

PEYTON WRIGHT

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Lucia Stern

(American Artist, 1895-1987)

Lucia Stern (born Martha Ida Lucia Karker) was an important figure in Wisconsin progressive art. Although her formal education was in music and literature (1918-1922), she was increasingly drawn to visual art. Her early influences were Matisse and Picasso, the two giants who also influenced each other.

In 1930 she married Milwaukee lawyer-politician Erich Stern, with whom she took annual trips to Europe, each time expanding their art connections. She was a friend of many important champions of non-objective art, including eminent Bauhaus artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), who painted a portrait of her, and with whom she exhibited. Moholy-Nagy's book on art theory, titled *Vision in Motion*, remained a steady influence on her.

Another friend was of Stern's was Baroness Hilla Rebay, director of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting in New York City (later to become The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum). Baroness Rebay collected and exhibited Lucia Stern's works at the Museum.

By 1935 Stern was working regularly as an artist. Throughout the more than five decades during which she was active, she utilized drawing, painting, sculpting, and decoupage (cut and stitched or glued fabric). She was also an early experimenter with unusual, re-arrangeable, sometimes hanging, 3D compositions using cork, plastic, glass, metal foil, cellophane, Lucite, and driftwood. She created stuffed sculptures that could double as toys for children and adults. In the 1960s-1970s she began integrating architecture and projected color-light with music and human voice.

Throughout her career, Stern was an enthusiastic lecturer on modern art. She was instrumental in the development of the Haggerty Museum at Marquette University. She kept up her global correspondence with the prominent figures of the art world and wrote exhibition catalogues for important shows at major museums, including exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1920s-1940s), and the first loan exhibition (1929) featuring Cezanne, Gauguin, Seurat and Van Gogh. Stern also authored the book titled *Criteria for Modern Art*, published in 1971, and contributed articles to numerous publications on modern art. During her lifetime, Lucia Stern's works were shown at an impressive list of international, national and regional venues, including major institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, the Museum of Non-Objective Painting in New York and the Chicago Art Institute. Stern was recognized as one of several important promulgators of non-objective art in the United States.

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SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- "Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors" - Milwaukee Art Institute 1943
- "55th Annual Exhibition of Watercolors and Drawings" - Art Institute of Chicago 1944
- "Wisconsin Salon of Art" - Madison 1944
- "International Watercolor Exhibition" - Art Institute of Chicago 1945
- "Paintings by Milwaukee Artists" - Cleveland Museum of Art 1945
- "Springfield Museum of Fine Arts Group Show" - Massachusetts 1945
- "Annual Group Exhibitions, Museum of Non-Objective Painting (later Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum)" - New York City 1944-1952
- "Salon des Realites Nouvelles" - Musee d'Art Moderne - Paris, France 1951
- "Galerie d'Origine" - Rome, Italy 1953
- "Exhibition with Paul Fontaine" - Kunstkabinet - Frankfurt, Germany 1960

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- "Exhibition of Decoupage" - Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit 1945
- "Lucia Stern: Design in Decoupage" - University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 1968
- "Lucia Stern: A Life in Design" - Milwaukee Art Center, Wisconsin 1977
- "Lucia Stern: A Reevaluation" - The Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Wisconsin, 1989 (P.H.)