

# SAUL STEINBERG

Drawings, Constructions & Objects



*Ink*, 1962, ink and pencil on paper, 13 ¼ x 22 ⅝ inches

The Drawing Room has long wished to present a Saul Steinberg exhibition on the East End, where the artist had a house and studio for nearly half a century. We are grateful to The Saul Steinberg Foundation: Patterson Sims, Managing Director; Sheila Schwartz, Research & Archives Director; Maryanna Vermonte; and the Board of The Saul Steinberg Foundation: Prudence Crowther, President; Ian Frazier, Vice President; John B. Koegel, Secretary and Treasurer; and James Abruzzo.

For extensive information about the life and art of Saul Steinberg visit [saulsteinbergfoundation.org](http://saulsteinbergfoundation.org).

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July 20 – August 26, 2018

In collaboration with The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York

THE DRAWING ROOM

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# INFLUENCE AND CONNECTION

Saul Steinberg, considered and remembered by Françoise Mouly & Art Spiegelman

*Married in 1977, Françoise Mouly, The New Yorker's art editor since 1993, and graphic artist and writer Art Spiegelman are great admirers of the art of Saul Steinberg (1914-1999). Their edited remarks derive from an interview and subsequent email revisions in May and June, 2018, with Patterson Sims, Managing Director of The Saul Steinberg Foundation.*

## **Art Spiegelman:**

I was first exposed to Steinberg's work as a kid in the early 1960s at the dentist's office. I'd glance past the covers of *The New Yorker* to find the cartoons that still continued the tradition of Peter Arno and Charles Addams—that was as lowbrow as the magazine got in those days. I was fascinated by all cartoons and comics as an aspiring eleven-year-old cartoonist, even the ones I didn't "like" or understand, but my primary allegiance was to the scruffy and wrong-side-of-the-tracks, street-smart cartooning of Harvey Kurtzman's *Mad* comics. Steinberg's highly sophisticated and refined approach to cartooning came from an aesthetic far from the low-rent, bare light-bulb neighborhood of Mutt & Jeff big-foot cartoons.

Steinberg's sensitivity to line and his conceptual approach to imagery came from the same world as Paul Klee, Max Ernst, Picasso, and Matisse—not my planet when I was a kid. My parents didn't subscribe to *The New Yorker*. It wasn't even aimed at them. It was for middle-class people aspiring desperately to be culturally upper middle class; my parents were refugees from Hitler's Europe just striving to be middle class. My mother came from a cultured and moneyed family in Poland, but she subscribed to *Life* and *Look* magazines. She had books. My father just read the tabloids.

I might have embraced Steinberg's work as I matured, but I was set back by having my nose forcibly rubbed in it by J.I. Biegeleisen, the dean of my vocational high school (the High School of Art and Design in Manhattan). He had written a book called *Careers in Commercial Art* and several books on typography. He spotted my work and said, "I'm going to personally groom you. You're talented." So instead of going to my second art class every day, he'd sit me at a drawing board in the back room of his office and told me to just copy some cartoons I liked.

About a week later, Mr. Biegeleisen walked in and saw me copying the detailed grotesque drawings of Basil Wolverton (nationwide winner of Li'l Abner's 1946 Ugliest Woman in the World contest); he gasped and ripped it to shreds, screaming "That's totally vulgar!" He pulled one of his Steinberg books off his shelf—I think it was *The Labyrinth*—shoved it at me and said, "Copy this!" And for a month or two I had to do that for an hour every day. It did teach me how to handle a Crow Quill Dip Pen rather than just draw with a Rapidograph, but I dreaded every one of these sessions because it wasn't self-chosen. I developed a sort of antibody to Steinberg that set me back a good ten years or so in learning to love his work. His beautiful distilled and playful drawings and his ability to literally give shape to thought finally won me over. Thank you Mr. Biegeleisen.

### **Françoise Mouly:**

After my arrival at *The New Yorker* in 1993, one of the first tasks I was given was to be Saul Steinberg's editor. He seldom came to the magazine's office. The editor, Tina Brown, asked me to handle the great master. I remember her way of putting it, warning me: "He's a heavy piece of furniture." I was somewhat insecure about the idea of meeting him since I wasn't well versed in his work, but of course I called him to make an appointment, saying I'd like to come to his apartment in the Upper East Side to introduce myself. From the first day, it was like falling in love at first sight. Saul was very intent on our meetings being formal dates, so there would be a day and time decided well in advance. He dressed up; I dressed up. Not that he wore a suit, but he was a natty dresser, often wearing cashmere sweaters in colors like yellow, salmon, or baby blue that European men, but not so much American men, wear. I would confirm in the morning

that I was coming. I was meant to arrive on time. The doorman would alert him that I was coming up, and when I got out of the elevator, he would be standing by the open door to greet me. I most often carried a portfolio but we didn't get down to business right away. We would spend an hour to an hour and a half in his living room, with me on the couch and Saul in his armchair. We would talk, or rather he talked and I listened. He was a fabulous conversationalist. It's one of the things that I find most poignant: his speech, his manner of speaking, his cadences, which were so precise and distinctive, have not survived. He wasn't a recluse, but at this point in his life, he wasn't very sociable, and I knew these meetings were a special gift. He made a ceremony of them—he liked rituals and it was out of the question that I should be in a rush. He would offer and make me an espresso, which was no small thing at the time.

We would sometimes speak in French at his choice, which he spoke very well, and his French obviously brought up memories or thoughts of his niece, who was living in Paris. He was also absolutely fine in English. He spent a lot of time explaining America to me, and I was a very willing audience. He talked about baseball, the landscape of America, in particular Arizona and the West, and about architecture and New York City buildings. He liked how anamorphic buildings in America were and pointed out how banks were designed as temples of money. I wanted so badly to be able to remember, memorize, and record every word, but he put me under strong orders not to. Our conversations were a gift and presented that way, not to be shared. I met him more often in the winter because in the summer he was in Long Island, and I didn't visit him there. It was in the course of one of these conversations, when he was talking about what he thought were some of his better images, like *The View of the World From 9th Avenue*, that I heard him say something I've quoted since: "When I make a good image, it enters into your brain like a word you didn't know and stays there in such a way that you can't remember how you thought about this topic beforehand." That was his goal: to make images so iconic that they live on in our brains as units of thoughts.

He was very complimentary about how well I did my job at *The New Yorker*. He often commented on and gave me his opinion about drawings in the magazine by other artists.

I would bring that back to the artists, who were delighted. And then after the conversation, we would finally start talking about his contributions to the magazine. He was interested in the controversial covers we had started to publish under Tina. Part of the purpose of the meetings, which were fairly regularly spaced, was to give him deadlines. He presented me with roughs, and we'd go to his flat files, where he had three or four thousand drawings, to forage for unique ideas. For *The New Yorker* covers, he had a golden rule: one idea per cover, and he didn't want to repeat himself. So he was searching for ideas all the time.

