

The Museum of Modern Art

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MAX ERNST: DADA AND THE DAWN OF SURREALISM

March 14 - May 2, 1993

A major exhibition focusing on the early work of Max Ernst (1891-1976), in celebration of the centennial anniversary of the German artist's birth, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on March 14, 1993. **MAX ERNST: DADA AND THE DAWN OF SURREALISM** explores the work Ernst created during the extraordinary years 1912-27, a period that marks a series of radical transformations in the artist's style, as well as the emergence of themes that continued throughout his life.

The exhibition emphasizes the years 1920-24, the period of Ernst's great innovations in collage and related techniques. Included are approximately 180 paintings, collages, drawings, and prints. The exhibition traces the many sources which inspired Ernst's enigmatic, often disturbing imagery, including classical mythology, Christian iconography, Freudian psychology, and appropriated imagery from popular sources.

MAX ERNST: DADA AND THE DAWN OF SURREALISM begins with the paintings Ernst created prior to and during World War I, when he was working in the vanguard Expressionist style. The year 1919, when he was introduced to Paul Klee, among other artists, and the works of Giorgio de Chirico, was a critical one for Ernst. This exposure, together with his disillusionment after the war, drew Ernst to the anti-aesthetic, inherently anarchistic revolt espoused by the Dadaists, and he became a co-founder of the movement in Cologne.

Over the next years, Ernst developed a body of intimate and ingenious works, including assemblages, prints made from commercial plates, rubbings, overpaintings of catalogue illustrations, and collages. He also added lengthy

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titles, which, instead of explaining his images, served to increase their mystery. The imagery during this period -- animated landscapes, anthropomorphized animals and plants, and humans with animal features -- became increasingly intriguing and dreamlike.

In the Dada period of 1920-21, with Hans Arp, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, and Ernst's wife Luise, Ernst created the so-called *fatagaga*, or *Fabrication de Tableaux Gasométriques Garantis*, which combined imagery and text. Represented in the exhibition, these collaborative works deemphasized the importance of individual authorship and, moreover, were regenerated as photographic enlargements to obscure the creative process.

By 1922, Ernst returned to creating easel paintings among his works. The imagery in these paintings is often based on his earlier, small collages. *Celebes* and *Ubu Imperator* -- two major paintings included in the exhibition -- evoke dreamlike, nightmarish, or obsessive states, foreshadowing Surrealism by several years.

In the year following Breton's *First Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924, Ernst invented the technique of frottage, making drawings by placing paper over such materials as floorboards, wickerwork, dried bread, string, cherry stems, seashells, leaves, and bark, and rubbing soft graphite over the paper. He soon adapted the frottage technique to works on canvas.

Ernst was born in Brühl, near Cologne, and attended the University in Bonn (1910-14). Although military service interrupted his studies, his academic background in literature, philosophy, and psychology was well beyond most artists of his day. Ernst's postwar activity first centered in Cologne, and then, in 1922, he emigrated to Paris. At the outbreak of World War II, Ernst was interned as an enemy alien by the French government. After two escape

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attempts, in 1941 he fled to New York with Peggy Guggenheim, to whom he was briefly married. In 1946 Ernst settled in Sedona, Arizona, with Dorothy Tanning, whom he married. In 1953 they returned to Paris, where Ernst eventually became a French citizen.

The exhibition, on view through May 2, was organized by The Menil Collection, Houston, as conceived by Walter Hopps, founding director, The Menil Collection, and William Camfield, professor of art history, Rice University, Houston; with Dr. Werner Spies, the renowned scholar of Max Ernst, and Susan Davidson, associate curator, The Menil Collection. It has been coordinated for The Museum of Modern Art by Kynaston McShine, senior curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture.

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After its New York showing, the exhibition travels to The Menil Collection, Houston (May 27 - August 29, 1993), and The Art Institute of Chicago (September 15 - November 30, 1993).

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For further information or photographic materials, contact Helen Bennett, press representative, the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9756. No.14