

OREGON JEWISH MUSEUM AND CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION



Media Release

June 3, 2019

Exhibition: Betty LaDuke - EARLY WORK

June 6, 2019 - September 22, 2019

Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education

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Betty LaDuke EARLY WORK, presents work from the 1960s with a series of black and white prints celebrating the vibrant street life of the immigrant neighborhoods of New York and an experimental dimensional painting

Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education opens an exhibition in the East Gallery of prints by internationally celebrated artist Betty LaDuke, curated by Bruce Guenther, Adjunct Curator for Special Exhibitions.

Since 1964 LaDuke has made her home in Southern Oregon, traveling the world with her sketchbook to observe and record the everyday lives of the people she encounters. In her distinguished 65 year career, LaDuke has remained committed to an art of advocacy and social justice through personal witness and engagement with people across five continents.

"These early works exemplify her aesthetic vocabulary and her political engagement at the beginning of her lifelong search for a universal representation of the figure as the embodiment of all humanity," said Bruce Guenther, Adjunct Curator for Special Exhibitions.

The lithographs and etchings in this exhibition reveal LaDuke's memories of the vibrant life in the immigrant neighborhoods of New York, and stories from the Hebrew bible in her early sketchbooks. The works illuminate her search to communicate the immediacy of urban street life and the emotional reality of Jewish immigrant communities of her childhood. She uses a compositional device of compressed groups of figures contained within an active silhouette to convey complex interpersonal interactions within the dynamics of space and time. LaDuke tackles complicated narratives in multi-panel subjects from the Hebrew bible. Her use of soft-ground etching produces mysterious dramatic spaces and sooty black surfaces that unify the multiple-figure events she depicts. The physicality of the print surface and strong compositions characterize her printmaking from the early 1960s through the 1970s. In LaDuke's large collaged and painted three-dimensional painting *Holocaust Remembered* (1968) there is a shift in her figurative language from specific ethnicities to universal and the experimental direction in painting that LaDuke took to voice the social upheavals of the late 1960s.

Betty LaDuke, née Bernstein was born in New York City in 1933, the only child of Yiddish-speaking immigrants who met in the Bronx. Sam Bernstein had fled from the unrest and pogroms of a rural shtetl in the Pale of Settlement and Helen Peskin emigrated from the city of Brest-Litovsk to find a new life in the United States. A house painter and a garment worker, LaDuke's non-observant parents were politically active in the trade unions. They sent LaDuke from the age of nine to fourteen to the International Workers Order sponsored interracial summer camp, Wo-Chi-Ca, which welcomed all nationalities (and was later closed by McCarthyite forces in the 1950s). LaDuke's first encounter with issues of social justice began in the Wo-Chi-Ca art classes taught by African-American artists Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White, who would become life-long adult friends. Determined to make art every day, she attended the prestigious High School of Music and Art in Harlem, where she began her life-long drawing practice on the streets of Harlem. College scholarships took her to Denver and Cleveland before she entered the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where she studied with the great American draftsman Rico Lebrun and met the Mexican muralists—Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Returning to New York after painting and living with the campesinos for three years, LaDuke taught art and directed art programs at the Grand Street Settlement House. Marriage to Native American activist Vincent "Sun Bear" LaDuke and a move to Los Angeles, positioned LaDuke to earn a MA and begin working intensely in printmaking. LaDuke separated from her husband when she took a position at Southern Oregon University, and has lived in Ashland since 1964.

She received the Oregon Governor's Art Award in 1993, and was honored with a dedicated gallery of her paintings in the National Museum of Eritrea in 2017.

Betty LaDuke—Early Work curated by Bruce Guenther, Adjunct Curator for Special Exhibitions, is supported by the Craig E. Wollner Exhibition Fund.

About Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education

The Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education (OJMCHÉ) explores the legacy of the Jewish experience in Oregon, teaches the universal lessons of the Holocaust, and provides opportunities for intercultural conversation. OJMCHÉ challenges our visitors to resist indifference and discrimination and to envision a just and inclusive world.

OJMCHÉ was formed through the 2014 merger of the Oregon Jewish Museum (founded 1990) and the Oregon Holocaust Resource Center (founded 1984). Together we have deepened our focus on Jewish art, history, and culture, while simultaneously recognizing the challenge of remaining relevant in a changing and tumultuous world.

In June 2017, following a successful capital campaign, OJMCHÉ moved into our new home in Portland's North Park Blocks. The museum building now has gallery space capable of accommodating traveling exhibitions and robust public programming, state-of-the-art storage for our archives and artifact collections, an auditorium, a gift shop, and a café. We serve as the community repository for the Jewish experience in Oregon and as the proud stewards of the Oregon Holocaust Memorial in Portland's Washington Park, offering year-round tours and speakers from our Holocaust Speakers' Bureau and bringing thousands of school children to both the museum and the Oregon Holocaust Memorial.

As a cultural organization serving all of Oregon and southwest Washington, OJMCHÉ provides a community-wide gathering place for exhibitions, public events, educational programs, and performances, and offers a wide range of collaborative opportunities. OJMCHÉ welcomes people of all income levels, ages, religions and ethnicities. At OJMCHÉ we seek to teach visitors how to recognize the roots of hatred, how to instill values of inclusion and respect, and how to participate in an inclusive, vibrant

democracy built on understanding one another and reconciling differences. Our values shape all of our exhibitions and programs, which celebrate and explore – in the broadest terms – issues of identity, the forces of prejudice, and Jewish contributions to world culture and ideas. For more information, visit www.ojmche.org.

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