

For immediate release

**LYONEL FEININGER
FROM MANHATTAN TO THE BAUHAUS**

**FIRST RETROSPECTIVE OF THE ARTIST IN NORTH AMERICA
EXCLUSIVE TO MONTREAL**

Montreal, January 18, 2012 – From January 21 to May 13, 2012, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts will present the first posthumous retrospective in North America on Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956). *Lyonel Feininger: from Manhattan to the Bauhaus* offers the first comprehensive panorama of the oeuvre of this American artist, who has been strangely forgotten since he spent most of his life in Germany. A celebrated cartoonist, a leading figure of Expressionism alongside Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, a professor at the avant-garde Bauhaus School, from its founding in Weimar until it was closed in Dessau by the Nazis, he was one of the most famous modern artists in Germany. Condemned as a “degenerate” artist by the Third Reich, he returned, after a fifty-year absence, to New York, where an exhibition at MoMA in 1944 proved to be his breakthrough. Our exhibition highlights the surprisingly modern multidisciplinary dimension of this versatile creator, who was an illustrator, painter, draughtsman, engraver, photographer, musician and composer. The 350 or so works exhibited include paintings, watercolours, engravings, illustrations and carved toys. For the first time photographs taken by the artist are on display together with a group of photographs by his son Andreas, a renowned photographer of the American modernist school. Seventy prints from a collection of 284 photographs recently gifted to the Museum will be exhibited. This retrospective was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, in partnership with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

The Museum wishes to restore the reputation of this unjustly neglected artist, a major figure of Expressionism and the Bauhaus”, said Nathalie Bondil, Director and Chief Curator of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. “Lyonel Feininger was an accomplished pioneer of the comic strip and an emeritus professor of engraving at the Bauhaus. His hitherto unpublished photographs show his artistic connection to his son Andreas, a famous modernist photographer whose descendants settled in Quebec City. “A Doctor of Souls”, Lyonel Feininger aspired to the spiritual in his art, as did his companions in the Expressionist group *Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) and the painters and musicians Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, who also worked at the Bauhaus. Together they sought to abolish the traditional boundaries of representation, regarding music as the ultimate transcendent art that could free the innermost creative self of every artist and seeking a synaesthetic correspondence between shapes and colours, sounds and words. This quest is mirrored in the Museum’s desire to assert its multidisciplinary and musical dimension...”

For this exhibition the MMFA is again incorporating music into the presentation, both in the galleries and in the new Bourgie concert hall, where a festival dedicated to Feininger is on the programme. Following *Andy Warhol*, *Imagine* and *Miles Davis*, this retrospective will reinforce the importance now accorded to music at the Museum with its first cooperative venture with the Arte Musica Foundation.

Major loans have come from a number of institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the National Gallery in Washington, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Harvard Art Museums, the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts and the Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, and by Lyonel Feininger's family in the United States and Canada, as well as from many other museums and private collectors in Germany, Austria and the United States and galleries such as Moeller Fine Art, New York - Berlin.

• **AN AMERICAN IN GERMANY**

Exceptionally for his era, Feininger was one of the first "American" artists of his generation to be perceived as an international artist with a hybrid identity. This has since become the norm for many contemporary artists.

Feininger was born in Manhattan, the son of professional musicians. His German-born father was an internationally recognized violinist and his German-American mother, a singer and pianist, while he himself was a talented violinist. At the age of sixteen he was sent to Hamburg, Germany, to study music, but he decided to switch to art school, studying in Berlin, Liège and Paris. He pursued a brilliant career as a caricaturist and painter in Germany. Although he was born American, he was considered a German artist and his works could not be exhibited at the famous Armory Show in New York in 1913. He exhibited in leading German museums, which purchased many of his works. When his oeuvre was denounced by the Nazis and featured in the infamous exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) of 1937, he returned to the United States shortly before the outbreak of World War II. Now that he was considered an American artist, American museums began to exhibit his work, which was presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, among others.

