

WILLIAM GROPPER

Artist of the People

OCTOBER 17, 2024-JANUARY 5, 2025



William Gropper,
*It's About the
Future of the World*,
1945, Ink, crayon,
and opaque white
paint on paper,
Framed 20 3/4 x 23
1/4 in., Collection
of Harvey and
Harvey-Ann Ross

[PRESS RELEASE](#)

[PRESS IMAGES](#)

[CHECKLIST](#)

[WALL TEXT](#)

[UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS](#)

PHILLIPS

The Phillips Collection

UPDATED RELEASE
October 17, 2024

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The Phillips Collection Presents *William Gropper: Artist of the People*

The first exhibition in Washington, DC, dedicated to the leading American social realist artist



WASHINGTON, DC—The Phillips Collection presents [*William Gropper: Artist of the People*](#), the first exhibition in Washington, DC, dedicated to political cartoonist, painter, and printmaker William Gropper (b. 1897, New York, NY; d. 1977, Manhasset, NY). Featuring more than 40 paintings, cartoons, and caricatures, this focused exhibition reveals Gropper’s biting commentary on human rights, class, labor, freedom, democracy, and the fallacies behind the American dream. The exhibition spans the artist’s most prolific years and reconstructs his political critiques and commitment to social justice for a contemporary audience. **The exhibition is on view from October 17, 2024, through January 5, 2025.**

The son of impoverished immigrants from Romania and Ukraine, Gropper grew up poor on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Witnessing the daily injustices faced by the working class during his formative years instilled in him a sympathy for marginalized communities, which greatly influenced his direction as an artist. Gropper contributed thousands of incisive illustrations to *Vanity Fair* and the *New York Tribune*, as well as to more radical papers like the *New Masses*, *Rebel Worker*, and *Morning Freiheit*. Gropper developed a powerful artistic language to catalyze social change, and was hailed as the Honoré Daumier of his time due to his sharp criticism of politicians and the government.

“Gropper was an artist of, by, and for the people, who fervently believed in the power of art to bring people together and effect change,” says **Vradenburg Director & CEO Jonathan P. Binstock**. “Over half a century since their creation, Gropper’s work exposes universal human concerns, including the fragility of our democracy, which continue to persist. As an artist who has long been overlooked in the history of 20th-century American art, we are excited to share his work with our guests and spark conversations about its relevance to our contemporary world.”

This presentation of Gropper’s satires and commentary features examples produced between the 1930s and 1950s, a highly prolific period of the artist’s career. During the Great Depression, Gropper, like many of his fellow social realist artists and mentors like Robert Henri and George Bellows, celebrated the importance and inherent dignity of the worker in his art. As a labor activist, Gropper championed unions and defended government programs like the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which provided government jobs for millions of the unemployed and commissioned public artworks by artists who have come to define the American modernist canon, including Stuart Davis, Dorothea Lange, Jacob Lawrence, and Jackson Pollock.

“Gropper was a fierce, lifelong social justice advocate who used art to advocate for a better world. He believed strongly that artists be given a ‘free hand’ to reveal hard truths,” says **Phillips Chief Curator and exhibition curator Elsa Smithgall**. “In addition to his scathing social and political commentary, Gropper also turned to folk heroes and popular imagery from contemporary American discourse to portray optimistic scenes of his vision for an egalitarian society.”

Gropper’s socially conscious work went beyond support for the worker to the condemnation of racism, fascism, antisemitism, and governmental corruption. In 1936, while on assignment for *Vanity Fair*, Gropper wielded his brush to document proceedings of the US Senate, where he observed firsthand the shortcomings of the political system. During World War II, Gropper supported the war effort, creating war bond posters and cartoons condemning domestic and foreign fascists. He produced thousands of cartoons and received numerous commissions for murals throughout the country, including *Construction of a Dam* in the Department of the Interior building in DC.

In the 1950s, Gropper found himself in the crosshairs of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s “Red Scare,” becoming the first of only two artists to be blacklisted, with his works banned from State Department traveling shows and many museums and galleries. The results were immediate and devastating, yet this did not diminish his belief in democracy and freedom of expression, nor his critical eye and artistic vigor. Following these dramatic events, Gropper produced his famed 50-print set titled *The Capriccios* after Spanish artist Francisco de Goya’s series of the same name, drawing a provocative parallel between the Spanish Inquisition and McCarthyism. He channeled this dark chapter of paranoia and political scapegoating into his art and regained popular reception in the final decades of his life. He continued to produce works that speak to themes of war, prejudice, greed, and exploitation into his late seventies. By the year of his death, he had shown at most major museums across the country.

William Gropper: Artist of the People is the first exhibition presented by The Phillips Collection dedicated to the artist. In addition to works on loan, the exhibition features a selection of Gropper’s paintings, prints, and drawings from the collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross, many of which recently entered the museum’s permanent collection and will be exhibited for the first time.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection and is made possible in part by the generous support of Phillips Trustee Emeritus Harvey Ross.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated scholarly catalogue published by The Phillips Collection. It includes a foreword by Jonathan P. Binstock, Vradenburg Director & CEO of The Phillips Collection, essays by noted scholars Norman Kleeblatt, Allan Lichtman, and Lauren Strauss, a conversation between Harvey Ross and the exhibition's curator Phillips Chief Curator Elsa Smithgall, and a translated excerpt of Gropper's writings that appeared in the Yiddish publication *Freiheit*. The publication is available at the Museum Shop or shopphillipscollection.org.

EXHIBITION PROGRAMMING

[William Gropper: Jerusalem Demsas in Conversation](#)

October 17, 6:30–8 pm

Join internationally-regarded journalist and author Jerusalem Demsas in a conversation exploring the core themes of William Gropper's work. Enjoy light refreshments after the program. *Free, registration required.*

[Field Trip & Talk: William Gropper's Construction of a Dam](#)

November 15, 12–1 pm

Join us at the Department of the Interior Building (1849 C Street, NW) to tour William Gropper's famed *Construction of a Dam* mural with Dr. Nick Hartigan, art historian and Fine Arts Specialist with the U.S. General Services Administration. Introduced by Phillips Collection Curatorial Assistant Grace McCormick. *Free, registration required.*

IMAGES: (L to R) William Gropper, *Witch Hunt*, 1947, Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper, 19 x 24 in., Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross, Published in *New Masses*, October 7, 1947; William Gropper, *Eternal Senator*, c. 1956, Oil on canvas, 72 x 42 1/8 in., Collection of Harvey Ross; William Gropper, *Justice from Capriccios*, 1953–57, Lithograph, 16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in., The Phillips Collection, Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinki's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022, 2022.

