

TIGHT BINDING

ART OF THE TWENTIES

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50TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION TO OPEN AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The major exhibition of The Museum of Modern Art's 50th Anniversary year, ART OF THE TWENTIES, will open on November 17, 1979 and remains on view through January 22, 1980. Selected entirely from the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition surveys the visual arts during the decade 1919-1929: painting, sculpture, drawing, prints, photographs, posters, architecture, design, and projects for the theater. ART OF THE TWENTIES, which will occupy the entire first floor of the Museum, has been made possible by a grant from SCM Corporation and the National Endowment for the Arts. The director of the exhibition, William S. Lieberman, is also editor of its accompanying catalog.*

ART OF THE TWENTIES has been conceived to suggest what might have been the first presentation by the new Museum had it chosen to open to the public in November 1929 with a contemporary exhibition. In fact, the Museum's first loan exhibition, held in a rented space in the Heckscher Building on Fifth Avenue, examined the achievement of four Post-Impressionist painters. But, as Mr. Lieberman notes, "for an inaugural exhibition, the Museum's founding director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. had originally proposed an international survey

*Art of the Twenties. Edited by William S. Lieberman. 144 pages. 250 black-and-white illustrations. \$8.95 paperbound.

The Museum of Modern Art

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50th Anniversary



encompassing all the contemporary arts. Fifty years later, it is possible to present such an exhibition. And, what is extraordinary is that its contents can be chosen exclusively from the collections of the Museum."

The decade 1919-1929 was a period of change, contrast, and continuity. Artists took often contradictory paths (e.g. Dadaism and Purism) to express their sense of a new era that had been brought into being by the social, economic, and intellectual dislocations, and the technological advances, occasioned by World War I. "During the decade, in the visual and performing arts and in literature, modernism became established as a philosophy and a creed," Mr. Lieberman observes. "In architecture, an International Style was born. Today, however, it is the jazz age, the roaring twenties, the crazy years, and the golden ones that are nostalgically recalled. The economic disasters and political unrest of the period are easily forgotten. It was the best and the worst of times."

Because the twenties has also been called "An Age of Film," a program of such screen classics of the decade as Fritz Lang's Metropolis, Chaplin's The Kid, and Eisenstein's Potemkin, among others, will be shown in the Museum's Roy and Niuta Titus Auditorium. The Edward Steichen Galleries on the third floor of the Museum will exhibit portraits of personalities of the period. Both films and photographs are also from the Museum's collections. In addition, the Museum's Department of Education will present a series of three Wednesday evening lectures on the art of the decade and its historical context (December 12 and January 9 and 16).

Six sections of ART OF THE TWENTIES develop major themes of the period: "The City" contrasts photographs and prints; "The Machine" presents images derived from the technology of a mechanical age; "The False Mirror" combines

varieties of illusionist representation done at a time when realism itself was increasingly questioned; "The World Transformed" includes works whose origins are in Expressionism; "The Circle and the Square" features De Stijl, Constructivism and other modes of geometric abstraction; and "A Modern Style" suggests affinities between America and Europe in the formulation of what might be called un style moderne. Also on view in ART OF THE TWENTIES will be architectural models and design objects highlighting the work of Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Marcel Breuer; and posters and other examples of typography.

"The City" -- which usually meant New York, Paris, or Berlin -- was a central concern of the art of the twenties. Among the prints and photographs in the exhibition depicting different aspects of the cityscape are Walker Evans' photographs for Hart Crane's great poem The Bridge; New York as seen by Edward Hopper, Louis Lozowick, Charles Sheeler, Edward Steichen, and Paul Strand; Niles Spencer's White Factory, and Kuniyoshi's Windows, views from Paris studios; Hungarian-born photographer André Kertész's evocations of Paris; and, of course, the great Paris photographs of Eugene Atget. Berlin and Marseilles are photographed by Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer, while Rodchenko's camera captures post-revolutionary Moscow. Casualties of World War I in Germany haunt drawings and prints by Max Beckmann, Gottfried Bröckmann, Otto Dix, and George Grosz.

