

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

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Twenty-two paintings, drawings, gouaches and watercolors by Fernand Léger (1881-1955) will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art from November 16 through January 2 in the first of a series of shows drawn entirely from the Museum's own holdings. This ground floor exhibition was installed by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of Collections.

The purpose of the new series is to display the riches of the Museum Collection either in one man shows of work by important artists or in selections of paintings by groups or movements. Usually, due to limited gallery space, only a sampling of works by one artist or of one movement can be shown. Other exhibitions of this kind to follow include "Latin American Masters," "Derain, Dufy, van Dongen," "Pioneers of Geometrical Abstraction," "The American Scene Between the Wars," "Dada" and "Surrealism".

The Léger collection has been formed over the past 25 years by purchase, gift and exchange. Because of the extremely high market in recent years, the Museum's last two important Légers, Exit the Ballets Russes and the Umbrella and Bowler could be acquired only by the sale of three less important works by the same master.

The collection includes two capital works of unique importance, The Three Women (Le Grand Déjeuner) of 1921 and the Three Musicians of 1944, which is not only one of Léger's masterpieces, but marks the beginning of the more realistic figure style which characterizes the work of his last years. Like the Three Musicians, The Divers II of 1941-42, the Red Decoration and Blue Decoration of 1941 and the Big Julie of 1945 were all done in New York during the war.

"The Museum's Léger collection is strong in most periods of the artists' work although not in paintings of the 1930s and the last ten years of his life in Paris. With the exception of the Léger Museum recently established at Biot in the South of France, the Museum's collection of Léger paintings is the most important in any public collection," according to Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

Other painters especially well represented in the Museum of Modern Art include Matisse, to whom an entire gallery is temporarily devoted, Cézanne, Picasso, Klee, Miró, Orozco, Hopper, Levine, Shahn, Pollock and Mondrian, samplings of whose works are usually to be seen in the second floor galleries where a selection from the collections is always on view. The current crowded installation is called "A Bid for Space", and is presented as a demonstration during the 30th Anniversary Fund Drive.

Photographs and an annotated checklist of the Léger exhibition are available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 St., New York, CI 5-8900. The checklist includes lively comments by the artist on several of the paintings made by Léger in an important interview given James Johnson Sweeney in 1946.

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FERNAND LÉGER *January 2, 1961*

Exhibition: November 16 - ~~December 4, 1960~~

CHECKLIST

With notes by Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

Oil Paintings

Contrast of Forms. 1913. Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 32". Philip L. Goodwin Collection.

Exit the Ballets Russes. 1914. Oil on canvas, 53 3/4 x 39 1/2". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Rübél.

According to Leonid Massine, the previous owner of this picture, Léger himself gave it its title. Massine joined Diaghilev's troupe in 1913 and made his debut as a young dancer in Paris early in 1914.

Propellers. 1918. Oil on canvas, 31 7/8 x 25 3/4". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest.

The City (Study). 1919. Oil on Canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 3/4". Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

There are several canvases and a number of watercolors painted by Léger as studies for the very large mural painting, The City 1919, now in the Philadelphia Museum.

Three Women (Le Grand Déjeuner). 1921. Oil on canvas, 72 1/4 x 99". Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund.

This painting is the greatest of a series of figure compositions painted partly as a reaction against the previous period of comparative abstraction represented by the Propellers and the study for The City in the Museum Collection.

"I have thought in terms of monumental figures after The City and in reaction against the last painting. All my life I have been in conflict between the mural idea and the easel painting idea. After I painted The City I felt the urgent need to do an easel painting--the Three Women as a contrary force--; so, more or less unconsciously, after using elements taken out of modern life, I felt the need to try to work with subjects or objects which have been treated by painters of other times. I felt the tradition of classicism dominating my work...It is the classical line in my opinion to put the subject or the object inside, behind the picture expression. The romantic is just the contrary, the subject or object is first. I have lived in this uneasy conflict all my life and the Three Women is a composition in which the classical won." (Letter, somewhat edited, from the artist to A. H. Barr, Jr., November 20, 1943)

Still Life. 1924. Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 23 5/8". Hillman Periodicals Fund.

This and the two larger still lifes, The Baluster of 1925 and the Umbrella and Bowler, 1926, represent a continuation in the mid-twenties of the classic spirit to be found in the Three Women of 1921. In 1924 Léger had visited Italy where he was much impressed by Roman and Byzantine mosaics.

The Baluster. 1925. Oil on canvas, 51 x 38 1/4". Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund.

Umbrella and Bowler. 1926. Oil on canvas, 50 1/4 x 38 3/4". A. Conger Goodyear Fund.

Red Decoration. 1941. Oil on canvas, 70 x 48". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Murphy.

This and the Blue Decoration of the same size and year were commissioned by Gerald Murphy for his New York apartment not long after Léger arrived in New York as a refugee.

Blue Decoration. 1941. Oil on canvas, 70 x 48". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Murphy.

