

Press Release
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Alice Neel: Drawing from Life
August 28 – December 6, 2008

Moore College of Art & Design presents *Alice Neel: Drawing from Life* in celebration of the College's 160th Anniversary year. Neel (1900 - 1984), a Philadelphia native and alumna of Moore College of Art & Design, is known for psychologically penetrating works that chronicle her life and times. The exhibition at Moore includes a selection of portraits and still lifes, many of which have never before been exhibited in Philadelphia, that focus on drawing as the primary process in both her works on paper and her paintings. A self-proclaimed "collector of souls," Neel's bold, drawing-based approach reflects the artist's lifelong commitment to the individual and the moment.

Alice Neel was a pioneer among American women artists. She defied convention by choosing an art school education and doggedly pursuing a career as a painter of people, or in her own words, 'a collector of souls'. The exhibition spans more than fifty years with thirty works on paper and nine paintings dating from 1930 to the year of her death in 1984. This is the first major presentation of Neel's work at Moore since 1971, when the College organized the first career survey of Neel's work. Happy Fernandez, president of Moore has stated: "The dedication and determination demonstrated by Alice Neel, one of Moore's distinguished Alumnae, throughout her career is an inspiration. This in-depth look at Neel's work and the concurrent exhibition of Mary McFadden's fashions are the perfect combination of shows to kick off Moore's year-long celebration of 160 years and beyond of excellence in the arts."

The exhibition is organized by The Galleries at Moore and curated by Lorie Mertes, Rochelle F. Levy Director and Chief Curator and presented with support from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Gallery Sponsor's of Moore's 160th Anniversary Year. The exhibition is on view from August 28 through December 6, 2008 in Moore's Levy Gallery for the Arts in Philadelphia. In conjunction with the exhibition, The Galleries will present the Philadelphia premier of the award-winning documentary on Alice Neel's life November 12 from 6 to 8pm.

About the Exhibition

The exhibition begins with a group of figure drawings and a painted female nude from the 1930s, five years after Neel graduated from the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now Moore). By the time Neel arrived at the school in 1921, life drawing courses were part of a standard curriculum shaped and influenced by the progressive leadership of Emily Sartain, principal from 1886-1920. Sartain is credited with introducing European

ideas of drawing from nature and life and the humanist approach of Ashcan School artists and educators John Sloan and Robert Henri.

The influence of these ideas were still present during Neel's years at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women is evident in both her dedication to drawing as the foundation of all her work and her humanist approach to her subjects. Neel is an astute observer, skills encouraged and honed by drawing from life and nature. She frequently returned to these early exercises evident in the many still life works she created over the course of her career. Included is one such work from 1984 based on an exercise of painting black bottles, which Neel recalls as a set subject at the school.

Neel's early career after graduation was marked by personal crisis precipitated by the death of her first born and her failed marriage to Cuban artist Carlos Enríquez who left her taking their second child with him to be raised by his family in Cuba. Shortly after, in 1930 she suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. The works in the **Private Lives** section of the exhibition from the late 1930s, have a significantly different tenor from Neel's early and subsequent work and are included to illustrate the intimate expressions of a maturing artist and woman in her thirties reveling once again in the joys of love and embracing her own sensuality.

Works in the section titled **Social Consciousness** touch upon Neel's dedication to telling the 'truth' of the people she encountered. From those she met during her time painting for the government's Works Progress Administration to those living around her in New York's Spanish Harlem where she documented immigrants suffering hardship during the economic depression and war in the 1930s and 40s. In these early works, Neel's psychological penetration of her subject is poignantly evident as is her superior draftsmanship.

The sections titled **Gestures** and **Sitters** groups together animated portraits from the 1930s to the 1980s that reveal Neel's uncanny ability to capture the intimate, casual, direct and personal aspects of each one-on-one encounter with her sitters, whether in a simple line sketch or fully painted portrait.

In **Same Subject** six works of the same person from a ten-year period, further illustrate Neel's ability to deftly use varying techniques to capture nuances of her sitter's character. Also included is a section devoted of images of members of Neel's family, her sons and their wives and children, in particular, were all constant presences in her life and therefore frequent subjects in her work.

Neel's penetrating vision frequently reveals underlying anxieties and aspects of her sitter's identity or emotional state as seen in the tension Neel shows us between artist Red Grooms and his wife Mimi Gross in a large scale painting from 1967 before they divorced. Neel once stated that, "Drawing is the discipline of art." This painting is one of many where Neel reveals the process of drawing that is the foundation, the structural basis of all of her work. She made no preliminary sketches in her work, each painting began with a line of blue or gray paint applied directly to the canvas.

