

JOSEPH FRIEBERT · A LIFE IN ART



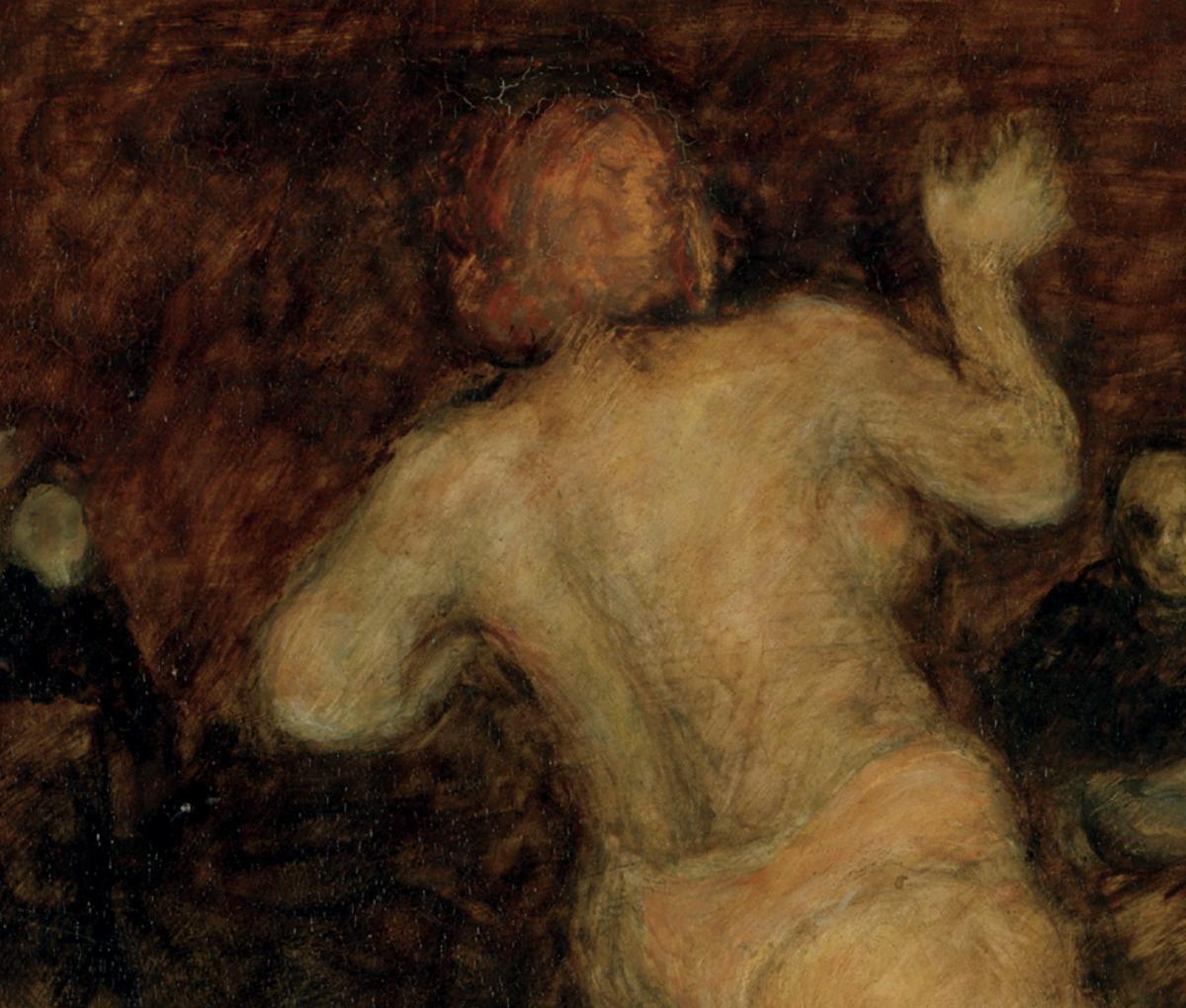
JOSEPH FRIEBERT · A LIFE IN ART

SUSAN FRIEBERT ROSSEN

PUBLISHED BY MUSEUM OF WISCONSIN ART



















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FOREWORD

Laurie Winters, MOWA Executive Director | CEO

"Joseph Friebert: A Life in Art" celebrates the life and career of one of Wisconsin's most distinguished artists and a major donation of artworks to the Museum of Wisconsin Art in 2015–16. Thanks to the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and the Kohler Foundation, Inc., the museum today is the primary repository for works by Joseph Friebert (1908–2002), representing all periods of his seven-decade career. This donation of sixty-seven significant paintings, drawings, and prints was the catalyst for the artist's first retrospective in twenty years and the largest exhibition of his work to date.

The project was an easy decision for MOWA. Friebert's work is strikingly original and not as well known as it deserves. The timing and magnitude of the donation created the perfect opportunity to reassess Friebert's career. His painting is steeped in some of the darkest moments of Wisconsin and American history—from the Great Depression to World War II to the racism and social inequity of the 1960s and 1970s. Friebert's thoughtful meditations on the human spirit provide a valuable counterpoint to the buoyant movements of the mid-twentieth century that dominate so much of our thinking about American art. A reassessment of his work and career was definitely in order.

A project of this scale would not have been possible without the collaboration of a number of individuals who generously contributed their time and talent. Our greatest appreciation is extended to Susan Friebert Rossen, who enthusiastically embraced the gift to the museum and the concept of an exhibition that would reposition her father's work within the larger national conversation. For many years the executive director of publications at the Art Institute of Chicago, Rossen was the obvious choice to author the catalogue's principal essay. She uniquely understood not only the artist and the man himself, but also the ebb and flow of

his career between Wisconsin and the East Coast. This was a heartfelt project for Rossen, both challenging and rewarding, and we offer our sincere thanks to her for so compellingly articulating the life and vision of her father. Daughter Judith M. Friebert also enriched the publication with an insightful memoir that frames her own identity as a working artist within her relationship to her father.

A deep debt of gratitude is owed to Graeme Reid, MOWA's director of exhibitions and collections, who worked closely with Rossen from the project's earliest inception. Special thanks must also go to our talented book designer, Steve Biel; the book's editor, Terry Ann R. Neff; and the book's photographer, Jamie Stukenberg of ProGraphics. Thanks also go to Andrea Waala, MOWA's registrar, and the many staff members whose hard work helped bring this project to fruition.

For their generous support of this exhibition, we sincerely thank our 2018 exhibition sponsors Karen and James Hyde, Tom and Cynthia LaConte, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Pick Heaters, and the Wisconsin Arts Board. We are genuinely grateful to the sponsors for helping us share the vision of Joseph Friebert.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Susan Friebert Rossen

I would like to thank the entire staff of the Museum of Wisconsin Art for their dedication to the work of my father, Joseph Friebert, and their enthusiasm for the exhibition "Joseph Friebert: A Life in Art" and this catalogue. Many contributed to the project but none more than Executive Director and CEO Laurie Winters, who has been involved in this initiative from the start, applying her many years of museum experience and sharp mind to every aspect. Director of Collections and Exhibitions Graeme Reid has been a firm and loyal supporter of Joseph Friebert's work since the early 2000s and a good friend to me. Registrar Andrea Waala, who among her many duties was the book's photo editor, responded with efficiency and warmth to my many queries. Clearly, a significant portion of my father's oeuvre—over one hundred works in many media—has found at MOWA the appropriate home.

I am deeply grateful to the Kohler Foundation, Inc., which in numerous ways supports artists whose work deserves to be seen and appreciated. The devoted staff, in particular former director Terri Yoho, Dan Smith, Susan Kelly, and Deb Boettner, helped place the significant gift of works at MOWA, as well as over two hundred others at thirty-five other art museums across the Midwest and East Coast. The Kohler employed Parma Conservation, Chicago, to conserve work that museums asked for. The paintings were handled by Ewa Devereux, whose devotion to my father's work is an unexpected blessing.

A number of people assisted in the preparation of my essay and the documentation included here. Heather Winter, librarian/archivist at the Milwaukee Art Museum, provided lists of exhibitions at that institution and other useful materials. Julia Stein (granddaughter of the artist Alfred Sessler) and Carrie Johnson (curator at the Rockford Art Museum) were helpful. My daughter, Rebecca Rossen Pavkovic, and my sister, Judith M. Friebert, each read a draft of my essay, as did Sandra and Tom Ullmann, who knew and loved my father over many decades. All provided excellent feedback. Mary Solt and Kerry Lehmann patiently endured my total absorption in this endeavor over many months. I feel privileged that my close friend and colleague Terry Ann R. Neff served as MOWA's editor of the catalogue, enhancing it with her keen intelligence and insightful editorial skills. Finally, I extend thanks to Pat Goley of ProGraphics, Rockford, Illinois, for agreeing to send the company's photographer, Jamie Stukenberg, to West Bend and Chicago. The outstanding reproductions in this book could not have been achieved without Jamie's eye and magic touch.



BUILDING A LEGACY

Graeme Reid

From the late 1930s until the mid-1960s, Joseph Friebert's art was selected for many major national exhibitions, as well as local and regional shows at which he garnered numerous awards. His inclusion in the 1956 Venice Biennale—alongside such notable figures as Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Lionel Feininger, Edward Hopper, Franz Kline, Norman Lewis, and George Tooker—marked him as an artist of the highest caliber.

In addition to his exemplary exhibition record, Friebert enjoyed a long and highly influential teaching career. One year after graduating, in 1945, from Milwaukee State Teacher's College (MSTC) with a degree in art education, he joined the faculty of his alma mater. In 1956, MSTC merged with the University of Wisconsin Extension, Milwaukee, to become the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UW–M). There Friebert was a respected and beloved instructor for thirty years, teaching primarily life drawing and painting until his retirement in 1976. Many of his students pursued careers in the arts.

Friebert's critical and professional success was considerable. Many solo exhibitions were organized during his lifetime, and several shows celebrated his centennial in 2008 and 2009. In 2000, the West Bend Art Museum—now the Museum of Wisconsin Art (MOWA)—acquired its first Joseph Friebert, a classic dark street scene of a tavern in Milwaukee from 1940/41. It was a great start to assembling the work of one of Wisconsin's most notable artists. MOWA sought and welcomed more examples, always with an eye to building not just a comprehensive representation of Friebert's art, but one that featured his best works.

In 2007, the year that the museum dedicated its mission to the art and artists of Wisconsin, it acquired nine examples by Friebert from a niece and nephew of the

artist. Seventeen more, from the Friebert estate, entered the collection the following year. By 2014, with ongoing help and guidance of Friebert's daughter Susan Friebert Rossen, MOWA owned thirty-nine works—an impressive representation of the artist's career.

MOWA has actively sought out the opportunity to do something that is rarely possible today: build a definitive selection by an individual artist. The museum has encyclopedic collections of works by Tom Bamberger, Paul Hammersmith, Carl von Marr, and Charles W. Thwaites. In 2014, an opportunity arose to follow suit with Friebert. The Kohler Foundation, Inc. partnered with the Friebert family to distribute to museums throughout the country a number of works from his sizable estate. MOWA asked for a substantial group of them, promising in return to establish the most comprehensive holdings of Friebert's art in a single institution, mount a major retrospective exhibition, and produce a scholarly catalogue.

In 2015, after judicious consideration, MOWA selected sixty-seven works spanning all of Friebert's styles (social realist, semiabstract, and expressionistic), media, and subjects. One of the earliest is a 1938 drawing of a man slumped in a doorway (p. 46), his posture conveying the despair felt by so many during the Depression; the image exhibits the compassion that would characterize much of Friebert's subsequent work. One of the latest examples is a self-portrait from 1989, when the artist was eighty-one (p. 86). The charcoal drawing on blue paper is a frank self-examination of strength and fragility, wisdom and questioning—the polarities of aging. These two works, among the more than one hundred now in MOWA's collection, beautifully bookend the artist's long career. Joseph Friebert has left us a great legacy. That legacy is now accessible to current and future audiences as part of the remarkable and resonant story of outstanding art and artists with Wisconsin connections.



JOSEPH FRIEBERT · A LIFE IN ART

Susan Friebert Rossen

Every morning after a breakfast of cereal and decaf coffee, he would descend the eight steps that led to the studio and turn the radio to the classical music station. Wearing a cap over his balding head, a soft, short-sleeved shirt, and beige work pants, he might begin his workday by building a new frame, cleaning his palette, or washing his brushes in the adjoining laundry room, which was equipped with a deep industrial metal sink. A canvas was usually waiting on the easel. He would study the composition, apply colors and glazes, wipe something off, apply more. He would move as far back as possible to get a more distant view of what he was doing or turn to look at the reflection of the work in a mirror placed strategically on the back wall. He would break for lunch, return to work, and call it a day when the light from his large, north-facing studio windows began to fade.

My father, Joseph Friebert (1908–2002), was an artist with a work ethic so strong that he repeated this routine every day he could, even when he was in a fallow period. Art was both a calling and his job. I grew up in a household filled with art and always smelling of turpentine, oil paint, and glue. My upbringing was so formative that I became an art historian and chose a museum career. In recent years, I have focused on bringing my father's work to new audiences.

THE BOY

Those who knew Joe Friebert described him as soft-spoken, self-effacing, thoughtful, and empathetic, as well as pessimistic, anxious, and funny. All but his humor are visible in the art he made during a career of nearly seven decades. Unsurprisingly, Friebert's view of the world and the place of art in it were formed

in great part by his childhood. Born in Buffalo, New York, he was three when his family moved to Milwaukee, where he would live for the next ninety-one years. While my father's personality was very like his retiring, sweet-tempered mother, Hermine (1876–1954), he was deeply influenced by his father, Edward Sr. (1875–1960), who worked as a tailor. A passionate unionist and Socialist who ran unsuccessfully for alderman as a Progressive, Edward Sr. sent Joe—the fourth of five brothers (the youngest died as an infant)—to a Socialist Sunday school, where even a performance of "Jack and the Beanstalk" was filtered through an anti-capitalist, antiwar ideology (the virtuous Jack versus the evil Giant; see p. 98).\footnote{1} A speech by the Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs, which my father heard in his early teens, left an indelible memory.