Looking through the decades of drawings, you could see all of the different tools and techniques, like rubber stamps, that had started him on the track of exciting and playful inventions. I kept offering to introduce him to computers, saying "what you did here on the Xerox machine, distortions and symmetry, you will be able to do with computers. I'll bring a laptop"—but he never let me.

**Patterson Sims:**

Did his high visibility and great success at *The New Yorker* compromise his success and status as an artist in the gallery world?

**Françoise Mouly:**

He talked a lot about that topic to me. He said it was his choice to do magazine covers and drawings, even if it might have done him a disservice and prevented him from reaching the height of fame of some of his friends like Calder or Willem de Kooning. He was surrounded by very famous people, though a greater number of his friends were esteemed writers rather than artists. He talked about the invention of abstract painting in a broken-down barn with Jackson Pollock and de Kooning. He told me about how the two of them went to Long Island one summer when they were young, unknown and had no money: the barn that they rented was about to fall apart. They went to the hardware store to buy some paint, basically to hold the planks together so that they wouldn't blow in the wind. They started rolling on the paint and that's where Pollock took a bucket of paint and started throwing it on the floor,

inventing Abstract Expressionism. Saul said to me (and again I wish I could have recorded our conversations), “I could have been an abstract expressionist” and noted that he was married to Hedda Sterne, an abstract painter. He said, “I could have thrown a bucket of paint. I could have figured out how to play that game.” But his love of the lowly magazine prevailed. Every time I came over, I would bring a proof of what we were going to publish. He was eager to mark up the proof with me, and he wanted me to mark up his original drawings. He wanted me to indicate crop marks and then with the big red and blue grease pencils I carried, mark “Reduce 80%” and “Bring out BK line.” He’d say, “Come on, mark it! Put lines through it!” I was like, “No, no, I’ll do it on the proof. It’s fine.” But he loved that part of the process, and we spent a lot of time talking about the making of and transformation of an image into its reproduction. He insisted that I give him edits and feedback, though he needed very few edits. His goal wasn’t to be the refined artist whose work hangs in a museum, but to be the one who’d put memorable images into the world and into readers’ heads.

He devoted his life to drawing for reproduction and loved the fact that *The New Yorker* had a wide distribution to sophisticated readers and didn’t have to compromise. Steinberg was a man of idea drawings, so when you’re talking about graphic novels or what we called comics at the time, he was interested in comics. When we looked through his files, I could clearly see R. Crumb entering into his focal sight and revitalizing his work in the late 60s and early 70s. He kept up with the Underground press, talked about his love for Kim Deitch’s comics, for example. He knew and respected Art’s work, was challenged and amused by how Art was transforming *The New Yorker*—he referred to Art as “le mari” (“the husband”).

### **Art Spiegelman:**

I never actually met or spoke with Steinberg. Françoise invited him to our house several times—I wanted to introduce him to the mysteries of manipulating drawings on the computer—but it never happened, alas. Sometimes Françoise would come back from visiting him with dispatches, saying: “You know, Steinberg said he liked that cover of yours!” and I’d be insufferably proud of myself for the next twenty-four hours.

At *The New Yorker*, during his heyday, Steinberg was in a class by himself, and other artists aspired toward his sensibility so that they could sell covers to William Shawn, the editor who had originally hired him. Shawn's idea of a cover was to stay outside the hurly-burly of the daily fray and offer a moment of respite on the newsstand. When Tina Brown invited me into the magazine in 1993—neither she or I had grown up with an inborn reverence for the magazine—she encouraged my natural inclination toward that hurly-burly of the daily fray, and I began making “controversial” covers that have since become part of the recombinant DNA of *The New Yorker*. At some point Steinberg got intrigued by seeing if he could do a controversial cover in his own manner. He submitted a sketch to Françoise that was a zip-code map of New York City—but with neighborhoods labeled “Golan Heights,” “Gaza,” and other regions of the Middle East. When he heard that Tina got really excited about the image, he lost all interest and never finished it as a cover drawing. (The sketch did get published posthumously as part of a portfolio of his maps within the magazine.)

Steinberg took the gag cartoon and reinvented it almost singlehandedly (although there were other artists, including William Steig and Roland Topor, who probed that territory), making a kind of highbrow version of the gag cartoon that Peter Arno had perfected.

Steinberg wasn't a graphic novelist; he was a graphic aphorist. What made him singular was that he was able to take complex ideas and distill them down to one picture. It had an enormous impact on other artists of his generation and since. In some ways it overlaps with, let's say, Magritte, who as a painter was economically and art historically valued and got appropriated by advertising and the graphic arts since his ideas were often also enigmatic aphorisms. Magritte's juxtapositions were a kind of pointed, focused surrealism—not the profligate surrealism of Dalí—that would allow a new idea to happen.

Steinberg's genuine love for printing started very early at his father's small box-making shop in Bucharest. Drawing was an extension of printing and writing for him, and it led him to a place where he couldn't be part of or comfortably slotted in the heroic development of Art, toward bigger and bigger canvases and toward, in some ways, less and less meaning. Steinberg took as

his mission to make an image that once seen cannot be unseen. No matter where you come from in the spectrum of high and low, maybe that is the goal: making something that lives beyond its particular set of lines and marks.

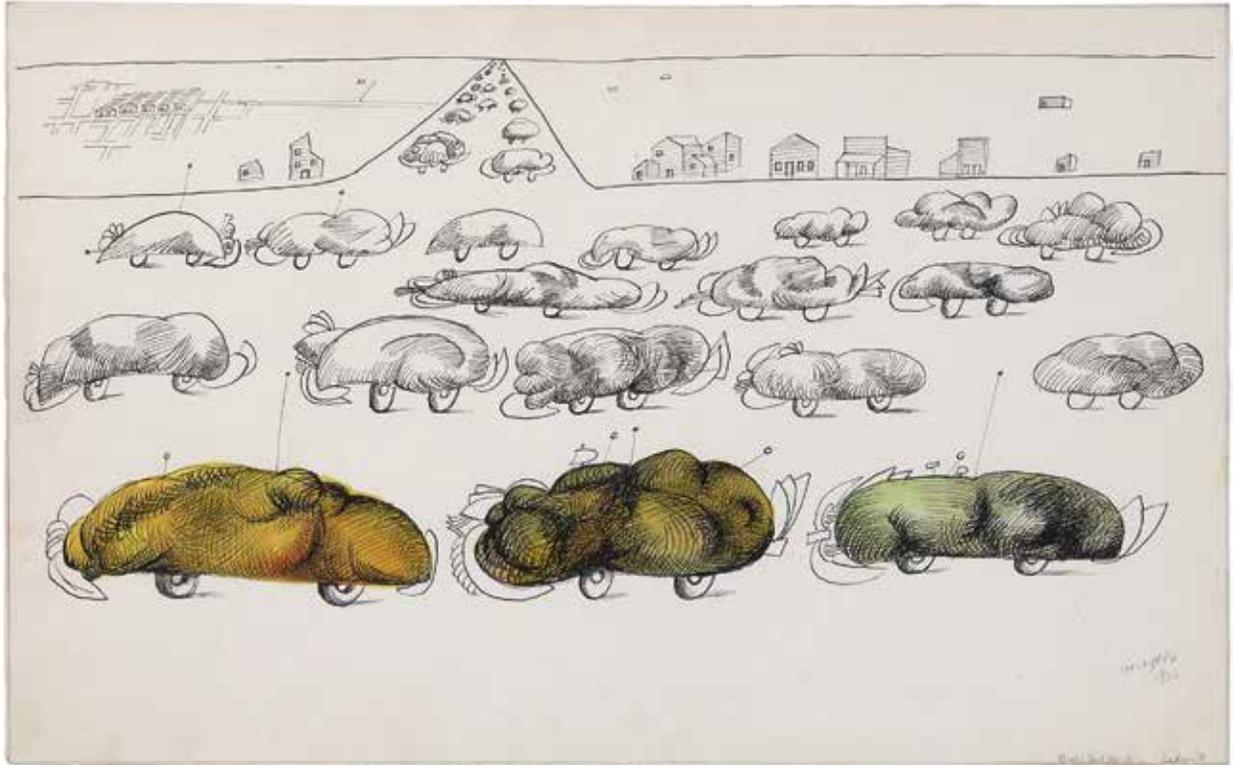
Despite my traumatic introduction to Steinberg's work he began to figure significantly in my thinking, starting in my underground comix days as I became more and more ambitious about what comics and cartoons could be. I started collecting his books when I found them in used book shops and began to admire them without breaking into a cold sweat thinking: "Oh my god, I'm gonna have to copy all these little curlicues and his weird mock-calligraphy!"