An ambivalent attitude to the machine characterizes much of the art of the 1920s. Included in the exhibition, in the section "The Machine," are visions of machines both real and fantastic. In Paul Klee's watercolor Twittering Machine, there is a crank which, when turned, sets four birds into song. Artists such as Rudolf Belling and Aleksandra Exter, and Hannah Höch see man as a robot, while Léger, Lissitzky, and Picabia find in the movement of mechanical devices suggestive sources for their abstractions. Taking

a realistic and celebratory approach to the Machine Age, Charles Sheeler presented photographic views of the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge Plant in the well-known series he was commissioned to do by Ford in 1927. Also included in "The Machine" is Max Ernst's pasted photo-engraving Here Everything Still Floats, George Grosz's Republican Automatons, Léger's painting Mechanical Elements, Man Ray's Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph, Moholy-Nagy's Nickel Construction, and two reliefs by Kurt Schwitters and John Covert.

Different approaches to realism found in artists as diverse in style and intention as Albright, Bellows, de Chirico, Magritte, Miro, Picasso, Roy, Stella, and Tanguy are included in the section of the exhibition Mr. Lieberman calls "The False Mirror." These range from highly finished, exact portrayals of utterly surreal situations to the sharp delineations of character found in the portraits of Germany's New Objectivity, for example George Grosz's painting of the poet Max Herrmann-Neisse and Otto Dix's portrait of the doctor Wilhelm Mayer-Hermann. In America, artists such as Demuth and Dickinson were also working in a precisionist mode, while photographers Edward Weston and Alfred Stieglitz were transforming their human subjects into almost object-like forms.

Expressionism flourished during the twenties, especially in Germany. "The World Transformed" includes works in which images of man and landscape are transformed, sometimes harshly. Among these are Paul Klee's paintings Around the Fish, Cat and Bird, and Actor's Mask. Mr. Lieberman notes in his catalog text that "the paintings of Klee transcend the Sturm und Drang of many of his contemporaries, but they belong, nonetheless, to a world transformed." Also featured in this portion of the exhibition are bronze sculptures by Gaston Lachaise and Ernst Barlach. Because artists in Germany in the twenties excelled

in graphic media, prints by Beckmann, Chagall, Heckel, Kirchner, Marcks, and Munch are on view and explore the expressive possibilities inherent in the woodcut. Mr. Lieberman notes that the works of Americans like Bluemner, Burchfield and Marin are often emotionally charged, while in such paintings as Lovis Corinth's Self-Portrait and Soutine's Old Mill a great "revelatory urgency is expressed."

De Stijl, Constructivism, and geometric abstraction went beyond the lessons of Cubism toward a revolutionary way of painting in which a picture could exist on a two-dimensional plane without any illusion of depth. De Stijl, represented in the section of the exhibition entitled "The Circle and the Square," by works of Mondrian, van Doesburg, and Vantongerloo, aspired to a condition of intellectual purity, to forms representing universal essences. It was, notes Mr. Lieberman, "a vision of a new world." Also on view are the Russian Constructivist Lissitzky's Proun compositions and works of Rodchenko, Malevich and Moholy-Nagy, the Hungarian-born master of many media. It was Moholy-Nagy who first called the twenties an "Age of Light."

The term un style moderne -- "The Modern Style" -- has been applied to many of the artistic manifestations of the twenties spirit, from Art Deco to the Bauhaus. It may be seen in the typography, architecture, and design objects of the period, as well as in its painting, sculpture, drawing and prints. The Purism of Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, the paintings of Léger and of the Americans Gerald Murphy and Stuart Davis, and the sculpture of Brancusi, Lipchitz, Storrs, Zadkine, and Zorach all participate in this twenties "look," characterized for the most part by a logical, sometimes astringent elegance.

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"On the occasion of its 50th Anniversary Year," says William S. Lieberman, "it seems appropriate that The Museum of Modern Art celebrate the wealth and cohesiveness of its collections." Moreover, as Mr. Lieberman notes, the exhibition stands as an appropriate eulogium to the Museum's founding director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. "More than any other person in the twentieth century, he influenced the way we look at the art of our time. His concept of modernism as an integration of all the arts had evolved during the 1920s. ART OF THE TWENTIES is a tribute to Mr. Barr and his vision, definition, and creation of the Museum's curatorial departments and their collections."

The Museum's overall exhibition program is supported in part with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

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