



Dorothy F. Foster,
"Abeyance" *Held in
Activity*, ballpoint pen
and ink on found
newsprint, 5
13/16 × 3 3/4 in
(14.8 × 9.5 cm),
FOST 821

Dorothy F. Foster

September 15–November 5, 2022

Reception: September 15, 6-8pm

Fleisher/Ollman is pleased to present a solo show of drawings by the late Dorothy F. Foster (1903–1986).

Foster was born in Jersey City, the youngest of three girls. After her father died at an early age, her mother moved the family to Manhattan, supporting her children as a dressmaker, and renting out a room in their house. Foster attended Wadleigh High School, studied art and interior design at Cooper Union, and went on to design textiles for a living. While working for the clothier A. Sulka and Co. in New York, she painted and wrote poetry in her spare time. In the last decade of their lives, Dorothy and her middle sister, Mary, lived together in senior housing in Port Jervis, New York, near their eldest sister, Muriel.

During this twilight time Foster may have abandoned her paints for multi-colored ballpoint pens, colored pencils, and paper. The bulk of what she left behind after her death were albums full of intimate drawings on magazine and newspaper clippings; greeting cards; and other ephemera, all uniquely—and often enigmatically—titled ("*Abeyance*" *Held in Activity*). The drawings blend cartoonish and ethereal figuration and pattern with the found media, recontextualizing—and obfuscating—the underlying imagery (often photographs or fashion illustrations). Clusters of elfin characters wearing tall, conical hats appear often: filling in the negative space in larger figures; at the edges of the work, supporting the main subject as tiny witnesses to the viewer; or as the subject itself. Red-haired women abound. A flat-topped arch border around each drawing is consistent, either heavily worked with black ballpoint pen, occasionally to the point of buckling the paper. Absent this border, Foster would cut the drawing to shape.

In 1973 Foster published the first of two books, *The Noisesome Day, The Stilly Night*, an autobiography which intersperses a year of her social life in New York, post-retirement, with moments of childhood nostalgia, all in the form of a punchy, poetic inner monologue. The book

jacket notes "A prolific artist, Miss Foster's paintings have been exhibited—most recently at Lynn Kottler Galleries in New York City." Her few mentions of artmaking in the text include references to "drawing and typing" as if they were daily rituals, which her great nephew confirms from his young memories of her. These late drawings give the impression of a meditative practice, perhaps another form of diary entry, and something for herself: "the typewriter, papers, paints, fold them up, close it up ... get them OUT OF SIGHT."

A trunk full of Foster's albums was preserved in her sister Muriel's house until the early 2010s, when her great-nephew discovered them. He found interest from a few local antique dealers, resulting in Foster's inclusion in a show at UpFront Exhibition Space in Port Jervis in 2015. In 2019 he opened Lost Antiques in Port Jervis, and began selling the drawings out of the shop. This is the first solo show of Foster's work since her death in 1986.