

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART OPENS LARGE EXHIBITION
OF ITS OWN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

Largest of its kind ever held by the Museum of Modern Art, the first general exhibition of the Museum's Collection of Painting and Sculpture opening to the public Wednesday, June 20, will omit two-thirds of the Collection because of space limitation. A few drawings and collages are included, but none of the Museum's extensive print collection. All the works shown belong to the Museum with the exception of a half-dozen extended loans which the lenders intend to bequeath to the Museum, meanwhile permitting the Museum to make full use of them.

The exhibition, which has been installed by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the Museum's Director of Research in Painting and Sculpture, includes approximately 300 paintings and 75 pieces of sculpture. The paintings are shown on the second floor and continue on the third floor, ending in the large eastern gallery from which one proceeds into the series of five sculpture galleries. Other sculpture is shown in the garden and a few pieces are exhibited in the painting galleries wherever they fit in appropriately. The exhibition will remain on view throughout the Summer and early Fall, closing November 4.

The primary purpose of the exhibition is to show the public a large number of the Museum's paintings and sculptures and to let the works of art speak for themselves with a certain informality which might be out of place in a more permanent installation. Many pieces of good quality or historical value have been omitted although had space permitted they might have added to the completeness of the show and to the visitors' more detailed understanding of important works.

Mr. Barr, Director of the exhibition, comments upon its selection and arrangement as follows:

"The installation has proven a complex and challenging problem. Even were it desirable, it would not have been practicable to follow a strictly chronological order or a

systematic division by nationality, school or medium.

"Beginning on the second floor, after a two-gallery 'preface' of American folk art and modern primitives: Rousseau, Kane, Pickett, etc.--the central international tradition of modern painting is followed in a suite of galleries leading from Cézanne, van Gogh, Seurat and Gauguin through the early 20th century masters of the School of Paris: Matisse, Rouault, Bonnard, Modigliani, etc. to their related contemporaries or followers elsewhere, particularly in the United States: Weber, Marin, Demuth, Kuniyoshi, etc., and in Central Europe: Kokoschka, Beckmann, etc.

"Cubism, the most important movement of the second decade of our century, begins with Picasso's Demoiselles d'Avignon and other classic works by Braque and Gris of Paris. The cubist tradition is followed in other countries--Feininger, Stuart Davis, Peláez, etc.--and in large paintings of the 1920's by Picasso, Léger and Braque. Malevich and Mondrian who, before 1920, carried Cubism to its abstract extreme in their quasi-geometrical paintings, are shown with some of their recent followers who keep alive the tradition of 'ruler and compass.'

"Some of the best painters active since 1920 have continued to work the vein explored earlier by Cézanne, van Gogh, Matisse, Rouault, the Cubists and the composers of squares and circles. But many of the most vigorous and original artists have rebelled in various ways against the vague emotions of expressionism, the dogma of abstraction and the esthetics of pure form and color. Some went back to earlier kinds of painting; some explored comparatively new problems. The rest of the exhibition is given over to their work, which has given new character and direction to the painting of the past quarter-century.

"On the second floor, following the 'abstract' room and in contrast to it, are four galleries with paintings predominantly realistic or romantic in character: the American 'precisionists' of the twenties: O'Keeffe, Sheeler, Preston Dickinson; their bitter German contemporary Otto Dix; the painters of the American scene: Hopper, Burchfield, etc., and the Latin American scene; American romantics: Eilshemius, Burchfield, Hartley, etc.; the Paris masters of mystery and sentiment: Bérard, Berman, Tchelitchev.

"The paintings on the third floor spring from two radically different artistic--and human--problems, both of fundamental importance in the modern world. One, concerned with the relation of man to society, has produced an art of satire, pathos, protest and action, often under Marxian influence: Orozco, Siqueiros, Grosz, Gropper, Shahn, etc.

"The other preoccupation springing from the relation of man to his subconscious mind, is more or less inspired or justified by modern psychology and the esthetics of Surrealism. In the first gallery are some of the pioneers: Chagall, de Chirico, Kandinsky, Klee, whose work goes back to the nineteen-tens. Then follow the masters of dream realism, of vivid wonders and incongruities: Ernst, Blume, Dali, etc. In contrast to their calculated magic, the artists in the next gallery create images from a chaos of weaving, automatic brush strokes: Masson, Graves, etc. The spontaneous, almost automatic method then finds a more calm and lucid expression in the nearly abstract 'free form' compositions of Arp and Miro.

"The final painting gallery brings together six paintings of very different style and intention, all of them painted in the past decade. They have in common their ambitious scale and elaboration and their allegorical character, whether the allegory concerns hope (Beckmann) or desperation (Siqueiros), political irony (Blume) or the poetic forces of nature (Matta, Tchelitchev, Lam). Using the techniques and devices of various modern schools they combine form and color with a wide range of feeling and idea.

"The five galleries of sculpture begin with the classic

masters Maillol and Despiau, followed by others of the older generation of figure sculptors--Barlach, Epstein, Kolbe, Lachaise, Lehmbruck, Zorach--whose work is more stylized and 'modern' than that of the two great Frenchmen.

"In the third sculpture gallery, on one side, are hewers of stone such as Flannagan and Ben-Shmuel or of wood such as Gross and Calder: and on the other the inventors of new forms: Duchamp-Villon, Lipchitz, Pevsner and Gabo, Brancusi and, continuing in the next gallery, Arp and Henry Moore. In the long vitrine are a series of small sculptures which show some of the problems attacked by modern sculptors: the simplified figure (Laurens, Marcks); the pierced form, the interchange of void and solid (Archipenko and Vantongerloo); three-dimensional line drawing (Calder); combination of isolated forms (Arp); composite of sculptural, graphic, architectural forms (Grippe).

"Finally, though without intending to exaggerate the sculptor's importance, two of Lehmbruck's large figures are allotted a gallery to themselves in order to give the visitor a sense of how effective sculpture can be when shown in ample, well proportioned space. Large pieces by Despiau, Lachaise, Lipchitz and Calder are shown in the garden or the stair well.

"A museum exhibition of this size requires more than a purely esthetic or decorative arrangement, yet categories and sequences inevitably lead to certain errors of emphasis. Only a few works of art are conveniently simple enough to fit into classifications. Many of the categories suggested by the installation are therefore tentative and inexact. Critics, scholars and the public are cordially invited to offer suggestions.

"No comprehensive collection of modern art, however, can possibly assume a rigid or final character. And this was never the intention of the men and women who have given so generously of their money and faith to make the collection possible. Now when absolutism is being defeated and nations are once more attempting to solve the dilemma of freedom and order it is well to repeat the words of the Museum's President, John Hay Whitney, written during the blackest days of war in the foreword of the catalog of the Collection:

"There is one aspect of the Collection which seems to me to have a special meaning at the present time. This is its catholicity and tolerance....

"This collection of the art of many nations is a symbol of freedom, freedom of the artist, and through the artist of every individual to speak his mind without fear of persecution. And beyond individual freedom, it symbolizes the freedom of nations to cherish not only their own works of art but those of other peoples as well so that international understanding and esteem may be furthered through art which can thus participate in the defeat of international hatred and contempt against which we are now fighting on the field of battle.' "