

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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‘Knitting Circle, New York’ (1948) by Fred Stein at Rosenberg & Co. Photo: The Estate of Fred Stein/Rosenberg & Co.

By WILLIAM MEYERS

## **The World of Fred Stein**

Rosenberg & Co.  
19 E. 66th St.  
212-202-3270  
Through Feb. 12

Fred Stein’s son, Peter, was in the gallery when I was there, and he told me that his father was a great conversationalist. To be one, you not only need to speak well but to have something to say; it also helps to have a talent for listening. Stein exhibits the visual equivalents in his photographs: clarity, curiosity and sympathy. Stein was born in Dresden, Germany, in 1909; left that country in 1933 to avoid the Gestapo; lived in Paris until 1939, when he was interned as an enemy alien; and escaped and made his way to Marseilles, France, where he embarked for the U.S. In New York, as he had in Paris, he practiced street photography and took portraits of cultural figures. He died in 1967. Rosenberg is showing 51 prints from Germany, France and New York. Still-lives, such as “Fish Platter, Brittany” (1935), and streetscapes, such as “Wrought Iron Staircase, New York” (1945), show a refined Bauhausian modernism. But most of the pictures are of people shot in public, such as the “Vendor, Paris” (1935) sitting outside with goods in her hand; the five women in a “Knitting Circle, New York” (1948) intent on their needles; and the two geezers having a “Chess Game, New York” (1947) on a park bench. Their mundane activities are invested by Stein with enormous dignity. There are wonderful pictures of children, and his photograph of two girls in swimsuits and sun hats caught on a “Swing, Paris” (1934) at its apogee is pure joy.