

Seeing the World Within: Charles Seliger in the 1940s

Curated by Jonathan Stuhlman

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

9 June – 16 September 2012

"I found a wonderful phrase...which I think states the nature of my painting in a most exact way: 'The Structure of Becoming,' two aspects of my work, so clear to me....My paintings are always concerned with the most minute relationships and structure yet always remain in flux, in a state of becoming, never (in spite of the intensity and detail) to arrive at a final and recognizable form." (Charles Seliger, journal entry, 1 December 1980).

This exhibition brings to Venice and to Italy for the first time a corpus of works—thirty-three paintings and drawings—by American Surrealist painter, Charles Seliger (1926-2009), working in the 1940s, the beginning of his career, that trace his rapid development from youthful enthusiasm and talent to a mature artist, confident in his own, original artistic vision.

As an adolescent Seliger showed an precocious interest in painting and modern art. By the time he was 20 he had developed a vocabulary and syntax of his own which were to be the basis of his future career. The fantastic imagery, inventive processes and creative freedom peculiar to Surrealism enthralled him, and led him, between 1942 and 1950, the period to which the works in this exhibition belong, towards his own aesthetic maturity. Seliger's theory and practice were profoundly indebted to Surrealist themes and to Surrealist automatism as a key to unlocking the creative impulse. Convinced of the inadequacy of normal vision to apprehend reality in its totality, he set out to paint the invisible. Seliger visualizes a natural world that is concealed from the human eye: biological structures, cells, organic viscera, and bones. In the same decade he acquired an interest, that was to endure his entire life, in the concept of metamorphosis, which was central to Surrealism. His images express profundity and interiority, as metaphors for the unconscious. He was if anything closer to true Surrealism than his contemporaries, many of whom were later to figure as American Abstract Expressionists. Despite his participation in the artistic climate that gave rise to Abstract Expressionism (New York in the early 1940s), Seliger developed a distinctive content, style and aesthetic of his own. Rarely has an artist matured so fast and so successfully at such an early age: slow motion images of the micro-world that surrounds us and of which we are made. In 1945 (30 October-17 November) Peggy Guggenheim gave Seliger his first solo exhibition, in her New York gallery Art of This Century. He was just 19 years of age.

This exhibition follows the swift evolution in which Seliger boldly experimented a variety of approaches to the making of his art. Given the times in which he grew up one can but agree with John Yau who has written: "In hindsight, it seems remarkable that Seliger was never overwhelmed by the circle of brilliant older artists to which he belonged. Despite the heady artistic and literary milieu in which he moved, he was able to establish and pursue his own direction." (Quoted from John Yau, *Charles Seliger: Chaos to Complexity*, New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2003). The paintings exhibited in this exhibition constituted the fertile ground from which grew a sixty-year career, the importance and brilliance of which are still to be discovered.

Peggy Guggenheim COLLECTION

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The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with texts in both English and Italian by the curator Jonathan Stuhlmán and Michelle Dubois.

Seeing the World Within: Charles Seliger in the 1940s is made possible through support from the Mint Museum Auxiliary and awards from the Terra Foundation for American Art and The Dedalus Foundation. It has been organized by the Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA, where it is on view through May 13. It travels first to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (9 June – 16 September) and then to the Munson-Williams Proctor Art Institute, Utica, New York (20 October – 20 January 2013). With the support of *Corriere della Sera*, Radio Italia is media partner. Hangar Design Group has designed the exhibition communications.

