

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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No. 45

FOR RELEASE: WEDNESDAY
May 11, 1955

PRESS PREVIEW: TUESDAY
May 10, 1955; 1 - 5 p.m.

RECENT EUROPEAN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE ON VIEW AT MUSEUM

THE NEW DECADE: 22 EUROPEAN PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from May 11 through August 7. The 85 works of art, most of them shown for the first time in this country, were selected by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, Director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture. The artists, each represented by three to five works, have all come into prominence during the past ten years. Each has made a special contribution to the art of this decade. Seven are French, five British and five Italian, three German, one Dutch and one Portuguese. Fourteen are painters and eight are sculptors.

The exhibition will be on view concurrently with a large exhibition, The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors at the Whitney Museum, 22 West 54 Street. After the New York showing, the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition will be seen in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Los Angeles County Museum, and the San Francisco Museum of Art.

The artists included are: The French Bazaine, Dubuffet, Hajdu, Manessier, Pignon, Richier and Soulages; the Germans Uhlmann, Werner and Winter; the British Armitage, Bacon, Butler, Chadwick and Scott; the Italians Afro, Burri, Capogrossi, Minguzzi and Mirko; the Dutchman Appel, and the Portuguese Vieira da Silva.

In his foreword to the catalog which accompanies the exhibition, Mr. Ritchie says that today European art, like politics, is in a state of flux but that in both fields there are remarkable signs of hope, despite a decade of anxiety, not to say despair. He points out that:

"... there has been a stirring of ideas that may eventually lead to a more stable, unified continent; and among younger artists there appears to have been a serious re-appraisal of pre-war art movements and a searching for new points of departure.

"The greatest tensions during the decade have been political. One by-product has been that in art the Communists have sought to steal the term 'realism' just as they have sought to appropriate the words 'peace' and 'democracy.' In France, most non-Communist painters tend to be abstract, in one way or another. In Italy, and West Germany, the same is true, and in these two countries the memory of the sentimental, would-be heroic realism of Fascist or Nazi art may have had something to do with their choice of an opposite direction. Britain, on the other hand, with more conservative political and artistic traditions has been less affected by these totalitarian pressures."

Mr. Ritchie continues by noting that "the weakness, even sterility, of most non-Communist figurative painting is in part the result of stronger minded artists having chosen an extreme reactionary or advanced position, leaving the middle ground to become impoverished. This impoverishment is no doubt a great misfortune; but it should surprise no one in a world where the middle ground between ideological extremes becomes daily more difficult to maintain."

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Mr. Ritchie, however, comments upon the fact that of the fourteen painters presented, "nine are abstract, in one or another meaning of that ambiguous term. Of the eight sculptors, only one has maintained a purely abstract direction." The middle ground in sculpture has not, for a number of reasons become so impoverished, he feels, perhaps because "Sculpture, for one thing, is a more expensive, less mobile medium and does not lend itself as easily as painting does to mass propaganda." As a result, possibly, the "Communist debasement of figurative imagery has had less opportunity to operate."

"One can only speculate, however," Mr. Ritchie says, "on the reasons why artists today follow one direction or another. Even their statements [in the catalog] give only vague clues as to why they paint or make sculpture as they do. Nevertheless, in reading them one is struck by how much these statements have in common and by the similarity of problems of experience referred to; the role that instinct or intuition plays in creation; how much the act of making has to do with discovering what a work will turn out to be; the work of art as an entity; art as an instrument for discovering meaning in the world; the relation of art to the object or the external world; and finally, the most frequent reference, the question of space."

All the French artists in the NEW DECADE except for Soulages, were born before the first World War, and two of the seven are sculptors. Etienne Hajdu is represented by a marble portrait head, a bronze Woman with Braids and by two recent bas-reliefs in hammered sheet metal, a method in which he has become more interested lately because he says it "allows one to reunite technically many contrary elements and to assure their interaction." Germaine Richier, one of two women in the show, is the other French sculptor. Her first one-man show in this country was held in Chicago last year. Three of her bronze figures are included.

Jean Bazaine, who is represented by three large canvases, including one called "Chicago," presumably inspired by a visit to this city when he came to this country in 1952 to serve as juror for the Pittsburgh International Exhibition, was included in the French section of the Venice Biennale in 1948 and 1952 and in the Sao Paulo Bienal in 1953 and 1951. In 1941 he organized the first exhibition of modern painting under the German occupation and has been exhibited regularly in Paris since that time.

Jean Dubuffet, whom Mr. Ritchie characterizes as "an embattled eccentric" is represented by five canvases dating from 1944 to 1954. Dubuffet, whose first one-man show was held after the Liberation of Paris in 1944, formed a society a few years ago to collect and exhibit l'Art brut, the work of prisoners, mediums, the insane and other non-professionals. Alfred Manessier, represented by four oils, also participated in the first exhibition of modern painting under the Occupation. Most of his abstract paintings have a religious motif. "But I believe also that in order to understand our painting, it is necessary that Christianity recover its place in the

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life of the world; all will be saved if we recover the evangelical spirit," he says.

