

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
NO. 50

Department of Public Information

SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP RETROSPECTIVE ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP, the first retrospective of the Swiss avant-garde artist's work to be held in the United States, will open to the public on September 17, 1981 at The Museum of Modern Art. Directed by Carolyn Lanchner, Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum, the exhibition will remain on view in third floor Collection Galleries through November 29, 1981.

The exhibition will consist of more than 40 works drawn from all periods of Sophie Taeuber-Arp's mature working career, which began around 1915. Its aim will be, in Carolyn Lanchner's words, "to present a small, selective retrospective that will demonstrate the quality, originality, and importance of her work." Included will be early abstract work from the mid-teens, several puppets, two Dada heads executed in painted and turned wood around 1920, a selection of oils, watercolors and maquettes for wall paintings from the 1920s, drawings, gouaches and oils, and painted wood reliefs from the 1930s.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp was born in Davos, Switzerland, in 1889. During the first decade of the 20th century she studied applied arts and textile design at the Gewerbeschules of Saint-Gallen and of Hamburg, and also spent two years as a student in an experimental workshop in Munich. In 1915 in

continued/

Zurich, which was at that time a center of Dadaist activity, she met Jean Arp, a young Alsatian artist and poet who was later to become her husband. They began an artistic collaboration that would, with varying degrees of intensity, continue for the length of their lives together.

In 1916, Sophie Taeuber-Arp was appointed a professor of textile technique and design in the department she helped found at the L'Ecole des Arts et des Métiers in Zurich, a post she held until 1929, when greater economic security allowed her to resign to devote more time to her own work. In 1918 she designed and executed 17 proto-Constructivist marionettes, as well as stage sets, for the Swiss Puppet Theater's production of Carlo Gozzi's Le Roi Cerf. In 1937 she founded and subsequently edited the journal Plastique, calling upon artists and critics in Europe and New York to contribute, and reproducing abstract work by artists of divergent persuasions. Toward the end of her life she lived and worked in the South of France, in Grasse, where she and Jean Arp had gone to escape German-occupied Paris. Sophie Taeuber-Arp died in Zurich in 1943.

As early as 1915, Taeuber-Arp was working in a geometric abstract style as advanced as any to be found in contemporary Holland or Russia. Her early nonrepresentational works were watercolors, gouaches, drawings and embroideries composed of rectangles and squares, arranged in horizontal/vertical patterns.

During the 1930s she painted several large oils which she called

continued/

"Space Pictures," in which planar divisions of surface are inflected by and merged with angular bands of color. Between 1936 and 1938, Taeuber-Arp executed a series of wood reliefs, some on rectangular grounds, others on circular bases. These reliefs, whose elevated elements were often painted in primary colors against white or black grounds, were described by Wassily Kandinsky as "combining the beauty of volumes with the mysterious moving power of color, which sometimes reinforces the voice of the simple forms and sometimes lowers its tone. It stresses the hardness of one form while endowing another with softness."

Sophie Taeuber-Arp's evolution of an abstract style was far more intuitive, and less dependent on theoretical justification, than was its similar development by her contemporaries in the generation that pioneered abstraction in painting between 1910 and 1920. Partially owing to this non-doctrinaire approach to art making, Taeuber-Arp's work is distinguished by a sense of freedom and an ability to evoke natural phenomena remarkable within the context of its severely reduced geometric vocabulary. Neither her scope nor her output was prodigious, yet within her chosen modes, Taeuber-Arp's work allows her a place among the finest avant-garde artists of her time.

This exhibition will be accompanied by a 54-page catalogue with text by Carolyn Lanchner, 8 color plates and 40 black-and-white illustrations. It will be published at \$4.95 by The Museum of Modern Art.

After closing at the Museum, SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP will travel to: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (January 9 - March 7, 1982); the

continued/

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (April 1 - May 16, 1982) and the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal (June 10 - July 25, 1982).

The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue have been made possible by a generous contribution from Pro Helvetia, Arts Council of Switzerland.

August 1981

For further information, please contact Luisa Kreisberg, Director, (212) 956-2648, or Pamela Sweeney, 956-7501, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019