The programs of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection are made possible by the Advisory Board and by:

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opening hours: 10:00 am-6:00 pm; closed Tuesdays
admission: €12; over 65 years of age €10; students €7; 0-10 years old free
for further information: tel. +39 041. 2405 404/415 - press@guggenheim-venice.it

FACT SHEET

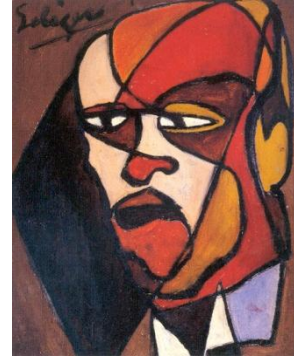
TITLE	<i>Seeing the World Within: Charles Seliger in the 1940s</i>
VENUES AND DATES	Peggy Guggenheim Collection June 9 – September 16, 2012
EXHIBITED WORKS	38
CURATORS	Jonathan Stuhlman
OVERVIEW	This is the first exhibition in Italy of the painting of Charles Seliger (1926-2009). It focuses on the first decade of his career, when his work was inspired by European Surrealism, which had shifted its centre of activities from Paris to New York. More than thirty of his best paintings from the 1940s (from both public and private collections) trace Seliger's origins as an artist, and explore the route by which he arrived at his mature style in the early 1950s. Peggy Guggenheim gave Seliger his first solo exhibition, in 1945 at Art of This Century, New York. Organized by The Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC, USA.
ADMISSION TICKET TO THE COLLECTION	Regular euro 12; seniors euro 10 (over 65); students euro 7 (under 26 or with a student ID card); children 0-10 yrs and members free entrance (further information on membership: membership@guggenheim-venice.it). Admission tickets allow the public to visit the temporary exhibition, the permanent collection, the Gianni Mattioli Collection and the Nasher Sculpture Garden. Free guided tours of the temporary exhibitions are daily at 3:30 pm. Reservations are not required.
OPENING HOURS	Daily from 10 am to 6 pm, closed on Tuesday and December 25 and 26
INFORMATION	info@guggenheim-venice.it www.guggenheim-venice.it/peggyg.mobi
BOOKINGS AND GUIDED TOURS	tel. 041.2405440/419
EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES	tel. 041.2405401/444
HOW TO ARRIVE	From Piazzale Roma - Ferrovia (train station): vaporetto no. 2 towards Lido, get off at the Accademia stop (25 minutes); vaporetto no. 1 towards Lido, get off at the Accademia stop (30 minutes); Vaporetto dell'Arte, Accademia stop / From St. Mark's Square: vaporetto no. 1, 2 towards Piazzale Roma-Ferrovia, get off at Accademia stop (5 minutes).
COMMUNICATION AND PRESS OFFICE	Alexia Boro, Maria Rita Cerilli / tel. 041.2405404/415 Please, once published, send the article to: press@guggenheim-venice.it

Checklist of the Exhibition (Elenco delle opere)

All works from the Estate of Charles Seliger are Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

Tutte le opere provenienti Estate of Charles Seliger si riproducono per gentile concessione della Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

Gustave Stresemann (Gustave Stresemann), 1942
Oil on canvasboard, 15 x 12 inches (38.1 x 30.5 cm)
Estate of Charles Seliger



Bird and Flower (Uccello e fiore), 1943
Oil on canvasboard, 10 x 14 inches (25.4 x 35.6 cm)
Collection of Ruby Tanner Rosenfeld



Primal Markings (Segni primitive), 1943
Oil on canvasboard, 16 x 12 inches (40.6 x 30.5 cm)
Collection of Bella Walden Rosenfeld



Primal Markings I (Segni primitivi I), 1943
Oil on canvas, 25 x 18 inches (63.5 x 45.7 cm)
Estate of Charles Seliger



Biomorphic Series, Organic Form #2 (Serie biomorfica, forma organica #2), 1944

India ink, white tempera, and watercolor on paper, 12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.4 cm)

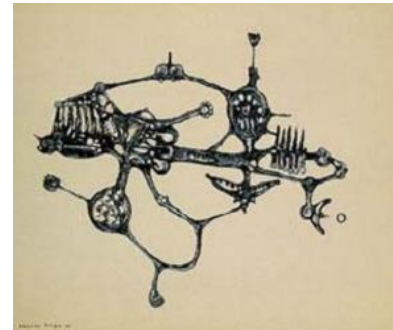
Estate of Charles Seliger



Biomorphic Series, Organic Form #4 (Serie biomorfica, forma organica #4), 1944

India ink and white tempera on paper, 11 x 14 inches (27.9 x 35.6 cm)

