

# The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release  
October 1985

## LECTURES AND FILM SERIES HELD IN CONJUNCTION WITH MAJOR ABSTRACT ART EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art will present two evening lectures and a daily film program in conjunction with the exhibition, CONTRASTS OF FORM: GEOMETRIC ABSTRACT ART 1910-1980, on view at the Museum through January 7, 1986. The lectures, which will be held in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, are as follows:

### Thursday, November 14, 8:30 p.m.

Magdalena Dabrowski, assistant curator in the Department of Drawings who collaborated in the organization of the exhibition, will discuss the historical development of the geometric tradition from 1910 through the present.

### Thursday, November 21, 8:30 p.m.

Critic and writer Joseph Masheck will focus on the contemporary issues related to the exhibition. Formerly the editor of Artforum, Mr. Masheck currently lectures in Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.

Tickets for each lecture are \$7 for the public, \$6 for Museum members, and \$5 for students with valid identification, and are available at the Lobby Desk or by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope with payment and coupon to the Department of Education, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019.

The film program, AVANT-GARDE OF THE TWENTIES, which consists of five short films made between 1921 and 1930, will be shown daily in the Edward John Noble Education Center. The program, thirty-two minutes in length, will be shown on videotape on a continuous basis (see attached for detailed film information).

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For additional information or photographic materials contact Jeanne Collins or Jessica Schwartz, Department of Public Information 212/708-9750.

Marcel Duchamp used film to further his experiments with motorized optical devices. In ANEMIC CINEMA, separate discs rotate in a series of eccentric and concentric rings, giving the illusion of spiral movement in three dimensions on the flat two-dimensional screen. These discs alternate with others containing nonsensical Dadaist puns, in French. ("Anemic" is an anagram of "cinema.") In the thirties, Duchamp exhibited the discs as autonomous works of art.

BALLET MÉCANIQUE is the outstanding achievement among the abstract films of the twenties related to modern art movements. It synthesizes many concerns of the period: the isolation of real objects such as eggbeaters and pistons to reveal the beauty of their movement; the attention to the machine and to city life; and the concept of repetition-with-variation (a trademark of American avant-garde film in later years). Whereas the other films in this program manipulate geometric patterns that are purely abstract -- whether circular in ANEMIC CINEMA, square in RHYTHMUS 21, or diagonal and curved in SYMPHONIE DIAGONALE and STUDIE NR. 6 -- BALLET MÉCANIQUE begins with photography of actual machines. It is the artist's framing and editing that make manifest the inherent geometry of these objects. Yet the way the repetition of abstract circles and rectangles highlights the geometric relationship of one machine to another makes BALLET MÉCANIQUE comparable to the other films in this program.

BALLET MÉCANIQUE was a collaboration between the Cubist artist Fernand Léger and the American filmmaker and photographer Dudley Murphy. Léger also worked in feature films during the twenties, designing the sets of the inventor's studio in Marcel l'Herbier's L'INHUMAINE and posters for L'INHUMAINE and Abel Gance's LA ROUE, two key French films of the twenties.

Oskar Fischinger began making a series of film studies in Germany in the early twenties. In these short films, abstract shapes appear on the screen and interact in various patterns of movement. In the late twenties, with sound added to his films, he became concerned with interpretation of musical themes. Fischinger worked in Hollywood beginning in the mid-thirties, and in the fifties made television commercials. In STUDIE NR. 6, one of his early sound films, comet-like shapes, then squares and circles, float through the air. By harmony, pause, and cadence, the film moves to its conclusion. The music is by Paul Hindemith.

Jon Gartenberg  
Department of Film

Further reading:

Curtis, David. Experimental Cinema. New York: Universe Books, 1971.

Lawder, Standish D. The Cubist Cinema. New York: New York University Press, 1975.

AVANT-GARDE OF THE TWENTIES

This compilation of short films is being shown in conjunction with the exhibition "Contrasts of Form: Geometric Abstract Art 1910-1980."

SYMPHONIE DIAGONALE (1924), Germany, by Viking Eggeling, black and white, silent.

RHYTHMUS 21 (1921), Germany, by Hans Richter, black and white, silent.

ANEMIC CINEMA (1926), France, by Marcel Duchamp, photography by Man Ray, black and white, silent.

BALLET MÉCANIQUE (1924), France, by Fernand Léger, photography by Dudley Murphy, black and white, silent.

STUDIE NR. 6 (1930), Germany, by Oskar Fischinger, music by Paul Hindemith, black and white, sound.

Total running time approximately 32 minutes. These films are available from the Circulating Film Library.

Many of the artists involved with geometric abstraction in the early part of the century found in the newly developed medium of film a logical extension of their work. The abstract films they created share a common concern with geometry and machinery, with formal patterns and editing rhythms. This program brings together some major achievements of these artists in the twenties.

Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling came to film after having explored Cubism, Expressionism, and Dadaism in their paintings. They worked together in Berlin, but their completed films were created independently. Seeking to create cinematic equivalents of musical patterns, they began by constructing scroll paintings; to make these compositions dynamic, they animated them through film. For Eggeling's SYMPHONIE DIAGONALE, thousands of drawings were made and then filmed in sequence to produce movement. As in musical compositions, many rhythmic effects are evident in the film. SYMPHONIE DIAGONALE also demonstrates Eggeling's preoccupation with diagonal patterns and with the flat surface of the film screen.

In Richter's RHYTHMUS 21, white, gray, and black rectangular forms of cutout paper are manipulated. The constantly changing sizes of the geometric forms create a tension between the surface and the depth of the image. The film's percussive quality becomes more complex at the end, when multiple rectangular forms interact with increasing complexity.