

**BEATRICE WOOD**  
**Drawings, Prints, Ceramics**

# BEATRICE WOOD

## Drawings, Prints, Ceramics

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## Preface

I have long admired the art, intellectual curiosity and independence of the California artist Beatrice Wood. Indeed I regret that our paths did not cross during her long and colorful life. It was therefore a particular pleasure to receive an exhibition proposal of the artist's rare drawings and prints from the distinguished scholar and our friend, Francis Naumann. Wood's art, and in particular her drawings, embodies her iconoclastic and restless spirit, and reveal a rich interior life. I am delighted too, that these charming and disarming works on paper are accompanied by a selection of the artist's ceramic sculptures.

L.A. Louver and Francis Naumann first worked together in 2016. Bonded by a mutual interest in Marcel Duchamp, L.A. Louver presented Francis's collection of the artist's works and ephemera dating from 1917-1968. For my own part, it would have been professionally and intellectually satisfying solely to have our second floor gallery filled with Duchamp's creations: original editioned objects and prints, collaborative designs, catalogues, readymades and archival materials. However it was additionally gratifying that L.A. Louver placed the entire collection with M+ Museum in Hong Kong, where it serves as a scholarly and art historically vital resource for the region.

Duchamp's 1963 retrospective at the Pasadena Museum of Art, curated by Walter Hopps (Ferus Gallery co-founder and close friend of Ed Kienholz), is a watershed in Southern California art history. It remains a fabled moment: Kienholz met Duchamp during that time, and Beatrice Wood attended the opening, where she danced. The following day, Beatrice (who had first met Duchamp in 1915) threw an enormous party in Duchamp's honor at her Ojai home.

Oh, to have been at that party! That is then – but we can celebrate today with Wood's art. In so doing, first and foremost I extend enormous thanks to Francis Naumann for offering us this collection and for his engaging essays and insights. I also thank his colleague Dana Martin-Strebel for a beautifully designed catalogue and for a myriad of organizational endeavors. And as always, I thank my colleagues at L.A. Louver.

In 1965, Anaïs Nin wrote a review of Wood's exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco for *Artforum*. She concluded it thusly: "The Japanese say it is the irregularity of the potter's clay by which the sculptor reveals his humanity. Beatrice Wood combines her colors like a painter, makes them vibrate like a musician. They have strength even while iridescent and transparent. They have the rhythm and the lustre of both jewels and of human eyes. Water poured from one of her jars would taste like wine."

To the imagination and work of Beatrice Wood, we raise a toast.

Peter Goulds  
Venice, California



Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Beatrice Wood*, ca. 1917, gelatin silver print.  
The Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts, Ojai, California

## From Scrawls to Art: The Drawings and Prints of Beatrice Wood

Francis M. Naumann

Throughout her life, Beatrice Wood referred to her drawings as mere “scrawls,” but when framed and hung on the wall of an art gallery or museum, she was surprised to see them magically transformed into works of art. The majority of these drawings record events that took place in her private life, imagery that supplement entries she made in a diary she faithfully maintained for 83 years, from 1915 through 1998, and by photographs that she took throughout her life.<sup>1</sup> These records formed the basis of her autobiography, which was published in 1985.<sup>2</sup> Until recently, her drawings played only a secondary role in telling this story, yet they document incidents and events she experienced with greater immediacy and emotion than whatever could be captured in words or by a camera.

Essentially, her activities as a draftsman can be divided into three basic periods: (I) Dada: early drawings made in New York from 1915 through 1920 (**Cat. 1-8**); (II) Art Deco: drawings and prints that date from 1926 through to the mid-1930s produced while she was living in Los Angeles (**Cat. 9-39**); and (III) Late Drawings: prompted by the discovery and display of her drawings in the mid-1970s, Wood began drawing again, an activity she engaged in nearly every evening at her home in Ojai, California, a practice that would continue until just a few years before her death at the age of 105 in 1998 (**Cat. 40-50**).

### I

Wood started drawing in her teenage years, aspiring to break from the conservative and restrictive atmosphere of her wealthy family to live the bohemian life of an artist in Paris. She lived in New York but was educated at a boarding school in Paris, where, in her free time, she took drawing lessons at the famed Académie Julian, an art school that was attended by many foreigners as it offered an alternative to the more



Untitled [Standing Nude], 1910, charcoal on paper, 23 7/8 x 12 5/8 inches

restrictive atmosphere of the École des Beaux-Arts. Wood was 17 years old when she attended life-drawing classes at the Julian, making several studies of female nudes that display little of the freedom of expression she would eventually come to possess as an artist. Her study in Paris was suddenly curtailed by the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Because she had become so proficient in French during her years in Paris, upon returning to New York she joined the French Repertory Company and played many minor roles in theatrical productions over the next three years. The chance encounter with a Frenchman in 1915 would put her at the center of the most exciting and experimental group of artists and writers in New York at the time, many of whom congregated at the home of Louise and Walter Arensberg, wealthy collectors of modern art whose large apartment on the Upper West Side was the nexus of what would eventually be called New York Dada.

On September 20, 1915, Wood was asked to visit the French composer Edgard Varèse, who had been hospitalized in New York with a broken leg. On her second visit there, she met at his bedside the French artist Marcel Duchamp, whom she referred to in her diary entry as “Marcelle.”<sup>3</sup> The mistake indicates that when they first met, Wood had not known who Duchamp was, even though he had gained considerable recognition in the New York art world when his *Nude Descending a Staircase* had caused a sensation at the Armory Show two years earlier. Wood was then living in Paris, however, so she likely had not heard anything about the show. Nevertheless, she was immediately drawn to the handsome French artist, while, at the same time, finding him strangely distant. “Marcel at twenty-seven had the charm of an angel who spoke slang,” she later recalled. “He was frail, with

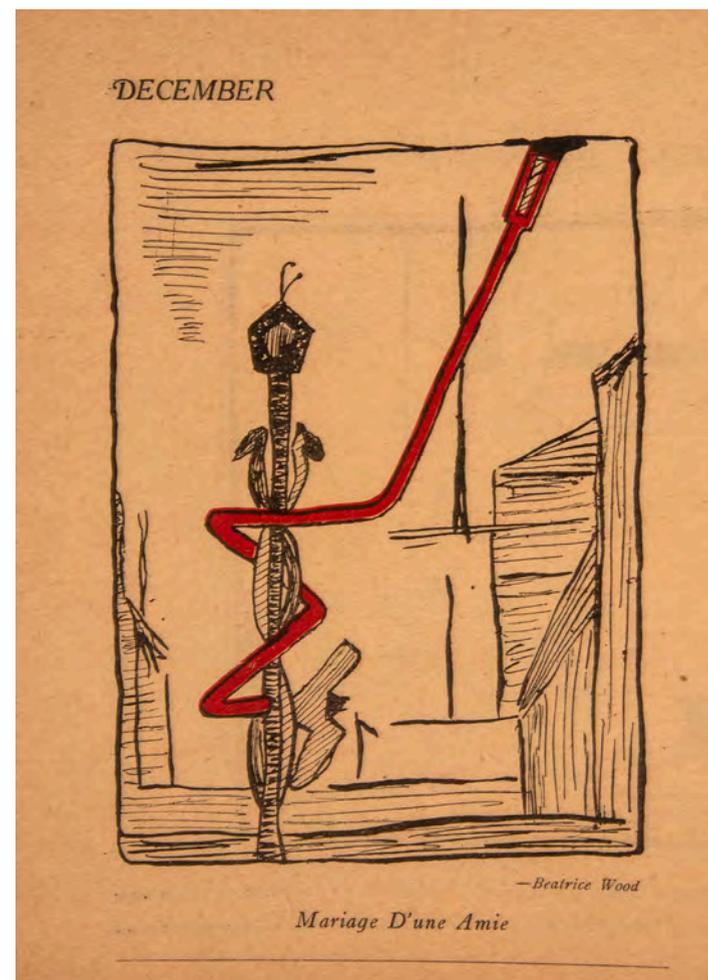


The Arensberg Apartment, ca. 1917  
photographs by Beatrice Wood

a delicately chiseled face and penetrating blue eyes that saw all. When he smiled the heavens opened. But when his face was still it was as blank as a death mask.”<sup>4</sup> When the topic of modern art came up, Wood told Duchamp that “Anyone can make such scrawls,” so he invited her to try, offering his apartment (which was located upstairs in the same building as the Arensbergs) as a place where she could seek refuge from her home life and work. One of her earliest known drawings from this period is called *Marriage of a Friend*, a rendering of a sharp angular red line enwrapping a totemic, vegetable-like figure, which she later explained represented the union of young woman (her friend from boarding school, Elizabeth Reynolds) with a much older man (Norman Hapgood). Duchamp arranged for the drawing to be published in the vanguard literary magazine *Rogue*, edited

by Allen Norton, a friend of Walter Arensberg, who also financed the publication.

Like the diary she kept, the subjects of Wood’s drawings were inevitably drawn from events that took place in her personal life, such as her attempt to separate herself from the restrictive atmosphere of living at home with her mother and two aunts. *Mères* (Cat. 1), for example, refers to her mother and her two aunts (who lived in the Wood household), dominating women whom she felt controlled her life to the point of exhaustion and desperation. Wood depicts herself several times in this drawing, most prominently the profile portrait in the center based on a photograph



*Mariage D'une Amie* [Marriage of a Friend], *Rogue*, December 1916

of her that was taken by the American photographer Jessie Tarbox Beals (see page 6).<sup>5</sup> Surrounding her portrait appear the words *Impulse* and *et Dépulse*. *Impulse* means the same in French as it does in English (the sudden urge to act), but the words *dépulse* does not exist in either language, unless she meant that she was tottering back and forth in her desire to commit some sort of action (as in having an impulse, and then letting it go away). In what might have been an intentional use of *Franglais*, she might have intended the word *pulse* to be taken literally, that is, as in having a heartbeat, which of course would stop (*de-pulse*) upon the cessation of life. That reading is reinforced by the scene envisioned at the lower center of the composition, where a figure can be seen jumping off a bridge and ending her life (the single word *FIN* followed by an exclamation mark appears next to the figure as it dives headfirst into the water). She renders herself again three times at the bottom of the drawing, accompanied by the words *elle mêmes* [herself], *j[o]uissance* [enjoyment or pleasure] and *Première coup de l'oeil* [First glance]. Many of these same elements are repeated in a closely related watercolor-and-ink drawing probably made at the same time called *Et... Toujours[s]... pourquoi* [And... Always... Why] (Cat. 2), which, in essence, expresses the same desperate cry for help. Wood shows herself again in profile and many of the same words that are in the earlier drawing appear here again, but this time she writes in the lower-right corner the words *Il Faut* [One must or should], as if to suggest the inevitability of acting upon her dire situation.<sup>6</sup>

Other drawings from this period were more spirited and uplifting in tone, especially as her friendship with the Arensbergs and members of their circle intensified. She made a delicate and sensitive ink-and-watercolor drawing of Louise Arensberg in a broad-rimmed hat having a glass of wine at a table (Cat. 3). Wood was especially close to Louise—whom she and friends called Lou—as she enjoyed the comfort of her quiet demeanor; the two would go on to become lifelong friends. Wood was an active participant in these gatherings, rehearsing parts for her various roles in the theatre with Walter, reciting her dreams for the gathered guests, and learning indecent words and expressions from the various French artists in attendance that she would blurt out with feigned innocence. By all accounts, the parties were joyous and entertaining affairs, evenings that often went on until the early morning hours. In a drawing appropriately called *Soirée*, she recalled a party at the Arensbergs where Duchamp played chess with Francis Picabia, who is seated on a large couch in the main studio of the apartment; the



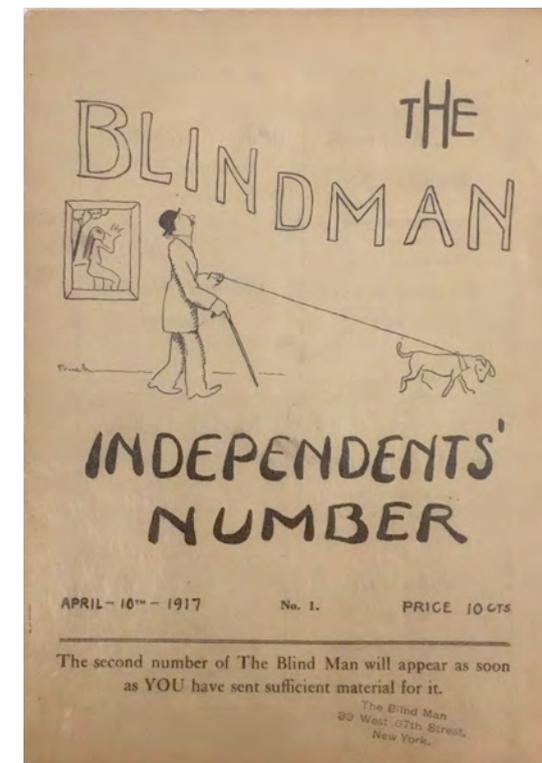
Soirée, 1917, pencil, ink and watercolor on paper, 8 5/8 x 10 7/8 inches

painter Albert Gleizes sits spread-eagled nearby, while two guests look on.

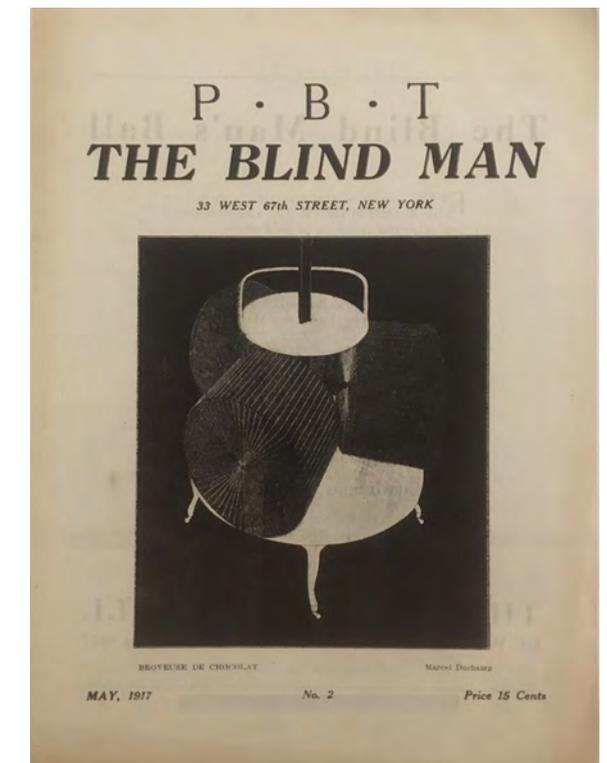
Shortly after they met, Duchamp introduced Wood to his friend Henri-Pierre Roché, who worked for the French consulate in New York and in Washington, D.C., during the war years. At the time, Wood was 24 and Roché 38, but he possessed a charm that swept her off her feet and, for the first time in her life, she fell in love. She sought every excuse possible to be in his company. The opportunity came when she helped him and Duchamp work on projects related to the newly established Society of Independent Artists, an organization modeled after the Société des Artistes Indépendants in France that was devoted to annual jury- and prize-free exhibitions in New York. Under the pseudonym of R. Mutt, Duchamp submitted to their first show an ordinary men's urinal, but this plumbing fixture was considered too indecent for public consumption, so it was suppressed from display in the exhibition. Instead, a work submitted by Wood to the

show got all the attention in the press. In a slip of the tongue, she titled it *Un peu d'eau dans du savon* [A Little Water in Some Soap] (Cat. 4) instead of the other way around, a mistake Duchamp preferred, so she kept it. The work featured a nude female figure emerging from her bath with an actual bar of soap attached to what Wood later called "the tactical position." She had planned on rendering the soap, but Duchamp talked her into using an actual bar instead. He helped her select the bar of soap from a nearby store and attach it to the painting, just another example of what she later explained was "his prankishness."<sup>7</sup>

With Duchamp and Roché, Wood served as editor of a journal that was intended to be the public voice of the Independents called *The Blindman*, which appeared in only two issues in April and May of 1917. To celebrate the exhibition and the magazine, on May 25, 1917, a fancy dress ball was held at Webster Hall, a well-known dance hall and nightspot in Greenwich Village. Wood designed the poster to advertise the event, which featured a stick figure thumbing its nose to the world (Cat. 5). From many preparatory



*The Blindman*, No. 1 (April 10, 1917)



*The Blind Man*, No. 2 (May 1917)

sketches she had made for the poster, Duchamp chose this one, which she thought was little more than a scrawl that should have been discarded. But this is exactly what Duchamp likely most admired about it. “Never do the commonplace,” he told her. “Rules are fatal to the progress of art,” words of advice she never forgot.<sup>8</sup> He might also have noticed that the subject of Wood’s drawing echoed a cartoon by Albert Fruh that appeared on the cover of the first issue of *The Blindman*, where an actual blind man walks his dog past the painting of a nude female figure miming the same insolent gesture.

