

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

No. 81

FOR RELEASE:

Tuesday, August 13, 1968

PRESS PREVIEW:

Monday, August 12, 1968

11 A.M. - 4 P.M.

Twenty-seven drawings and paintings by the Russian-born artist John D. Graham will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from August 13 through October 13. Eila Kokkinen, Assistant Curator for Drawings of the Museum's Department of Drawings and Prints, has selected this group of his later works which includes portraits of women, self portraits, and other subjects reflecting his absorption in astrology, numerology, and other occult and mystical systems. Graham had been among the vanguard of American abstract art in the 30's, but he developed in these works of the 40's and 50's a unique figurative style based on Renaissance painting.

Graham, who died in 1961, was born Ivan Dabrowsky in Kiev. An enigmatic figure, he created an aura of myth about himself. Even the date of his birth is not certain, though he was in his thirties when he came to the United States in 1920 and began to study painting for the first time at the Art Students League. His work was soon recognized, and he had one-man shows in Paris in 1928 and 1929, and in the latter year he was exhibited at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, and the Dudensing Galleries, New York.

Although his work is not well known to the general public, Graham himself was well known to the New York art world of the 30's through his activities as a collector and artist. Graham knew Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, David Smith, and others, and he championed the important artistic ideas of the times-- primitive art, abstract art, and the role of the unconscious in the creative process--ideas which he summed up in his book System and Dialectics of Art, published in 1937. He formed for Frank Crowninshield an important and influential collection of primitive art.

Graham abandoned abstraction in the early 1940s for a classical style based on prototypes in Raphael, Leonardo, Poussin, and Ingres, and he would startle friends by denouncing Picasso as a fraud. His artistic development reflects his personal history; in growing isolation from prevailing trends, Graham came into his own stylistically. "By the mid-

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forties Graham had achieved a monumental reinterpretation of the Renaissance style in large portraits of seated women, although the broad handling of paint remained modern," says Miss Kokkinen. "Immobile and outwardly calm, the women convey in their dislocated glance a mysterious and disquieting inner state. In Two Sisters (a major painting of 1944 recently acquired by the Museum) the women gaze with an eccentric and wildly askew glance but have a monumentality that grows on contemplation. The areas of flesh, circumscribed by clothing, form broad, abstract shapes which tie his style to the twentieth century. Graham's spoken purpose for the dislocated eye was to create more tension, to make the figures more fixed and timeless. He would say: 'My paintings have more tension than Raphael, but, then, I live in a more tense age.'"

Probably beginning in the early 50's Graham made oil drawings by painting on the reverse of tracing paper, while drawing the image on the front. The tracing paper softens the garishly bright colors, creating a muted, shimmering quality. The drawings of this period are an expression of his spiritual preoccupations: astrological symbols surround the figures, and some of the images, such as the swan, may refer to alchemy. A system of squares and rectangles, referring to the "golden section," is often superimposed on the faces. In the self portrait drawings of Graham's last years there also appears the Buddhist "inner eye," the circle between the eyes symbolizing spiritual illumination. "Because the sources from which he drew are so diverse, attempts to interpret Graham's symbols must remain speculative," says Miss Kokkinen. "However, in later years Graham himself said his work was not intended to be beautiful but to convey information about the occult which would be recognizable to only a few."

After its New York showing, John D. Graham: Paintings and Drawings will tour throughout the United States and Canada under the auspices of the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions.

Photographs, checklist, and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, and Patricia D. Bauman, Coordinator, Press Services, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.

The Museum of Modern Art

To Press

From Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, 245-3200

Date 8/9/68

Re John D. Graham Press Preview

At the time of this writing, the galleries of The Museum of Modern Art are closed to the public due to a strike by the union representing the Museum's guards.

Please call us if you plan to cover the show, so that we can inform you if the press preview and public opening have been postponed.

The Museum of Modern Art

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JOHN D. GRAHAM: PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS

August 15 - October 13, 1968

Wall Label I

John Graham is presented here with a selection of paintings and drawings in the figurative style of his later years. Although the body of his work is very small, since his death in 1961 the enigmatic portraits have exerted an increasing fascination.