The Divers, II. 1941-42. Oil on canvas, 90 x 68". Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund.

Léger painted several large compositions of divers in New York between 1941 and 1943. This is one of the two most important. Léger referred to this series in an interview with James Johnson Sweeney: "What has come out most notably, however, in the work I have done in America is in my opinion a new energy -- an increased movement within the composition -- in paintings where

the modelling was emphasized such as the Plongeurs series, as well as in the flatter organizations such as the 1942 Divers, Acrobats and Dancers." ("Eleven Europeans in America", The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin, 1946, Vol. XIII, Nos. 4-5.)

Mechanical Fragment, 1943-44. Oil on canvas board, 24 x 19 7/8". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald H. Peters.

Three Musicians. 1944. Oil on canvas, 68 1/2 x 57 1/4". Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund.

"The Three Musicians is perhaps something apart. It was based on a drawing of 1925 which I had always hoped to expand into an oil, but only found the opportunity after my arrival here. But even in this canvas, for all its static character, there is strength which is new. It would have been less tense and colder had it been done in France. And as a matter of fact I cannot imagine that my series of 1942 of moving figures would ever have been possible there." (Interview with James Johnson Sweeney in "Eleven Europeans in America", The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin, 1946, Vol. XIII, Nos. 4-5.)

Big Julie. 1945. Oil on canvas, 44 x 50 1/8". Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

"For me," Léger once said "the contrast in the United States between the mechanical and the natural is one of great anti-melodic intensity. But bad taste is also one of the valuable raw materials for the country. Bad taste, strong colors -- it is all here for the painter to organize and get the full use of its power, Girls in sweaters with brilliant colored skin; girls in shorts dressed more like acrobats in a circus than one would ever come across on a Paris street. If I had only seen girls dressed in 'good taste' here I would never have painted my Cyclist series, of which La Grande Julie in the Museum was the culmination.

"I always hate to see 'good taste' come to the people. For painters like me who are robust it is very dangerous to frequent the beau monde, ballets and the like. French 'taste' is a pitfall for the creative artist...In Paris the 'Casino de Paris' represents 'taste': the same sort of taste has taken the vitality out of the musical shows in New York. Even burlesque shows are infected by 'good taste'. Still there is no need yet to worry. One only has to study the hand-painted ties on Broadway -- a locomotive and four pigeons on a violet and black ground, or a buxom nude on a saffron ground -- to realize there is still a vigorous survival." ("Eleven Europeans in America", The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin, 1946, Vol. XIII, Nos. 4-5.)

Landscape with Yellow Hat. 1952. Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 7/8". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David M. Solinger.

Drawings and Works in Watercolor and Gouache

Kneeling Nude, c. 1907-08. Pen and Ink on grey paper, 12 1/4 x 9 3/4". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Victor Thaw.

Verdun: The Trench Diggers. 1916. Watercolor, 14 1/8 x 10 3/8". Frank Crowninshield Fund.

Léger served three years in the French Artillery in various positions both behind the front and in the trenches.

Skating Rink: design for costume. 1921. Watercolor, 12 3/8 x 9 1/2". W. Alton Jones Foundation Fund.

Between 1921 and 1923 Léger designed the settings and costumes for two productions for the Ballets Suédois, produced in Paris by Rolf de Maré under the general direction of the Swedish dancer, Jean Borlin. Léger himself wrote: "The Ballets Suédois show that an audacious spectacle beyond classic convention could be accepted by the public. It had to be risked. Rolf de Maré understood this and went the farthest in the adventure. He always accepted the newest projects without even trying to restrain them...(In Skating Rink) I attempted to obtain the greatest scenic intensity only by using pure tones applied flatly."

The first of these was Skating Rink, first performed in Paris January 20, 1922.

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Book: Riciotto Canudo (whose portrait drawing by Picasso is shown elsewhere on this floor). Music: Arthur Honegger. Scenery and costumes: Fernand Léger. Choreography: Jean Borlin.

The Creation of the world: Design for Setting. 1922. Pencil, 8 x 10 3/8". Gift of John Pratt.

Ballets Suédois, La Création du Monde: Ballet in 1 act. Book: Blaise Cendrars. Music: Darius Milhaud. Scenery and Costumes: Fernand Léger. Choreography: Jean Borlin. First performance: Paris October 25, 1923. Three giant dieties, Ngama, Medere, N'kva, shown in the drawing, moved about the stage.

Compass and Paint Tubes. 1926. Gouache, 10 1/2 x 14 1/4". Gift of Edward M. M. Warburg.

On view in the exhibition, 100 Modern Drawings: A Selection from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art.

Foot and Hands (left) Composition (right). 1933. Pen and ink, each 12 3/4 x 9 3/4". Purchase.

Face and Hands. 1952. Brush and ink, 26 x 19 3/4". Mrs. Wendell T. Bush Fund.