Edouard Pignon, son of a miner, has worked at many trades -- mining, building, as a comedian, and as a foreman in a Renault plant. He studied drawing and sculpture in night classes. His first one-man show in Paris was in 1946 and since then his work has been included in many international exhibitions. Like many French artists he has illustrated books with lithographs and also designed for the theater.

Pierre Soulages, the youngest French painter in the exhibition, had his first one-man show in Paris in 1949, in Copenhagen in 1951, in Munich in 1952, and in New York in 1954. He too has designed for the ballet and for Louis Jouvet in the theater. Four of his paintings, which he titles by dates only, are included in the exhibition.

Two of the German artists, Hans Uhlmann, a sculptor, and Fritz Winter, a painter, in the 1930s were forbidden by the Nazis to exhibit their work. Uhlmann was a political prisoner from 1933 to 1935 and did not exhibit until 1945. He has won increasing recognition in Germany since the war and has exhibited in international shows in São Paulo, Lucerne, Amsterdam, London, Venice and Milan.

Fritz Winter studied at the Bauhaus in Germany under Paul Klee before the school was closed by the Nazis. He spent ten years in the German army and for four additional years was a prisoner of war in Siberia. Eldest son of a coal miner, he was trained as an electrician and also worked as a miner. His first one-man show here was in 1952.

Theodor Werner, the oldest artist in the exhibition, was born in Wurttemberg in 1886 but did not become widely known in Germany as a painter until 1947. His first one-man show in this country was held in New York last year.

Three of the five British artists selected for the exhibition are sculptors, and two, Lynn Chadwick and Reg Butler were both trained and worked as architects. Chadwick is represented by a small mobile and a seven and a half foot iron construction, both dated 1952, and two dancing figures which he made last year for this exhibition. He says, "If I look back on my work over a period of years I can see a development from mobiles and constructions on to beaten shapes with limbs and connections, to the solid forms on which I'm now working. It seems there has been a deliberate continuity, as if the mobiles had been a research into space and volume (separate parts free in space), and the constructions had been a way of joining the parts together, fixing them in space to make forms, and that these constructions have become armatures for the solid shapes...."

Reg Butler, grand prize winner of the international sculpture competition for a monument to "The Unknown Political Prisoner," practiced architecture until 1950 and

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did not start sculpture until 1944. In addition to two forged and welded or forged and cast pieces, Mr. Butler is represented by two five and a half feet tall figures in shell bronze, completed last year.

Kenneth Armitage, the third British sculptor, is represented by four of his relief sculptures, most of which are groups rather than individuals, such as Family Going for a Walk and Seated Group Listening to Music.

Of the two British painters, Francis Bacon was born in Ireland and William Scott in Scotland. Bacon's intensely expressive paintings were first seen here in a one-man show in 1952. His Figure in a Landscape, Baboon, Dog and Study after Velazquez' Portrait of Pope Innocent X contrast with William Scott's cool and ordered still lifes and most recent abstract Seated Figure.

Two of the five Italians in the exhibition are brothers: the painter Afro and the sculptor Mirko. Afro says, "The picture should be an enclosed world; within its limits the drama unfolds; this chess board spells victory or defeat." Three of his four paintings in the exhibition, Encounter, Boy with Turkey and Ballet, are being shown here for the first time. His first one-man show in this country was in New York in 1950 and since then his work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1952 and 1954 and at the São Paulo Bienal in 1951 and 1953.

His brother Mirko executed the bronze gates for the Ardeatine Cave in Rome, a memorial to the 320 Italians killed by the Germans in 1944 in reprisal for the death of 32 Germans. In addition to three bronzes, one completed only this year, Mirko is represented by a sheet brass cut-out, Architectonic Element, more than six feet high and three feet wide, which is suspended from the ceiling.

Minguzzi, the other Italian sculptor, is now a Professor at the Accademia di Brera in Milan. Two 1951 pieces, Goat and Dog Among the Reeds, are included, along with Acrobat on Trapeze and a Woman Jumping Rope, executed in 1953 and 1954, and both about six feet tall.

Guiseppe Capogrossi, represented by four paintings which he calls "surfaces" was originally a successful conventional artist who changed his style radically in 1949. "For years I was a realist or representational painter, actually a rather successful one; so much so that many amateurs still mourn my lost talent while some few of the most lenient politely marvel at my conversion to abstract painting. I, however, am convinced that my painting has not substantially changed; it has only become clearer," he says.

Alberto Burri, the other Italian painter, began to paint while a prisoner of war in Texas. He had originally studied medicine. Three recent textile and paint collages are included as well as an earlier oil on canvas. Burri's first one-man show was in Rome in 1948.

The only Dutchman in the exhibition, Karel Appel, was one of the founders of the "International Experimental Group." From 1949 to 1951 he contributed to Cobra, the magazine of the group and organized Cobra exhibitions in Denmark, Belgium, Germany and France. His work was included in the São Paulo Bienal in 1953 and in the Venice Biennale in 1954. His first one-man show here was in 1954.

Maria Helena Vieira da Silva was born in Lisbon, Portugal, spent the war years in Rio de Janeiro and now lives in Paris. She has exhibited her paintings regularly since 1947 and has done theater décors, a tapestry and a mural for the Ministry of Education building in Rio de Janeiro.

Note: Photographs and catalog available on request from

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Museum of Modern Art.