

# The Karl Drerup Art Gallery

at Plymouth State University

## Enchanted Garden: Enamels by an American Master

### A Guide for Students and Families

This exhibition celebrates the work of **Karl Drerup**, artist and founding professor of the Plymouth State University Fine Arts Department. This guide will take you on a journey through his work and remarkable career.



#### While exploring the Gallery with this brochure, please remember:

- not to touch works of art,
- to keep a safe distance from the objects at all times,
- to use only pencils in the gallery.
- Please feel free to sit on the floor as you talk, write, or draw, but do not lean on display cases or walls.

**Thank you for helping us to protect these works of art for future generations!**

# Karl Drerup's Enchanted Garden

## A guide for Students and Families

### 1

#### Painting with Fire

To begin, find this work in the center of the gallery. This three-part panel and many of the objects in this exhibition are enamels, the art form for which Karl Drerup became best known.

Enameling is the process of

- applying thin layers of powdered glass to metal, and
- heating it until it melts and fuses.

**Look carefully at the image of the juggler to discover the special qualities of enamels.**

What do you notice about:

- the colors?  
*Are they rich or dull? Bright or muted?  
Do they have depth or do they seem flat?*
- the surface?  
*Does it appear soft or hard? Wet or dry?  
Matte or shiny?*
- how light affects the image?  
*Do some areas seem to glow? Do others remain in shadow?*

In the cases nearby, you will find many of the different types of enamel objects he made.

**See if you can find an example of each.**

Please remember not to point with your pencil.

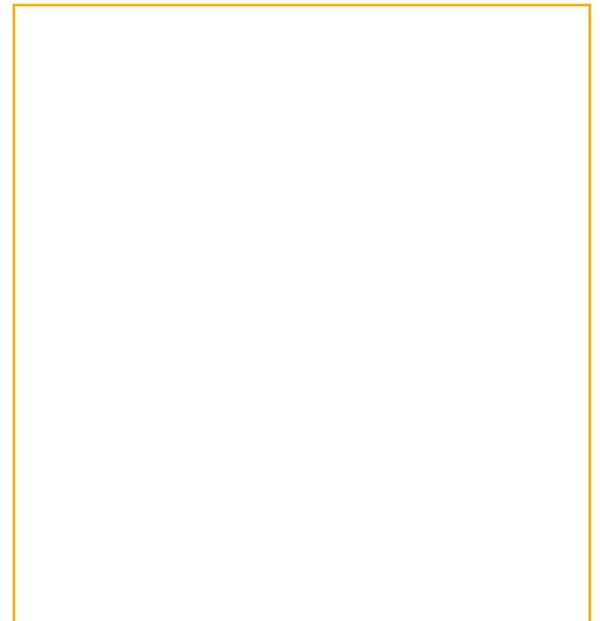
### 2

#### A Thoroughly Modern Artist

**Now, find the section of the exhibition entitled "Drerup and the Graphic Arts." It is located in the middle of the wall to the left of the entrance.**

Karl Drerup began his career as most artists do—doodling and drawing. As a child growing up in Germany, he was sent to a strict Catholic school, where he filled a notebook with funny pictures, or **caricatures**, of the monks who taught there. The notebook got him into trouble, but convinced his parents of his natural artistic talent. They sent him to art school, where he focused on drawing and printmaking.

He used these skills to make illustrations for books.



**Try copying some of the lines of his "Carmen" in the space below to get a feeling for the energy and expressiveness of his drawing.**





**A little further along the wall to the right, you will find the section “Cubism and Drerup’s work.”**

In Europe, Karl learned from and exhibited with many cutting edge, or “*avant garde*” artists. He was particularly influenced by the work of Pablo Picasso, who had developed an abstract style of painting known as *cubism*.

