

Ian Dejardin,  
Director, introduces  
the Gallery's  
winter show

26 November 2008  
– 15 February 2009

SAUL STEINBERG (1914-1999) liked to say that he had four 'homelands' – Romania, Italy, New York... and *The New Yorker*.

He was born in Romania, and studied philosophy at university there; he then moved to Milan to study architecture. While in Milan, he began drawing cartoons for *Bertoldo*, a biweekly humour magazine. As fascist Italy began its persecution of Jews, and Romania became an ally of Nazi Germany, Steinberg fled. With the help of *The New Yorker*, he eventually secured a visa to the States.

This was, by any standards, a shrewd move on the part of the magazine: Steinberg was to work for *The New Yorker* for nearly sixty years, creating a unique world-view forever to be associated with the magazine. In the meantime, the war took him all over the world, working for the intelligence corps – China, North Africa, Europe. He loved travel. He spoke several languages. This brilliant man brought not only intellectual rigour, but also an encyclopaedic grasp of European art and a uniquely surreal sense of humour, to his own output. He said later, wryly: 'I deal

with mediocrity and clichés; I am not only involved with the sublime.'

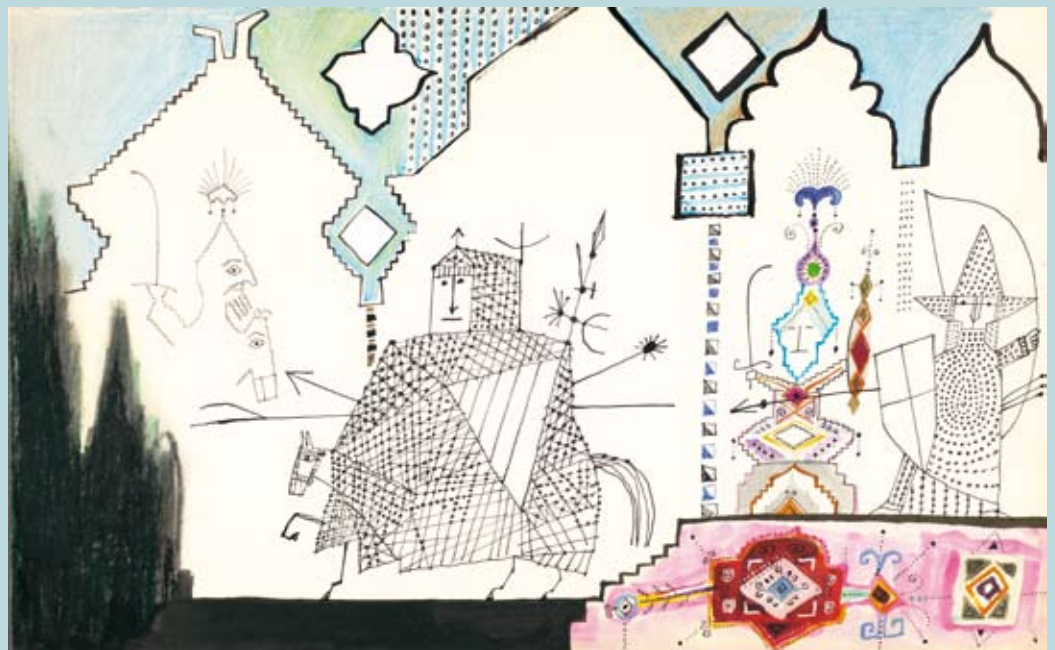
Dulwich Picture Gallery's series of exhibitions devoted to British illustrators has been one of our greatest success stories – the last one, *The Age of Enchantment*, brought in over 32,000 people. It also drew something of a temporary line under that particular series of shows, which charted the 'golden age' of British illustration between Beardsley and Heath Robinson, by way of Rackham, Beatrix Potter and E H Shepard.

*Saul Steinberg: Illuminations* marks a significant change in direction, linking that series to the series of American shows that we have lined up over the next few years. Steinberg's name is now little known over here, except to established readers of *The New Yorker*, by whom he is still revered. The exhibition reveals Steinberg for the first time in the broad perspective of his entire career. He created his own linear reality, which spread out well beyond *The New Yorker* into art galleries and museums. He often seems to take the concept of the doodle and then give it a life of its own.

# SAUL STEINBERG

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Cover: *Twenty Americans*, 1975. Graphite, crayon, coloured pencil, watercolour, and ink on paper with graph paper collage. 20 x 15 in. The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York

Below left: *Curtain design for Rossini, The Count Ory*, 1958. Ink, watercolour, and coloured pencil on paper. 14 1/2 x 23 in. The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York

Above: *Techniques at a Party*, 1953. Ink, coloured pencil, and watercolour on paper. 14 1/2 x 23 in. The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York

# ILLUMINATIONS

In doing so, his work can often take you by surprise – what looks like a simple gag can hide considerable depth and breadth of reference.

One of my favourites is his *Techniques at a Party*, of 1953. It is a very funny ensemble of individuals each drawn in a different technique – the technique stands for each person’s character, and half of the fun of this virtuoso drawing is working out the characters involved. They are all communicating like fun – but can a Picasso-like classical head really communicate meaningfully with a stippled post-impressionist lady? What will the Gibson Girl have to say to the cartoon clown? It is a brilliant and funny commentary on the loneliness of the individual in the crowd.

As a result of his perspective as an

immigrant – an outsider – his portrayal of America was both affectionate and sardonic. This privileged critical vision can be seen in *Twenty Americans*, a *New Yorker* cover image, and the *In View* cover too, where Uncle Sam and Lady Liberty are joined in a line-up with a gangster, a riot cop and a lost astronaut. Is the artist himself represented there too?

Steinberg liked words; the look and feel of them, as well as their meaning. His *I Do, I Have, I Am* from 1971 (another *New Yorker* cover) is gorgeous to look at, but again hides a very serious point at its heart – the worthlessness of material possessions. ‘I Do’ is a firework display of dazzle and spiritual excitement; ‘I Am’ has the solidity of earth and roots; on the other hand ‘I Have’ is a tumbledown washing-line of rags and broken woodwork, perilously

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Left: *Three Liberties*, 1949-51. Ink and watercolour on paper, 14 x 23 in. The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York

Right: *I Do, I Have, I Am*, 1971. Ink, marker pens, ballpoint pen, pencil, crayon, gouache, watercolour, and collage on paper, 22 3/4 x 14 in. The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York

Below: *Woman in Tub*, 1949. Gelatin silver print, 12 3/4 x 11 1/4 in. The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York

**Director's Exhibition  
Lecture**

*Thurs 27 November  
12.30pm/Linbury  
Room  
Free, no booking*

**LATE Openings:**

**New York, New York**  
*Thurs 18 December  
See page 12*

poised between the other two, over the abyss. We are reminded that Steinberg started out studying philosophy.

The variety of Steinberg's work is something quite spectacular in itself, as is his ability to combine successfully different media to create something altogether unique. For about a decade (from the late 1940s) Steinberg used photography in his work creating hybrid photo-cartoons, either by drawing on objects which were then photographed, as in *Woman in Tub*,

or by drawing on the surface of photographic prints. Through this form Steinberg questions the authenticity of reality as perceived through the camera lens. As in so much of his work, things are not as they first seem.

Steinberg lived a long life; he only died in 1999, aged 85. A Retrospective of his work toured in the 1970s, but this is the first major touring show since then. Whatever you do – don't miss it. I haven't laughed so much in years.

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