IMAGE GALLERY

High-resolution press images are available upon request. Please contact lcantrell@phillipscollection.org.

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection, America's first museum of modern art, was founded in 1921. The museum houses one of the world's most celebrated Impressionist and American modern art collections and continues to grow its collection with important contemporary voices. Its distinctive building combines extensive new galleries with the former home of its founder, Duncan Phillips. The Phillips's impact spreads nationally and internationally through its diverse and experimental special exhibitions and events, including its award-winning education programs for educators, students, and adults; renowned Phillips Music series; and dynamic art and wellness and Phillips after 5 events. The Phillips Collection's extensive community partnerships include Phillips@THEARC, the museum's satellite campus in Southeast DC. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

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PRESS IMAGES

William Gropper: Artist of the People

October 17, 2024–January 5, 2025

William Gropper

Eternal Senator

1935

Oil on canvas

72 x 42 1/8 in.

Collection of Harvey Ross



William Gropper

Axis Alliance

1938

Ink and opaque paint on paper; graphite pencil inscription

24 1/4 x 17 5/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, August 16, 1938



William Gropper

Construction of the Dam

1938

Oil on canvas

27 1/4 x 87 1/4 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service



William Gropper

Down with the New Deal—We'll Fight

Roosevelt—Cut the WPA

1939

Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

15 3/4 x 19 3/4 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Elsa Smithgall's professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *New Masses*, February 21, 1939



William Gropper

WPA Wage Cuts: Economize! Cut W.P.A.

1939

Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over blue pencil on paper

11 1/4 x 15 5/8 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Elsa Smithgall's professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, June 12, 1939



William Gropper

Lincoln Observing Corrupt Politicians, Silver Shirts, and the KKK

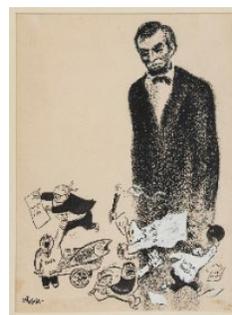
1940

Ink, crayon, and white opaque paper over graphite pencil on paper

19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, February 13, 1940



William Gropper

"Our present foes are domestic foes, not foreign foes."

1942

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

15 3/8 x 11 1/4 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Elsa Smithgall's professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *The Illustrious Dunderheads*, 1942



William Gropper

Congressional Declaration

1947

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

19 5/8 x 15 5/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, July 8, 1947



William Gropper

Witch Hunt

1947

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper

24 x 19 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, October 7, 1947



William Gropper

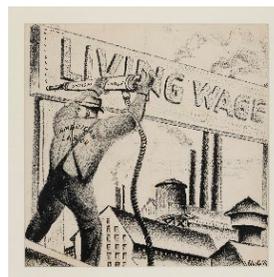
Living Wage

c. 1947–48

Ink with spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over blue pencil on paper

22 x 22 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross



William Gropper

Blacklist, from *Capriccios*

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection

2008–2022, 2022



William Gropper

Justice, from *Capriccios*

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection

2008–2022, 2022



Page 4—Press Images: *William Gropper: Artist of the People*

William Gropper

Politicos, from *Capriccios*

1953–57

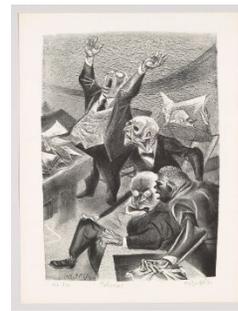
Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's
exemplary service to The Phillips Collection

2008–2022, 2022



William Gropper

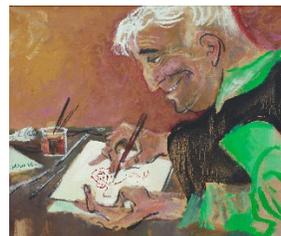
Self-portrait

1965

Oil on canvas

20 x 24 in.

Collection of Craig Gropper, Courtesy ACA
Gallery, NY



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CHECKLIST

William Gropper: Artist of the People

October 17, 2024–January 5, 2025

William Gropper*Untitled*

n.d.

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

16 3/8 x 22 1/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit***William Gropper***Preparatory Sketch for Hunger March (Right panel for "Class Struggle in America Since the War" mural proposal)*

1932

Ink and spatter on paper

26 1/4 x 19 1/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

**William Gropper***The Factory*

1932

Ink and spatter on paper

44 1/2 x 28 1/2 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

**William Gropper***Eternal Senator*

1935

Oil on canvas

72 x 42 1/8 in.

Collection of Harvey Ross

**William Gropper***Travel Companions*

1936

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

14 3/4 x 12 1/2 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, August 19, 1936

Page 2—Checklist: William Gropper: Artist of the People

William Gropper

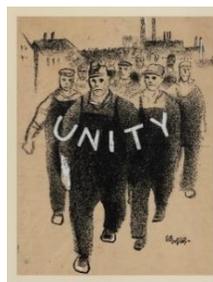
Unity Is Our Strength

1936

Crayon, ink spatter, and opaque white paint on paper
22 x 18 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, September 7, 1939, and
International Fur and Leather Workers Union booklet,
1948



William Gropper

Suburban Post in Winter (mural study, Freeport New York Post Office)

c. 1936–37

Oil on canvas

34 1/2 x 13 5/8 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the
General Services Administration



William Gropper

Axis Alliance

1938

Ink and opaque paint on paper; graphite pencil
inscription

24 1/4 x 17 5/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, August 16, 1938



William Gropper

Construction of the Dam

1938

Oil on canvas

27 1/4 x 87 1/4 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service



William Gropper

Death's Grip

c. 1938

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper
20 1/4 x 17 1/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross



