

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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****PRESS PREVIEW**

Tuesday, June 28, 1983

East Building 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

ARP: THE DADA RELIEFS
AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. June 13, 1983. The first exhibition to focus solely on Jean (Hans) Arp's rare Dada relief constructions goes on view in the National Gallery of Art's East Building July 3 through October 30, 1983. Arp was a major figure in the creation of the twentieth-century Dada movement in Zurich, where Dada began, and in Paris and Cologne as well. He was the first artist to experiment with automatism --the spontaneous, unpremeditated creation of art--which prepared the way for the development of surrealism.

The medium of the relief construction was central in the work of Arp. While he made over 800 reliefs between 1914 and his death in 1966, only 42 Dada reliefs are known to have been made between 1915 and 1922. Sixteen reliefs from this period as well as five later reliefs are included in the exhibition. All are made of wood, sometimes polished or painted.

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In addition, several automatic drawings and collages have been included to show their relationship to the reliefs which have been drawn from American and European museums and private collections.

Arp introduced a new formal language, biomorphism, in his automatic drawings, using abstract natural shapes such as trees, vegetables, navels, birds, and fish. These drawings were translated into cutout wooden forms which were then assembled, often with the element of chance as a factor in their construction and final painting.

In the (1916) Forest, in the National Gallery's collection, which is one of his most famous and most frequently reproduced reliefs, the wooden shapes of a tree, mushroom, and the sun/moon are recognizable. They are sharply defined by their three-dimensional character and Arp's use of intense colors.

Another Forest (c.1916), from the Cleveland Museum of Art, is oval in format and more abstract. The curvilinear forms of the painted wooden elements suggest a forest only in the biomorphic character of their shapes.

Between 1921 and 1924, Arp moved away from automatism and the reliance upon natural subjects. Arp depended instead upon everyday objects in unlikely combinations as seen in Shirtfront and Fork (1922). In these later works, Arp moved toward a protosurrealist style. Also on view is The Eggboard (1928), a relief inspired by a tennis game played with raw eggs. A poem by the same title, written as a commentary on Zurich society, is included in the exhibition.

(more)

Dada, more a state of mind than an art style, was a literary movement as well. Arp and his Zurich literary colleagues started the Dada movement in response to what Arp called the "slaughterhouses" of World War I. The focal point of Zurich Dada was the Cabaret Voltaire, where the Dada artists' performances and behavior shocked audiences of middle-class values. It was here, briefly, that ideas were exchanged and that funds were raised to publish the artists' works.

While Dada was an antiart movement seeking to replace existing art forms, Arp, who considered himself a painter, was influenced by the collages of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, and by the reliefs of the latter, folded paper or tin cutouts which were hung on walls like paintings. This influence is seen in the geometric forms and planes of varying depths in Arp's 1915 Crucifixion, which opens the exhibition.

Arp: The Dada Reliefs is the sixth exhibition in a series exploring the works of twentieth-century artists, including Mondrian, Picasso, Kandinsky, Bellows, and Braque. E. A. Carmean, Jr., curator of the Gallery's department of twentieth-century art, organized the series and has written the brochure which accompanies the Arp exhibition.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs please contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Amiot, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565 (202) 842-6353.