In elementary school, Friebert excelled at drawing and was singled out by teachers to make large-scale copies of images from books on the blackboard during recess. He forgot about art in high school. His abilities in chemistry and biology led to an interest in medicine, but medical school was way beyond his family's means. Two of his brothers had become pharmacists, and he followed suit. He would spend eighteen years as a druggist.

ARTISTIC BEGINNINGS, CAMARADERIE, AND INFLUENCES

Friebert took up art again around 1934, when the Depression forced him into part-time pharmacy work. He borrowed how-to-draw-and-paint books from the library. His gifts were first noticed in 1935 at the Oriental Pharmacy by artist

Samuel Himmelfarb, who often ate at the lunch counter. Impressed with what he saw, Himmelfarb recommended that Friebert join the Businessmen's Sketch Club, where Robert Von Neumann, a German-born printmaker and painter, was teaching. Friebert also met Robert Schellin (fig. 1), from whom he learned much about art and artists. Schellin in turn introduced him to Ruth Grotenrath, Schomer Lichtner, Alfred Sessler (fig. 2), and Santos Zingale (fig. 3). They all came from

working-class families and formed close friendships. Friebert enrolled at the Layton School of Art in 1936, taking night classes with painter Gerrit Sinclair. Both Von Neumann—who portrayed fishermen and others at work with consummate draftsmanship and vigor (fig. 4)—and Sinclair—a skilled observer of contemporary city and country life (fig. 5)—became mentors.



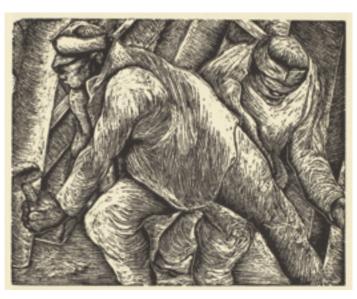










Fig. 1. Robert Schellin, Self-Portrait, c. 1936. Fig. 2. Alfred Sessler, At Work, c. 1937. Fig. 3. Santos Zingale, Refugees, c. 1938.

Fig. 4. Robert Von Neumann, Portuguese Fisherman, c. 1940. Fig. 5. Gerrit Sinclair, Above the Dam, Milwaukee, 1930. Fig. 6. Betsy Ritz Friebert, Fourth Street Church, c. 1937.

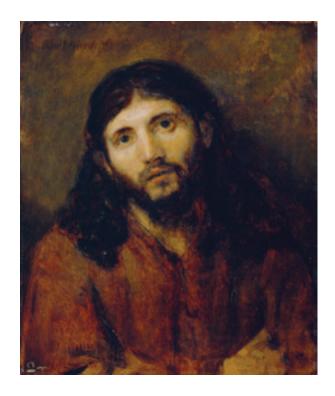




Fig. 7. Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, Head of Christ, c. 1648/50. Fig. 8. Diego Rivera, Detroit Industry (North Wall), 1932-33.

Milwaukee's young artists clustered together in studios on Third Street, along the Milwaukee River north of downtown. They regularly visited one another's workspaces, shared ideas and methods, arranged group sketching outings, and more. It was a tremendous learning period for my father. Among those with studios were Agnes Jessen and Betsy Ritz. Jessen and Ritz both had day jobs, but on Friday nights they hosted life-drawing sessions, charging each participant a quarter. Friebert attended them regularly and eventually shared the studio with the two women and photographer Rod Johnson. Ritz—a gifted artist (fig. 6) who had graduated from Milwaukee State Teachers College (MSTC) in 1932 with a degree in art education—and Friebert were married in 1937.² They honeymooned in Detroit because my father's oldest brother lived there. The couple visited the Detroit Institute of Arts, where Rembrandt's *Head of Christ* (fig. 7) and Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry* murals (fig. 8) made a lasting impression.

Friebert always acknowledged Rembrandt as his most important influence, in at least four significant ways: the Dutch master's formidable drawing abilities; his expressive golden-brown palette; the complex glazing technique that produced an

inner light; and his compassion for his subjects—biblical, mythological, the elite, and ordinary people. The great mural art of Rivera and his Mexican compatriots had a profound effect on artists throughout the United States, not only on those who painted murals for the Federal Art Project. Rivera's Detroit murals were especially revered. The Mexicans, as Chicago muralist Mitchell Siporin put it, made American artists "aware of the scope and fullness of the 'soul' of our own environment [and the] socially moving epic of our time and place.... We will develop ... [forms] for the things we say that will bind us closer to those to whom we speak." 3

Despite the terrible conditions and profound insecurities of the Depression, it was a stimulating and exciting time to be an artist. Lewis Mumford, one of Friebert's favorite writers on art and architecture, described the effect of the Roosevelt administration's visual-arts programs on the nation's artists: "[They] have been given something more precious than their daily bread: they have at last achieved the liberty to perform an essential function of life, in the knowledge that their work had a destination in the community." The democratization of art—achieved by extending it into the public sphere, working with subjects and in styles that spoke

to many rather than to a few, and allowing artists to express their beliefs (although images deemed too critical or depressing were sometimes censored)—was exhilarating for the likes of Grotenrath, Lichtner, Schellin, Sessler, Sinclair, and Zingale, all of whom were on the federal payroll, and for Friebert, even though his employment as a druggist made him ineligible. Years later, my father and Schellin reminisced about how happy they had been to create in an environment in which art mattered and artists were validated as forces of good.⁵

EARLY WORK

The values that Friebert had learned in his Socialist household were especially relevant during the Depresssion years. He keenly felt a responsibility to depict the period's harsh realities. As painter Stuart Davis, an abstractionist with strong leftist beliefs, declared in 1936, "Increasing expression of social problems of the day in the new American art makes it clear that in times such as we are living in, few artists can honestly remain aloof, wrapped up in studio problems. . . . The artist has not simply [to look] out of the window, he has to step into the street." 6

On State Street, near the studio in which my father and mother first lived and worked, there was a tavern that offered burlesque shows. Occasionally, my parents joined artist friends there for a beer. My father commemorated such nights in one of his most celebrated paintings, *State Street Sadie* (p. 48), in which a nearly nude woman dances before a lustful crowd of men (and one woman—my mother—who wears a red wrap). The painting tips its hat to three major Old Masters: Rembrandt (technique and palette), Rubens (the full-figured Sadie), and Goya (the leering faces). Sadie's ample form glows in the smoky brown atmosphere. Friebert achieved this effect, beginning in the late 1930s, by following Old Master methods. He painted "indirectly," as he described it, using thin oil pigment and glazes applied over egg tempera to create a luminosity that seems to emanate from within. He also used tempera, which is non-translucent, along with oil and glazes, to create a play across the surface of opaque and transparent tones.

Unlike others who infused similar subjects with satire (fig. 9), Friebert allowed the performer a degree of dignity by showing her from the back and thus protecting her identity. Throughout his career, he approached the female nude—an important subject for him—with respect. As Milwaukee Journal art critic

Donald Key observed about his nudes, "There is only a slight aura of eroticism about the works. Friebert is no misogynist. Mostly they reveal the artist's affectionate response to the character of the subjects."

Along with many of his generation, my father was familiar with the ideas of philosopher and educator John Dewey, who regarded art as "an individual expression arising out of societal experience." From the start, Friebert's work demonstrates his connection with the less fortunate and his concern for their struggles. He sketched the unemployed, such as a man slumped hopelessly on a doorstep (p. 46), giving people a dime or a quarter for the privilege of drawing them. In a signal image from the 1930s, the arresting *Two Lines, One Job* (p. 49), men in drab, heavy work clothes, their backs to the viewer, stand in two orderly lines that recede into the distance. Their anonymity and sheer number underscore the futility of their wait. Friebert was drawn to industrial scenes, such as Milwaukee's Harley Davidson factory and other blue-collar worksites (pp. 42–43, 59).



Fig. 9.
Charles W. Thwaites,
Untitled (Burlesque #1),
c. 1935.





Fig. 10. Robert Henri, Dutch Joe (Jopie van Slouten), 1910. Fig. 11. George Inness, Sunset in Georgia, 1890.

A powerful series of nocturnal images features people clutching their overcoats against the cold as they walk past dark store fronts arranged across the picture plane (pp. 51, 54). Friebert also explored the underside of cities, such as alleys (p. 50) and the backs of buildings (p. 52). He took up similar subjects in lithographs, a medium that allowed him to create mood with lights, darks, and shadows (p. 55). Unlike the laborers—strong and vital even in the face of inhumane working conditions—depicted by many contemporaries (fig. 2), Friebert's protagonists are small, bent, and all-but-defeated by back-breaking toil (p. 56). The pathos of such depictions would be present in all of his future work.

During a 1997 interview, Friebert spoke about the stylistic options available to him when he began to paint. While he was aware of abstraction, he preferred figuration. He distinguished between two main approaches: American Scene and Social Realist painting. He was less drawn to the former, which favored depictions of rural areas

and small towns, than to the latter, which was more concerned with city life. He and his contemporaries found inspiration in the urban themes and direct painting styles of the artists of New York's early twentieth-century Ash Can School, such as George Bellows, Robert Henri (fig. 10), George Luks, Reginald Marsh, and John Sloan.

Landscape also held great appeal. My father paired the rural and urban in a double-sided composition, *Country Life/City Life* (p. 58). Among his many drawn and painted images of the Wisconsin countryside in the late 1930s and 1940s, he showed a preference for night scenes, such as *Lodi* and *Moonlight on Corn Stalks* (pp. 53, 57). The dark, brooding character of these works may be explained by the strong romantic streak that attracted him to the images of such poets of the night as Albert Pinkham Ryder and George Inness (fig. 11). But this quality is also a metaphor for the foreboding engendered by the rise of fascism and war raging in Europe. For example, in his stark 1940 depiction of a stormy night in Lodi,

Wisconsin (where his brother Edward Jr. ran a drugstore for several years), land and sky signal the threat of violence and destruction. Houses look like tombstones. Even Friebert's still lifes from this moment include troubling elements, such as renderings of dead pigeons bought from a poultry store near his studio (p. 44).¹¹

Friebert's rise to prominence was remarkably fast, thanks to the recognition he received in local, regional, and national juried exhibitions. During the first half of the twentieth century, competitive shows—annual and biannual—offered artists the best avenue for displaying their work. As the introduction to the second biannual "Six-State Exhibition of Paintings and Prints," organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, declares, "Regional exhibitions are the foundation of our nation-wide art development. They are the well-springs from which flow many talents, transitory and permanent—some to flow aimlessly and become lost, others to find a channel toward fruition." Because such exhibitions were central to an area's cultural life, organizers sought out jurors who were artists, museum directors, and scholars with national reputations. 12

Friebert's first exhibited work was a watercolor selected for the 1935 Salon of Wisconsin Art at the University of Wisconsin's Memorial Union in Madison. He had been making art for less than a year. In 1937, two portraits (one of which is on p. 41) were accepted into the Art Institute of Chicago's prestigious American Exhibition. He did many astute portraits of family and friends in these years (p. 60). In 1938, he received his first awards: one at the 25th Annual Exhibition of Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors and the other at the Wisconsin State Fair. In 1938–39, an oil landscape in the Great Lakes Exhibition (which included art from six states) traveled to museums in Buffalo, Rochester, Toronto, Toledo, Cleveland, and Detroit, as well as Milwaukee. In the 1940s, works in his Social Realist style won dozens of awards and were included in the Art Institute's Artists of Chicago and Vicinity Exhibitions (seven times from 1938 to 1949); Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (1941); Illinois State Fair (1942, 1948, 1949); Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (1947, 1949); and the Walker Art Center (1947, 1949).

Some of the most forward-thinking exhibitions in Wisconsin were conceived by the director of Gimbel Brothers Department Store, Charles Zadok. In recognition of the Milwaukee store being the first in the Gimbel's national chain, Zadok decided to celebrate Wisconsin's centennial, in 1948, by asking artists to submit to

a jury works relating to the state and its history. Gimbel's allotted an astounding \$12,500 for awards, some of which were purchase prizes that allowed the store to assemble a collection. To complete the collection, Gimbel's underwrote four more annual exhibitions. ¹⁴ The intention was to donate eventually all of the works the store owned to state museums and educational institutions. Friebert won several awards in those shows, and thus paintings by him in the Gimbel's collection were among those given in the mid-1950s to state institutions such as the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the Milwaukee Art Center (now the Milwaukee Art Museum¹⁵). In this way, his work and that of other Wisconsin artists began to enter the permanent collections of the state's museums.

In the 1930s and '40s, both American Scene and Social Realist art were called "Regionalist." The term is deeply problematic. For one thing, what was not Regionalist? Only New York City and the East Coast escaped the label, even though the concerns and styles of many artists living there were shared by their peers in other parts of the country. For some, Regionalism meant provincial, localized, and narrow in scope, as opposed to more cosmopolitan (abstract) art, which aimed at the universal. But Wisconsin-based artists were not isolated. They traveled (my parents went to New York City in 1938). They saw a fine selection of nineteenth-century art at Milwaukee's Layton Art Gallery (fig. 11) and early twentieth-century American art (fig. 10) and traveling exhibitions at the Milwaukee Art Institute (an early name for the Milwaukee Art Museum).¹⁶ The Art Institute of Chicago's Old Masters and Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collections were not far away. They read newspapers and magazines and often appeared in them. Critics for the Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel wrote weekly about the art scene in the city, state, and beyond. They reviewed Wisconsin's annual competitive exhibitions and shows at the region's museums and institutions; hailed local artists who exhibited and won prizes at national exhibitions; opined about the state of the art world; and wrote features about artists' lives. Friebert's decision to live in a smallish pond and become a big fish afforded him plenty of support and recognition.