Feininger began his career as a caricaturist, illustrator and cartoonist for prestigious publications such as the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and *Ulk*. As one of the most famous caricaturists in Germany at the turn of the 20th century, he also created comic strips for the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* – *The Kinder Kids* and *Wee Willie Winkie's World*. His style, his subjects, his compositions and juxtapositions, not to mention his sense of humour, were to make him one of the fathers of the modern comic strip. He abandoned his career as an illustrator at the age of thirty-six and in about 1907 began to focus on painting in oils. The lively colourful paintings he executed in that decade evoke his early work as a caricaturist. It was while exhibiting at the Salon des indépendants in Paris in 1911 that he discovered Cubism. He then developed a personal style

characterized by fragmented images. He later exhibited at the avant-garde Galerie Der Sturm in Berlin and taught at the Bauhaus from 1919 to 1933. The retrospective will also feature a selection of watercolours and woodcuts that Feininger produced after 1918, and photos showing his fascination with light. An equally important and original facet of his production – which can be seen also in his paintings – are his carved wooden toys and miniature buildings.

• THE CIRCUIT OF THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition consists of five sections:

- *Genesis of a Career: From Comic Strips to Modern Painting*
New York, Hamburg, Berlin, Liège, Paris (1871-1906)

This section presents Feininger's early work as an illustrator and caricaturist, a chronology of his life through archival documents borrowed from his family, and his earliest paintings.

- *Feininger the Expressionist: Settling in an Unsettled World*
Paris, Berlin (1907-1918)

The second gallery is devoted to the critical period between 1907 and 1918, when Feininger became one of the avant-garde German Expressionist artists.

- *The Bauhaus: A Search for Harmony*
Weimar, Dessau, Berlin (1919-1933)

Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, the revolutionary art and design school, appointed Feininger as its first "master" in 1919. Despite the shift in the school's orientation in 1923 to bring together art and industry, an approach that conflicted with Feininger's convictions, he remained at the school. He became increasingly interested in photography, a passion he shared with two of his sons, Andreas and T. Lux.

- *At the Edge of the Word (1934-1956). Berlin, Deep, Manhattan*

When the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, the situation became unbearable for Feininger and his Jewish wife, Julia. Some 400 of his paintings were removed from German museums. They leave Dessau, splitting their time between the Baltic village of Deep and Berlin. The Feininger family moved to the United States in 1937, just months before the sadly famous exhibition *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art] in Munich, which displayed nineteen of Lyonel's works. In addition to chronicling this last period of the artist's life, the final section of the exhibition will include music in order to underline Feininger's truly multidisciplinary approach.

- *Andreas Feininger*

In conjunction with the Lyonel Feininger retrospective, some seventy photographs by Andreas Feininger (1906-1999), a major figure in the history of photography, will be exhibited for the first time in this retrospective. They constitute a recent gift from the artist's family through the Wyses E. Feininger Bequest. These images are displayed in an innovative fashion to demonstrate the influence of the photographer's formative years at the Bauhaus, when he lived in Dessau in his father's "teacher's house".

● A MUSIC ROOM AND A FESTIVAL OF MUSIC ACCOMPANT THE EXHIBITION

A talented violinist and composer, Feininger compared his art to music, which played a major role in his approach to art. Throughout his life he sought to reproduce the structures of the fugue in both his pictorial work and in his musical compositions. When asked which artist had influenced him the most, he replied “Bach”. Like his colleagues Klee and Kandinsky, he believed that music brought transcendence to his art.

At the centre of the exhibition is a music room that enables visitors to experience the synthesis of painting and music as Feininger envisaged it: the musical constructions of counterpoint echo the chromatic partitions of his paintings through a wealth of fugues and other pieces for various instruments, most of them composed by Bach but others written by the artist himself.

At the same time the Arte Musica Foundation is presenting a festival in the new Bourgie Hall entitled “A Fugue at the Museum”, an exploration of the world of the fugue with lectures and concerts devoted to this rich and thrilling musical form. The programme ranges from 18th-century repertoire (with Bach’s *Art of Fugue* and the *Well-tempered Clavier*, two landmark pieces) to the present, including Feininger’s own compositions and works inspired by his paintings. The festival “A Fugue at the Museum” was conceived by Isolde Lagacé, general and artistic director of the Arte Musica Foundation.

