

GLADSTONE

Gladstone Presents a Solo Exhibition of Late Czech Artist Anna Zemánková's Historic Drawings

Exhibition features rarely seen works spanning the 1960s and 70s

This May, Gladstone Gallery presents an exhibition of drawings by Czech artist Anna Zemánková (1908–1986), spanning her oeuvre from the 1960s–1970s. Presented through an art historical lens, the presentation emphasizes the remarkable foresight of Zemánková's work, reflecting her trailblazing influence in abstraction, similar to her contemporaries Hilma af Klint and Emma Kunz, as well as her enduring resonance with modern day painters seeking to expand the psychological and spiritual realms of the form. Presented in collaboration with the Estate of Anna Zemánková, the show includes incandescent botanical drawings and pastel works on paper embroidered with yarn.

To engage with Zemánková's art is to enter a realm of fluid metamorphosis. Her compositions pulse with biological urgency, as if each line were a living organism. *Untitled* (1970s), reminiscent of the zither her father once played at weddings, radiates effervescent yellows laced with electrifying blues, its thorns piercing velvety curves. Fibrous strings extend like tentacles or arpeggios of color. Here, sound becomes substance in a stunning manifestation of synesthesia: a shimmering grid of magnified cork-cells vibrate with Charles Lloyd's soulful syncopation. Zemánková's visual language thrives on the duality of microscopic precision and cosmic abstraction, a tension mirroring her process—trance-like improvisation guided by innate musicality.

A dentist, mother, and grandmother, Zemánková channeled life's multiplicities into creations that defy simple categorization. While often compared to mediumistic artists such as Kunz or Klint, Zemánková's work rarely touches on spirituality directly, instead rooting itself in the subconscious—what the Surrealists termed "pure psychic automatism." In her quotidian back-and-forth between labor and leisure, Zemánková found a way to forge her cellular patterns into networks of visual information and stimulation, liberating herself from the physical confinement imposed by her diabetes. Her refusal to title works, another deliberate act of liberation, invites viewers to project their own narratives onto her wildly imaginative botany. Cleaving open otherworldly spaces with her art, Zemánková's legacy lies in her fantastical elsewhere.

Born in Moravia, Zemánková came of age during the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the birth of an independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. This era fostered a fervent patriotism, marked by a devotion to preserving cultural traditions such as folk costumes, songs, fairy tales, and ornamental drawings. These influences ignited Zemánková's early passion for painting. Though gifted in depicting colorful, realistic landscapes, her parents discouraged her from attending art school, redirecting her toward dentistry. Amid the turmoil of political and social upheaval, Zemánková followed a conventional path: marriage, motherhood, and grandmotherhood—roles that temporarily eclipsed her artistic ambitions.

Zemánková's artistic rebirth began serendipitously. In the late 1950s, her sons Slavomír and Bohumil discovered a forgotten suitcase filled with her early paintings in the family basement. Recognizing the vitality of these works, they encouraged her to resume painting—a therapeutic act that blossomed into an astonishing late-career surge. Though self-taught, Zemánková was no recluse. Her son Bohumil and daughter-in-law Markéta, both trained sculptors, admired her intuitive genius, as did a circle of cultural figures including artist Jan Reich, filmmaker Vlastimil Venclík, and even Czechoslovakia's First Lady, Olga Havlová. Zemánková actively courted public recognition, hosting an open house in 1964, exhibiting at Prague's Theatre on the Balustrade in 1966, and later showcasing her work at London's Hayward Gallery in 1979.

In the quiet hours before dawn, she would rise in her Prague apartment, surrounded by real and artificial flowers, and surrender to the classical music of Beethoven and Janáček or the Jazzy Blues of Charles Lloyd. These solitary sessions, lit by the soft glow of imagination, became her sanctuary. With paper as her stage, she conjured a universe of pulsating tendrils, succulent petals, and coiled organic forms—a paradise of biomorphic flowers that blurred the boundaries of

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reality. Born from the shadows of personal suffering, her work invites the viewer into a kaleidoscopic garden where beauty and the grotesque intertwine, where music morphs into matter, and where creation itself becomes transcendence.

"Sure, I'll draw you something, I'll draw you one of my fantasies."

—Anna Zemánková

Exhibition Details:

May 3 – June 14, 2025

Opening Reception: May 3, 3–6pm

130 East 64th Street

New York, NY 10065

About Anna Zemánková:

Anna Zemánková is one of the great artists of the twentieth century and a pivotal figure in the Art Brut pantheon, alongside Jeanne Tripier, Madge Gill, Aloise Corbaz, and Emma Kunz. Her work has been featured in international solo and group exhibitions since 1971, preceding appearances at the Venice Biennale (2013 and 2024). Among her most significant exhibitions are *Outsiders* at London's Hayward Gallery (1980) and the São Paulo Art Biennial (1981). Posthumous retrospectives include the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (1997); Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava (2007); Museum Montanelli, Prague (2011); Saarland Gallery and European Art Forum, Berlin (2011); Museum of Art, Kobe, and Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan (2012); and Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne (2017). Her work resides in public collections such as the Milwaukee Art Museum, WI; American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY; Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM; Arnulf Rainer Museum, Baden, Austria; and private collections including the abcd collection, Paris; Centre Pompidou, Paris; LAM, Musée d'art Moderne, d'art Contemporain et d'art Brut de Lille Métropole, Villeneuve-d'Ascq; Boston Fine Arts, Boston, and The Museum of Everything, London.

About Gladstone Gallery:

Gladstone Gallery is recognized for its embrace of experimentation and visionary practices. The gallery has long been an active partner with artists pursuing catalytic ideas and engaging with pressing issues. Headquartered in New York, Gladstone's impact extends globally with galleries in Brussels and Seoul, enabling it to present new bodies of work and evolve its program to advance the practices and reach of its artists through time. Alongside its work with contemporary artists, the gallery is a steward of the legacies of pivotal historical artists and an advocate for the enduring power of their work. Gladstone is led by a team of partners who spearhead its long-term vision and program, building on the values of its founder Barbara Gladstone.

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