Page 3—Checklist: William Gropper: Artist of the People

William Gropper

Dies Committee

1938

Black ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over blue crayon

22 1/2 x 17 7/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, September 27, 1938



William Gropper

Hirohito Composed a "Peace Poem," Tokyo Reports

1938

Ink, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper

15 1/4 x 20 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, January 29, 1938



William Gropper

It Depends How You Look at It

1938

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper

26 1/4 x 20 3/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, March 8, 1938



William Gropper

Reactionary Senators Lynch the Anti-Lynch Bill

1938

Ink and crayon over blue pencil on paper

14 3/4 x 16 3/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, January 24, 1938



William Gropper

Down with the New Deal—We'll Fight Roosevelt—Cut the WPA

1939

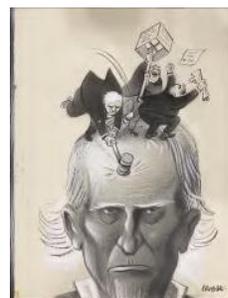
Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

15 3/4 x 19 3/4 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Elsa Smithgall's professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *New Masses*, February 21, 1939



William Gropper

The International “Double-Crosser”

1939

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint over blue pencil on paper

11 1/4 x 12 3/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, March 4, 1939



William Gropper

Wage Standard

1939

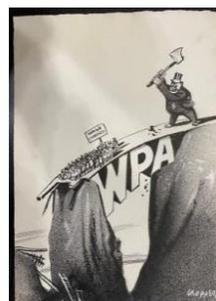
Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

15 1/2 x 11 1/4 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross, in honor of Elsa Smithgall's professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, July 22, 1939



William Gropper

WPA Wage Cuts: Economize! Cut WPA

1939

Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over blue pencil on paper

11 1/4 x 15 5/8 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Elsa Smithgall's professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, June 12, 1939



William Gropper

Lincoln Observing Corrupt Politicians, Silver Shirts, and the KKK

1940

Ink, crayon, and white opaque paper over graphite pencil on paper

19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, February 13, 1940



Page 5—Checklist: *William Gropper: Artist of the People*

William Gropper

Suppression

1940

Ink and white opaque paint over blue pencil on paper

23 1/4 x 17 1/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, January 9, 1940



William Gropper

They Pull the Rope Tighter

1940

Ink, crayon, and white opaque paint on paper; blue pencil inscription

24 7/8 x 19 7/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, October 15, 1940



William Gropper

We're Just Crazy about Fascism

c. 1940

Ink, spatter, crayon, opaque white paint, and stencil over blue pencil on paper

20 x 16 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross



William Gropper

Automobile Industry

1940–41

Oil on fiberboard

18 7/8 x 46 5/8 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, museum acquisition



William Gropper

Hirohito Falls

c. 1940–45

Opaque watercolor, watercolor, and ink over blue pencil on paper

27 3/8 x 22 3/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross



William Gropper

Production for Victory

1941

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

17 7/8 x 15 1/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, January 1, 1942



William Gropper

“Our present foes are domestic foes, not foreign foes”

1942

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

15 3/8 x 11 1/4 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Elsa Smithgall’s professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *The Illustrious Dunderheads*, 1942



William Gropper

Untitled

1942

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint

21 1/8 x 18 1/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, February 12, 1942



William Gropper

Untitled

c. 1942

Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

18 3/8 x 20 7/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross



William Gropper

Full Speed Ahead

1942

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

18 x 16 3/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, February 12, 1942



Page 7—Checklist: William Gropper: Artist of the People

William Gropper

The Murderers Spill Our Blood

1943

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper
27 5/8 x 35 1/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Currents*, July 1943; *New Masses*,
August 3, 1943; *Morning Freiheit*, August 15, 1943;
Your Brother's Blood Cries Out, 1943; *Never to Forget:
The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto*, 1946; International
Fur and Leather Workers Union CIO booklet, 1947;
Morning Freiheit, April 3, 1948



William Gropper

*All New York Jews to the People's Demonstrations for
Rescue, Victory*

1944

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper
14 1/8 x 14 5/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, July 31, 1944



William Gropper

It's About the Future of the World

1945

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper
20 3/4 x 23 1/4 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, February 10, 1945



William Gropper

Paul Bunyan

1945

Oil on canvas

170 1/4 x 87 3/4 x 3 1/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross



William Gropper

William Gropper's America, Its Folklore

1945

Oil on canvas

36 x 53 in.



Page 8—Checklist: William Gropper: Artist of the People

Collection of Craig Gropper, Courtesy ACA Galleries, NY

William Gropper

Congressional Declaration

1947

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper
19 5/8 x 15 5/8 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, July 8, 1947



William Gropper

Witch Hunt

1947

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper
24 x 19 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, October 7, 1947



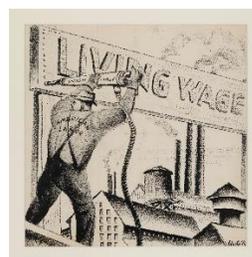
William Gropper

Living Wage

c. 1947–48

Ink with spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over
blue pencil on paper
22 x 22 in.

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross



William Gropper

Blacklist, from Capriccios

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's
exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022,
2022



William Gropper

Emancipation, from Capriccios

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection



Page 9—Checklist: William Gropper: Artist of the People

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022, 2022

William Gropper

Justice, from Capriccios

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022, 2022



William Gropper

Informers, from Capriccios

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022, 2022



William Gropper

Patrioteers, from Capriccios

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022, 2022



William Gropper

Politicos, from Capriccios

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022, 2022



William Gropper

Pomp, from *Capriccios*

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's
exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022,
2022



William Gropper

Vengeance, from *Capriccios*

1953–57

Lithograph

16 1/8 x 12 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski's
exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022,
2022



William Gropper

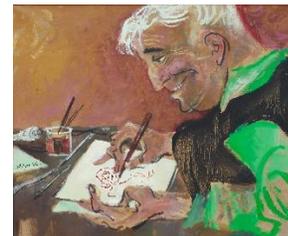
Self-Portrait

1965

Oil on canvas

20 x 24 in.

