

From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig

Organized by The Jewish Museum

The Jewish Museum has organized *From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig*, which will feature over 150 original works, including Steig's drawings for his *New Yorker* cartoons and his books for children as well as a selection of his symbolic drawings. The exhibition will be complemented by sketchbooks, dummies for a number of Steig's children's books, correspondence, and other documentary material that will shed light on Steig the man and the artist. Following its presentation at The Jewish Museum from November 4, 2007 through March 16, 2008, the exhibition will be available for travel to two to three additional venues.

Known for his brilliant cartoons and award-winning children's books, William Steig (1907–2003) leaves a legacy that spans much of the twentieth century. In the



Untitled drawing (family portrait), c. 1981
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
8 1/2 × 8 3/4 in. (21.6 × 22.2 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© William Steig

seventy-three years that Steig worked for *The New*

Yorker, the magazine published over 120 of his covers and more than 1,600 of his drawings in a wide variety of styles. Ranging from classic cartoons to psychologically fraught pen-and-ink drawings to Picasso-esque portraits to geometric figure studies to delicately rendered sketches to opulently colored watercolors, Steig was all in one. His work arises from keen observation and deep understanding of his fellow man, whether adult or child. His art is never sarcastic, and even in its most satirical moments—and there are many of those—it is filled with empathy.

A son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Steig was born in Brooklyn on November 14, 1907, and grew up in the Bronx. He drew his first cartoons for

his high school newspaper and later spent two years at City College, three years at the National Academy, and five days at the Yale School of Fine Arts before dropping out. Prompted by the need to support his family during the Depression, Steig began illustrating for *The New Yorker* in 1930. He brought a fresh voice to the magazine by creating cartoons that drew on his experience as a son of Jewish immigrants.



William Steig, c. 1970
Photograph by Henry Humphrey
Courtesy of Maggie Steig



Joseph and Laura Steig (the artist's parents), 1912



**Untitled drawing
(still life with figures)**
Published in *Ruminations* (1984)
Pen and ink on paper
10 1/8 × 10 3/4" (25.7 × 27.3 cm)
Collection of the William Steig
Estate
© 1984 William Steig

Steig ushered in a new era at *The New Yorker* by radically transforming the way cartoons were created at the magazine. Before his arrival cartoons heavily relied on gags—short comic episodes—and were the result of the collaboration between writers, who supplied the ideas and the captions, and cartoonists, who provided the illustrations. Steig became the first cartoonist at *The New Yorker* to create his own ideas, write the one-line captions, and make the drawings. “When I do cartoons,” Steig later explained, “[pictures and words] happen at the same time, because the idea and the execution are one.”

In his sixties, Steig embarked on a second career as a writer and illustrator of children’s books, including *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* and *Shrek!* These remarkable projects bring together numerous key elements of Steig’s work: his evocative use of

reverie, his interest in cranks and complainers, and his belief in the redeeming power of love, nature, and art.

Given the amazing breadth of Steig’s work, it is not surprising that most people are familiar with only one aspect of his oeuvre. The artist’s devoted following

includes, on one side, generations of readers of *The New Yorker* who have enjoyed his cartoons for

decades, and, on the other, millions of children who

respond to his charming pictures and fanciful stories. But many fewer fans are acquainted with his symbolic drawings of the late 1930s and 1940s. When these forays into the unconscious first emerged from Steig’s pen, *The New Yorker* was not ready to embrace them, but the psychiatric community took notice. In fact, it is this third and seminal body of work that enabled Steig to move from his early and more traditional style of cartooning to his mature and masterful output.

It is the paradoxical plight of cartoonists and illustrators that while their audience is familiar with their line and style, and while their art is widely disseminated in printed form, the public does not often get a chance to behold their original art. In this centennial year of the artist’s birth, The Jewish Museum’s exhibition offers the opportunity to view original works from Steig’s three bodies of drawings together

for the first time, and a better understanding of the artist’s journey from his earliest offspring—those young rascals who peopled his cartoon series “Small Fry”—to his idiosyncratic creations and existentialist characters.