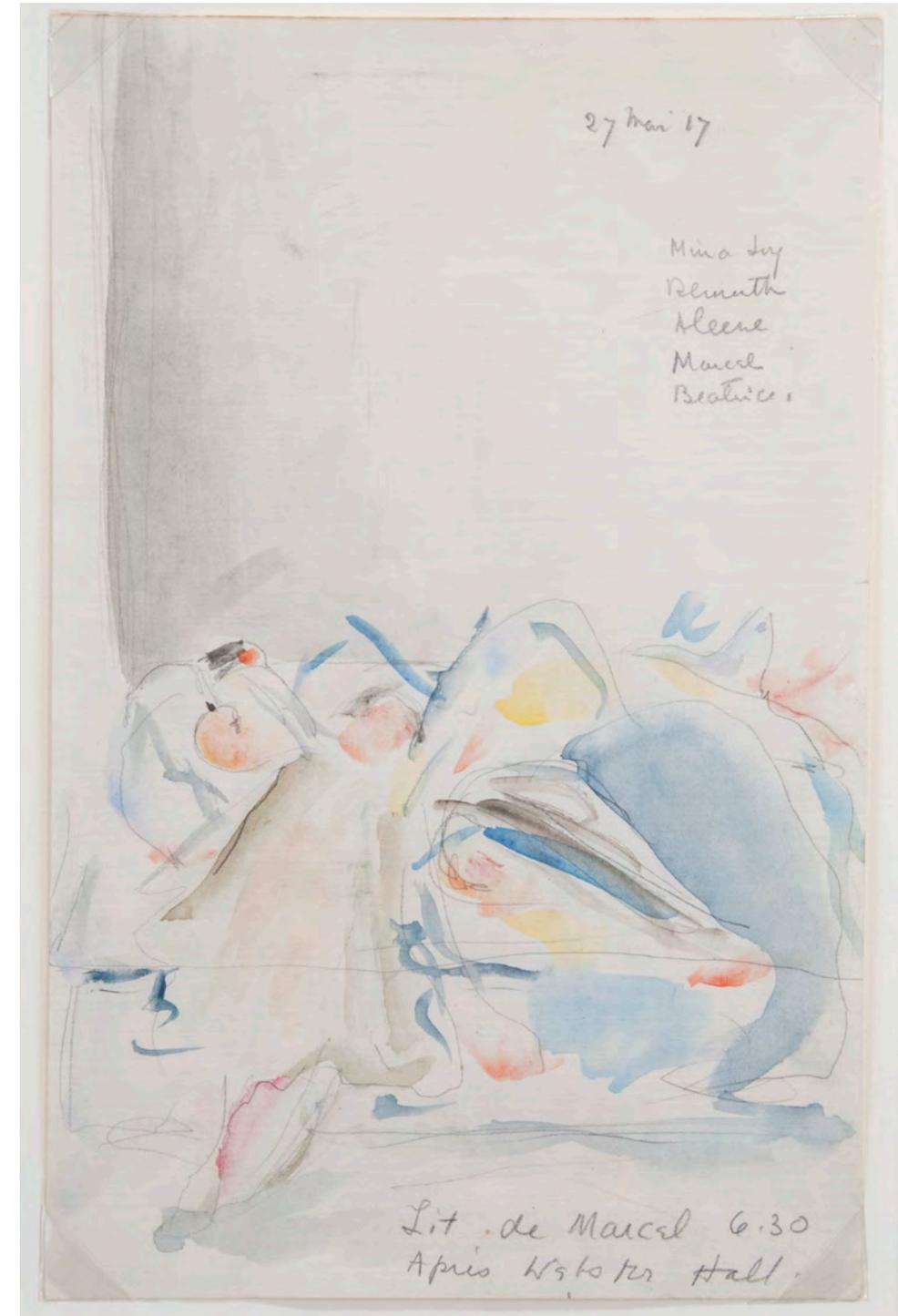
Virtually every member of the Arensberg Circle attended The Blindman’s Ball, where Beatrice Wood danced a Russian dance in full Russian costume, an event she recorded the next day in a drawing called, appropriately, *Dance Russe* [Russian Dance] (Cat. 6). Possibly the most memorable of Wood’s drawings from this period is her rendition of an event that took place after the ball. When it was over, the Arensbergs and many of their friends retired to their apartment, where a party ensued until late into the night. Wood was so tired that she and three friends—the brilliant and beautiful English

poet Mina Loy, the American painter Charles Demuth visiting from his home in Philadelphia, and a friend named Aileen Dresser—spent the night in Duchamp’s bed. The memorable experience was beautifully captured by Wood in a drawing made two days later, inscribed *Lit de Marcel 6:30 / Après Webster Hall*, where colors from a quickly moving brush suggests the jumble of five sleepers squeezed uncomfortably into such close quarters.

Wood’s love affair with Roché ended abruptly only a few months after it began, primarily because Roché was a philanderer and refused to remain monogamous (he was having an affair with Alissa Frank, a journalist who was their mutual friend, and, unbeknownst to Wood at the time, also secretly with Louise Arensberg).<sup>9</sup> With continued pressure from her



Beatrice Wood dances a Russian dance at the Independents, photograph, April 1917



*Lit de Marcel*, 1917, pencil and watercolor on paper, 8 7/8 x 5 3/4 inches

mother, Wood decided to accept an offer from the French Theater in Montreal and break away from everyone in New York, which she did in mid-August of 1917. She was still in love with Roché, and her separation from him was emotionally distressing, captured, to an extent, in her drawing inscribed *L'esprit de Béatrice qui vient / Embrasser Pierre, de Montréal* [The Spirit of Beatrice Coming from Montreal to Embrace Pierre] (Cat. 7), where she hugs Roché as he continues writing. In Montreal, Wood healed her emotional wounds by entering into a relationship with a Belgian theatre manager named Paul Ranson, whom she lived with for about a year and married in 1918 (without knowing that he was already married to a woman in France). She enjoyed cooking for him, although he occasionally admonishes her for not keeping the kitchen in order. Her diary is filled with entries like: “Adore cooking” (10/21/17), “Cook delicious dinner” (12/16/17), “Cook lovely meals. Very happy” (12/23/17), “We have ideal time cooking. Blanquette de Veau and chocolate cake” (07/06/18), and “Cook chicken. Make delicious meals” (09/01/18).<sup>10</sup> Her delight in these culinary pursuits is accurately reflected in a drawing from 1918 that shows her in the kitchen, frying pan in hand, a red heart floating in space, labeled *La Cuisine – Désordre – Rêves* [The Kitchen – Mess – Dreams] (Cat. 8).

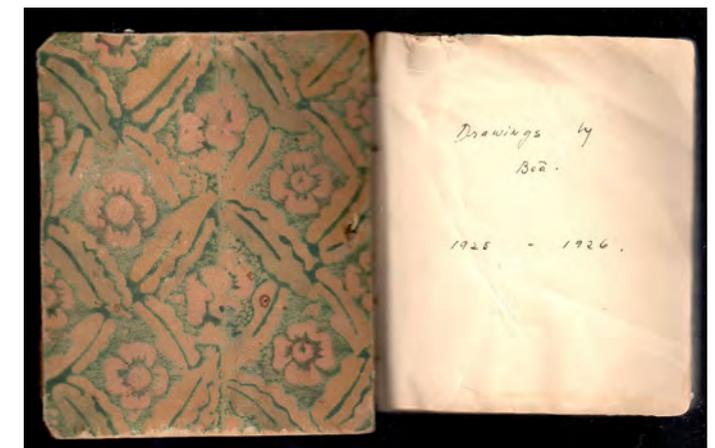
## II

This drawing would be the last Wood would make for some years because events in her personal life became too all-consuming. She brought Ranson to New York, but after her parents discovered he was a bigamist and Wood learned that he had secretly borrowed substantial amounts of money from the Arensbergs, their marriage was annulled. She continued acting, and in one production met the actor Reginald Pole, a strikingly handsome man with whom she fell deeply in love. During the summer of 1923 he moved to Los Angeles, and she joined him, thereby renewing her friendship with the Arensbergs, who were in Southern California seeking a winter residence (they would eventually move there permanently). In 1925-26, Wood made a large group of watercolors and a few oils, suggesting that she was seriously contemplating the pursuit of an artistic career, should her work as an actress not succeed. She took black-and-white photographs of 85 of these drawings, gathered them into three small albums, and sent copies to Walter Arensberg, Marcel Duchamp and Henri-Pierre Roché, to whom, she

wrote in each, “I owe the fun of drawing.”

How they reacted to these images is unknown, for the drawings varied as much in quality as they did in subject. The style of these works is said to have derived from Art Deco, a prevalent artistic movement of the day, characterized by a linear and simplified treatment of form, although it is highly unlikely that Wood relied upon this precedent consciously. In terms of subject, many of these drawings reflected Wood’s peripatetic life as she traveled back and forth across the United States by train (Cat. 15), arriving at her destination in Los Angeles and departing (Cat. 12). Some deal with the mundane situations of life, like a visit to the osteopath (Cat. 16), where she sought relief from a painful curvature to the lower part of her neck that had developed in adolescence. Several drawings record her close friendship with the actress Helen Freeman, whom she had known from New York, but who also moved to California and would remain a lifelong friend. One shows a closely cropped image of just their faces seen through the rear-view mirror of an automobile (Cat. 17), another of the two in a more intimate setting as they disrobe for their parts in a theatrical production (Cat. 18). Several of the drawings made in this period render their subjects casting sharp shadows, as in a small watercolor from 1925 of three figures simply called *Trois* (Cat. 10), or in another called *Playwrights* (Cat. 13), which depicts Pole and the well-known author and playwright Stark Young as they discuss, perhaps, their writings. The figures in both drawings cast multiple shadows as if to suggest they are being lit by several intense lights while seated onstage.<sup>11</sup>

A good many of the drawings made in this period deal with her somewhat tortured relationship with Pole, for he was unable to commit to remaining with her alone. Jealousy inevitably intervened, an impulse Wood struggled to control, suggested by the title she gave to a drawing of herself and Reginald unclothed called *Possession* (Cat. 9), her lone eye sufficient to convey a sense of the emotional agony she endured



*Drawings by Béa: 1928-1926, album of photographs 4 7/8 x 4 x 1 3/8 inches (reproducing 85 drawings)*



*Sex Complex*, 1925, pencil and colored pencil on paper, size unrecorded, present whereabouts unknown

in this situation. Perhaps one of the most experimental and modernist drawings in the album is a now-lost work she called *Sex Complex*. When asked to explain the meaning of this image late in life, she could no longer recall what the various elements were meant to represent, beyond what is suggested by its title, the complex and inevitably complicated sexual relationship that takes place between a man and a woman.

Excluded from her album but made in this same period is a large drawing from 1925 called *Victor and Lucie* (Cat. 11). She may have decided not to include it because, unlike the other drawings in the album, this one is of a fictional subject; the clothed man who

embraces the naked woman are the basis of a novel whose cover is depicted in the lower-left corner of the image. Unfortunately, insofar as we know, this novel never advanced beyond the idea recorded in the drawing, but we can be fairly certain that if it did, it would be a romantic tale of lovers with a happy ending. If Wood's affairs of the heart would not work out to her satisfaction in real life, she could always resort to her imagination, thereby using the medium of drawing to not only preserve the events of the past, but to help spin a fictional narrative of what is capable of occurring in the future. One of the last images reproduced in the album is a *Self-Portrait* from 1928, which is exceptional because it is not a drawing on paper, but an oil painting on board. In this work the artist looks directly at the viewer, but the conspicuously absent nose and mouth give her the appearance of intense sadness, which might very well have been her state of mind at the time, for she continued to struggle with her conflicting thoughts about Pole and his infidelities.

Wood's closest friends in California were the Arensbergs, whom she visited regularly. Once they purchased a home on Hillside Avenue in Los Angeles, she was a regular guest, meeting many of the notable individuals in the art world they entertained. She made many drawings of those gatherings, one from 1930 that shows Walter speaking



*Untitled [Self-Portrait]*, 1928, oil on board, 16 ½ x 12 inches

with Duchamp on a sofa as she and Helen Freeman relax nearby.<sup>12</sup> One exceptional drawing that was recently discovered is her portrait of Galka Scheyer, a German art dealer who promoted the work of Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Alexej von Jawlensky (whom she called “The Blue Four”). She was famous for her gregarious and sometimes strident personality. “When I met Galka Scheyer,” she later recalled, “I wanted to run, for she impressed me as the rudest person I had ever met. Short, with a large head full of dyed henna hair and Semitic features, the unconventional beauty of her face escaped me. Her voice was strident and her manner so intense it was abrasive. Yet, she was so alive in a room and scintillating, that no one else counted.”<sup>13</sup> A degree of that overpowering personality is captured in Wood’s portrait, where Scheyer sits in an overstuffed armchair (possibly in the Arensberg home) as she gesticulates wildly in an attempt to emphasize the importance of a point she is trying to make.



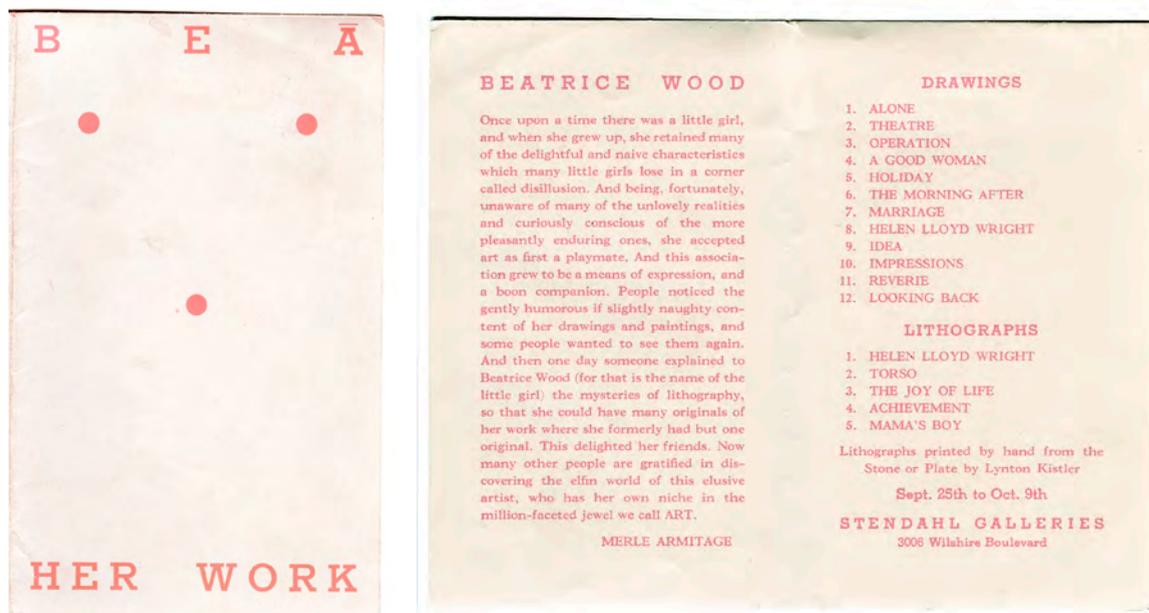
*Visit*, 1930, pencil and watercolor on paper, 8 ½ x 11 ¼ inches

It was at the Arensbergs’ that Wood first met Merle Armitage, a set designer and tour manager who also wrote extensively on the arts. Along with Walter Arensberg and a few friends, he was among the first to take an interest in Wood’s drawings and encouraged her to continue making them. He introduced her to the California printer Lincoln Kistler, who, in 1933, gave her lithographic plates to work with. She had already been taught how to use them from a friend of Lloyd Wright (the son of Frank Lloyd Wright), but she immediately seized upon the opportunity to translate her drawings into black-and-white prints.<sup>14</sup>

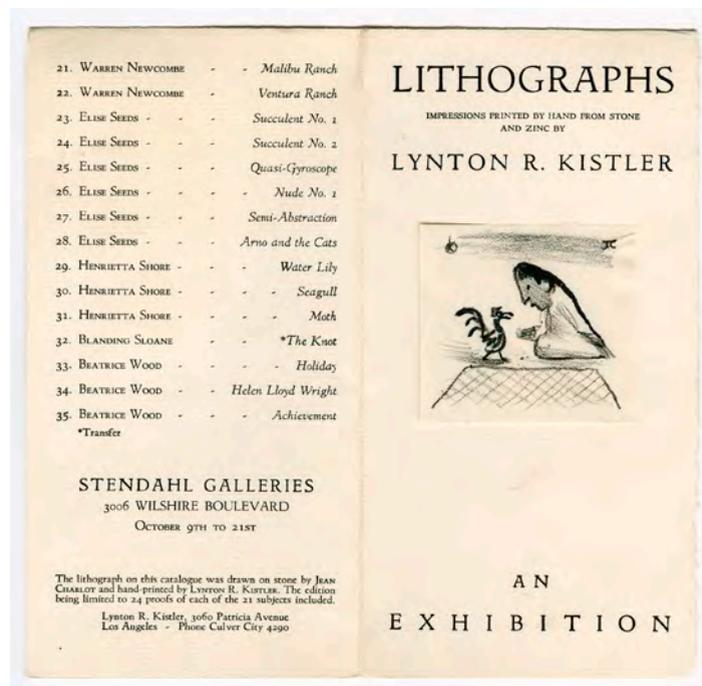


*Galka Scheyer*, 1932  
pencil and colored pencil on paper,  
Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California

Kistler was the son of William A. Kistler, who had operated a printing firm in Los Angeles for more than 20 years, but his son preferred to work with select artists in producing fine-art lithographs. At first, Wood was dissatisfied with the results Kistler produced, but he kept working at them until she was pleased. Armitage liked Wood’s drawings and prints so much that he arranged for a show at the Stendahl Galleries, an arrangement that pleased her to no end (“I am thrilled,” she wrote in her diary on 08/28/33). Earl Stendahl lived next door to the Arensbergs, and he was the main dealer to sell them Pre-Columbian artifacts, which, over the years, developed into a major collection.<sup>15</sup> The Wood show at his gallery featured an elegant brochure designed by Armitage, who also wrote the introductory remarks. The cover consisted of the three letters of Wood’s first name BEA (in capital letters) across the top of the page—that with three pink dots form the base of an inverted equilateral triangle—followed by the words HER WORK spread evenly across the bottom of the page. “People noticed the gently humorous if slightly naughty content of her drawings and paintings,” noted Armitage, “and some people wanted to see them again.” He then explains that some revealed to her



BEA: HER WORK, September 25-October 9, 1933, Stendahl Galleries, Los Angeles



LITHOGRAPHS: Impressions Printed by Hand from Stone and Zinc by Lynton R. Kistler, exhibition catalogue, October 9-21, 1933, Stendahl Galleries, Los Angeles

“the mysteries of lithography, so that she could have many originals of her work where she formerly had but one.”<sup>16</sup>

The show featured 12 drawings and 8 lithographs. It was followed by a show at the Stendahl Galleries of lithographs by Kistler made for various artists he worked with throughout Southern California, and the accompanying brochure presented another introduction by Armitage. “There is every reason to believe that the hand-press of Kistler will be the center of a movement which will have no sectional or aesthetic bounds,” he wrote. The show included three lithographs by Wood, but her drawings were probably still left on display in the gallery, for she wrote in her diary “Many of my drawings much commented on” (10/07/33). The show also included five drawings by Elise Seeds, Armitage’s wife at the time, but Wood found her work inferior (“I don’t think the drawings particularly good,” she confided in her diary on 09/23/33). No matter what she thought of the work, that did not prevent her from making a portrait of Seeds to be included in her book of 1934 called simply *Elise* (Cat. 39). Seeds was tall and a slender woman, who had studied art in Philadelphia but went on to work as comedian in several Hollywood films (including several with W.C. Fields). After they married, Armitage convinced her to return to making art. She worked primarily in an abstract style, although figuration occasionally crept into her compositions. In her portrait, Wood shows her reclining with her ovoid head positioned between upraised arms, her notably defined lips rendered in crimson red.

