

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

48210-9

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXHIBITS WORK OF TWO CONSTRUCTIVIST SCULPTORS

To communicate the reality of life, art should be based on the two fundamental elements: space and time.

To realize our creative life in terms of space and time: such is the unique aim of our creative art.

...we shape our work as the world its creation, the engineer his bridge, the mathematician his formulas of a planetary orbit.

Art should stop being imitative and try instead to discover new forms.

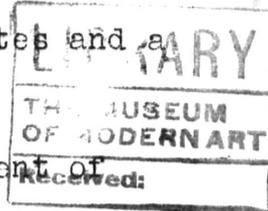
With these statements in 1920, two Russian brothers opened an exhibition of their works in an orchestra shell in Moscow and took their independent stand in the world history of art.

On Wednesday, February 11, the Museum of Modern Art will open two simultaneous one-man shows of the abstract sculpture of these two brothers: Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner to continue through April 25. Approximately eighty works, including a few paintings and drawings, will trace the development of the two living sculptors who most strikingly exemplify the Constructivist movement in modern art. Gabo, the younger of the two who changed his name so as not to be confused with his brother, works in plastics and other materials, Pevsner chiefly in metals.

The exhibition has been installed by Rene d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum's Curatorial Departments. The preface to the book the Museum will publish on the exhibition is by the celebrated English Art Critic Herbert Read. Essays on the two artists have been written by Ruth Olson and Abraham Chanin of the Museum staff. In addition, the book of 84 pages will include 80 halftone plates and a bibliography.

James Thrall Soby, Chairman of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture, has written the following introduction for the exhibition:

Gabo and Pevsner, Russian born brothers, are Constructivists. In simplest terms this means that they construct three-dimensional art objects instead of creating sculpture through the traditional methods of carving or modeling with clay. They frequently use the new materials of modern industry. Their primary aim is to extend the spatial range of conventional sculpture, to suggest by implied motion and directional forms the relationship between space and time.



The art of Gabo and Pevsner is sometimes related to the models of higher mathematics and can perhaps be best understood as symbolizing the abstract truths and intangible scientific equations by which we all live, even if unaware. Their art does not attempt to remind us of familiar appearances but to reveal a new and abstract beauty, like the fugues of Bach. The brothers' aim is inspirational. They do not reflect the present so much as they propose an ideal harmony, serenity and equilibrium--a solace and a goal for a world in disorder.

In his preface Herbert Read discusses the problem of communication as related to abstract and constructivist art, he says:

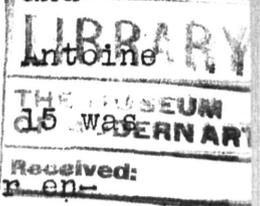
"Essentially the problem is the same whenever the public is confronted with an original or 'difficult' type of art: it is the problem which arises when the same public is confronted with the music of Stravinsky or the poetry of Eliot. A difficulty in philosophy or science--the 'difficulty' of Heidegger or Carnap--is accepted as a necessary, or at least as a natural, price to pay...The visual language may be just as difficult to learn as any verbal language; and within this visual language there are as many degrees of difficulty as there are in literature.

"There is no imprecision of visual language in a construction by Gabo or Pevsner: every piece has the absolute clarity of a Euclidian theorem. The development of both artists, during the past twenty-five years, is towards an increasingly exact equivalence of vision and expression.

"Much--perhaps most--of the art that is specifically 'modern' is in the nature of a protestation; it is not decadent art, but it is a negative reaction to the decadence of our civilization....But the art of Antoine Pevsner and of Naum Gabo is positive and prophetic and it looks beyond the immediate convulsions of our epoch to a time when a new culture based on an affirmative vision of life will need and will call into being an art commensurate with its grandeur."

The lives and careers of the two brothers--Pevsner born in Orel, Russia, on January 18, 1886; Gabo August 5, 1890 in Briansk, central Russia--have been chiefly in separate countries except for a most important period of their early maturity when they came together for seven years. Their father was an executive of copper refineries and the two older brothers of the family chose engineering careers. the third brother, decided to become an artist and at the age of sent to Kiev to prepare by rigorous study in the liberal arts for entrance to the Academy of Fine Arts, which he attended for two years. With several other artist rebels he left the Academy in 1910 for a pilgrimage of cities and towns in Russia which were treasuries of medieval art and the ancient craft of icon making. Pevsner was greatly impressed by the latter, seeing in it certain principles of motion later suggested in his own abstract constructions. Recalling his impressions of the art of iconography he states:

"The inverted laws of ancient perspective struck me deeply. Giving an impression of mobility, forms appeared sometimes open, sometimes closed...at the same time moving in and out, hollow and raised--a phenomenon which produced the sensations of life itself."



