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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM TO OPEN LARGEST RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF WORK

GEORGES BRAQUE

The largest exhibition ever held in the United States of the work of the celebrated French artist, Georges Braque, will open to the public on March 30, 1949. All phases of the artist's work will be represented in a selection of over one hundred works which include paintings, collages, drawings, prints and sculpture. Assembled for the Museum of Modern Art from private and public collections in Europe and the United States by Dr. Henry R. Hope, Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts, Indiana University, the exhibition will remain on view in the third floor galleries of the Museum, 11 West 53 Street, until June 12. The exhibition is jointly sponsored by this Museum and the Cleveland Museum of Art where it has recently been on view.

The retrospective will present one of the most important masters of modern art and will show works of all periods from 1904 to 1947. His early paintings, striving toward impressionism, were done while he was still an apprentice to his father's trade, house painting, and were executed in the country around Argenteuil where he was born in 1882. The exhibition will begin with paintings from his youth in Paris showing the early influences consecutively of Signac's neo-impressionism, of Matisse and the "fauves" and, in his first important works, of Cézanne. Of special interest are the many fine examples of his work done during his friendship with Picasso when together they invented cubism. These analytical cubist canvases profoundly affected the development of modern art and eventually modern architecture and design, particularly in the study of space relationships. After the collages of 1912 and 1913, the "partnership" with Picasso dissolved, and Braque's art took a divergent path.

At the end of the war in 1918, after the interruption to his work caused by a head wound received in action near Artois, he renewed his progress toward a more personal art characterized by richness of texture, subtlety of color and delicately balanced composition.

Though still sometimes highly abstract in effect, Braque's work about 1920 shows a greater concern with natural appearances. Recognizable figures and landscapes, not used since his pre-cubist days,

were reintroduced, but his treatment of volumes and space always retains elements of cubism. Braque himself writes:

"To arrive at abstraction one must start from nature, and to start from nature is to find a subject. If one loses contact with nature one will end fatally in decoration.

"On the other hand those who begin by arranging still lifes and then try to paint them, are only imitating their own arrangements. For them painting becomes an act of doing after something, a lifeless imitation without feeling."

His use of lettering and of textures, such as simulated wood grain and marble, has its source in his apprenticeship as a house painter, a training which may also be responsible for his sustained excellence of craftsmanship. Flowers, musical instruments, household items and still-life foods are among the objects ever recurring in his choice of subject matter. Of his use of these subjects he says:

"I try to make an object lose its usual function. I only take it up after it is good for nothing else but the trash can, at the moment when its practical use has ended. It is only then that it becomes the object of a work of art and acquires the quality of universality."

In the early '30s Braque introduced into his painting and prints classical subject matter stemming from his long interest in ancient Greek art and myth. Sculpture, a medium in which he had worked for many years, interested him particularly at this time, and the examples he produced also reflected the Greek tradition. Several examples will be shown in the exhibition.

The German occupation was difficult for Braque as well as other artists living in Paris, and illness shortly after the liberation has not made the '40s an easy period for him; but recent canvases do not reveal any lessening of the powers of this great artist.

Many paintings never before shown in this country have been brought here especially for this exhibition. Seven of the Museum's own collection of eight Braques, the most representative group in any public collection, will be shown as well as selections from the Museum's excellent group of prints.

The exhibition is to be installed by Margaret Miller, Research Associate to the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture. Dr. Hope has written a copiously illustrated book on Braque to be released by the Museum on March 29. The section on prints in both the book and the exhibition was done by William S. Lieberman of the Museum's Print Department.

Monsieur Jean Cassou, Chief Curator of Le Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, has written a preface to the book in which he

makes the following comments:

"What seduces us at first glance is the particularity of his coloring, exact and sober and of a ravishing delicacy, and his orderly composition tending, as in everything he does, infallibly, undeviatingly and, as it were, fatefully, to a certain noble and simple grandeur. This same sure instinct is to be observed in the minuteness and refinement of his handling of textures, now silky, now rough, always sensuously delectable. The word for it is one which the critic now hesitates to use: beauty. Braque's painting is beautiful painting....

"What he meditates upon and reasons about is the nature of the creative process, and the proper functioning of the creator. He has no set principle or preconception, but a full consciousness of what he is doing. In this he is one of the most complete artists I know and one whose presence, conversation and friendliness have inspired in me the greatest admiration, enjoyment and gratitude....

"He has all those virtues which seem to us peculiar to our nation which we intend to perpetuate: divine modesty of a fruitfulness that I have tried to indicate, the love of labor and of work well done, the appetite for knowledge and understanding, the determination to see things clearly, and an inalterable sense of human dignity. Braque excels in all these characteristics and ideals. Therefore he has indefatigably persevered in his life work, like a simple workman and, at the same time, a great aristocrat.

"Considering his work as a whole, in its elegance, its discretion, its faultless determination, satisfactory to intellect and sensibility alike, we may unhesitatingly classify him with great predecessors: Le Nain, Chardin, Manet. The purest and deepest aspects of the French spirit are reflected and made eloquent in his genius."

To supplement the Braque exhibition, a gallery of the Museum Collection on the second floor will be hung with paintings by Braque's companions, Picasso, Gris and Duchamp, to illustrate the development of cubism between 1908 and 1914. Picasso's famous portrait of Clovis Sagot, 1909, lent by a private collector, will be shown for the first time in America.