

The Skirball Cultural Center presents

Wild Things Are Happening
The Art of Maurice Sendak

The West Coast debut of the largest exhibition of one of the most celebrated and original artists of our time.

April 18 - September 1, 2024

(Los Angeles, CA, February 29, 2024) The Skirball Cultural Center announces the West Coast debut of *Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak*, celebrating the work of Jewish American artist Maurice Sendak, creator of the acclaimed children’s books *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), *In the Night Kitchen* (1970), and *Outside Over There* (1980). Organized by The Columbus Museum of Art, where it premiered in October 2022, this is the first major Sendak retrospective since his death in 2012, and the largest and most complete exhibition of his work to date. *Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak* opens to the public on April 18, 2024, and will be on view at the Skirball Cultural Center through September 1, 2024.

“Twenty years ago, the Skirball had the chance to celebrate the vision of Maurice Sendak. In that show, we got to visit with Max in his bedroom, slide into a giant bowl of chicken soup with rice, and see reproductions of Sendak’s brilliant work. This second visit with Sendak isn’t just a chance for a whole new generation to become familiar with some of the most indelible and beautiful characters in all of childhood. It’s a chance to appreciate the astonishing breadth and depth of Sendak’s artistry – from children’s books to toys to opera sets – to learn about his life from childhood to adulthood, and to gain insight into the impact of his Jewish heritage,” says Skirball Cultural Center President and CEO Jessie Kornberg.

Wild Things Are Happening is composed of more than 150 sketches, storyboards, and paintings by Sendak on loan from the collection of The Maurice Sendak Foundation.

Presented alongside landmark pictures for Sendak’s own books will be examples of artwork he created for such celebrated publications as *The Bat-Poet* by Randall Jarrell, *A Hole is to Dig* by Ruth Krauss, the *Little Bear* series by Else Holmelund Minarik, and *Zlateh the Goat* by Isaac Bashevis Singer.

Designs for many of Sendak’s opera, theater, film, and television productions are also featured. His impact on the broader world of the performing arts is illuminated through his collaboration and friendship with directors, composers, playwrights, and visual artists, such as Carroll Ballard, Frank Corsaro, Spike Jonze, Tony Kushner, and Twyla Tharp.

The exhibition will also highlight Sendak’s love of Mozart and the way the composer’s life and work influenced not only Sendak’s designs for Mozart’s operas, such as *The Magic Flute*, but also key books including *Outside Over There* and *Dear Mili*. As Sendak stated, “I love opera beyond anything, and Mozart beyond anything.”

This groundbreaking exhibition also adds new depth to audiences’ understanding of Sendak’s life – as a child of Jewish immigrants, a lover of Romantic music and art, a skilled collaborator with other cultural innovators – and how he drew inspiration from writers ranging from William Shakespeare to Herman Melville. From portraits that he made of loved ones, to archival photographs of family members, to toys he designed as a young adult, the exhibition brings Sendak and his work to life in three dimensions.

In consultation with curator Jonathan Weinberg, the Skirball’s presentation of *Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak* will also include:

- A comprehensive reading area within the exhibition with Sendak books for sharing and an area for sketching.
- A focus on the newly published *Ten Little Rabbits*, including Sendak's original drawings.
- Video footage of the *Where the Wild Things Are* balloon in the 1999 Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.
- A display of Sendak’s books directly beneath their original sketches and final artwork, giving the viewer a comprehensive sense of the artist’s creative process.

“The brilliant Maurice Sendak created work that, while informed by his own personal history, reaches across generations and communities. This landmark exhibition puts Sendak forward as the expansive, creative force that he was, with an inimitable power to

move and delight people. It fits beautifully with the Skirball's goal of presenting exhibitions that both humanize and celebrate the vastly different people who have enriched American culture," commented Sheri Bernstein, Skirball Cultural Center Museum Director.