In many ways the battle between "High Art" and "Low Art" has been fought to a draw by now, but it seemed like an almost uncrossable barrier—sort of like the Berlin Wall—in Steinberg's time. Still, Steinberg seemed to dance on top of that wall and didn't jump one way or the other. He just lived on top of it, above the fray, by having defined his own turf on the hyphen between High and Low.

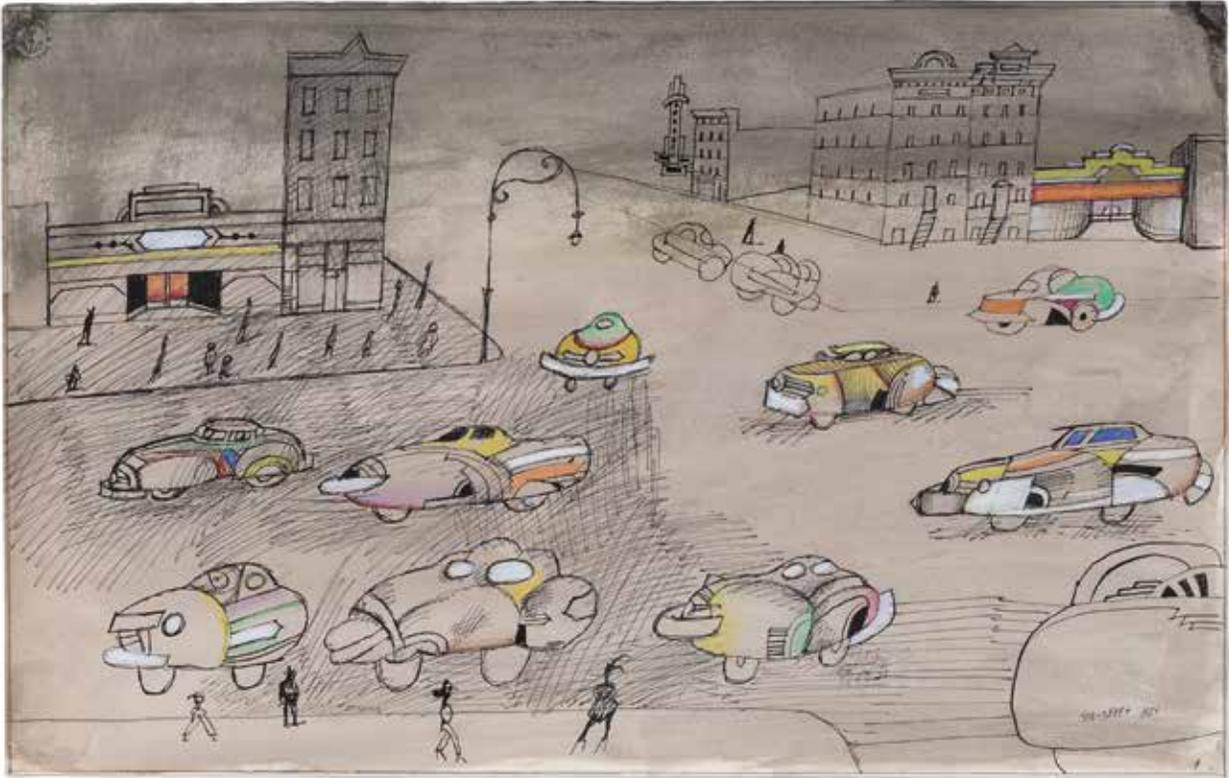
Interview © by Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman. All rights reserved.



*Untitled*, 1978, watercolor, pencil, and colored pencil on paper, 15 x 22 ¼ inches



*Highway Traffic*, 1953, ink, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 23 inches