The majority of lithographs that Wood made in this period were based on her drawings. *Achievement* (Cat. 22), for example, which shows three figures balancing upon one another in a circus-act pose, is a fairly straightforward translation of her drawing from 1930 with the same title (Cat. 19). In many cases, the lithographs survive but the drawings on which they were based do not, as in her portrait of Helen Lloyd Wright (Cat. 25), for according to the catalogue, both the drawing and lithograph were include in her first show at Stendahl. It is also likely that her prints of *Holiday* (Cat. 26), *Mama’s Boy* (Cat. 27), *The Joy of Life* (Cat. 28) and *Operation* (Cat. 29) were all based on drawings, although in most cases those drawings are no longer extant (the drawing for *Operation* reproduced here [Cat. 36] is actually a subsequent iteration of this subject made two years later, which is why it is given the title *Operation II*). All four of these images seem to have been rendered in a self-consciously naïve style, a technique Wood would later perfect in

making figurative ceramic sculpture. Several of the lithographs that survive were pulled only as trial proofs and thus exist in only one or two examples, as in the fragmented image of a man and woman embracing (Cat. 32), or her rendition of a man and woman at a table casting shadows on the wall behind them (Cat. 33). Whereas this subject likely worked well in color, they did not translate as well to the black-and-white medium of lithography, so editions of these images were never printed.

Perhaps the most successful of the lithographs she made in these years were her renditions of embracing couples—one composed primarily of angles (Cat. 23) and the other of curves (Cat. 31)—both based on earlier drawings (Cats. 20 and 34). These are the subjects that preoccupied Wood in these years. In 1934, Wood was 39 years old and, having been brought up at the end of the Victorian era, she felt that love and romance were the ultimate goals to achieve in life, so she longed to fall into the arms of a man whom she could love and possibly marry. Instead, she had just been introduced to a medium that would preoccupy her interests for the remaining 65 years of her long life: ceramics and the world of working in clay. From this point onward, she would only make drawings in preparation for figurative ceramic works, but those were preparatory drawings in every sense, as the majority of those were discarded after the work was finished. She made a watercolor in 1965, for example, of an elderly woman seated on a couch (Cat. 40), which became a ceramic sculpture called *My Rich Aunt*, but she must have thought it successful enough to not be thrown out, as it is among only a handful of drawings from this period that she retained.

### III

Beatrice Wood moved to Ojai, California, in 1948, and it was from her various homes there that she built her career as an internationally renowned ceramic artist, particularly well known for her lusterware glazes. She never threw away her earlier drawings and would occasionally show them to friends and visitors if they expressed an interest in seeing them, as she did to the present author when he visited her home in 1976.<sup>17</sup> She was at the time attempting to find a publisher for her autobiography, to which she gave the delightful title *I Shock Myself*, as she was herself surprised to discover upon its completion that “I never made love to the men I married, and I did not marry the men

I have loved.”<sup>18</sup> At the time of our meeting, Wood was in the process of completing a series of black-and-white pencil drawings to accompany the manuscript. One captured the moment a fly flew into her mouth on her first visit to see Edgard Varèse in the hospital (Cat. 41) and another her roller-coaster ride with Francis Picabia and Duchamp in Coney Island (Cat. 42). A show of her drawings was immediately organized for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, whereupon a selection of important early drawings and illustrated manuscripts was donated by the artist to the permanent collection of the museum. The Philadelphia show was followed by a commercial exhibition at the Rosa Esman Gallery in New York, which consisted of 43 drawings ranging in date from 1917 to 1950.<sup>19</sup> A number of drawings from that exhibition sold, most notably to the Italian art

historian, dealer and collector Arturo Schwarz. The attention these drawings received inspired Wood to continue making more, so for the next two decades she pulled out her pencils and watercolors nearly every evening and made one or two drawings, inspired by whatever happened to be on her mind at the time. When she was asked to contribute a drawing to *The New Yorker* in 1977, for example, she was then having a hard time sleeping, so she submitted a drawing called *Insomnia* (Cat. 43), which depicted a young woman in her bed unable to sleep, her eyes wide, arms overhead, and hands wrung in exasperation.

Often the subjects of these drawings were philosophical in nature, but they inevitably dealt with the complex interplay that existed between a man and a woman. When she was asked by the California artist Lee Waisler in the mid-1980s to make a series of etchings for a portfolio, she chose precisely this theme and called the collection *Bed Stories* (Cat. 46). The titles alone give an indication of what she intended to convey:



Beatrice Wood and Francis M. Naumann, at the opening of *Beatrice Wood Drawings*, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978



*Beatrice Wood and Friends: From Dada to Deco*, The Rosa Esman Gallery, New York, May 16 – June 16, 1978

*After the Quarrel, The Jealous Wife, Bored at a Cocktail Party, Her Mistake, Two Men with a Single Thought, The Woman Who Found Out, Marriage, He Could Not Wait*, etc. The portfolio featured an introduction by Arturo Schwarz, who divided these etchings into three separate categories: those that were autobiographical in nature, others that were essentially humorous and, finally, those conveying universal themes. He also quoted a letter written to the present author wherein Wood speaks about what it is like to reach such an advanced age. “Regardless of time one does not feel old,” she wrote. “Now I can just lust after handsome young men, thinking it would be fun to go to Singapore with them, and since they have no idea what goes on in my mind, no mischief follows, no heartaches consume one, and one skips on to the

next fine fellow who passes through the door. In spite of age, one can still escape into the romantic.”<sup>20</sup>

The drawings made in this period vary widely in subject, from comparatively trivial things like her love for cats (Cat. 44) or the depiction of an innocent girl seated in a decorative chair (Cat. 45), a subject to which she had often given form in ceramics. At times the subject could be as mundane as showing a group of blank faces at a cocktail party (Cat. 47), or as serious as having been engaged in a heated discussion about abortion rights (Cat. 48). When an operation at the age of 101 found her near death, she miraculously survived to make a drawing that she explained was the last thing she saw when she was dying, a glowing circular orb (Cat. 49), which, as it turns out, is an image seen by many as they approach the final moments of life. At times she just drew freely on the page with no preconceived notion of what would develop, as in an essentially abstract image that features at its center a head, where, once this element is perceived, so are arms and two hands in the space that surrounds it (Cat. 50).

Drawings such as these were essentially therapeutic, a means by which Wood was

able to express her reaction to the sometimes inexplicable events in life in a meaningful and permanent way, inadvertently, a means by which to impart the wisdom of her years to others even after she was gone. Today, her drawings continue to speak for her, as they are an integral part of the various retrospective exhibitions that were organized at the end of her life and after. They not only serve to illustrate her introduction to the world of the visual arts, but they convey to viewers the essence of her inner thoughts and feelings on a variety of subjects. In the end, the drawings made in the last years of her life preserve the frank and unabashed opinions of a kind, generous and intelligent woman, one who had lived a long and fruitful life, enriched all the more by her love and dedication to the art of drawing.



Beatrice Wood drawing, Ojai, California 1988 (photograph by Marlene Callahan Wallace)

Bibliographic note: Wood's drawings have been addressed on several earlier occasions, primarily by the present author; see Naumann, "The Drawings of Beatrice Wood," *Arts* 57, no. 7 (March 1983), pp. 108-111; Naumann, "The Other Side of Beatrice Wood: Drawings, Tiles and Figurative Ceramic Sculpture," in *Intimate Appeal: The Figurative Art of Beatrice Wood*, exh. cat., The Oakland Museum, 18 November 1989 – 18 February 1990, The Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, 19 June – 28 October 1990; and Naumann, ed., *Beatrice Wood: A Centennial Tribute*, exh. cat., American Craft Museum, New York, 3 March – 8 June 1997, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 13 September – 4 January 1998. See also the excellent article by Paul B. Franklin, "Beatrice Wood, Her Dada. . . and her Mama," in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on the Sex, Gender, and Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 104-138.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Selected entries from the diaries were published in Marie T. Keller and Francis M. Naumann, eds., "My Life in Art: Excerpts from the Diaries of Beatrice Wood," *Beatrice Wood: Career Woman—Drawings, Paintings, Vessels and Objects*, Elsa Longhauser and Lisa Melandri, eds., Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, California, exh. cat., September 10, 2011 – February 25, 2012, pp. 72-131.

<sup>2</sup> The portions of her autobiography that dealt with her early years in New York were first published in Naumann, ed., "I Shock Myself: Excerpts from the Autobiography of Beatrice Wood," *Arts* 51, no. 9 (May 1977), pp. 134-139. The book itself was first published as *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood*, Lindsay Smith, ed. (Ojai: Dillingham Press, 1985), and has gone through several subsequent reprints: Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1988 and 1992, and *I Shock Myself: Career Woman of Art* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2018). All references in this text are to the 1992 edition from Chronicle Books.

<sup>3</sup> Much could be read into this, since Marcelle is the female equivalent of Marcel, and Duchamp would go on to develop a female alter ego, but it was more likely a result of Wood's loose grasp of French grammar. For the complete entry for this date, see Keller and Naumann, "Excerpts from the Diaries of Beatrice Wood," p. 77 (where the spelling of Duchamp's first name was corrected).

<sup>4</sup> Wood, *I Shock Myself*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Wood preserved a small print of this photograph in her albums, but it was not identified as having been taken by Jessie Tarbox Beals, so when I first published it the identity of the photographer was not provided (Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-23* [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994], p. 112). It was later discovered to have been taken by Beals in Alexander Alland, Sr., *Jessie Tarbox Beals: First Woman News Photographer* (New York: Camera Graphic Press, 1978), plate 61 (in this publication the identity of the sitter is not provided and the photograph is given the date of 1924, but it was more likely taken during the time Wood worked as an actress in New York, that is, in ca. 1917, the date provided here).

<sup>6</sup> It appears at first that she wrote *Il Paut*, but since no such words exists in French, it would seem to be another example of her mistaken spelling. I wish to thank Paul Franklin and Jean-Paul Florentin for their assistance in translation, although the analysis of these translated words is entirely my own.

<sup>7</sup> Wood, *I Shock Myself*, p. 32. For more on this exhibition, see Naumann, "'The Big Show,' The First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, 1917," Part I: *Artforum* XVII, no. 6 (February 1979), pp. 34-39; Part II: "The Critics," *Artforum* XVII, no. 8 (April 1979), pp. 49-53.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Robert Bryan, "The Ceramics of Beatrice Wood," *Craft Horizons* XXX, no. 3 (March-April 1970), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Roché's love affair with Beatrice Wood is at the center of Ruth Brandon, *Spellbound by Marcel: Duchamp, Love, and Art* (London: Pegasus, 2022). My review of that book emphasizes the importance of Wood's drawings in telling that story (see Naumann, "Lit de Marcel," *The Brooklyn Rail* 22, no. 3 (April 2022), pp. 107-109.

<sup>10</sup> Wood's original diaries are among her papers in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Selections of these entries dealing with Wood's involvement in the world of art were published in Keller and Naumann, eds., "My Life in Art" (for full ref., see note 1 above), but these entries are from an unpublished transcription of the diaries prepared by Wood in the 1990s and given to the author.

<sup>11</sup> These cast shadows in the drawings of Beatrice Wood were first observed by Carolyn Lane-Steins, who wrote a paper on the subject in a class she took called "Movement Dada: Aesthetic Anarchy from Zurich to New York 1915-23" that I taught at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in the spring of 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Wood added the names below this drawing in the mid-1970s, likely not realizing that the man seated next to Walter was not Duchamp, for in 1930 he had not yet visited the Arensbergs at their home in California. He would visit them on only two occasions, in 1936 and in 1949. The figure on the couch is likely Steve Hoag, Beatrice's male companion, who she would marry in name only in 1948.

<sup>13</sup> Wood, *I Shock Myself*, p. 87. Wood also made a drawing that shows Scheyer commandeering a conversation at the Arensbergs (reproduced in *I Shock Myself*, p. 88). The drawing of Scheyer from the Norton Simon Museum was discovered in the Scheyer Papers in 2017 by Casey Lee, then an intern at the museum. It is reproduced here for the first time. For more on Scheyer's relationship with the Arensbergs, see Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, "Narrow Circles and Uneasy Alliances: Galka Scheyer and American Collector of the *Blue Four*," in Vivian Endicott Barnett and Josef Helfenstein, eds., *The Blue Four: Feininger, Jawlensky, Kandinsky, and Klee in the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 55-57.

<sup>14</sup> Wood knew Lloyd Wright because when Reginald Pole divorced his first wife, Helen, she married him. The friend who gave her the lithograph plates was Richard Day (1896-1972), who Wood met in Los Angeles on October 24, 1931 (see her diary for that date). Day was a Hollywood art director and set designer, who also worked as an artist and was a good friend of Merle Armitage; Armitage wrote the introduction to the book *The Lithographs of Richard Day* (New York: E. Weyhe, 1932).

<sup>15</sup> See George Kubler, *Arensberg Collection* vol. II: *Pre-Columbian Sculpture* (Philadelphia Museum of Art: 1954). See also Ellen Hoobler, "Smoothing the Path for Rough Stones: The Changing Role of Pre-Columbian Art in the Arensberg Collection," in Mark Nelson, William H. Sherman and Ellen Hoobler, eds. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2020), pp. 343-398. On Arensberg's friendship with Stendahl, see April Dammann, *Exhibitionist: Early Stendahl, Art Dealer as Impresario* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2011), pp. 163-170.

<sup>16</sup> On Wood's working relationship with Lincoln Kistler and her show at the Stendahl Galleries, see her diaries for the following dates: 06/16/33 (Kistler gives Wood lithographic plates), 06/22/33, 06/27/33, 06/28/33 (Wood meets Kistler at the Arensbergs where he has come to see her drawings), 07/03/33, 07/28/33 (learns from Armitage that he has arranged for her exhibition at Stendahl's), 08/23/33, 09/23/33

(Armitage hangs Wood's drawings at Stendahl's), 09/25/33, 09/27/33, 09/28/33, 10/02/33 (meets Stendahl for the first time), 10/07/33 (unpublished transcriptions from the diaries; for full ref. see n. 10 above).

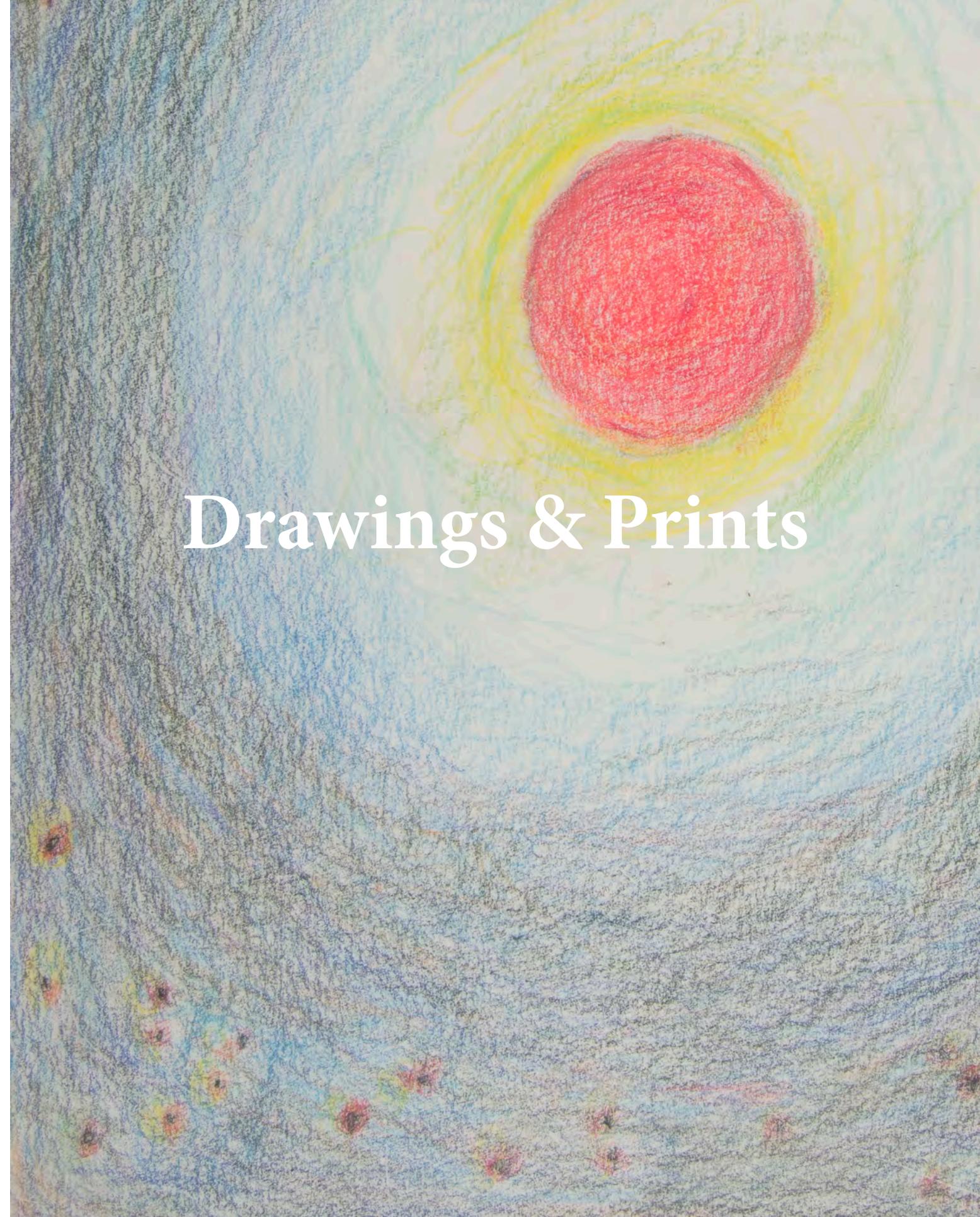
<sup>17</sup> I have told the story of my discovery of these drawings in Naumann, *Mentors: The Making of an Art Historian* (Los Angeles: Doppelhouse, 2018), pp. 77-79. At the time of that writing, I had not known that Stephen P. Huyler, whom Beatrice had employed to help her with work in the studio, discovered these drawings a few years earlier and brought them to the attention of curators at the Denver Art Museum (he was a student at the University of Denver at the time), but they were unresponsive, so Huyler returned them to Wood. His account is provided in Huyler, "Inspired: A Life Transformed by India," unpublished manuscript, pp. 24-25. I am grateful to Huyler for having shared a copy of his manuscript with me.