**Preliminary illustration for
*Sylvester and the Magic
Pebble* (1969)**
“‘Oh, how I wish he were here with
us on this lovely May day’ said Mrs.
Duncan”
Pen and ink and watercolor on
paper
10 3/4 × 8 in. (27.3 × 20.3 cm)
Collection of Lucy Steig
© 1969 William Steig, renewed
1997.



**Final illustration for title page of
Shrek! (1990)**
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
11 1/4 × 9 3/4 in. (28.6 × 24.8 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1990 William Steig

The Art of William Steig, a full-color catalogue being published with Yale University Press, will feature over 280 images of Steig's work, many of them previously unpublished, and include a foreword by Maurice Sendak and essays by exhibition curator Claudia J. Nahson; Steig's fellow cartoonist Edward Sorel; the artist's daughter, Maggie Steig; his long-time friend, the artist Robert Cottingham; and his wife of thirty years, Jeanne Steig.

The Art of
William Steig

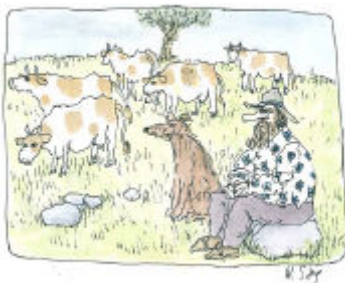


Cover of *The Art of William Steig* (2007)
Forthcoming exhibition catalogue
Yale University Press. Published in
association with The Jewish Museum
208 pp., 165 b/w + 131 color
illustrations

Exhibition Walkthrough

Each section of the exhibition will be designated with a large text panel. The exhibition will be on view in The Jewish Museum's first-floor galleries, a 3,860-square-foot space. These climate-controlled galleries are 12 feet high and offer an open plan space suitable for both intimate and large areas. The exhibition design will be both elegant and playful and will include a reading area inspired by many of Steig's characters for his children's books, currently being devised. The use of documentary film footage featuring interviews with the artist is also being explored.

The exhibition will be organized in four sections with an epilogue. The first section will be an introduction composed of three smaller sections including: an opening wall, a look at Steig as a constant doodler, and at his origins as a son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. From the second section onward, the exhibition's overall organization will focus on Steig's three main bodies of work: his work for *The New Yorker*, his symbolic drawings, and his art for children's books.



Ruminating
Published in *The New Yorker*,
October 24, 1983
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
9 1/4 x 12 1/2 in. (23.5 x 31.8 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1983 William Steig

Section 1: Introduction

Section 1A: Opening Wall

The exhibition will commence with a wall of eight works representing the multiplicity of Steig's styles and themes and covering a number of decades of the artist's career. This introduction will allow visitors of all ages to encounter from the beginning of the exhibition at least one aspect of Steig's work they might recognize. The works on this wall will include a drawing of faces (one of Steig's favorite motifs), drawings made for recent *New Yorker* cartoons, as well as a final illustration for his picture book *Shrek!*

Section 1B: Sublime Doodler

Steig was once called “a sublime doodler,” a title he relished, given his lifelong love of drawing and the sheer profusion of his art. No matter what the size or quality of the paper—from a shopping list to a sketchbook, from the back of a page with a canceled drawing to the scraps from some larger sheet of paper—Steig was always drawing. This small section will therefore function as an overture for the exhibition, and establish from the beginning the importance of drawing for the artist. A number of loose sketches, a sketchbook, a box filled with drawings the artist gave his daughter Maggie over a period of four years in the 1970s, and a ring made by her for her father (and used by the artist while drawing) will be exhibited. In addition a number of photo panels will show the artist drawing, and his working space with the many pens he used. The possible use of film footage showing the artist at work is currently being investigated.



