

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

NEWLY ACQUIRED WORKS BY 15 ARTISTS TO GO VIEW

Recently acquired works of art by 15 artists will be on view on the 1st floor of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from July 26 through November 5. The 18 works, 17 of them recently added to the Museum Collection and one on extended loan, include 13 oil paintings, 3 watercolors, one sculpture and one construction.

Seven of the artists are well-known Europeans: Picasso, Léger, Mondrian, Beckmann, Klee, de Chirico, Pevsner. Four prominent Americans are represented: Charles Burchfield, Charles Demuth, Rico Lebrun and Morris Graves; while three of the remaining four American artists are newcomers to the Museum's Collection and its public: Richard Lippold, J.M. Hanson and Richard Pousette-Dart. Jimmy Ernst is already represented in the Collection with an earlier painting.

Picasso's Harlequin was painted toward the end of 1915. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of the Museum Collections says:

"The painter, because of his Spanish nationality, had not been directly involved in World War I, but he had seen many of his friends - Braque, Apollinaire, Derain, Cocteau, Léger and others - leave for the front while he remained behind in a frightened and gloomy Paris. Meanwhile his beloved mistress, Eva, had fallen mortally ill and had to be taken to a hospital far from Montparnasse where Picasso was then living.

"It was in this atmosphere of general and personal distress that Picasso painted the Harlequin. During the previous year he had gradually transformed his cubist style from a rococo manner, pretty in color, soft in design and sprinkled with gay confetti-like dots, into a comparatively austere art of simple, flat rectangular planes. The early climax of this development is the Museum's monumental Harlequin.

"The harlequin stands like a great heraldic symbol, one hand resting on a table. The other hand, reduced to a row of tiny white dots, holds a sheet of paper which seems unfinished and blank except for what may be a vague profile. The harlequin's head is split into a dark circular face and a white rectangular face, each with a round eye. His figure is placed against a sombre black background, ironically and perhaps significantly.

"For it may well be that the Harlequin reflects Picasso's state of mind more than the gaily colored figure suggests. On December 9th, 1915, Picasso wrote a letter to Gertrude Stein telling her of his anxiety over Eva's illness and of how he had little time or heart to work since much of his day was spent on the subway traveling back and forth to the hospital where daily Eva was growing worse. (She was to die within a week.)

"'Nevertheless,' he concludes, 'I have done a painting of a harlequin which in the opinion of myself and several others is the best thing I have done.' (The original letter is preserved in the Gertrude Stein Collection at the Yale University Library

and has been lent for the exhibition through the courtesy of Carl Van Vechten, Gertrude Stein's literary executor, and Donald C. Gallup, curator of Yale's Collection of American Literature.)

"Artists are usually enthusiastic about their most recent work but this remark of Picasso's is so exceptionally strong as to be quite out of character. Yet he did not altogether exaggerate, for the Harlequin is perhaps the most important of Picasso's cubist paintings between 1914 and the Museum's Three Musicians of 1921. By it he clarified the 'synthetic' cubist style, greatly influenced the other cubists such as Gleizes, Villon and Metzinger in their composition, and Braque in his adoption two years later of a black background. The Harlequin, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest, valuably reinforces the Museum's Picasso collection which (except for his earliest and latest periods) is now the best in the world."

Giorgio de Chirico's canvas of 1913, Disturbing Journey, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest is a notable addition to the Museum's group of paintings by this master. James Thrall Soby, leading authority on de Chirico, says of this work:

"Disturbing Journey is among the most compellingly dream-like of de Chirico's images. It seems to express the nightmarish terror of being lost in a railroad station, of trying to locate a train for reasons of desperate urgency, only to be aware of its presence at last - as a phantom lurking at the end of an inaccessible corridor.

"The picture's oneiric intensity is adequate compensation for a certain sketchiness and technical poverty by comparison with other works of de Chirico's early career. These works, painted in Paris just before the First World War, became a principal inspiration for the surrealist artists of the 1920s and 1930s, with their re-emphasis on psychological suggestion and poetic mood, as opposed to the formal order of the abstractionists."

Three canvases by Piet Mondrian, spanning a large part of his career, are included in the exhibition, two of them illustrating phases of his work not hitherto represented in the Collection. The Composition in Brown and Gray was painted about 1914 when Mondrian was beginning to emerge from the influence of analytical cubism which he had felt deeply during his first years in Paris. This canvas comes midway between Mondrian's cubist work and his later abstract "plus and minus" pictures, illustrated in the Collection by the large drawing of 1914, Pier and Ocean.

The second painting, Color Squares in Oval, 1915, also dates from the long and important period of Mondrian's development from cubism to his later style. In it the two principal motives of his work, the straight line, or bar, and the rectangle, appear in the same picture, composed in a kind of free counterpoint.

