

The Museum of Modern Art

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART TRANSFORMS ITS HOLDINGS OF EARLY 20TH-CENTURY ART WITH MAJOR ACQUISITIONS FROM THE MERRILL C. BERMAN COLLECTION

324 Works by 97 Artists Offer Expansive Stories of Historical Avant-Gardes

NEW YORK, May 17, 2018—The Museum of Modern Art has acquired more than 300 masterworks of The Merrill C. Berman Collection, one of the most significant collections of early 20th-century works on paper in private hands. The Museum’s acquisition focuses on the core of Mr. Berman’s collection—works that vividly demonstrate the wide-ranging experimentation and political and social engagement of artists in this period. The selected works offer an overview of the major avant-garde movements of the era—Dada, the Bauhaus, de Stijl, Futurism, and Russian Constructivism—and include unparalleled and pioneering works by renowned figures such as Aleksandr Rodchenko, Lyubov Popova, John Heartfield, and Hannah Höch. Its graphic design includes exceptional examples of the period’s new typography and dynamic combinations of word and image in posters and books, while its extensive representation of photomontage proves that strategy’s dominance in the early 20th century. The acquisition is made possible by trustees and supporters of The Museum of Modern Art in recognition of the Museum’s 90th anniversary in 2019.

“Long admired by our curators across the Museum for its outstanding representation of the avant-garde activities of the first decades of the 20th century, the Merrill C. Berman Collection is a transformative addition to the Museum’s holdings,” said Glenn D. Lowry, Director, The Museum of Modern Art. “In bringing this private collection to the public, this acquisition offers the possibility of sharing new and complex stories of the period with our visitors while making rare historical materials available to scholars.”

“By representing crucial figures—often women and artists from lesser-known geographies—missing or underrepresented in our collection, this extraordinary body of work is especially welcome as the Museum continues its commitment to diversifying modernism’s narratives with its forthcoming expansion in 2019,” said Christophe Cherix, the Robert Lehman Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints. “The practices, strategies, and languages of artists involved in Futurism, Constructivism, and Dada continue to challenge contemporary artists, scholars, and audiences, allowing opportunities to make links between the radical experimentation of the early 20th century and contemporary art.”

The Berman Collection, which has been a key source of loans to MoMA exhibitions on the early 20th century—from the 1998 Rodchenko monograph to the 2009 *Bauhaus, 1919–*

1933: Workshops for Modernity to the 2016 *Dadaglobe Reconstructed*, among many others—showcases avant-garde movements including: the Bauhaus, with a mix of unparalleled, unique works that fill gaps in the Museum’s collection and a wealth of rare graphic material that demonstrates the activities of the school; Dada, with a focus on standout Berlin examples by such artists as Raoul Hausmann, whose radical photomontage practice was not previously represented in MoMA’s collection, Hannah Höch, and Johannes Baader; and the Soviet avant-garde, with unique works and graphic material that present the fundamental contribution of Soviet artists to modernism.

The newly acquired works powerfully demonstrate the links between art and politics, especially in moments of war and revolution and social and economic change. To immerse oneself in this collection is to experience the far-reaching and profound impact of the early 20th century’s momentous events—World War I, the Russian Revolution, the rise of fascism—and to see wholesale shifts in industry, technology, and labor. Lydia Naumova, for example, used photomontage to tell a history of international trade unions and the Communist Party, while Lyubov Popova designed sets, costumes, and posters for a new revolutionary workers’ theater, transforming the stage for ideological ends.

One of the key narratives of the Berman Collection is the history of photomontage, a groundbreaking artistic language of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, and one that remains essential today. Artists took advantage of the proliferation of what was then new media, cutting and pasting together bits of printed photographic and widely circulated images. The results were works that were distinctly connected to the world and captured the spirit of the new age: in their bold collisions and juxtapositions, in their deployment of photographs of crowds and striding leaders, and in their presentations of laborers, cities, and factories. Innovators of this cut-and-paste strategy well represented in the Berman Collection include John Heartfield, who protested Nazism and fascism by combining found images to create charged meanings, and Valentina Kulagina in the Soviet Union, who used photomontage in posters and broadsides to demand participation in new forms of labor. A major strength of this collection is the way Berman collected maquettes along with their final products, which will allow viewers to better understand process and technique.

Containing 96 works by women artists, the Berman Collection illuminates the essential roles they played in this period, enabling the Museum to present expanded, complex, and diverse stories of the practitioners, strategies, and subjects of the early 20th century. Many of these artists—including Elena Semenova and Fré Cohen—are represented in depth in the Berman Collection, making possible overviews of entire careers. Iconic works further deepen understandings of key artists, including those by Lyubov Popova and Vavara Stepanova, while others, Maria Bri-Bein and Franceska Clausen, are entirely new to the collection, introducing new histories, forms, and ideas.

The Berman Collection is particularly strong in the art of Central and Eastern Europe, keenly demonstrating the importance of Budapest, Warsaw, and Prague as modern centers and hotbeds of avant-garde experimentation, and revealing the networks of activities in the region and communication with the West. Henryk Berlewi of Poland, whose drawings are a standout

in Berman's collection, called for an art that was equivalent to the new industry; Lajos Kassák established activist journals in Budapest and Vienna; and Czech designer Ladislav Sutnar pioneered information graphics.

The Museum will make this material available through exhibitions, gallery displays, and publications, encouraging collaborative study, research, dialogues, and debate by MoMA curators and outside scholars. As a start, the Museum will organize and present a major exhibition of works drawn from The Merrill C. Berman Collection within the next few years, and will publish an accompanying scholarly catalogue.

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