



Untitled, c. 1931, colored pencil on paper, 8.27h x 10.63w in (21h x 27w cm)

frieze masters

Sergei Eisenstein: *Drawings*

Frieze Masters | London | October 4 – 7, 2018 | Booth H10

Alexander Gray Associates in collaboration with Matthew Stephenson presents a rare private collection of drawings by the Russian filmmaker and theorist, **Sergei Eisenstein** publicly on view for the first time in the United Kingdom. These sexually explicit drawings, completed between 1931–1948, span the period of his travels in Mexico and the United States in the 1930s until his death in Moscow in 1948.

A renowned director and film montage innovator, Eisenstein also wrote extensively and made upwards of 5,000 drawings throughout his life, including designs for film sets and storyboards. This group provides insight into the creative and experimental thinking of the influential director, in part informed by his own bisexuality, as well as his considerable reading and travel. Arranged in groupings that demonstrate a diversity of content, the drawings on view are intimately scaled, mostly monochromatic, with flashes of colored pencil typically in red, blue, or green.

As historian Joan Neuberger notes, during his time in Mexico, “Eisenstein confirmed that drawing was no less important in his work as an artist than film-making and theory writing,” though it remains lesser-known. Many of his films are subtly subversive in his refusal to broadly prioritize propagandistic Soviet Realism over experimentation with camera techniques. In his “sex drawings,” Eisenstein engages in pointed institutional critiques, occasionally through the inclusion of Christian iconography and clergy members performing sacrilegious sexual acts. He also illustrates figures engaged in intercourse in public spaces, including leaning out a window and on film sets. Through his exploration of this content, Eisenstein constructs succinct and transgressive visual stories in a medium that was intentionally less public-facing than his films.

Also present in many of these drawings are irreverent depictions of inter-species relations, including a cow with women, a rabbit with a fox, and a series of images reinterpreting the myth of Leda and the Swan. These pairings highlight Eisenstein’s fascination with dualities, which he called the “unity of opposites,” as well as his interest in representing a broad range of behaviors and desires reflecting the Freudian topicality of their time. Eisenstein’s experiences in Hollywood are apparent in these drawings, in particular his interest in Walt Disney’s films, which he claimed were “the greatest contribution of the American people to art,” and which informed his sometimes cartoonish style, demonstrated in this presentation by drawings of an onanistic centaur.

After spending six months in California, Eisenstein traveled to Mexico to begin filming *¡Que Viva México!*, an epic about the country’s history. He intended his trip to last three to four months; it lasted over a year. In 1946, Eisenstein wrote, “it was in Mexico that my drawing underwent an internal catharsis, striving for mathematical abstraction and purity of line. The effect was considerably enhanced when this abstract, ‘intellectualized’ line was used for drawing especially sensual relationships between human figures.” This interest in line and the interplay of figures underscores

his connection to the work of Mexican muralists, including Diego Rivera, who Eisenstein first met in 1927, and whose work he greatly admired.

This collection of drawings has a rich history. When departing Mexico, Eisenstein was stopped, questioned, and his luggage searched at the United States border where the drawings were nearly confiscated for their incendiary nature. Upon his return to Moscow at the height of Stalin's rule, he kept the explicit images hidden until his death in 1948. His widow, Pera Atasheva, donated his archive, with the exception of most of the more graphic sex drawings, to the Russian State Archives of Literature and Art in Moscow (RGALI). Atasheva entrusted the erotic drawings to Eisenstein's close friend and collaborator, the famous Soviet cinematographer Andrei Moskvin, who protected the director's reputation by keeping the drawings hidden. After Moskvin's death in 1961, his widow safeguarded the drawings. In the late 1990s, her heirs sold the drawings to the family of the present owner. A quarter of the drawings were also donated to the permanent collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Also on view in this presentation are continual projections of three of Eisenstein's films, including his 1925 masterwork *Battleship Potemkin*, the 1979 edit of *¡Que Viva México!*, and the 1944 epic *Ivan The Terrible, Part I*. These three films provide additional context for the director's images, establishing a connection between his cinematic vision and drawing practice. In addition, a selection of photographs and ephemera, as well as a booklet with an essay by the film and Eisenstein scholar Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History at Birkbeck, University of London accompany the presentation.