<sup>18</sup> Wood, *I Shock Myself*, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup> Naumann, "Beatrice Wood and the Dada State of Mind," in *Beatrice Wood and Friends: From Dada to Deco*, exh. cat., Rosa Esman Gallery, New York, May 16-June 16, 1978. The Philadelphia Museum exhibition was held from March 19-April 9, 1978, but was not accompanied by any publication (see, however, the review by Maryanne Conheim, "Beatrice Wood: The Rebel Now is an 'Old Fogey,'" *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 19, 1978).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Schwarz, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Lover," 1986. The portfolio was produced in an edition of 25 copies, each of which contain 22 etchings.

# Drawings & Prints





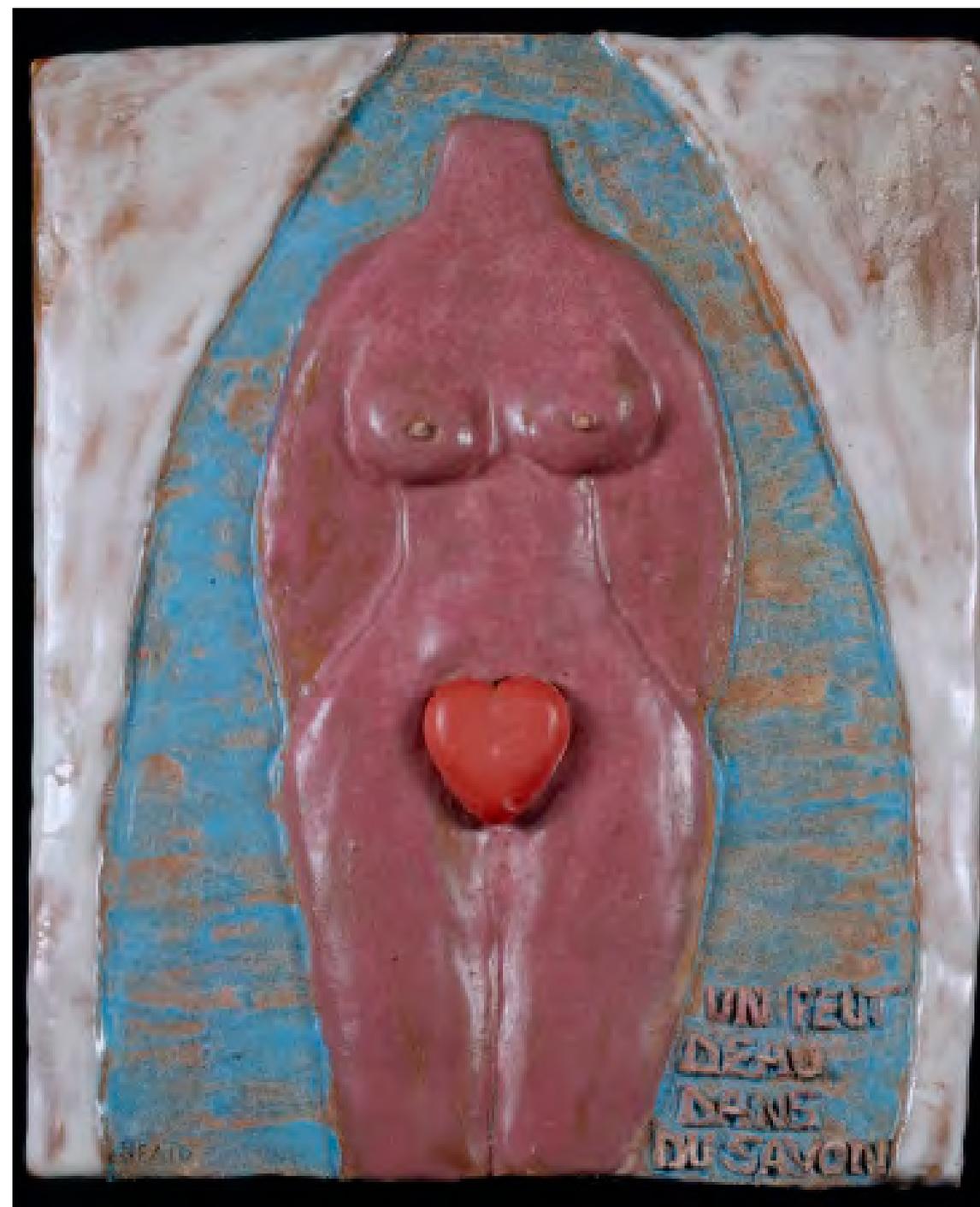
1. *Mères*, 1917  
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 12 ½ x 12 inches



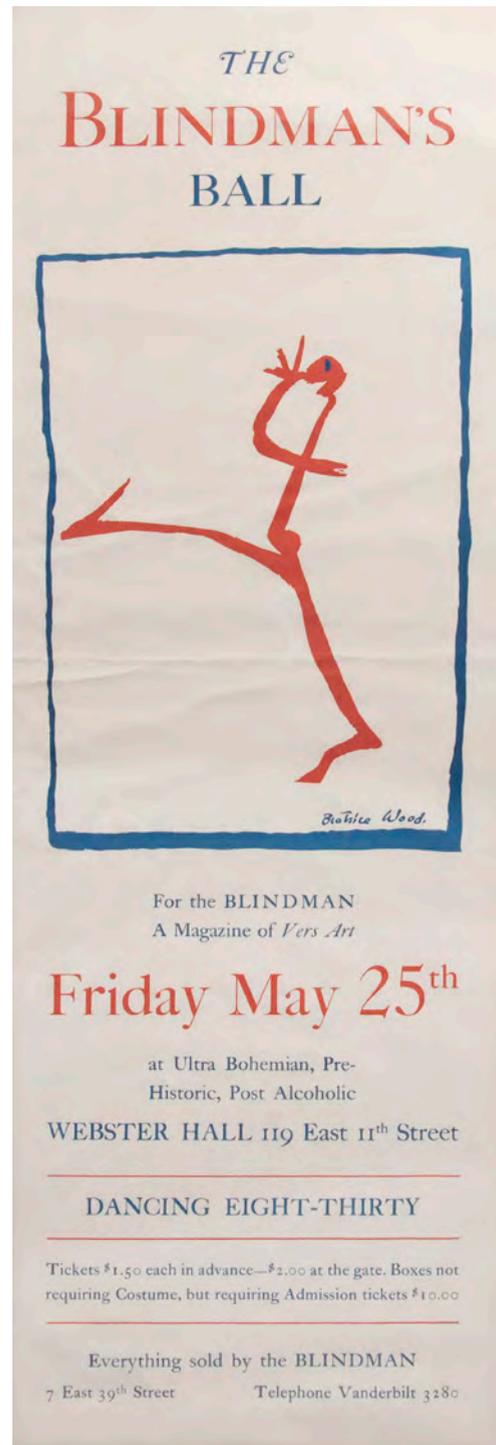
2. *Et toujours[s] pourquoi*, 1917  
Colored pencil and ink on paper, 9 ⅞ x 8 inches



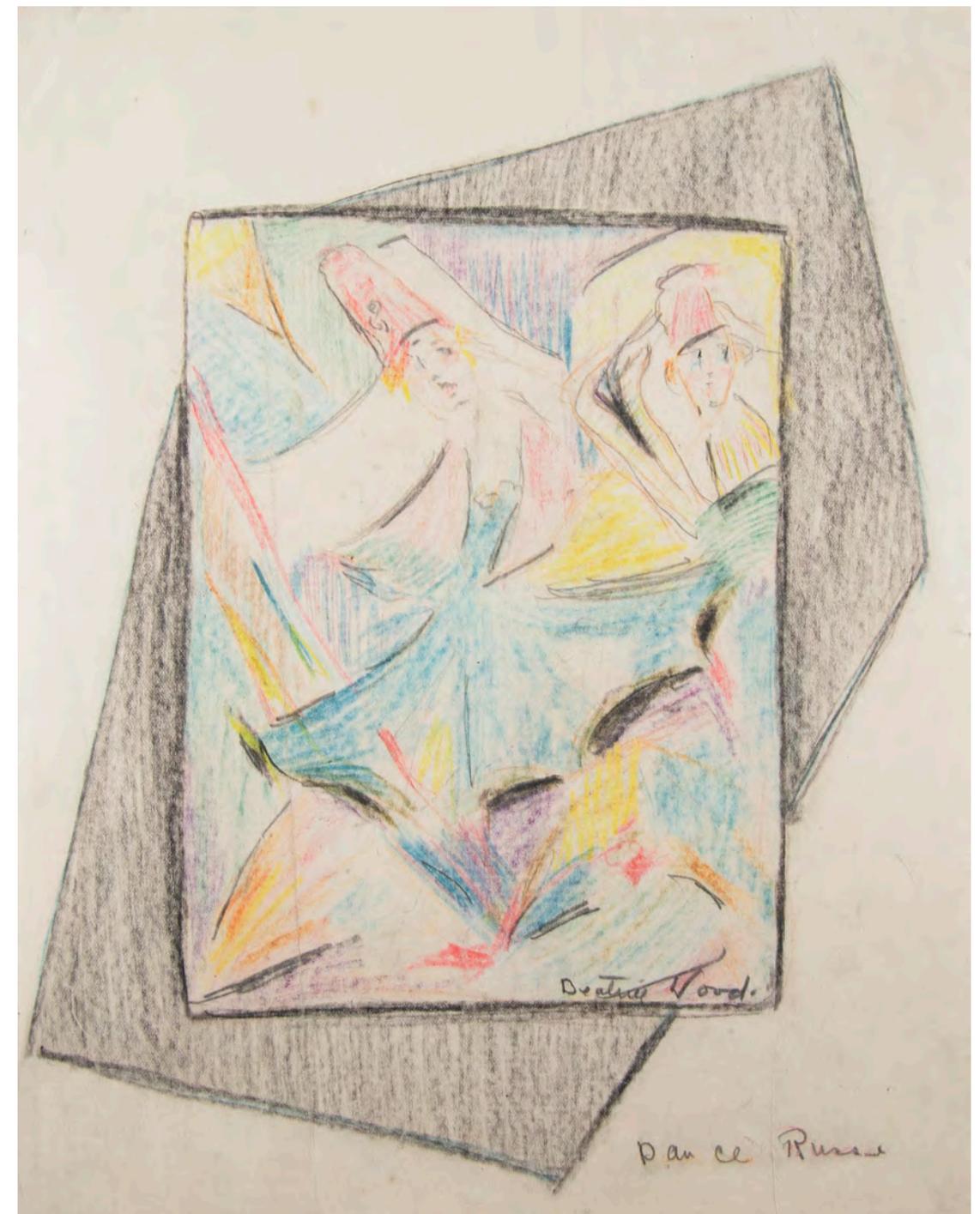
3. *Cher Lou*, 1917  
Ink and watercolor on paper, 19 1/8 x 7 1/2 inches



4. *Un peu d'eau dans du savon* [A Little Water in Some Soap], 1917/77  
Glazed earthenware and soap, 11 3/4 x 9 7/8 inches



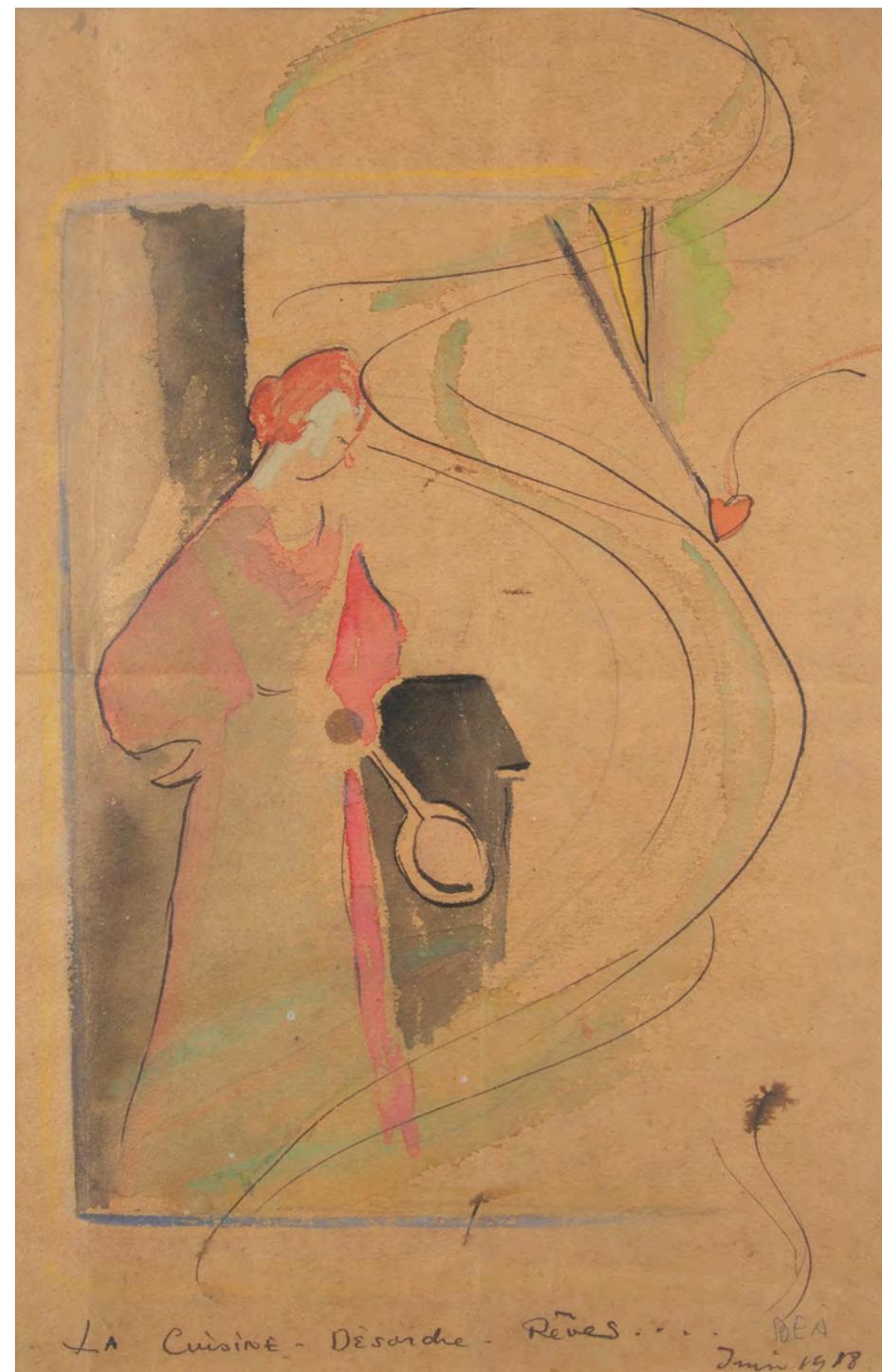
5. *The Blindman's Ball*, 1917  
Color lithograph, 27 ½ x 9 ½ inches



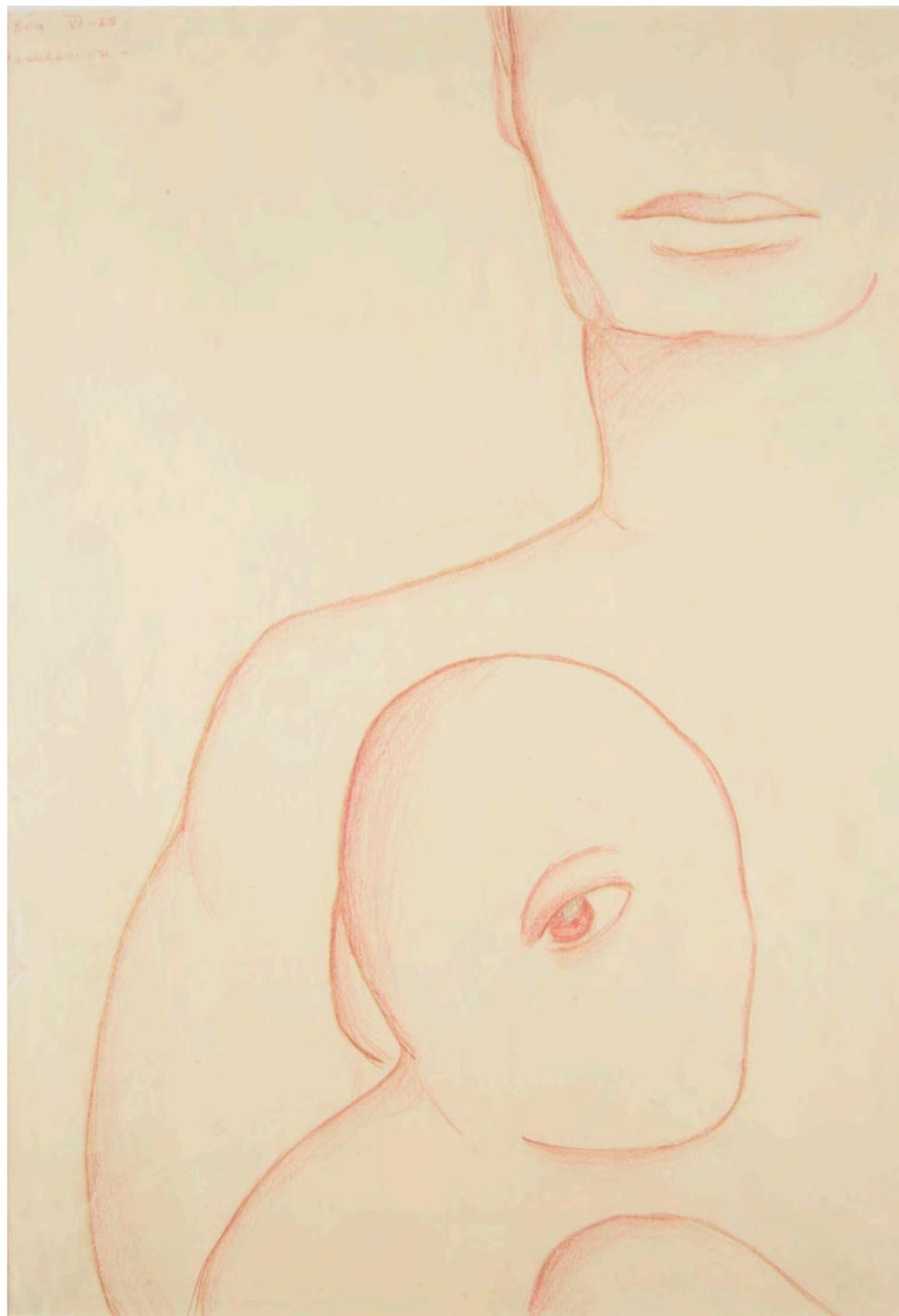
6. *Dance Russe*, 1917  
Colored pencil on paper, 9 ⅞ x 8 inches



