

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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The first major Museum retrospective in this country of work by Jean Dubuffet, leading artist to emerge in postwar France, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art from February 21 through April 8.

The 61-year old artist will come to New York for the opening of the exhibition which will later travel to Chicago and Los Angeles. The exhibition includes almost 200 works selected from Dubuffet's prodigious output since his first exhibition at the age of 43 in Paris in 1944.

Peter Selz, Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at the Museum and director of the exhibition, says Dubuffet attempts to bridge the gap between mind and emotion in art. There appears in his work a new fusion of form, content and material--beyond the unity of form and content essential to all art.

"His subjects are common people and most ordinary occurrences; his form is rather closely related to wall scratchings and to children's art. His proclamation that 'my art is an attempt to bring all disparaged values into the limelight' is certainly a key to the interpretation of all his work. It accounts for his subjects--the walls of old buildings, jazz musicians, drilling dentists, old tables and stones, Bowery bums. It clarifies his opposition to classical beauty and his interest in the values of barbarism, in the art of the simple-minded, the psychopaths, the untrained; it explains his various techniques, his use of the bark of trees, of tar and asphalt, of tobacco leaves and of clinkers and old sponges in his sculpture."

Among the famous series represented in the exhibition are: The Corps de Dames paintings, "among the most aggressively shocking works known in the history of painting;" Sols et Terrains of the 50s, boundless landscapes which turned into a series of tables, "quiet tables, wild tables, venerable tables;" assemblages from 1955 to 1957, composed by cutting up paintings and rearranging the elements; imprints made from assemblages; texturologies (1957-1958); the beards (1959) and materiologies; sculpture made of clinkers, charcoal, roots, sponges, driftwood, papier maché and works made of botanic elements.

The artist, whom Selz calls the most lucid artist writing on art since Delacroix and van Gogh says: "I am convinced that by defining too explicitly the objects and places one intends to evoke, instead of augmenting, one diminishes the intensity of their apparition. It is because a painting without any blanks to be filled, without demanding any effort, no longer acts as a stimulus to the imagination, so that the

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imagination failing to react, no sparks are kindled in the mind. It is the blanks in a painting that are important, that constitute its power....So, it seems to me that to set oneself to inventory the true measurements of things is a practice without the slightest value. What to me seems interesting is to recover in the representation of an object the whole complex set of impressions we receive as we see it normally in our memory."

In 1942 when Dubuffet at the age of 39 began painting again after two earlier periods, he painted the fields and houses in the green countryside outside Paris, awkward cows and energetic milkmaids, Parisians on their daily journey in the Métro, the old facades of high tenements. From facades he went on to look more closely at the pavements and walls. The "Messages" of 1949 are derived from graffiti and wall scratchings, which stimulated him as they did the photographer Brassai.

Looking at the walls, Dubuffet became beguiled by the old and venerable stone in which his selective eye discovered a new beauty. "In the Texturologies," Selz says, "Dubuffet paints blurred peripheral areas that are usually ignored though they are perceived unconsciously. By an inspired observation of specific surfaces of matter, he actually delves beyond conscious phenomena of a fragmentary world toward an apprehension of the unbroken phenomena of continuity."

The exhibition includes many portraits of friends, poets, writers and artists. In these his aim is the prevention of easy recognition by emphasis on specific fortuitous details--a hairy ear, long teeth--in order to stimulate the imagination of the spectator. Certain accessories constantly recur on the clothed figures: the hat which is part of the face, the buttons which assume the importance they have in children's drawings, the necktie and large watch as signs of bourgeois respectability.

Of his landscapes Selz says they are in fact more "realistic" than the traditional Western landscapes; and their boundlessness, homogeneity and extension also different from the dispersal of motifs in Chinese landscapes. Here the soil is seen head-on and simultaneously from the top. In some a narrow band of sky gives some possibility of orientation, but in others the total picture surface is covered by a hard impasto forming the relief of the landscapes. With no visual center, the landscapes expand before us in four directions.

"I am pleased," Dubuffet says, "if the landscapes I have done in this spirit have an uncertain, unsteady scale. So that one may think, depending on one's mood...of a vast expanse of land, or, equally of a minute particle of earth drawn to scale, or even enlarged."

Other landscapes, the artist says, are landscapes of the brain. "They aim to show the immaterial world which dwells in the mind of man: disorder of images, of beginnings of images, of fading images...." Other landscapes later became transformed

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into tables. "It should be remarked," Dubuffet says, "that a table is in a way an elevated piece of ground. It is moreover, one of the objects to which a man's life is most intimately linked, and is adapted to serve both as a place and an instrument for intellectual pursuits, exemplified by the use of tables in religious worship, in the practice of magic and in spiritualistic seances."

Dubuffet's concern with new materials is apparent throughout the exhibition. New material and techniques, in fact, Selz says, furnish him with the reasons for new exploration while simultaneously leading him toward further discovery as they tap ever new resources in his imagination.

"The element of chance is welcomed, although channeled toward the artist's final aim. Dubuffet is the prestidigitator who uses the accident to perform his sorcery. The articulation resulting in the end is the product of the play among the artist's hand, his mental image and the nature of the material. Important as the material is to him, he never permits it to gain the upper hand; his attitude is never one of passive acceptance, but neither does he merely execute a preconceived image. He speaks of a dialogue between the artist and his materials and tools. The working process for him is a matter of adventure and discovery."

Works from the United States, France, England, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, and Canada are included.

Jean Dubuffet was born in Le Harve in 1901. As a young man he studied in Paris, became interested in the art of the insane through Dr. Hans Prizhorn's writings, and traveled in Italy and Brazil. In 1930 he started a small wholesale wine business which he abandoned a few years later, returned to in 1937 and again left to resume painting in 1942. Shortly after the liberation of France in 1944 he had his first one-man show in Paris. His second exhibition there in 1946 was a scandal among the critics, a success among collectors who bought everything. The next year he made his first trip to the Sahara to which he returned again that year and again in 1949.

Dubuffet's first New York show was in 1946 and in 1948 a painting was included in a Recent Acquisitions show at the Museum of Modern Art. Since then his work has been shown fairly regularly in New York and has been included in several group shows at the Museum of Modern Art. In November 1951 he made his first trip to New York where he lived for six months. He lives in Vence with his wife, Lili.

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Photographs and further information are available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19, N. Y. CI 5-8900.