

The Museum of Modern Art

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RENÉ D'HARNONCOURT BIOGRAPHY

René d'Harnoncourt joined the staff of The Museum of Modern Art in 1944 and became Director in 1949.

Born in Austria in 1901, Mr. d'Harnoncourt lived in Mexico from 1925 to 1931, when he came to this country as the Director of the Mexican Art Exhibition for the American Federation of Arts and the Carnegie Foundation. His first show for the Museum, as guest director in 1941, was Indian Art of the United States, for which he co-authored a book with Frederic H. Douglas. Other exhibitions he directed reflect his widespread interests and expertise and include Art of the South Seas (1946), Timeless Aspects of Modern Art (1948), Modern Art in Your Life (1949), and Ancient Art of the Andes (1954). He also collaborated on the publications for these shows.

Mr. d'Harnoncourt is widely known here and abroad as an expert on exhibition installation techniques. For The Sculpture of Picasso, the Museum's current major exhibition, Mr. d'Harnoncourt prepared scale drawings of each object and perspective drawings of more than 30 vistas in specially constructed galleries that he designed for the show.

Abroad, Mr. d'Harnoncourt installed the U.S. representation at the biennial exhibitions in Brazil in 1951 and in Venice in 1962, as well as Museum exhibitions at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris in 1953 and 1955 and Modern Sculpture U.S.A., a major exhibition at the Musée Rodin in June, 1965. Among the exhibitions he has installed at the Museum are Gabo and Pevsner and Elie Nadelman (1948), Seurat and Jean Arp (1958), New Images of Man (1959), Steichen the Photographer (1961) and Auguste Rodin (1963).

A member of the National Council on the Arts since its founding in 1965, Mr. d'Harnoncourt previously served on a number of federal commissions dealing with the arts. He is a member of the board of the newly-founded Center for Inter-American
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Relations and Vice-President of the Museum of Primitive Art, and has been associated with the United States Commission for UNESCO since 1946. He is a Trustee of the Museum of African Art in Washington, the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art in Fort Worth, and of the American Federation of Arts, and Artistic Consultant to the Department of Interior.

In 1964, when the Museum reopened after its major expansion program, Mr. d'Harnoncourt described the role of the Museum in an editorial in Art in America magazine and observed that today, activities of numerous museums and galleries, as well as the proliferation of art books and extensive coverage of modern art by all the communications media, have created a wide audience aware of the developments in modern art almost as soon as they occur. "But information is not insight," he observed. "In the midst of the bewildering quantity and diversity of contemporary expression, the Museum's task remains essentially what it has always been: to further the understanding, as well as the enjoyment, of modern art; and to continue to select from the art of the recent past and -- still more difficult -- that of the evolving present, what it considers to be most excellent and significant."

His discernment in the face of this challenge was praised by Dartmouth College in 1955, when he was presented with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters: "...as Director of The Museum of Modern Art you seem to thrive on the hazardous occupation of running a museum in the no-man's land of contemporary art. In your daily work, integrity and open-eyed judgement must go boldly forward hand in hand without waiting for the aid of time to light the way."

Mr. d'Harnoncourt has also received honorary degrees from Columbia University (1958) and the University of New Mexico in 1964, on the occasion of the dedication of their new Fine Arts Center. He has also been decorated by the French, German, and Peruvian governments.

A genial giant of six-foot-six, Mr. d'Harnoncourt, who is fluent in six languages, was educated in Austria and studied chemistry and philosophy at the State University in Graz from 1918 to 1922 and chemical engineering at the

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Technische Hochschule in Vienna from 1922 to 1924. In Mexico, Mr. d'Harnoncourt worked as a poster artist and illustrated children's books before entering the Museum field.

A united States citizen since 1939, Mr. d'Harnoncourt directed a network radio program called "Art in America" from 1933 to 1934. For the two following years, he taught at Sarah Lawrence College. Mr. d'Harnoncourt was named General Manager of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the United States Department of Interior in 1937 and served in that position until 1944, becoming Chairman of the Board, until 1961.

While he was associated with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Mr. d'Harnoncourt also served as Acting Director of the arts section of the Office of Inter-American Affairs and Chairman of the Committee on Manual Industries for that office. In 1944, when he joined the staff of the Museum, he served as Vice-President in charge of Foreign Affairs and Director of the Department of Manual Industries. In 1947, he became Director of Curatorial Departments.

Mr. d'Harnoncourt lives in New York City with his wife, the former Sarah Carr of Chicago, and vacations in his house in Key West. Their daughter, Anne, is an assistant curator of painting and sculpture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Mr. d'Harnoncourt reached retirement age in 1966 and was asked by the Trustees to continue until a successor was named. He will retire on July 1, 1968, when he will be succeeded by Bates Lowry.

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Patricia B. Kaplan, Associate, Press Services, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.