Saucissons Alfresco

From “Dining Out” series
Published in *The New Yorker*,
January 18, 1999
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
9 1/4 x 10 3/4 in. (23.5 x 27.3 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1999 William Steig

Section 1C: William Steig’s Origins



**Untitled drawing
(Sunday painter), n.d**
Pen and ink on paper
4 5/8 x 6 3/8 in. (11.8 x 18.7 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© William Steig

This section will delve into Steig’s family’s Eastern European Jewish origins and his upbringing as a son of immigrants in New York during the early twentieth century. Particular attention will also be paid to the artist’s working-class background and the influence of the artist’s father Joseph Steig’s Socialist ideas on the young Steig, as a prelude for the presentation of William Steig’s early work at *The New Yorker*.

The section will feature a number of Steig’s drawings that can be understood as portraits of family members, including “Sunday Painter” (the artist’s father painted houses for a living during the week and

worked on his own paintings on weekends) and an illustration of Irene’s seamstress mother, from *Brave Irene* (1986), a picture book for children and a moving story of courage and filial love, that might be interpreted as Steig’s tribute to his own mother, who, like many immigrant Jewish women from Eastern Europe, was a dressmaker.

A couple of illustrations for Steig’s last picture book *When Everybody Wore a Hat* (2003) that clearly establish his family’s connection to the Old Country will also be included in this section.



Final illustration for title page of *Brave Irene* (1986)

Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
7 1/2 x 11 1/16 in. (19.1 x 28.1 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1986 William Steig

Section 2: *The New Yorker*

This section will focus primarily on William Steig's early years at *The New Yorker*. Included in this section will be a rare collaboration between the artist and fellow cartoonist Helen Hokinson published in 1935. This cartoon brilliantly captures young Steig's entrance into the aristocratic world of the magazine, depicting a group of well-dressed, upper-middle-class children taking a guided tour of a museum (drawn by Hokinson) while a boy sporting a pair of knickerbockers and a full head of spiky hair (drawn by Steig), defiantly intrudes on the genteel proceedings. The docent asks the interloper, "Pardon me, young man, are you a member of this Study Group?"



"Pardon me, young man, are you a member of this Study Group?"

Drawing by Helen E. Hokinson (1893–1949) and William Steig
Published in *The New Yorker*, January 26, 1935
Pen and ink, wash, and collage on paper
14 x 12 in. (35.6 x 30.5 cm)
Collection of Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences, Peoria, Illinois
(1964.10.69)



"What a beautiful morning!"

Published in *Colliers*, January 7, 1950
Pen and ink and wash on paper
11 x 10 in. (27.9 x 25.4 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1950 William Steig, renewed 1978, 2006

Newly arrived Steig was in fact the antithesis of all other cartoonists in the magazine: his Jewish background and Bronx upbringing, his interest in street life and the dramas of the lower class, made him an outsider. A number of works in this section will clearly establish how Steig's early submissions to *The New Yorker* betray a

need to reconcile his desire to fit into the cultured world of the magazine while remaining rooted in his own, his characters oscillating "between the tenement dwellers of his own childhood" and the "Fifth Avenue 'swells,'" in the words of Lee Lorenz .



Big Sister

From "Small Fry: Park Playground"
series
Published in *The New Yorker*,
April 18, 1953
Pen and ink and wash on paper
9 1/2 x 10 in. (24.1 x 25.4 cm)
Collection of Maggie Steig
© 1953 William Steig, renewed 1981

The centrality of children in Steig's oeuvre will be established early on in the exhibition, with the inclusion of a number of his "Small Fry" drawings. Featuring street children, this famous series, which the artist created in the early 1930s and continued into the early 1950s, allowed Steig to remain in contact with the world of his Bronx Jewish childhood, a way of life that was on the verge of disappearing when he joined *The New Yorker*. The selected "Small Fry" works will demonstrate how these early drawings presented two visions of childhood: one

that showed children just being children, filled with wonder and innocence, and another that surveyed how the adult world interfered in their lives, either by presenting youngsters as precocious or by showing the impact of World War II on children. Also included in this section will be a number of Steig's drawings for "Dreams of Glory." In this important series from the 1940s and early 1950s, the artist uses humor and piquancy to portray a world saved by young heroes because grown-ups seem to have lost control.