TEACHING

When they married, my mother and father made a pact: He had five years to establish himself as a self-supporting artist (it ended up taking nine). He would

continue to work as a pharmacist, and she would keep her position as a social worker. She left her job in 1941 when I was born. In 1942, my father enrolled full-time at Milwaukee State Teachers College, working at a drugstore on his free days and nights and on weekends. His income barely kept them afloat; they lived frugally, literally counting their pennies at the end of each month. In 1946, one year after his graduation, he secured a full-time position at his alma mater (which eventually became the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee [UW-M]), allowing him to leave pharmacy for good.

For thirty years, Friebert taught drawing and painting at UW–M, preferring to work with freshmen and sophomores, who he felt were more open than advanced students to learning what he could teach them. He saw drawing as the core of good art in any medium. A legion of devoted students has expressed gratitude for the many ways in which he supported and mentored them. "An art educator," he remarked, "is not primarily concerned with making artists out of all students; he has the broader goal of making all students more responsive to good visual experiences." Friebert showed his students slides of great artworks. He took classes to museums. One former student, the muralist Richard Haas, remembered those times as "especially memorable and inspired." Another described, with fondness, his annoyance with my father's habit of showing pupils what they ought to be thinking about by drawing or painting directly on their artwork. The student kept two compositions going concurrently, one that he never showed Friebert and the other that he would quickly put up on his easel when his teacher drew near. In that way, he ended up with what he considered an actual "Friebert." An other described when his teacher drew near.

A DETOUR INTO ABSTRACTION

By the late 1940s, abstraction had become the ascendant style of American art. Like other Milwaukee-based artists, my father began to experiment with it. ²⁰ He embarked on a series depicting semiabstracted urban structures—cathedrals and synagogues, towers, viaducts, apartments, bridges—stressing horizontal, vertical, and diagonal forces arranged, as he put it, in "intricate pattern[s] of construction detail through which . . . light and its component of shadow form a mosaic of light and dark." ²¹ In these works (pp. 66–69), he continued to refine his "indirect painting" technique. Critic Frank Getlein described his method as follows: "The Friebert formula . . . can be expressed in three words: Underpainting,

overpainting, glazes. [These three actions allow] the light of heaven's sun [to] be captured on canvas, split up into small pieces and made to figure in a composition in the same way color and shape figure in all composition.... Solid substance is created out of light and shadow."²²

Our family spent the academic year 1952–53 in New York City. My father had won a Ford Foundation Fellowship to study at the Art Students League with Yasuo Kuniyoshi, among others; audit classes with the art historian Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University; and visit the city's cornucopia of museums and galleries. Saturdays were devoted to family activities in Manhattan (we lived in Fort Lee, New Jersey, across the George Washington Bridge). Inevitably, those activities included going to museums. I resented being dragged into them when there were so many other exciting things for a twelve-year-old to do. But one day, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, my father led me to Rembrandt's famed etching *Three Trees* and showed me how, with just a few diagonal lines, the Dutch master had indicated the end of a storm and sunlight breaking through clouds. I was hooked; I trace my love of art history and my museum career to that moment.

Friebert's New York sojourn confirmed for him that his current work—in which forms were abstracted but never fully so—was in harmony with the times. His impressive resumé now included his having been one of five Wisconsin artists represented in the Metropolitan Museum's 1950 exhibition "American Painting Today," in which he showed a Cathedral. Furthermore, an abstract Synagogue won first prize—the prestigious Logan Medal—at the 1952 Chicago and Vicinity Show at the Art Institute of Chicago. Toward the end of our stay, Friebert gathered his courage and took his work to Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery on East 51st Street. For decades one of the city's leading dealers of modern American art, Halpert boasted a stable of artists that included Stuart Davis, Jack Levine, Jacob Lawrence, Ben Shahn, and Charles Sheeler, among others. It is possible that my father approached Halpert on the recommendation of Kuniyoshi, who exhibited at her gallery. Indeed, she was looking for new artists working in an abstractionist vein and was enthusiastic about Friebert's work. She told him that she needed to show it to her assistant before finalizing an agreement. When my father returned, as requested, a few days later, he found the gallery closed, his artwork and materials packaged up next to the door, and a note from the assistant saying that Halpert had decided not to handle him. Deeply shaken, he never again approached a New York gallery.²³



Fig. 12. Fred Berman, White City No. 9, 1954–56. Fig. 13. Norman Lewis, Cathedral, 1950.

Nonetheless, throughout the 1950s, Friebert's semiabstract compositions attracted attention. They appeared in national exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago (1954, 1957, 1960); the Walker Art Center (1950, 1951, 1956, 1958); the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1954); the Whitney Museum of American Art (1956); and the National Academy of Design (1958). Amost significant was his inclusion in 1956 in the 28th Venice Biennale, the world's leading international art exhibition. The American Pavilion exhibition was put together for the first time by a woman, Katharine Kuh, the Art Institute of Chicago's curator of modern painting and sculpture. Rather than focusing on one or two artists as was usually done, she organized her display around a theme, "American Artists Paint the City." Friebert and Fred Berman were the only Wisconsinites among the thirty-five artists selected.

Because Berman was eighteen years Friebert's junior, it has often mistakenly been assumed that he was my father's student. They became acquainted around 1945, when Berman, a precocious talent, took work to Friebert for critiques. He was inspired by my father's somber palette and his predilection for compositions arranged in horizontal and vertical patterns. Their close friendship lasted nearly sixty years (see p. 101). By 1956, Berman had lightened his palette considerably and gone further into abstraction than Friebert was willing to do, but the paintings they showed in Venice were not dissimilar in subject (soaring urban structures) and feeling (a quality of iridescence and transcendence) (compare fig. 12 and p. 68). In the catalogue, Friebert's *Urban Cathedral* was reproduced opposite a notably kindred soul: Cathedral, a 1950 oil by the Abstract Expressionist Norman Lewis, a New York-based African American artist (fig. 13). Arts magazine noted that several painters in the exhibition identified skyscrapers at night with "exultant Gothic cathedrals. Both Norman Lewis and Joseph Friebert . . . reveal their delight in the vertical thrust of jeweled radiance."25 I do not know whether my father was familiar with Lewis's art, but it is striking that the two were working so similarly. While the American Pavilion included examples by such artists as Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Lionel Feininger, Edward Hopper, Franz Kline, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Tobey, only one painting—Friebert's Urban Cathedral—was purchased out of the show.²⁶

That Friebert painted cathedrals as well as events from the New Testament (p. 62) raises the issue of his Jewishness. He always claimed that, while there are Jewish artists, there is no such thing as Jewish art. Despite his distrust of organized religion,

he depicted religious subjects, which he approached ecumenically: biblical events are human events; symbols are applicable to everyone, everywhere. He explained his fascination with Gothic churches as an "absorption with the emotional and inspirational force of this architectural form" and its "soaring spirit." His cathedrals and synagogues, his religious edifices and skyscrapers all can be hard to distinguish one from the other. Moreover, my father's social consciousness was not rooted in being a Jew; it came from being the child of Socialist, immigrant parents who struggled to make good in trying circumstances. That they were Jewish added to the challenges of assimilation they faced.

RETURN TO FIGURATION

Even during his abstract phase, Friebert produced figurative work. For example, *Flagellation* (p. 62) and *Still Life with Chicken* (p. 65) date from the mid-1950s, around the same time as his monumental *Square Cathedral* (p. 67). Given the stylistic differences of these three works, it seems clear that he was searching for a visual language that felt true to him. Social critiques such as *Flagellation* reflect his conviction that a style which breaks up human, natural, and man-made forms into abstract patterns cannot convey meaning in the same way figurative images can. He would have agreed with the American painter Max Weber, who in his early years produced accomplished Cubist abstractions but in the 1930s abandoned that mode for a figurative manner because, he said, "Abstraction cannot make us experience horror."²⁸

The late 1940s and early 1950s were clouded by the Cold War and McCarthyism. My father, along with other leftists and Democrats, had crossed over in the 1946 Wisconsin Republican primary for the United States Senate in a protest against the incumbent, Robert La Follette Jr., a highly unpredictable senator who, while domestically liberal, had become a fierce isolationist. They voted for his opponent, a judge about whom they knew little: Joseph McCarthy. Struggling with the inadvertent part he had played in catapulting McCarthy to power, Friebert did a number of figurative images that excoriate a society which supports such nefarious elements as the Ku Klux Klan and the Red Scare while hiding behind masks and costumes. His searing commentaries on the forces of evil that can erode human values continued into the 1960s and early 1970s. Bawdy House, Human Carnival, and Human Folly (pp. 70–72) are among his most strident works.

Turning away from a style that had garnered Friebert so much critical success took courage. Years later, looking back on his abstractions, he admitted that he had felt pressured to embrace "the trends," and that, in the end, he had only explored abstraction "half-way." At the same time, he found value in the aesthetic: "Abstract painting can live without subject matter, but subject matter cannot live without abstract fundamentals."30 In a 1977 conversation with Milwaukee Journal art critic James Auer, he talked about his admiration for Abstract Expressionists such as De Kooning and Franz Kline. "They made a very important contribution in that they brought back to the painter the need to know design and structural concerns. They taught the importance of involvement with human passion and the realization that subject matter is not the end all."31 Abstraction had showed Friebert how to design and structure forms into compositions; freed up his brushwork; and allowed the "serendipitous" accident to take him places he had not envisioned. Nonetheless, he consistently declared that style, subject, and technique were subservient to capturing emotions. He had come to two major conclusions: "One is that art should communicate feelings rather than stories. The other is that the real subject of any art worth its salt is the artist himself." He aimed to pull everything together "into a kind of totality in which my feelings and self are depicted. My paintings are an extension of myself."32

Betsy Ritz Friebert was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer in 1958. She survived for five more years, but they were difficult ones. Nonetheless, in 1961 my father, mother, and sister used a travel grant from the University of Wisconsin to visit Europe for the first time. Speaking about the upcoming trip, Friebert stated that he hoped to "see deeply, more than summarily, the forms that have occupied my paintings. . . . It is an interesting contradiction that I have never seen a Gothic cathedral, and the paintings [of the theme] have developed in an almost vicarious fashion, chiefly through . . . reproductive material."33 For four months, they traveled through Belgium, Holland, France, Italy, and Switzerland before my mother's deteriorating health forced them to return home sooner than planned. In addition to experiencing medieval architecture, they visited museums. Friebert's undated Tower of Babel (p. 69 and opposite) was certainly influenced by sixteenth-century Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder's magnificent composition of the same subject. While I cannot be sure that my father saw the version illustrated here (fig. 14), he must have been thrilled to come upon numerous examples by Bruegel in the Low Countries, not to speak of the Rembrandts.³⁴

My mother died in late spring 1963 at age fifty-three. Watching her throughout my childhood illustrate our grade-school newsletter and announcements for a women's arts club to which she belonged, I felt that her considerable gifts were being wasted. She promised she would return to art after my sister left for college, but she died three months before Judith entered the University of Wisconsin.

Betsy Ritz Friebert's truncated life and career is perhaps the saddest fact of our family history. While my father claimed that the death of his life partner did not change his art, I believe that it is deeply marked by that loss. The turned inward to find a vision and a painterly language that were truly his. He was no longer concerned that his art be seen beyond Wisconsin. By the mid-1960s, competitive group shows had been replaced by commercial galleries. Between 1965 and 2015, Friebert was represented by three Milwaukee dealers (see p. 103). And Milwaukee museums recognized his achievements in one-person shows mounted in 1969, 1989, and 1998.



Fig. 14. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Tower of Babel, c. 1568.



In his later decades, Friebert enjoyed drawing the female body, using strong charcoal lines to endow the forms with an almost three-dimensional presence (pp. 82–83). He continued to produce self-portraits, moved by the many powerful images that Rembrandt had made of himself throughout his life. Friebert came to know his own face so well that he could paint it without looking at a mirror. Furthermore, he felt "he could take liberties with himself that he would not dream of taking with portraits of others." MOWA's three self-portraits—from his early, middle, and late years (pp. 61, 63, 86)—document his aging in different palettes and media; what connects them is their directness and lack of pretense.

A sense of mourning can be seen in later images of people in indoor or outdoor settings. They are suffused with profound sadness and isolation. A number of paintings depict refugees, a topic of great importance to my father. In a version from 1955 (p. 64), a blur of people and carts moves from right to left in a long horizontal line. The overall reddish palette, accented with dark outlines and strong brushwork, binds them to the wilderness and a march that seemingly will never end. In a later treatment of the theme (p. 74), the now individualized refugees have paused to gather close to the picture plane; a thin railing separates them from viewers. Perhaps Friebert used the barrier to suggest our remove from such tragic, stateless people and to emphasize that we observe but do not engage. The refugees present themselves with dignity, despite the exhaustion and hopelessness that are painfully evident.

The messages inherent in the figurative compositions of my father's later years become increasingly indirect. Despite the title of the painting *Hanging in the Snow* (p. 85), one must look hard to find the two tiny figures hanging by ropes from tree branches in the middle ground. The generalized crowd clustered around the double lynching seems in no hurry to leave, while the three impassive figures walking out of the picture at the left express no concern or remorse for what they have witnessed. If anything, they look anxious to get out of the cold.

The meaning of other figurative compositions is even less clear. Picnicking is a dominant theme. MOWA's example (p. 75) feels as joyless as a painting of refugees. In *The Family and the Model* (p. 73), my father inserted a three-quarter view of his head behind the second figure in the upper left. The composition presents more questions than answers. We cannot see what the artist is doing—

is he, perhaps, painting the very scene before us? We do not know why the family members are so detached from one another or why they seem totally unfazed by the naked woman in their midst. Friebert called such compositions "heavy opera," a reference to the work of Richard Wagner.³⁸ He was likely comparing his complex harmonies, rich textures, and tonal layering on canvas to similar effects in Wagner's powerful music, as well as likening the grave mood of his images to the composer's fatalistic worldview.