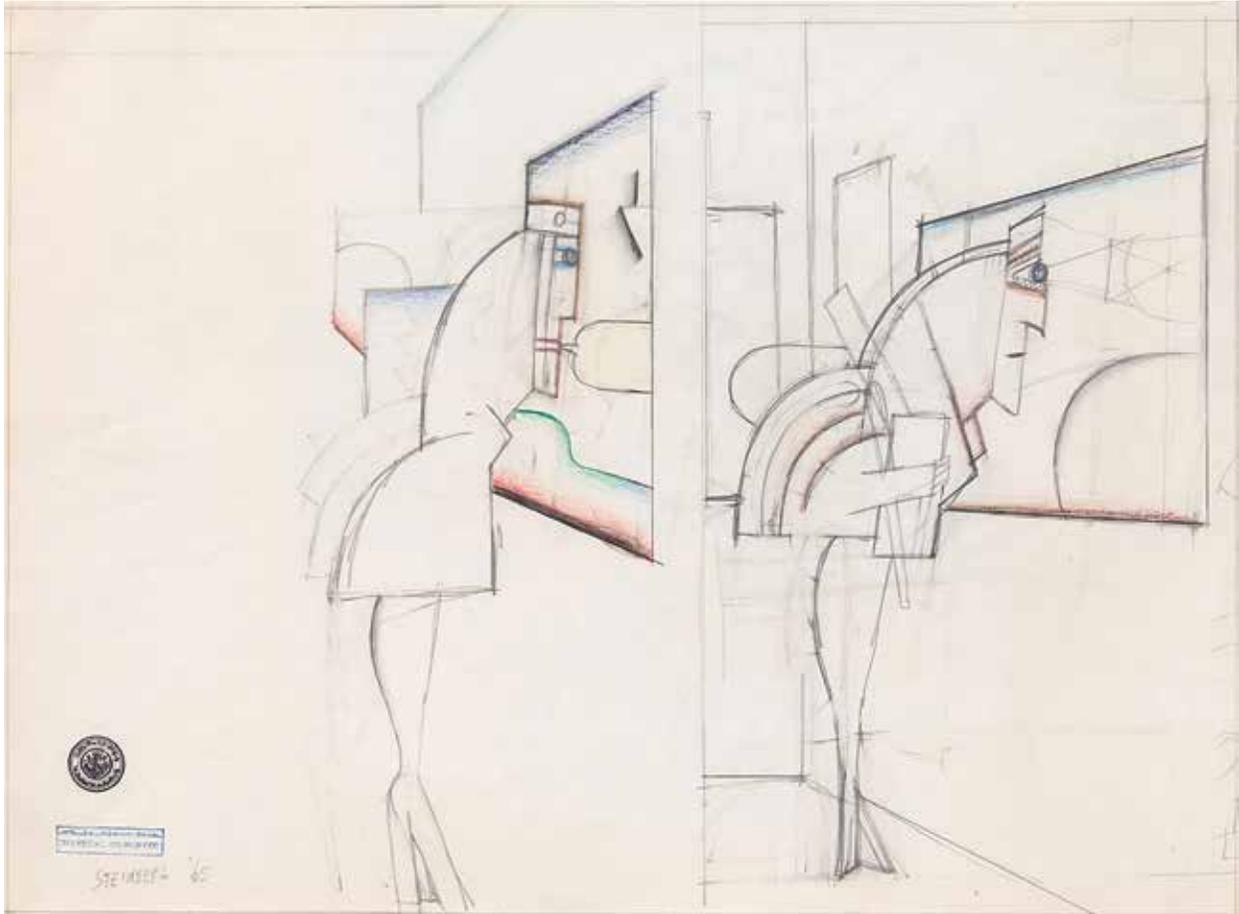


*New York Brownstone*, 1953, ink, crayon, pencil, and colored pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 23 inches

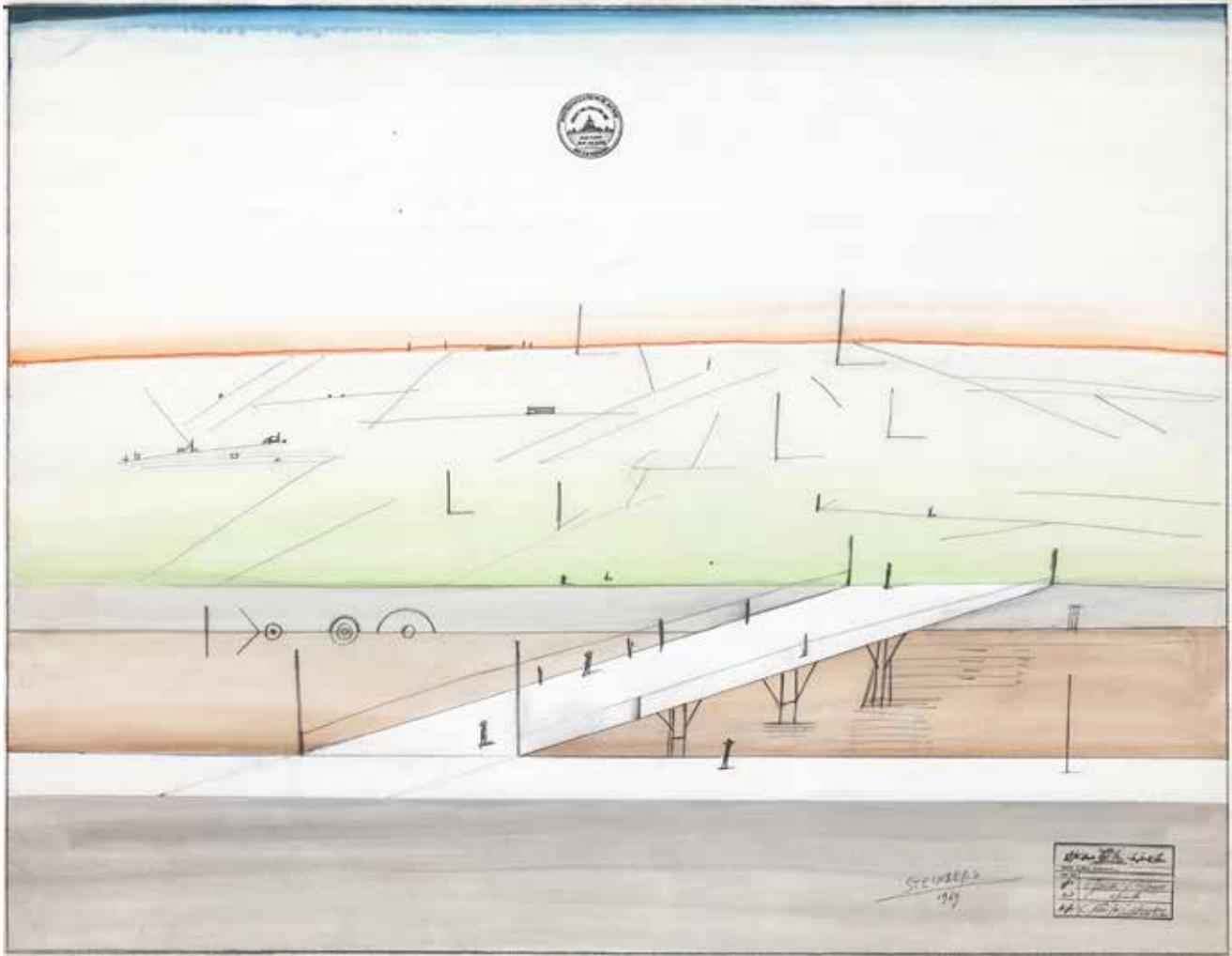


*Harold Rosenberg, 1964, colored pencil, crayon, pencil, and ink on paper, 9 ½ x 10 ¼ inches*

*Feet on Chair, 1967, pencil and colored pencil on paper, 13 ¾ x 16 ½ inches*



*Two Art Lovers*, 1965, pencil, colored pencil, and rubber stamps on paper, 15 1/2 x 21 inches



