

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART OPENS LARGE RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION
OF TCHELITCHEW PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS

The first important exhibition of the season at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, will open to the public Wednesday, October 28, when the Museum will present simultaneously two one-man shows: Tchelitchew Paintings and Drawings and The Sculpture of John B. Flannagan. The entire second floor, the Museum's largest gallery space, will be devoted to the double exhibition which will close November 29. Each of the two shows will be the largest retrospective exhibition ever held for either artist: 214 oils, gouaches, water-colors, drawings and stage and costume designs by Tchelitchew; 43 sculptures and 30 drawings by Flannagan.

James Thrall Soby has directed the Tchelitchew exhibition and installed it in the Museum galleries against a color scheme devised by Tchelitchew himself. Mr. Soby is also the author of the catalog for the exhibition, which is a book of 100 pages, 75 halftones and 2 color plates. Cloth bound copies sell for \$2.25, paper bound for \$1.00.

Pavel Tchelitchew, Russian born painter, has for the past twenty-two years lived and worked at his art in Kiev, Constantinople, Sofia, Berlin, Paris, England, Spain and Italy. For the past eight years New York has been his residence. During the twenty-two years of his wanderings his art has traveled through almost as many phases as the cities in his odyssey. Though he was once a leading member of the group of Parisian painters known as the Neo-Romantics--painters who reacted violently against abstract art and tried to restore a lyric feeling of moment and place to art--he is no longer associated with a specific school or style. In addition to the mastery of line for which his drawings are noted and the great variety of his paintings, Tchelitchew is acknowledged to be a leading portraitist, particularly in the difficult art of silverpoint. As an outstanding stage designer, both here and in Europe, he executed the sets and costumes for the ballets Ode (1928), Errante (1933) and Orpheus (1936), the last two performed both in New York and Paris.

Tchelitchew has just completed what he considers his greatest work, a large oil Cache Cache or Hide and Seek which will receive its first public showing when the exhibition opens. It has been acquired

by the Museum through the Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. The large canvas, nearly 6 1/2 x 7 feet, is the culmination of two strikingly original lines of experiment with which Tchelitchew has for many years been intensely preoccupied: multiple-image metamorphosis* and triple perspective.** At times merging, these two experimental trends have persisted in a steady line of development throughout the radically changing phases of Tchelitchew's art. The culmination of these two major trends in the artist's master work is analyzed and described by Mr. Soby as follows:

"The canvas itself was begun at Derby Hill (Vermont) in the summer of 1940, but its genesis really dates from the spring of 1934 when on a friend's estate in Sussex, England, Tchelitchew saw a huge, gnarled tree of which he made a literal sketch. The tree, with its finger-like branches, remained in his thought and the following year he peopled it with children playing hide-and-seek. For the next three years the hide-and-seek theme lay dormant in his mind. His interest was revived at Weston, Connecticut, in 1938-39 by the autumn leaves which he saw as capes concealing the forms of children. He made a magnificent ink and watercolor sketch of the tree with branches forming a hand and with a human foot for base. He gradually perceived that the trunk was suggestive of an old man's head seen full-face, with the branches of the tree as wild hair. In time he therefore arrived at the central multiple image of Hide-and-Seek: the tree as a joined hand and foot, and also as the head of an aged Viking, with its left eye the butterfly on the tree trunk, its right eye the arm of the girl spread-eagled against the trunk, its nose the girl's torso.

"By the summer of 1940 the disposition of the passages surrounding the tree and interlacing its finger-branches had become relatively clear in his mind. There were to be two principal children's heads, representing seasons of the year, facing each other across the tree trunk--Head of Spring and Head of Autumn. There are six children's heads or heads-and-figures woven into the finger-branches above the heads of spring and autumn. Five of these heads are seen from above, at relatively the same angle from which the baby at the foot of the tree is seen. The sixth, Head of Summer, is seen more nearly straight-on and acts as a transitional passage between the five heads in the branches and the heads of spring and autumn which are viewed at normal eye level.

"From the studies for Hide-and-Seek to the final canvas, Tchelitchew moved steadily toward an ever more impressive clarity, unity and grandeur. The picture is all in one piece and so it may be seen before the observer begins that exploration of its interior images which leads to almost endless discoveries. The fact is the more remarkable in that this, so large and complicated a composition, was begun and finished on the canvas without measurement or calculation as to the scale of the component parts."