Collection of Craig Gropper, Courtesy ACA Galleries, NY



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WALL TEXT

William Gropper: Artist of the People

October 17, 2024–January 5, 2025

We painters for the People must not only tell them the truth in human justice and righteousness, but we must . . . say it better and with more conviction than anyone else to be accepted. —William Gropper, 1944

William Gropper (1897–1977) was a noted American political cartoonist, painter, and printmaker who wielded the power of his brush to tell hard truths about the political and social ills of society. The son of impoverished Eastern European immigrants who struggled to support a family while working in the sweat shops of New York, Gropper used his art to express deep sympathies for the working class and for those on the margins. Gropper displayed artistic talent from a young age, encouraged by his studies at the progressive New York Ferrer School with American social realist artists Robert Henri and George Bellows. Following the tradition of his celebrated 19th-century French forebear, Honoré Daumier, Gropper employed his fluid graphic line and sharp wit to expose universal human concerns, from freedom and democracy to civil rights.

Gropper contributed thousands of cartoons to mainstream publications such as *Vanity Fair* and the *New York Tribune*, as well as more radical leftist papers including *Rebel Worker*, *New Masses*, and the Yiddish daily *Morning Freiheit*. In 1936, Gropper's work was first shown at New York's ACA Galleries, and it soon entered numerous prominent museum collections, including The Phillips Collection. In 1953, at the height of the Cold War, Gropper's career came to a crashing halt when he was accused of communist activities by the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Despite being blacklisted, Gropper regained international recognition in the last decade of his life through his groundbreaking *Capriccios* series.

While unsparing in his biting condemnation of racism, racial violence, fascism, antisemitism, and governmental corruption, Gropper fervently believed in the power of art to bring people together across the aisle and effect change. As you explore the exhibition, consider the enduring relevance of Gropper's art today.

This exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection and is made possible in part by the generosity of Phillips Trustee Emeritus Harvey Ross.

Untitled

c. 1942

Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Notice the disheveled figure running for his life to escape an onslaught of bombs and pitchforks. This image satirizes the foolhardiness of the Nazi's attack on the Soviet Union. During the months long blitzkrieg or "lightning war" on Russia, Hitler's troops were isolated deep inside enemy territory with inadequate supply lines throughout the winter. In December 1942, Soviet forces mounted a surprise attack and forced Nazi soldiers to retreat—a major turning point of WWII.

Gropper portrays Hitler in a Napoleonic-like tailcoat that may suggest he is repeating the same mistake the French Emperor had made more than a century earlier in invading Russia during its harsh

Page 2—William Gropper: Artist of the People Wall Text

winter. Gropper's illustrations such as this, which accompanied reports on the Nazi's incursion, helped garner US support for the Soviet defensive forces.

Full Speed Ahead

1942

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*

This image features an approaching torrent of fighter jets and tanks that were manufactured by American industry. Just one month after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the US entering WWII, this dynamic illustration ran in *Morning Freiheit*, helping to galvanize support for the war effort.

The Murderers Spill Our Blood

1943

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Currents*, July 1943; *New Masses*, August 3, 1943; *Morning Freiheit*, August 15, 1943;

***Your Brother's Blood Cries Out*, 1943; *Never to Forget: The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto*, 1946;**

International Fur and Leather Workers Union CIO booklet, 1947; *Morning Freiheit*, April 3, 1948

How does Gropper use alternating dark and light contrasts and gestural language to draw you into this scene and evoke emotion? In this gripping image, German soldiers snarl and viciously use their rifle butts to prod a group of defenseless women, children, and elderly carrying what few belongings they could gather in sacks. *The Murderers Spill Our Blood* grew out of a series that Gropper created in response to the Lidice Massacre in 1942, where Nazi stormtroopers razed the small Czech town and murdered or deported its residents. Gropper voiced his outrage over the Nazis' brutality in images like this one, published in various outlets, including *Morning Freiheit* accompanying a rare statement by the artist written in the height of WWII, excerpted here.

As a Jew and an Artist I Scream of the Suffering of Hitler's Massacres

With the human imagination it is difficult to understand the cruelty, madness, and vileness that fascism seeks to create. Is it easy to imagine that we live in a civilized world in 1943, when scientific development has reached its peak, when cultural accomplishments and the growth of art, education, and innovation have raised humanity higher than one could have ever imagined, and then at the same time, to observe that a million helpless Jews are being murdered by Nazis, and that day after day thousands of men, women, and children are being annihilated? Never before in the history of mankind has there been such a pogrom of innocent people. . . .

I Cannot Remain Silent

I cannot remain silent and watch as my Jewish brothers and sisters are murdered. I want to protest, scream, fight, and save the lives of the Jewish people.

I am not alone. Every decent person feels the same way as a Jew. But I am just an artist, and the only thing that I can do is paint pictures, and so I attempt to convey my feelings and thoughts through my

Page 3—*William Gropper: Artist of the People Wall Text*

pictures. As a Jew, as one who is connected to the fate of humanity, I paint pictures as a protest against the injustices that are being perpetrated against innocent people. This is my means of expression. This is my way of giving speeches. This is the language that brings the depictions and interpretations of what has happened before our eyes. Many others feel this way: artists, writers, composers, teachers, and all those who want to protest against the injustices to the best of their abilities. . . .

Millions of lives are being sacrificed to fight the enemy on the battlefields, while the enemy on the home front is not weakening its shameful attacks against the people in our country. The same feelings of hatred can be incited against Jews by these Nazi-influenced forces, which are reactionary and anti-Soviet.

Let us not be misled by these destructive elements that wish to divide us in order to drain the energy that we need to defeat our common enemy and to build a secure world free from fascism, free from fear, and free from hunger. Let us help bring about the day when people will be able to enjoy all the freedoms they are entitled to.

