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## **The Wolfsonian Focuses on Catastrophe and Promethean Peril in *Margin of Error*, Opening November 13**

*Exhibition examines the rise, rupture, and attempted redemption  
of man's aspirational spirit through works by Man Ray, Lewis Hine, and more*

**MIAMI BEACH (October 14, 2015)** — This November, The Wolfsonian—Florida International University presents *Margin of Error*, an exhibition exploring cultural responses to mechanical mastery and engineered catastrophes of the modern age—the shipwrecks, crashes, explosions, collapses, and novel types of workplace injury that interrupt the path of progress. Revealing the consequences of mankind's endeavor to defy and exceed limits, *Margin of Error* traces the narrative of technological ambition from myth and triumph to peril and accident prevention. Major artists and designers showcased in the exhibition include Man Ray, Lewis Hine, Margaret Bourke-White, Herbert Bayer, Julius Klinger, and Louis Lozowick.

*Margin of Error* will be on view November 13, 2015 through May 8, 2016 and brings together over two hundred works from the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including decorative and graphic art, painting, sculpture, industrial artifacts, photography, and ephemera.

“Bellowing engines, towering bridges, great galleries of revolving wheels—these things all gave credence to the idea that a new era was at hand, at once thrilling and thoroughly terrifying,” explained Wolfsonian curator Matthew Abess, who organized the installation. “The exhibition is a reminder of how every step forward brings us that much closer to the edge of some cliff—how we are in equal measures masters of the universe, and masters of its unmaking.”

*Margin of Error* charts the feats and follies of this process in five thematic sections, each featuring works from The Wolfsonian's permanent collection as well as a small selection of loaned objects. Together, they present the cultural embrace of modern engineering alongside associated disasters—the famous, the infamous, and the everyday—that routinely disrupt the pace of progress.

Highlights include:

- Designer Joseph Binder's poster *Gib acht sonst . . .* [Be Careful or Else . . .] (1929–30), warning of the risk of electric shock while changing a lightbulb;
- Man Ray's 1931 photogravure portfolio *Électricité*, commissioned by a Parisian utilities company to encourage domestic use of electricity by capturing its cosmic wonder;
- Czech, Dutch, Belgian, and Italian work safety posters and postcards instructing on best practices in the industrial workplace by showing (sometimes humorously) the unfortunate results of careless behavior—loose hair caught in machinery, graphic depictions of injured limbs, etc.;
- A mid-1930s photograph album from the British Royal Air Force (RAF) flight training school in Egypt, with non-fatal crash images coyly captioned "Error of Judge-ment," "One of Nature's Tricks," and more; and
- Hungarian-born illustrator Endre Lukács' jarring 1940 poster *Dit kan een voet kosten* [This Can Cost You a Foot], depicting the dangers of walking near exposed nails.

Opening with the mythic roots of our collective instinct to surpass boundaries—as we continually expand, invent, and make—*Margin of Error* takes the story of Prometheus, the cunning and ill-fated Greek deity said to have gifted fire to mankind, as its point of departure. Through objects both directly and indirectly referencing this Promethean impulse, the exhibition explores how advanced infrastructure, utilities, and modes of production gave rise to a new repertoire of visual symbols for describing visionary pursuits, casting man as a race of builders bending the world to its will.

*Margin of Error* then proceeds into focused sections examining construction and electricity. While stylized industrial landscapes and skyscrapers are testaments to the promise of expansion, works referencing the grisly realities of mine collapses, fires, and other accidents remind that we cannot always master the elements or avoid human error. Similarly, celebratory images commemorating the opening the first electrified world's fair or the mysticism of incandescent light are juxtaposed by depictions of electricity as a lurking demon.

A fourth section centered on transportation extends this narrative to the steamships, railcars, zeppelins, airplanes, and automobiles in which we opened new frontiers and forever changed how we think about time, space, and movement. Here, objects range from travel posters to model trains, children's games, and modernist designs for street and railway signs. Major disasters such as the sinking of the Titanic, Hindenburg explosion, and the wrecks of the Soviet Railway are also represented in rare ephemera reflecting society's shock at cutting-edge engineering gone awry.

The exhibition concludes with industrial hazards, risk awareness, and accident prevention. In work safety, insurance, and public education materials, *Margin of Error* will explore some of the design solutions for navigating the hazards of modern industry.

*Margin of Error* will be accompanied by a richly illustrated companion book with an essay by Matthew Abess. The Wolfsonian will mark the opening of the exhibition with a public open house

as well as additional programming such as a free family day; a Takeover Tour led by astrophysicist and educator Jorge Pérez-Gallego; a film series; and art-making workshops.

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#### About The Wolfsonian–Florida International University

The Wolfsonian–FIU is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collection comprises approximately 180,000 objects from the 1850s to the 1950s—the height of the Industrial Revolution through the aftermath of the Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial-design objects; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian is located at 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL. Admission is \$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors, students, and children age 6–12; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under six. The museum is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 10am–6pm; Friday, 10am–9pm; Sunday, noon–6pm; and is closed on Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at [wolfsonian.org](http://wolfsonian.org) for further information.

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#### About Florida International University

Florida International University is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity and recognized as a Carnegie engaged university. It is a public research university with colleges and schools that offers 196 bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in fields such as engineering, computer science, international relations, architecture, law and medicine. As one of South Florida's anchor institutions, FIU contributes almost \$9 billion each year to the local economy. FIU is Worlds Ahead in finding solutions to the most challenging problems of our time. FIU emphasizes research as a major component of its mission. FIU has awarded more than 220,000 degrees and enrolls more than 54,000 students in two campuses and three centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell, FIU@I-75, and the Miami Beach Urban Studios. FIU's Medina Aquarius Program houses the Aquarius Reef Base, a unique underwater research facility in the Florida Keys. FIU also supports artistic and cultural engagement through its three museums: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, The Wolfsonian–FIU, and the Jewish Museum of Florida–FIU. FIU is a member of Conference USA and more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit [fiu.edu](http://fiu.edu).