

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF PRIMITIVE PAINTINGS

BY RETIRED CLOAK AND SUIT AND SLIPPER MANUFACTURER

SHOWN AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Thirty primitive paintings--all he has produced since he began to paint in 1937 after his retirement at the age of sixty-five from several decades in the cloak and suit business and as a slipper manufacturer--constitute the retrospective exhibition of paintings by Morris Hirshfield of Brooklyn, New York. to open at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, Wednesday, June 23, where it will be on view through August 1.

Mr. Hirshfield took his first work for critical appraisal to Mr. John I. H. Bauer, Curator of Paintings at the Brooklyn Museum, who sent him to a New York gallery. It was here that Sidney Janis saw one of Hirshfield's paintings.

Mr. Janis, well-known collector of modern paintings and author of articles on modern art and a book on American primitive painting, has long been a member of the Museum's Advisory Committee. When he was preparing an exhibition Unknown Americans sponsored by the Museum's Advisory Committee in the **Fall** of 1939, he included in this exhibition Hirshfield's first two oils. In 1941 the Museum purchased Hirshfield's Girl in a Mirror and Tiger.

Mr. Janis has directed and installed the Hirshfield exhibition, assisted by Margaret Miller of the Museum staff. In wall captions, visual analysis, and also in an article on the painter published in the Museum's Bulletin Mr. Janis traces the relationship between Mr. Hirshfield's art and his occupational and racial backgrounds. He writes in part as follows:

"Contributing to the singular quality in Hirshfield's art are many extraordinary elements. Among them his occupational and racial backgrounds unconsciously play a vital role. In his paintings, for example, he may without intention represent the profile of a female figure in terms of a dressmaker's dummy or, reverting to the technique of the cutting room, draw the outlines of his main forms on separate papers and then fit and trace them, pattern-like, upon his canvas. Racial reminiscences are sometimes to be seen in the nature of his color, which corresponds to that of colors used in ceremonial objects, and in various motifs that are in effect transmuted Hebraic symbols.

"Hirshfield paints realism; not the realism of outer representation but that of the inner life of the individual. The memory-image and his fancy are persistent enough to infuse

his pictures with a magical quality whereby they look real only to himself. The fascination for the observer lies elsewhere: in the very distance between the newly created world and that of everyday reality. Hirshfield believes passionately in his work."

Mr. Hirshfield was born in 1872 in a small town in Russia-Poland, near the German border. At the age of twelve he began carving Biblical characters in wood. When he was fourteen, he carved for the local synagogue a six-foot prayer-stand with two huge lions holding between them the ten commandments. Four years later he came to the United States, where he found a position in a women's coat factory.

After spending two decades in the cloak and suit industry, he became a slipper manufacturer. At the age of sixty-five ill health forced his retirement. With hands idle for the first time in his life, he turned to painting.

Although he bought colors and brushes, the canvases for his first works were two paintings from his own walls, which he over-painted. After many long months of slow, methodical work, the original pictures were virtually buried under many thousands of minute, carefully applied brushstrokes, though a significant detail of each painting was carefully retained. Two years of struggle enabled him to reach the mark he had set for himself: to achieve a result he believed entirely literal, a precision "better than the camera can do."

The Visual Analysis in the exhibition which accompanies the painting Inseparable Friends was prepared by Mr. Janis. It consists of related photographs, directional lines and color signals. The underlying idea is experimental; its object being to suggest a technique for educational exhibits in which the word is supplanted by the visual symbol.

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96  
Exhibition of  
THE PAINTINGS OF MORRIS HIRSHFIELD  
June 23 - August 1, 1943

The Museum of Modern Art  
11 West 53 Street, New York.

CHECKLIST (arranged chronologically)

- Beach Girl. 1937. Oil on canvas, 36 x 22 1/8".  
Lent anonymously.
- Angora Cat. 1937. Oil on canvas, 22 x 27 1/8".  
Lent anonymously.
- Tailormade Girl. 1939. Oil on canvas, 41 1/8 x 25 1/8".  
Lent by the Artist
- Lion. 1939. Oil. 28 1/4 x 40 1/8". Lent anonymously.
- Tiger. 1940. Oil, 28 x 39 7/8". Collection The Museum  
of Modern Art.
- Girl in a Mirror. 1940. Oil, 40 1/8 x 22 1/4".  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art.
- Girl with Dog. 1940. Oil, 38 x 30". Lent by Sam A.  
Lewisohn, New York.
- Landscape with House. 1940. Oil, 14 1/2 x 19 1/2".  
Lent by M. Martin Janis, Buffalo, New York.
- Landscape with House. 1940. Oil, 15 1/8 x 19 7/8".  
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Ogden Stewart, New York.
- Waterfall. 1940. Oil, 20 1/8 x 28 1/4". Lent by the Artist
- House with Fountains. 1940. Oil, 20 1/4 x 28 3/8".  
Lent by the Artist.
- Nude at Window. 1941. Oil, 53 1/4 x 30". Lent by  
Art of This Century, New York.
- Flower Garden. 1941. Oil, 26 x 36 1/8". Lent by the Artist
- Nude with Kittens. 1941. Oil, 26 1/8 x 34 1/8". Lent by  
Mr. and Mrs. Donald Ogden Stewart, New York.
- Landscape with Swans. 1941. Oil, 26 1/4 x 34 1/8".  
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Ogden Stewart, New York.
- Girl in Blue. 1941. Oil, 36 x 26 1/8". Lent by the Artist.
- College Ground. 1941. Oil, 28 x 40 1/8". Lent by the Artist.
- Inseparable Friends. 1941. Oil, 60 1/8 x 40 1/8".  
Lent anonymously.
- Opera Girl. 1941. Oil, 40 1/8 x 28 1/4". Lent by the Artist.
- Coquette. 1941. Oil, 40 1/8 x 28 1/8". Lent by the Artist.
- Mother Cat with Kittens. 1941. Oil, 26 x 36". Lent by  
M. Martin Janis, Buffalo, New York.
- Patriotic Children. 1942. Oil, 36 1/4 x 48". Lent by  
the Artist.
- American Beauty. 1942. Oil, 40 1/8 x 40". Lent by  
the Artist.
- Loving Mother and Children. 1942. Oil, 48 x 36 1/4".  
Lent by the Artist.

- Girl with Pigeons. 1942. Oil, 30 x 40". Lent anonymously.
- Bathing Beauty. 1942. Oil, 44 x 36 1/4". Lent by the Artist.
- Peacock. 1942. Oil, 28 1/8 x 40". Lent by the Artist.
- Zebra Family. 1942. Oil, 34 1/8 x 50". Lent by the Artist.
- Two Girls in a Mirror. 1943. Oil, 52 1/2 x 60 1/4". Lent by the Artist.
- Leopard Family. 1943. Oil, 40 x 52 1/8". Lent by the Artist.