

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

Press release

The Nature of Arp

April 13 – September 2, 2019

Curated by Catherine Craft, Nasher Sculpture Center

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

From April 13 through September 2, 2019 the **Peggy Guggenheim Collection** presents ***The Nature of Arp***, curated by Catherine Craft and organized by the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, first venue of the show. The Peggy Guggenheim Collection is particularly pleased to host the exhibition in light of their close relationship dating from 1995 when the Venice garden was named the Nasher Sculpture Garden in recognition of the Nashers' generous support towards its renovation. This exhibition investigates in depth the achievements of **Jean (Hans) Arp** (1886-1966), one of the most important and multifaceted artists of the modern era, whose experimental approach to creation, radical rethinking of traditional art forms, and collaborative proclivities resonate with the wide-ranging character of art today.

Over a career spanning more than six decades, Arp produced a remarkably influential body of work in a rich variety of materials and formats. A founder of the Dada movement and pioneer of abstraction, he developed a vocabulary of curving, organic forms that moved fluidly between abstraction and representation and became a common point of reference for several generations of artists. The seven works by Arp nowadays belonging to the **Peggy Guggenheim Collection** provide a rich starting point for this exhibition, as Arp was the first artist to enter Peggy Guggenheim's collection with his small bronze sculpture ***Head and Shell*** (*Tête et coquille*) dated 1933. "The first thing I bought for collection was an Arp bronze. [Arp] took me to the foundry where it had been cast and I fell so in love with it that I asked to have it in my hands. The instant I felt it I wanted to own it" wrote Peggy Guggenheim in her autobiography "*Out of This Century*" (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979). She then enthusiastically added sculptures, as well as collages, reliefs and works on paper to her holdings. Likewise, Patsy Nasher purchased a bronze sculpture by Arp, *Torso with Buds*, for her husband Raymond on his birthday, and it turned out to be — as for Peggy — the founding work of the famed Nasher collection of modern sculpture. Peggy Guggenheim included Arp's work in several exhibitions of contemporary sculpture that she organized, first in her London gallery in 1938, then at her museum/gallery Art of This Century in New York, in a solo exhibition in 1944. Furthermore, in the autumn of 1949, Peggy organized her first exhibition of contemporary sculpture at Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, of which this year marks the 70th anniversary, where she exhibited two works by Arp: *Head and Shell* and *Crown of Buds I*, 1936, which are both included in the exhibition. Then Arp won the grand prize for Sculpture at the XXVII Venice Biennale in 1954 and was a frequent guest at Peggy's palazzo during the 1950s as attested by his witty sketches in her guest books.

Bringing together more than 70 objects, including sculptures in plaster, wood, bronze, and stone, painted wood reliefs, collages, drawings, textiles, and illustrated books, ***The Nature of Arp*** includes works drawn from prominent U.S. and European museums, foundations, and private collections. Significant loans include

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the earliest documented Dada relief, *Plant-Hammer* (1917; Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, Netherlands); all three of the artist's surviving multipart works of the early 1930s, innovative reconceptions of sculptural form that rejected the pedestal and encouraged viewers to interact with movable elements (from the collections of Tate Modern, London; the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg; and the Museum Jorn, Silkeborg); and a group of works made in collaboration with his wife, the artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp, including their joint wood sculpture, *Marital Sculpture* (1937; Stiftung Arp, Berlin/Rolandswerth).

The title *The Nature of Arp* reflects in part the special role accorded to nature in Arp's work. Disillusioned by the destructiveness of World War I, Arp rejected traditional approaches to making art—especially art that claimed to imitate the appearance of nature—and instead sought creative strategies analogous to processes found in nature, such as growth, gravity, decay, and chance. In nature, Arp saw a force wiser and more constructive than the human arrogance that was so frequently the target of his absurdist humor. The exhibition also reflects the nature of Arp himself. In response to the butchery of World War I, Arp fled at the age of 28 to neutral Switzerland, where in 1916 he became one of the founders of Dada, an experimental, iconoclastic artistic and literary movement whose rejection of the established order reinforced Arp's own inclinations. Born in Strasbourg, Alsace, at a time when the region was subject to an extended struggle for control between France and Germany—one of the very factors that had contributed to the war—Arp responded with an adamant rejection of militarism and nationalism, along with an energetic, lifelong exploration of practices common in today's global art world. Switching easily between Alsatian dialect, French, and German (signaled by the dual Jean/Hans of his name), Arp deftly negotiated boundaries between cultures, movements, and mediums, at ease being identified as a Dadaist, a Surrealist, or an abstractionist, a painter or a sculptor, an artist or a poet. Defying the sectarian currents that would fuel two world wars, he befriended and worked with a stunning range of artists and writers of many different nationalities and sensibilities, evidenced in *The Nature of Arp* by a selection of collaborative projects, including books, magazines, and works on paper. In two galleries, adjacent to the exhibition, selected works from Peggy Guggenheim's collection by artists associated with Arp, including Theo van Doesburg, Max Ernst, Jean Hélion, and Kurt Schwitters will also be on view.

The Nature of Arp is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue with a central essay by the curator of the exhibition, Nasher Curator Catherine Craft, an introduction to the list of works that details the current state of Arp research, a detailed chronology, and additional essays by established and emerging scholars: Lewis Kachur, professor of art history at Kean University, Union, New Jersey, and pioneer in the analysis of artists as curators and exhibition-makers; Walburga Krupp, a research associate at Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, Zurich, co-editor of a collection of Sophie Taeuber-Arp's correspondence and co-curator of a forthcoming Taeuber-Arp retrospective; and Tessa Paneth-Pollak, assistant professor of art history at Michigan State University, who is writing a book on cut-outs in modern art.

Free tours of the exhibition are offered daily at 3:30 pm; museum ticket purchase required. Members always visit the museum for free.

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