



MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM of ART
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Mississippi Museum of Art Presents
Curious George Saves the Day: The Art of Margret and H. A. Rey
Opens Saturday, March 3, 2012
March 3 – July 22, 2012

DRAMATIC STORY OF ESCAPE AND SURVIVAL
REVEALED THROUGH NEARLY EIGHTY ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

(Jackson, Miss) ... The Mississippi Museum of Art (the Museum) presents the exhibition, *Curious George Saves the Day: The Art of Margret and H. A. Rey*, from March 3 through July 22, 2012. It is the twelfth presentation in The Annie Laurie Swaim Hearin Memorial Exhibition Series. Established in 1989 to honor the memory of Annie Laurie Swaim Hearin, one of the Museum's most dedicated patrons and volunteers, the Hearin series showcases exhibitions of world-class art, attracting visitors to Jackson from across Mississippi, the Southeast, and beyond.

Curious George Saves the Day: The Art of Margret and H. A. Rey has been organized by Claudia Nahson, Curator at The Jewish Museum, New York. The exhibition installation design was created by Barbara Suhr. Kris Stone designed the reading room and all other theatrical environments. Katharine Staelin, Assistant Curator at The Jewish Museum, designed the interactive timeline which incorporates original illustrations by Marcellus Hall, whose work has been featured in *The New Yorker* and other publications. *Curious George Saves the Day: The Art of Margret and H. A. Rey* is supported through a bequest from the Estate of Lore Ross.

Curious George, the impish monkey protagonist of many adventures, may never have seen the light of day were it not for the determination and courage of

his creators: illustrator H. A. Rey (1898 - 1977) and his wife, author and artist Margret Rey (1906 - 1996). They were both born in Hamburg, Germany, to Jewish families and lived together in Paris from 1936 to 1940. Hours before the Nazis marched into the city in June 1940, the Reys fled on bicycles carrying drawings for their children's stories including one about a mischievous monkey, then named Fifi. Not only did they save their animal characters, but the Reys themselves were saved by their illustrations when authorities found them among their belongings. This may explain why saving the day after a narrow escape became the premise of most of their Curious George stories.

After their fateful escape from Paris and a four-month journey across France, Spain, Portugal, and Brazil, the couple settled in New York in the fall of 1940. In all, the Reys authored and illustrated more than thirty books, most of them for children, with seven of them starring Curious George. Over seventy years after the arrival of Curious George in America, the monkey's antics have been translated into more than a dozen languages, including Hebrew and Yiddish, to the delight of readers, young and old, around the world.

The exhibition at the Museum offers visitors a rare opportunity to view nearly eighty original drawings and vibrant watercolors of Curious George and other characters. Many of these works have never been on display before. Preparatory dummy books, vintage photographs, and documentation related to the Reys' escape from Nazi Europe, such as H. A. Rey's journals detailing the couple's perilous journey to freedom, are also included. One of the exhibition galleries will be transformed into a reading room for visitors of all ages inspired by the beloved monkey's escapades in *Curious George Flies a Kite*.

In addition, the exhibition features an interactive timeline, accessed via a touch-screen computer, about the Reys' life in France from the late 1930s through their fateful escape in the summer of 1940. Visitors will be able to view additional pages of H. A. Rey's journal, detailing the couple's journey to safety; images of illustrations by H. A. Rey; photographs taken by Margret Rey in France; documentary photography related to early World War II in France; and historic video. Audio interviews with the couple are also included.

“We are very excited about hosting this extraordinary exhibition. While on the surface the antics of a monkey entertain us, in reality they serve to teach us important life lessons about perseverance, bravery, and optimism,” said Betsy Bradley, director of the Mississippi Museum of Art. “The Reys’ personal story is one of triumph in the face of danger. Through George, they reveal their own heroics that, in the end, uplift and inspire their readers.”

Following its showing at The Jewish Museum, New York, the exhibition traveled to the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, California (November 14, 2010 to March 13, 2011); the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia (April 27 to September 18, 2011); and the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts (November 12, 2011 to February 5, 2012).

H. A. Rey (né Hans Augusto Reyersbach) had no formal art training, but in the early 1920s he designed and lithographed circus posters in Hamburg. Margret Rey (née Margarete Waldstein) studied art and photography at the Bauhaus School and then worked in advertising firms and photographic studios in Germany and England in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The two first met in Hamburg before Hans departed for Rio de Janeiro in 1925 to work for a relative. They were married in 1935, after Margret joined him there, following Hitler's ascent to power in Germany.

An extended honeymoon took them to Paris, where the Reys began working on children's books. Filled with gentle humor and illustrated with H. A. Rey's vivid watercolors, their stories were usually formulated by Hans and later developed by Margret into a full plot.

Following the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, and France's declaration of war against Germany, the Reys sought refuge first in the southern region of Gers and later in Normandy, fleeing Paris for the third and last time on June 12, 1940. Despite the difficulties, the Reys were prolific in France, publishing seven books from 1937 through 1939 (three in both French and English) and completing the manuscripts and drawings for at least four others later published in America. On October 14, 1940, the Reys finally reached New

York. Within a month, four of the manuscripts they had brought with them were accepted for publication by the publisher Houghton Mifflin.

Exhibition highlights include original drawings and bright watercolors for *Raffy and the 9 Monkeys* (in which Curious George makes his debut as Fifi), featuring a lonely giraffe named Raffy and the nine monkeys that become his playmates; *Whiteblack the Penguin Sees the World* with Whiteblack setting out on a globe-trotting pursuit of new adventures; *Fifi: The Adventures of a Monkey* (later published as *Curious George*); and subsequent American escapades of the famous monkey hero.

Whether falsely alarming the fire department while experimenting with a telephone, going up in the air with a bouquet of balloons or a kite, or falling into the water after a failed attempt to fish with a mop, the little monkey is always in trouble, both propelled and undone by his insatiable curiosity and appetite for adventure. While the idea of the monkey's narrow escape from danger was introduced in the first Curious George story created by the Reys in France, the concept of "saving the day" is only used in their later books written in the safety of America. By the time the man with the yellow hat comes to his rescue, George's capers have already been mitigated with some poetic justice, which may be understood as emblematic of the important role the character had played both in saving the Reys' lives when fleeing Nazi Europe and later helping them rebuild their careers in the United States. In turn, the little monkey born in France acts out the fantasies of many immigrants: he lands an acting job in Hollywood soon upon arrival, advances research by traveling in a spaceship, and makes it to the front page of newspapers, all the while becoming thoroughly Americanized.

It is fitting that the last venue for this exhibition is in Mississippi; most of the art and documentation in the exhibition has been lent by the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi (USM). After the exhibition concludes at the Museum, the art and documentation return to USM.

“The de Grummond Collection is recognized worldwide as the premier Children’s Literature Collection,” said Ellen Ruffin, Curator of the de Grummond Collection. “We are pleased that the Curious George exhibition comes home to Mississippi and makes its final stop at the Mississippi Museum of Art.”

Curious George Saves the Day: The Art of Margret and H. A. Rey is made possible locally through the generous support of the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation. Additional support is provided by Trustmark Bank, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi, *The Clarion-Ledger Media Group*, and the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau. Support is also provided in part by funding from the Mississippi Arts Commission, a state agency, and in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Museum hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM; Sunday, noon to 5 PM; closed Mondays. Admission: Adults \$12, Senior Adults (60+) \$10, children (6 – college) \$6, children 5 and under free, Museum members free.

For more information about the Mississippi Museum of Art’s exhibitions, programs, and special events, please call 601-960-1515 or 1-866-VIEW ART (843-9278), or visit www.msmuseumart.org.

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