During the early 1940's Graham turned against the predominant current of abstraction in American art for a figurative style based on Renaissance painting, Poussin and Ingres. First to reflect the change in his ideas are paintings and drawings of Russian soldiers executed in a consciously primitive style. Drawings from this group, Study for Sharpshooter and Study for Soldier of Paul Regiment, have an intent seriousness of expression also seen in Harlequin, a self portrait painting of nearly the same time. In paintings of seated women that followed, Graham achieved a unique reinterpretation of the classical style. In Two Sisters the women gaze with an eccentric and wildly askew glance but have a monumentality that grows on contemplation. The areas of flesh, circumscribed by clothing, form broad, abstract shapes which tie his style to the twentieth century. Graham's spoken purpose for the dislocated eye was to create more tension, to make the figures more fixed and timeless. "Painted with normal eyes, a figure can wander off the canvas," he once said.

The works of the late 1950's mirror his later interest in occult and mystical systems. The drawings embody cryptic images derived from astrology, numerology, alchemy, the cabala and Eastern mysticism. The women in the drawings have mysterious wounds on the throat and their faces are encased in a network of line

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which relate to the golden section. Self portrait drawings done late in life, of which the most remarkable is Apotheosis, contain images from alchemy. For example, the sun and the moon on the shoulders may be a hermetic symbol for the fusion of fixed and volatile elements in an alchemist's retort. The self portrait, too, has between the eyes the circle for the "inner eye," the Buddhist symbol for spiritual enlightenment. Graham's fascination with stigmata and martyrdom is represented by the arrow of St. Sebastian which penetrates the side. Shafts of light project from the head and horns appear on the forehead, signifying man's dual nature.

E.K.

The exhibition was directed by Eila Kokkinen, Assistant Curator for Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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JOHN D. GRAHAM: PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS

August 15 - October 13, 1968

Wall Label II

John Graham was born Ivan Dabrowsky in Kiev in the Ukraine. He studied for a legal career, trained as a cavalry officer and fought in the first World War. Later he became a member of the footguard of Czar Nicholas II. He was briefly imprisoned after the Revolution and on his release fled Russia but returned to join the counter-revolutionary forces in the Crimea. On their defeat, he was able to obtain a passport for the United States and reached New York in 1920.

Graham first studied painting at the Art Students League shortly after his arrival in America. Frequently living abroad, he began to collect art objects during the late 1920's and later used collecting partly as a means of earning a living. He was given one-man exhibitions in 1928 and 1929 at the Galerie Zborowski, Paris; at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, and the Dudensing Galleries, New York, in 1929. During the 1930's he painted abstract compositions after the post-cubist manner of Picasso and was closely associated with young, then unknown avant garde American artists, Gorky, de Kooning, David Smith, among others. His work was shown several times during the 1930's at Dudensing Galleries and elsewhere and in 1937 he published a book, System and Dialectics of Art.

Works in his later style were exhibited at The Pinacotheca, New York, in 1946, and at Stable Gallery, New York, in 1954. During the 1950's he lived in Southampton in relative isolation from the art world, painting and writing. His last exhibition during his lifetime was held at the Gallery Mayer, New York, in 1960, and he died in London in June 1961.

E. K.

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JOHN D. GRAHAM: PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

August 13 - October 13, 1968

Checklist

1. Madame Sijou. 1943. Oil and casein mixed with plaster, charcoal and pencil on canvas, 28 1/4 x 24 1/4. Lent by André Emmerich Gallery, New York. (Mathews 1752).
2. Study for Sharpshooter. 1943. Crayon and pencil on tracing paper, 24 5/8 x 19. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. John David Graham, Windermere, Florida. (Mathews 1723).
3. Study for Soldier of Paul Regiment. 1943. Oil and pencil on tracing paper, 24 3/8 x 18 1/8. Lent by The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection, New York. (Mathews 1061).
4. Poussin m'instruit (Poussin Instructs Me). 1944. Oil, casein, charcoal and pencil on composition board, 60 1/2 x 48 1/8. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. John David Graham, Windermere, Florida. (Mathews 1753).
5. Two Sisters. 1944. Oil, casein, enamel, charcoal, pencil, pen and ink on composition board, 47 7/8 x 48. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase. 1968. (Mathews 1754).
6. Harlequin. (c. 1944). Oil and pencil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 20 3/8. Lent by Mr. Harry Kahn, New York. (Mathews 1755).
7. Celia. (c. 1944). Oil, casein, charcoal, chalk, pencil, pen and ink on composition board, 48 1/4 x 35 3/4. Lent by André Emmerich Gallery, New York. (Mathews 1756).
8. Study after Celia. 1944-45. Pencil on tracing paper, 23 x 18 7/8. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Lester Francis Avnet. (Mathews 649).
9. Study for Two Sisters. (c. 1944-45). Crayon, wash, pencil and brush-on tracing paper, 24 1/8 x 18 7/8. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Max Granick, New York. (Mathews 1754).
10. Study after Seated Woman. 1945. Chalk and pencil on tracing paper over blue-green paper, 22 3/4 x 18 1/4. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. M. Vanderwoude, Great Neck, New York. (Mathews 1757).
11. Study for La Donna Ferita (The Wounded Woman). 1945. Chalk and pencil on tracing paper, 15 3/4 x 10 3/8. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman, Chicago.
12. Fenêtre sur paysage italien (Window on an Italian Landscape). (c. 1945). Oil on canvas, 18 1/4 x 24 1/4. Lent by André Emmerich Gallery, New York. (Mathews 1759).
13. Cheval en dressage (Horse in Training). (c. 1945). Oil, casein, charcoal and pencil on composition board, 72 x 48 1/8. Lent by Mrs. Hannah Fabricant Rovinsky, New York. (Mathews 1760).