Untitled drawing (untitled)
 c. 1956
 Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
 9 1/4 x 11 in. (23.5 x 27.9 cm)
 Collection of Lucy Steig
 © William Steig

This section will be completed by a wall featuring Steig's art for eight *New Yorker* covers over his many decades at the magazine. This selection will make clear to visitors how the artist soon made the transition from an outsider at *The New Yorker* to one of its most representative cartoonists, and was assigned to illustrate many all-American covers in celebration of the Fourth of July, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving Day, the beginning of football season, and Christmas.



Final cover illustration for *The New Yorker*, October 9, 1989
 (Columbus Day Cover)
 Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
 12 3/4 x 9 3/4 in. (32.4 x 24.8 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1989 William Steig



Untitled drawing
 (Originally conceived as *New Yorker* Thanksgiving cover)
 Published in *The New Yorker*,
 November 30, 1992
 Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
 13 1/8 x 9 1/2 in. (33.3 x 24.1 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1992 William Steig

Transition Wall: *The Battle of the Sexes*

The exhibition will include two transition walls, one between Sections 2 and 3 and one between Sections 3 and 4. These walls, showcasing eight works each, will focus on central themes in Steig's oeuvre that will help the visitor to connect the drawings viewed in a previous section with the works in a forthcoming one. This first transition wall will focus on the battle of the sexes, a recurrent theme throughout Steig's career. Courtship and marriage are portrayed by the artist as full of yearning and tension and he dissects these subjects with a sharp

pen and a caustic sense of humor. This prevailing inability of couples to communicate successfully, first humorously exposed in Steig’s early submissions to *The New Yorker*, will become central to much of the symbolic work the artist created in the 1940s and 1950s—the subject of the following section.



Our marriage will be different

Final drawing for *Till Death Do Us Part: Some Ballet Notes on Marriage* (1947)
 Pen and ink on paper
 9 3/4 x 6 3/8 in. (24.8 x 16.2 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1947 William Steig, renewed 1975, 2003



“Are we early?”

Delivered to *Look* magazine, May 17, 1956
 Pen and ink and wash on paper
 10 x 9 1/4 in. (25.4 x 23.5 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1956 William Steig, renewed 1984



“Relent!”

Final drawing for *Sick of Each Other* (2001)
 (Originally published as a pen-and-ink drawing in *The New Yorker*, November 22, 1982)
 Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
 9 3/8 x 12 1/2 in. (23.9 x 31.8 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 2001 William Steig

Section 3: Symbolic work

Beginning in the late 1930s and continuing through the 1950s Steig created some of the most haunting works of his career. Fraught relations between men and women and the artist’s fear of American society’s corruption of its children, propelled the artist to delve more and more into the depths of the human soul. Through these explorations, Steig finds the path to a freedom of expression that, earlier in his career, had no precedent and would become his trademark as well as the answer to a lifelong quest: “I’ve always felt that something went

wrong and it was my business to find out what happened.” Deemed “too personal and not funny enough” by *The New Yorker*’s legendary editor Harold Ross, these drawings—which Steig would call “symbolic”—were published in such books as *About People* (1939) and *The Lonely Ones* (1942) and were well received in the psychiatric community (letters by prominent psychiatrists praising these publications, will be on display).



**Final drawing for *About People: A Book of Symbolic Drawings* (1939)
*Melancholia***

Pen and ink and wash on paper
 5 1/2 x 6 1/2 in. (14 x 16.5 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1939 William Steig, renewed 1967, 1995

Twenty-four symbolic works from the late 1930s through the 1950s will be featured in the exhibition, along with a selection of drawings later created by Steig in the same symbolic vein and published in *The New Yorker* beginning in the 1970s when these works began to be embraced by the magazine.

Included in this section will be some of the drawings Steig created to illustrate *Listen, Little Man!* (1948) a call for action to the ordinary folk written by controversial Jewish psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), a major

influence on Steig's life and art, as well as a selection of drawings for *The Agony in the Kindergarten* (1950), Steig's own wake-up call to America on the abuse and repression of its children, a seminal work which the artist dedicated to Reich. This section will also feature two to three symbolic sculptures done by Steig in the late 1930s. These important works are rare because very few have survived since they were first made.