Poignantly illustrating Neel's ability to capture *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, are two adjacent works: the 1973 drawing of Adrienne Rich, a radical feminist activist, poet and

author who stares confidently, clearly comfortable in her skin juxtaposed next to the buttoned up and anxious image of Marilyn Semmes from 1981 who wears the prim female power suit of the 1980s. According to exhibition curator, Lorie Mertes, "Even without the clothing that signals the era of each work, Neel makes us aware of the socio-psychological condition and position of each individual in relationship to society, through subtle gestures, postures and expressions." Mertes continues, "One of the foremost portrait artists of the twentieth century, Neel had a tremendous influence on artists working today. It is exciting to bring her work back to Moore, and to Philadelphia, where so many young artists are discovering their own voice and vision."

As an artist and as a woman, Alice Neel went against the tide of the times, against prevailing trends, and her position, in her attempt to tell the truth as she perceived it and, in doing so, she presented an amazing chronicle of her life and times.

"I believe what I am is a humanist. That's the way I see the world, and that is what I paint. And I have to be myself. I think this strange life I've had has been a search for experience, and that all experience you can have is good for your work because it makes you more of a person. It forces you to have a broader view of life. Provided it doesn't kill you."

- Alice Neel

About Alice Neel

Alice Neel was born on January 28, 1900 in Merion Square, Pennsylvania and moved to Colwyn shortly after. In 1921 Neel enrolled in the Philadelphia Design Scholl for Women (now Moore College of Art & Design.) Attended Chester Springs summer school of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1924. In 1925 Neel graduates from the Design School for Women. Exhibition history: Neel's first solo exhibition was in 1926 in Cuba. In 1938 she has her first solo exhibition in New York followed by subsequent solo shows in New York galleries in 1944, 1950, 1951 and 1954. In 1960 one of her paintings is reproduced in *ArtNews* and in 1962 is awarded the Longview Foundation Purchase award, given to under-recognized artists. In October of that year, the first major feature article on Neel appears in *ArtNews* written by critic Hubert Crehan. Graham gallery in New York represents Neel giving her solo exhibitions in 1963, 1966, 1968. In 1968, Neel joins the protest at the omission of women and African American artists from the Whitney Museum's exhibition *The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America* and in 1969 January, joins demonstrations against the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition *Harlem on my Mind*. In May 1969, Neel receives an Arts and Letters award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York. In August 1970, first of Neel's *Time* magazine covers published. In 1971, in January, first major survey exhibition at her *alma mater* Moore College of Art & Design (formerly the Philadelphia School of Design for Women). February, awarded the Benjamin Altman Figure Prize. In May, joins the demonstration against the Whitney Museum's exhibition *Contemporary Black Artists in America*. June, awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts by Moore College of Art & Design. Her doctoral address is published in the journal *Women and Art*. In September, joins the protest against the Museum of Modern Art organized by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition and Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam. In 1972 included in the Whitney Museum of American Art Annual. In 1974, at age 74, Neel is given her first major retrospective of her portraits in New York at the Whitney Museum of American Art followed the next year by a second major exhibition featuring portraits, still life and landscapes at the Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, Georgia. 1976 Elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and receives International Women's Year Award. In same year, included in the groundbreaking exhibition *Women Artists 1550-1950* organized by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. 1979 Receives a National Women's Caucus for Art award for outstanding achievement in art, presented by President, Jimmy Carter. Major retrospective exhibition held in Connecticut at the University of Bridgeport and the Slivermine Guild of Artists. 1981 Major solo exhibition held at the Artists' Union, Moscow. 1983 Receives the Benjamin Altman Figure Prize for a second time. The first major monograph on Neel's work was written by Patricia Hills is published by Abrams. 1984 February, solo show at Robert Miller Gallery, New York. Appears on Johnny Carson show and again later in the year. October 13. Dies from cancer in New York City. **Selected posthumous Solo Exhibitions:** 2000 *Alice Neel*, organized by the Philadelphia

Museum of Art opens at Whitney Museum of American Art New York; travels to: Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Denver Museum of Art; 2004 *Alice Neel: A Chronicle of New York 1950-1976*, Victoria Miro Gallery, London; 2005 *Alice Neel's Women*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.; 2007 *Alice Neel: The Cycle of Life*, Victoria Miro Gallery, London. A major retrospective of Neel's paintings curated by Jeremy Lewison will open in 2010 at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London and travel to additional venues in Europe.

ORGANIZATIONAL CREDIT:

Alice Neel: Drawing from Life is organized by The Galleries at Moore and curated by Lorie Mertes, Rochelle F. Levy Director and Chief Curator.

Moore's 2008-09 exhibition season is presented with support from The Philadelphia Inquirer, Gallery Sponsor's of Moore's 160th Anniversary Year.