Once, when asked to explain why such works seem so brooding, dark, and disquieting, Friebert replied, "The mood is sort of depressing because the subjects are depressing."39 This brings us full circle back to the issue of humor. Almost universally, people found my father to be charming and funny. His humor was mostly self-deprecatory—in the Jewish comedic tradition—and could emerge at any time. A great raconteur, he often punctuated his stories with hilarious one-liners. And yet, humor is nowhere to be found in his work beyond the very occasional detail slyly inserted into a composition. This is the case with an early self-portrait (p. 41), where the slight pitch of his hat introduces a note of playfulness. In the left middle-ground of Back Alley (p. 50), a small man in a blue shirt turns away from the viewer. He has pulled his cart into a deserted alley so that he can urinate discreetly against a wall. My only explanation for the absence of levity in my father's art is that he regarded his profession with great seriousness. He came to it later than most and never took it for granted. He was shaped by the economic and social traumas to which his father and early experiences had sensitized him and had begun to paint at a time when even the federal government believed the arts could and should help create a better society. He could never approach a canvas or a topic lightly. Moreover, he had great empathy for his subjects and wanted his viewers to share it.

Landscape is a subject that, especially from the late 1950s on, did allow him to express joy. His works in the genre are rooted not only in his deep understanding and love of nature but in his ability to suffuse the images with feeling. He called himself a "romantic realist," a label that, when one views his later landscapes, seems just right. A gouache (p. 78) reveals his delight in the irises he grew in his garden. His pleasure is evident in *Five Trees (Door County)* (p. 76), a scene of the Lake Michigan shoreline in Door County, Wisconsin, in which deep blues, greens, and golds replace his characteristic terracottas and browns. I have always thought

of his later landscapes as musical (p. 88). In proper lighting, they sing with deft strokes of orange, purple, blue, and green, played against undertones of red and burnt umber. He liked working in pastel (p. 77) and sometimes added touches of that medium to his oils, lithographs (p. 79), and monotypes (pp. 80–81). Whether depicting water, reflections, grass, trees, or sky, his masterful application creates a painterly atmosphere that vibrates and hums. Moreover, the brushwork brings the viewer into the pigment, demonstrating, as one writer put it, that painterly application, "when the result of control, not chance . . . [is], in itself, a dramatic visual experience." As he worked his colors and glazes over a canvas, the surface became a locus of life. He said, "I've always felt that the painting has to tell you certain things. As you breathe into it, it must breathe back at you."

Over his long career, my father earned praise as "a painter's painter." Dean Jensen wrote, "If a ballot were conducted among area artists' to select the best painter, there is a likelihood that Joseph Friebert would come out on top. [His] virtuosic technique aside, there aren't many artists hereabouts who are his equals in being able to make such powerful statements about the human condition."⁴² While honored to be thus recognized by fellow artists and critics, Friebert was motivated by something else. Nathan Guequierre astutely observed that he "cared about [his] subjects, not in an abstract or theoretical way, but as the only reasonable focus of a life in art. . . . [This] gives his paintings their unique glow . . . [suffusing them with] pathos, commiseration, sorrow, and empathy. . . . It is difficult to look at them without developing feelings for their subjects."⁴³ The legacy of Joseph Friebert is a life work that quietly and with somber authenticity urges justice, tolerance, and compassion for all.

NOTES

1. Friebert recalled the school hosting a talk on art around 1918 (when he was ten) by Dudley Craft Watson, director of the Milwaukeee Art Institute from 1913 to 1924. He never forgot Watson's decalaration that, in an ideal society, children should have the "chance to enjoy artistic activity." See Kenneth Teitelbaum, *Schooling for "Good Rebels"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 134–35. In October 1981, Teitelbaum interviewed Joseph and his brother Edward Jr. about their experiences at the school. He also consulted Edward Sr.'s unpublished autobiography, which is at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

- 2. Milwaukee State Teachers College was renamed Wisconsin State College in 1951, and in 1956 it joined the University of Wisconsin system, becoming the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UW–M).
- 3. Mitchell Siporin, "Mural Art and the Midwestern Myth," in Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project, ed. and intro. by Francis V. O'Connor (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), pp. 64, 67.
- 4. Cited in Bruce L. Bustard, A New Deal for the Arts (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1997), p. 22.
- 5. See Margaret Fish Rahill, "Milwaukee Paintings of the 1920's and 30's," *Milwaukee Reader* 21, 3 (January 21, 1974). This article focuses on an exhibition mounted at the Charles Allis Museum, Milwaukee, that was Friebert's brainchild. The *Reader* quotes him as saying, "Perhaps it's my age that made me want to look back on those good times when the artists often stood together on artistic and social questions. It all came back to me vividly when I came across paintings in my cellar that I hadn't seen for decades, and I thought a show of the work of the period would help others remember, too, and [demonstrate to] younger artists what our youth was like." In his retirement, Friebert curated two other exhibitions, one on the art of Gerrit Sinclair, at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (1982), and the other, "Joseph Friebert/Betsy Ritz: Beginnings, Works on Paper of the 1930s" (1984), at the Allis.
- 6. Stuart Davis, "Abstract Painting Today," in Art for the Millions (note 3), p. 126.
- 7. Donald D. Key, "State Artists Show Fruits of Their Work in Orchard," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 1, 1960.
- 8. Frances K. Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002), p. 366. For an astute discussion of ideas such as those of Dewey that play out in the work of midwestern artists in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as a fine overview of the period, see Michael D. Hall, "Inlanders and the American Scene: Modern Great Lakes Painting," in *Great Lakes Muse: American Scene Painting in the Upper Midwest* (Flint, Michigan: Flint Institute of Arts, 2003), pp. 15–32.
- 9. "Joseph Friebert: Romantic Realist/Talks with Xavier Baron, July 1998," DVD, MOWA Archives. This DVD includes interviews from 1997 and 1998. Of course, American Scene painters also depicted life in cities and towns, but such images struck Friebert as too idealistic and prettified.
- 10. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, when Edward Jr. ran a drugstore in Lodi, a farming community southeast of Madison, the region was rife with anti-Semitism. According to Stuart Friebert, Ed's eldest son, living there was a very hard for his family. Email to the author, June 6, 2018.
- 11. Some thirty years later, he included a dead chicken in a more abstract still-life composition (p. 65), evidence that even at a time of relative peace, he could introduce a dark note.

- 12. The juries included artists such as George Biddle, Hyman Bloom, John Steuart Curry, Philip Evergood, Philip Guston, Bernard Karfiol, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Reginald Marsh, and Max Weber; museum directors such as Andrew Ritchie (Albright-Knox Art Gallery) and William R. Valentiner (Detroit Institute of Arts); and art historians such as Horst W. Janson (New York University), Ullrich Middeldorf (University of Chicago), and Wolfgang Stechow (Oberlin College).
- 13. A July 1948 review from an unidentified San Francisco newspaper of an exhibition circulated by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, praises a landscape by Friebert as one of the "distinctive contributions to the show, . . . broad, sweeping, indefinite as to almost abstraction, yet haltingly beautiful." JF Archive.
- 14. The four subsequent shows were "Wisconsin the Playground" (1949), "Wisconsin at Work" (1950), "Wisconsin from the Air" (1951), and "Wisconsin Artists View of 1952" (1952). "Wisconsin from the Air" occasioned Friebert's first airplane ride. Inspired by an artist airscape project organized in Holland that he had read about, Zadok hired a private plane to carry artists across the state. Friebert's flight took off at dusk. "Joseph Friebert, a Milwaukee painter who favors browns and blacks, was delighted with the rich shading of ploughed fields after rain." Milwaukee Sentinel, undated article [1951]. See also Harry Pease, "Day's End from Plane Intrigues State Artists," unidentified clipping, June 4, 1951. JF Archive. The Gimbel's chain closed in 1986.
- 15. The Milwaukee Art Museum traces its history back to 1888, the year that both the Milwaukee Art Association and the Layton Art Gallery were established. In 1916 the association became the Milwaukee Art Institute. In 1957, Layton and the Art Institute merged into a new entity, the Milwaukee Art Center. In 1980, the Art Center changed its name to the Milwaukee Art Museum.
- 16. Every month the Milwaukee Art Institute presented new exhibitions, mainly traveling shows, but also some the museum itself organized. There Friebert could have seen Goya's *Horrors of War* and bullfight prints (1937) and Romantic paintings by Gros, Géricault, and Delacroix (1939). The museum mounted several displays of German Expressionist art (1938, 1939), as well as solo exhibitions by Lovis Corinth (1938) and George Grosz (1941, 1942). In 1937 it hosted an important exhibition, "Surrealism, Dada, and Fantastic Art," circulated by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Other traveling exhibitions focused on Pablo Picasso (1942) and Hans Hoffman (1945). I am grateful to Heather Winter, Librarian/Archivist, Milwaukee Art Museum, for supplying me with a complete list of the institution's exhibitions.
- 17. Marjorie Chere, "Whole Family Took Advantage of Friebert's Ford Foundation Award," Whitefish Bay Herald, December 3, 1953.
- 18. Richard Haas, "Obituaries [Joseph Friebert]," CAA News 28, 2 (March 2003), p. 21.
- 19. See Allen Caucutt, in *Drawing Influence: Joseph Friebert & His Students* (Milwaukee: Peck School of the Arts, Department of Visual Art, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2009), p. [8]. The pamphlet produced for this exhibition, organized during the centennial year of Friebert's birth, includes tributes and comments by many former students, pp. [8–13].

- 20. Lowell Lee and, most notably, Carl Holty, come to mind.
- 21. "Joseph Friebert," biography sheet prepared for the publicity department of Gimbel Brothers Department Store, July 10, 1952. JF Archive.
- 22. Frank Getlein, "Vision, Technique Are United in Friebert's Complex Works," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 8, 1958.
- 23. The assistant, Charles Alan, was the older brother of Aline Bernstein Loucheim, an art writer who would marry architect Eero Saarinen in 1954. Loucheim had introduced her brother to Halpert, and he joined the gallery in the mid-1940s. As Halpert aged, her dependence on Alan increased. Shortly after Friebert's appointment with Halpert, Alan—angered by Halpert's refusal to name him as her successor—left to open his own gallery. For more information on Halpert, Downtown Gallery, and Alan, see Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery: Edith Gregor Halpert and the Making of the Modern Art Market* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006). Why my father did not recover from the rejection (which seems in fact to have been the result of a personality clash that had nothing to do with his art) and pursue other gallery options in New York signals to me that one year in the city was not enough to toughen him up for the challenges of its often cut-throat art scene.
- 24. For one response to Friebert's presence in the Whitney Annual, see Frank Getlein, "Whitney Annual Shows Art Trend," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 25, 1956. Friebert's only truly Jewishthemed work (with the exception of the early etching *Rabbis*) was a 1956 mural commission from Congregation Shalom in Fox Point, a suburb north of Milwaukee. The composition was inspired by Isaiah 2:4: "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." Friebert filled the long wall in the synagogue's lobby with symbols that express a unity of learning, justice, freedom, faith, and peace. See Margaret Fish, "Mural Symbol of Jewish Faith," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 22, 1957; and [Frank Getlein], "Friebert's Bible Mural on 'Peace," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 22, 1957.
- 25. "American Artists Paint the City," Arts 30, 9 (June 1956), pp. 28–29. Lewis was underappreciated for decades, but his oeuvre has been the subject of recent exhibitions and publications. See Norman Kleeblatt et al., Lee Krasner/Norman Lewis 1945–1952 (New York: Jewish Museum, 2014); and Ruth Fine, ed., Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 2015).
- 26. *Urban Cathedral* was purchased by a medical doctor from Bologna. I visited him and his family in 1961. My father's painting hung in the dining room, along with several silvery still lifes by Giorgio Morandi; paintings by Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso were displayed in the living room.
- "American Artists Paint the City" was not well reviewed by American critics, who quarreled with the use of a theme and the selection of works. See Howard DeVree, "Verdict at Venice," New York Times, July 1, 1956. The Chicago Tribune art critic, Eleanor Jewett, complained on July 22 that Kuh had betrayed "Chicago art and American art [with a] hodgepodge of modernism that The Chicago Art Institute is standing behind in Venice." Others were miffed that the only Chicago artist in the exhibition was Ivan Albright; see Emery Hutchinson, "Artists Here Get

Civic Dander Up," [Chicago] Daily News, June 18, 1956. On the other hand, European critics praised the display. One declared, "Throughout, the paintings express the experiences of city life, skyscrapers, chains of light, the madness of urban temp[o] and sensations of loneliness among tumultuous crowds." Saying that the selection established once and for all the leading role American art is now playing worldwide, critics called it "daring and courageous," "exciting," and "the most complete and interesting, perhaps, of the whole painting section of the entire Biennale." International press excerpts, mimeographed, JF Archive.

- 27. "Joseph Friebert: Romantic Realist" (note 9).
- 28. Cited in Bram Dijkstra, *American Expressionism: Art and Social Change,* 1920–1950 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), p. 160.
- 29. "Joseph Friebert: Romantic Realist" (note 9).
- 30. Typed manuscript of interview [1980s] with Joseph Friebert by Jessica Anderson, Galleria Del Conte, Milwaukee. JF Archive.
- 31. James Auer, "Beautiful Spirits' Helped Guide His Brush," Milwaukee Journal, March 6, 1977.
- 32. Ibid.
- 33. "Cathedrals Beckon Friebert," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 29, 1961. This article includes a reproduction of a *Cathedral* that had been shown in the 1961 American Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago. Also included is a photograph of Joseph and Betsy Friebert in the Glendale studio (p. 37).
- 34. Sometime in the late 1940s, my father borrowed a volume on Pieter Bruegel the Elder from the MSTC library that he never returned. Perhaps he could not bear to because he saw how much my sister and I loved it. The book featured beautifully printed, tipped-in plates, including the artist's two versions of *Tower of Babel*. Friebert traveled to Europe twice more. In the mid-1960s, he went to Tuscany to paint landscapes, and in the mid-1970s he visited an artist friend in England and Wales.
- 35. "Joseph Friebert: Romantic Realist" (note 9).
- 36. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (1969), Milwaukee Art Museum (1989), and Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University (1998).
- 37. Ottilia M. Gauerke, "Everyone Paints or Draws and Life Moves on in Pattern of Serenity," *Glendale-Town Crier*, July 29, 1954.
- 38. Fred Berman, interview with Xavier Baron, May 7, videocassette, 1998. MOWA Archive.
- 39. "Joseph Friebert: Romantic Realist" (note 9).