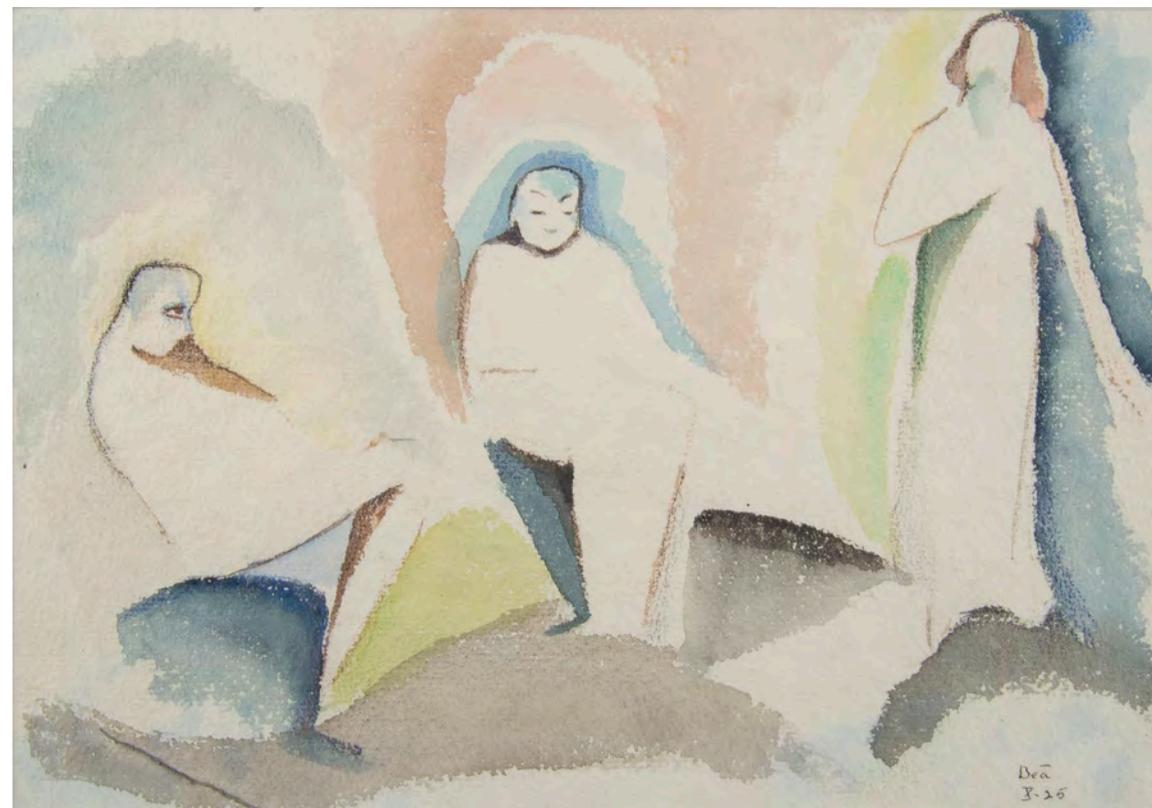
7. *L'esprit de Beatrice qui vient embrasser Pierre, de Montréal*, 1917  
Colored pencil and ink on paper, 10 ½ x 8 inches



8. *La Cuisine - Désordre - Rêves...*, 1918  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 10 x 6 ¾ inches



9. *Possession*, 1925  
Colored pencil on paper, 13 ½ x 9 ½ inches



10. *Trois*, 1925  
Watercolor on paper, 6 ¾ x 9 ¾ inches



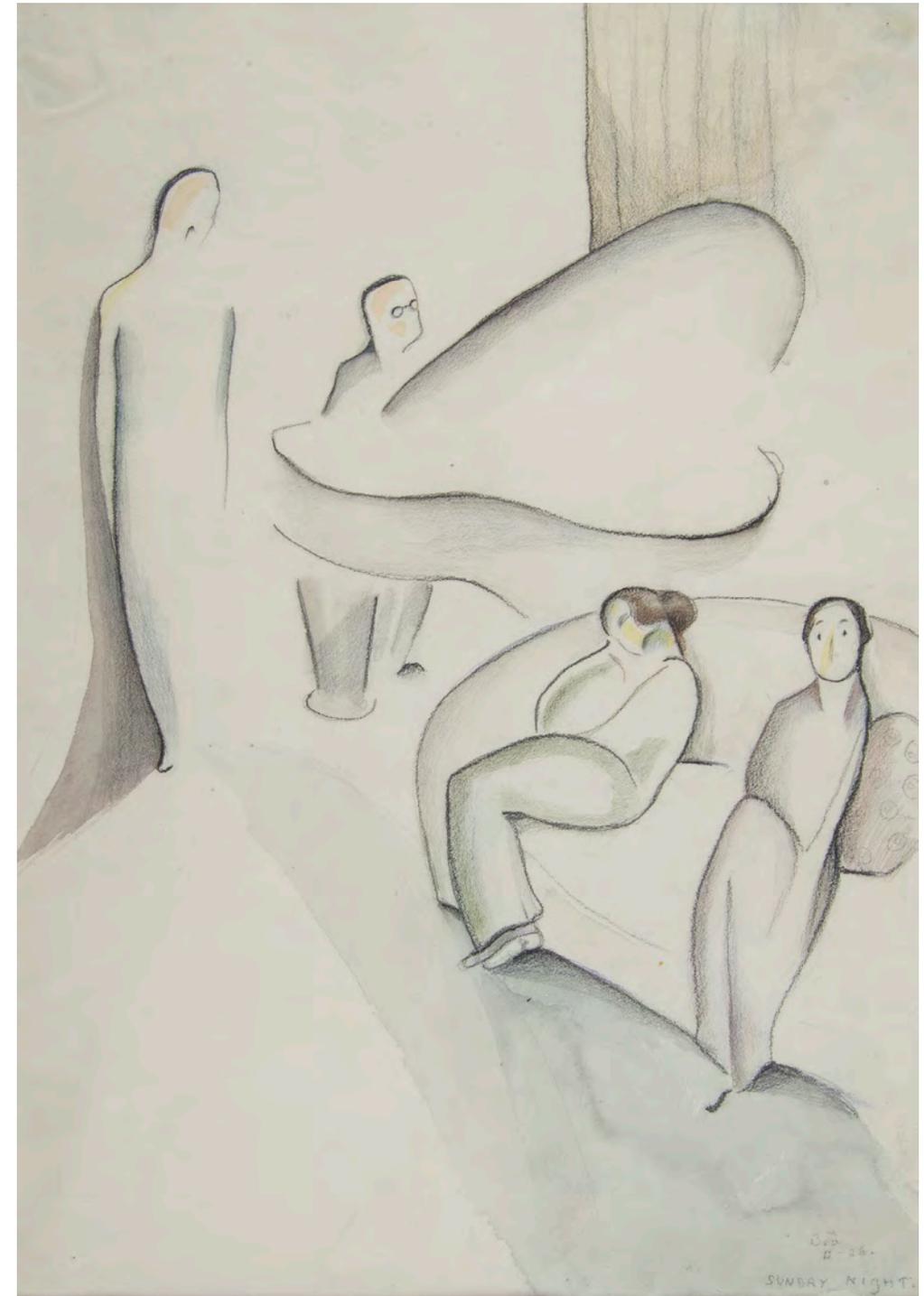
11. *Victor et Lucie*, 1925  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 14 ½ x 9 ½ inches



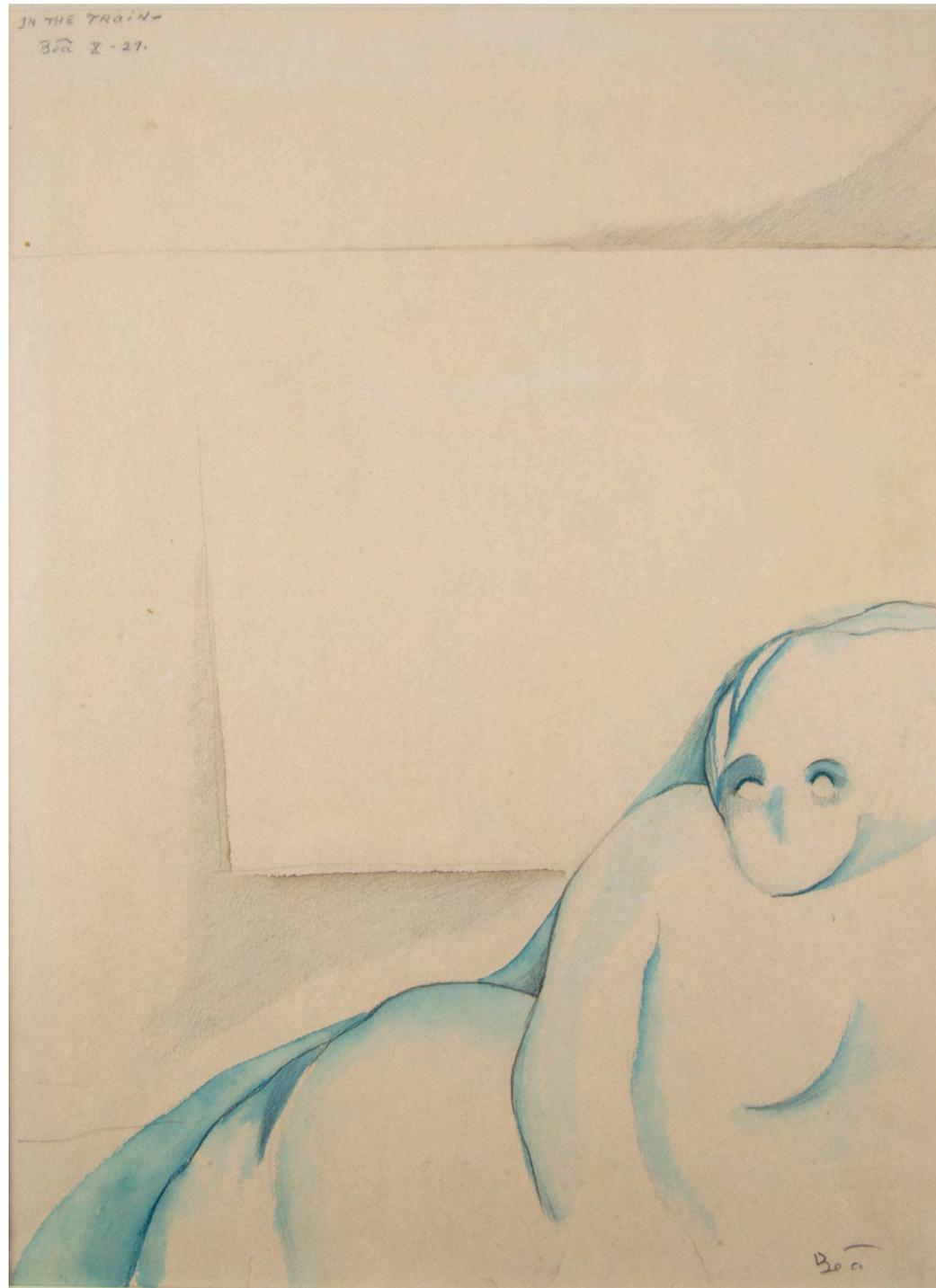
12. *Le départ*, 1926  
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 13 ¾ x 9 ½ inches



13. *Playwrights*, 1926  
Watercolor, pencil on paper, 9 ½ x 14 inches



14. *Sunday Night*, 1926  
Colored pencil and watercolor on paper, 13 ¾ x 9 ¾ inches



**15. *In the Train*, 1927**  
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 11 ¾ x 8 ¾ inches



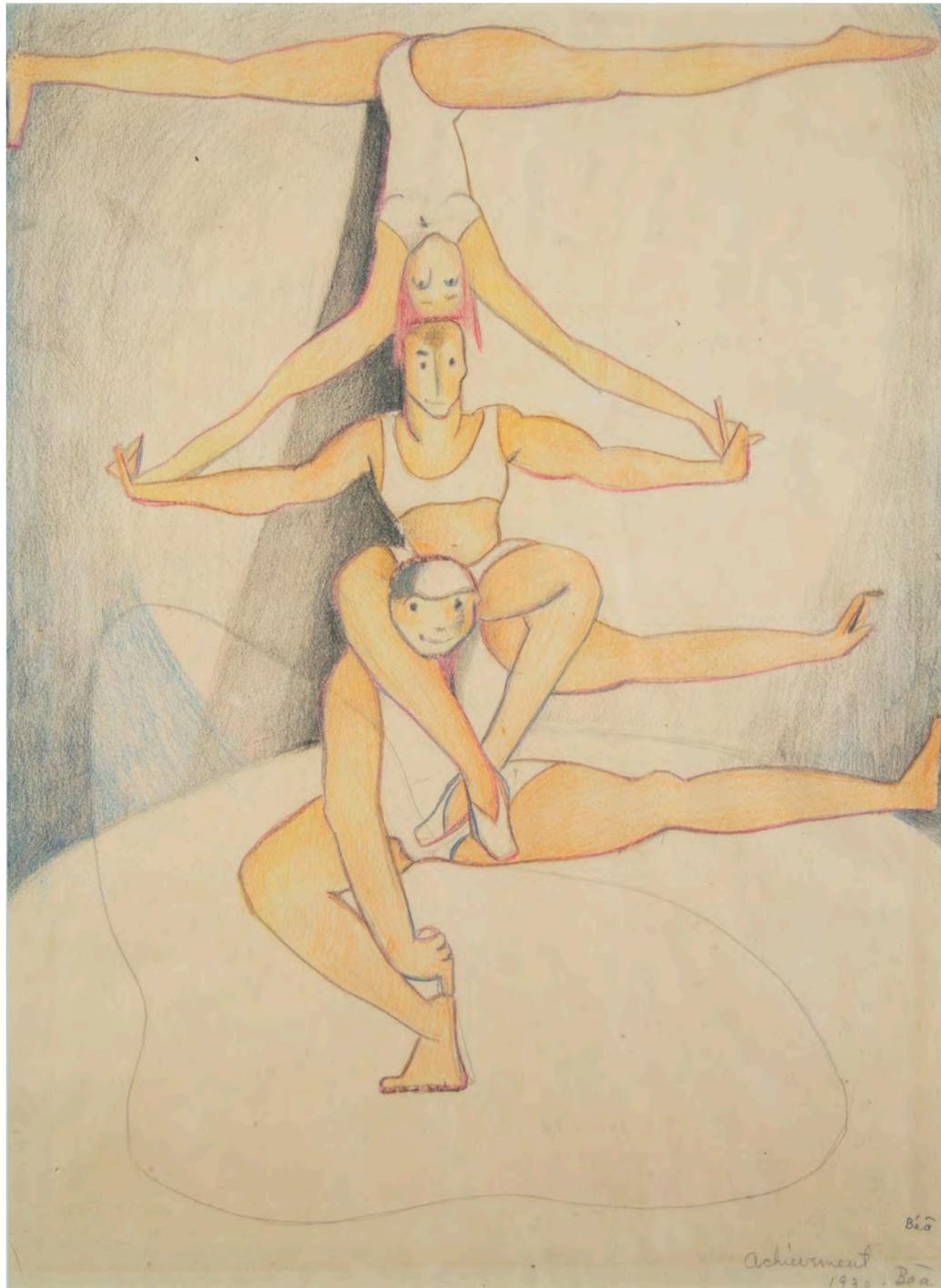
**16. *The Osteopath*, 1927**  
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 12 x 8 ½ inches



**17. *In Auto (Beatrice and Helen Freeman)*, 1928**  
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 5 x 6  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches



**18. *Actresses*, 1928**  
Watercolor and ink on paper, 13  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 17  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches