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14. Mona Anna Uxor de Adolfo Ravenato (Lady Anna, Wife of Adolfo of Ravenna). (c. 1950). Oil, casein, ballpoint pen, pencil, pen and ink on tracing paper, 25 1/2 x 15 3/4. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. David A. Prager, New York. (Mathews 1761).
15. Kali Yuga. (c.1952). Oil, casein, chalk, ballpoint pen on cardboard, 25 1/2 x 21 1/4. Lent by André Emmerich Gallery, New York. (Mathews 1762).
16. La Strega (The Sorceress). (c. 1952). Oil, casein and pencil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 20 1/4. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Frederick R. Weisman and Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Weisman, Los Angeles. (Mathews 1763).
17. Horse. (c. 1953). Gouache, pencil, ballpoint pen, pen and ink on tracing paper, 23 1/2 x 18 7/8. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller, New York. (Mathews 1296).
18. Figure on Horseback. (c. 1953). Oil, watercolor, wash, ballpoint pen, pencil and chalk, pen and ink on tracing paper, 22 3/4 x 16 1/8. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Jay Stein, New York. (Mathews 996).
19. Head of a Woman. 1954. Oil, chalk, ballpoint pen, colored pencil, pencil, brush, pen and ink on tracing paper, 24 x 18 3/4. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harris B. Steinberg, New York. (Mathews 1012).
20. Leda #1. 1954. Oil, gouache, ballpoint pen, brush, pen and ink on tracing paper, 16 x 13 1/2. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, John S. Newberry Fund. (Peterson 1711)
21. Donna Maria. 1954. Ballpoint pen and pencil on tracing paper, 16 1/8 x 13 1/4. Lent by Mrs. Muriel Bultman Francis, New Orleans. (Mathews 1764).
22. Head of a Woman. (c. 1954). Oil, pencil, pen and ink on tracing paper, 16 3/4 x 13 3/4. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. John David Graham, Windermere, Florida. (Mathews 1722).
23. Angel in Dodecahedron. (c. 1954). Oil and chalk on canvas, 30 1/8 x 24 1/4. Private Collection, New York. (Mathews 1765).
24. Woman with Clear Eyes. (c. 1954). Casein, chalk and pencil on tracing paper, 16 x 13 1/2. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. William Francis Ewald, Jr., New York. (Mathews 1766).
25. Apotheosis. 1955-57. Oil, pencil, pen and ink on paper, 50 1/4 x 36 1/2. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman, Chicago. (Mathews 1635).
26. Venere Lucifera (Venus as the Morning Star) (1957). Oil, gouache, ballpoint pen, pen and ink, pencil and chalk on tracing paper, 23 3/4 x 19". Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Saul Schluger, New York. (Mathews 1768).

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27. Self Portrait as Laureate. (c. 1958). Oil and ballpoint pen on tracing paper, 16 7/8 x 13 7/8. Lent by André Emmerich Gallery, New York. (Mathews 1767).
28. Self Portrait. 1959. Oil, ballpoint pen, pen and ink on tracing paper, 17 x 13 7/8. Lent by Tennessee Arts Center, Cheekwood, Nashville, Tennessee. (Mathews 1769).