William Gropper, *Morning Freiheit*, August 15, 1943

Translated from Yiddish by Beata Kasiaz

All New York Jews to the People's Demonstration for Rescue, Victory **1944**

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, July 31, 1944

In this tightly cropped composition featuring three tight-fisted hands wielding a protest flag, Gropper evokes the heroic efforts of activists who fought for the United States to combat the persecution of Jews as WWII waged on. Gropper's drawing, made at a time when xenophobia was at an all-time high in the US, helped publicize the August 1, 1944, demonstration where tens of thousands of Americans gathered in New York's Madison Square Park to demand the US government take more action to provide humanitarian relief to Jewish refugees and those imprisoned in concentration camps.

Untitled

n.d.

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*

In this cartoon from *Morning Freiheit*, we are drawn to the gruesome skull hiding behind the mask of an alluring young woman. The woman lifts her skirt coyly as she saunters past the American soldier, who casually stands with his hands tucked into his pockets and his rifle on his back. What is lurking beneath this encounter? Gropper recognized how the Nazis were using propaganda as a weapon to confuse and mislead the American public and thwart organized resistance movements.

Travel Companions

1936

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, August 19, 1936

In this cartoon, Gropper invites us to contemplate how our choice of companions reveals who we are and what we value. The image shows the travel companions of the North Dakota Congressman William Lemke during his failed Union Party bid for president in 1936. Letting Hitler drive the show, Lemke takes a backseat sitting alongside Father Coughlin, whose gaping mouth can barely contain his passionate swastika-infused pro-Nazi rhetoric. A month before the illustration appeared, Gropper would have read about the Lemke campaign rally in Cleveland, where the Catholic priest gave a now-famous speech expressing his antisemitic views. Until 1939, Coughlin used the bully pulpit of his influential radio show to proselytize his fascist views to nearly 30 million listeners.

We're Just Crazy About Fascism

c. 1940

Ink, spatter, crayon, opaque white paint, and stencil over blue pencil on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

This cartoon displays some of the most influential figures in America in the 1930s singing their praises for fascism proudly on stage. Gropper's contrived scene features Ezra Pound, the important poet and literary critic whose songbook is Hitler's political manifesto, *Mein Kampf*; Charles Lindbergh, celebrity aviation hero; William Randolph Hearst, media mogul; John O'Donnell, *Daily News* columnist; and politicians Senator Burton K. Wheeler, Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, and Congressman John E. Rankin—all of whom openly supported white supremacy, antisemitism, and Nazi propaganda.

Undercut with Gropper's stereotypical wit, the cartoon offered sobering commentary on how fascism ceased to be a fringe movement in the US by the late 1930s.

Axis Alliance

1938

Ink and opaque paint on paper; graphite pencil inscription

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, August 16, 1938

In this cartoon, Gropper imagines a trio of dictators: Chancellor Adolf Hitler, Prime Minister Benito Mussolini, and Emperor Michi Hirohito, at the helm of a massive excavator punctuated by an enormous human skull that chomps at people caught in its sharp teeth.

The year before the cartoon's publication, fascist Italy had joined Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan by signing the Anti-Comintern Pact, a mutual aid agreement between the three countries to fight against the Communist International, an organization controlled by the Soviet Union. In images like these, Gropper and his fellow leftist artists urged US government intervention against the increasing threat of the axis powers to the sovereignty of Europe and China.

Hirohito Composed a “Peace Poem,” Tokyo Reports

1938

Ink, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, January 29, 1938

Do you notice the shape of a dove in this image? On January 24, the front page of *The New York Times* blared the headline concerning Japan’s annual New Year poetry contest: “Hirohito in Poem Hopes for Peaceful Conditions.” Riffing on this report, Gropper shows Hirohito taking flight on the wings of a dove donning a gas mask who drops bombs in its wake. Gropper offers a paradoxical twist on the common symbol of peace—a dove with an olive branch—while exposing the hypocrisy of Hirohito’s call for peace seven years after the Japanese invasion and occupation of Manchuria and other parts of China.

Gropper employed grotesque and pervasive racist stereotypes—slanted eyes, buck teeth, and coke-bottle glasses—in his caricature of Hirohito that contributed to a culture of racism against Japan while simultaneously offering a scathing indictment of his militaristic imperialism.

This image has origins in a controversial cartoon Gropper made three years earlier for a column in *Vanity Fair* on “five unlikely historical situations.” In it, Gropper envisioned Hirohito pulling a rickshaw with his Nobel Peace Prize in tow (seen here). With its depiction of the Emperor as a working class laborer, Gropper’s caustic cartoon stirred a major diplomatic outcry by the Japanese government, for which the US government apologized.

The International “Double-Crosser”

1939

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint over blue pencil on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, March 4, 1939

What does it mean to be a double-crosser? This illustration accompanied an article in *Morning Freiheit* titled “Betrayal.” In it, the author derides Great Britain for betraying the Arab and Jewish delegations with whom they convened at the St. James Conference the previous year to establish the future governance of Palestine. When no agreement could be reached, Britain prolonged the mandate while imposing strict limitations on immigration of Jews to Palestine. The author harshly criticizes Chamberlain for towing the line between the two sides while “taking the fascists as partners” in the affairs of Palestine.

In his drawing, Gropper shows a conniving Prime Minister Nevil Chamberlain marking swastikas on the backs of Palestine, Czechoslovakia, and Spain. The previous year, Britain had joined Germany and Italy in signing the Munich Pact, giving Germany control of Czechoslovakian Sudetenland in exchange for their pledge of peace. The UK had also denied support to Spanish Republicans fighting Francisco Franco’s fascist backed Nationalist Party. Next in line, Gropper depicts France and Great Britain, predicting France’s fall to the Nazis and the German invasion of Britain.

Gropper’s cartoon decries Great Britain’s actions and appeasement policies which left other regions vulnerable to further violence and fascist intervention. It is a reminder of the deep historical roots of ongoing conflicts and tensions in our global world.

Eternal Senator

1935

Oil on canvas

Collection of Harvey Ross

Ever since he was sent to Washington, DC, on assignment for *Vanity Fair* in 1934 and given a front seat to the Senate chambers, Gropper made politics a favorite subject in numerous paintings, drawings, and prints.

