

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan
Katie Ziglar
(202) 842-6353

IMPORTANT NEW ACQUISITION INCLUDED IN DADA INSTALLATION

AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Washington, DC, August 23, 1989 -- Francis Picabia's Machine Turn Quickly (Machine tournez vite), 1916-1918, recently acquired by the National Gallery of Art, will go on display at the Gallery for the first time August 27, 1989. It will be included in an installation of dada art on view through February 25, 1990 within the installation, Twentieth-Century Art: Selections for the Tenth Anniversary of the East Building. Machine Turn Quickly was purchased with income from the Patrons' Permanent Fund of the National Gallery.

"It is with great delight that we unveil Machine Turn Quickly, one of Picabia's most beautiful works," said National Gallery director J. Carter Brown. "This is the first Picabia to be acquired by the National Gallery, and we are grateful to the Patrons' Permanent Fund for making it possible," he added.

The dada movement of "anti-art" arose in Europe and in America from a mood of disillusionment about events leading to World War I. Dada artists in New York, led by Marcel Duchamp, Picabia, and the American, Man Ray, emphasized word play, the absurd, and the importance of chance in artistic creation. Dada did not involve a specific artistic style, but its practitioners often used machine imagery to portray human activity.

Machine Turn Quickly, relates to the "machine paintings" or "mechanthropomorphic" images that Picabia, a Frenchman of Cuban ancestry, began to produce in New York in 1915. Picabia explained his interest in machine imagery by stating, "The machine has become more than a mere adjunct of life. It really is a part of human life -- perhaps the very soul." The gouache and metallic paint composition depicts two gears with intermeshed sprockets. The smaller gear, labeled with a "1," and the larger gear, noted by a "2," are identified by Picabia as "woman" and "man" in the lower left-hand corner of the work. The gears are literally and symbolically enmeshed in an endlessly repeated cycle, giving the obvious sexual metaphor strong psychological and social overtones.

Picabia created this ironic and insistent image of modernity with the careful delicacy of a medieval manuscript illuminator. The gears, modeled in a range of subtle blue tones against a black ground on paper, are overlaid by a series of gold geometric forms and intersecting lines. His use of metallic paint recalls gold leaf, and his spiralling lines have an almost calligraphic effect.

Other works of art, also from the National Gallery's permanent collection, that will be installed with Machine Turn Quickly are The Box in a Valise, 1941/1959, by Marcel Duchamp, a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, and Untitled (Medici Prince), c. 1953, by Joseph Cornell, gift of the National Gallery Collectors Committee. Duchamp was a friend of Picabia and Cornell and influenced the artistic concepts of both.

A Frenchman who became an American citizen, Duchamp conceived The Box in a Valise in Paris on the eve of the Second World War. The box was to be a kind of portable briefcase filled with miniature replicas of his earlier works, to be treated as a work of art in its own right, and reproduced in an on-going series limited to an edition of 300. Five slightly varying editions of the box were issued between 1941 and 1968.

picabia acquired/installed at national gallery . . . page three

Many of the works in The Box in a Valise are associated with the most important work of Duchamp's career, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, generally known as The Large Glass. The painting depicts an elaborate mating ritual between the machine-like bride in the upper half of the glass and the uniformed bachelors in the lower half. Duchamp's invention of technically complex machine forms to embody human behavior can be seen as a crucial example to Picabia for his Machine Turn Quickly.

Other Duchamp works of art represented in the Box include examples of his "ready-mades," the most famous of which is Fountain, a urinal turned 90 degrees and signed R. Mutt, one of the artist's pseudonyms. Another "ready-made" miniaturized for the Box is WANTED/\$2,000 REWARD, a wanted poster that Duchamp found in a restaurant in New York on which he placed his own picture. Characteristic of the artist are amusing word plays, such as the name of the wanted criminal's establishment, "Hooke, Lyon and Cinqueur."

The highly personalized expression of the American sculptor Joseph Cornell developed in part from exposure to the dada and surrealist movements. Cornell was among the first to be asked by Duchamp to help assemble the many parts of The Box in a Valise in 1941, when Duchamp brought its miniature replicas from Paris to New York.

picabia acquired/installed at national gallery . . . page four

Cornell's work consists of nostalgic assemblages, usually housed in small boxes, which are enigmatic in meaning and whimsical in inspiration. Untitled (Medici Prince) belongs to a series of works conceived around a reproduction of a sixteenth-century Italian painting of Piero de'Medici as a young boy. This fantastic arrangement of unrelated objects including maps, balls, and bits of French texts, intended to spark unexpected associations in the viewer's imagination, is characteristically ordered and balanced with seemingly mathematical precision.

The dada installation at the National Gallery has been coordinated by Nan Rosenthal, curator of twentieth-century art, and Marla Prather, acting assistant curator of twentieth-century art.