Mondrian's famous last work, Victory Boogie Woogie, left unfinished at his death in 1944, is on loan to the Museum from the Miller Company's "Painting Toward Architecture" Collection, Meriden, Conn. With the Museum's Broadway Boogie Woogie, completed in 1943.

this canvas marks a change in Mondrian's work - the culmination of a development which began when he came to New York in 1941. For many years he had confined himself with ascetic concentration to compositions of sparse rectangles austere divided by black bars. In this country his painting grew less severe and more complicated. The asymmetric rectangles of these last paintings and their quick rhythmic excitement correspond to the forms of the American music which Mondrian greatly admired, and express, too, something of his reaction to New York.

Two large painted decorations which Léger made in 1941 for a large, high-ceilinged room in the New York apartment of Gerald Murphy are the gift of Mr. Murphy to the Museum. These canvases, with their use of free flowing forms in black and white against backgrounds of solid red in the one and blue in the other, are an interesting contrast to Léger's early cubist work and also to his post-cubist use of monumental, machine-like shapes as seen in his masterpiece of 1921, the Three Women (Le grand déjeuner) in the Museum Collection.

Still Life with Candles is a late and powerful work by the German expressionist painter, Max Beckmann, who came to the United States in 1947. This canvas was painted in New York in 1949 and has not been exhibited before. The Museum Collection already contains paintings of 1920 and 1921 by Beckmann, as well as the great triptych Departure, 1932-35, symbolic of the exile from Nazi Germany which the artist was to choose shortly after. Beckmann lived in Amsterdam from 1936 to 1947, then came here to teach at Washington University, St. Louis, Mo. He now lives in New York and teaches at the Brooklyn Museum Art School.

Equals Infinity, Paul Klee's brilliant little oil painting of 1932, enriches the group of works by Klee in the Museum Collection, illustrating as it does a phase of the artist's work not previously represented. Its shimmering "mosaic" surface of bright spots of paint reveals the power and freshness of Klee's use of color. The painting was acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

The Developable Column by Antoine Pevsner, dating from 1942, was shown in the retrospective exhibition of the work of the Russian-born constructivist and his brother Naum Gabo which was held at the Museum in 1948. This sculpture, made in oxidized metals by a process unique with the artist, is one of his best recent works and the first late example of it to enter the Museum Collection. Pevsner was born in Orel in 1886 and lives and works in Paris.

An excellent, large watercolor of 1920 by Charles Burchfield, Pippin House, East Liverpool, Ohio, comes to the Collection as the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alex Hillman. Of this work the artist says: "It was painted on the spot, a cold raw day, just above freezing.... The aim was to suggest a certain grimness pertaining to the winter season; the raw quality of river life; a feeling of apprehension that exists on a dour day when the weather is apt to turn colder, with a storm in the offing." The watercolor by Charles Demuth, Vaudeville, 1917, is one of the most subtly drawn of the theatre subjects shown in the recent Demuth retrospective exhibition at the Museum. Morris Graves' watercolor, Bat Dancing for a Slug, given anonymously, was painted in 1943, a few years after the mystical bird and snake subjects for which the artist first became known.

Rico Lebrun's Figure in Rain is a distinguished example of his recent painting. It is the gift to the Collection of Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss. Lebrun says of his work that he wishes to use symbols that are intelligible, contemporary and universal, depicting the general "human condition." He was born in 1900 in Italy and studied at the Naples Academy. He came to the United States in 1924, won a Guggenheim Fellowship in the mid-30s, and eventually settled in California, becoming an influential teacher. A group of his paintings and drawings in Americans 1942 at the Museum of Modern Art was his first extensive showing in New York. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Whitney and Metropolitan Museums, the Santa Barbara Museum, the University of Michigan, Mills College, and Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, own his work.

Richard Lippold worked for about a year on his remarkable Variation Number 7: Full Moon, finishing it early in 1950. Fine nickel chromium wire and thin brass rods are the materials used in this almost incredibly delicate construction. The long supporting wires are of stainless steel. The artist writing of this work says that its visual and technical structure depends on the unity of diversity in tensions, so characteristic of our age, a unity to which the work is dedicated in spirit. "We can hope," he says, "even prove, that our wisdom is stronger than our weapons. This construction is one such proof. The firmer the tensions within it, the more placid is its effect."

J.M. Hanson was born in Halifax, Yorkshire, England in 1900, studied art there, and in Paris with Friesz, Léger and Ozenfant, later

working as assistant to Ozenfant. His first one-man show in Paris in 1928 was followed by others in England and in New York after his arrival here in 1939. His work is in museums in Omaha, Neb. and Athens, Ga. and museums in his native Yorkshire. Mr. Hanson says: "It has always seemed to me that art is an expression in definite forms of the mystery of things, and a compensation for that mystery, and so, useful and necessary to society." He thinks of painting "in terms of visual music, a music which dominates the subject matter and exists in its own right, and is, in itself, a satisfying organization, so that should the subject matter cease to have interest, the picture still would have a chance of being enjoyed." Of Nocturnal Encounters he says: "The painting has no topical or symbolic meaning, but is simply what I considered to be a poetic, musical expression of a certain phase of night life, that of drifting, accidental encounters executed in terms of 'empty space.'"