**Be on the lookout for the following examples of cubist-style painting in Karl’s work throughout the exhibition.**

- objects that are simplified into basic geometric shapes, like rectangles, trapezoids, and squares
- objects that are distorted into free-form shapes
- objects seen from different points of view—the side or from the top—all in the same picture
- space that has been cut up into overlapping sections, sometimes set at odd angles

## 3

### The Canary Islands and the Rise of Fascism

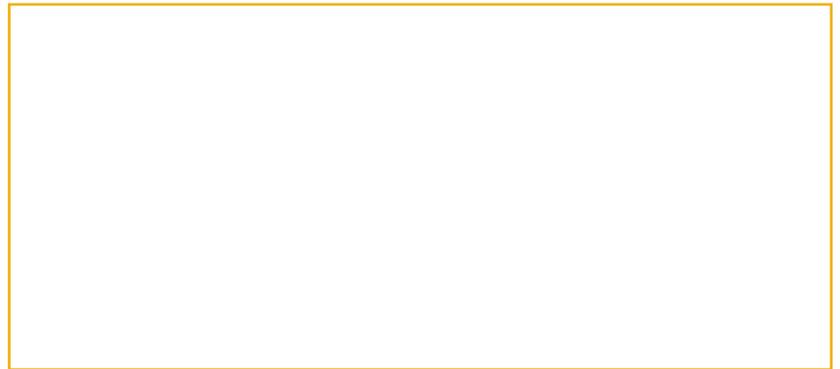
While studying in Italy, Karl met his wife, Gertrude, a German Jewish student of language and literature.

By this time, Hitler had risen to power in Germany and had begun to persecute intellectuals, artists, and Jewish people. Karl and Gertrude moved to the relative safety of the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa.

**Proceed to the case filled with ceramic objects at the far end of this wall closest to the entrance of the gallery.**

In Italy, Karl learned the art of painting on pottery. In the objects in this case, you can see the influence of living on a tropical island on Karl’s ceramic work. Notice how he uses a few quick strokes of his brush to create:

- fish
- octopus
- seaweed



**Draw your favorite marine design in the space above.**

But even the far-flung Canaries proved too dangerous as Hitler’s power extended across Europe. Fearing for their lives, Gertrude and Karl made their way through England to the United States in 1937.

Karl chose to show the chaos and destruction of war only subtly in his work. In this case and on the wall nearby, you can see it in images like:

- an ancient city with a sinking ship
- a hungry wolf at a stag’s throat
- a dove holding an olive branch

# 4

## Fine Art vs. Craft

As a newly arrived immigrant in New York City, Karl needed to earn a living. Although he had been wealthy and successful in Europe, he came to America with very little.

His ceramic painting skills brought his first success.

- In the nearby case, you can see some of the lamp bases he made for sale with a friend and fellow artist.

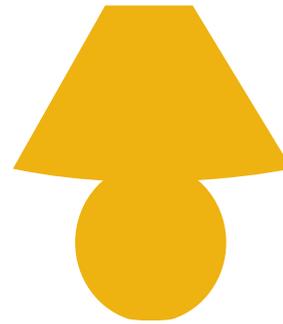
They actually fired their ceramics at night in a toilet bowl factory, using the space left over in the kiln between the toilet bowl molds.

At the same time, he taught himself how to make enamels because no one else in New York was making them.

- In the next case along the wall, you can see some of the many enameled covers for woman's make-up cases, cigarette boxes, and mirrors that Karl made for fancy Fifth Avenue shops.

But Karl wanted his work to be seen not merely as a decorative, useful craft. He wanted the world to see enamels and ceramics as fine art.

- So during these early years in New York, he also created larger, more ambitious pieces like the free-form work on the shelf behind you.



Entitled "Building the World of Tomorrow," this work is almost entirely abstract. Karl used lines, shapes, and colors to celebrate the technology, industry, and architecture of New York City.

