

Berthe Weill

Art Dealer of the Parisian Avant-garde

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In an exclusive showing in Canada, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) is bringing to light the story of Berthe Weill: a nearly forgotten figure of Modern art who played a seminal role in the development of Avant-garde movements in France in the first half of the 20th century.

A trailblazing female art dealer, Berthe Weill (1865-1951) was the first to sell [Pablo Picasso](#)'s work and to exhibit Henri Matisse. She was also the only dealer to organize a solo show for Amedeo Modigliani during his lifetime. Passionate, outspoken and visionary, Weill unwaveringly supported fledgling artists, many of whom went on to become icons of Modernism.

Comprising over 100 works and archival documents, 'Berthe Weill, Art Dealer of the Parisian Avant-garde' features exceptional paintings and sculptures by major figures of Modern art ranging from [Pablo Picasso](#) to Suzanne Valadon. It is the first large-scale exhibition dedicated to the career and artistic vision of Berthe Weill.

Weill opened her Paris gallery in 1901 in the bustling neighbourhood of Montmartre. She was the first woman to show the work of young artists and the only one to specialize in emerging talent. Her efforts led to the discovery of some of the biggest names we know today. She exhibited works by [Pablo Picasso](#), Aristide Maillol, Henri Matisse, André Derain, Raoul Dufy, Maurice de Vlaminck, Robert Delaunay, Diego Rivera, Amedeo Modigliani, and Marc Chagall, among others, before they had made a name for themselves. She also strove to foster the recognition of women artists, like Émilie Charmy, Hermine David, Alice Halicka, Jacqueline Marval, and Suzanne Valadon. With unflagging enthusiasm and biting humour, the one whom artists affectionately called la petite mère Weill persevered in supporting young artists throughout the nearly four decades of the Galerie B. Weill's existence (1901-1941).

The exhibition examines Weill's overlooked contribution to the history of Modernism, highlighting the remarkable achievements of this indomitable businesswoman who overcame sexism and anti-Semitism to preserve her freedom and autonomy.

Exceptional loans and works from the collection

Organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Grey Art Museum, New York University, and the Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, the exhibition boasts exceptional loans from major European and North American museums, some of which will be shown exclusively at the Montreal presentation. It brings together over 100 works by 55 artists, consisting mainly of paintings, but also of sculptures, drawing and prints.

It also features works from the MMFA's collection, including two strikingly modern portraits of Berthe Weill that were recently acquired: one by Émilie Charmy and the other by Édouard Goerg. A selection of archival documents, such as invitations, exhibition catalogues, photographs, and letters, underscore Galerie B. Weill's importance and provide further insight into this artistically prolific period.

“We are thrilled to introduce Quebec and Canadian audiences to the first art dealer to devote her gallery exclusively to the promotion of emerging artists, and to celebrate her profound influence on the history of art. Conceived in collaboration

with the Grey Art Museum in New York City and the Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris, this exhibition offers a rare chance to delve into the life and legacy of this bold, and visionary woman who discovered some of the greatest artists of her time – including many women. Works by leading figures of the 20th century avant-garde, several of which are on exclusive view in Montreal, shed new light on the lasting impact of this extraordinary trailblazer,” says Mary Dailey Desmarais, Zhao-Ionescu Chief Curator of the MMFA.

“Of modest beginnings, Berthe Weill showed a selfless commitment to supporting emerging artists. She introduced the world to some of the greatest names in art in the 20th century, and championed many others whose works merit being better known today. At a time when we are working to bring women out of the margins of history, this exhibition offers a unique opportunity to see the extraordinary art that passed through Weill’s Parisian gallery while bringing to light her fascinating story,” says Anne Grace, Curator of Modern Art at the MMFA and co-curator of the exhibition.

“This exhibition marks the culmination of 15 years of research. At long last, Berthe Weill is receiving her due – a vindication made possible through a striking selection of works that once passed through her hands. These pieces restore her rightful place among the world’s great art dealers after half a century of her languishing in obscurity. Beyond acknowledging her pivotal role during the heights of the Modernist era, it is also an act of justice to recognize that her discerning eye and unwavering dedication helped shift the artistic sensibilities of her time. Her life stands as a powerful example of resilience and independence – an enduring source of inspiration,” adds Marianne Le Morvan, guest curator and founder of the Berthe Weill Archives.