

The Museum of Modern Art

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

290
NO. 98

FOR RELEASE: Dec. 2, 1976

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

Six recently acquired paintings and sculptures by Matisse, Braque, Picasso, Klee, Brauner, Dubuffet and Alechinsky will be on view in a special exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, through January 23, 1976. With the temporary closing of its East Wing gallery where, since September, new acquisitions by younger Americans--Benglis, Close, Flack and Shapiro, among others--have been exhibited as part of the regular installation of the art of the 60s and 70s, the Museum will install this group of works by European artists in its small Northeast Gallery, just off the main lobby. These works have all been acquired in the past 18 months and are being shown for the first time as part of the Museum's Collection.

One of the most important of these new acquisitions is the Male Nude of Henri Matisse, painted in 1900, which was posed for by Matisse's favorite model of the time, Bevilacqua. Georges Braque's Landscape at La Ciotat of 1907 is that artist's first Fauve painting to enter the Museum Collection. Woman with a Mandolin (1914) is a work from Picasso's "Synthetic Cubist" period and was originally a part of the renowned Gertrude Stein Collection. Paul Klee's Cat and Bird (1928), previously seen at the Museum in loan shows, is one of his most popular pictures. Jean Dubuffet's Cursed Gossip of 1954 is the second of his extraordinary small sculptures to enter the Collection. Pierre Alechinsky's The Complex of the Sphinx (1967) is the first major painting by this significant European artist, known as a leader of the "Cobra" group, to be acquired by The Museum of Modern Art. Victor Brauner's La Psylle Miraculeuse (1943) is one of the group executed by the Rumanian-born artist while in hiding during World War II.

Matisse's Male Nude is of special importance to the Museum Collection as it is its only significant work of Matisse dating prior to the artist's

(more)

Fauve period (1905-07). William Rubin, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, observes: "The superb Male Nude demonstrates that Matisse was already a fully formed painter at the turn of the century. His mastery permitted him to so fully absorb influences from Cézanne and Rodin that the Male Nude bears his characteristic stamp in both its draftsmanship and color.

The painting is also of special interest because it relates directly to the Museum's bronze known as The Serf (1900-03), Matisse's first important sculpture, which shows the same model posed in the same position." Matisse began both works in 1900, but found himself unsatisfied with the sculpture. In 1903 he resolved what he considered to be its compositional problems by cutting off the arms on the original plaster. As the relationship between these two works has a special esthetic and art historical interest, the Museum has juxtaposed The Serf (normally exhibited in the third floor sculpture gallery) with the newly acquired Male Nude. Male Nude is one of three major works belonging to the Matisse heirs that the Museum had the good fortune to acquire; the others were Notre Dame (1914), now on exhibition in the Matisse gallery on the second floor, and The Swimming Pool (1952), a room-sized decoupage which will first be exhibited in March of next year in a gallery of its own.

One of the most important and among the last of Braque's Fauve paintings, Landscape at La Ciotat contains none of the neo-Impressionist elements that his other works of that period share with Derain, Marquet and other Fauvists. "Rather," notes Mr. Rubin, "it shows Braque already strongly influenced by Cézanne -- in the vertical staging of the composition, the brushwork patterns of the foliage and the passage of planes -- and it anticipates Braque's paintings of autumn 1907, which marked his departure in the direction of Cubism." Landscape at La Ciotat, formerly in the collection of the art historian Douglas Cooper, was acquired by the Museum during preparations for its Fauve exhibition mounted earlier this year.

Woman with a Mandolin (1914) is one of a group of Picasso paintings which

(more)

was promised to the Museum by a syndicate of its trustees and friends at the time they purchased the estate of Gertrude Stein. "A highly abstract work in Picasso's 'Synthetic Cubist' style, Woman with a Mandolin is comparatively difficult to decipher. Nevertheless, its gray, blue, red and green patterns can be understood to represent the head, upper torso, arms and hands of a female figure holding a mandolin on which are inscribed a group of Russian letters, fragments of the phrase 'Bol(shoi) Concert' (the equivalent of the French grand concert). It is a gift of David Rockefeller.

Paul Klee's Cat and Bird (1928) has been exhibited many times at The Museum of Modern Art since its first exhibition of Klee's painting in 1930. It is one of Klee's most popular and finest pictures, in part for the manner in which it subsumes a number of major themes of his art. The picture surface is almost entirely filled with a close-up, frontal view of the head of a cat whose staring eyes suggest a state of profound preoccupation. The bird, which is the object of the cat's obsession, is inscribed by Klee on the lower forehead of the cat in a manner that implies less a thing seen than a projection on the screen of the mind's eye. The execution of the picture, marked by delicate tonalities and seismographically sensitive drawing, demonstrates a degree of subtlety more often found in Klee's watercolors than in his oils. Cat and Bird was purchased from the 1930 exhibition by Dr. F. H. Mirschland, from whose heirs it has been acquired, partially as a gift from Suzy Prudden Sussman and Joan H. Meijer and partially through the generosity of Sidney Janis.

Dubuffet's Cursed Gossip (1954), a gift of Henry Slesar, is the second of this artist's exceptional small sculptures to enter the Museum Collection. (The Museum possesses two large later sculptures of the "Hourloup" series.) Cursed Gossip is very different from The Magician, its other small sculpture (on exhibit in the third floor galleries), which is a rough-hewn figure with a body made of slag and a head formed from the roots of a tree. Miniaturist in scale, Cursed Gossip is lovingly formed from small chips of charcoal,

(more)

organized with the same intricacy and delicacy that characterize such other small-scale efforts of Dubuffet as his extraordinary butterfly-wing collages.

Pierre Alechinsky's The Complex of the Sphinx of 1967, a gift of Mary A. Gordon, is, as Mr. Rubin observes, "characteristic of Alechinsky's work of the late 60s. It contains a single large image -- in this case a semi-abstract image of the Egyptian sphinx in orange, umber and blue on a blue-black ground -- located above a group of four small 'predella' panels which contain pseudo-narrative scenes drawn cursively in black and white that constitute a kind of ironic and humorous commentary on the main image."

Victor Brauner's La Psylle Miraculeuse (1943) is from a group of works executed while the artist was in hiding during World War II. Unable to get oil paints, he began to experiment with encaustic, which remained his characteristic medium until his death in 1966. "La Psylle Miraculeuse is dominated by a frontal female nude with flaming red hair, a kind of surreal 'medicine-woman' whose body is inscribed with a variety of cryptic, cabalistic signs. A 'psylle' is a personage, probably of Hindu origin, who worked with snakes, and Brauner's figure is framed by a green serpent that devours its own tail." It is the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Nathan L. Halpern.