Richard Pousette-Dart was born in St. Paul, Minn. in 1916, moving with his family to New York State soon after. As a painter he is self-taught. He has had one-man shows in New York since 1939 and is represented in the Addison Gallery, Andover, Mass. Although like many of his contemporaries he is opposed to titles for his paintings, preferring to number them, he subtitles the Museum's painting A Presence, perhaps expressing in this way his feeling that a painting is whole and mysterious, like a person, and that it defies explanation.

Jimmy Ernst, son of Max Ernst, was born in Cologne, Germany, in 1920, and came to the U.S. in 1938. Since 1943 he has held one-man shows in New York and is represented in the Whitney Museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford and the Pasadena Art Institute. Of his painting, A Time for Fear, he says: "If this painting has meaning in the sense of reference beyond itself, or personal symbolism, this emerged after its completion. The finished painting suggested to me an unfamiliar yet ominous object with a time mechanism to set it in motion...."

A check list of these recent acquisitions follows.

BECKMANN, Max. German, born 1884. In U.S.A. since 1947.

STILL LIFE WITH CANDLES. 1949. Oil on canvas, 35 x 55 7/8". Purchase Fund.

BURCHFIELD, Charles. American, born 1893.

PIPPIN HOUSE, EAST LIVERPOOL, OHIO. 1920. Watercolor, 26 x 19 3/8". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alex Hillman.

de CHIRICO, Giorgio. Italian, born Greece 1888. Lives in Paris.

DISTURBING JOURNEY. 1913. Oil on canvas, 29 1/4 x 42". Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

DEMUTH, Charles. American, 1883-1935.

VAUDEVILLE. 1917. Watercolor, 8 x 10 1/2". Purchase Fund (by exchange).

ERNST, Jimmy. American, born Germany 1920. In U.S.A. since 1938.

A TIME FOR FEAR. 1949. Oil on canvas, 23 7/8 x 20". Purchase Fund.

GRAVES, Morris. American, born 1910.

BAT DANCING FOR A SLUG. 1943. Watercolor, 24 x 29 7/8". Given anonymously.

HANSON, J. M. British, born 1900. In U.S.A. since 1939.

NOCTURNAL ENCOUNTERS. 1949. Oil on canvas, 35 1/8 x 45 3/8". Given anonymously.

KLEE, Paul. Swiss, 1879-1940. Worked in Germany.

EQUALS INFINITY (Gleich unendlich). 1932. Oil on canvas (center) and on wood (margins), 20 1/4 x 26 7/8". Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

LEBRUN, Rico. American, born Italy 1900.

FIGURE IN RAIN. 1949. Duco on canvas over composition board, 48 x 30 1/8". Gift of Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss.

LÉGER, Fernand. French, born 1881.

RED DECORATION. 1941. Oil on canvas, 70 x 48". Gift of Gerald Murphy.

BLUE DECORATION. 1941. Oil on canvas, 70 x 48". Gift of Gerald Murphy.

These paintings were commissioned for a large, high-ceilinged room in Mr. Murphy's New York apartment.

LIPPOLD, Richard. American, born 1915.

VARIATION NUMBER 7: FULL MOON. 1949-50. Nickel-chromium wire, stainless steel wire and brass rods, 10 feet high. Purchase Fund.

MONDRIAN, Piet. Dutch, 1872-1944. Lived in Paris and New York.

COMPOSITION IN BROWN AND GRAY. 1914. Oil on canvas, 33 3/4 x 29 3/4".

Purchase Fund.

COLOR SQUARES IN OVAL. 1915. Oil on canvas, 31 x 42 3/8". Purchase Fund.

PEVSNER, Antoine. French, born Russia 1886. Lives in Paris.

DEVELOPABLE COLUMN. 1942. Brass and oxidized bronze, 20 3/4 inches high.

Purchase Fund.

PICASSO, Pablo. Spanish, born 1881. Lives in France.

HARLEQUIN. 1915. Oil on canvas, 72 1/4 x 41 3/8". Acquired through the

Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

NOTE: A letter written by Picasso to Gertrude Stein on December 9, 1915, describing the Harlequin which he had just painted, has been lent for this exhibition from the Gertrude Stein Collection in the Yale University Library through permission of Carl Van Vechten, Gertrude Stein's literary executor, and Donald C. Gallup, curator of Yale's Collection of American Literature.

POUSETTE-DART, Richard. American, born 1916.

NUMBER 11: A PRESENCE. 1949. Oil on canvas, 25 1/8 x 21 1/8". Purchase Fund.

EXTENDED LOAN TO THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

MONDRIAN, Piet. Dutch, 1872-1944. Lived in Paris and New York.

VICTORY BOOGIE WOOGIE. 1943-1944 (unfinished). Oil on canvas with colored tape and paper, 50 x 50". Extended loan from the Miller Company's "Painting Toward Architecture" Collection, Meriden, Connecticut.