

PRESS RELEASE

PAST & PRESENT

December 7, 2005 - February 4, 2006

**Reception: Wednesday, December 7
5:30 - 8:30 pm**

Presentation: Sunday, January 22, 2006 2:00 pm, "In Search of Lena Gurr" Priscilla Bain-Smith

Like Walt Whitman, Lena Gurr (1897-1992) found poetry in the everyday world of urban street life. [Tabla Rasa Gallery](#) is delighted to present her extraordinary artwork in PAST & PRESENT. As a female artist, in an era when women were blatantly under-recognized, she managed to spend her life creating artwork with heart, verve, and astute social observation. Her paintings, and that of her husband, Joseph Biel (1891-1943), are shown with works by various contemporary artists of similar genre and sensibility, Simon Dinnerstein, Gregory Frux, Sylvia Maier, and Dave Mitri.

Gallery hours: Noon – 5:00 pm
Friday and Saturday

TABLA RASA GALLERY
224 48th Street
(b/w 2nd & 3rd Aves.)
Sunset Park
Brooklyn NY 11220

North end of "R" train to 45 Street exit in Brooklyn.

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Lena Gurr was born in Brooklyn in 1897. She studied at the Brooklyn Training School for Teachers, Educational Alliance Art School, Arts Students League with John Sloan and with M. Sterne in Paris. Gurr was a member of the Artists League of America, National Association of Women Artists, New York Society of Women Artists, Brooklyn Society of Artists, Audubon Artists and the American Artists Congress. She exhibited in many of the shows held by these organizations as well as the Whitney Studio Club, National Academy of Design, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Brooklyn Museum, World's Fair (1939) and had three solo shows at the ACA Gallery (1935, 1939, and 1945). Gurr's work is represented in the collections of the Biro-Bidjan Museum in Russia and the Library of Congress. In addition to her career as a painter, lithographer and serigrapher, Gurr also taught art in the New York City public school system

Like Lena Gurr and Joseph Biel, the contemporary artists in this show are also Brooklynites, and each demonstrates an affinity for finding artistic inspiration by looking at the urban scenes, right outside their windows.

Most prominent among them is Simon Dinnerstein, well represented in museum collections (such as the National Museum of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution), and recipient of numerous National and International Awards (such as the Fulbright Fellowship, Rome Prize Fellowship) He is interested in the mysterious and haunting aspects of dream states and "time suspensions," which suggest that all earlier times may coexist, overlap and interweave with and within the present time. The Dinnerstein graphite drawings and prints, exhibited in this show are created with crystalline purity, and quiet drama.

Brooklyn-based artist Gregory William Frux documents and celebrates the vibrant life of his city in oil paintings, etchings & drawings. His work investigates the brownstones of Park Slope, the waterfront, Coney Island, industrial neighborhoods, canals and night in the city. He says of his work, "The 'guts' of the city, the hidden structures that make it work, fascinate me. To me, the emotional life of the landscape is reflected in the forms and colors of the buildings, streets, harbor and skyline. My paintings seek to excavate the myriad memories and associations of our complex and layered community."

The stunning paintings by Sylvia Maier are powerful, enigmatic and always thought provoking. Her life size figures are placed in urban settings. The work is bold and emotional, and the paint itself is just gorgeous. The figures are entwined, with lots of movement and concern with spatial boundaries

Since relocating to New York, Dave Mitri's paintings have dealt with the challenges the city has presented. Issues that relate to privacy, or lack thereof, feelings of being trapped or closed in, along with a disconnection from nature, are all subjects that he explores. "I want to make paintings that have a strong, life size, figurative presence that seem to compete with actual physical space."

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Biographical Note on Lena Gurr

Born October 27, 1897, in Brooklyn, New York, Lena Gurr was the daughter of Hyman and Ida (Gorodnick) Gurr. She attended the Maxwell Training School for Teachers from 1915 to 1917, then turned her energies toward art. She studied painting and printmaking at the Educational Alliance Art School in 1919, and at the Art Students League (1920-1922), where she was a student of John Sloan and Maurice Stern. She also studied art in Paris, Nice, and Mentone, France. Her first solo exhibition was in 1932 at the Brooklyn Museum.

On November 24, 1931, Gurr married painter and photographer Joseph Biel. He was born October 27, 1891, in Russia, studied at the Russian Academy in Paris, and at the Workman's College, Melbourne, Australia. He also established the first Jewish Library in Melbourne. Upon his arrival in the United States, he studied under George Grosz at the Art Students League. Biel died in April 1943 of a heart ailment.

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Below is background information on the "Ashcan" art movement, which continued to influence artists in the Depression era, from [World Wide Arts Resources](http://WorldWideArtsResources.absolutarts.com).

Art History: Ash Can School: (1908 - 1918) Following the dictum "art for life's sake" the Ash Can school shocked audiences with their depictions of new themes that included the streets and city life. The group's name derives from the urban garbage can image and hostile critics also named the group the "black gang." The group was begun by Robert Henri in Philadelphia around 1891, and soon gained the attention of newspaper illustrators George Luks, John Sloan, William Glackens, and Everett Shinn. Henri was an admirer of American realist painters Thomas Eakins and Thomas Anshutz. The Ash Can School group was more revolutionary in subject matter than style. The artists strived to paint what was real about urban life, finding beauty in that truth. The group of American painters focused on common urban scenes with unpleasant and unfashionable subjects such as the working class, the streets, alleys, and bars. They created realistic and un-enhanced portraits of everyday life and common people. Ash Can School paintings have a spontaneous and loose style distinctive from the rigid techniques taught in the early twentieth century American art academies. Paint was applied thickly and rapidly, leaving evidence of brushstrokes. Ashcan painters used a dark, muted palette. The Eight was a group comprised of the eight members of the Ashcan school. They originated in New York City in 1908, exhibiting together despite their different artistic approaches. The group was comprised of romanticist Arthur B. Davies, impressionists Maurice Prendergast, Ernest Lawson, and William Glackens, illustrator Everett Shinn, virtuoso Robert Henri and his followers, John Sloan and George Luks. What united the men of The Eight was their opposition to strict academic exhibition procedures. They organized a revolutionary exhibition that rebelled against American modern art in that it was the first self-organized and self-selected exhibit by a group of related artists, without a jury and prizes. They also held the Armory Show in 1913, which exposed modern European art to the American public, who received it with a mix of shock and curiosity. In 1917, The Eight organized the Society of Independent Artists along with George Bellows and others. The American Scene Painting movement of the 1920's and 1930's carried on the Ashcan school's ideology.