- 40. "The Critick's Bench [Paintings by Joseph Friebert]," Let's See (February 1960), p. 16.
- 41. Auer (note 31).
- 42. Dean Jensen, "Joseph Friebert at the Top of His Form," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 1981. IF Archive
- 43. Nathan Guequierre, "So Long, Joe: Wisconsin Loses a Towering Artist," *Shepherd Express*, February 27–March 5, 2003.



MY FATHER THE ARTIST

Judith M. Friebert

Surrounded by art in our Shorewood, Wisconsin, home, I cheerfully painted and drew as children do, alongside my older sister, Susan. Our mother, Betsy Ritz Friebert, imbued us with her love of the arts in multiple forms—a gift that has enriched our entire lives. Our father, Joseph Friebert, was for me a monumental but sometimes distant figure caught up in his work. When he was home in the studio, Mom always cautioned us to be quiet and not disturb him.

From very early on, the brooding character of Dad's paintings formed a backdrop of how I began to view the world and what I would become as an artist myself. The melancholy pervading his images spoke to me as an unspecified warning or fear. I later understood that he was deeply affected by having lived through World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II—events filled with catastrophe for Jews and all humankind. They evoke a sadness that, when young, I did not comprehend, but that engendered in me the heartfelt concern for the dispossessed which runs through my father's work. His use of Old Master methods, glazing with thin washes of oil paint, was not just a technique, but also a way for him to capture depth tinged with sorrow, while eliciting light, and thus hope, from that darkness.

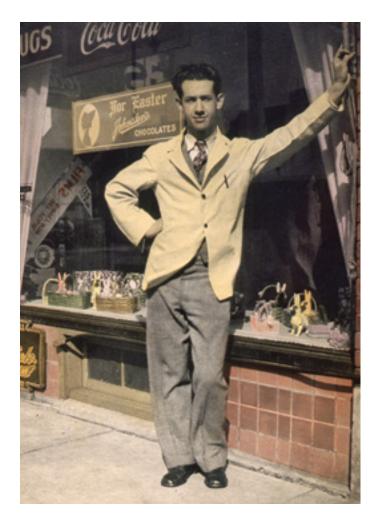
Being Jewish was complicated for our family. My parents felt a strong cultural connection to "our people," as well as a sense of lurking danger (my father would occasionally pronounce, "No one will ever forget you're a Jew"). But they also exhibited a desire to distance themselves from this identity. Reared in a Socialist household, Dad had no use for religion. Mom's parents, Orthodox Jews from Lithuania, never really assimilated. Needing to move away from Old World ways,

she and her siblings all exchanged their Yiddish-derived names for American ones. Such mixed messages made it hard to come to terms with my own identity. I tended to feel that being Jewish was something to be ashamed of, but, at the same time, being "other" opened me to examine different cultures and beliefs. If you asked my father why he painted a Crucifixion, he said that the event represented universal suffering.

My father became my teacher, explaining such things as the importance of repeating a color at least twice in a painting. He demonstrated how to construct a head or delineate an oval with a loose circular hand motion (something he loved to show others, whether or not they were artists). Accurate drawing, he asserted, is essential, as is attention to composition.

Despite such "rules," Dad emphasized "feeling over facts." Artists whose work lacked "feeling" did not cut the mustard even if they commanded the "facts." This was a life-long refrain: facts can be learned, but expressiveness cannot. He insisted that virtually any subject was suitable, as long as it passed the feelings test. Although for about a decade he explored abstraction when it was the leading avant-garde style, he returned to figuration, where he felt most at home, and encouraged me always to be true to my own vision.

In our new home in the Milwaukee suburb Glendale, our time together in the studio was largely spent on the technical aspects of being an artist: how, for example, to make frames or prepare rabbit-skin glue for sizing a support. The strong interest





Joseph Friebert, registered pharmacist, Milwaukee, 1927. Susan, Betsy, Judith, and Joseph Friebert, Milwaukee, 1945.

in chemistry that had led him into the field of pharmacy extended into his life as an artist: Dad loved to explain scientific aspects of art materials. I was happy to be his apprentice even when he repeated the same tutorials again and again. In fact, I eagerly engaged in Dad's interests whenever there was an opportunity. I learned to appreciate professional baseball, namely the Milwaukee Braves and later the Brewers. Along with the pervasive, year-round odor of turpentine, during the summer the prattle of the radio sportscasters wafted upstairs from the studio. I adopted the same habit, finding the rhythmic narrative pace of baseball a perfect antidote for the uncertainty of creating art. We attended a few games; his delight was palpable. Baseball seemed rooted in his memories of the minor league clubs that played during his youth in Milwaukee.

Although he was deeply concerned about current affairs, Dad often reminisced about "the old days." Road trips after Mom died perhaps served as a way for us to share early and happy aspects of his life. His practice of imparting the significance of personal landmarks while nearly careening off the road was for years a source of humor for his friends and family. He loved to point out his old haunts, by then often radically changed, such as the Socialist Party headquarters where his father played cards with his cohorts; the duplex in which he and his brother Ed built a life-size airplane in the attic; Grauvogel's Pharmacy, where a rat showed up while Dad was serving a busy lunch crowd and where one of his bosses played classical violin in the back room; and the area of the city in which young artists congregated, which is where he met Mom and where they lived during their early married years.

Both before and after Mom died, there were sketching trips in the countryside within an afternoon's drive from Milwaukee and longer sojourns in Door County, Wisconsin. When we found a view to our liking, we would pile out of the car with art supplies in hand and install ourselves on someone's land, often a dairy farm, without permission. Perhaps we felt that, as artists, we were exempt from such formalities. Or perhaps we just did not want to bother the farmers. In any case, we set up our stations and drew quietly for hours. Once in a while, farmers came by, but I do not remember a single complaint: they were usually delighted that we found their land worthy of admiration, although they were not always impressed with the results of our efforts. Those outings taught me to appreciate how hard farmers work to provide food for us. Dairy farms, especially, have become a major theme in my art—a choice also closely related to my father's and grandfather's belief in the dignity of manual labor.

On one memorable day, my father, mother, and I were ensconced on the bank of Lake Michigan in Door County, sketching fishing boats. When we finally stood to look at one another's finished works, we observed some dramatic contrasts. Dad had described a turbulent scene with threatening dark clouds, as if a storm was about to strike; Mom had portrayed a carefree summer day with a minimum of gentle lines; my sketch was somewhere in between.

Both of my parents encouraged knowledge about the history of art. Museum and gallery visits were a constant for us as a family and another opportunity for my father to instruct. He spoke softly and reverently about works of art he liked. Works he had no use for he dismissed with alacrity. He rejected any art that did not contain the emotive qualities he felt were essential. Struggle in a work of art was fundamental, an indication of authenticity. He passed that conviction on to his students and to me.

Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert in the Glendale, Wisconsin studio, c. 1960. Joseph Friebert outside his Glendale studio, with one of his paintings, c. 1975.

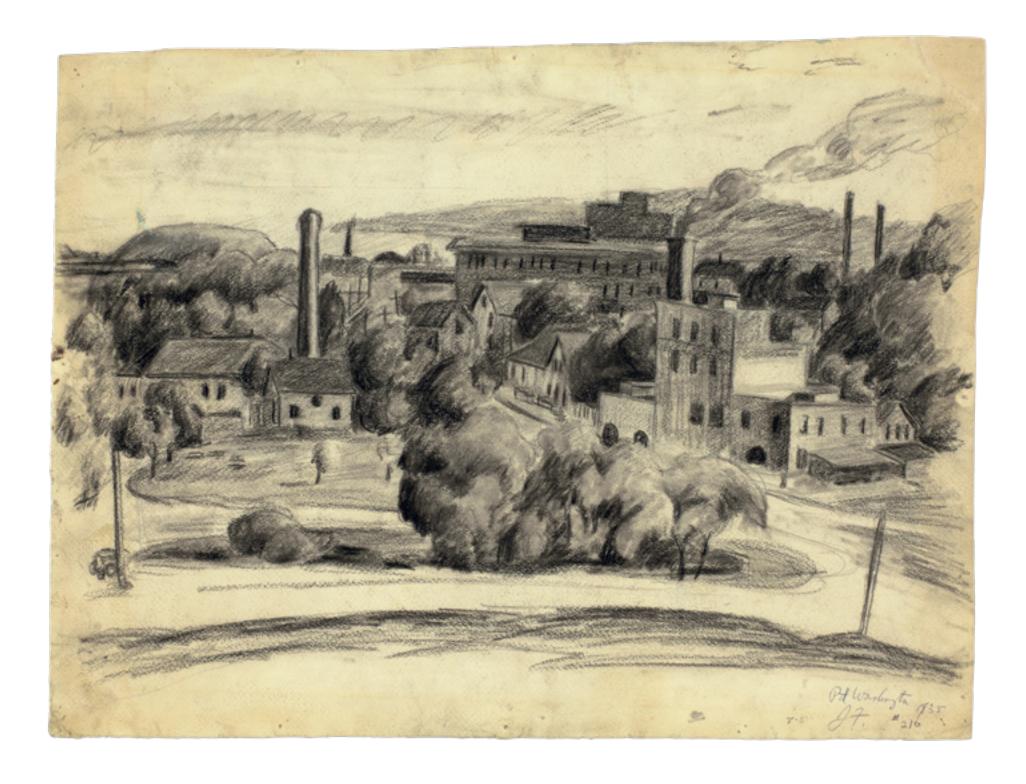






PLATES

Dates appearing on works are not always correct; some were added by the artist years later and have been adjusted based on recent research.



Port Washington, 1935



Self-Portrait, 1936



Harley Davidson Factory, 1937/39



Harley Davidson Factory, 1937/39



Dead Pigeons, 1937



Pomegranates, 1938



Seated Man, 1938 (not 1935 as inscribed)



