

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## JUAN GRIS RETROSPECTIVE AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The most complete retrospective ever presented in this country of the work of the pioneer cubist artist, Juan Gris (1887-1927) will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from April 8 through June 1. Sixty-three paintings and 27 gouaches, drawings and prints are shown covering Gris' career from drawings in the Art Nouveau style made in Paris shortly after the turn of the century through his participation in cubism beginning about 1913 and concluding with his neo-classical paintings of the twenties.

With Picasso, Braque, and Léger, Gris is generally considered one of the greatest cubist artists of our time. And although the three older men paved the way for Gris by their experiments in cubism and in some respects have appeared to overshadow him, "a refinement of calculation and a highly original color sense....have finally won him his separate place in cubism's front rank," James Thrall Soby, Director of the exhibition, says in his extensive monograph published by the Museum to accompany the show.\*

The exhibition has been organized in collaboration with three other museums where it will be shown this summer and autumn: the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, San Francisco Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum. Sam Hunter, Associate Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, is Associate Director of the exhibition and has installed it. Mr. Soby is Chairman of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture.

Juan Gris, born José Victoriano Gonzalez, as a young engineering student in Madrid covered his notebooks with caricatures of professors and friends and contributed humorous drawings to local publications. In 1906, finding the Madrid atmosphere restrictive, he scraped together enough money with the help of his sister to go to Paris where he arrived with 16 francs. There he rented a studio in Le Bateau-Lavoir, where his countryman Picasso worked. He soon became part of Paris' High Bohemia of the day, and a friend of Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy, Max Jacob, Maurice Raynal, Gertrude Stein, Georges Braque and other poets and artists of that time. Here too he met Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler who became his loyal and diligent champion as well as dealer and close friend.

By 1913, Mr. Soby says, if his admirers were few compared to Braque's and, above all, Picasso's, his champions were effective. "To Gertrude Stein in particular much credit must go for his ascending fame. She wrote about him and his art more warmly than about any other artist with the exception of Picasso; she cajoled or bullied

\* JUAN GRIS by James Thrall Soby. 128 pages; 126 illustrations (19 in color); published by the Museum of Modern Art, NY. \$5.50. Distributed by Simon & Schuster, NY.

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many visitors to her apartment on the rue de Fleurus into taking him seriously as a cubist of the first rank."

The earliest painting in the exhibition is a qualified, cubist definition of form, Still Life with Book (1911), in which the objects are easily identified. Soon however, Gris was producing works in which conventional modeling is abandoned, such as the Still Life, painted later in 1911, A Table at a Cafe of the following year, and Portrait of Picasso, 1912, one of the finest portraits of the cubist movement.

In 1913 Gris began to enrich the color and forms of his paintings and progressed from analytical to what is called synthetic cubism. This development is seen in Violin and Guitar, and in two of his masterworks of that year, Still Life with Pears and the Violin and Chessboard. "In these paintings," Mr. Soby says, "we can easily recognize what was to become an earmark of Gris' art--the echoed application of comparable shapes to objects of differing character and identity within a given composition."

By 1914 the 27-year old artist was producing masterly collages distinguished from the work of Picasso by their vibrant, bold color. "Gris worked with such assurance in this period and medium that whether his vision was expressed through the dulcet, gay forms of the Breakfast or the dramatic contrasts of the Guitar, Glasses and Bottle he remained an inspired master....During the year 1914 Gris seemingly could do no wrong in his handling of collage. To his images of that time the word 'exquisite' can be applied with strength and meaning; their eloquence is haunting, their reappraisal of everyday appearance is art of an exceptionally perfect order," Mr. Soby says. Other collages of this year in the exhibition are Still Life with Bottle of Beer, The Bottle of Banyuls, Still Life, Still Life with Fruit Bowl, The Table, The Marble Console and Still Life with Grapes.

Gris lived in France throughout the war. He was desperately poor, but although his mood, as revealed in letters, was often black, his paintings became more opulent. The seven oils from 1915 shown in the exhibition reveal an astonishing variety. Among the paintings of 1916 in the show is Still Life with Fruit Bowl, which Gris presented soon after it was completed to Henri Matisse, and Portrait of Josette, Gris' devoted wife.

By 1917, Gris' painting became more complex. Again frequently depressed, he nevertheless continued to work with skill and devotion. Among the pictures from this period are The Sideboard, one of the most superbly controlled of all his works. Paintings from 1918 include House in a Landscape. In 1919 his pictures tended to become more severe and deliberately flat, as seen in Harlequin and Guitar and Fruit Bowl.

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During the 20's Gris' chronic depression was aggravated by recurring illness and the last seven years of his life were disturbed by hospitalization and periods of convalescence. During these years he also spent some months on designs commissioned in 1922 and again in 1923 by Diaghiliev, for the Russian ballet.

Art scholars differ in their estimate of Gris' late work. A number of esteemed critics, quoted in Mr. Soby's book, give full credit to Gris' earlier masterworks, but say it is only after 1920 that Gris at last seems in full possession of his resources. Mr. Soby, however, feels that the recurring illness, the frequent absorption in stage design and the fact that Gris was no longer nourished by the cubist movement (Braque and Picasso had by then gone on to other ventures) took a severe toll and that his greater contribution lies in the early work.

"Considering such factors as ill health, lack of worldly success and an uneasy if sometimes proud response to the challenge of stage design, it is all the more commendable that Gris was able to produce in his final years a number of distinguished works. Among them are: Seated Harlequin of 1923, as impudent as pistachio, as compelling as a gong; The Scissors; the poetic Drummer; the Guitar with Sheet of Music...and the Book and Fruit Bowl, painted the year Gris died of uremia at forty."

Lenders to the exhibition are:

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Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland; Albright Art Gallery, Room of Contemporary Art, Buffalo, NY; The Art Institute of Chicago; The Minneapolis Institute of Arts; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.; Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, The Netherlands; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Peter H. Deitsch Gallery, NY; Fine Arts Associates, NY; Hanover Gallery, London; Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris; Saidenberg Gallery, NY.