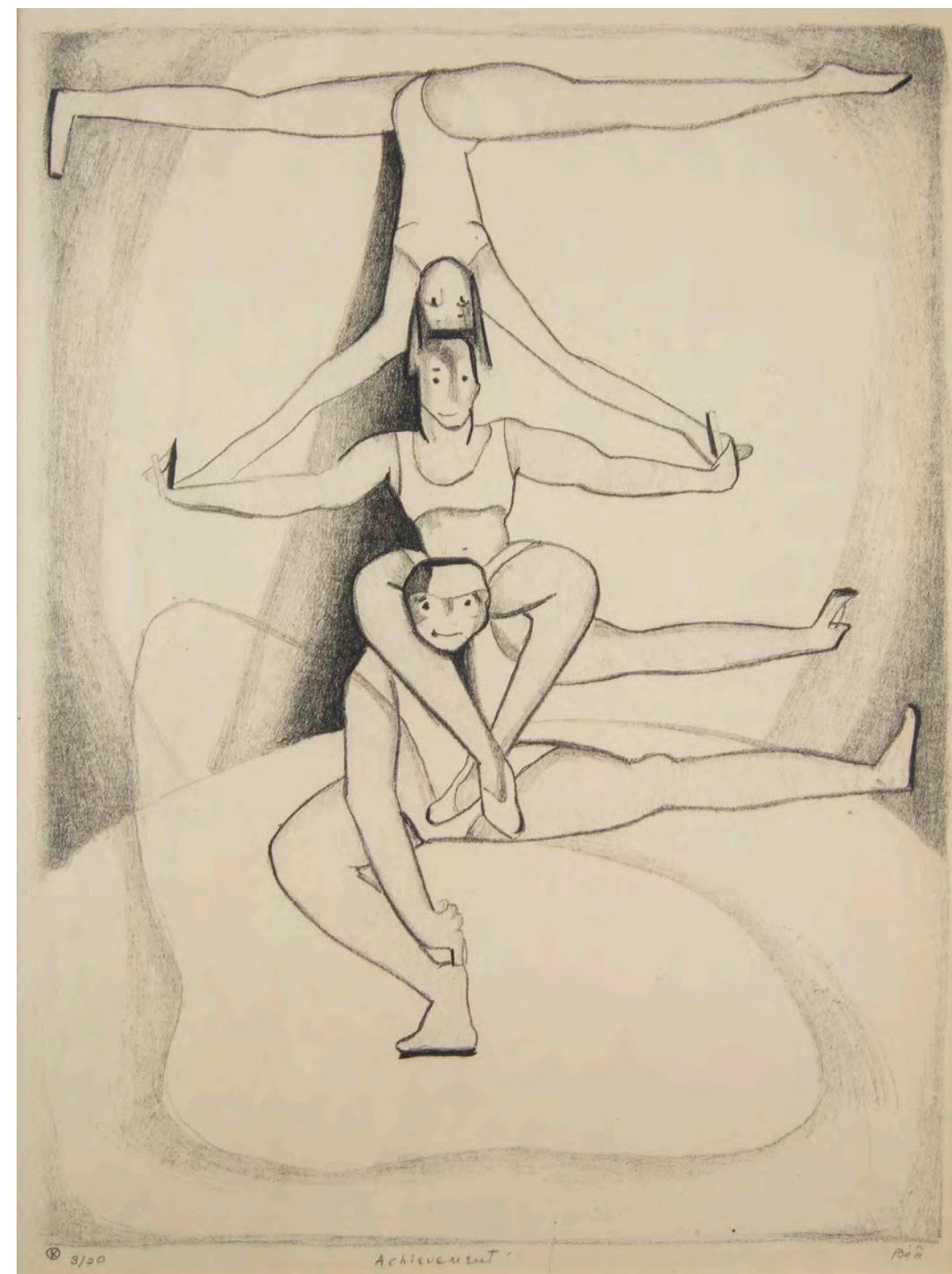
**19. Achievement, 1930**  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 11 x 8 ¾ inches



**20. What is it all about? 1930**  
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 11 ¾ x 8 ¾ inches



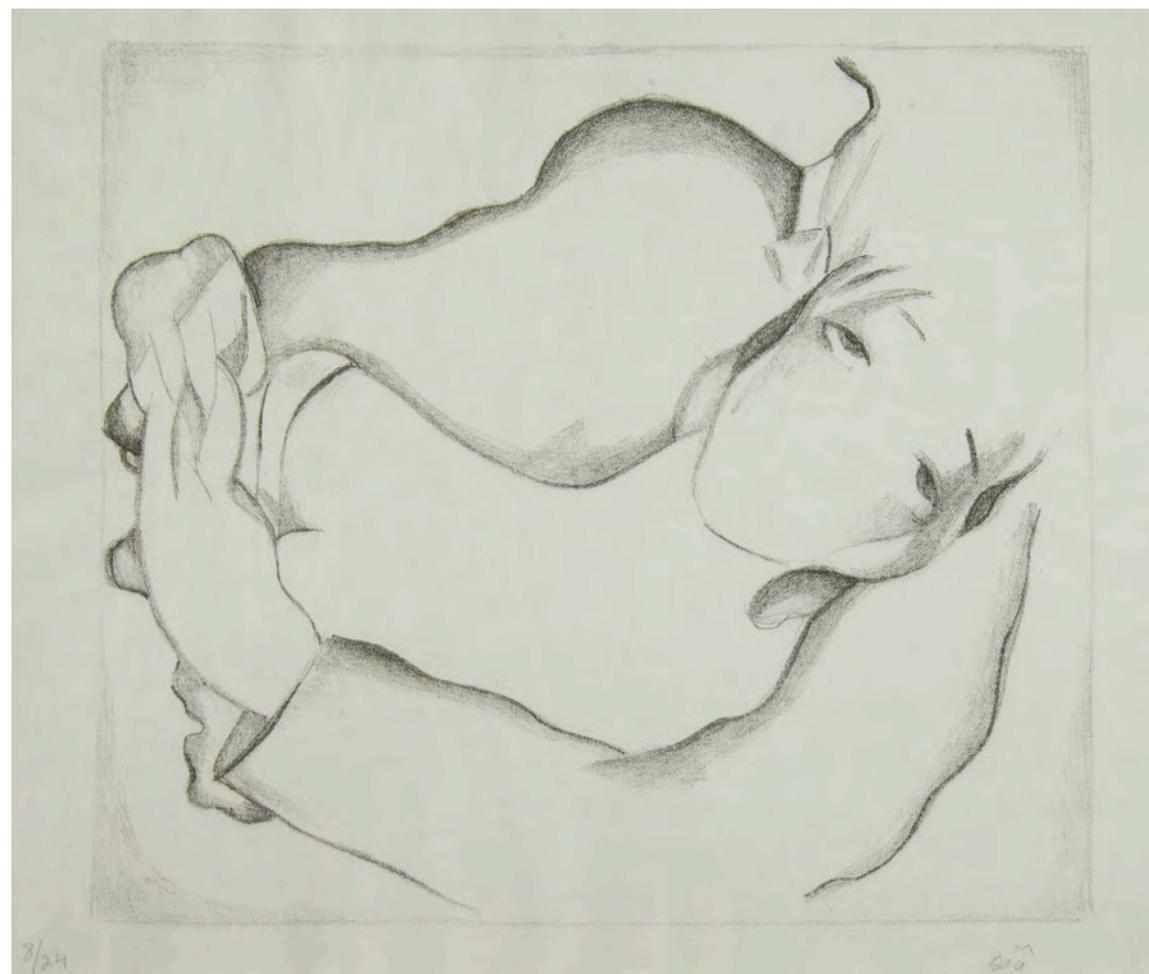
21. *Untitled [Radiating Red Mask and two Figures]*, 1932  
Watercolor on paper, 11 ½ x 17 ¼ inches



22. *Achievement*, 1932  
Lithograph, (3/20), 12 ½ x 9 ½ inches



23. *Embracing Couple* [Angular], 1932  
Lithograph (20/24), 15 x 10 inches



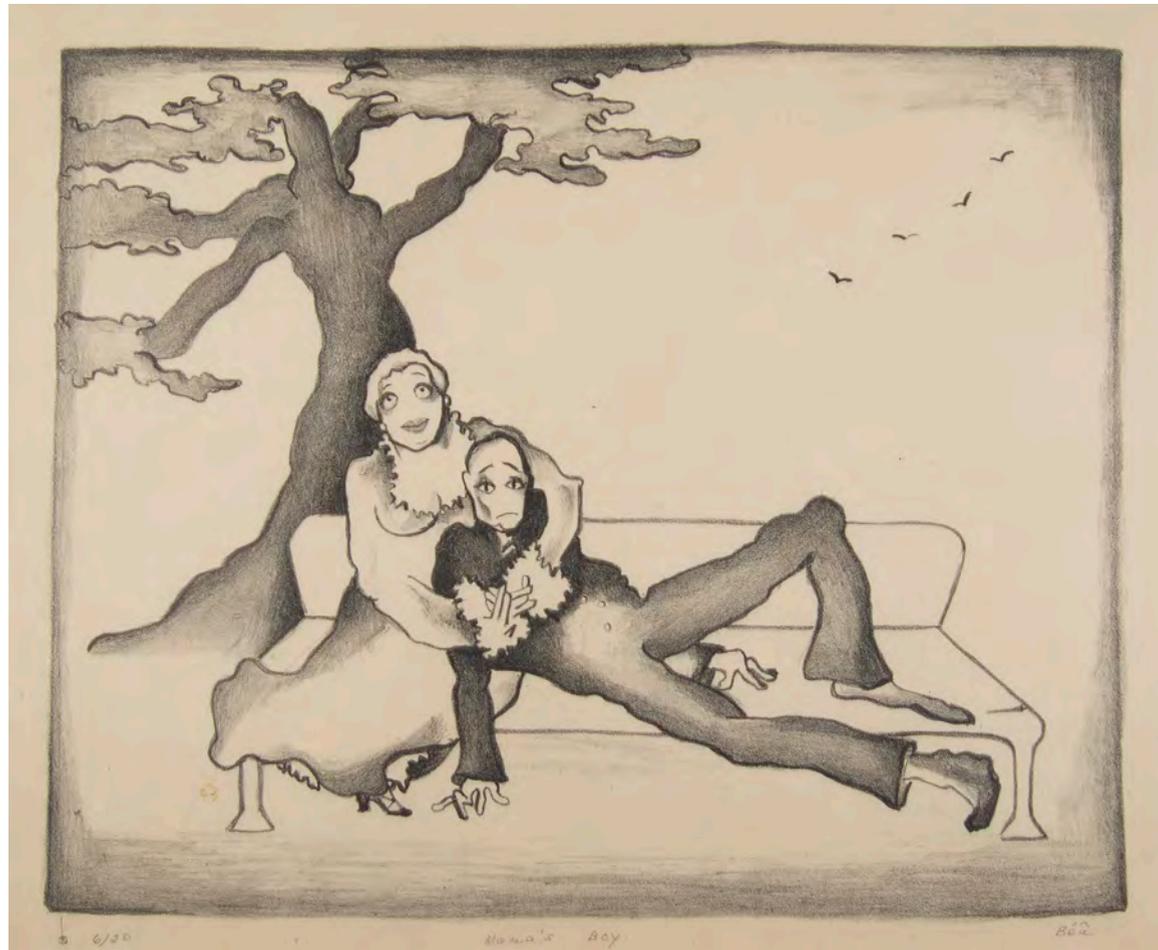
24. *Embracing Couple*, ca. 1932  
Lithograph, 8 x 9 ½ inches



25. Helen Lloyd Wright, 1932  
Lithograph (8/20), 10 ½ x 13 ½ inches



26. Holiday, 1932  
Lithograph, 12 x 15 inches



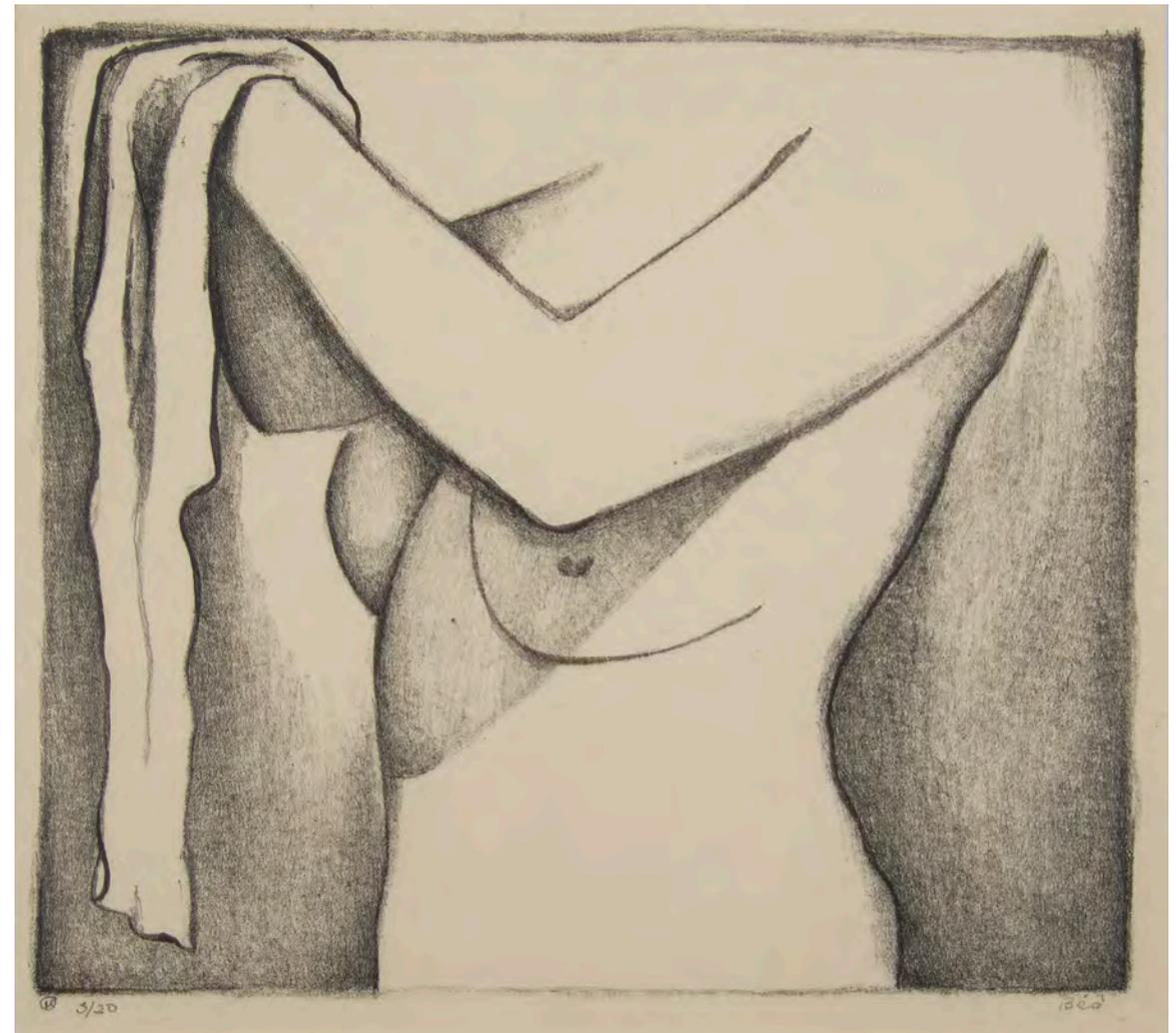
27. *Mama's Boy*, 1932  
Lithograph, 12 x 14 inches



28. *The Joy of Life*, 1932  
Lithograph, 12 x 15 ½ inches



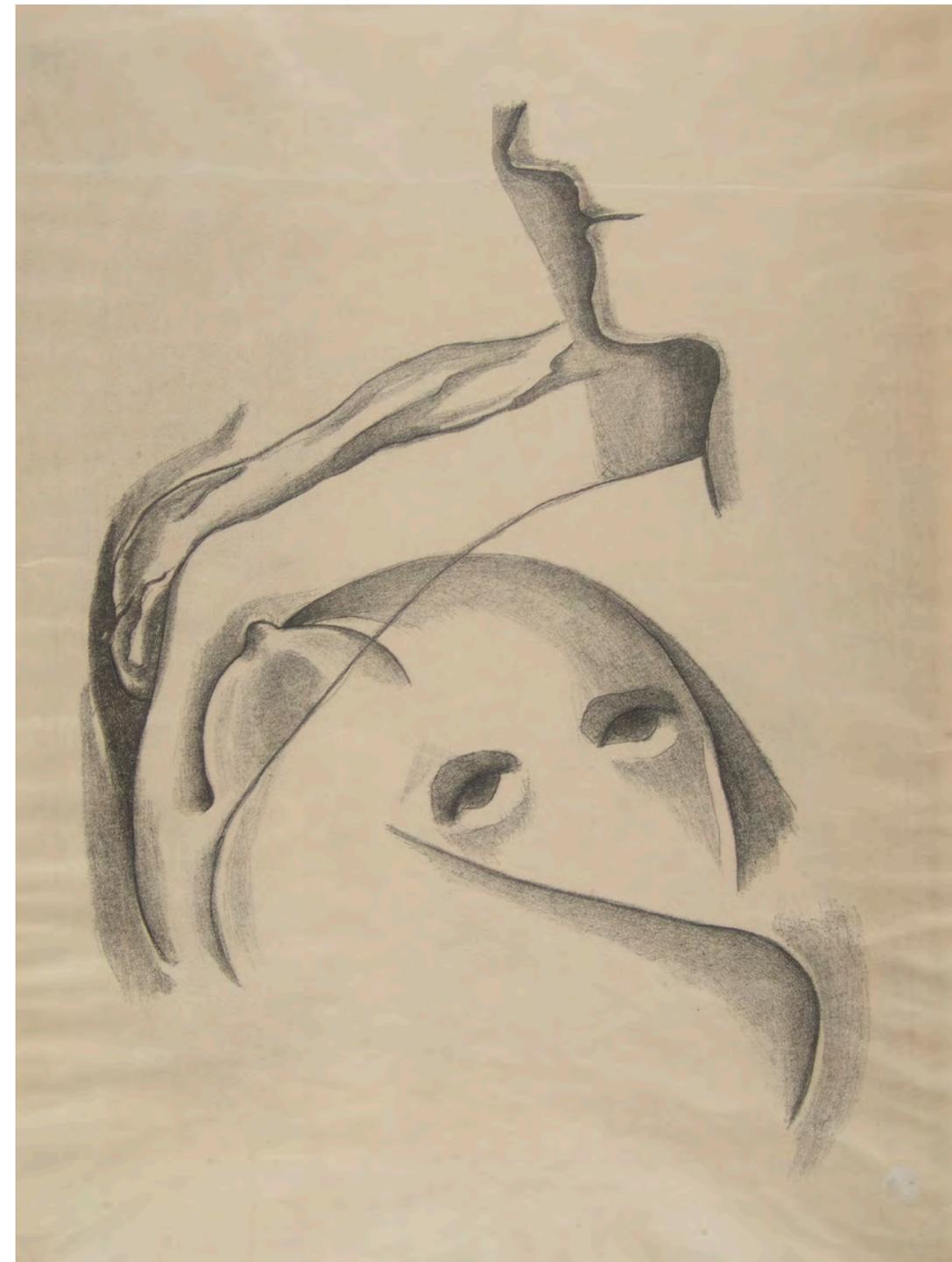
29. *The Operation*, 1932  
Lithograph (1/32), 11 x 8 ½ inches



