

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART REASSEMBLES ART COLLECTIONS OF GERTRUDE STEIN AND HER FAMILY

"As I say, everybody has to like something some people like to eat, some people like to drink, some people like to make money some like to spend money, some like the theater, and some even like sculpture, some like gardening, some like dogs, some like cats, some people like to look at things, some people like to look at everything... I have not mentioned games indoor and out, and birds and crime and politics and photography, but anybody can go on, and I, personally, I like all these things well enough but they do not hold my attention long enough. The only thing, funnily enough, that I never get tired of doing is looking at pictures ... Presidents of the United States of America are supposed to like to look at baseball games, I can understand that, I did too once, but ultimately it did not hold my attention. Pictures made in oil on a flat surface do, they do hold my attention."

This was the message Gertrude Stein, expatriate for 30 years told her audiences in 1934-35 during a triumphant lecture tour throughout her native land. She saw her name in lights in Times Square, had tea with Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House, and dined with Charlie Chaplin and Dashiell Hammett in Hollywood.

Now 35 years later the pictures she talked about and which held her attention have been reassembled from all over the world for an exhibition that will begin a nationwide tour in December at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

FOUR AMERICANS IN PARIS: THE COLLECTIONS OF GERTRUDE STEIN AND HER FAMILY, sponsored by Alcoa Foundation, will not only evoke through paintings, objects and documentary photographs a highly significant moment in the development of 20th century art but will also illuminate the personalities of four members of a noted family. The impact of the Steins was formidable as Aline B. Saarinen says in her best-selling book, The Proud Possessors. "They altered the whole

atmosphere of modern art ... By becoming patrons of the great modern masters at crucial moments in their careers, the Steins gave these artists -- especially Picasso and Matisse -- influential boosts. The catalytic action of their salons and of Gertrude's writings brought these artists prominence and clients."

Gertrude Stein and her brothers, Leo and Michael, were born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, which delighted Gertrude because it amused her to see French officials try to write Allegheny, Pennsylvania when filling out endless numbers of documents.

By 1905, Gertrude and Leo had settled in an apartment at 27 rue de Fleurus, and her older brother, Michael, and his wife, Sarah, at 23 rue Madame. Both houses became weekly gathering places for aspiring artists, writers, poets, musicians and collectors. Picasso and his mistress, Fernande Olivier, Matisse and his wife, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire and his friend, the painter Marie Laurencin were among the regulars. The photographer, Edward Streichen and the composer, Virgil Thomson also came. "When in 1913 modern art burst upon the American public in the notorious Armory show in New York, some of those who had helped select it and many of those who supported it had received initiation or indoctrination at 27 rue de Fleurus or 23 rue Madame," Mrs. Saarinen observes in The Proud Possessors. After World War I during the 20's and 30's, American writers such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson and Thornton Wilder, were in attendance.

Among the pictures that once hung in these apartments and have been borrowed from their present owners for the exhibition are a Bonnard, now in the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia, a Cézanne, now in the Baltimore Museum of Art, a Manet, owned by a private collector in Sweden and Matisses now owned by the National Gallery of Oslo, the Tate Gallery in London, the

Robert Lehman Collection in New York, Dumbarton Oaks Collection in Washington, D.C., and the San Francisco Museum of Art. Two important works by Picasso, once owned by the Steins, have been lent by the Hermitage in Leningrad.

"In later years," Leo Stein wrote, "people often said to me that they wished they were able to buy such things for such prices, and I had to remind them that they also were in Paris then and had more money than I had. But they, to use Picasso's words, had to wait until the cogs were rusty, or -- it would perhaps be better to say -- they were worn smooth and ran easily."

The Steins preferred antique furniture to modern, and the needlepoint designs Picasso made for Alice B. Toklas were put on 18th century chairs which have been borrowed for the exhibition from Yale University. But Michael and Sarah Stein were interested in architecture, and in 1925 gave the young Le Corbusier, later internationally acclaimed as one of the greatest architects of our time, his first important private commission -- to build a house for them in a suburb of Paris. A scale model of this house has been constructed for the exhibition and will be shown with some of Le Corbusier's original drawings and photographs of the interiors as they were when the Steins lived there. They sold the house in the 1930's and returned to California where Michael died in 1938, his wife in 1953.

The pictures that held Gertrude Stein's attention, and that of her family, were widely scattered because they traded works of art back and forth, among themselves, with their artist friends and with dealers. Their income was not large and they usually bought for very little. As the values of many of the things they owned increased enormously, they sold when they needed money for emergencies or necessities. Leo Stein sold one of his last drawings to pay for radium treatments, his nephew, Allan Stein, sold a portrait of himself when he was hospitalized. Gertrude sold works in order to publish a book.

Gertrude did not like to sell things, however. At her death, she bequeathed one painting to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York -- the famous portrait Picasso painted of her in 1906 -- and left a sizeable collection of art to her nephew, Allan Stein, the son of Michael and Sarah, with the proviso that her companion and secretary, Alice B. Toklas, retain possession during her lifetime. When Allan Stein died in 1961, his interest in the estate was inherited by his children, Michael Stein, Gabrielle Stein-Tyler and Daniel M. Stein. They came into possession of the pictures when Miss Toklas died in 1967, and the following year sold 38 works by Picasso and nine by Juan Gris, to a group of American collectors: David Rockefeller, John Hay Whitney, William Paley, Nelson A. Rockefeller and Andre Meyer. Many of these pictures have never been seen in this country before.

Gertrude Stein has surfaced again, someone recently said in an article about her. Her operas are being performed again, much of her writings put to new music, her books reprinted in paperbacks and sold widely. In connection with the exhibition FOUR AMERICANS IN PARIS: THE COLLECTIONS OF GERTRUDE STEIN AND HER FAMILY, The Museum of Modern Art will publish a new book of essays on the family, illustrated with many works of art from Gertrude's estate as well as photographs taken in the apartments in Paris.

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