Dad's Drugstore, 1938



State Street Sadie, 1939



Two Lines, One Job, 1939



Back Alley, 1939



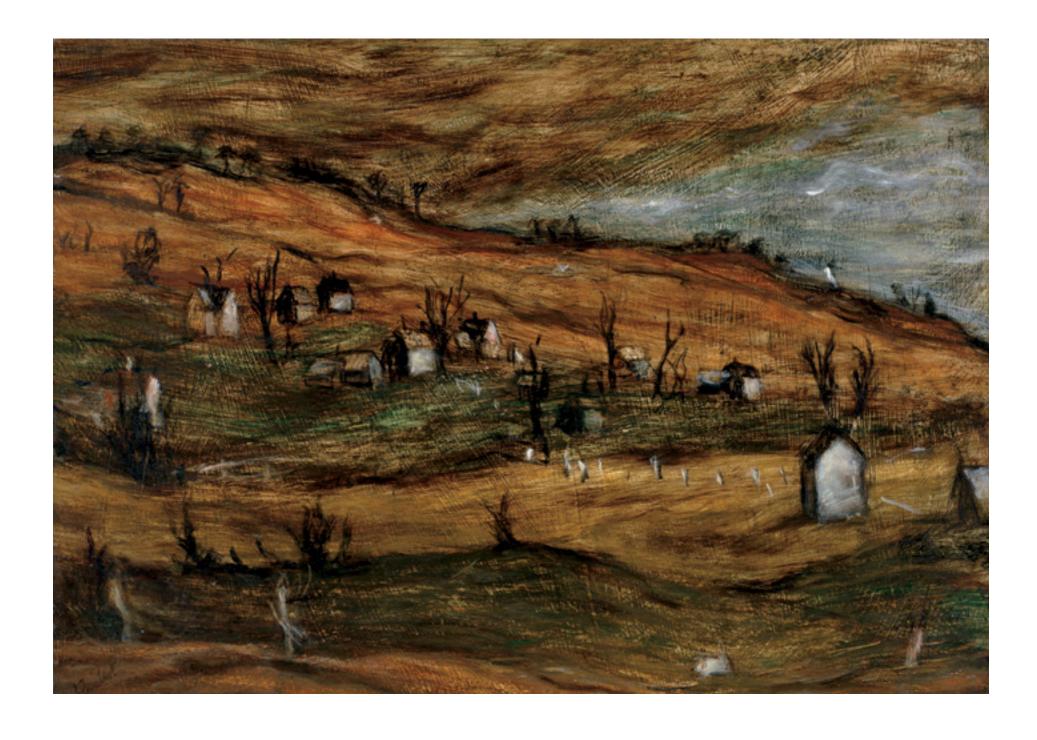
Chicken Market, 1940



City in Winter, 1940



Back of Fourth and State, 1940



Lodi, 1940



Tavern Front, 1940/41



Third Street, 1940



Street Workers, 1940



Moonlight on Corn Stalks, 1941

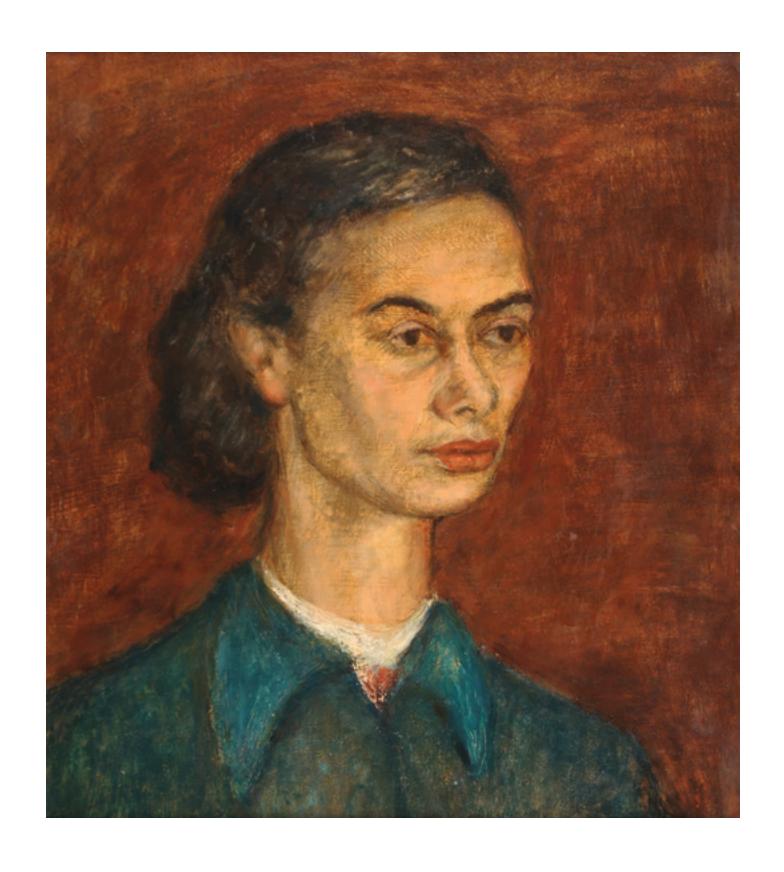




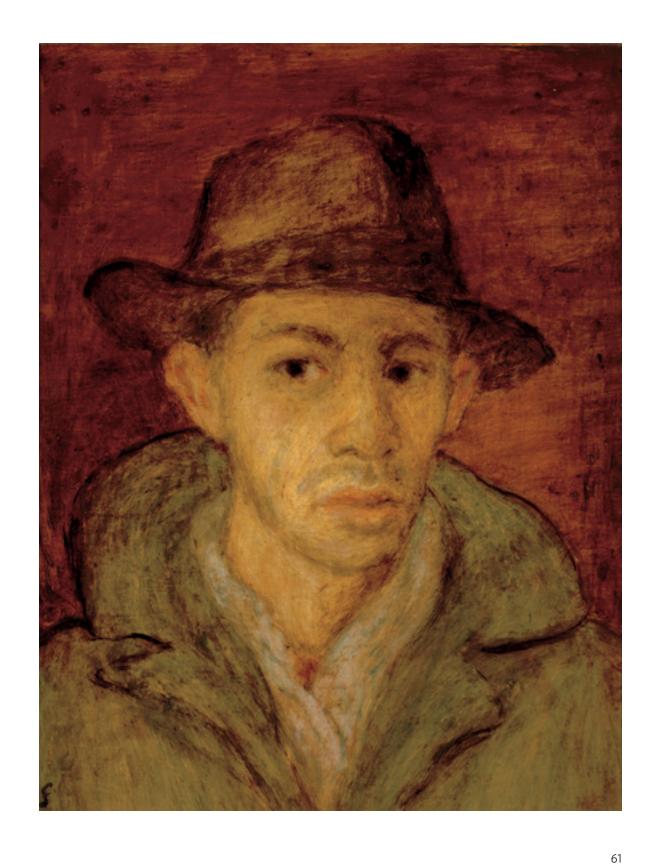
Country Life (recto)/ City Life (verso), early 1940s



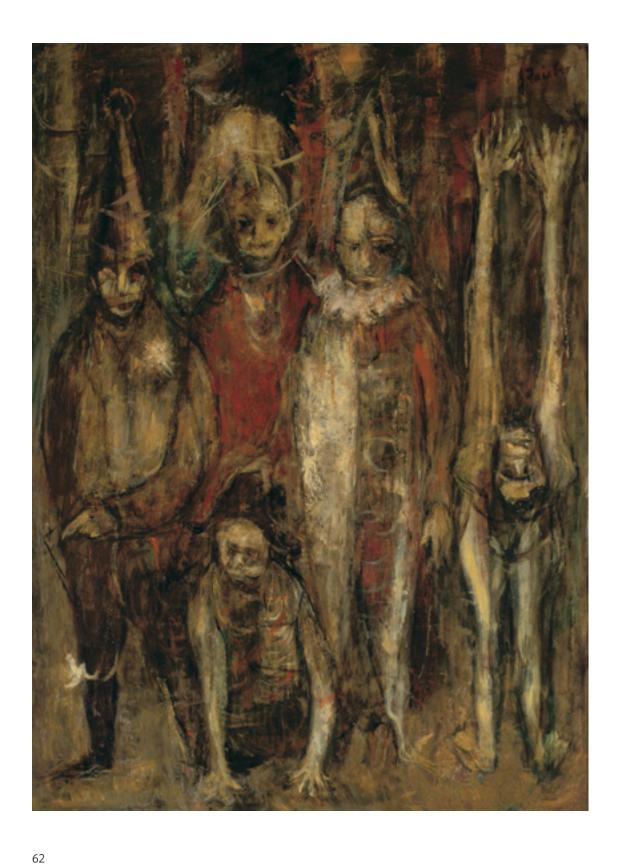
Factories, 1947



Esther Leah Ritz, 1945



Self-Portrait with Hat, 1948



Flagellation, 1954



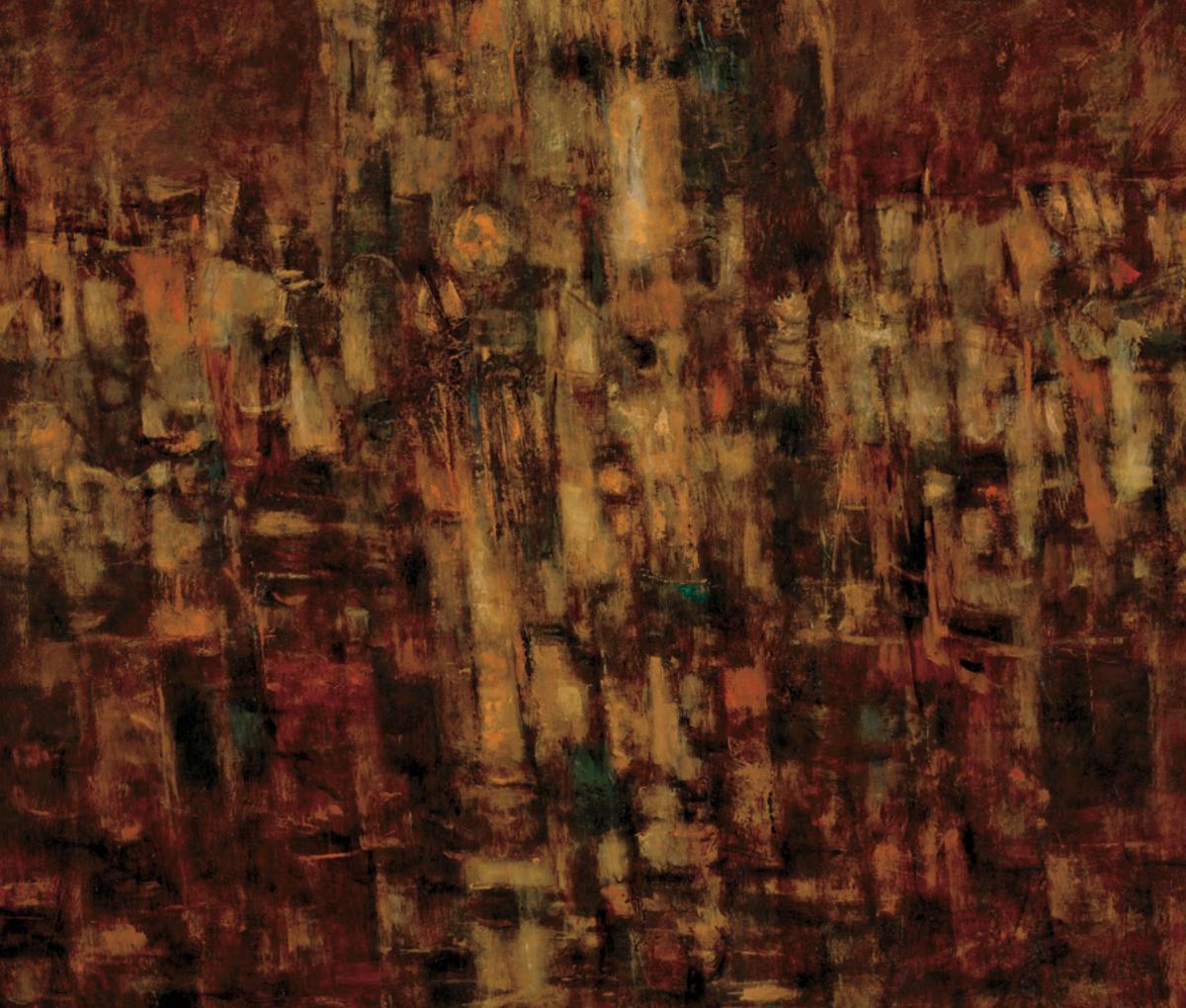
Self-Portrait, 1955



Refugees, c. 1955



Still Life with Chicken, 1956

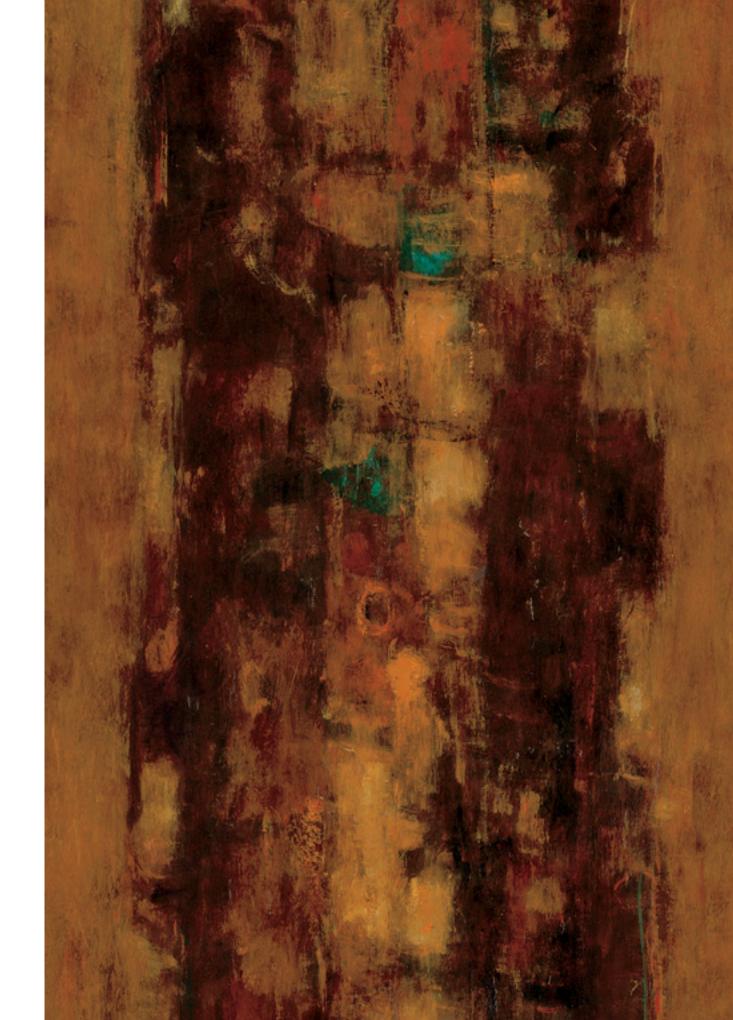




Square Cathedral, 1956 (detail opposite)



Vertical Structure, c. 1960 (detail at right)



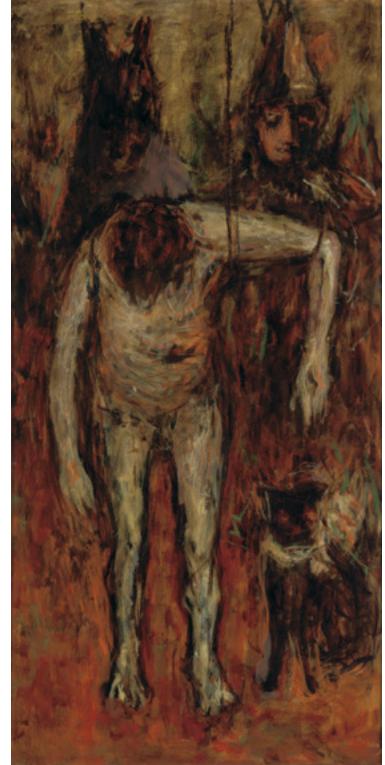


Tower of Babel, c. 1958/60



Human Carnival, 1962





Human Folly, 1966 (diptych)