In this monumental oil, Gropper captures an elderly Senator passionately gesturing with his hand raised high above his head. Despite his commanding presence at nearly 6 feet tall, the words of the senator are falling on deaf ears as the lackadaisical fellow congressmen casually chat in the background, paying no mind to his theatrical antics. Gropper's incisive and graphically astute political caricatures placed him within a long tradition of political cartoonists, from Honoré Daumier to Francisco Goya. Gropper addressed the same subject in *Politicos* from his *Capriccios* series (on view nearby).

Preparatory Sketch for Hunger March

(Right panel for "Class Struggle in America Since the War" mural proposal)

1932

Ink and spatter on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Gropper's sketch features a dramatic scene of class struggle in America. Two groups stand on opposite sides of the tracks: a line of law enforcement officers on one side taking aim with their rifles at a group of protesters on the other. Some bear signs calling for an end to lynching, hunger, and unemployment. Notice the tall man at the front who holds his hands up in the air; behind him a young boy clings to his mother in fear. Above, two ropes hang from a large tree branch, a gruesome relic of a recent lynching. For Gropper these were the realities of life during the Great Depression for the average American: violence, poverty, and racism.

Hunger March was part of a three-part mural proposal submitted to the Museum of Modern Art for the exhibition *Murals by American Painters and Photographers*. Gropper's piece was so controversial that MoMA planned to remove it from the show. After Gropper and fellow artists Ben Shahn and Hugo Gellert protested MoMA's decision, Gropper's mural was permitted to be shown, though in a less conspicuous gallery and images of the work were left out of the catalogue and other official documentation.

It Depends How You Look at It

1938

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, March 8, 1938

In this dynamic composition, Gropper brings us into the ring with a giant-sized worker with two puny businessmen, one who tugs at his left arm with a rope and the other at his right arm's sleeve. In images like these, Gropper skillfully employs exaggeration, gesture, and humor to call attention to capitalists' exploitation of the worker.

Page 7—William Gropper: Artist of the People Wall Text

When this cartoon appeared in the communist magazine *New Masses*, it was accompanied by two captions: along the bottom, “THE UNEMPLOYED,” and along the right side, “THE WAY BIG BUSINESS WOULD LIKE IT.” When viewed vertically, the unemployed worker valiantly overtakes weak capitalists as they hang off his gargantuan limbs. However, when oriented horizontally, the worker is toppled by the hands of big business.

Who wins this fight depends on how you look at it—will the worker be strong-armed by big business? or will the worker wield his strength to rise above the capitalists?

WPA Wage Cuts: Economize! Cut WPA

1939

Ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over blue pencil on paper

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Harvey Ross, in honor of Elsa Smithgall’s professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, June 12, 1939

Gropper caricatures the rotund capitalist who hoists a gigantic sack of cash while demanding cuts to the Works Progress Administration. Since its creation in 1935, the WPA created hundreds of thousands of jobs to aid the post-Depression economic recovery. The summer of 1939 was extremely chaotic as workers around the country protested Republican attacks against the WPA and New Deal initiatives that remained vital for millions of struggling Americans. Gropper lent his talents to the fight, creating numerous images like this one lambasting the wealthy elite’s call for budget cuts for their own selfish gain.

The year before Gropper made this cartoon, he received the first of several WPA mural commissions, including *Construction of a Dam* and *Automobile Industry*, studies for which are on view in this gallery.

Automobile Industry

1940–41

Oil on fiberboard

Smithsonian American Art Museum, museum acquisition

In this small panoramic study for a mural in Detroit, man and machine come together in perfect unison to build American industry. Based on photographs of Ford’s River Rouge factory in Detroit, Gropper captured the energy and teamwork of the production line. Framed by the dynamic geometry of metal supports on the factory ceiling, Gropper skillfully built up his composition with a sweeping line that moves from one broad-shouldered autoworker to the next.

Despite Gropper’s acclaim as a mural artist, having completed many federally commissioned murals by the 1940s, Ford would not permit Gropper into its River Rouge factory because of his communist and anti-capitalist affiliations.

Paul Bunyan

1945

Oil on canvas

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

“Paul Bunyan is the symbol of the gigantic American spirit. . . . He could move mountains and accomplish feats of great strength, which, many years later, with the development of American science and industry . . . became possible.”—William Gropper, 1945

The larger-than-life figure of the lumberjack Paul Bunyan lunges across a mountain with his massive ax ready to conquer the world. As a strategic tool to invoke optimism in the fight against fascism, Gropper and his fellow leftist artists turned to telling stories about America’s epic folk heroes. Their mythic feats were celebrated as patriotic symbols of the collective might of the frontiersmen, explorers, builders, and soldiers who built a the nation.

Paul Bunyan also appears among a cast of folk characters that Gropper portrayed in a folklore map of the United States, shown nearby.

William Gropper’s America, Its Folklore

1945

Oil on canvas

Collection of Craig Gropper, Courtesy ACA Galleries, NY

In this map, Gropper glorified the nation’s folk heroes—including Paul Bunyan, the Northwood lumberjack, Johnny Appleseed, sower of fruit trees, and Davy Crockett, “King of the Wild Frontier”—as emblems of the strength of the common worker in the building of America.

Associated American Artists helped Gropper popularize his painted map into a poster that became widely circulated in US Information Services libraries throughout Europe. Eight years later, when Senator Joseph McCarthy’s aids were sent to look for “subversive” literature in libraries abroad, they discovered the map and alleged its maker was a covert cartographer for the Soviet Union. The map became the excuse they needed to subpoena Gropper before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations about his ties to the Communist party. During his questioning, Gropper pleaded the fifth but a false testimony by Harvey Matusow, a communist informer, resulted in Gropper’s wrongful indictment and subsequent blacklisting.

Living Wage

c. 1947–48

Ink with spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over blue pencil on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

With a drill in hand proudly declaring it is union made, a strong laborer puts up a large billboard that proclaims “Living Wage,” while smoke rises above factories in the distance. When President Roosevelt first instituted a federal minimum wage on June 25, 1938, he expressed his intent for it to be “more than a bare substance level,” and one that would represent “the wages of decent living.”

