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Still Life with Horse, 1928

Oil on canvas

21 by 21 inches (53.3 x 53.3 cm)



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Provenance: Hans Burkhardt, Los Angeles
Ruth S. Schaffner Gallery, Santa Barbara
Private collection, Chicago
Christie's, New York, *Contemporary Art Part II*, May 6, 1992, lot 262
Private collection, United States

Exhibition: Pasadena, The Pasadena Art Museum, *Paintings by Arshile Gorky*, January-February, 1958

La Jolla, California, La Jolla Art Center, *Arshile Gorky Paintings & Drawings 1927-1937 the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Hans Burkhardt*, February-March 1963, no. 16

Literature: J.M. Jordan and R. Goldwater, *The Paintings of Arshile Gorky: A Critical Catalogue*, New York and London, 1982, p. 171, no. 47, illustrated.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided above, confirmation of these facts may not always be possible due to the unavailability of primary sources. Please be advised that the work of art described above is subject to changes in availability and price without prior notice.

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Arshile Gorky's *Still Life with Horse*, 1928 is a richly painted and tonally engaging bridge between his early figurative work and the cubist and surrealist influences that preoccupied his work of the 1930s and 40s. Nascent suggestions of cubism peer through the present work's tranquil and deceptively representational surface.

Born in Armenia, Gorky was only nine years old when the Armenian Genocide was inflicted upon his people. The horrors he witnessed left Gorky with psychological scars that would remain with him until his death in 1948. He fled to America in 1920 and quickly joined the flourishing avant-garde New York art scene. He was predominantly self-taught and looked to the revolutionary styles of Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, and Joan Miró while developing his widely influential and unique approach to the canvas. Gorky's extensive knowledge of early European modernism and his ability to emulate their pictorial innovations set him apart from his American contemporaries. Gorky manipulated rather than emulated the Synthetic Cubism of Picasso and Braque. While employing many cubist techniques, he remained true to his own creative impulses. In particular, he maintained the warmer color palette and more gestural and emotive brushwork that is on full display in *Still Life with Horse*. Also, the enigmatic forms surrounding the richly painted fruit and presiding over the painting's background are indicators of the surrealism that would soon come to fruition in his work.

While markedly figurative, *Still Life with Horse* has an enigmatic but decidedly noticeable sense of abstraction. Gorky's oeuvre lies somewhere between these two poles of painterly expression: "At times, someone appears who sees all. Gorky was one of these. Agonizingly, he saw everything that was being done in painting and that had already been done. He admired certain faraway artists' works with evident passion, and, like a dye you swallow before the X-ray, it showed up in his own pictures. It stained them with the dreams of his idols until, in his last five or six years, and emerging from the spell as from anesthesia, he found his own way, solitary and sovereign" (D. Tanning, *Between Lives: An Artist and Her World*, New York, 2001, p. 48).

After his move to the United States in 1920, Gorky combined artistic reminiscences of his homeland with elements of Post-Impressionism, Analytic Cubism, and Surrealism to produce a unique form of expression that paved the way for the seismic shift of the New York School. His synthesis of modernism's many inventions, combined with his passionate embrace of nature,

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created a new vision for painting that would inform the work of 1940s and 1950s artists, from Willem de Kooning to Clyfford Still and well beyond.

All the seeds of the visual motifs that came to define Gorky's exceptional and idiosyncratic body of work and their powerful impact on the progression and transformation of American art can be seen in *Still Life with Horse*.

Similar paintings can be found in museum collections around the world, including *Flowers in a Pitcher*, ca. 1939 in The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, and *Landscape*, 1933 in The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Arshile Gorky, *Flowers in a Pitcher*, ca. 1939, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco



Arshile Gorky, *Landscape*, 1933, The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York