# 5

## Peace in the White Mountains

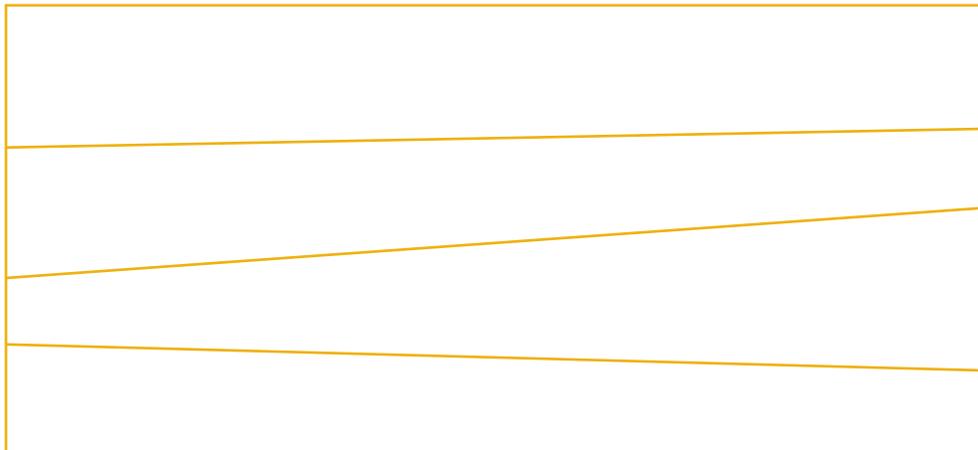
In New York, Karl also taught art classes. He was soon offered many jobs at colleges all over the country. But Karl had visited and fallen in love with the “Granite State.” He moved to the Plymouth area in 1945 where he eventually became a full professor at Plymouth Teachers College (now Plymouth State University) and built an art department of over 100 students.

Karl preferred the peace and grandeur of the White Mountains to the hectic “business” of art in New York City. The White Mountains reminded him of Germany, and home.

### Find the section of the exhibition entitled “Railroad Express – From New Hampshire across the USA.”

- How did Karl’s work change after arriving in New Hampshire?
- In what subject does he seem most interested?

Karl turned his attention to nature and began working in a very realistic style. But the forms he created and the arrangement, or **composition**, of his pictures were influenced by ideas in the modern art and design of the time.



### See if you can find at least three paintings laid out like the grid above in this part of the exhibition and in the section at the end of this wall entitled “In the Garden.”

Then look carefully to locate the following creatures in these works:

- |              |             |            |             |           |         |
|--------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| toads        | salamanders | chipmunks  | butterflies | fish      | beetles |
| cats         | lizards     | birds      | mice        | dogs      | rabbits |
| grasshoppers | flies       | centipedes | fox         | squirrels | snails  |

**If you like, you can use the grid above to draw in some of your favorites from any of the three works.**

# 6

## Stories and Symbols

Drerup retained his zest for life, despite the toll of war and the difficulties of beginning life in a new country. He used the stories he had learned in Catholic school and fond memories from his childhood to express his sense of hope.

**In the section entitled “Revelry and Religion” see if you can find examples of the following stories and images and then match them to the meaning Drerup attached to them.**



### Stories and Images

#### St. George and the Dragon

According to legend this Christian saint defeated a dragon that was terrorizing the people of a medieval city.

### Meaning

#### Joy and beauty

For Karl, music was a source of happiness.



#### St. Hubert witnessing a miracle in the woods

In this German legend, St. Hubert fell to his knees on a hunting trip when he experienced a vision of a stag with a cross between its antlers.

#### The triumph of good over evil

This image may refer to Hitler's eventual defeat.



#### Musicians

#### The spectacle and unpredictability of life

For Drerup, the circus symbolized the great stage of life, full of color, danger, and excitement.



#### Jugglers, puppeteers, and circus performers

#### The sacred and healing quality of nature

This image may have had particular significance to Karl because of the peace he found in the White Mountains.

**Karl Drerup died in 2000 at the age of 96. He left behind the warm memories of his students, the respect of his fellow artists, and a body of work that will continue to “enchant” and inspire viewers into the future. If you like, you can see images of Karl Drerup and his family in the paintings and enamel “photo collages” on the back wall of the gallery.**

**We hope you have enjoyed learning about Karl Drerup’s life and work. Please visit the Drerup Gallery often.**