Gropper’s image is a relevant reminder that now, as then, both federal and state/city minimum wages stand at levels far below the living wage to support an individual and/or their families. Calls for higher living wages continue, as inflation has significantly increased the cost of living. As of July 1, 2024, the minimum wage in Washington, DC, increased from \$17 to \$17.50 per hour. How does the minimum wage compare where you live?

Congressional Declaration

1947

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, July 8, 1947

It was 1947, the beginning of the Red Scare—a period of paranoia over the rise of communism—when Gropper published this searing satire that features two politicians defacing the Declaration of Independence. A top-hatted man hoists up his co-conspirator who, with his loaded brush, emends the statement to note those who are not in fact “created equal.” Though inflected with his usual dose of humor, Gropper calls out the seriousness of this hypocrisy in the contemporary climate of racism, antisemitism, sexism, and anti-labor.

Notice that among the people named as excluded in the cartoon are artists. Six years later, Gropper would experience severe attacks on his artistic freedom after being falsely tried as a communist by the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

Construction of the Dam

1938

Oil on canvas

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service

This study for a mural in the Department of the Interior is a dynamic scene of the worker as both a modern hero and creator of a new America. The courageous men stand situated on a rocky hilltop, working together to create one of the massive dams being built across America as a part of President Roosevelt’s Works Projects Administration (WPA) program. In his mural, Gropper distilled observations he had made during his travels out West to see the Boulder (now Hoover) and Grand Coulee dams.

Construction of the Dam bears the hallmarks of the government’s ideology of casting heroic, masculine white men as the great engine building up America. Yet, Gropper took this opportunity to insert his own leftist politics into the mural. In the center panel he included Black and white workers, moving in unison. On WPA work sites, work crews were almost always segregated. In taking artistic license, Gropper presents his aspirations for a world in which all are equal.

Reactionary Senators Lynch the Anti-Lynch Bill

1938

Ink and crayon over blue pencil on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, January 24, 1938

This is one of a number of cartoons Gropper made condemning lynching and forms of racial violence against African Americans. Here he offers damning commentary on the latest actions of Southern legislators who, in 1938, filibustered for 30 days to block the Wagner-Van Nuys Anti-Lynching Bill. In the background, two politicians leisurely chat and smoke cigars as one holds onto the rope hanging the anti-lynching legislation.

Page 10—William Gropper: Artist of the People Wall Text

This was just one of nearly 200 anti-lynching bills brought before Congress since the turn of the 20th century. It wasn't until 2022, when Congress unanimously passed the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act, that lynching became a federal hate crime.

Lincoln Observing Corrupt Politicians, Silver Shirts, and the KKK

1940

Ink, crayon, and white opaque paint over graphite pencil on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, February 13, 1940

Take a moment to look at all the activity going on in the lower portion of this image beneath the standing figure of Abraham Lincoln, a symbol of emancipation. In the ring are a cast of influential figures in 1940s America: a hooded KKK Klansman; a blindfolded man, aka the Department of Justice, who is ready to “pin” trumped up charges on an unsuspecting victim; the foul mouthed Congressman Martin Dies trotting a cart with his signature “red herring” fish of misleading information; Father Coughlin, the antisemitic radio celebrity distributing his misleadingly titled magazine *Social Justice*; and a bomb-wielding member of the Silver Shirts, the American group modeled after Hitler’s Stormtroopers.

Throughout his cartoons, Gropper worked tirelessly to publicize the danger of those who sowed racist hatred and misinformation to the American people.

Capriccios

1953–57

Lithograph

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Dorothy Kosinski’s exemplary service to The Phillips Collection 2008–2022, 2022

“This is not the first time in history that people are tortured by inquisitions. . . . Like Goya, who was moved to create a set of *Capriccios* etchings of his times, I devoted . . . to express myself on the Inquisitions of our time.”—William Gropper

In 1953, Gropper became the first of only two visual artists to be blacklisted following his questioning by the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. The impact was devastating: his exhibitions were canceled, friends refused to speak to him, and the market for his work and commissions went dry. In response, Gropper worked in isolation to channel his feelings about the Red Scare into a new body of work, a 50-lithographic portfolio inspired by Francisco Goya’s 80-print *Caprichos series* (1797-98) about the brutality of the 18th-century Spanish inquisition. Gropper pushed the bounds of the lithographic medium to new expressive heights, creating dense, symbolically rich images that range in tone from soft gray to deep black.

Despite their initial rejection, Gropper later sold out of the limited-edition portfolio and regained recognition in the final decades of his life.

Witch Hunt

1947

Ink, crayon, spatter, and opaque white paint on paper

**Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross
Published in *New Masses*, October 7, 1947**

Gropper expressed his outrage at assaults on artistic freedom that extended not only to visual artists but also leading musicians, poets, and literary figures of the day. In this cartoon, John Parnell Thomas, a member of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, presides over a hearing with Hollywood-based German-born composer Hanns Eisler. Thomas lunges over the bench as he screams in the face of Eisler. Behind him witches scowl and attempt to intimidate the witness.

In 1947, the House Committee on Un-American Activities began calling Hollywood actors, producers, and composers to testify about alleged communist associations within the entertainment industry. Eisler, who emigrated to the US after his music had been banned by the Nazi Party, was subject to relentless questioning before the Committee. Despite a lack of incriminating evidence and petitions from the likes of Pablo Picasso and Charlie Chaplin, he was deported from the US and returned to Germany in 1948.

Untitled

1942

Ink, crayon and opaque white paint

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, February 12, 1942

Gropper's cartoon features an eerie set of imposing shadows on the US Capitol building. The silhouettes represent some of the most influential figures in American society during the 1940s—the ubiquitous antisemitic Father Coughlin; celebrity aviation heroes Charles Lindbergh and Laura Ingalls; and Republican politicians Norman Thomas and Burton Wheeler—all marked with swastikas for their public affiliations with fascism and Nazi Germany.

These individuals were outspoken isolationists, and many were members of "America First," an isolationist group popularized by media mogul William Randolph Hearst. The committee used the misleading slogan to pressure the United States against involvement in WWII under the guise of patriotic nationalism.

