A New Exhibition Explores Another Side of Beloved Children’s Book Author and Illustrator Maurice Sendak Through His Set Designs

Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet
June 14 to October 6, 2019

New York, NY, Wednesday, April 10, 2019 — A summer exhibition at the Morgan Library & Museum celebrates an extraordinary bequest from acclaimed author and illustrator of children’s books Maurice Sendak (1928–2012). Best known for his 1963 picture book Where the Wild Things Are, Sendak was an avid music and opera lover. Beginning in the late 1970s, he embarked on a second career as a designer for opera and ballet. Opening June 14, Drawing the Curtain brings together nearly one hundred and fifty drawings from more than 900 by Sendak in the Morgan’s collection, including preliminary sketches, storyboards, finished watercolors, and painted dioramas. Also included are earlier works by Sendak on loan from The Maurice Sendak Foundation, and a number of props and costumes. This is the first museum exhibition dedicated to Sendak’s set and costume designs, offering new insights into the artist’s inspirations and creative process.

Like his children’s book illustrations, Sendak’s designs for the stage embody his singular hand, his fantastical mode of storytelling, and his keen—sometimes bawdy—sense of humor.

*Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet* presents a wide selection of works from five of his most important productions: Mozart’s *Magic Flute*, Janáček’s *Cunning Little Vixen*, Prokofiev’s *Love for Three Oranges*, Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker*, and an opera based on *Where the Wild Things Are*. These inventive designs demonstrate his exceptional skill as a visual storyteller.

A selection of eighteenth and nineteenth-century works from the Morgan’s collection by artists who influenced Sendak will be displayed alongside his designs. Throughout his career, Sendak drew inspiration from his visits to the Morgan, particularly his encounters with the compositions of Mozart, and the drawings of William Blake and Giambattista and Domenico Tiepolo. The Morgan’s diverse holdings of music manuscripts, autograph letters, printed books, and Old Master drawings mirrored Sendak’s own wide-ranging passion for music, art, and literature.

This will be the fourth and most comprehensive exhibition of Sendak’s work at the Morgan. The first took place in 1981, with drawings for Sendak’s deeply personal picture book *Outside Over There* and from his recent work on *The Magic Flute*. Both had been inspired by a visit Sendak made to the Morgan in 1977 to view drawings by Blake. This was followed by exhibitions of his illustrations for the Grimm tale *Dear Mili* in 1986 and drawings for the book *Where the Wild Things Are* in 2009, on the occasion of the release of a major motion picture adaptation. Sendak made use of the Morgan’s collections on at least two other occasions, including in 1987, when he leafed through Mozart manuscripts during the filming of the PBS documentary *American Masters*.

“Few people know that Maurice Sendak had a long and productive relationship with the Morgan. It is exciting to focus on his work as a theater designer, which is an often overlooked but
important aspect of his career as an artist,” said Director of the museum, Colin B. Bailey. “We are deeply grateful to The Maurice Sendak Foundation for their support in the planning of this exhibition and for lending several key works, including examples of Sendak’s charming Fantasy Sketches.”

“This exhibition will be a wonderful surprise to those who are familiar with Sendak primarily through his beloved books,” said Rachel Federman, Assistant Curator in the Modern and Contemporary Drawings Department and the curator of the exhibition. “His designs for opera and ballet have all the beauty, humor, and complexity of his picture books and illustrations, but they also put on full display his passion for art, art history, and music.”

Publication

Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet will be the first major museum catalogue of Sendak’s work. It reproduces all works in the exhibition as well as additional works by Sendak and others from whom he took inspiration. The essays discuss the importance of music and movement to Sendak, the artworks that inspired his stage designs, and the historical and biographical contexts that formed them, providing critical insights into one of the twentieth century’s most important children’s book authors and illustrators.

Author: Rachel Federman, with contributions by Liam Doona, Christopher Mattaliano, and Avi Steinberg
Publisher: The Morgan Library & Museum and DelMonico Books - Prestel
208 pages.

Public Programs

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Summer Family Fair

Celebrate art and literature at the Morgan’s Summer Family Fair! Visit J. Pierpont Morgan’s library, interact with our poetry wall to draw inspiration from our Walt Whitman: Bard of Democracy exhibition, and visit our three different craft stations related to our current exhibitions, including Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet, and permanent collection.

Thursday, June 23, 2-4:30 PM
Tickets: Free with museum admission. Appropriate for ages 3-14.

FILMS

Tell Them Anything You Want: A Portrait of Maurice Sendak

(2009, 41 minutes)

From Lance Bangs and Spike Jonze (acclaimed director of Where the Wild Things Are) A Portrait of Maurice Sendak is a loving look at one of the most cherished and complex figures in children's literature. The film is a tribute to Sendak, offering an unexpected look
at his exceptional life through his own words, personal photos, and illustrations. Featuring James Gandolfini and Meryl Streep.

**Where The Wild Things Are**
*Recorded at Glyndebourne Festival Opera in August 1985*

Director: Christopher Swann
(1985, 45 minutes)
Based on Maurice Sendak’s award winning book, this fantasy opera follows the young Max (Karen Beardsley) on a journey to the land of the wild things and back again. Libretto and production design by Sendak with music composed and conducted by Oliver Knussen.

**Friday, June 28, 7 PM***
**Tickets:** $15; free for members and students with a valid ID.
*The exhibition *Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet* will be open for program attendees.*

**LECTURE**
**Behind the Scenes: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera**
Christopher Mattaliano

General Director of the Portland Opera Christopher Mattaliano talks about his collaboration with Maurice Sendak and opera director Frank Corsaro in staging Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Janacek's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*. The presentation will be illustrated by images of Sendak’s sketches and production scenes. A live performance of select arias from *The Magic Flute* will end the evening featuring Patrick McNally, baritone, and Lindsay Ohse, soprano.

**Thursday, September 27, 6:30 PM***
**Tickets:** $20; $15 for members.
*The exhibition *Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet* will be open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.*

**GALLERY TALKS**
**Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet**
Rachel Federman, Assistant Curator, Modern and Contemporary Drawing

**Friday, June 21, 6 PM**
**Friday, August 2, 1 PM**

**Organization and Sponsorship**
*Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet* is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum. The curator of this exhibition is Rachel Federman, Assistant Curator in the Modern and Contemporary Drawings department.

The exhibition is made possible with generous support from the Rita Markus Fund for Exhibitions, The Maurice Sendak Foundation, the Caroline Morgan Macomber Fund, Rudy and Sally Ruggles, and the David Berg Foundation, with assistance from Marilyn J. Friedland.

The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.
About the Morgan Library & Museum
A museum and independent research library located in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the personal library of financier, collector, and cultural benefactor Pierpont Morgan. The Morgan offers visitors close encounters with great works of human accomplishment in a setting treasured for its intimate scale and historic significance. Its collection of manuscripts, rare books, music, drawings, and works of art comprise a unique and dynamic record of civilization, as well as an incomparable repository of ideas and of the creative process from 4000 BC to the present.

The Morgan Library & Museum | 225 Madison Avenue | 212.685.0008 | themorgan.org