

Arshile Gorky

Arshile Gorky was born Vosdanik Adoian in the village of Khorkom, province of Van, Armenia, on April 15, 1904. The Adoians became refugees from the Turkish invasion; Gorky himself left Van in 1915 and arrived in the United States about March 1, 1920. He stayed with relatives in Watertown, Massachusetts, and with his father, who had settled in Providence, Rhode Island. By 1922 he lived in Watertown and taught at the New School of Design in Boston. In 1925 he moved to New York and changed his name to Arshile Gorky. He entered the Grand Central School of Art in New York as a student but soon became an instructor of drawing; from 1926 to 1931 he was a member of the faculty. Throughout the 1920s Gorky's painting was influenced by Georges Braque, Paul Cézanne, and, above all, Pablo Picasso.

In 1930 Gorky's work was included in a group show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. During the thirties he associated closely with Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, and John Graham; he shared a studio with de Kooning late in the decade. Gorky's first solo show took place at the Mellon Galleries in Philadelphia in 1931. From 1935 to 1937 he worked under the WPA Federal Art Project on murals for Newark Airport. His involvement with the WPA continued into 1941. Gorky's first solo show in New York was held at the Boyer Galleries in 1938. The San Francisco Museum of Art exhibited his work in 1941.

In the 1940s he was profoundly affected by the work of European Surrealists, particularly Joan Miró, André Masson, and Matta. By 1944 he met André Breton and became a friend of other Surrealist émigrés. Gorky's first exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York took place in 1945. From 1942 to 1948 he worked for part of each year in the countryside of Connecticut or Virginia. A succession of personal tragedies, including a fire in his studio that destroyed much of his work, a serious operation, and an automobile accident, preceded Gorky's death by suicide on July 21, 1948, in Sherman, Connecticut.

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