

The Museum of Modern Art

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

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Press invited*

PAINTERS FOR THE THEATRE: THE NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MODERN

Painters for the Theatre, a unique exhibition that offers the opportunity to evaluate the work of artists who have contributed to the performing arts, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from December 10 to February 1974. The exhibition will serve to introduce designs of 29 artists of international repute, part of the rich yet little-known Theatre Arts Collection of the Museum.

Directed by William S. Lieberman, Curator of Drawings, Painters for the Theatre includes 58 watercolors and drawings of curtain designs, scenery and costumes for an array of well-known ballets, operas and plays. The exhibition covers theatrical history from the early part of the century to the contemporary scene, from the Ballets Russes of Diaghilev to the recent "Oh! Calcutta!"

The artists represented are Chagall, Diego Rivera, Delaunay, Dubuffet, George Grosz, Léger, Picasso, Ben Shahn, and Oskar Schlemmer, among many others. Chagall's designs for "Aleko", a ballet he and Leonide Massine wrote together, are shown as well as an earlier unexecuted theatrical curtain designed as an "Homage to Gogol" in 1917 for the Hermitage Theatre in St. Petersburg. (more)

*Contact Lillian Gerard, Department of Public Information, 956-7296, for photographs, color transparencies and additional information.

The work of George Grosz and Walter Dexel represents the experimental theatre in Germany in the 1920's, when these artists created designs for plays by Berthold Brecht, Ivan Goll and Arnold Zweig. Two controversial Bauhaus productions which have continued to remain influential were designed by Oskar Schlemmer, whose "Triadic Ballet" may be seen along with "The Figural Cabinet."

Also on view are Diego Rivera's costumes for the ballet "H.P." ("Horse Power") for which Carlos Chavez composed the music and, with Rivera, wrote the libretto; designs Ben Shahn created for the sets of e.e. cummings' play "him"; and Christian Bérard's designs for "The Madwoman of Chaillot."

While the present selection from its own collection is the most comprehensive one that the Museum has presented, the exhibition is not intended as a survey of theatre designs by modern artists. Rather it suggests the richness of the Museum's holdings, according to Mr. Lieberman, who also points out such a collection remains particularly relevant to the art of our time when so many of the foremost painters have contributed their talents to the theatre.

The selection made by Mr. Lieberman begins with the early productions of Diaghilev, the brilliant Russian impresario, who enlisted the collaboration of modern artists, first in St. Petersburg, and after 1907 in Paris, London and Monte Carlo. Noting the immeasurable contribution of Diaghilev, Mr. Lieberman attributes to him the establishment of a standard of creative collaboration between composer, choreographer and designer, which

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today, almost 45 years after his death, remains an ideal.

Designs for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in this exhibition were created by Leon Bakst, who was Chagall's teacher, and Delaunay, Gontcharova, Larionov and Picasso. Inviting comparison are two versions of the same scene from "Le Coq d'Or": one by Nathalie Gontcharova done in 1914, the other by Alexandre Benois in 1927.

The tradition of Diaghilev was emulated in the 1920s by the Ballet Suédois, which commissioned the decor and costumes for "Skating Rink" and "The Creation of the World" by Fernand Léger. In the 1930s and early 1940s still more commissions were given by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Ballet Theatre to artists of the School of Paris, including three Russian expatriates, Chagall, Berman and Tchelitchew. Their work is prominent in the exhibition: Berman contributed "The Threepenny Opera," the tavern for "Devil's Holiday," the ballet by Vincenzo Tommasini with choreography by Frederick Ashton, and a curtain for "Giselle." Tchelitchew is represented by drawings from Cabaret Theatre and several ballets; and Chagall's contribution consists of "Aleko" as noted already.

The music of Stravinsky attracted many of the painters to the theatre, as Mr. Lieberman points out, such as the composer's "The Fox," designed by Larionov; in addition, Soudeikine was responsible for the decor and costumes of "The Wedding," while Sidney Nolan designed the composer's "The Rite of Spring" and Tchelitchew created the designs for "Apollon Musagète."

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In this country Lincoln Kirstein is considered the most ardent practitioner of the creative tradition started by Diaghilev. Kirstein, working with George Balanchine as choreographer, has continued the collaborative expression of artists in the theatre. It was Kirstein who commissioned and wrote the books for two ballets represented in the exhibition: "Transcendence" in 1934 and "Filling Station" in 1933. He was also responsible for the productions of "Orpheus" in 1936, "The Ranch" in 1941, and the unproduced "Cave of Sleep," designed by Tchelitchev.

The more recent designs in the exhibition are Jim Dine's costumes for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (1966), David Hockney's designs for a London production of "King Ubu" (1966), those of Robert Israel for "Gulliver" in 1972, and Jean Dubuffet's "Cuckoo Bazaar" of the same year.

The Theatre Arts Collection consists of some 400 drawings, but this historical collection, Mr. Lieberman states, is largely uncatalogued and unresearched because of a lack of funds. In addition to theatre works, it also includes printed lithographs and woodcuts, posters and programs, and drawings for animated films by Red Grooms (1962), Léger (1935), Survage (1913) and Hans Richter (1902). The collection also contains drawings from the historic film of George Melies, "A Trip to the Moon" (1902).

The Theatre Arts Collection is an aspect of the Museum

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relatively unknown to the general public. It was first conceived in 1934 by Lee Simonson, the famous scenic designer. Mr. Simonson at that time organized for the Museum an "International Exhibition of Theatre Art," a comprehensive survey of scene and costume design. Five years later Lincoln Kirstein founded a Dance Archive at the Museum; subsequently, it was enlarged to include theatre designs, when it became known as The Department of Dance and Theatre Design. In 1962 the collection was incorporated with those of the Department of Drawings and Prints under the aegis of Mr. Lieberman. The curator said the Museum collection of dance and theatre designs differs from others in that it focuses on artists widely recognized outside of the theatre.

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Advice to Critics and Editors

An unusual exhibition entitled PAINTERS FOR THE THEATRE : AN INVITATION TO THE THEATRE ARTS COLLECTION will go on view at the Museum. It will provide the opportunity to see the rare, rich and little-known group of works the Museum has assembled over the past three decades. Consisting of drawings and watercolors for curtains, scenery and costumes, the exhibition, under the direction of William S. Lieberman, Curator of Drawings, covers ballet, opera, stage plays and in more recent years, happenings.

Many well-known artists have been fascinated and inspired by the theatre. Prominent in this exhibition is work of Chagall, ("Homage to Gogol" for the Hermitage Theatre in Leningrad) and other Russian expatriates such as Eugene Berman and Pavel Tchelitchev, all of whom created designs for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The experimental theatre in Germany during the early 1920's is represented by George Grosz; the French stage by Christian Berard; the American opera by Florine Stettheimer who designed "Three Saints in Four Acts."

In addition there are designs by Ben Shahn for e.e. cummings' "him"; others by Diego Rivera for "H.P." (Horse Power); Jim Dine's more contemporary, radical interpretation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Other artists in the show are: Delaunay, Dubuffet, Gontcharova, Larionov, Léger, Schlemmer, Soudeikine, Watkins, etc.

Photographs and color transparencies are available. Previews will be arranged at your convenience. The opening is scheduled for late November, 1973.

For further information: Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator
or Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Public Information 956-7296 or 956-7501.