The eternal variety and the essential unity of all things have fascinated Tchelitchew since his earliest memory. He was born in 1898 on his father's huge estate just outside Moscow, the eldest son in a family of two daughters and two sons. The children had a simultaneous variety of governesses: French, English and German. But

*Images, singly or in combination, which are made up of, turn into, or suggest other images.

**Simultaneous presentation of three different angles of perspective: straight-on, from above, from below.

it was his Russian nurse who formally introduced Pavel at the age of four to the mystery of separability in unity. The child asked about one of the many icons on the nursery walls. According to the artist's recollection the conversation ran as follows:

"That is the Trinity," explained the nurse, "three in one, indivisible and independent."

Wonderingly, the child said "How could that be?"

"It is not something to think about," the nurse said impatiently, "just believe. More intelligent people than you have troubled their brains over it. You have to believe."

"It is impossible," announced the infant, rejecting not the idea but the acceptance of it through mere belief.

The child grew up in an atmosphere of Russian and German folklore and fairy tales, where fact and fantasy never opposed each other but blended happily. He pored over volumes in the family library illustrated by Gustave Doré and by the stage designs of Bakst and Benois. At the age of eight, after painting an oil portrait of his mother, he completed a head of Medusa in the Doré style. He was fond of playing a game of cards which reproduced the works of Botticelli, Raphael, Rubens, Tintoretto and Rembrandt.

Although Tchelitchew's father was known as a liberal who had long advocated the distribution of land rights to the peasants, the family belonged to the aristocracy. In the fall of 1918, after a year of the Revolution, they fled Moscow for Kiev. Tchelitchew was then twenty and determined to become a professional painter. He attended free courses in the Kiev Academy but profited more from private lessons given him by Rabinovitch, now one of Soviet Russia's most famous stage designers. He helped Rabinovitch execute the sets and costumes for a small music hall having weekly changes of program. Tchelitchew's style was at this time completely abstract, but before he left Kiev in 1920 his painting became slightly more representational and he evolved the theory that a line cannot be stright because to be related to man's spherical existence a line must be endless, therefore a circle.

Desperately poor, he moved on to Constantinople, then to Sofia, and arrived in Berlin in the autumn of 1921, where he soon received a series of commissions for stage decors and costumes. He established a reputation and before he left that city in 1923 he was commissioned to design the decor and costumes for an important theatrical production and also for the Berlin State Opera production of Coq d'Or. During the last year of his stay in Berlin Tchelitchew met Diaghilew and was asked by the great impresario to go to Paris to execute a

commission for the ballet. The commission did not materialize until five years later, but in July, 1923, the painter arrived in the French capital. He spent the autumn and early winter of 1924 painting landscapes in the Bois de Boulogne and in parts of Brittany, working for the most part with pastels and crayons. Gradually the human face began to fascinate him above all other subjects.

In 1925 Tchelitchew began experimenting with the simultaneous presentation of several different aspects of the human head and figure. In 1926 he painted his first multiple-image picture, The Ship. The sky in The Ship consists of nine eggs which are at the same time a bunch of grapes; the water is the shadow cast by the egg-grape sky. The picture is thus the direct forerunner of the labyrinth of multiple images concealed within Hide-and-Seek and the first evidence on canvas of his intense preoccupation with the multiple-image theme.

Tchelitchew's second long-time experimentation has been a new perspective--rather, a triple perspective combining in one picture objects seen at normal eye level, from above, and from below. He feels that this takes away from the static quality of a painting and gives it motion. He tells the story of his very early childhood when he was given a set of large blocks with pictures painted on the six surfaces. Arranged in one way the set would form a certain picture; arranged in another, a different picture. Tchelitchew says that he was never content to let the blocks remain long in one picture, yet he wished for a way to change the picture without shifting the blocks.

As he grew older, he found the same fault with paintings. They were too changeless and static. Now, by his use of triple perspective, he claims to have achieved perpetual motion in pictures as, under the spectator's glance, the picture moves forward or recedes, the painting turning, moving and progressing as the eye rests upon it. The multiple-image technique contributes to this continual movement within the picture, and the artist has evolved an Einsteinian theory to explain it:

"It consists in three different subjects happening in three separate moments of time and seen from three points of view which must correspond to the three levels of perspective: above, straight-on, and below. In this manner each point of view is attached to a separate moment of time, which in the condition of metamorphosis inhering in the painting exist as one, simultaneously, indivisibly and independently."