



Old Gables VI

Date

1944

Primary Maker

Lyonel Feininger

Medium

Oil on canvas

Description

Born in New York to German immigrant parents, Lyonel Feininger moved to Germany in 1887 to study music and began taking drawing lessons on the side. He subsequently contributed cartoons to a number of German and American magazines before turning exclusively to the fine arts around 1908 after a trip to Paris, where he was exposed to the latest developments in modern art. He was active in German avant-garde circles and taught at the Bauhaus from 1919 until 1933, when the progressive art school was closed by the Nazi government. In 1937, he fled Germany, his work having been deemed “degenerate” by the Third Reich, and returned to the United States. Old Gables VI belongs to a series of paintings Feininger made between 1921 and 1954 showing rows of traditional northern European houses pressed one against the other. The focus of this example is on the geometric contours of the buildings and the roofline, which is articulated with thin, draftsman-like lines over imprecise areas of mottled paint; the volumes of the houses, by contrast, are suggested with minor details. The scene is based—whether from memory or from sketches or other works—on the ranks of Gothic and Baroque buildings found in many historic German towns, such as Hildesheim, Lübeck, and Lüneburg. The artist’s wife, Julia Feininger, noted that the versions of this motif he painted after fleeing Germany changed in tone. Of a work similar to this one, Red Gables (1941), she recalled: “I saw the well-known row of Lüneburg houses—but staring at me as never before—the windows like dead eyes, the entire atmosphere changed, as if the evil spirit then pervading Germany had also assaulted this formerly beloved place.” Although Germany was clearly still on his mind, Feininger also began to paint the skyline and skyscrapers of Manhattan in the early 1940s. Feininger likely painted Old Gables VI specifically for a 1944 retrospective of his work mounted at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which toured the country afterward, paired with works by Marsden Hartley. James Taylor Dunn, Class of 1936, purchased the canvas in 1946 out of the traveling exhibition, and he and his wife, Marie C. Bach Dunn, presented it to the Emerson Gallery in 2001. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Overall: 16 3/4 × 27 3/4 in. (42.5 × 70.5 cm) Frame: 18 1/2 × 29 5/8 × 1 3/4 in. (47 × 75.2 × 4.4 cm)