

### Information on

William Zorach (pronounced Zohr-ack)

American, born Russia, 1887–1966

*Milking Time (Echo Farm, New Hampshire)*, 1917

Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 in.

Gift of Robert L. B. Tobin, 1999.107



### Subject Matter

In *Milking Time (Echo Farm, New Hampshire)*, William Zorach depicts a scene in which three people move cows into a barn for milking. A bright orange sun shines down from the top center of the painting, forming an isosceles triangle (two equal sides) spotlighting the activity below. To the left and right of the center triangle are inverted right triangles (with top corners being right angles) with the multicolored woods and mountains extending to the top. The barn is a series of flat, gray rectangles. Silhouettes of people and cows are dark and angular. The bright yellow-orange ground in front of the barn and the trees around it are backlit by the sun's rays. Flat building shapes in the foreground are dull brown and green.

### About the Artist

The eighth of ten children, William Zorach was born in Lithuania, with the birth name Zorach Finkelstein. His family immigrated to the US around 1893, settling in Cleveland, Ohio. After his teacher said his first name, Zorach, was too difficult to pronounce, his name was changed to William Zorach. His departure from school after eighth grade for an apprenticeship at a lithography company allowed him to develop artistic gifts while he helped to support the family. At night he studied at the Cleveland School of Art.

In 1908, Zorach went to study at the National Academy of Design in New York City, where he learned the academic system of meticulous rendering and spent long hours at the Metropolitan Museum of Art copying such masters as Frans Hals, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Diego Velazquez. After saving to travel to Europe, he settled in Paris in 1910. At the Académie de la Palette, Zorach fell in love with fellow student Marguerite Thompson. While the studio emphasized the bright colors of the Fauves, Thompson encouraged him to free himself from academic instruction and "be just as artistic as you have it in you to be." At the same time Zorach began to favor more structured works by Paul Cézanne and others who came after the Impressionists.

The Zorachs returned to New York City and were married in 1912. From 1913 to 1917, he was influenced by art shown at Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291, the Armory Show in 1913, early Cubist works by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, and analytic Cubist pictures with objects broken into faceted planes. At the Armory Show in 1913, Zorach exhibited Fauvist paintings; then at the Forum Exhibition in New York, 1917, he showed Cubist and Expressionist works. The Zorachs spent summers in New Hampshire in 1915, 1917, and 1918. In 1917, the Zorachs settled with their two young children in the secluded New Hampshire hills at Plainfield, living and working at Echo Farm. Paintings done at Echo Farm are organized with a formalism based upon cubist division of space, as evident in the McNay's *Milking Time (Echo Farm, New Hampshire)*, 1917.

Zorach began carving wood in 1917 and stone in 1921. He abandoned oil painting in 1922, rejecting it for the greater sense of immediacy afforded by bronze, stone, and wood. (He did continue to produce watercolors.) That shift led to a prodigious outpouring of deservedly acclaimed work in sculpture, two of which are in the McNay collection: *Head*, 1952, and *Torso-Lena*, 1932. Zorach taught in progressive schools in New York, at Columbia University, and at the Art Students League. He died in 1966 in Bath, Maine.

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William Zorach  
*Milking Time (Echo Farm, New Hampshire), 1917*

### Quotes from the Artist

*In Paris I had not understood or been interested in the Cubists. But after the Armory Show I began making my visual observation of nature into Cubist patterns. It was another revelation: that one was not confined to the small section of nature framed in the space of a canvas and seen from only one point of view, but was free to use all the colors and directions of space and form that surrounded one.*

*Art is My Life, p. 34*

In 1931, William Zorach, addressing an audience at New York's Art Students League, observed, *Modern Art to my generation was a spiritual awaking [sic], a freeing of Art from the idea of copying Nature. We entered into a whole new world of form and color that opened up before us.*  
*Marguerite & William Zorach: Harmonies and Contrasts, p. 8*

### Strategies for Tours

**Primary Grades (ages 6-8):** What is happening in this picture? Is this painting a portrait, landscape, or still life? If you were standing in this painting, what sounds would you hear? What would you smell? How is living in the country different from living in the city? Where do you get your milk? Name the colors (primary and secondary) you see.

**Upper Elementary (ages 9-11):** [Use questions above.] How did the artist use geometric shapes (two dimensional and three-dimensional) to organize the parts of picture? Where do you see light or effects of light? What time of day is it? [Not everyone agrees on this answer.] How does dairy farming in this painting differ from modern-day dairy farming?

**Middle School and High School (ages 12-18):** [Use questions above.] What do you think the artist was most interested in when he painted this scene? What might Zorach have done differently? Where do you see pattern, contrast, balance, and movement in this painting?

**Adults:** [Discuss Zorach's background and artistic influences. Discuss analytic cubism and regionalism, which is painting local subject matter in a realistic and comprehensible style.] What characteristics in this painting typify Cubism? What characteristics typify regionalism?

### Sources Worth Consulting

Hoffman, Marilyn Friedman. Marguerite and William Zorach: The Cubist Years 1915–1918. Manchester, NH: Currier Gallery of Art, 1987.

Hoopes, Donelson F. William Zorach Paintings, Watercolors, and Drawings 1911–1922. New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1969.

Marguerite and William Zorach: Harmonies and Contrasts. Portland, ME: Portland Museum of Art. 2001.

Zorach, William. Art is My Life: The Autobiography of William Zorach. Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1967.