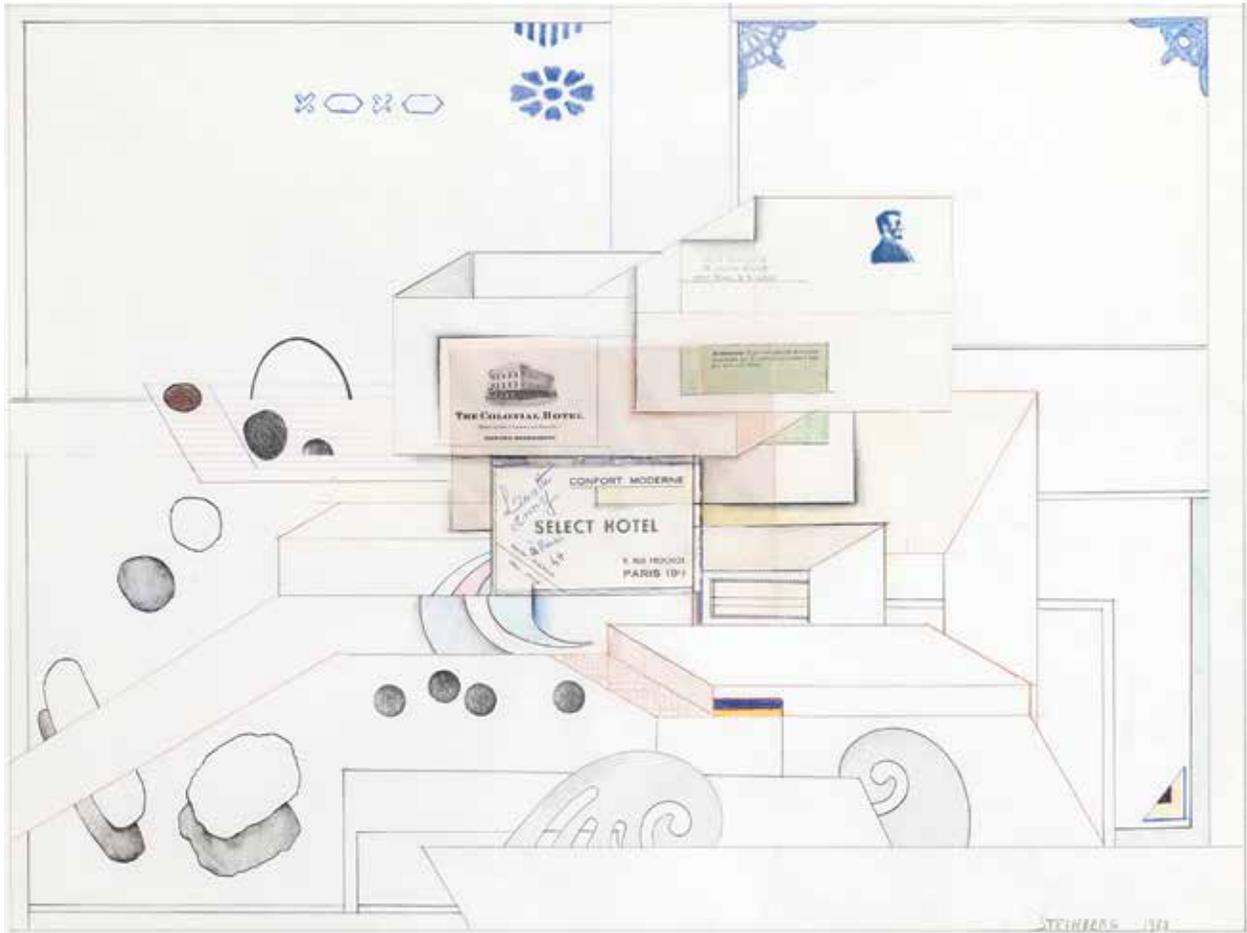
*Japan Bridge*, 1969, watercolor, pencil, crayon, and rubber stamps on paper, 22¼ x 28¾ inches



*Three Landscapes and Green Seal*, 1978, watercolor, ink, pencil, green and gold foil, embossed seal, and rubber stamps on paper, 22 ¾ x 19 ½ inches



*Medaglia D'Oro Still Life, 1952, ink on paper, 14 1/2 x 23 inches*



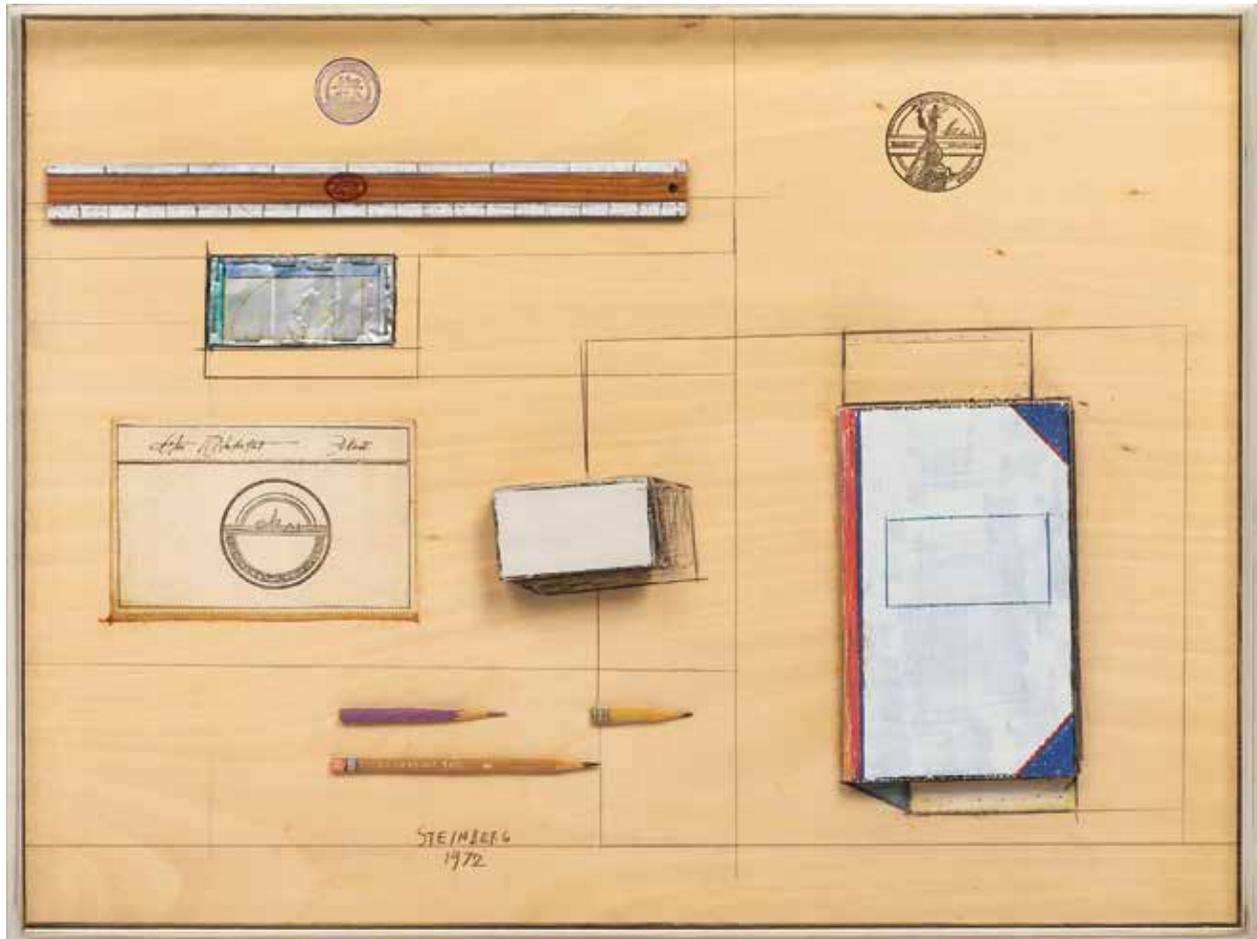
*Lucette Still Life*, 1968, pencil, colored pencil, watercolor, wash, rubber stamps, and collage on paper, 18 3/4 x 25 inches



