

The Museum of Modern Art

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FOUR RECENTLY DISCOVERED PICABIAS AND OTHER MODERN MASTER ACQUISITIONS ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Four recently rediscovered major paintings by Francis Picabia will be on view together with works by Matta, Klutis, Arp, Tack, Balthus, and Georgia O'Keeffe, among others, in an exhibition of recent acquisitions at The Museum of Modern Art. FOUR RECENTLY DISCOVERED PICABIAS AND OTHER MODERN MASTER ACQUISITIONS opens January 25. The Picabia paintings have not been exhibited in over sixty years--all trace of them having disappeared during World War I--and were thought to have been lost or destroyed before their 1974 rediscovery in the basement of the former home of Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer, owners of the Washington Post, in Mt. Kisco, New York.

The four Picabia works are Danses à la Source II (1912), La Source (1912), C'est de moi qu'il s'agit (ca. 1914), and Mariage Comique (1914). Francis Picabia (1878-1953) was a central figure in the Parisian and New York avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s, and the two larger works of 1912 on view in the exhibition are, in the opinion of William S. Rubin, Director of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum, "the culminating examples of Picabia's Cubist phase." The two later works, notes Mr. Rubin, are "fascinating--almost whimsical--paintings, unlike anything produced elsewhere during 1914--excepting, of course, in Picabia's own work." All four paintings were discovered under the bird feeders and an old croquet set in the basement of the former Meyer home.

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The late Agnes E. Meyer (1887-1970) was a patron of the arts and a staunch supporter of Alfred Stieglitz's pioneering "291" gallery and Marius de Zayas' "Modern Gallery." In the opinion of Elizabeth Lorentz, Mrs. Meyer's daughter, the Picabias, along with the murals by Edward Steichen with which they were rolled up, were probably sent to the Meyer house for storage during World War I. Upon their rediscovery in 1974, the Picabia paintings required painstaking restoration, recently completed by Jean Volkmer, the Museum's Conservator. The restoration was made possible by the Meyer family and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. All four works are a gift to the Museum from Elizabeth Lorentz, Eugene Meyer III, Katherine Graham, and Ruth Epstein in honor of their parents, Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer.

Radio-Announcer, a 1922 construction-sculpture by the painter, sculptor, and designer Gustav Klutssis, is a maquette for one of his "radio announcers" or "screen-tribune-radio-kiosks" developed in 1922 for the Fifth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. These Constructivist propaganda kiosks were designed to be placed at main intersections for the radio transmission of Lenin's speech of 1922. Formally the work embodies all of the principal characteristics of constructivist work in three-dimensions. It is a composite of geometric panels, "architectural" supports, and gaily painted loudspeakers assembled by means of tension cables--which hold the composition together by reciprocal tension. This piece is not only one of the best examples of Klutssis' work, but also one of the rare original constructions surviving from this period. The first such three-dimensional work to enter the Collection, it is an important addition to the Museum's holdings of Russian avant-garde paintings and works on paper.

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Matta's Onyx of Electra (1944) is unlike the Museum's other works by this important Surrealist in that its markedly abstract character underscores the formal and historical relationship between Surrealist painting and the work of the New York School (Abstract Expressionism). Indeed, it is this Matta which best illustrates that connection. Mr. Rubin describes this painting as "taut and intricately wired...gemlike clusters of pigment function as nodes or terminals for nervous linear circuits." Writing of this work in his 1969 book "Dada and Surrealist Art," Mr. Rubin observed: "Metaphorically Onyx of Electra seems to deal not so much with the deep recesses of the psyche as with a more intimate area, closer to the surface of the self, in which the life force is transformed into mental and nervous energy. In this 'electrical' system of the mind all the tensions, ambiguities, contradictions, and frustrations of reality are felt. The space is fraught with pitfalls and sudden obstructions; perspective convergences pull us in opposite directions through planes whose surfaces bend under our impact and past pairs of icons suspended in sympathetic vibration."

Georgia O'Keeffe's Abstraction Blue of 1927 is a "symphonic" work, a total abstraction--and thus a relatively rare example in the work of this artist. "The acquisition of this painting" Mr. Rubin observes, "is part of a continuing effort by The Museum of Modern Art to fill in the lacunae in its collection of pre-World War II American abstract painting." On view as well is Jean (Hans) Arp's Enak's Tears (Terrestrial Forms) of 1917, one of the very few large painted Arp reliefs extant from the heyday of Dada during World War I. A pioneer example of Arp's revolutionary biomorphic form-language, it is an absolutely crucial work, which the Museum has sought to purchase since it was exhibited here in 1968. "Its beautiful flat color anticipates by three decades the spirit of Matisse's cut-outs," Mr. Rubin

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observes. The exhibition also includes, among other works, a painting by Balthus, Girl With Green and Red Jacket (1939), and a rare canvas by the pioneer American abstractionist Augustus Vincent Tack. Dunes (ca. 1930), a play of forms abstracted from photographs of the desert, "stands mid-way between Whistler and Clyfford Still," according to Mr. Rubin. "Its jagged proto-Abstract Expressionist forms are realized in nuanced, evanescent colors and gold reminiscent of the palette of 19th-century Symbolism."

FOUR RECENTLY DISCOVERED PICABIAS AND OTHER MODERN MASTER ACQUISITIONS has been directed by William S. Rubin, assisted by Cora Rosevear, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture.

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