

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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

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An exhibition of more than 40 paintings and drawings by the surrealist artist Yves Tanguy, ranging from early works of the 20's to his culminating masterpiece, completed a few months before his death in 1955, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, from September 8 through October 30. The exhibition was directed by James Thrall Soby, well-known art critic and scholar, who has written the catalog which accompanies the show. (Yves Tanguy, James Thrall Soby, 72pp 65 plates (8 in color), \$1.75 paper, \$3.00 boards.) Margaret Miller, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture who assisted Mr. Soby, installed the exhibition.

Tanguy's career as an artist really started in 1923, when riding down the rue de La Boetie on a bus, he saw in the window of Paul Guillaume's gallery an early painting by de Chirico. It was not until 1927, however, that Tanguy, with astonishing abruptness, Mr. Soby says, found his way as an artist, and the exhibition includes the three climactic pictures from this first period: A Large Picture Which is a Landscape, The Extinction of Useless Lights and Mama, Papa is Wounded, its title taken from a psychiatric case history.

"The ground in the first-named picture is striated with heavy shadows on which wisps of seaweed grow, and at the left a strange mesa presides over the ominous calm. Tanguy's objects have now tended to congeal into hard kernels, shaped like puffed grains of cereal and casting dense, black shadows. In The Extinction of Useless Lights, the landscape seems to be one from which the sea has just receded (and indeed a fish still swims unaware in the sky), and a mysterious monument with outstretched hand guides on a string a passing cloud.

In the famous Mama, Papa is Wounded, a hairy stalk rises at the right against dark gusts of color, and the illusion of limitless space is heightened by a linear cat's cradle binding the flecked shadows on the earth. The picture illustrates with extraordinary acuteness a relative constant of Tanguy's technique: the dual manipulation of perspective, from far to near and from high to low. Naturally, conventional perspective presupposes both depth and height, but perhaps no other modern painter has so insistently dramatized an opposition between these two dimensions. The fascination of Mama, Papa is Wounded stems in part from its ambiguous placing of forms within vertical space, as when two of the foreground objects (the one at the right resembling a fish with popping eyes) coast in the air above their shadows, as if gravity had lost its hold and released a chimerical medley above the placid earth. Or, as if the entire scene took place in an aquarium mechanically provided with a lighted horizon."

Three other fine early works in the exhibition, The Mood of Now, Old Horizon and The Lovers, typify the astonishing technical progress Tanguy made within a few years.

"The windswept landscape of The Mood of Now evokes a supernatural mood, as objects drift in the imponderable haze," Mr. Soby says. "The dark Old Horizon affirms Tanguy's essential solemnity as a painter - a quality standing in marked contrast to the deliberate playfulness of much surrealist art. In The Lovers, with its superbly modeled, air-borne forms, the compositional device of the two pictures just discussed is reversed. Instead of portraying long vistas of land against a far, low sky, the picture becomes virtually a skyscape, bounded in the foreground by a narrow shelf of earth." more...

In 1930 and 1931, after a trip to Africa, Tanguy completed a series of six or seven canvases, of which the finest, The Armoire of Proteus, is included in the exhibition. His color became more complex and varied and he made more and more frequent use of one of his most poetic inventions - the melting of land into sky, one image metamorphosed into another, as in the moving picture technique known as lap dissolve, Mr. Soby says.

"The filed horizon was now often replaced by a continuous and flowing treatment of space, and in many paintings of the 1930's and 1940's, among them Move-ment and Acts and The Furniture of Time it is extremely difficult to determine at what point earth becomes sky or whether objects rest on the ground or float aloft. The ambiguity is intensified by changes in the density of the objects themselves, from opaque to translucent to transparent, creating a spatial double entendre."

Tanguy and his wife, the painter Kay Sage, came to America in 1939 and later bought an early 19th century farmhouse at Woodbury, Connecticut where he lived until his sudden, tragic death in January 1955. "His removal to a foreign land caused no fundamental change in Tanguy's art, which always stemmed from inner sources," Mr. Soby points out. "But in America he tended to become a more audacious colorist and to work occasionally on larger canvases, as in The Palace of Windowed Rocks, the largest picture he ever painted, perhaps because it was virtually commissioned as a central piece in the exhibition of surrealist art, organized by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp at the Reid mansion on Madison Avenue in 1942."

Commenting on three pictures in the exhibition painted during the war years Mr. Soby says:

"During the war Tanguy completed at Woodbury a number of extremely rich and handsome works, among them Slowly Toward the North, Wine, Honey and Oil and perhaps most memorable of all in poetic quality - Indefinite Divisibility, whose mirroring bowls are like dream-transfigurations of the pie plates in Bruegel's Country of Cocaigne. He worked slowly and only when he felt so impelled. His studio in a barn behind the Woodbury house was a spotless white, and near his easel his colours were laid out in a compartmented wooden box he had made with as much skill and care as he lavished on a chess set he carved for his own and his wife's delectation. (The set was a replica of a set carved from a broom handle which Tanguy gave to the sculptor, Brancusi, before leaving Paris.)"

Suffering Softens Stones and The Transparent Ones typify the post war series, Mr. Soby says, when more than ever, Tanguy deserved to be called a painter's painter, admired for his technical skill and sensitivity by artists of quite opposite tendencies.

In Rose of the Four Winds, for the first time occurs that "breathless congestion of boulders, pebbles or bones." Mr. Soby says this painting suggests the Western wastelands and may have been inspired by parts of Arizona he visited soon after his arrival in this country, the experience reaching its creative climax in

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Multiplication of Arcs.

Three drawings by Tanguy made during 1952 and 1953 when he did few paintings, in part because of ill health, in part because he and his wife traveled abroad, are included along with three paintings completed in 1954. The final painting in the exhibition, completed during the last months of his life, Mr. Soby calls almost certainly the greatest work of his entire, dedicated career - Multiplication of Arcs

"I saw Tanguy several times in Woodbury when Multiplication was in progress," Mr. Soby says. "He worked on the picture like one possessed, hurrying back to his studio after a brief lunch, whereas ordinarily he would have sat for hours, talking about literature and pictures (though never about his own, unless stubbornly pressed and the state of the world of art, with its chronic feuds and armistices, its developments and counter-developments. Clearly he sensed that the Multiplication was to be the summary of lifelong aims and preoccupations; he would arrive at the house at the end of the day exhausted by the long hours of unrelenting concentration. And what a cosmic image he achieved! The picture is a sort of boneyard of the world its inexplicable objects gathered in fantastic profusion before a soft and brooding sky. The close gradations of light, tone and form are handled with such acumen that a pristine order evolves, whose poetic impact is more than likely to establish the picture as one of the masterworks in the art of our time."

Photographs and catalog available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York City, Circle 5-8900