● THE LAYOUT

The layout of the exhibition was designed by Nathalie Crinière of the Agence NC, Paris. The designer has worked with the Museum on several shows, most notably with *Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences* in Beaubourg, *Jean Cocteau, Enfant Terrible* in Beaubourg and Montreal and *Il modo italiano* in Montreal. She designed the layouts for the retrospective on *Yves Saint Laurent* in Montreal, San Francisco and Paris, and has just created the new presentation for the Liliane and David M. Stewart Pavilion of Decorative Arts and Design, which will be completed in May 2012. The winner of the competition for the Louvre at Abu-Dhabi, she works regularly for the leading institutions of Paris (Beaubourg, Musée d'Orsay, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais...).

● THE CURATORS

The chief curator of the exhibition is Barbara Haskell, a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. The presentation of the exhibition in Montreal was directed by Nathalie Bondil, director and chief curator of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Anne Grace, the MMFA’s curator of modern art.

• THE CATALOGUE

Edited by Barbara Haskell, a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art of New York, the fully illustrated 277-page catalogue accompanying the exhibition sheds new light on the artist's life and work, based on his voluminous private letters and on new monographs and critical studies published in Germany. Published in English by Yale University Press, it comprises essays and a detailed chronology. The authors are John Carlin, free-lance writer and curator, president and CEO of Funny Garbage, Bryan Gilliam, Frances Hill Fox Professor in Humanities, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, Ulrich Luckhardt, curator, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany and Sasha Nicholas, senior curatorial assistant, Whitney Museum of American Art.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts will oversee the publication of the catalogue in collaboration with the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and Somogy Éditions d'art, Paris. It will be the first complete monograph in French on the oeuvre of Lyonel Feininger, and will be available at the Museum's Boutique and Bookshop.

• THE SPONSORS

The exhibition **Lyonel Feininger: From Manhattan to the Bauhaus** is organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in collaboration with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, with support from the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Canada Travelling Exhibitions Indemnification Program and the Museum's Volunteer Association.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts extends its thanks to Sun Life Financial, the exhibition's presenting sponsor.

We would also like to thank Astral Media, *La Presse* and *The Gazette*, our media partners, and Air Canada, our official airline, as well as Moeller Fine Art, New York-Berlin, and Essence du Papier, for their support. Our gratitude also extends to the members of the Feininger family and all the lenders and donors who helped make this exhibition a reality.

The Museum wishes to express its gratitude to Quebec's Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine, the Conseil des arts de Montréal and the Canada Council for the Arts for their ongoing support.

The Museum would like to acknowledge the invaluable support provided by the Volunteer Guides. We would also like to thank all our members and the many individuals, corporations and foundations who support our mission, especially the Arte Musica Foundation, presided over by Pierre Bourgie, and the Fondation de la Chenelière, led by Michel de la Chenelière.

The Museum's International Exhibition Programme receives financial support from the Exhibition Fund of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Foundation and the Paul G. Desmarais Fund.

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Images of a number of works in the exhibition are available on the Museum's website at the following address: mmfa.qc.ca/media.

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About the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is one of the most popular museums in Canada. Every year some 600,000 visitors are welcomed free of charge at all times to view its encyclopaedic collection, unique in Canada, and its innovative exhibitions covering every artistic discipline (fine arts, music, film, fashion, design) enhanced by original and unusual layouts. It conceives, produces and tours many of its exhibitions across Europe and the Americas. It is also one of Canada's leading publishers of bilingual art books, which are distributed worldwide. Over 100,000 families and school groups take part every year in its educational, cultural and community-oriented programmes. 2011 saw the opening of a fourth wing devoted exclusively to Quebec and Canadian art – the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion– and a 444-seat concert hall incorporating an outstanding group of Tiffany windows – the Bourgie Hall. At the same time the Museum's rich collections have been redeployed in the other three pavilions, housing the World Cultures, Early and Contemporary European Art, Decorative Arts and Design collections. Finally, from now on the Museum is integrating music, in the form of musical strolls through the galleries and other uncommon activities, to introduce visitors to a different way of appreciating the visual arts.