30. *Untitled [Woman Drying Herself with Towel]*, ca. 1932  
Lithograph (3/20), 8 x 9 inches



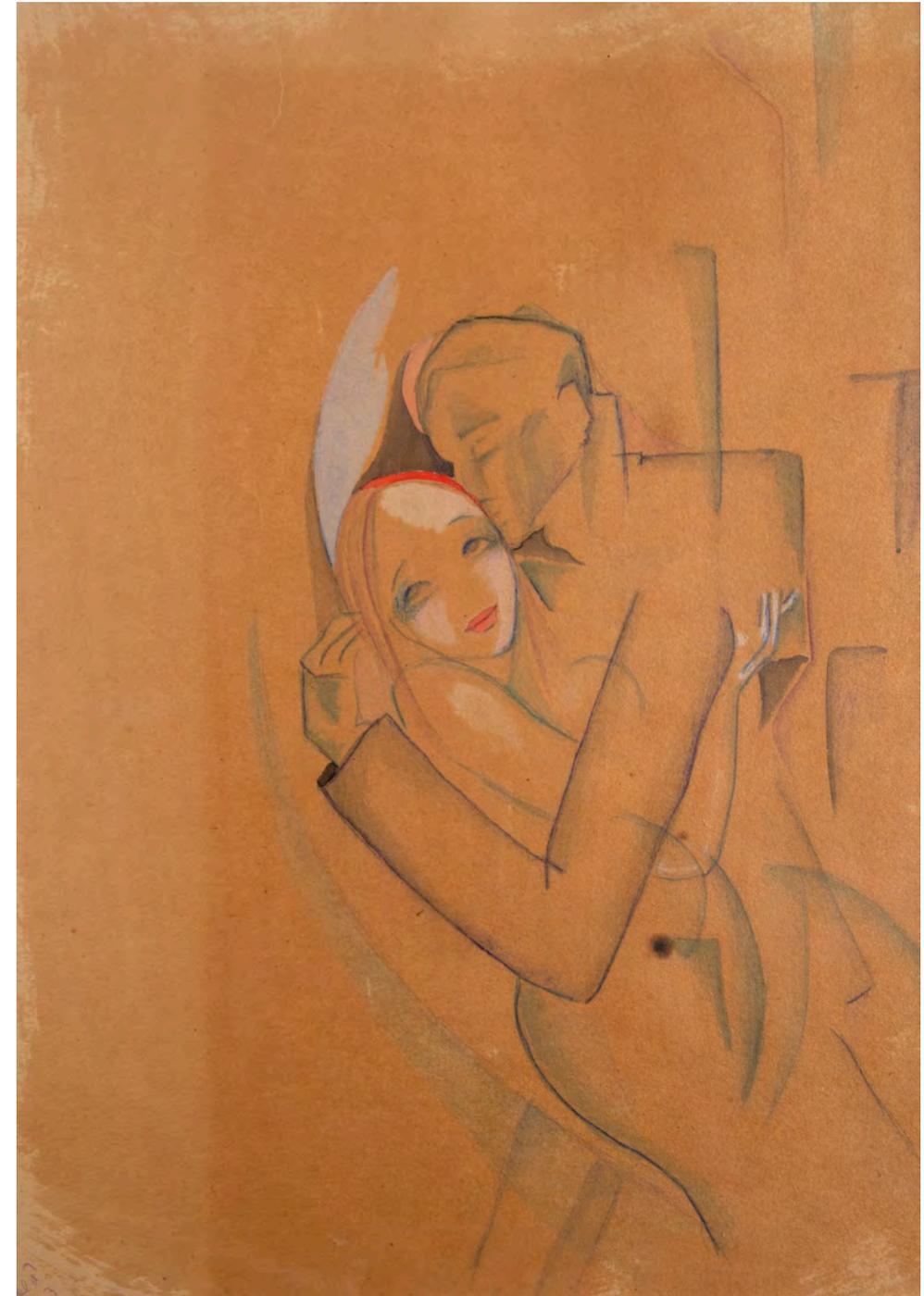
31. *Embracing Couple* [Circular], 1933  
Lithograph (23/24), 17 x 11 ½ inches



32. *Untitled* [Lovers], ca. 1932-33  
Lithograph (trial proof), 15 ¾ x 11 ¾ inches



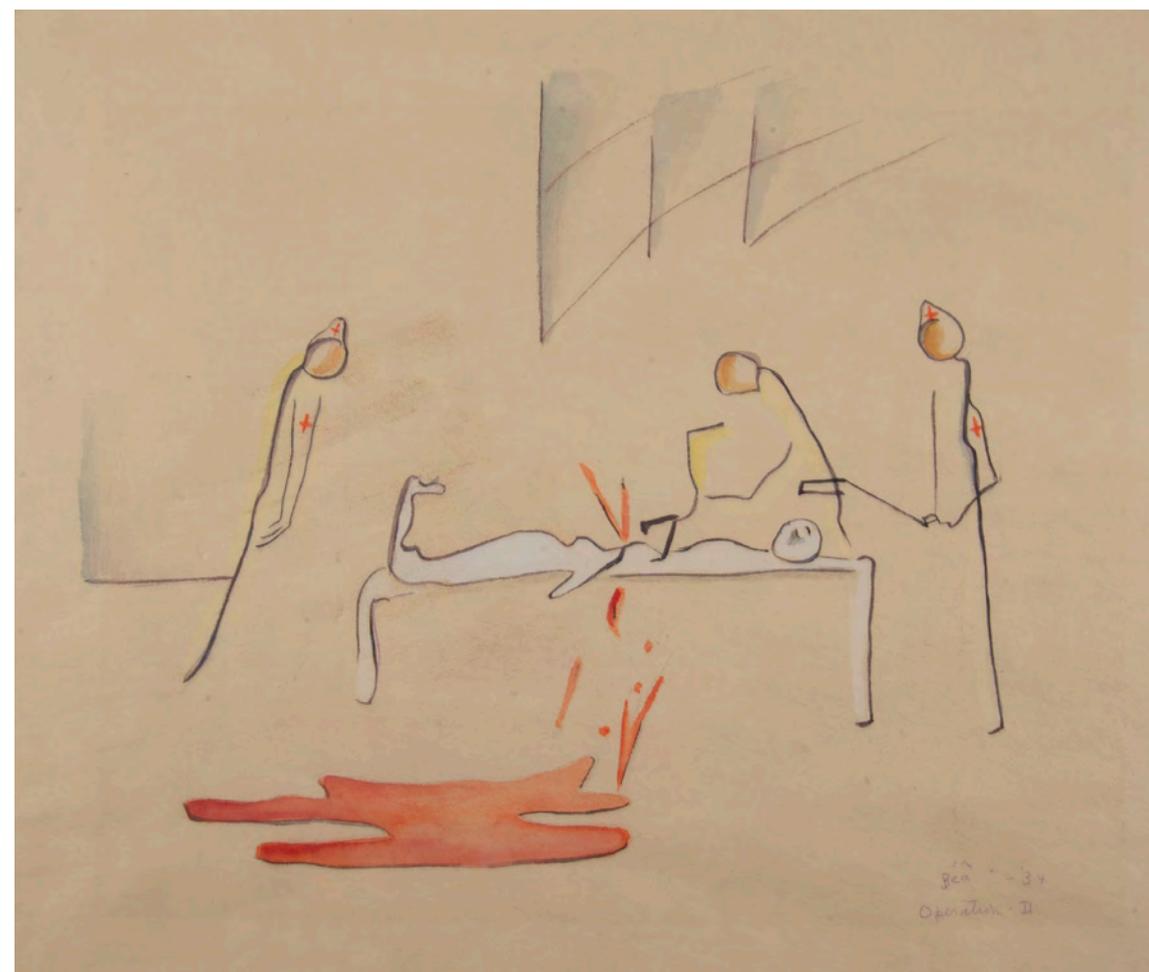
33. *Untitled* [Seated Woman and Man Reading Paper], ca. 1932-33  
Lithograph, 14  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 12  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches



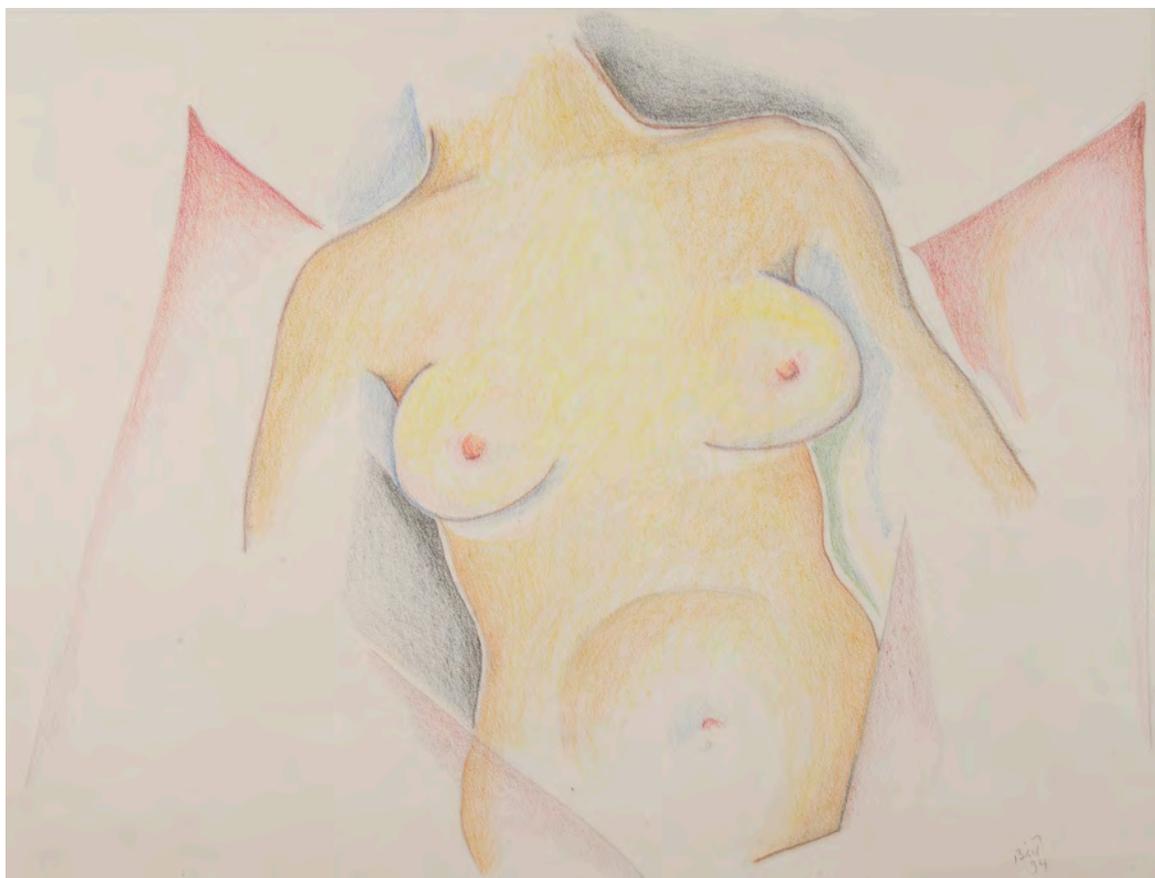
34. *Embracing Couple*, 1933  
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 12 x 8  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches



35. *Fear*, 1934  
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 11 ¼ x 9 inches



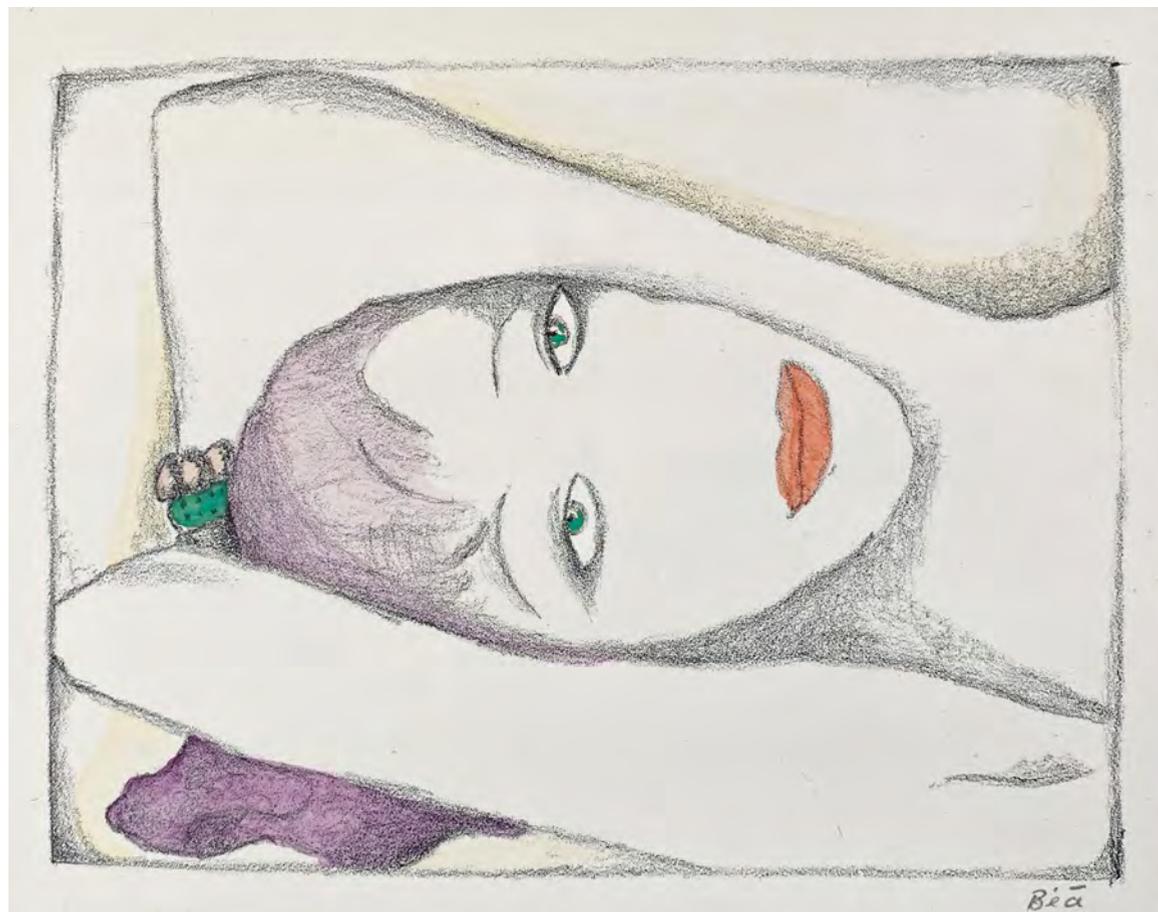
36. *Operation II*, 1934  
Pencil, ink and watercolor on paper, 10 x 12 inches



37. *Untitled [Nude Female Torso]*, 1934  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 10 ½ x 14 inches



38. *Woman and Pekingese*, 1934  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 11 x 8 ½ inches



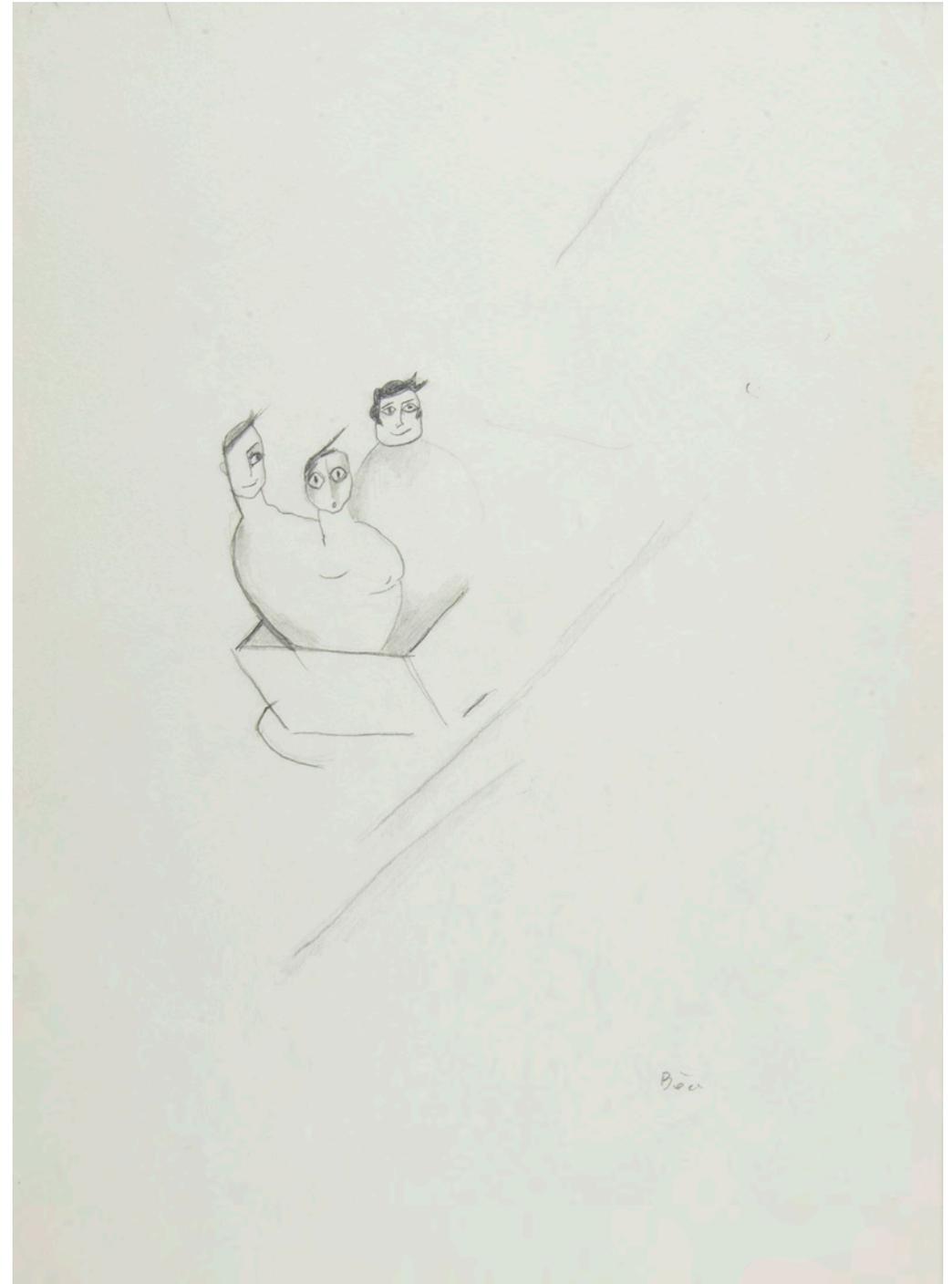
39. *Elsie*, 1934  
Lithograph, 5 ½ x 7 inches