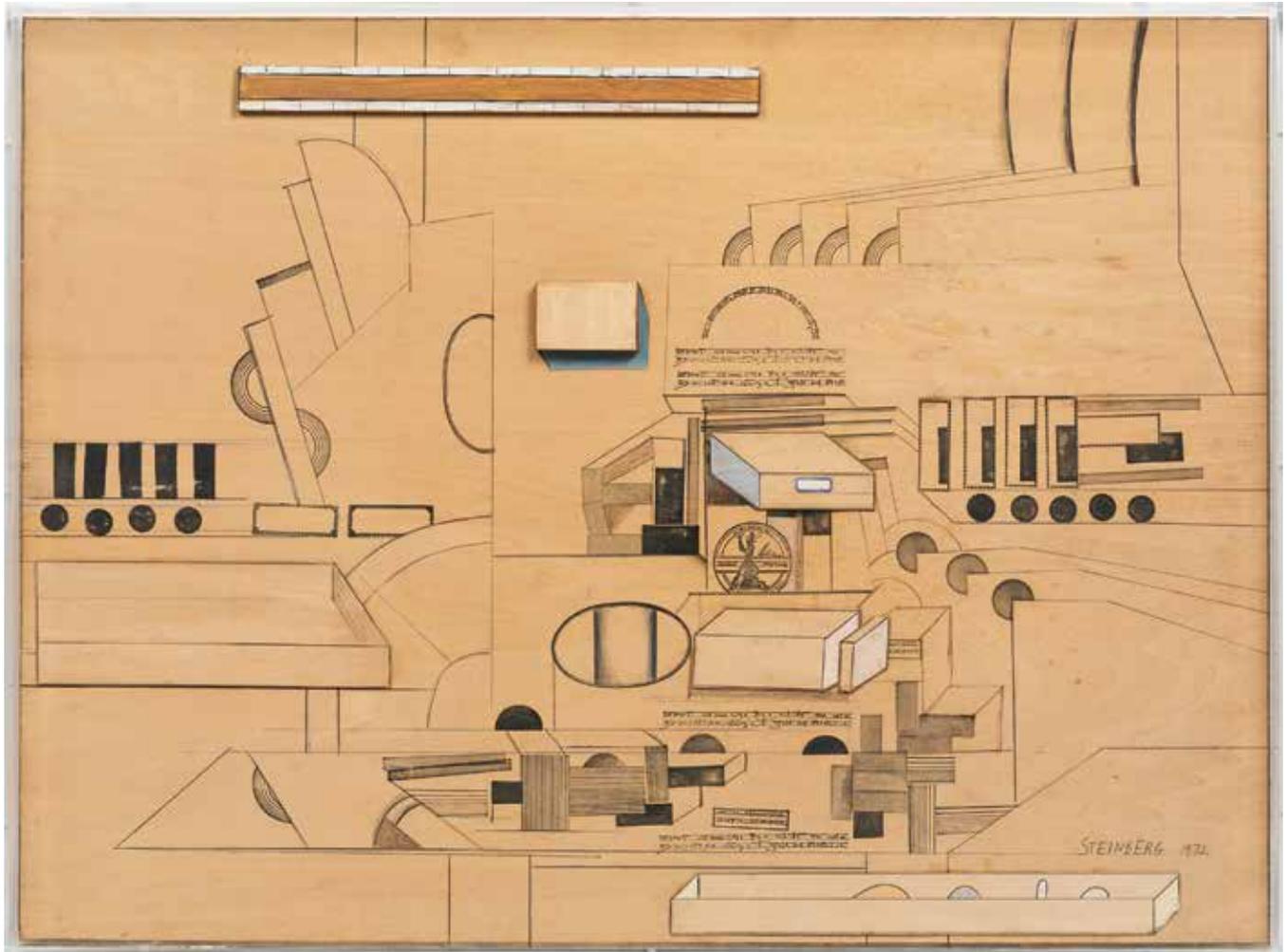
*Louse Point*, 1969, oil and rubber stamps on Masonite, 14 x 18 x 1/8 inches



*Four Landscapes, 1974, watercolor, oil, and varnish on paper, 18 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 27 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches*