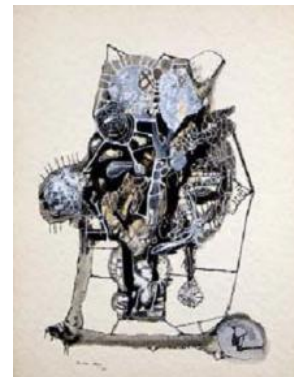
Estate of Charles Seliger



Biomorphic Series, Organic Form #12 (Serie biomorfica, forma organica #12), 1944

India ink, earth and white tempera on Morilla board, 14 ¾ x 11 inches (137.5 x 27.9 cm)

Collection of Michael Rosenfeld and halley k harrisburg



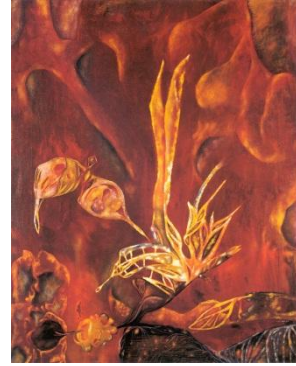
Biomorphic Series, Organic Form # 18 (Serie biomorfica, forma organica #18), 1944

India ink, earth and white tempera on Morilla board, 11 x 13 ½ inches (27.9 x 34.3 cm)

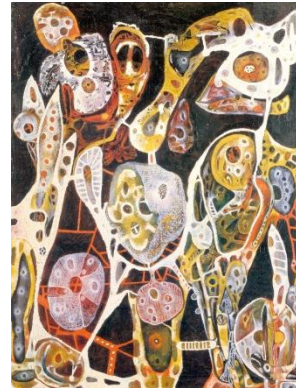
Estate of Charles Seliger



Confrontation (Confronto), 1944
Oil on canvas, 27 ³/₄ x 22 inches (70.5 x 55.9 cm)
Greenville County Museum of Art, Museum purchase



Cerebral Landscape (Paesaggio cerebrale), 1944
Oil on canvas, 24 ³/₁₆ x 18 ³/₁₆ inches (61.4 x 46.2 cm)
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Zalstem-Salessky



Don Quixote (Don Chisciotte), 1944
Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches (76.2 x 101.6 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of Elaine Graham Weitzen



Interior Space (Spazio interior), 1944
Oil on canvas, 36 x 15 inches (91.4 x 38.1 cm)
Estate of Charles Seliger



The Last Cyclops (L'ultimo ciclope), 1944
Oil on canvas, 22 x 22 inches (55.9 x 55.9 cm)
Collection of Marjorie and Michael Levine, New York



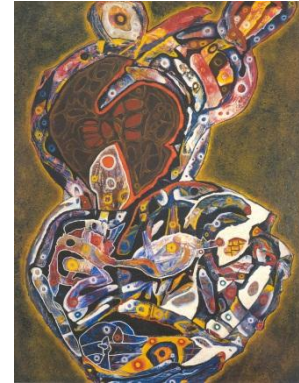
Sex, Evolution and the Man (Sesso, evoluzione e l'uomo), 1944
Ink, watercolor, and collage on paper, 12 x 9 inches (30.5 x 22.9 cm)
Estate of Charles Seliger



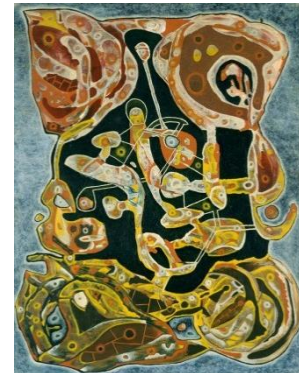
Hidden Skeleton (Scheletro nascosto), 1945
Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 inches (55.9 x 71.1 cm)
Norton Museum of Art, Purchase R. H. Norton Trust, 2004.24