Preliminary drawing for *The Agony in the Kindergarten* (1950)
Mother's got an awful headache today
 Pen and ink on paper
 9 1/2 × 8 in. (24.1 × 20.3 cm)
 Collection of Maggie Steig
 © 1950 William Steig, renewed 1978, 2006



The Ever-Chattering Mind
 c. 1980s
 Pen and ink and colored pencil on paper
 8 × 10 in. (20.3 × 25.4 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © William Steig



Man in a Deep Depression
 Published in *The New Yorker*, June 8, 1992
 Pen and ink and wash on paper
 10 1/16 × 11 in. (25.6 × 27.9 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1992 William Steig

Transition Wall: The Redeeming Power of Love, Nature, and Art

As Steig emerged from his haunting years during the 1940s and 1950s, his work became more optimistic in nature, emphasizing the restorative power of love, nature, and art. These subjects will be treated in many of the artist's late cartoons for *The New Yorker*, and will be at the core of all his writing and art for children. As a prelude to Section 4, which will be devoted to his children's books, this wall will feature eight works from the 1970s through the 1990s—a wonderful selection of works that exude a bucolic feeling, and combine gentle humor with an optimistic outlook—all traits that permeate Steig's art for children showcased in the following section.



A Self in Love
 Similar version published in *The New Yorker*, March 9, 1992
 Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
 7 1/4 × 7 1/2 in. (18.4 × 19.1 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1992 William Steig



Impressionist Receiving Impressions
 Published in *The New Yorker*, October 25, 1982
 Pen and ink on paper
 9 3/8 × 12 in. (23.9 × 30.5 cm)
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1982 William Steig



Final cover illustration for *Abel's Island* (1975)
 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975)
 Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
 7 1/4 × 6 in. (18.4 × 15.2 cm)
 Photograph courtesy of the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, Amherst, Massachusetts
 Collection of the William Steig Estate
 © 1975 William Steig, renewed 2003

Section 4: Children's Books

This section will feature thirty-six drawings for some of Steig's most beloved books for children including *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (1969), for which the artist won the prestigious Caldecott award, his two Newberry Honor Books, *Doctor De Soto* (1982) and *Abel's Island* (1976), and his 1990 picture book *Shrek!*—which means “fear” in Yiddish. Even though Steig published his first children's book in 1968, when he was sixty years old, it will become apparent to visitors at this stage of the exhibition that this third body of Steig's work clearly emanated from his earlier cartoon art, often imbued with a childlike air, and from his lifelong interest in the doings of children which began with the “Small Fry” series, and his need to remain in contact with the child within him.



Preliminary illustration for *Roland the Minstrel Pig* (1968)

“At night, before saying his prayers and going to sleep, he sang this sad song”
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
11 x 8 1/4 in. (27.9 x 21 cm)
Collection of Lucy Steig
© 1968 William Steig, renewed 1996



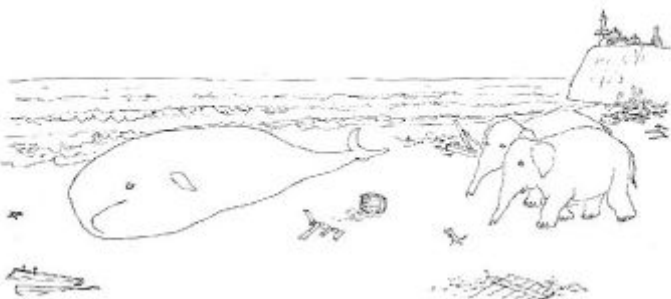
Final illustration for *Doctor De Soto* (1982)

“Doctor De Soto stepped into the fox's mouth”
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
12 x 8 7/8 in. (30.5 x 22.5 cm)
Collection of Melinda Franceschini
© 1982 William Steig



Final illustration for *Shrek!* (1990)

“His mother was ugly and his father was ugly, but Shrek was uglier than the two of them put together”
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
11 1/4 x 10 in. (28.6 x 25.4 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1990 William Steig