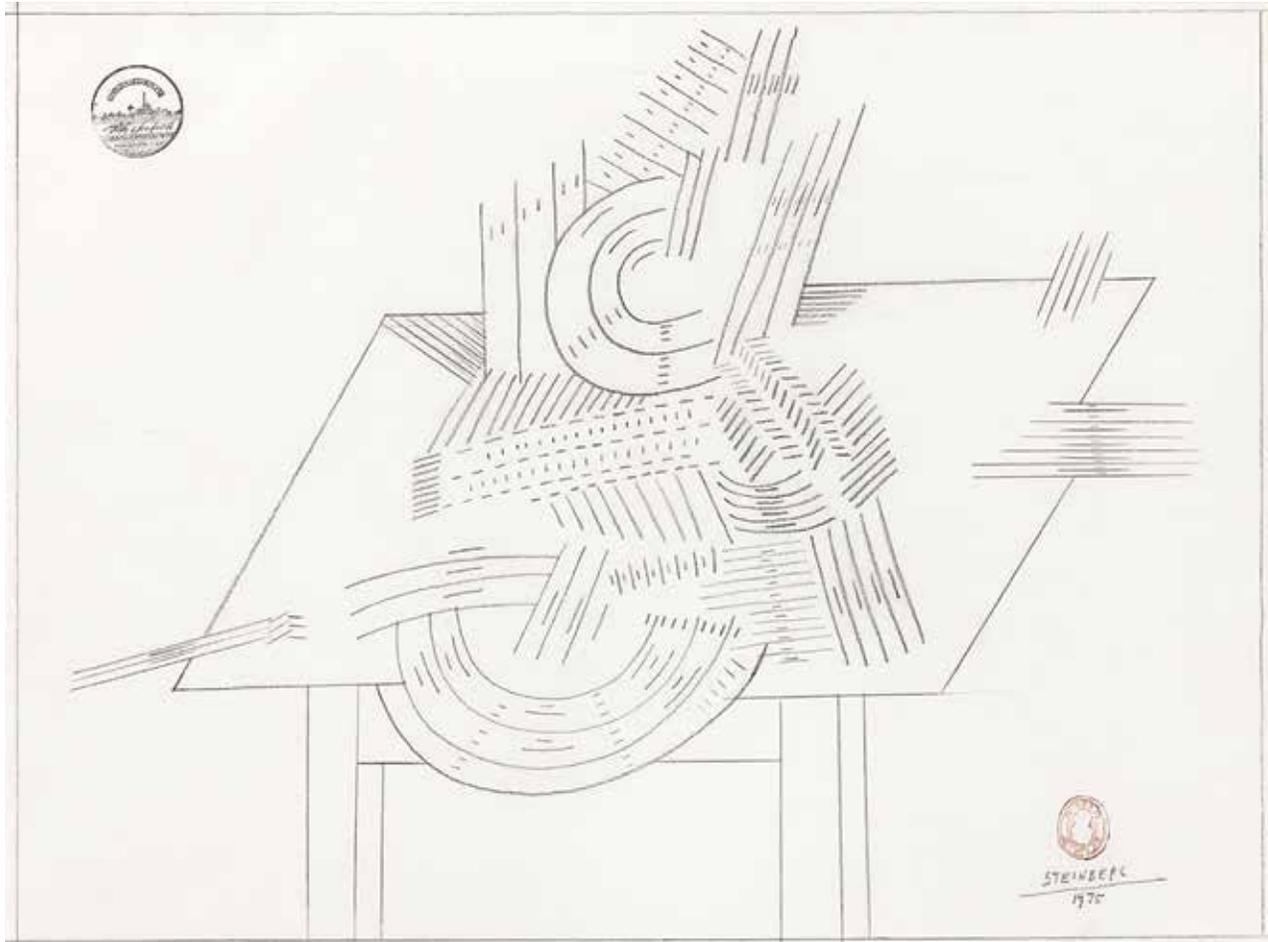


*Shadows*, 1972, carved wood, metal, staples, cloth, pencil, gouache, colored pencil, and rubber stamps on wood, 18 x 24 inches



*Rubber Stamps*, from the Table Series, 1972, rubber stamps, pencil, colored pencil, carved wood, and paper label on wood, 23 x 31 x 3/4 inches

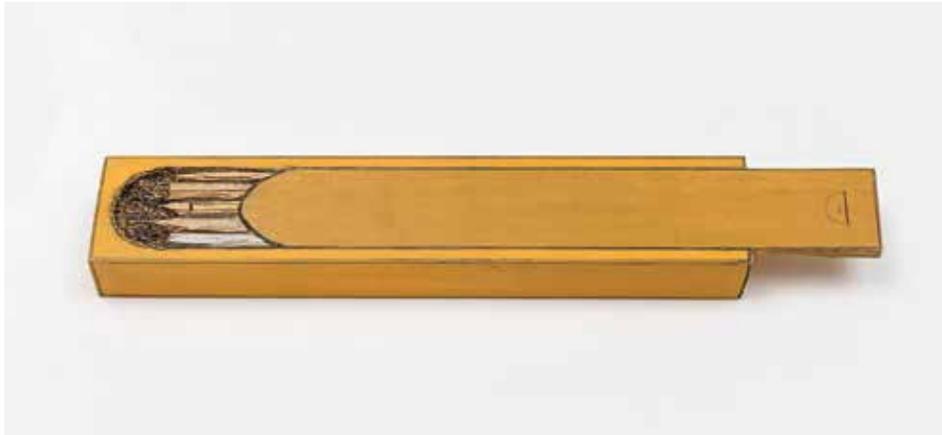




*Drawing Table*, 1975, conté crayon, pencil, and rubber stamps on paper, 19 ½ x 25 ¾ inches

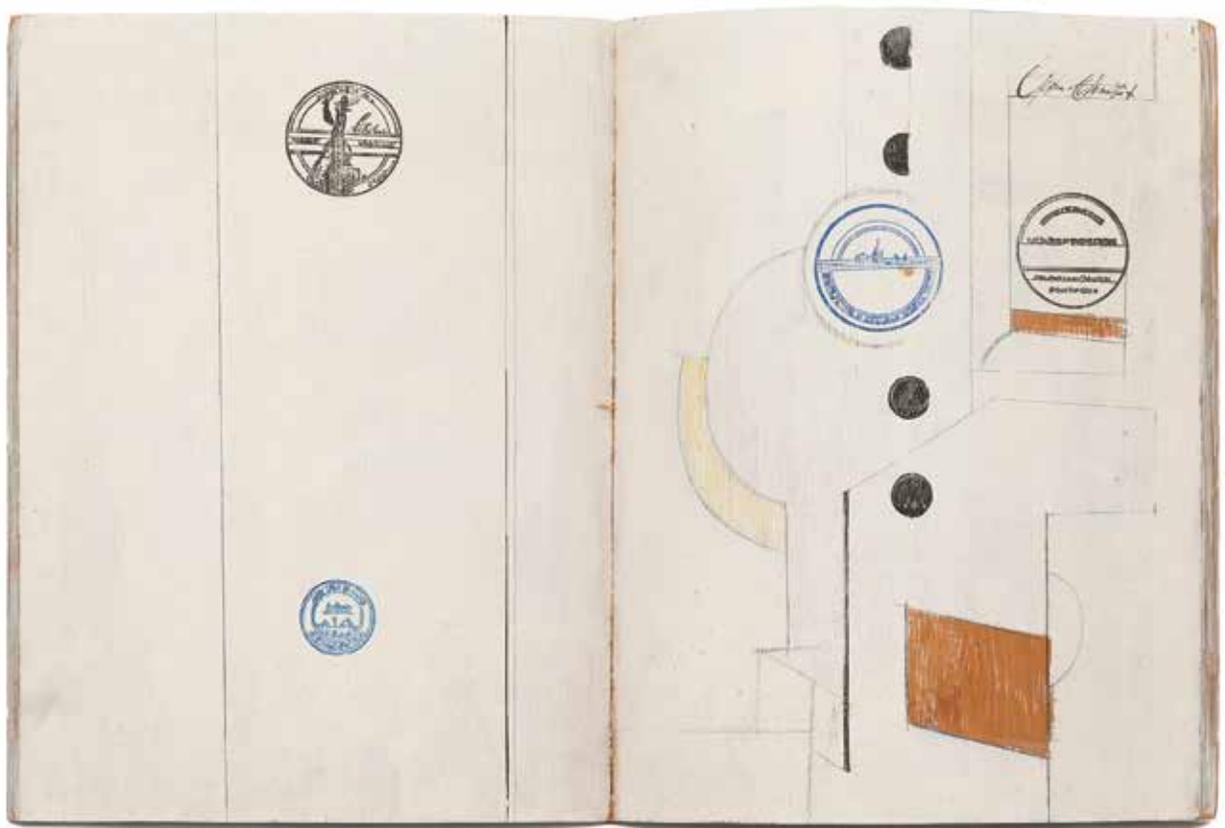


*Untitled, 1972, carved wood, gouache, rubber stamps, pencil, and etched metal  
on wood, 16 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 24 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 1 inches*



