ON 100th ANNIVERSARY OF SAUL STEINBERG’S BIRTH, RENOWNED ARTIST’S FOUNDATION MAKES GIFT OF 54 WORKS CREATED OVER 40 YEARS TO ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Focused Installation Celebrates Rich Oeuvre Of Postwar American Art

In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of noted artist Saul Steinberg (1914–1999) on June 15, the Art Institute of Chicago is pleased to announce that The Saul Steinberg Foundation has donated 54 of his original works on paper to the museum, including five of his distinctively whimsical masks drawn on paper bags.

To celebrate this generous gift, the Art Institute has organized a focused installation of Steinberg’s work, which opens to the public July 4 and runs through October 12, 2014, in Gallery 124A. Five of the recently gifted works will be on view, representing each decade from the 1950s through the late 1980s, as will the three drawings that were already part of the museum’s collection.

Steinberg had one of the most remarkable careers in postwar American art. While renowned for the covers and drawings that appeared in The New Yorker for nearly six decades, he was equally acclaimed for the drawings, paintings, prints, collages, and sculptures exhibited internationally in galleries and museums. Famed worldwide for giving graphic definition to the postwar age, he
crafted a rich and ever-evolving idiom that defies conventional museological and critical categories. The 54 works gifted to the Art Institute of Chicago traverse the wide-ranging realms of Steinberg’s world, from witty black-ink takes on his newly adopted land in the 1940s to the America he saw through late 20th-century eyes. Encompassing the representative imagery of Steinberg’s career as it evolved over the decades, the collection attests to the underlying coherence of his achievement.

In total the Art Institute’s permanent Steinberg collection now includes 57 drawings, three prints and one textile. It is the largest collection of Steinberg’s works, public or private, outside the Foundation.

The earliest work in the planned installation at the Art Institute is the 1952 collage *Downtown Building*. It transforms two 19th-century engravings—of an organ and a display cabinet—into a building through the addition of inked doorways and an urban streetscape. The latest work on display, which became a *New Yorker* cover, is the 1989 drawing *Untitled (Las Vegas)*. This satirical take on U.S. icons features a skeleton-faced cowboy, a soldier in camouflage, Lady Liberty, Abraham Lincoln, Mickey Mouse, and more, all posing as sphinxes presiding over tiny vehicles on a highway.

“As wide-ranging stylistically as they are chronologically, the works in this selection demonstrate the rich visual imagination, boundless wit and keen cultural significance of Steinberg’s art. They only hint at his near encyclopedic range of drawing methods, but offer a rich overview of this collection-altering gift,” said Mark Pascale, Curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute. Pascale visited The Saul Steinberg Foundation in New York to study the works under consideration as gifts to the museum, and after a yearlong review made the selection.

Born in Romania, Steinberg spent a year at the University of Bucharest before moving to Milan to study architecture at the Regio Politecnico. There he also produced cartoons for the humor newspapers *Bertoldo* and *Settebello*. Fascist racial laws forced
him to flee Italy, and he eventually landed in New York City in 1942. From 1943 to 1944, he served with U.S. Naval Intelligence and the Office of Strategic Services in China, India, Algeria, and Italy.

By the time he returned to New York, Steinberg’s witty, incisive talent helped secure him a spot as a regular contributor to *The New Yorker* and other mass-market publications, even as he expanded his production to include wallpaper and fabric design, advertising, and several monumental mural commissions.

The wider public first became aware of Steinberg's prodigious talent via his magazine contributions, and later through a series of published compilations starting with the best-selling *All In Line* in 1945 and ending with *The Discovery of America* in 1992. His first gallery show was held in 1943 in New York. Ultimately, he had more than 80 solo shows in museums and galleries throughout the world, including several in Chicago.

"This major gift, the most significant in the history of The Saul Steinberg Foundation, brings Steinberg's work to the attention of a new audience and, in its breadth, reveals the many facets of the artist's complex and fascinating oeuvre," notes Beth Venn, CEO of The Saul Steinberg Foundation. "With this gift, the Art Institute now has the largest collection of Steinberg drawings outside the Foundation. And it is a fitting 100th birthday gift to Steinberg, whose work now takes a proud place among the museum’s many treasures."

“Saul Steinberg had an exceptional and prolific career. He's a brilliant draftsman whose works exude wit and intelligence, providing humorous insights into postwar culture,” said Douglas Druick, President and Eloise W. Martin Director of the Art Institute. “We are thrilled to receive this extraordinary and generous gift from The Saul Steinberg Foundation. Present and future generations of visitors to our museum will benefit from Saul's wonderfully clever and deeply perceptive look at the world in which he lived."

Images:
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Saul Steinberg, Untitled (Las Vegas), 1989. The Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of The Saul Steinberg Foundation. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation

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