



Riverbank, from the "Floral" series, 1971, watercolor on paper, 23h x 23w in

Vera Paints a Summer Bouquet

June 26 – August 8, 2014

Susan Seid in conversation: Thursday, June 26, 2014, 6:30 pm

Vera Neumann (b. 1907, Stamford, CT – d. 1993, North Tarrytown, NY) was an icon of mid-century American design—instantly recognizable by the branded signature Vera—Neumann's artwork was the bedrock of her multi-faceted textile designs. Her vision was accessible, populist art: Neumann believed that art be available to all, something to aspire to and be inspired by, in everyday life. Her original drawings were the basis for all her designs of scarves, apparel, home linens, dishes, and fashion items.

For its inaugural exhibition, Alexander Gray Associates presents *Vera Paints a Summer Bouquet*, a selection of iconic watercolors and drawings of Neumann's primary muse: bountiful, abundant, and joyful flowers. These artworks, made between the 1950s and 1980s, will be exhibited for the first time, although many of the images will be familiar to collectors of Vera scarves, napkins, and apparel. Arranged salon-style in the Gallery's ground-floor space, the watercolors and drawings include images of flowers from Neumann's Hudson Valley garden: daffodils, tulips, irises, bleeding hearts, roses, delphinium, daisies, sunflowers, and poppies; many featuring the Vera ladybug icon.

Vera Neumann graduated from Cooper Union with a degree in Fine Arts in 1928, and in the 1930s attended the Traphagen School of Design. In the 1940s, at her New York City kitchen table, she began designing placemats with a handmade silkscreen; this was where she founded Printex (later known as Vera Companies) with her husband George Neumann and Frederick Werner Hamm. Drawing inspiration from the Bauhaus school, the Vera Companies conceived its products at the nexus of art, design, and technology. By the early 1970s, the peak of the Vera Companies' business, Vera imagery was sold on thousands of products internationally in over 20,000 retail outlets. Throughout her business career, Neumann saw herself as an artist, whose works translated graphically into accessible products that she conceived as wearable or usable art. Further, Neumann's identity as an artist—always with her sketchbook—was central to the company's innovative marketing and public relations campaigns.

Vera Neumann's drawings are foundational to her creative process; every product sold under the Vera brand began with an individual and unique artwork. Recognizable for bold colors, gestural marks and confident brushstrokes, Neumann's visual language featured a wide range of motifs, as well as geometric abstract designs. Best known for her exuberant florals, she found inspiration for her work in nature, every day objects, and most significantly, her fascination with world cultures. Throughout her life, Neumann travelled extensively throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, constantly expanding her vocabulary, incorporating themes into the mainstream consumer landscape through their application in fashion and household products. Neumann worked with a wide variety of media, including tissue paper, acrylic, crayon, colored tape, and batik, but most often she used ink and watercolor applying Japanese style *sumi-e* brushwork. Her artworks capture her decisive and spontaneous ability to draw with an economy of line and use of negative space. About *sumi-e*, Neumann explained, "It allows me to leave out everything extraneous. With one brush stroke, I can be both impressionistic and graphic." A minimal composition gave Neumann the possibility of developing a cohesive artist vision for both her works on paper and textile patterns.

Vera Neumann's work as a designer indelibly impacted the American visual landscape, from the Truman White House to the sportswear that Perry Ellis designed while working at Vera Companies. She maintained close relationships with her contemporaries in art and design; among her friends were Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, and Marcel Breuer, who designed her home in Westchester and her Garment District showrooms. She has cast a long shadow of influence on contemporary artists interested in design culture, including Polly Apfelbaum, Jim Isermann, Kate Shepherd, and Pae White. Neumann's designs are represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Susan Seid is the author of *Vera: The Art and Life of an Icon* published by Abrams in 2010. A graduate of The Fashion Institute of Technology and an industry veteran, she is the former owner of The Vera Company.

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Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery in New York. The Gallery presents exhibitions focused on artists who emerged in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Influential in political, social and cultural spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is a member of the Art Dealers Association of America. Summer Gallery hours: Tuesday–Friday, 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM.