

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

No. 22

FOR RELEASE:

Wednesday, March 1, 1961

PRESS REVIEW:

Tuesday, Feb. 28, 1961

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

FIRST ERNST RETROSPECTIVE IN U. S. OPENS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A retrospective exhibition of work by Max Ernst, pioneer of Dada, a founder of Surrealism and a master of today's School of Paris, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art from March 1 through May 8. In addition to 145 paintings and 28 sculptures, the exhibition includes 60 collages and drawings as well as theater designs and book illustrations. It is the first comprehensive show of Ernst's work to be presented in the United States and surveys five decades of achievement.

The exhibition, directed by William S. Lieberman, Museum Curator of Prints and Drawings, also celebrates the artist's 70th birthday. Shown in New York on two entire floors of the Museum, the exhibition will later be presented at the Chicago Art Institute. Mr. Lieberman has also edited the accompanying catalog.*

"Throughout his career technical innovation has nourished Ernst's art," Mr. Lieberman says. "His experiments, he insists, are essentially children's games and he has never developed any technique as an end in itself. Ernst is a painter of pictures, technical experimentation serves only to stimulate his vision. His altered engravings of 1919 were invented from almost banal sources--advertisements from printed catalogs, pieces of type, botanical charts. In the same way his paper collages of the 1920s metamorphosized 19th century wood engravings. In 1925-6 the innovation of frottage consisted simply of rubbing paper or canvas against textures; in the late 1930s he personalized the accident of decalcomania; in the early 40s he experimented with paint dripped from a can across the surface of a canvas. These devices helped Ernst to discover the image which he finally painted.

"From Ernst's frottages, decalcomanias and flows of pigment emerge a procession of visions sometimes obsessive and often prophetic: new landscapes inhabited by new phantoms and animals; new adventures and new terrors revealed by the rarest and most significant dreams. The world of Ernst can be turbulent, eruptive and violent. It can also offer, with irrational lucidity and calm, an explanation of the magic of objects, the black humor of human foibles and the apparition of unseen presences. Like the looking glass, the imagined world of Ernst is a reverse image. It is also a universe."

more...

MAX ERNST. 64 pages. 85 plates, 1 in color. Catalog, bibliography. Chronology by the artist. Edited by William S. Lieberman. \$2.50.

Ernst's paintings were first exhibited in his native Cologne in 1912 when he was 21. His career as an artist was interrupted, however, by World War I in which he served for four years. After the war Dada, named in Zurich in 1916, found adherents in various parts of postwar Europe and America. Ernst, co-conspirator with his friend the sculptor Jean Arp, founded the Dada movement in Cologne in 1919.

"Outraged by the stupidity and folly of World War I and its aftermaths, the Dadaists declared war against the conventions, wastes and standards of respectable society, even against reason itself. Yet because some of them were men of great talent they produced from their anarchic anger and ennui works of art of originality and lasting interest. Furthermore they abruptly broadened the horizons of art, preparing the way for new developments, among them Surrealism." (A. H. Barr, Jr., Masters of Modern Art)

Max Ernst's important contributions to Dada are seen in almost 30 works in the exhibition including several of his highly personalized collages. In some of these the artist cut up various flat reproductions of objects or parts of objects and then pasted them together to form a picture of something new and strange. In others he altered with pen, watercolor and gouache botanical charts, technical engravings, or rough proofs painted from pieces of type. They were given such titles as The Hat Makes the Man and The Little Gland that Says Tic Tac.

In 1920 at the invitation of the writer Andre Breton, Ernst exhibited his Dada collages in Paris. Two years later he moved to the French capitol and became the leading exponent of Surrealism as a painter. The Surrealists preserved the anti-rational character of Dada but developed a far more systematic and serious experimental attitude toward the subconscious as the essential source of art. They practiced "automatic" drawing and writing, studied dreams and visions, the art of children and the insane, the theory and technique of psychoanalysis, the poetry of Lautreamont and Rimbaud.

Ernst, perhaps the most versatile of the artists associated with Surrealism, is the foremost master of the Surrealist collage and of the semi-automatic technique of frottage, which he invented, and later decalcomania.

Eighty-two paintings, a dozen sculptures and reliefs and 26 examples of collage made between 1922 and 1938 when Ernst quit the Surrealist group are shown. These include several "painted dreams" of the early 20s and the famous Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale, a collage painted in relief which was for Ernst a farewell to collage technique. Many paintings on the theme of birds, which have always preoccupied Ernst, are shown of which the most important is Monument to Birds. A pair of paintings The Bride of the Wind, done in 1926, relate to One Night of Love, painted in 1927.

Several of the "Horde" series, painted the same year, are shown including one of the final compositions owned by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

One gallery is devoted to paintings of forests, another theme which has haunted Ernst. Among the characteristic work of the 30s are Two Anthropomorphic Figures and a large painted and modeled plaster figure. Five paintings from the Garden Airplane Trap series from the same period are shown and the Joy of Living, the culminating picture of a series called The Nymph Echo, a personal restatement of classical myth.

In 1936 Ernst painted three pictures called The Entire City which in a peculiar way portray the landscape of Arizona, which he had never seen but where he was to make his home a decade later. The Angel of Hearth and Home, an eruptive painting of turbulence and violence was painted in 1937, the same year Picasso painted Guernica.

In contrast to the passionate feverish line of Masson for example, Max Ernst's surrealism is meditative, ingenious, explorative, often humorous. His poetry is less violent, more complex, and his forms range from the abstract to an expert magic realism which anticipates Dali.

During World War II Ernst was interned but finally escaped to the United States with the help of the Emergency Rescue Committee. He arrived in this country in 1941. He remained in America until 1953.

A series of paintings begun from decalcomania in 1939, is represented by several important works such as Napoleon in the Wilderness, his first painting in America and the large, prophetic, Europe After the Rain, finished in 1942. Among the imaginary portraits of the forties and fifties are paintings of Euclid, W. C. Fields and Leonardo da Vinci.

Other recent work in the retrospective includes paintings shown at the 27th Venice Biennale, held in 1954, where Ernst won first prize. Among the 48 works from the past decade are one of the series of pictures Ernst has painted each year for his wife, Dorothea Tanning, incorporating the initial of her first name and his most recent painting, a portrait of her painted in 1960.

Five bronzes were completed for the exhibition, including The Spirit of the Bartille, a sculpture more than 10 feet high.

In speaking of Ernst's recent work, Mr. Lieberman says: "Although they continue to be poetically conceived, Ernst's paintings from the past decade offer strong contrasts to the works of his Surrealist period. Specific illustration has surrendered to a series of freely painted, brilliantly colored canvases."

Private collectors in six countries abroad and in nine states in this country and from seven European and American museums have lent works to the exhibition.

 Photographs and additional information are available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. CI 5-8900.