

Exhibition: *Edward Biberman, Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice*
On View: May 18–November 16, 2014
Location: Art of the Americas Building, Level 3



Image caption on page 3

Edward Biberman, Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice celebrates the recent conservation of the mural *Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice*, painted by Los Angeles artist Edward Biberman in 1941. This example of New Deal-era art will be exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in a special installation about Venice in the context of a narrative about the artist's long-term engagement with public art and fascination with Southern California culture.

Senior curator of American Art Ilene Susan Fort states, "LACMA is honored and thrilled to have the opportunity to present the mural to a broad public. When I first moved to Southern California from New York City, I drove to Venice especially to see the famous painting in person. It is fun and quite unique in composition and presentation among the many murals commissioned during the Depression to decorate new post offices built all around the country. LACMA's presentation places it within the historical context of Venice's visionary foundation and actual fate. It is an intriguing tale."

Recent conservation of *Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice* was underwritten by film producer Joel Silver. "Edward Biberman's *Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice* mural is a treasured part of the history of Venice," says Silver, CEO, Silver Pictures. "As a longtime preservationist of architecture, I understand the importance of the mural to both the residents of Venice and admirers of WPA-era art."

The Mural

Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice traces the history of Venice, California, from 1905, when the seaside resort was built, to the early 1940s. The three-part composition centers on a portrait of Venice founder Abbot Kinney, framed within a rounded arch that is reminiscent of the

colonnades found along the façades of local commercial buildings in Venice. In the background, Biberman depicts Kinney's grandiose vision for a West Coast cultural destination with Venetian-style gondolas navigating canals bordered by vacation bungalows. On either side of this utopian vista loom scenes portraying the eventual fate of the town decades later: at left, the bustling beach boardwalk and its amusement park attractions on the Venice pier, and at right, the encroaching oil fields with towering oil derricks and tanks marring the natural coastal environment. The artist drew inspiration from historical documents, such as the photographs on display in the exhibition, that echo the imagery in his mural. Following its presentation at LACMA, *Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice* will be housed in the headquarters of Silver Pictures, formerly the United States Post Office of Venice, California.

The Artist

Edward Biberman studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. He traveled to Europe in 1926, where he lived primarily in Paris, successfully exhibiting in salons and in a solo show at Galerie Zak. Biberman returned to New York in 1929 and began to develop his ideas of relating painting to architecture, entering his first competition. His encounters with "Los Tres Grandes"—the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco—furthered Biberman's interest in public art.

In 1936 Biberman settled in Los Angeles, where he continued painting portraits and urban landscapes as well as entering mural competitions. By 1941, when he painted the work for the Venice Post Office, Biberman had been designing murals for over a decade. The Depression gave rise to government-subsidized art programs, such as the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP, 1933–34) and the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP, 1935–43), which were created in large part as welfare to support unemployed artists. The main mission of the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, which supported *Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice*, however, was to commission high-quality art for federal buildings. In the mid-1930s, Biberman participated in over a half dozen Section of Fine Arts competitions. He was awarded several contracts for murals at post offices, including the downtown Los Angeles branch in 1937 and the Venice branch in 1940. In addition, he was a member of the selection committee for the Social Security building mural in Washington, DC, executed by Ben Shahn in 1940.

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 120,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research

facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement at lacma.org. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles which also contains the Page Museum and La Brea Tar Pits and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

Image caption:

Edward Biberman, *Abbot Kinney and the Story of Venice*, oil on canvas mounted on aluminum, lent by the United States Postal Service®. Recent conservation provided by Joel Silver. Photo: Anthony Peres © 2014.

Press Contact: press@lacma.org 323 857-6522

Connect with LACMA



@lacma | @enlacma