

The Museum of Modern Art

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NO. 94
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARP WORKS ON PAPER AT MOMA

A comprehensive selection of more than 75 works on paper by Jean Arp, representing the whole range of the artist's techniques in this medium, will be on view in the third-floor Sachs Galleries of The Museum of Modern Art from December 15 through March 5, 1978.

Although primarily known for his sculpture and reliefs, Jean Arp drew and worked directly with paper to create collages throughout his long career, from before his 1916 Dada days in Zurich to his death in 1966. ARP ON PAPER, directed by Bernice Rose, Curator of Drawings, includes Arp's collages of both classically geometric and expressive biomorphic forms, as well as his drawings, illustrated books, and cardboard reliefs. Also on view will be papiers déchires, collages made with torn paper. The works in the exhibition come from Marguerite Hagenbach-Arp, the artist's widow, from Madame Arp's gift to the Kunstmuseum, Basel, from private lenders, and from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art.

In his collages, Arp wished to use materials directly and purely, even devoutly, to create images for contemplation. Construction in Planes and Curves in the exhibition is representative of the geometric precision of Arp's early work in this medium. Also included in the exhibition is Here Everything is Still Floating from the collage series Fatagaga, one of the rare surviving examples of Arp's collaboration with Max Ernst in the 1920s.

Arp worked in a more expressionistic mode as well, for example in the drawing Portrait of Tristan Tzara. Also to be seen in the exhibition are the automatic drawings on which Arp worked without preconceived images in mind. By drawing freely, he was able to move away from specific images toward more generalized

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organic forms. Rope Dancer (1940), a later example of automatic drawing, has been characterized by Ms. Rose as "classically controlled and elegant in effect."

Arp's papiers déchires may be said to have evolved from earlier collages. They originated when Arp, in preparation for an exhibition, took down some old, fastidious, perfectly finished collages from his attic only to find that years of exposure to dampness and extremes of heat and cold had cracked, spotted, and otherwise deformed them. At first devastated, Arp soon responded to nature's shattering of his dreams of perfectability by tearing paper instead of cutting it, smearing his paper with paste, and sticking his collages together with newsprint rather than carefully pressing them with blotting paper. "I had accepted the transience, the dribbling away, the impermanence, the fading, the withering, the spookishness of our existence," Arp recalled later. "These torn picture, these papiers déchires brought me closer to a faith in things other than worldly. . ."

Calling Arp a "master illustrator," Bernice Rose claims that he was "one of those responsible for a whole new attitude toward the illustrated book." Arp not only illustrated the books of fellow poets and friends such as Tristan Tzara and Richard Huelsenbeck, but he produced books of his own poetry illuminated by his own compositions. As Ms. Rose observes, Arp the poet and Arp the artist are "inseparable, and poetry was for long periods integral to Arp's plastic work." Thus, Arpaden is the name not only of a 1918 portfolio of prints in the exhibition, but also of a group of Arp's 1917 poems that were written by randomly selecting and juxtaposing words, phrases, and sentences from newspapers, just as the images in the lithographs are juxtaposed and combined--really compounded--into images like Moustache Hat and Navel Bottle. "There is a constant interplay in Arp's work," according to Ms. Rose. "Prints illustrating one group of poems may be cut into collages as illustrations for another group of poems, woodblocks are given a second life as relief sculpture, and collages are transformed into reliefs." ARP ON PAPER emphasizes and traces this metamorphosis.

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Jean Arp (1887-1966)--painter, sculptor, poet, and graphic artist--has been called "a one-man laboratory for the discovery of new form." Achieving an astonishing expressiveness, inventiveness, and complexity with a few elementary forms, Arp built a symbolic language that wittily and with insight probed the underlying laws of nature and of artistic creation. He imbued the creative processes of free association, chance, and automatism with new capacities for invention and revelation.

ARP ON PAPER has been made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C.

The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition program is made possible in part with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency whose funds are recommended by the Governor and appropriated by the State Legislature.