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Robert Fishko, *Director*

### **Bernard Karfiol**

1886 – 1952

Bernard Karfiol was born on May 6, 1886 in Budapest. After briefly living in Hungary, Karfiol and his American parents moved to Long Island, New York, where his father owned a factory and also worked as an engraver and inventor. At fourteen, Karfiol developed an interest in art and attended the National Academy of Design in New York. A year later, with \$25.00, Karfiol went to Paris to study painting at Académie Julian with Jean-Paul Laurens, and at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts. He quickly adopted a style of painting influenced by French artists like Cézanne and Renoir. Already a mature artist at 17, in 1904 Karfiol became the youngest artist at the time to be included in a show at the Grand Salon. The following year, Karfiol exhibited at the Salon d'Automne. While in Paris, Karfiol sold a painting for \$200.00, which allowed him to travel to Poland, Italy and England before returning to the United States in 1906.

Once back in New York Karfiol remained mostly unknown for several years. For income Karfiol taught art classes in Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's Eighth Street studio. Karfiol's contributions to the infamous 1913 Armory Show helped in establishing his credibility in New York. Hamilton Easter Field gave Karfiol his first exhibition in New York with John Marin in 1917 at his Ardsley Studio. However, it was his participation in the 1921 exhibition at the Modern Artists of America that attracted the attention of gallery owner Joseph Brummer, who subsequently gave Karfiol three solo exhibitions in 1923, 1925 and 1927.

Karfiol's one-man shows helped his reputation grow in the art world. In December of 1929, the newly established Museum of Modern Art held its second exhibition featuring the "Nineteen Best American Artists" as determined by a panel of trustees. Included in the show were five of Karfiol's oil paintings, of which one winning critical acclaim as one of best nudes in the show. Another important show in Karfiol's career was his participation in the 1931 inaugural biennial exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

In the 1930s, owner of The Downtown Gallery, Edith Halpert, became interested in Karfiol's critically acclaimed work. Halpert included his work in several group shows before serving as his representative for the majority of his life and beyond his passing. During his life, Karfiol had four solo exhibits at The Downtown Gallery in 1933, 1941, 1946 and 1949. Edith Halpert described Bernard Karfiol as a

romanticist, defining romanticism as “an imaginative creation removed from a specific time and place.” His last show at The Downtown Gallery was in 1956 and served as a memorial exhibition.

A formidable colorist, Karfiol’s loose and painterly brushstrokes and his focus on form reflected the essence of the subjects he painted. His figures appear lost in thought and removed from space, but his technical mastery and profound sense of compositional design securely anchor them within the reality of his paintings. More than anything, whether painting nudes or landscapes, Karfiol painted with an intensity of feeling and tenderness, displaying a keenly sensitive awareness of the humanity he emphasized.

Spending most of his life in Manhattan, Ogunquit, MA, and Irvington-on-Hudson, the inspiration provided by scenes from these places formed the basis for many of the paintings Karfiol created throughout his career. From the mid 1930s to the late 1940s, Karfiol travelled repeatedly to Cuba, Jamaica and Mexico with the images from these locations resulting in many more works.

Karfiol received numerous honors and awards throughout his life including an Honorable Mention in 1927 at the International Exhibition, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA; the first William A. Clark Prize (\$2000.); the Corcoran Gold Medal, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and an Honorable Mention, 1925, Pan-American Exposition, Los Angeles, CA. He also served as member of The Painters and Sculptors Gallery Association.

His lifetime of work is currently represented in many esteemed museums and collections throughout the nation: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; The Detroit Museum of Art, Detroit, MI; The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Ogunquit Museum of Art, Ogunquit, ME; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; and The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. among others.