Photos available upon request

RELATED PROGRAMS:

Wednesday, October 15, 11:45 am – 12:45 pm

ART FOR LUNCH: Gallery Talk with Sarah Powers

Featuring author and art historian, Sarah Powers, discussing the complexity of Alice Neel's life and process in her drawings and paintings.

Wednesday, November 12, 6 – 8:30 pm

VISIONARY VOICES: CONVERSATIONS ON ART & CULTURE

Screening of Documentary on Alice Neel and Conversation with Director Andrew Neel

Presenting the Philadelphia premiere of *Alice Neel* (2007) by Director Andrew Neel, Alice Neel's grandson. This feature-length documentary film about Alice Neel tells the story of Neel's life, exploring the struggles she faced as a woman artist, a single mother and a painter who defied convention. Andrew Neel will be present for a post-screening

Q & A. Followed by a reception.

The VISIONARY VOICES: CONVERSATIONS ON ART & CULTURE series is made possible through the generous support of Wilmington Trust.

Education Spot – ongoing

A space is provided in the exhibition for visitors to learn more about Alice Neel's work through reading, writing and drawing activities.

About the Curator

Lorie Mertes has more than fifteen years of curatorial and museum experience with a focus on international art of the 20th and 21st centuries. Mertes has curated numerous solo and group exhibitions featuring such artists as: Janine Antoni, Russell Crotty, Dara Friedman, Anna Gaskell, Jim Hodges, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ann Hamilton, Alfredo Jaar, Sarah McEaney, Vik Muniz, Oscar Munoz, Paul Pfeiffer, Miguel Angel Rios, James Rosenquist, George Segal, Shahzia Sikander, Lorna Simpson, and Bill Viola.

Moore's 160th Anniversary Sponsors:

Moore is grateful to the following sponsors of its 160th anniversary: Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest (160th Anniversary Presenting Sponsor); *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (160th Anniversary Galleries' Presenting Sponsor); Fran Graham '66 and Bill Graham (*Moore Footsteps* Alumnae Exhibition Sponsor); Charming Shoppes (160th Anniversary Fashion Show Patron); Wilmington Trust Company (160th Anniversary Lecture Series Sponsor); Comcast (160th Anniversary Senior Show Sponsor); Blank Rome LLP (WHYY 160th Anniversary Video Sponsor); Phoebe W. Haas Charitable Trust B as recommended by David Haas; Michael Fell and M&M Displays; Phoebe W. Haas Charitable Trust A as recommended by Carol Haas Gravagno; David's Bridal; Frances and Bayard Storey; and The Four Seasons Hotel.

About The Galleries at Moore College of Art & Design

For the past twenty years, The Galleries at Moore have provided a forum for exploring contemporary issues and ideas through the presentation of a diverse range of exhibitions and programs that offer insights into the work of established and emerging artists. Past exhibitions include the first U.S. presentations of internationally-renowned artists: Artur Barrio, VALIE EXPORT, Terry Fox, Raymond Hains, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, and Roman Singer. Serving the only art and design college for women in the US, the Galleries have featured solo exhibitions of significant women artists and designers including: Jo Baer, Janet Biggs, Dara Birnbaum, Hanne Darboven, Jay DeFeo, Marlene Dumas, Barbara Ess, Viola Frey, Marisol, Jacqueline Matisse, Alice Neel, Adrian Piper, and Faith Ringgold. Major group exhibitions featuring women artists include: *Guerrilla Girls Talk Back: A Retrospective: 1985-1991*; *The Philadelphia Ten: A Women's Artist Group 1917-1945*; *Painted Faces: Mary Cassatt, Karen Kilimnick, Alice Neel*; *Gloria: Another Look at Feminist Art of the 1970s*; *Women to Watch: Photography in Philadelphia*; and *IN REPOSE: Images of Women by Women*.

The Galleries at Moore receives generous support from Moore College of Art & Design and the Friends of The Galleries at Moore. The Galleries also receive state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency as well as program support from the Philadelphia Cultural Fund and the Barra Foundation. In addition, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, an independent federal grant-making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners by helping libraries and museums serve their communities, supports The Galleries at Moore. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The Galleries at Moore

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All exhibitions are open to the public, free of charge.

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Moore College of Art & Design sets the standard of excellence in educating women for careers in art and design. The nation's first and only art college for women, Moore offers a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with ten majors. The award-winning faculty, 8:1 student-to-faculty ratio and central location in Philadelphia, place Moore BFA students at the center of a vibrant, supportive community of artists, designers and scholars. In addition, Moore provides many unique opportunities in the arts through The Galleries at Moore, continuing education programs for professional adult men and women, the acclaimed Young Artists Workshop for girls and boys grades 1-12, The Art Shop and Sculpture Park. For more about Moore, visit www.moore.edu.

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