About the Artist

Maurice Sendak (1928-2012) was born in Brooklyn, New York, a year before the Great Depression began, to Jewish immigrant parents. A largely self-taught artist, Sendak illustrated over one hundred-fifty books during his sixty-year career. The books he wrote as well as illustrated include *Kenny's Window*, *Very Far Away*, *The Sign on Rosie's Door*, *Nutshell Library* (consisting of *Chicken Soup with Rice*, *Alligators All Around*, *One Was Johnny*, and *Pierre*), *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *In the Night Kitchen*, *Outside Over There*, *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*, *Bumble-Ardy*, *My Brother's Book*, and *Presto and Zesto in Limboland* (co-authored by Arthur Yorinks). He has collaborated with such celebrated authors as Meindert DeJong, Tony Kushner, Randall Jarrell, Ruth Krauss, Else Holmelund Minarik, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. And he has illustrated classics by Mother Goose, the Brothers Grimm, Herman Melville, and Leo Tolstoy. Sendak began a second career as a costume and stage designer in the late 1970s, designing operas that included Krása's *Brundibar*, Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*, and Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, as well as Tchaikovsky's ballet, *The Nutcracker*. He also designed the sets and costumes, as well as wrote the book and lyrics for the musical production of *Really Rosie*. Maurice Sendak remains the most honored children's book artist in history. He was the recipient of the 1964 Caldecott Medal, the 1970 Hans Christian Andersen Award, the 1983 Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, and the 2003 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. In 1996 President Bill Clinton presented him with the National Medal of Arts in recognition of his contribution to the arts in America.

"I refuse to lie to children," Sendak told an interviewer. In Sendak's world of monsters, potentially anxious challenges, and imperfect adults, the heroes just happen to be children who manage to find joy and confidence within themselves.

Curatorial Acknowledgments

Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak is guest-curated by Jonathan Weinberg, artist, and Curator of The Maurice Sendak Foundation. Weinberg also edited the richly illustrated catalog that brings together a diversity of perspectives, including Sendak's own words about his career and a major essay by distinguished art historian Thomas Crow. Both the book and the exhibition are notable for their scope, their focus on

Sendak's emulation of other artists, and the role played by art history in his creative process. As Sendak himself said, "if there must be more to life, then it is surely what art provides." In this spirit the retrospective highlights the relationship of Sendak's pictures to the art that he collected and loved including works by Walt Disney, Winslow Homer, Winsor McCay, George Stubbs, and Beatrix Potter.

Wild Things Are Happening is organized by the Columbus Museum of Art in conjunction with The Maurice Sendak Foundation.

Sheri Bernstein, Museum Director, joined the Skirball in 2001. Bernstein oversees the Skirball's exhibitions, collections, and museum operations. For the past two decades, Bernstein has played an important role in building the Skirball's identity as a vibrant, ambitious, and values-driven institution. She first joined the Skirball as Director of Education, leading the creative team for the internationally acclaimed children's and family destination Noah's Ark at the Skirball and guiding the development and growth of the Skirball's School and Family Programs. In 2015, Bernstein became the Vice President of Education and Visitor Experience, assuming the oversight of the docent touring program and the frontline visitor engagement team. Appointed as Museum Director in 2021, Bernstein brings to the role a deep commitment to expanding the Skirball's relevance, inclusiveness, and accessibility. Prior to joining the Skirball, Bernstein spent six years at LACMA in the Modern and Contemporary Art Department. She has also held positions at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. Bernstein holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in art history from Yale and Harvard universities, respectively.

Cate Thurston, Chief Curator, joined the Skirball team in 2015 and is the coordinating curator for *Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak*. She is also the co-curator of the Skirball exhibition "I'll Have What She's Having": The Jewish Deli, which is currently traveling on a five-city national tour. Thurston previously curated the acclaimed exhibition Notorious RBG: Ruth Bader Ginsburg (2018), now on view at the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington D.C. She was the managing curator for the Skirball's presentations of Blacklist: Hollywood's Red Scare (2023) Sara Berman's Closet (2018), Future Aleppo (2018), Paul Simon: Words & Music (2017), Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American (2016), and the curator for The Unauthorized History of Baseball in 100-Odd Paintings: The Art of Ben Sakoguchi (2016). Prior to joining the Skirball, Thurston worked at the Autry Museum of the American West for five years in a variety of exhibition-, education-, and visitor experience-related positions, culminating in a hybrid curatorial role.

Thurston holds a B.A. in American History from Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire and an M.A. in History from California State University, Northridge.

Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak exhibition and its related educational programs at the Skirball Cultural Center are made possible through the generous support of **The Keston Family**. Media sponsorship is provided by **KCRW 89.9 FM**.

About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00 pm; Saturday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm; closed Mondays and holidays. Effective March 1, new streamlined ticket prices provide access to all exhibitions as part of General Admission: \$18 for General, and \$13 for Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children 2-17. Exhibitions are always FREE to Skirball Members and Children under 2. The permanent exhibition Noah’s Ark at the Skirball is ticketed separately. Advance timed-entry reservations are recommended. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.

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