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Modern-Age Spirituality
at the Heart of The Wolfsonian's Fall/Winter Season:
***The Pursuit of Abstraction*, October 7, 2016–April 16, 2017**

A rare tapestry by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
anchors exhibition of fine and decorative art dating 1900–1950

MIAMI BEACH (June 23, 2016) — This October, The Wolfsonian–Florida International University examines cultural responses to spiritual crises of the modern age in *The Pursuit of Abstraction*, an exhibition of works by early twentieth-century artists searching for meaning beyond the boundaries of scientific reasoning and rationality. Drawn from the museum's permanent collection, The Jeri L. Wolfson Collection, and The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of Decorative and Propaganda Arts Promised Gift, the exhibition features paintings, prints, sculpture, and decorative art—including one of the few theater curtains ever created by renowned German expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, innovatively displayed for a full front-and-back view of the overpainted canvas to reveal two different moments in the life of the work.

The Pursuit of Abstraction will be on view from October 7, 2016 through April 16, 2017, and paired with an online content platform with images, essays, and other supplementary material. In addition to Kirchner, featured artists include Mabel Alvarez, Wenzel Hablik, Victor Karl Hammer, Gertrude Hermes, Agnes Pelton, Henry van de Velde, and Ida O'Keeffe, younger sister of Georgia O'Keeffe.

“As modernization eroded mysticism, artists experimented with new forms of expression to reintroduce mystery into everyday life,” explained Wolfsonian curator Matthew Abess, who

organized the exhibition. “This spiritual counterculture sought to reenchant the world by way of aesthetic experience.”

Focusing on works produced between 1900 and 1950, the exhibition takes a close look at North American and European artists that turned to abstract thought, feeling, and form as counterpoints to the concrete realities and alienation of modern life. As the world around them became increasingly secular and urbanized, these makers imagined new expressions of spiritual awareness that drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources: philosophy, mythology, psychology, poetry, and ideologies ranging from established religious doctrines (Christianity and Buddhism) to newer, lesser-known schools of thought (Theosophy and Anthroposophy). Despite this diversity, common threads are found in an emphasis on transformation, allusion to forces within and forces beyond, and the depiction of otherworldly figures.

Of the roughly 80 objects on view, highlights include:

- Kirchner’s massive, 7x16-ft theater curtain from the 1920s, installed at The Wolfsonian to reveal both the later overpainting for a 1931 performance and the original composition of a Dionysian/cosmic fantasy scene, which remains visible as a mirror image on the reverse;
- *Energia sociale* [Social Energy] (1920), a painting by Italian artist Sexto Canegallo that expresses spiritual harmony through a synthesis of color and line;
- *Abstraction* (1926–38), a sensuous painting of mountain summits and valleys by mountaineer Georgia Engelhard, whose developed her signature style alongside her aunt and frequent companion, Georgia O’Keeffe;
- *Silent Places* (c. 1929), a colorful, meditative dreamscape by Mabel Alvarez;
- Agnes Pelton’s luminous painting *Radiance* (c. 1929), which seeks to render light as a manifestation of inner being;
- An angular desk with bookcase (c. 1930) by designer Camillo Cerri that evokes the Anthroposophical belief that prismatic, elemental forms could reveal spiritual mysteries;
- *The Stokowski Symphony* (1934), a tonal portrait of composer Leopold Stokowski by partially deaf artist Dorothy Brett, painted in soft pastels to convey the mystery of musical experience; and
- A selection of prints from Wenzel Hablik’s *Schaffende Kräfte* [Creative Forces] portfolio (1942), portraying a visionary, crystalline utopia.

“It is commonly said, ‘art feeds the soul,’” stated Tim Rodgers, Wolfsonian director. “This peek inside the vaults of The Wolfsonian and the unique collections of Jeri and Micky Wolfson provides a feast for viewers, inviting them on a journey into an abstracted world of feeling and sensation, color and light.”

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Exhibition Support

The Pursuit of Abstraction is made possible by Funding Arts Network (FAN).

About The Wolfsonian–Florida International University

The Wolfsonian–FIU is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collection comprises approximately 180,000 objects from the 1850s to the 1950s—the height of the Industrial Revolution through the aftermath of the Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial-design objects; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian is located at 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL. Admission is \$10 for adults; \$5 for seniors, students, and children age 6–12; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under six. The museum is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 10am–6pm; Friday, 10am–9pm; Sunday, noon–6pm; and is closed on Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at wolfsonian.org for further information.

The Wolfsonian receives generous and ongoing support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; and City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program, Cultural Arts Council.

About Florida International University

Florida International University is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity and recognized as a Carnegie engaged university. It is a public research university with colleges and schools that offers 196 bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in fields such as engineering, computer science, international relations, architecture, law and medicine. As one of South Florida's anchor institutions, FIU contributes almost \$9 billion each year to the local economy. FIU is Worlds Ahead in finding solutions to the most challenging problems of our time. FIU emphasizes research as a major component of its mission. FIU has awarded more than 220,000 degrees and enrolls more than 54,000 students in two campuses and three centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell, FIU@I-75, and the Miami Beach Urban Studios. FIU's Medina Aquarius Program houses the Aquarius Reef Base, a unique underwater research facility in the Florida Keys. FIU also supports artistic and cultural engagement through its three museums: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, The Wolfsonian–FIU, and The Jewish Museum of Florida–FIU. FIU is a member of Conference USA and more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit fiu.edu.