

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Isabel Bishop

### *A Selection of Paintings, Drawings, and Prints*

September 5 – October 5, 2013

Opening Reception Thursday, September 5, 6 – 8 pm

In the project space, DC Moore Gallery features one of the foremost figurative artists of the twentieth century, Isabel Bishop (1902-1988). Best known for her images of shop girls, office workers, and down-and-out men around Union Square in New York, she also created nudes and still lifes, all of which reinterpret a classical sensibility in a contemporary mode.

In light of this, the question might arise as to why we do not know or hear more about Isabel Bishop today. The answer lies in large part in her painstaking studio practice and self-critical review process. Her very deliberate method began with sketches done either outdoors or with models posed in her studio, followed by drawings, etchings, and prints. From her studies, she then created final paintings with vibrant, complex surfaces built up through multiple layers of oil and varnish over a toned gesso ground. Due to the exacting standards that she set for herself, the number of completed paintings is surprisingly few – by most estimates about 160 over the course of a sixty-year career. Most of them are in museums or closely held private collections, so it can be difficult to see her work. This focused exhibition provides a rare opportunity to view a choice group of her works from the 1930s through the 1970s.

Bishop portrayed everyday people in extraordinary ways, often monumentalizing her figures within minimally defined contexts, whether they are sitting on park benches or soda fountain stools, riding the subway or strolling the neighborhood during lunch hour. She found particular inspiration in Renaissance and Baroque art, especially the work of Rembrandt and Rubens. As with seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish genre painters, she depicted her prosaic subjects with an uncritical eye, never idealized, but presented in a sympathetic manner that imbued them with an innate humanity.

Born in Cincinnati and raised in Detroit, Bishop arrived in New York in 1918 at the age of sixteen to study illustration at the New York School of Applied Design for Women. After two years, she enrolled at the Art Students League, where she studied with Kenneth Hayes Miller and Guy Pène du Bois. In 1926, she moved into a studio that looked out onto Union Square at Broadway and Fourteenth Street. She was soon part of a loosely associated group of artists that has been called the Fourteenth Street School, which included her good friend, Reginald Marsh, as well as Miller, Edward Laning, and Raphael Soyer.

At the time, the Union Square area was one of the busiest commercial and entertainment districts in the city, although much faded from its fashionable days in the late nineteenth century. Three major department stores were nearby, as well as many industrial lofts and small businesses that employed thousands of people. Numerous vaudeville and burlesque theaters, movie houses, billiard parlors, and amusement game halls were also in the vicinity. The sea of humanity that loitered in the park or passed through the neighborhood on a daily basis provided Bishop with a wealth of subjects for decades.

Bishop's work is in the collections of major museums across the country. She had her first one-person exhibition at Midtown Galleries in New York in 1933. Numerous solo exhibitions followed, including a major retrospective organized by the University of Arizona Museum of Art in 1974 that traveled to the Whitney Museum of American Art, and a retrospective of drawings presented by Bard College in 1989. Recently, the Bank of England announced plans to feature an illustration by Bishop of a scene from *Pride and Prejudice* on an English banknote commemorating Jane Austen in 2017. The original drawing is in the collection of the Morgan Library & Museum.

Also on view in the main gallery: **Barbara Takenaga: New Paintings**



Isabel Bishop, *Noon Hour*, 1935. Etching, 6 7/8 x 4 7/8 inches.

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**DC MOORE GALLERY** specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. Summer hours are Monday through Friday from 10 am to 6 pm. Beginning September 5, we are open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 6 pm. For more information, for photographs, or to arrange a viewing, please email [mowers@dcmooregallery.com](mailto:mowers@dcmooregallery.com).