Final drawing for *Amos & Boris* (1971)

“Amos came racing back with two of the biggest elephants he could find”
Pen and ink on paper
9 1/2 x 21 3/4 in. (24.1 x 55.3 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1971 William Steig, renewed 1999



Final illustration for *Gorky Rises* (1980)

“As Gorky passed over Pruneville, they were craning their necks out of windows”
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
10 x 10 1/8 in. (25.4 x 25.7 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 1980 William Steig



Preliminary model for Shrek character
Created for first *Shrek* movie (2001)
Collection of Jeanne Steig

Given the fact that Steig’s picture book *Shrek!* has been popularized in a number of recent movies, a section will be devoted to the book—a story of two monsters who passionately fall for each other, defying the fairytale notion that love is only for the young and beautiful. The exhibition will feature final illustrations for the book as well correspondence between William Steig and the producer of the first *Shrek* movie, with the artist’s suggestions for the adaptation of his book into a film. In addition, the loan of a number of preparatory drawings and models for the creation of the first *Shrek* movie is being currently pursued.

Epilogue: *When Everybody Wore a Hat* (2003)

The epilogue of the exhibition will focus on the children’s book *When Everybody Wore a Hat*, which marks the end of William Steig’s personal and artistic trajectory, taking him back to where it all began—his own childhood. As in many of his books where the protagonist culminates his or her journey by returning to the safety of home and loved ones, in *When Everybody Wore a Hat*, published a few months before his death in 2003, Steig, the protagonist of his own life story, goes back to the safety of his home and family. The artist himself had said that “coming back to a family in the end is natural for kids.” *When Everybody Wore a Hat* surveys the artist’s early life in the Bronx, telling of a time when “there were almost no electric lights, cars or telephones—and definitely no TV,” when “there were lots of immigrants” and “no such a thing as a hatless human being.”



Final illustration for *When Everybody Wore a Hat* (2003)
“This was Mom’s best friend”
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
6 3/4 × 7 1/2 in. (17.2 × 19.1 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 2003 William Steig



Final illustration for *When Everybody Wore a Hat* (2003)
“I got my first haircut at Ditchick’s Barbershop”
Pen and ink and watercolor on paper
10 1/2 × 11 in. (26.7 × 27.9 cm)
Collection of the William Steig Estate
© 2003 William Steig



William Steig, 1997
Photograph by Nancy Crampton
Copyright © Nancy Crampton

This final section will thus bring the visitor full circle to Steig's origins as a son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants growing up in a world that would inspire him to create his "Small Fry" drawings. The epilogue will feature a selection of final and preliminary illustrations for *When Everybody Wore a Hat* as well as a number of autobiographical notes and sketches by the artist that will shed light on the illustrations.

Since a number of drawings featured in the book first appeared in pen-and-ink and wash form in *The New Yorker* in 1959, the selected works will include both pen-and-ink-and-wash originals as well as a number of drawings later colored by the artist for inclusion in the children's book. The style of these drawings—both mature and genuinely naïve—strengthens the connection to Steig the child without ever losing sight of Steig the artist, a feat that only such a masterful artist could keep up through a very long and prolific career.

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- Cost:** A \$35,000 organization fee, plus shared additional costs, to be determined at a later date, including insurance, loan fees, framing and matting, conservation (if necessary), crating, shipping (including a share of assembly, intervention, and dispersal), Jewish Museum and lender couriers, and fees and travel costs for any necessary consultants (set installers, etc.).
- Available:** April 2008 through January 2009
- Space Requirements:** Approximately 4,000 square feet of secure, climate-controlled gallery space.
- Contact:** Dolores Pukki
Exhibitions Coordinator
212-423-3345
e-mail: dpukki@thejm.org



From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig

Organized by The Jewish Museum

Tentative tour dates

2007	November 3-	The Jewish Museum
2008	March 16	
	April 12 -	<i>available</i>
	July 20	
	August 16-	<i>available</i>
	November 23	
2009	January-	Skirball Cultural Center
	March	