

# George Marinko

1908 - 1989

*"I made no effort to be profound or recondite but to create a cryptic sense of mystery"* - *George Marinko*,  
American surrealist pioneer

Arguably America's purest surrealist painter, and certainly one of several of the nation's finest surrealists, George Marinko completed much of his best work while residing in Waterbury, studying and teaching at the Waterbury Art School from 1920 to 1950.

Born in Derby, CT in 1908 Marinko enrolled in the Waterbury Art School at age 17. There he studied with visiting Yale art professor, Lewis York, who helped raise tuition to provide Marinko with a year at Yale. The Great Depression ended formal study. Marinko took various odd jobs simply to buy food. For the federal Works Progress Administration he produced a mural in 1934, a stylized map of Waterbury, which hangs to this day in the City's Aldermanic Chambers. Another of his murals in the Elton Hotel depicts the history of innkeeping. He continued his education through wide personal readings in areas such as mythology and psychoanalysis and through travel in Mexico and Europe. By 1936 his "Inevitable Recollection" was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, and "Frustration" was shown at the Yale Gallery. By 1939 his "Orpheus in Agony" was exhibited at the World's Fair, and Marinko was appointed director of the Waterbury Art School.

Through the Depression Marinko developed a highly distinctive precise technique and extraordinary imagery. His primary surrealistic image is the bending and twisting of all sorts of common place objects, especially tools and other mechanical objects, which become living actors in bizarre postures, set against nearly extra terrestrial landscapes filled with classical and religious structures and figures, animals, clowns and everyday artifacts.

Just before World War II he married and later became the father of two sons. During the war he served as art editor for the Army newspaper in the Pacific and sent his somber sketches of soldiers to two Mattatuck Museum exhibits.

On his return he continued to work largely in isolation prompted only by his own initiative and imagination. While his works were exhibited many times at the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts, and were eventually added to the collections of dozens of museums, including Waterbury's Mattatuck Museum, Marinko remained largely unknown beyond the greater New York area. For the last 30 years of his life he lived in poverty in a two room apartment in New Haven. His apartment, virtually without furniture, was filled



with his later art which bore witness to ever growing artistic versatility; work in oil and charcoal, totemic structures of found objects and sculptures of wood, as well as traditional regional landscapes and clowns produced simply for income.

Wider recognition came with the first major retrospective exhibit of American surrealism in 1977 at Rutgers University. In 1978 Mattatuck Museum presented an exhibition solely in his honor and displayed his work again in 1988. By 1989, the year of Marinko's death, his "Orpheus in Agony" was chosen the quintessential image of surrealism for the New York Public Library's nationally acclaimed display of "Surrealist Books and Prints". Today a single work by Marinko can bring over \$60,000. George Marinko today has arrived as one of America's major surrealist pioneers.