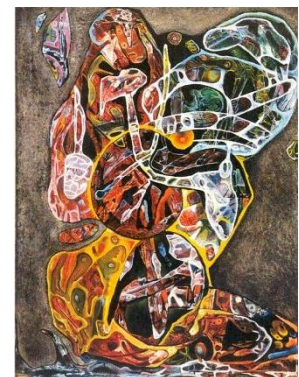
Orator (Oratore), 1945
Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
Collection of Dennis Alter



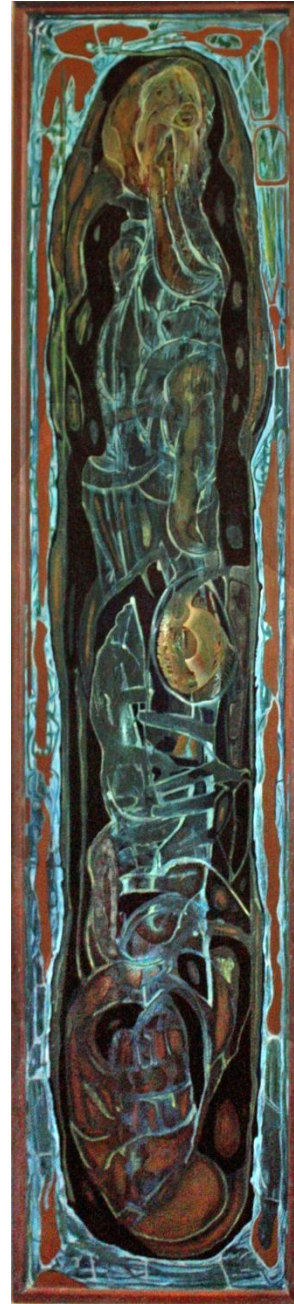
The Trapeze (Il trapezio), 1945
Oil on canvas, 36 x 28 inches (91.4 x 71.1 cm)
Private Collection; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY



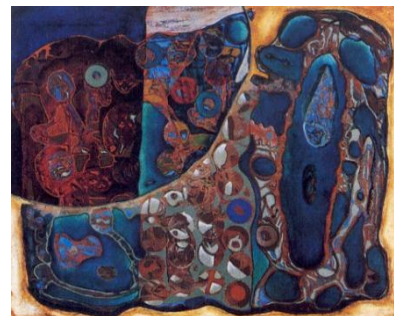
Homage to Erasmus Darwin (Omaggio a Erasmus Darwin), 1945-46
Oil on canvas, 35 ¾ x 27 ¾ inches (90.8 x 70.5 cm)
University of Iowa Art Gallery



Natural History: Botanical #1 (Storia naturale: Botanico #1), 1946
Oil on canvas, 47 x 11 ¼ inches (119.4 x 28.8 cm)
Estate of Charles Seliger



Natural History: Form Within Rock (Storia naturale: forma nella roccia), 1946
Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 inches (63.5 x 76.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of August Hanniball, Jr., 1947



Natural History: Organic Forms, Plant and Animal (Storia naturale: forme organiche, pianta e animale), 1946

Oil on canvas, 54 x 46 inches (137.2 x 116.8 cm)

Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld



Natural History: Organic Forms (Plant and Animal) Storia naturale: forme organiche (pianta e animale), 1946

Watercolor and wax on illustration board, 18 1/2 x 26 inches (47 x 66 cm)

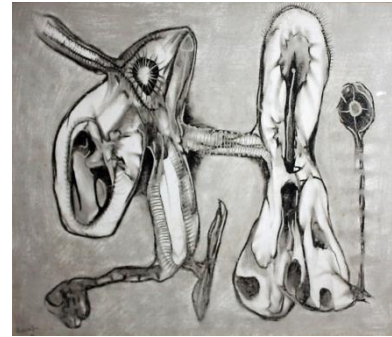
Estate of Charles Seliger



Study of Organic Forms (Studio di forme organiche), 1946

Ink on paper, 19 1/2 x 24 1/2 inches (44.5 x 59.4 cm)

