

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

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No. 97

FOR RELEASE:

Monday, October 7, 1968

FIVE MAJOR LOANS ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Five major paintings lent to The Museum of Modern Art by two leading collectors, Mrs. Bertram Smith of New York and Norton Simon of Fullerton, California, are on display at the Museum in an experimental installation that will be on view through November 3. This is the first of a series of temporary installations that Bates Lowry, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture as well as Director of the Museum, has introduced so that members of the staff can test methods of exhibiting works of art in ways that make them highly accessible to the viewer while permitting the Museum to live up to its role as conservator and protector.

The collection of Mrs. Smith, a Trustee of the Museum and a Patron of its collection, contains some of the finest examples of 20th-century art. From her private collection she has lent Wassily Kandinsky's Picture with an Archer and Picasso's Woman Dressing Her Hair. From his distinguished collection of paintings Mr. Simon, a Trustee of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and President and Trustee of the Hunt Foods & Industries Museum of Art, has lent Bathing Girls by Franz Marc, Still Life with Poem by Juan Gris, and Le Chinois by Georges Rouault, before they are permanently hung in the Hunt Museum of Art at Fullerton.

In this first experimental installation, which was designed by Mr. Lowry and Wilder Green, Director of the Museum's Exhibitions Program, the paintings are shown in a gallery in which the carpet that covers the floor continues upward to cover a two-foot high baffle that runs along the base of the gallery walls. Set about three feet away from the wall, the baffle conceals floor lights that illuminate the paintings and acts as an architectural barrier that prevents the paintings from being touched but is less obtrusive than the familiar rope and stanchions. The combined lighting from below and above casts an even light on the paintings and reduces the reflections where paintings are framed under glass.

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Kandinsky's Picture with an Archer of 1909 and Marc's Bathing Girls of 1910 represent the flowering of German Expressionism, the pioneer modern movement that used color as an expressive force. Gris's Still Life with Poem of 1915 belongs to the major movement that was then revolutionizing painting in France. His device of painting in a poem as if it were written on a scrap of paper and tacked onto the canvas is typically Cubist and demonstrates the strong ties that existed among Cubist painters and poets. The other two paintings date from the period between the wars. Rouault's Le Chinois of 1937 reflects his preoccupation with the theme of misery and war. Exhibited with the painting is the etching The Chinese Invented Gun Powder, They Say, and Gave It to Us, which Rouault finished about 1926 after some ten years of work and after which he modeled the painting. Picasso's Woman Dressing Her Hair of 1940, painted on the eve of the second World War, uses forms that derive from Cubism but betrays the despair of the Guernica, which Picasso had painted the previous year.

A large descriptive panel, which discusses the five paintings on loan and relates them to paintings in the Museum's permanent collection, accompanies the exhibition.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.

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FIVE MAJOR LOANS:
PAINTINGS LENT BY MRS. BERTRAM SMITH AND MR. NORTON SIMON

August 30 - November 3, 1968

Wall Label

Art in Europe before the first World War was marked by a spirit of revolt. Painters began to free color and form from their traditional allegiance to nature. No longer did a three-dimensional object have to be painted round and full, nor did a tree have to be painted green because it was that color in reality. During the first decade of the twentieth century Picasso and Braque liberated form, the French Fauves and the German Expressionists set color free.

Kandinsky, the leading spirit behind the German Expressionist movement, believed that just as every musical note has a distinct resonance and tone, every color and every form has a unique expressive quality. Thus, he felt, a picture could be built on chords of color and harmonies of form. In Picture with an Archer (1909), or his Church at Murnau of the same year (2nd floor, gallery 16), one can still recognize some forms--the mountain, the houses, the archer on his horse. But the picture contains a dramatic innovation: pure colored forms that explode across the canvas with a logic based not on nature but on pictorial and expressive needs.

Two years after Kandinsky painted Picture with an Archer he and Franz Marc founded the group known as Der Blaue Reiter. The members of this "Blue Rider" group shared a common desire to investigate the expressive qualities of color divorced from the visual reality in which sky had to be painted blue and grass, green. Hence the rose-colored tree trunks and lemon-yellow fields in Marc's Bathing Girls (c. 1910) are not unusual for a man who wrote: "Yellow is the feminine principle, gentle, serene, sensual. Red is matter, brutal and heavy." For Marc color describes not the object but the response of the artist to the object. This makes his painting fundamentally different from a Fauve work such as Derain's L'Estaque (2nd floor, gallery 4). The red tree trunk in the Derain painting is the result of primarily pictorial considerations, while the

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rose-toned trees in the painting by Marc reflect the artist's concern with the expressive qualities of color.

Juan Gris regarded his work as an expression of intellect rather than emotion. The relationship among Cubist painters and poets was a close one, and in Still Life with Poem (1915) Gris testifies to his affection for his friend the poet Pierre Reverdy by making it appear as if he had tacked one of his poems onto the canvas. Such illusionism occurs frequently in Cubist works of the period, as does the basic pictorial vocabulary of bottles and goblets, guitars, playing cards, and pipes, seen, for example, in Picasso's Pipe, Glass, Bottle of Rum (2nd floor, gallery 9). However, while the contemporary Synthetic Cubist works of his colleagues--for example Braque's Oval Still Life or Metzinger's Still Life with Lamp (both 2nd floor, gallery 10)--were essentially flat and lacking in pictorial depth, Gris almost always retains a degree of three-dimensionality in his work. His traditional Cubist objects rest on the table as well as on the canvas.

Following the first World War, European artists became grim commentators on the human scene, stressing content as well as problems of color and form. Perhaps few were so suited to this role as Rouault. As early as 1916 he had begun a series of etchings on the subject of misery and war. One of these prints, completed in 1926, bears the title: The Chinese Invented Gun Powder, They Say, and Gave It to Us. As Rouault worked on the etching he also began a related painting, finishing Le Chinois eleven years after the print. Once the full title is known the ironies of the picture emerge: A Chinese scholar musing by a vase of flowers and a painting of a soldier marching off to war.

Picasso's work, too, reflects the dark mood of the times. In 1937 he had responded publicly to the outrage of war by painting Guernica (3rd floor, gallery 4). But even his smaller, more private work shows an anguished dissolution of the human form. In the spring of 1940, as war spread across Europe, Picasso painted Woman Dressing Her Hair. The lavenders and greens that had characterized such paintings as Still Life with Red Bull's Head (3rd floor, gallery 4) of 1938, and Night Fishing at Antibes of the following year (3rd floor vestibule), here become somber purple and dark green. Against this ground the distorted woman's form emerges white and dead, like something fossilized. The irony is sharpened by the woman's hands, fumbling to arrange the hair on what is already a corpse.

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Checklist

GRIS, Juan. Spanish, 1887-1927.

Still Life with Poem. 1915
Oil on canvas
Lent by Norton Simon.

KANDINSKY, Wassily. Russian, 1866-1944.

Picture with an Archer. 1909
Oil on canvas
Lent by Mrs. Bertram Smith

MARC, Franz. German, 1880-1916.

Bathing Girls. c.1910
Oil on canvas
Lent by Norton Simon

PICASSO, Pablo. Spanish, born 1881.

Woman Dressing Her Hair. 1940
Oil on canvas
Lent by Mrs. Bertram Smith

ROUAULT, Georges. French, 1871-1958

Le Chinois. 1937
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas
Lent by Norton Simon