

PRESS RELEASE
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TATE MODERN

DOROTHEA TANNING

27 February – 9 June 2019

Open daily 10.00 – 18.00 and until 22.00 on Friday and Saturday

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Supported by The Destina Foundation, with additional support from the Dorothea Tanning Exhibition Supporters Circle, Tate Americas Foundation, Tate International Council and Tate Members

This Spring, Tate Modern will stage a major exhibition of the work of pioneering artist Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012). Organised in collaboration with the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, it will be the first large-scale exhibition of her work for 25 years and the first ever to span Tanning's remarkable seven-decade career. Bringing together some 100 works from across the globe, the exhibition will explore how she expanded the language of Surrealism. From her early enigmatic paintings, to her ballet designs, uncanny stuffed textile sculptures, installations and large-scale late works, it will offer a rare opportunity to experience the artist's unique internal world.

The exhibition will follow the story of Tanning's life and work, from her influential first encounters with Surrealism in New York in the 1930s, through to her later years as a painter, poet and writer. Prominent early works will be brought together, such as the artist's powerful self-portrait *Birthday* 1942 (Philadelphia Museum of Art) which attracted the attention of Max Ernst whom she married in 1946. These will join key examples of Tanning's mid-career prismatic paintings, as well as and her later soft sculptures to show the full breath of her practice.

Born in 1910 in Galesburg, Illinois, Tanning wanted to depict 'unknown but knowable states': to suggest there was more to life than meets the eye. Early in her career she explored domesticity as a central theme, combining the familiar with the strange to turn the home into a Surrealist space. Significant works from this period such as *Children's Games* 1942 (private collection) and *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* 1943 (Tate), exemplify Tanning's interest in suppressed desires and burgeoning sexuality. Poetic imagery of young girls, domestic interiors and half-open doors are frequent motifs in these paintings derived from the artist's love of Gothic and Romantic literature. This interest is also reflected in her fictional writings and poems, spanning from the 1940s to her last collection of poems *Coming to That*, published at the age of 100.

Tate Modern will explore the artist's life-long passion for dance, music and performance, which became particularly prevalent in her more abstract paintings from the mid-1950s. Tanning described these works as 'prismatic', in reference to the effects of colour and elements of figuration which come in and out of focus, as seen in *Insomnias* 1953 (Moderna Museet, Stockholm). Beautiful examples of her set and costume designs for ballets by George Balanchine and John Cranko in the late 1940-50s will be shown alongside dynamic figurative paintings such as *Tango Lives* 1977 (Moderna Museet, Stockholm), to shed new light on these images of splintered but sensual forms.

In the mid-1960s Tanning turned to her Singer sewing machine to make a highly original 'family' of soft sculptures that will be a key focus of the exhibition. These hand-crafted, anthropomorphic forms, in between bodies and objects, inspired a legacy of their own in the world of Surrealist sculpture, with echoes in the works of Louise Bourgeois, Sarah Lucas and others. Important pieces such as *Etreinte* 1969 (The Destina Foundation, New York) and *Nue Couchée* 1969-70 (Tate) feature limb-like forms contorted, transformed and intertwined. A highlight will be the room-sized installation *Chambre 202, Hôtel du Pavot* 1970-3 (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris). At once sensual and eerie, this major work features bodily shapes growing out of the walls and furniture of an imaginary hotel room, transforming this interior space into one of Surrealist possibility.

Dorothea Tanning is curated by Alyce Mahon, Reader in Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Cambridge, and Ann Coxon, Curator, International Art, Tate Modern, supported by Emma Lewis and Hannah Johnston, Assistant Curators, International Art, Tate Modern. The exhibition is organised by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid in collaboration with Tate Modern.

For press information contact joanna.sandler@tate.org.uk / rachael.young@tate.org.uk or call +44(0)20 7887 4942 / 8732 . High resolution press images can be downloaded from tate.org.uk/press