*Untitled*, c. 1980-90, paint, crayon, marker, rubber stamps, and ink on wood, 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 7  $\frac{1}{2}$  x  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches

*Untitled*, c. 1980-90, carved wood, pencil, and paint, 2 x 12 x 1 inches



*Untitled, c. 1980-90, gouache, pencil, colored pencil, and rubber stamps on carved wood, 14 x 20 3/4 x 1 7/8 inches*



*Still Life*, c. 1973-84, pencil, colored pencil, and china marker on wood, 12 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 17 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 7 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches



*Schwinn*, c. 1982-92, pencil and colored pencil on wood,  $9\frac{1}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{8} \times 1\frac{1}{4}$  inches

*Untitled (Montauk Highway Map)*, c. 1975, pencil and marker on wood,  $5\frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{5}{8} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$  inches



Cabinet, 1970, canvas with ink, metal drawer handle, porcelain knob, metal plaque, rubber stamps, pencil, and gouache on incised wood, 15 1/2 x 20 1/8 x 1 1/4 inches

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina  
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts  
Akron Art Museum, Ohio  
Albright-Knox Art Museum, Buffalo, New York  
American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York  
Allentown Museum of Art, Pennsylvania  
Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia  
The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois  
Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland  
Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut  
Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas, Austin  
Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania  
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York  
Alexander Calder Foundation, New York  
Cameron Museum of Art, Wilmington, North Carolina  
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Cartoon Museum, Basel, Switzerland  
Centre Pompidou, Paris, France  
Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, Madison  
Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio  
Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio  
Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio  
Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York  
Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan  
Cummer Museum of Art, Jacksonville, Florida  
Dallas Museum of Art, Texas  
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington  
Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan  
Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, State University of New York, New Paltz  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California

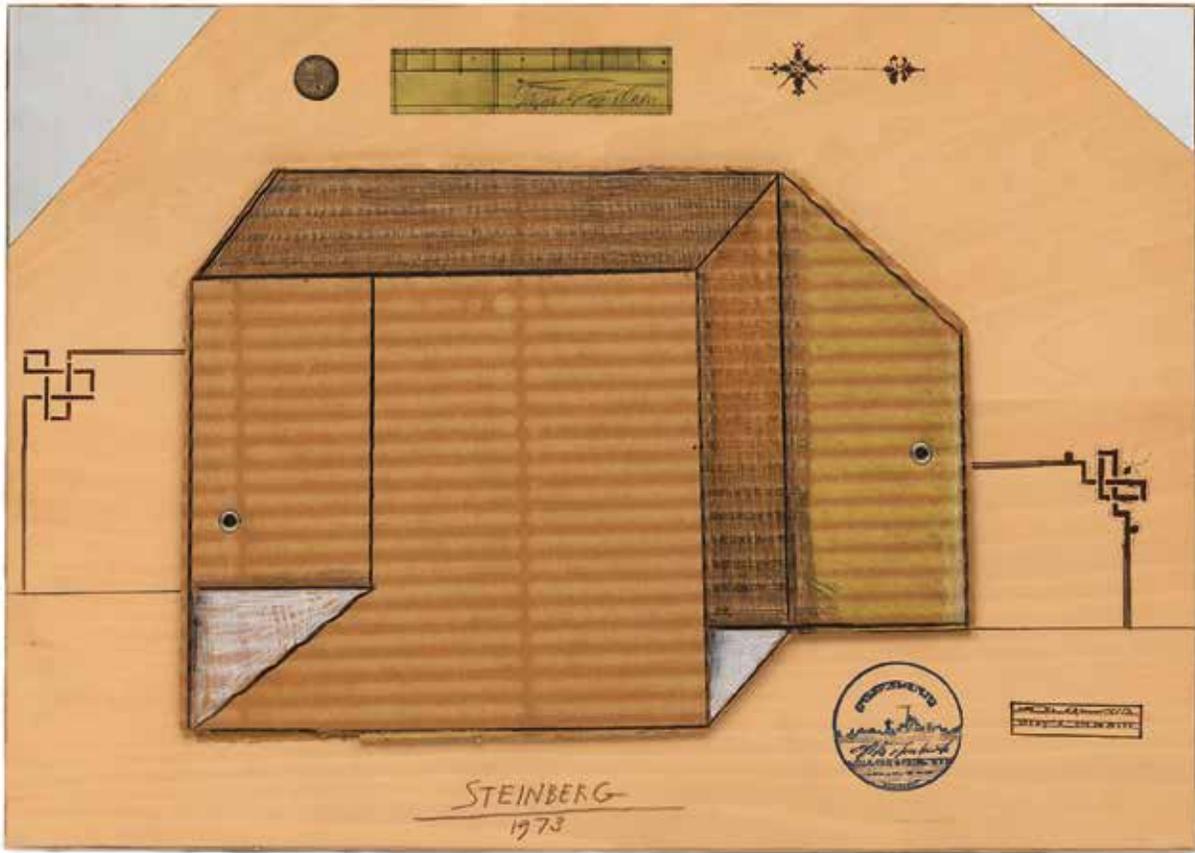
Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris  
Fondation Folon, La Hulpe, Belgium  
Fondation Alberto Giacometti, Paris  
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris  
Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul-de Vence, France  
Fondo Adami, Fondazione Europea Del Disegno, Vaduz, Liechtenstein  
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, Charlottesville  
Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York  
Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman  
Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens  
Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University  
Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC  
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany  
Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, Connecticut  
Indiana Museum of Art, Bloomington  
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana  
Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Valencia, Spain  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem  
The Jewish Museum, New York  
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Michigan  
Kararikaturmuseum, Krems, Austria  
Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri  
Kunsthalle, Tübingen, Germany  
Library of Congress, Washington, DC  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California  
McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas  
The Menil Collection, Houston, Texas  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota  
Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden  
Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey  
Morgan Library & Museum, New York

Munson-William-Proctor Institute of Arts, Utica, New York  
Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels  
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany  
Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, Florida  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri  
Neuberger Museum of Art, State University of New York, Purchase  
Neues Museum, Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Design, Nuremberg, Germany  
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh  
Palm Springs Art Museum, California  
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania  
Portland Art Museum, Maine  
Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California  
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California  
Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, Illinois  
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC  
Tomi Ungerer Museum, Strasbourg, France  
University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City  
University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor  
Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany  
Walker Art Museum, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Wayne State University Art Collection, Detroit  
The Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis  
Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Wilhelm-Busch-Museum, Hannover, Germany  
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

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*Photography* Jenny Gorman *Design* Kate Canfield *Printing* Ocean Printing

front cover: *Untitled*, 1968, crayon, pencil, colored pencil, rubber stamps, and collage on paper, 16 x 21 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches  
back cover: *Untitled*, 1973, metal, rubber stamps, corrugated cardboard, and colored pencil on wood, 12 x 17 inches



EMILY GOLDSTEIN & VICTORIA MUNROE  
**THE DRAWING ROOM**  
EAST HAMPTON NEW YORK