Estate of Charles Seliger



Earth Crust (Crosta terrestre), 1947

Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 inches (55.9 x 71.1 cm)

Estate of Charles Seliger



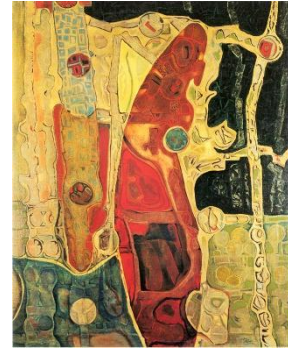
Metamorphosis (Metamorfosi), 1947

Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches (40.6 x 50.8 cm)

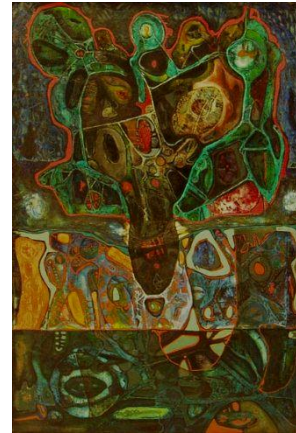
Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld



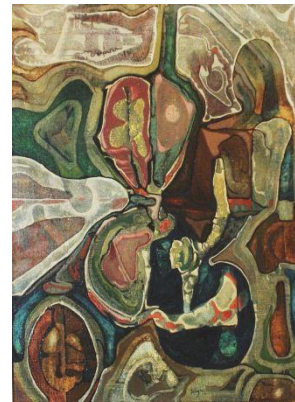
Sentinel (Sentinella), 1947
Oil on canvas, 33 ½ x 29 ½ inches (85.1 x 75 cm)
Collection of Elaine Weitzen



Subterranean Excavation, Sky and Air (Scavi sotterranei, cielo e aria), 1947
Oil on canvas, 34 x 20 inches (86.4 x 50.8 cm)
Gift of Elaine Graham Weitzen and Dr. Hyman G. Weitzen, Addison
Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts



Botanical Form (Forma botanica), 1948
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches (50.8 x 40.6 cm)
Estate of Charles Seliger



*Botanical Form: Glacial Fragment #15 (Forma botanica:
frammento glaciale #15)*, 1948
Tempera on Masonite, 9 x 11 ⅞ inches (22.9 x 30.2 cm)
Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld



Organic Form: Air, Sea, Land Enveloped (Forma organica: avvolta da aria, mare e terra), 1948

Tempera on Masonite, 9 x 12 inches (22.9 x 30.5 cm)

Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Edward W. Root
Bequest 57.229



Suspense (Tensione), 1948

Tempera, oil, and wax on Masonite, 13 x 8 ¾ inches (33 x 22.2 cm)

Collection of Tom and Susan O'Hanlan



Winterscape: Interior of a Cocoon (Paesaggio invernale: interno di un bozzolo), 1948-49

Enamel, paint, tempera, and ink on paper, 12 15/16 x 10 5/8 inches (32.9 x 27 cm)

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Gift, Dr. Alexandra Adler, 1985.
85.3291



Fish (Pesce), 1949

Pastel, oil, tempera, watercolor, and ink on paper, 9 ¾ x 27 ¾ inches (24.8 x 70.5 cm)

Estate of Charles Seliger



Hidden Flower Under Earth (Fiore nascosto sotto la terra), 1949
Tempera, oil, and ink on cardboard, 14 ¼ x 10 ¼ inches (36.2 x 26 cm)
Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Edward W. Root Bequest 57.228



Undersea Starfish (Stella marina sotto il mare), 1949
Gesso, ink, tempera, varnish, and oil on illustration board, 10 ¾ x 13 ⅞ inches (27.3 x 35.2 cm)
Collection of the Newark Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. S.L. Berne, 1949



Confrontation: Scorpion and Tarantula (Confronto: scorpione e tarantola), 1950
Ink, watercolor, and tempera on illustration board, 20 ¾ x 19 ⅜ inches (52.7 x 49.2 cm)
Estate of Charles Seliger