Dies Committee

1938

Black ink, spatter, crayon, and opaque white paint over blue crayon

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, September 27, 1938

Gropper regularly criticized the House Committee on Un-American Activities, nicknamed the Dies Committee after its first chair Congressman Martin Dies. It was formed in 1938 to investigate alleged subversive activities by individuals with communist ties working both in and outside the government. In the cartoon, Gropper playfully imagines the Dies Committee in the form of a conniving fish—a jab at how the committee effectively served as a "red herring" or diversion from the real threat to America—the members themselves.

Notice the faceless figures beneath the massive fish who scuttle over papers with the headlines "Nazi Propaganda," "Nazi Spies," "Stool Pigeon"—a term referring to police informants. This cartoon

was published alongside an article summarizing the various charges of misconduct by members of the committee, including openly expressing Nazi sympathies in public speeches.

It's About the Future of the World

1945

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *Morning Freiheit*, February 10, 1945

This image appeared in *Morning Freiheit* months before Germany's surrender to the Allied Powers in May 1945. The stoic allegorical figure of the worker holds up the world as he contemplates what comes next. Gropper's drawing captures the heavy weight many were shouldering as they considered an uncertain future in the face of fascism's continued threat to international freedom.

"Our present foes are domestic foes, not foreign foes"

1942

Ink, crayon, and opaque white paint on paper

Gift of Harvey Ross in honor of Elsa Smithgall's professionalism and dedicated service to The Phillips Collection, 2023

Published in *The Illustrious Dunderheads*, 1942

This drawing is among Gropper's illustrations for *Illustrious Dunderheads*, an anthology by Rex Stout that compiled quotes and voting records from nearly 150 US representatives from the years before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Stout's witty title was a direct indictment of the stupidity of the American isolationist representatives who refused to recognize the looming threat of the Nazis and international fascism to the American public.

Here, one of the "illustrious dunderheads" stands atop the US Capitol wielding a mighty ax at an innocent bald eagle, the emblem of the country. Gropper's cartoon takes aim at the words of Oregon Senator Rufus C. Holman, who stated in February 1941: "Our present foes are domestic foes, not foreign foes," a sentiment he shared with other Senators in diverting attention away from the crisis in Europe.

Suppression

1940

Ink and white opaque paint over blue pencil on paper

Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross

Published in *New Masses*, January 9, 1940

How would you depict a society that condones intolerance? In Gropper's wry hands, this takes the form of a chaotic family tree. At the top are staunch anti-communist Congressmen Martin Dies of Texas (as a man) and Hamilton Fish III of New York (as a fish). Below them lies Father Coughlin—one of the most influential voices in the US during the 1930s who used his pulpit to spread hatred and pro-Nazi propaganda—in the guise of a spectacled megaphone spewing racial epithets. At the upper right, a blindfolded US Attorney General Frank Murphy struggles to restore order, holding the scales of justice in his right hand and a sword in the other.

Page 13—*William Gropper: Artist of the People* Wall Text

blindfolded US Attorney General Frank Murphy struggles to restore order, holding the scales of justice in his right hand and a sword in the other.

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

The information below was updated in October 2024 and is subject to change.

[*Breaking It Down: Conversations from the Vault*](#)

November 2, 2024–January 19, 2025

The Phillips Collection, from its inception, has focused on creating what founder Duncan Phillips called “units:” groups of works of art that represent key aspects of an artist’s vision or spirit. Leaders in championing the independent-minded artist, Duncan and Marjorie Phillips gave many their first museum exhibitions and acquisitions. This presentation offers a deep dive and new take on several artists who are cornerstones of the collection, including Georges Braque, Richard Diebenkorn, Arthur Dove, Sam Gilliam, Paul Klee, and Georgia O’Keeffe, alongside a growing collection of works by trailblazers of our time, including Sean Scully, Sylvia Snowden, Renée Stout, Joyce Wellman, and more.

This exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection.

[*Timeless Mucha: The Magic of Line*](#)

February 22–May 18, 2025

Timeless Mucha: The Magic of Line reappraises the work of Art Nouveau pioneer Alphonse Mucha (b. 1860, Ivančice, Moravia, Austrian Empire; d. 1939, Prague, Czechoslovakia) and explores his impact on graphic art since the 1960s. This exhibition provides an opportunity to survey the development of Mucha’s style, and to explore how his art was rediscovered by later generations of artists. Mucha was a key influence on Psychedelic Art of the 1960s–70s, as well as on a wide range of visual culture from the late 20th century to today, exemplified by American comics, Japanese manga, and street murals.

This exhibition is organized by the Mucha Foundation.

[*Essex Hemphill: Take care of your blessings*](#)

May 17–August 31, 2025

This exhibition charts the relationship between the writings of poet and activist Essex Hemphill (b. 1957, Chicago, IL; d. 1995, Philadelphia, PA) and contemporary visual art. Raised in Washington, DC, Hemphill emerged as a luminary in the DC arts scene of the 80s and 90s. He self-published chapbooks including *Earth Life* (1985) and *Conditions* (1986), before publishing his full-length collection *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry* (1992). Whereas Hemphill died of AIDS-related illness at just 38, his work persists, reflected in visual dialogues with his contemporaries such as Lyle Ashton Harris and Isaac Julien, and a new generation of artists such as Diedrick Brackens and Tiona Nekkia McClodden.

This exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection.

[*Vivian Browne: My Kind of Protest*](#)

June 28–September 28, 2025

Drawing upon previously unknown works and archival findings, this exhibition recovers the depth and variety of the more than three-decade career of Vivian Browne (b. 1929, Laurel, FL; d. 1993, New York, NY). The exhibition features paintings, prints, and works on paper across seven bodies of work, as well as ephemera that highlight Browne’s pioneering activism and influential teaching career. Browne was a

Page 2—Upcoming Exhibitions

founder of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, an organization that fought for Black representation in New York museums; a founder of SoHo20, one of the first women's art cooperatives in Manhattan; and a professor at Rutgers University (1971–92). Browne's signature approach to color and form challenged the neatly defined categories of abstraction and figuration, and art and politics, revealing a more nuanced approach to art-making that is part of Browne's unique contribution to 20th-century art of the US.

This exhibition is co-organized by The Phillips Collection and the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati.

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