40. *Untitled [Woman Seated on Red Couch]*, 1965  
Watercolor on paper, 8 ½ x 11 ⅛ inches



41. *Untitled* [Visiting Varèse], ca. 1976  
Pencil on paper, 8 x 10 inches



42. *Untitled* [Duchamp, Beatrice and Picabia Going Down the Rollercoaster in Coney Island], ca. 1976  
Pencil on paper, 11 x 8 inches



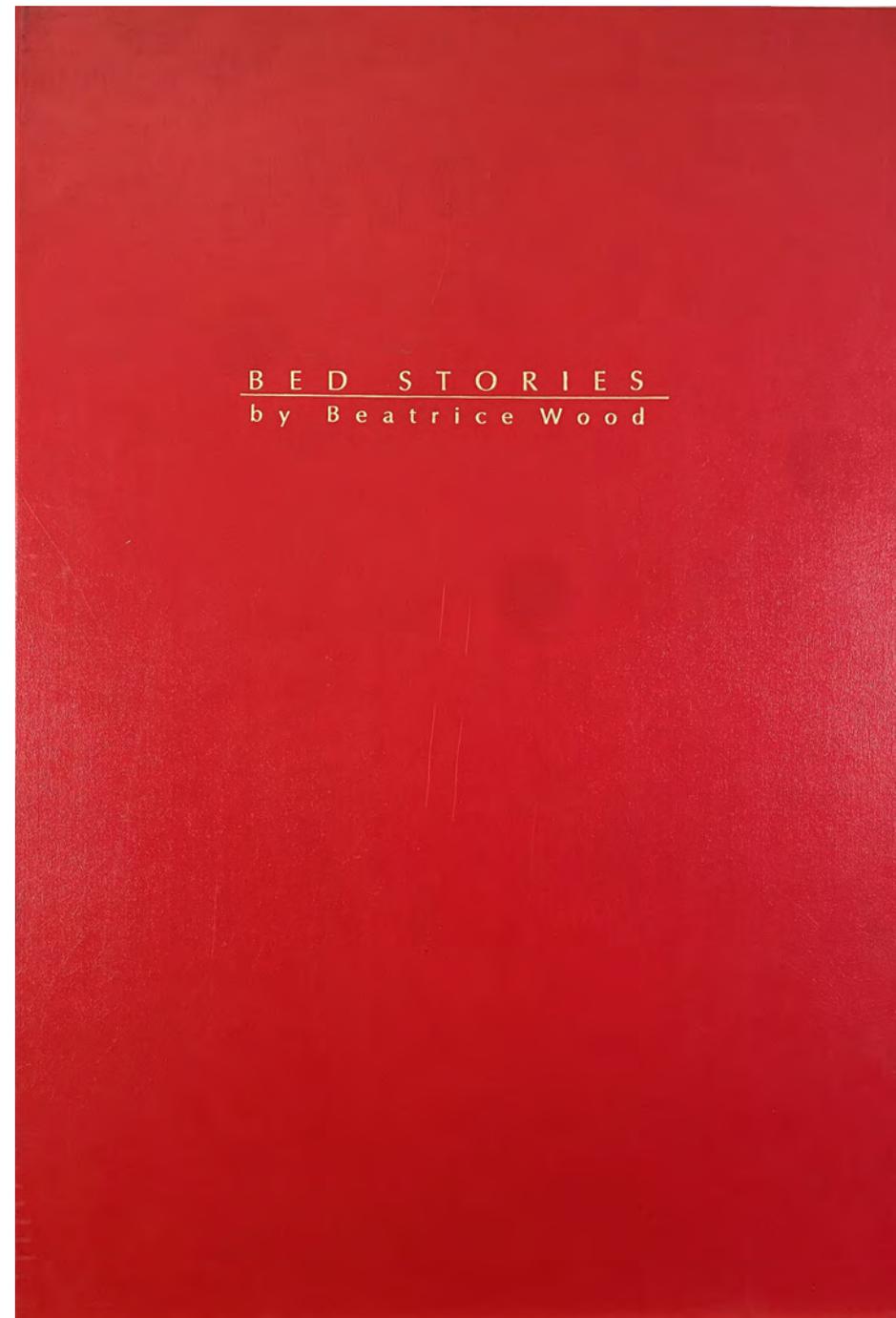
43. *Insomnia*, 1977  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 13 x 10  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches



44. *The Woman Who Loved Pussie Cats*, 1985  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 11 x 14  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches



45. *Untitled* [Woman Seated in Fancy Chair], n.d. (ca. 1985)  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 13 ½ x 10 inches



46. *Beatrice Wood: Bed Stories*, 1986  
Portfolio containing 22 hand-colored etchings, edition of 25, leather-bound box, 23 ½ x 16 x 1 ¼ inches

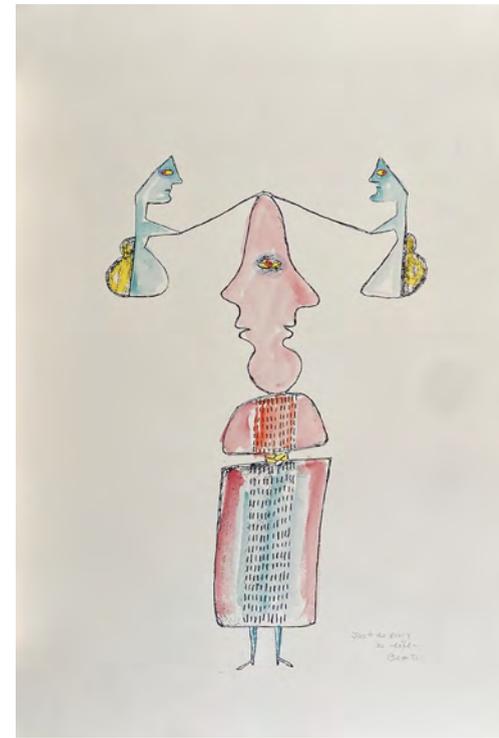
Each print measures 22 x 15 inches  
A selection of prints are shown on the following pages



*He Watches*



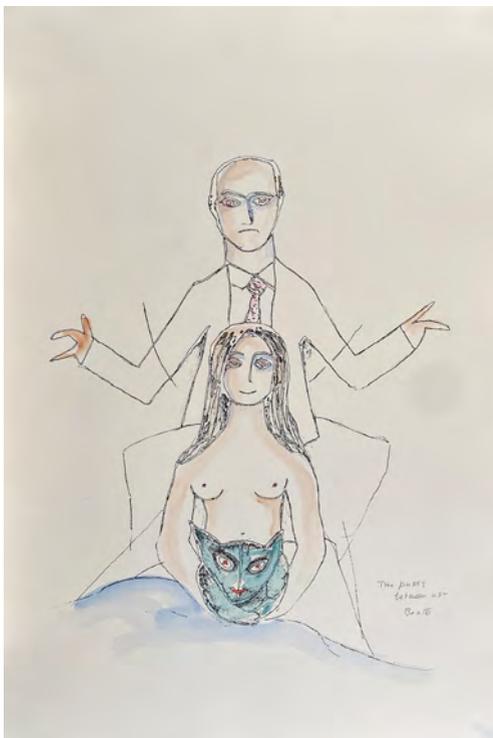
*The Jealous Wife*



*Just as Silly as Life*



*Two Men with a Single Thought*



*The Pussy Between Us*



*Riches Do Not Happiness Make*



*Saturday Night*



*The Woman WHO was Extravagant*



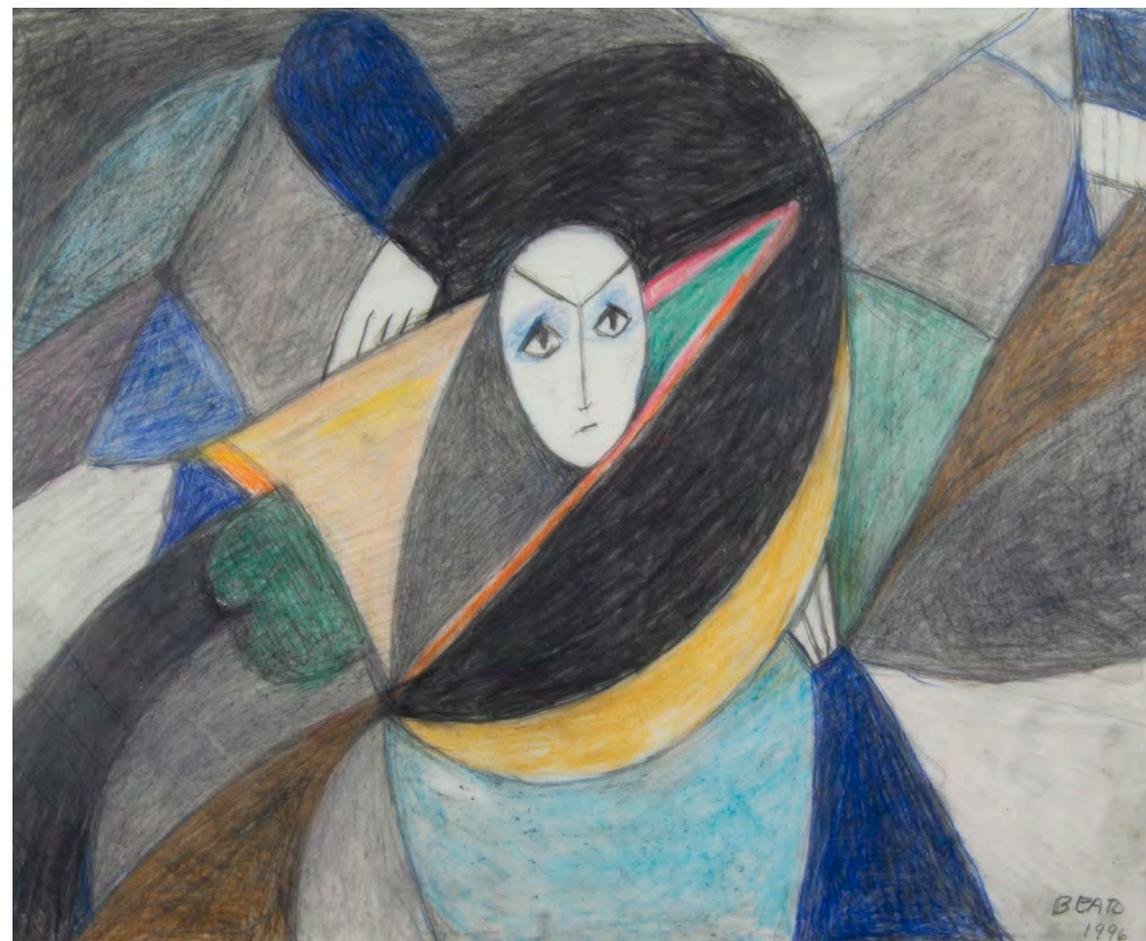
47. *Cocktail Party*, 1990  
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 16 x 12 inches



48. *Discussion about Abortion*, 1991  
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 12 x 16 inches



49. *Untitled* [Vision Beyond], 1994  
Crayon and colored pencil on paper, 13 ¾ x 10 ¾ inches



50. *Untitled* [Head in Abstraction], 1996  
Pencil and colored pencil on glossy paper, 10 ¼ x 13 ¼ inches



Beatrice Wood working at the wheel in her Los Angeles studio, 1940 (photograph by Baskerville)

## Where Craft Ends and Fine Art Begins: The Ceramics of Beatrice Wood

Francis M. Naumann

Beatrice Wood made her first ceramic vessel in 1933 when she was 40 years old. The impetus was to make a teapot that matched six lusterware plates she had found a few years earlier in an antiques shop in Holland. She assumed the process of creating this vessel would be quick and simple, but soon realized that working in clay took considerable training and experience, so she enrolled in a ceramics class through the Adult Education Department at Hollywood High School. After her very first lesson, she returns home and writes in her diary, “will like it,” a prescient prediction, for just a few months later she writes, “adore pottery” and “am crazy about pottery.” At the time, Wood’s main involvement in the visual arts was producing drawings and lithographs, which she had recently shown at an exhibition at the Stendahl Galleries in Los Angeles. But making pottery soon became an all-consuming activity, one that became the main focus of her working life for the next half century, which she pursued in earnest and with great success until just a few years before her death in 1998.

When Wood undertook the study of pottery, she lacked skill at the wheel and knew virtually nothing about glazes. In 1934, she took lessons from Glen Lukens, who taught pottery at the University of Southern California, but he was a perfectionist who made bowls and dishes that lacked the experimental quality that appealed to Wood. She preferred her work to be more decorative, which prompted her to make cups and saucers that feature floral decorations, as well as figurative ceramic sculpture, such as clowns, fish, harlequins and acrobats that derived from her earlier drawings. These items found a receptive audience and buyers in a small shop she rented in 1937 at Crossroads of the World, a newly opened shopping center on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. She was still not certain that she could turn her interest in pottery into a career, but was determined to



Beatrice Wood in her shop, Crossroads of the World, Los Angeles, 1937

make her best effort, so in 1940 she sought further instruction from Gertrude and Otto Natzler, Austrian emigre potters who settled in the Los Angeles area. With them Wood learned a great deal about working on the wheel (from Gertrude) and glazing (from Otto), especially the luster technique for which she would herself become well known in the years to come.

In 1948 Wood moved to Ojai, California, a picturesque rural community about an hour north of Los Angeles. There she would sell works out of her home and studio, first in a house on McAndrews Road (from 1954 through 1974) and then on property in the upper Ojai Valley owned by The Happy Valley Foundation (from 1974 until her death in 1998). It was in these years that she refined and perfected her lusterware technique, producing chalices and lavish table settings in silver and gold that seemed fit for use by kings and queens. Her reputation as a ceramic artist grew steadily as articles about her appeared in the leading craft magazines, and her work was shown in exhibitions at galleries and museums throughout the country. In 1961 she took the first of three

trips to India, a transformative and life-altering experience as she became drawn to that country's deep appreciation for folk art and traditional crafts, examples of which she collected and placed on display in her home and studio in Ojai. In the mid-1970s, her early drawings were discovered and shown in gallery and museum exhibitions, thereby establishing her identity as an important participating member in the Dada activities of New York long before her career in pottery began. In 1981 she had her first show at the Garth Clark Gallery, the leading exhibition space for ceramics in the United States, one that had branches in Los Angeles and New York. In 1983, when she turned 90 years old, Wood decided it was time to start making larger vessels, something she had not attempted before, for throwing sizable amounts of clay on the wheel requires a great deal of strength, a process that can present a challenge for even much younger potters. Nevertheless,



Beatrice Wood at her exhibition, America House, New York, 1947

during the next two to three years, she created some of the most impressive large-scale ceramic vessels of her entire career, a remarkable achievement for a potter at any age.

In the last years of her life, Wood was the subject of a major documentary film called *Beatrice Wood: The Mama of Dada* (1993), as well as several retrospective exhibitions, shows that included not only her ceramic production, but also selections of her earlier drawings. The most significant and comprehensive of these exhibitions was the retrospective that opened at the American Craft Museum in New York and concluded at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1998, a show that Wood attended. When she walked into the galleries of that exhibition, she concluded that her work had magically been transformed from mere craft to fine art, and she was especially pleased with the sumptuous catalogue that accompanied the show, as she said it was something she could present to St. Peter with pride as she entered into the gates of Heaven. It was only at this



point—just a few months before her death at the age of 105—that, with some reluctance, Wood accepted the fact that she had made a genuine contribution to the art of her times, while history will remember her as one of the most important and renowned ceramic artists of the twentieth century.

Beatrice Wood in her studio, Ojai, California (photograph by Donald Wm. Saban)





51. *Cup and Saucer with Floral Decoration*, ca. 1937  
Glazed earthenware, 6 ½ x 8 ¼ inches



52. *Thank God for Television*, ca. 1958  
Glazed earthenware and Indian jewelry, 15 x 10 ¾ inches



53. *Innocence is Not Enough*, ca. 1958  
Glazed earthenware, 23 inches high, 14 ½ inches wide, 12 ¾ inches deep



54. *Table Service for Four*, ca. 1965  
Glazed earthenware, 20 pieces, comprised of four chalices, four dinner plates, four salad plates, four soup bowls, four soup plates, dimensions vary



55. *Is My Hat on Straight?*, 1969  
Glazed earthenware, 18 inches high, 17 ½ inches wide, 9 inches deep



56. *Gold Luster Chalice*, ca. 1980  
Glazed earthenware, 12 ½ inches high, 9 ¼ inches deep



57. *Large Vessel*, ca. 1983  
Glazed earthenware, 14 inches high



58. *Dear Pussie*, ca. 1985  
Glazed earthenware, 13 ½ x 18 ½ x 6 inches



59. *Double-Handled Vessel*, ca. 1985  
Glazed earthenware, 12 ½ x 12 ½ x 12 ½ inches



60. *Fish Bowl*, ca. 1990  
Glazed earthenware, 7 ¾ inches high

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