In 1911 Pevsner attended the St. Petersburg Academy of Beaux-Arts but after one year broke with it and went to Paris where he now lives.

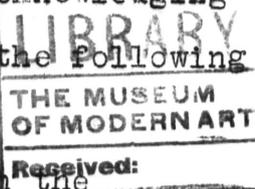
In the meantime, his younger brother Naum, after graduating from the Kursk Gymnasium, was sent in 1909 to the University of Munich to study for a medical career. Very soon, however, Gabo found that his real interests were in science and the arts. He had the good fortune to study under world-renowned chemists and physicists including Roentgen, winner of the Nobel Prize for the discovery of Xray. In his art history classes he was as fortunate. He studied under the celebrated Professor Heinrich Wölfflin who was developing a formalistic means of classifying art: the linear vs. the pictorial, vision of surface vs. vision of depth, open vs. closed forms, multiplicity vs. unity, absolute clearness vs. relative clearness.

About this time Gabo met Kandinsky, who was seeking a synthesis of the arts. Outside the classroom students and advanced artists discussed systems, philosophies and sciences. The French Cubists had shown in Munich and the Munich "Blue Rider" group were exhibiting and writing in defense of their explosive abstractions and bright colored expressionism.

Gabo in Munich and Pevsner in Paris became part of the avant garde movement in art. At the outbreak of World War I Gabo was sent to Oslo where a year later Pevsner joined him. It was there that Gabo made the change in his name. Early in 1917 both brothers returned to Moscow, during the Kerensky regime; and in 1919 they helped establish a workshop in Moscow where Pevsner received an official professor's post. Both had been strongly affected by the Cubist movement. At the same time Gabo who had become much interested in Futurism while on a walking trip through Italy in the summer of 1912, investigated motion as an esthetic factor and in 1920 invented the technical working Kinetic Model shown in the current exhibition. Although acknowledging the Futurists' pionnering, Gabo rejected their program in the following comment:

"Ask any Futurist how he imagines speed, and on the scene will appear a whole arsenal of raging automobiles, rumbling stations, tangled wire, the clang, bang, noise and ring of the whirling streets.... This is not at all required for speed and its rhythms.... Look at a ray of sun--the quietest of the silent strengths--it runs three hundred thousand kilometers in a second. Our starry sky--does anyone hear it?"

Pevsner sought a method of solving what he considered the Cubists had left unsolved and for a period studied Malevich's Suprematist system, later returning to his own plan of individual artistic expression.



In 1923 the artistic tide in Russia changed and became reactionary. The two brothers went to Berlin. Shortly thereafter Pevsner returned to France and exhibited with Gabo the following June in Paris. In 1930 Pevsner became a citizen of France. In 1932 Gabo left Germany to spend three years in Paris and then went to London where he lived during the war and where he married an American, Miriam Israels, painter and descendent of the Dutch genre painter Joseph Israels. In 1946 he came to America and settled in Connecticut. He plans to become an American citizen.

A few years ago Gabo defined and declared his creed as an artist:

"I have come to the conclusion that a work of art restricted to what the artist has put in it is only a part of itself. It only attains full stature with what people and time make of it.... 'Abstract' is not the core of the Constructive idea I profess. The idea means more to me. It involves the whole complex of human relation to life. It is a mode of thinking, acting, perceiving and living.... Any thing or action which enhances life, propels it and adds to it something in the direction of growth, expansion and development, is Constructive.... I think that the image of my work is the image of good--not of evil; the image of order--not of chaos; the image of life--not of death. And that is all the content of my constructions amounts to.... all that the Constructive idea is driving at."



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THOMAS W. BRADEN ELECTED SECRETARY OF MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Nelson A. Rockefeller, President of the Museum of Modern Art, announced today the election by the Trustees of Thomas W. Braden as Secretary of the Museum to succeed John E. Abbott who recently resigned.

The office of the Secretary serves to coordinate the Museum's activities and acts as a clearing house for information concerning them. Mr. Braden who is on the faculty of Dartmouth College will assume his new duties in April.

A graduate of Dartmouth College in the class of 1940 he has had experience in newspaper and radio work in New York and Washington. During the war he served in North Africa with the King's Royal Rifle Corps of the British Army and later transferred to the American forces as a parachutist with the Office of Strategic Services. He is co-author with Stewart Alsop of Sub Rosa, an account of the war-time activities of that organization.

In addition to teaching English at Dartmouth Mr. Braden has been in charge of organizing the Great Issues Course, an experimental educational venture designed to provide all Dartmouth seniors with a practical introduction to great contemporary public questions. He has served as Executive Secretary of this course since its inception last fall.

