x 16.5"
7 "I'm in Agony"		11 x 13"
8. "Two Yards of Earth Tombstone"		14 x 15.5"
9 "Heathcliff Fleeing Through the Storm"		13.5 x 16"
10. "House"		14.5 x 17"
Drawings for The Zoo of Zeus	1964	
1 "Charybdis"		12 x 15"
2 "The Dragon"		12 x 15.5"
3 "Hoopoe"		15 x 15"
4 "Echidna"		12 x 15.5"
5. "Hydra of Lerna"		12 x 14.5"
6. "Cerberus"		12 x 15.5"
7 "Cyclops"		12 x 16"
8. "Title Page"		12 x 16"
9 "Pan"		10 x 11"
Drawings for Gilgamesh	n.d.	
1 "The First Dream"		15 X 25.5"
2 "Meeting Enkidu"		14 X 16"
3. "The Death of Gilgamesh"		14 X 16"
Other Drawings		
1 "Birth of the Gods"	n.d.	32 x 40"
2 "Small Village Street"	1991	31.5 x 39.5"
3. "Keeper of the World Wide Dump"	1998	28 x 41"



## Prints

1	"Figure in a Lonely Landscape"	n.d.	etching	16 x 18"
2	"Night Figures"	1928	etching	14.5 x 14.5"
3.	"Scoville Ave. S. E."	1928	lithography	16 x 13.25"
4	"Depression"	1929	lithography	15.5 X 13.25"
5.	"Unemployed Madona"	1929	lithography	15 X 14"
6.	"Fourteenth St. Entrepreneurs"	1934	lithography	22 x 16"
7	"Head"	n.d.	etching	13.5 x 13.5"
8.	"Sleeping Goddess"	c.1980	etching	12 x 14"
9	"Sleeping Goddess and Temple"	c.1980	etching	16 x 18"
10.	"Self Portrait, Age 7"	n.d.	etching	16 x 18"
11	"Quandary"	n.d.	etching	22 x 27"

## Paintings

1	"Studio Figure"	c.1976	o/c	50 x 35"
2	"Passage"	c.1978	o/c	65.5 x 43"
3.	"The World Egg Over the South Solon Meeting House"	c.1980	o/c	41 x 62"
4.	"Melancholia"	c.1987	o/c	50 x 50.5"
5.	"Adventures in Skin Trade"	c.1988	o/c	50.75 x 32.25"
6.	"Of Shadows Numberless"	c.1991	o/c	38.75 x 44.75"
7	"Triumph of the Egg"	c.1995	o/c	38.5 x 38"
8.	"Evening Game"	c.1995	o/c	38.75 x 82.75"
9	"Prospect" ("Outlook")	c.1998	o/c	40 x 47"

## Books

- "The Twenty Miracles of Saint Nicolas" Boston: Little, Brown and Company (1960)
- "The Zoo of Zeus" New York: Grossman Publishers (1964)
- "Gilgamesh" New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (n.d.)

Nancy Einreinhofer, Director

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"Evening Game" c.1995 o/c 38.75 x 82.75"