

REYNOLDS GALLERY

THERESA POLLAK

The Wonder of Life

September 7 – October 26, 2018

Opening Reception
Friday, September 7
7 – 9 pm



Untitled, 1951, ink on paper, 24 x 18 inches.

Photograph by Steven Casanova, courtesy of John Concannon.

Reynolds Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Theresa Pollak: The Wonder of Life*. Developed through archival research by Sarah Kleinman, Art History PhD candidate at VCU, the exhibition provides an unprecedented look at Pollak's career, highlighting the artist's groundbreaking efforts to establish a world-class art school and to transcend barriers in the art world. *Theresa Pollak: The Wonder of Life* opens with a reception on Friday, September 7 from 7 – 9 pm and continues through October 26, 2018.

In the 1920s, when Pollak began summer study at the Art Students' League of New York, Richmond had few venues dedicated to the fine arts and artistic training. As a student at the Richmond Art Club, a hub for creatives and collectors, Pollak had experienced the vast possibilities of creative expression. These early experiences prompted Pollak to pursue formal training at the Art Students' League, where professional artists instructed and worked alongside students, including Alexander Calder, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Arshile Gorky, among others. Pollak also made her debut in New York galleries, exhibiting in her first group show at the Studio Club in 1926 and winning first prize. This early recognition signaled Pollak's ascent as a professional artist.

When she returned home in 1928, she was recommended to develop an art department at Richmond Professional Institute (RPI), the precursor of VCU. At the time, fine arts baccalaureate programs were considered to be innovations in American and European higher education, with the founding of Yale School of Fine Arts in 1869 and the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany in 1919. Although RPI administrators doubted the appeal of an art program, Pollak's first class surpassed studio capacity, an early indication of the artistic impetus that characterizes Richmond today.

Theresa Pollak: The Wonder of Life traces the evolution of Pollak's art alongside the growth of Richmond's art scene, using archival materials and ephemera to contextualize her innumerable contributions to the fine arts, academia, and Richmond's cultural life. Woven throughout the exhibition are Pollak's philosophies about teaching and creating art. Astute and highly critical, Pollak developed the curriculum from what she believed to be the strongest pedagogical aspects in New York City and other metropolitan schools. Built into this model is room for continual growth and collaboration. In Pollak's words, "students literally live in a world of all the arts that takes the form in widely different yet significantly related activities." Indeed, VCU was one of the first universities where students could take courses in the School of the Arts alongside ones in the department of Occupational Therapy. Pollak's vision for VCU extended into local, statewide, national, and international purviews.

As the founding faculty member of the Art Department at VCU, Pollak served as its first faculty chairperson from 1942 to 1950. After teaching for forty-one years, she retired from VCU and in 1968 received the prestigious title of Professor Emerita. In 1971, the VCU School of the Arts building was named the Theresa Pollak Building in her honor. As an artist, her work was the focus of several exhibitions at such nationally renowned institutions as the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; the Whitney Museum of American Art and Rockefeller Center in New York; and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She received fellowships for her work from the Tiffany Foundation in Oyster Bay, Long Island; the Carnegie Fellowship for study at the Fogg Museum, Harvard University; and the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Over her lifetime, Pollak was the recipient of numerous awards recognizing her career as an artist and educator, including the Distinguished Alumna Award from Westhampton College in 1964; Richmond Federated Arts Council Annual Award for Distinguished Service in 1976; the Virginia Cultural Laureate Center Peer Eminent Award in the Arts in 1977; and honorary doctorates from the University of Richmond in 1973 and VCU in 1978. She died at the age of 102 on September 18, 2002.

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