Bawdy House, 1961–62



The Family and the Model, 1971



Refugees, 1964



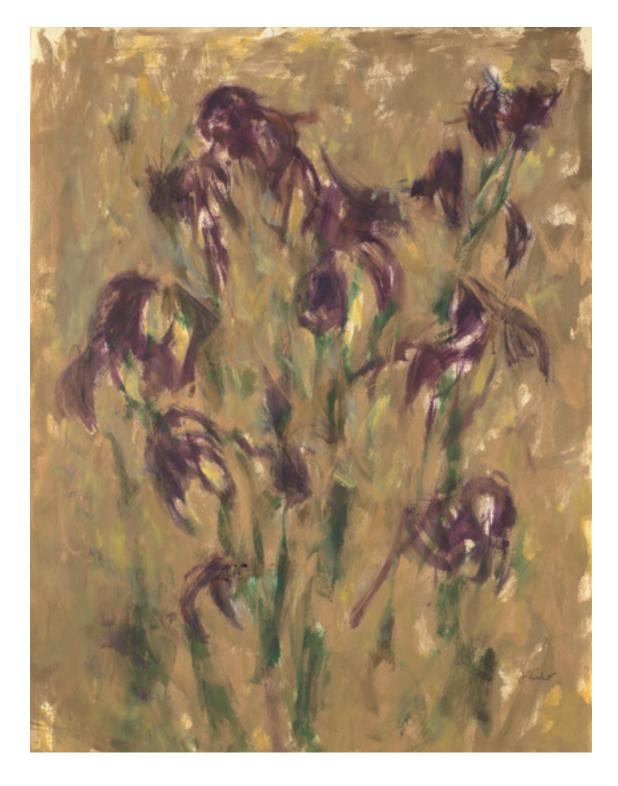
Picnic, 1966



Five Trees (Door County), early 1960s



Landscape, 1970



Irises, c. 1970





Door County (River Boats), 1975 Door County (River Boats), 1975



Road in Barrington, 1977



Stone Wall in Barrington, 1977



Woman in Blouse, 1976

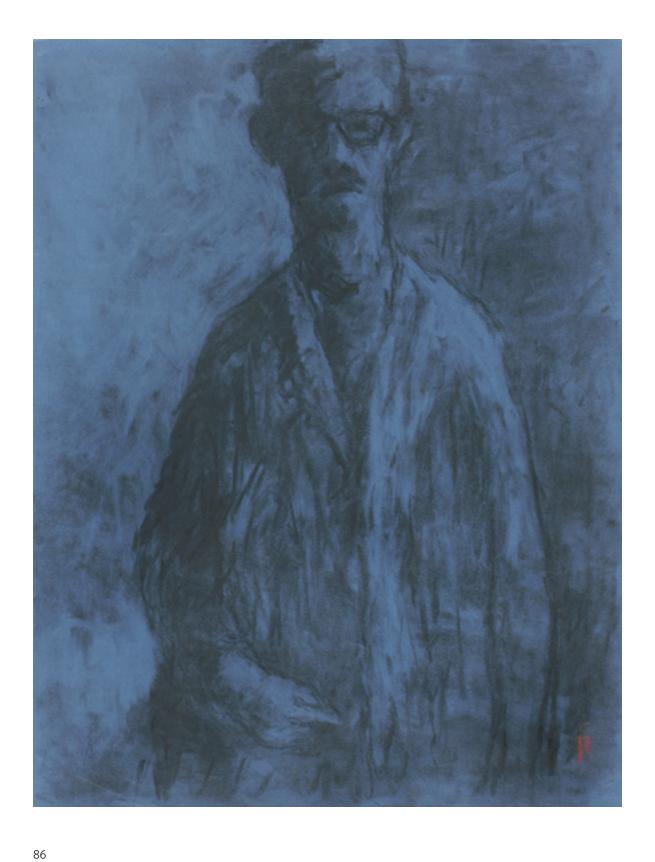


Nude with Shawl, 1978

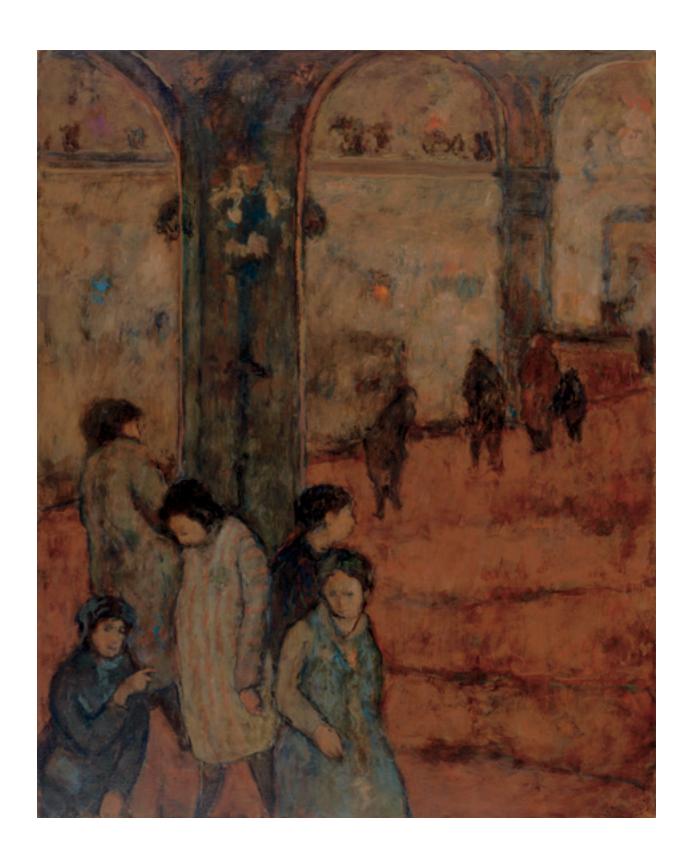




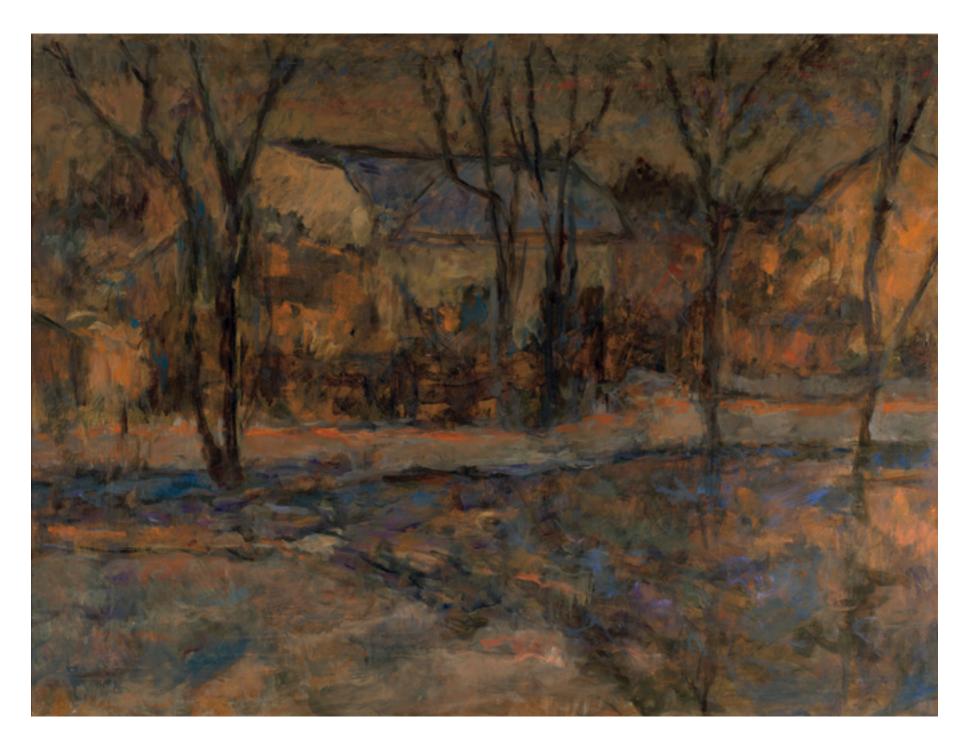
Hanging in the Snow, 1979 (detail opposite)



Self-Portrait, 1989



The Mall, 1995



Cedar Creek, 1985-87, 2002? (detail opposite)





Detail of *Dead Pigeons*, 1937 (p. 44), showing striated application of gesso ground visible beneath oil paint.

A CONSERVATOR'S NOTE

Ewa Devereux

In 2016, I began work on paintings by Joseph Friebert. Parma Conservation, Chicago, where I have been a paintings conservator for twelve years, received a number of his works from the Kohler Foundation, Inc., a longtime client. One of the foundation's programs places the art of underappreciated, deserving artists in public collections throughout the United States. The examples by Friebert required various levels of conservation before traveling to their new homes. Some are now part of the Museum of Wisconsin Art's permanent collection.

I felt an unprecedented, deep connection to Friebert's paintings. I was struck by their emotional intensity and beauty. The themes of suffering and oppression, the moody landscapes, the dark streets returned me to my childhood in Communist Poland and a totalitarian society where World War II and the Holocaust continued to cast long shadows. I also appreciated the artist's masterful execution and the complexity of his techniques. I spent about one year cleaning and repairing his paintings and studying his Old Master methods.

From the beginning of his career into the 1960s, Friebert painted on Masonite. Subsequently, he worked exclusively on fine linen canvases. Thanks to his expert craftsmanship, his paintings are generally well preserved. He began by sealing his supports with rabbit-skin glue, a traditional sizing. Next, he applied a gesso ground, using a brush to create a texture of peaks and valleys, which he then covered with toned ground, or imprimatura. His favorite addition to this layer was yellow ocher, following an old Flemish recipe; the color is often visible under areas of thinly applied paint.

Friebert chose egg tempera as his first layer of paint. He made it himself, binding ground pigments with yolk. He applied the medium with a thin, almost-dry brush; the series of narrow strokes resemble pencil lines (opposite). Over the opaque egg tempera, Friebert constructed his final composition with oil pigments and glazes. Their transparency over the tempera base results in a deep saturation of color

and the impression of depth. He juxtaposed strokes of tempera with oil paint to create a play between mat and transparent effects. In later works, he sometimes added pastel.

One can use water-based solutions to clean paintings, but in the case of Friebert's works, which contain the water-based medium egg tempera, I was careful to use a gentle solvent-based cleaning solution so as not to remove pigment from the painting's surface.

The most time-consuming conservation task involved repairing abraded edges and corners of the works by Friebert on Masonite that had not been framed and therefore were vulnerable to damage. These areas required injecting adhesive into the Masonite and clamping it between two pieces of wood lined with felt. Missing corners were rebuilt with gesso. I inpainted chipped areas along the edges, as well as occasional high ridges where paint had flicked off the gesso.

Friebert did not varnish his paintings. In order not to change their surface—which, as stated above, often alternates between opaque and glossy finishes—I used a mat varnish with UV protection that can saturate the mat areas but does not alter the way they look when it dries.

I offer the above observations, descriptions, and methods to collectors, whether public or private, who own paintings by Joseph Friebert and wish to ensure their permanence. It is my hope that they will be appreciated by many and for years to come.



EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

The checklist is organized chronologically and then alphabetically by title.

Port Washington, 1935

Charcoal on paper; 17 1/2 x 23 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.135

Self-Portrait, 1936

Oil on Masonite; 15 x 15 ½ in.

Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership

Dead Pigeons, 1937

Oil on Masonite; 16 ½ x 21 ½ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.102

Harley Davidson Factory, 1937/39

Charcoal on paper; 11 x 14 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.077

Harley Davidson Factory, 1937/39

Charcoal on paper; $8^{13}/_{16} \times 11^{3}/_{4}$ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.100

Dad's Drugstore, 1938

Pen and ink, brush and wash on paper;

8 ³/₄ x 11 ³/₄ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.097

Pomegranates, 1938

Oil on Masonite; 15 x 25 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.105

Seated Man, 1938 (not 1935 as inscribed)

Brown conté crayon on paper; $8\,^{3}/_{4}$ x $11\,^{3}/_{4}$ in. Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.074

Back Alley, 1939

Oil on Masonite; 24 1/4 x 26 1/4 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.118

State Street Sadie, 1939

Oil on Masonite; 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Susan Friebert Rossen

Two Lines, One Job, 1939

Oil on Masonite; $16 \frac{1}{4} \times 20$ in.

Susan Friebert Rossen

Back of Fourth and State, 1940

Oil on Masonite; 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

Kevin Milaeger

Chicken Market, 1940

Oil on Masonite; 16 x 24 in.

Paul Woelbing

City in Winter, 1940

Oil on Masonite; 18 5/16 x 25 7/8 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.115

Lodi, 1940

Oil on Masonite; 18 x 25 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.107

Street Workers, 1940

Lithograph; 13 x 20 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.081

Third Street, 1940

Lithograph; 9 ½ x 12 ½ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership, 2008.013

Tavern Front, 1940/41

Oil on Masonite; $16 \frac{1}{2} \times 24 \frac{3}{6}$ in. Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of Arthur and Patricia Gebhardt, 2000.018

Moonlight on Corn Stalks, 1941

Oil on Masonite; 18 x 25 3/4 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.114

Country Life (recto)/City Life (verso), early 1940s

Oil on Masonite; 15 x 25 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.104

Esther Leah Ritz, 1945

Oil on Masonite; 18 x 16 ¼ in. (sight) Lent by Peter and Carrie Ritz

Factories, 1947

Gouache on paper; 18 % x 25 ¼ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.117

Self-Portrait with Hat, 1948

Oil on Masonite; 18 x 14 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.101

Flagellation, 1954

Oil on Masonite; 30 x 22 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.119

Refugees, c. 1955

Oil on canvas; 24 x 46 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2016.076

Self-Portrait, 1955

Oil on Masonite; 22 1/8 x 18 7/8 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art Collection, gift of the James and Karen Hyde Foundation, Inc., 2011.002

Square Cathedral, 1956

Oil on Masonite; 48 x 48 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.133

Still Life with Chicken, 1956

Oil on canvas; 30 x 48 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2016.075

Tower of Babel, c. 1958/60

Oil on Masonite; 30 x 36 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.112

Vertical Structure, c. 1960

Oil on Masonite; 72 x 24 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of Esther Leah Ritz Living Trust, 2004.013

Five Trees (Door County), early 1960s

Gouache on paper; $22 \times 33 \%$ in.

Susan Friebert Rossen

Bawdy House, 1961–62

Oil on Masonite; 35 % x 40 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of Samuel K. and Doris Hersh Chortek, 2014.013

Human Carnival, 1962

Oil on Masonite; 36 x 30 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.110

Refugees, 1964

Oil on canvas; 40 1/8 x 60 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.130

Human Folly, 1966

Oil on Masonite; 36 x 35 % in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.121

Picnic, 1966

Oil on Masonite; 46 x 46 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of James and Karen Hyde, 2013.015

Irises, c. 1970

Gouache on paper; $28 \% \times 22 \%$ in. Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of Phyllis Friebert Levy, 2007.043

Landscape, 1970

Gouache and pastel on paper; $9 \frac{1}{2} \times 12 \frac{7}{8}$ in. Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.075

The Family and the Model, 1971

Oil on canvas; 48 x 47 3/4 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.131

Door County (River Boats), 1975

Lithograph; 4 1/4 x 10 1/4 in.

Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership

Door County (River Boats), 1975

Pastel over lithograph; $4 \frac{1}{4} \times 10 \frac{1}{4}$ in.

Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership

Woman in Blouse, 1976

Charcoal on paper; 25 % x 19 ¾ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.126

Road in Barrington, 1977

Pastel over monotype; $8 \frac{3}{4} \times 5 \frac{3}{4}$ in. Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership

Stone Wall in Barrington, 1977

Monotype; 5 3/4 x 8 1/2 in.

Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership

Nude with Shawl, 1978

Charcoal on paper; 25 ½ x 19 11/16 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.116

Hanging in the Snow, 1979

Oil on Masonite; 23 1/8 x 35 1/8 in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.134

Cedar Creek, 1985-87, 2002?

Oil on Masonite; 29 x 39 in.

Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership

Self-Portrait, 1989

Charcoal on paper; 25 ½ x 19 ¾ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.111

The Mall, 1995

Oil on canvas; $60 \times 48 \%$ in.

Museum of Wisconsin Art, gift of the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2015.132



PROFILE

CHRONOLOGY

All locations are in Milwaukee and Wisconsin, unless otherwise noted.

1908

Born in Buffalo, New York

1911

Family moves to Milwaukee



Cast of "Jack and the Bean Stalk," International Socialist Sunday School, Milwaukee, 1920. Joseph Friebert is second from the right in the first row.

1926

Graduates from North Division High School

1927

Becomes a full registered pharmacist

1934

Begins to draw and paint

1935-36

Joins Businessmen's Sketch Club and studies with Robert Von Neumann. Meets Ruth Grotenrath, Agnes Jessen, Schomer Lichtner, Betsy Ritz, Robert Schellin, Alfred Sessler, and Santos Zingale. Begins to exhibit his work

1936

Takes classes at Layton School of Art with Gerrit Sinclair

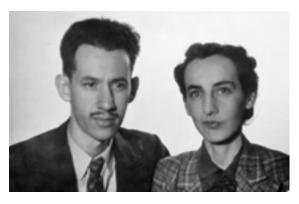
1937

Wins first awards, at the 25th Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors Annual Exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Institute, and at the Wisconsin State Fair

Marries Betsy Ritz

1938

Travels with Betsy Ritz Friebert to New York



Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert, c. 1937.

1941

Wins award at the Chicago and Vicinity Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. Daughter Susan is born. Moves to duplex on Newport Avenue

1942

Enrolls at Milwaukee State Teachers College (MSTC) full-time. Works as a pharmacist on days when he is not in class and on weekends

1945

Daughter Judith is born. Graduates from MSTC with BS in art education. Teaches at the Layton School of Art

1946

Joins art faculty at MSTC (now University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee [UW-M])

1947

One of two Wisconsin artists chosen for the 142nd Annual Exhibition of American Paintings at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

1948

Purchases and moves to duplex on Larkin Street in the Milwaukee suburb Shorewood



Ruth Grotenrath, Joseph Friebert, and Betsy Ritz Friebert on a sketching trip in rural Wisconsin, c. 1938.

1950

One of five Wisconsin artists chosen for the "American Painting Today" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

1951

Receives MS in art education from the University of Wisconsin, Madison (UW), with a thesis on Frank Lloyd Wright's 1948 Albert and Edith Adelman House, in the Milwaukee suburb Fox Point

1952

Wins top prize—Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Medal—at the Chicago and Vicinity Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago

1952-53

Spends academic year on a Ford Foundation
Fellowship studying art and art education at the
Art Students League and Columbia University,
New York. The family lives in Fort Lee, New Jersey

1956

Selected by Katharine Kuh, curator of modern art at the Art Institute of Chicago, for the United States Pavilion exhibition, "American Artists Paint the City," at the 28th Venice Biennale. His *Urban Cathedral* is the only painting purchased from the American Pavilion

Moves to new home and studio, designed by Willis and Lillian Leenhouts, on Monrovia Avenue in the Milwaukee suburb Glendale



Joseph Friebert teaching a life-drawing class, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1956.

1957

Completes mural based on Isaiah 2:4 ("They will beat their swords into plowshares") in lobby of Temple Shalom, Fox Point, Wisconsin

Becomes full professor at UW-M

1961

A travel grant from UW allows Friebert, along with wife, Betsy, and daughter Judith to travel for four months in Europe. They visit museums and sites in Belgium, France, Holland, Italy, and Switzerland

1963

Betsy Ritz Friebert dies after a long battle with cancer

1969

First UW-M Art Department faculty member to be honored with a retrospective exhibition

1976

Retires from UW-M

1990

Receives grant from the Richard J. Florsheim Foundation

2002

Dies in Milwaukee at age ninety-four from heart failure

2015-17

The Museum of Wisconsin Art (MOWA) becomes the leading repository of Friebert's art with a sizable donation from the Joseph and Betsy Ritz Friebert Family Partnership and Kohler Foundation, Inc.

The family and the Kohler also give works to other museums throughout the country

COLLECTIONS

The art of Joseph Friebert can be found in nearly fifty public art museums and university gallery collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin (Madison), Columbus Museum of Art, Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Davison Art Center at Wesleyan University, Detroit Institute of Arts, Flint Institute of Arts, Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, Haggerty Museum at Marquette University, Indiana University Art Museum, J. B. Speed Museum, Joslyn Museum, Mariana Kistler Beach Museum of Art at Kansas State University, Milwaukee Art Museum, Mint Museum, Museum of Wisconsin Art, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Northern Michigan University, Peabody-Essex Museum, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Princeton University Art Museum, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Sheldon Museum of the University of Nebraska, Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas, Smith College Museum of Art, University of Georgia Art Museum, University of Michigan Art Museum, Emile H. Mathis Gallery at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Wriston Art Center at Lawrence University, and other public and university/college museums/galleries in Wisconsin.



Fred Berman with Joseph Friebert, Holy Hill, Wisconsin, c. 2000.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

All locations are in Milwaukee unless noted otherwise. For a more complete list of exhibitions, go to josephfriebert.com.

ONE-, TWO-, AND THREE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1944

Layton Art Gallery, "Joseph Friebert, Alfred Sessler, Santos Zingale"

1946

Art Students League, Milwaukee State Teachers College, "Paintings and Drawings by Joseph Friebert"

1948

Riccardo's, Chicago, "Riccardo Presents Paintings by Joseph Friebert" (brochure)

1949

Milwaukee Jewish Community Center; Milwaukee Art Institute

1956

Milwaukee Art Institute, "Paintings: Joseph Friebert / Fred Berman" (brochure)

1958

Milwaukee Journal Gallery of Wisconsin Art, "Journal Square in Retrospect: Exhibit of Oil Paintings by Joseph Friebert"

1960

Milwaukee Art Center, "Wisconsin Artist Joseph Friebert" (brochure, with statement by the artist)

1964

Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin

1969

Fine Arts Galleries, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, "Four Decades of Painting by Joseph Friebert" (brochure, with text by Howard C. Schroedter)

1977

Fine Arts Galleries, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, "George Goundie: Sculpture/Joseph Friebert: Paintings" (catalogue, with texts by John Lloyd Taylor and Howard C. Schroedter)

Rahr-West Museum, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, "The Art of Joseph Friebert" (brochure)

1984

Charles Allis Art Museum, "Joseph Friebert/ Betsy Ritz: Works on Paper of the 1930s" (brochure, with text by John Lofton)

1989

Milwaukee Art Museum, "Joseph Friebert: Selected Works" (catalogue by Dean Sobel)

1997

Temple Emanu-El B'ne Jeshuren, "Joseph Friebert, Adolph Rosenblatt"

1998

Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, "Joseph Friebert at Ninety" (catalogue by Curtis Carter)

2000

Studio 613, "Joseph Friebert, Betsy Ritz Friebert, and Judith Friebert, Paintings, Drawings, and Prints, 1930s–1999"

2003

Mary Nohl Galleries, School of Fine Arts, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, "An Artful Marriage: Works on Paper by Joseph Friebert and Betsy Ritz Friebert" (brochure by Susan Friebert Rossen)

2006-2007

Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, "Joseph Friebert, Fred Berman, & the Milwaukee Scene, 1935–65" (catalogue by John Corbett)

2008

Museum of Wisconsin Art, West Bend, Wisconsin, "Joseph Friebert"

Inova/Arts Center, Peck School of the Arts, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, "Drawing Influence: Joseph Friebert and His Students" (brochure, with text by Nathan Guequierre).

2009

Northwestern Mutual Art Gallery, Cardinal Stritch University, "Joseph Friebert Centennial Exhibition: Wisconsin Landscapes" (brochure, with text by Nathan Guequierre)

2017

Cedarburg Art Museum, Cedarburg, Wisconsin, "Joseph Friebert: Through the Years, 1945–2000"

2018

Wriston Art Center Galleries, Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin, "The Artwork of Joseph Friebert"

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1935-64

Wisconsin Salon of Art, Memorial Union, University of Wisconsin-Madison (fifteen exhibitions and three awards) (catalogues)

1936-64

Annual Exhibition of Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors, Milwaukee Art Institute (Milwaukee Art Center; Milwaukee Art Museum) (twelve exhibitions and four awards) (catalogues mostly published as issues of the Art Institute's *Bulletin*)

1937-60

American Painting and Sculpture Exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago (four exhibitions) (catalogues)

1938-39

Great Lakes Exhibition (catalogue) (traveled)

1938-54

Artists of Chicago and Vicinity Exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago (twelve exhibitions, four awards) (catalogues)

1938-58

Annual Wisconsin State Fair Festival of Arts Exhibition, West Allis, Wisconsin (thirteen exhibitions and ten awards)

1940

Midwestern Artists Exhibition, Kansas City (Missouri) Art Institute (catalogue)

1940-59

Illinois State Fair, Springfield (six exhibitions and three prizes)

1941

Carnegie International Exhibition, Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh (catalogue)

1943

Renaissance Society, Chicago, "Artists from Milwaukee"

1947-53

Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture,
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
(three exhibitions) (catalogues)

1947-62

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (seven exhibitions and two prizes) (catalogues) (some shows traveled)

1948-52

Gimbel's Centennial Collection Exhibitions (five exhibitions and three prizes) (catalogues)

1950

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, "American Painting Today: 1950" (catalogue)

1954

Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama, "Steel, Iron, and Men" (traveled)

1955-56

Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (catalogue)

1956

American Pavilion, 28th Venice Biennale, Venice, "American Artists Paint the City" (catalogue by Katharine Kuh, with foreword by Leonardo Venturi)

1958

Annual Exhibition, National Academy of Design, New York

1959

Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (catalogue)

1963

Sixty-Ninth Western Annual, Denver Art Museum

1965

Burpee Art Museum, Rockford, Illinois, "Fifty States of Art" (Friebert represents Wisconsin) (catalogue) (traveled)

1985

Wichita (Kansas) Art Museum, "American Art of the Great Depression: Two Sides of the Coin" (catalogue by Howard E. Wooden)

1992-93

Milwaukee Art Museum, "A Breath of Vision: The Ritz Collection" (catalogue by Russell Bowman and David Morgan)

1993

Milwaukee Art Museum, "The Jewish Contribution in Twentieth Century Art" (catalogue, with texts by Tom L. Freudenheim and Tom Bamberger)

1994

Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, "Wisconsin Artists: A Celebration of Jewish Presence" (catalogue by Curtis Carter and Johann J. K. Reusch)

1996-97

Charles Allis Art Museum, "Self Portraits: Wisconsin Artists" (catalogue)

Flint (Michigan) Institute of Arts, "Painters of the Great Lakes Scene" (catalogue by Michael D. Hall) (traveled)

1998

Milwaukee Art Museum, "100 Years of Wisconsin Art" (catalogue, with text by Janet Treacy and Dean Sobel)

1998-99

Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin, "150 Years of Wisconsin Printmaking" (catalogue by Andrew Stevens)

2012

Art History Gallery, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, "Wisconsin Masters: An Artistic Legacy, 1900–1970" (catalogue)

2014

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, "Art Work: Art and Labor" (catalogue by Brandon Ruud et al.)

2015

Jewish Museum Milwaukee, "Founders and Visionaries: Wisconsin Jewish Artists from the Milwaukee Art Museum: Fred Berman, Aaron Bohrod, Joseph Friebert, Alfred A. Sessler"

2017

Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, "Mining Pictures: Stories from Above and Below Ground"

2018

Cedarburg (Wisconsin) Art Museum, "Wisconsin Modernists: Rebels from Regionalism" (catalogue by Mary Chemotti)

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, "Unexpected Encounters: Recent Gifts"

Three Milwaukee galleries handled Friebert's work, organizing between them more than one dozen solo shows and including his work in multiple group exhibitions. Friebert's first dealer was Dorothy Bradley, who ran the Bradley Galleries from 1965 until her death in 1991. Between 1994 and 1997, Friebert was at the Galleria Del Conte. Finally, the Elaine Erickson Gallery represented him from 1997 until it closed in 2015.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Joseph Friebert's archive contains hundreds of newspaper and magazine clippings that mention him. Many simply list works by him that were exhibited and prizes he won. The catalogues in the archive are mostly those produced for the annual or biannual juried shows into which his art was accepted; they list his name and the exhibited work(s). In 2019, the archive will be transferred to the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, which will catalogue and digitize it for online access. One can find a more complete list of references at josephfriebert.com. Thus, a selection of publications with significant biographical or critical content is included here.

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

(see Selected Exhibitions, pp. 101-102).

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Pousse-Dart, Nathaniel, ed. *American Painting Today*. New York: Hastings House, 1956, pp. 60 (ill.), 68.

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