

# The Museum of Modern Art

## MoMA ANNOUNCES THE FIRST MAJOR TRANSATLANTIC RETROSPECTIVE DEDICATED TO VISIONARY SWISS ARTIST MERET OPPENHEIM

### Exhibition Brings Together Over 180 Works Spanning Five Decades, Highlighting Oppenheim's Prolific and Multifaceted Career

**NEW YORK, August 11, 2021**—The Museum of Modern Art announces *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition*, the first major transatlantic exhibition—and the first in the United States in over 25 years—to survey this visionary Swiss artist's career. On view October 30, 2022, through March 4, 2023, the exhibition considers the full scope of Oppenheim's lifelong innovation through over 180 works, including paintings, sculptures, objects, collages, and drawings. *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition* is organized by The Museum of Modern Art; Kunstmuseum Bern; and the Menil Collection, Houston. Organized by Anne Umland, Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA; Nina Zimmer, Director, Kunstmuseum Bern; and Natalie Dupêcher, Assistant Curator of Modern Art, the Menil Collection; with Lee Colón, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA. Prior to its presentation at MoMA, the exhibition will be shown at the Kunstmuseum Bern in Oppenheim's native Switzerland (October 22, 2021–February 13, 2022) and at the Menil Collection in Houston (March 25–September 18, 2022).

Over the course of 50 years, Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985) produced an unconventional body of work that was characterized by her fierce originality and wit. At the time of her death in 1985, at age 72, her creations encompassed uncanny object constructions, narrative paintings, and geometric abstractions, as well as jewelry designs, public sculpture commissions, and poetry. The exhibition will explore all of these facets of Oppenheim's career, from early paintings such as *Quick, Quick, the Most Beautiful Vowel is Voiding, M.E. by M.O.* (1934), to mid-career sculptures such as *The Green Spectator* (1959), to monumental late works like *New Stars* (1977–82). Her broad thematic interests ranged from the natural world and mythology to gender and selfhood. "Nobody will give you freedom," she stated in 1975, "You have to take it."

Oppenheim's artistic career began in 1930s Paris. At the age of 23, she produced her best-known work, *Object* (1936), a fur-lined cup, saucer, and spoon, which MoMA subsequently acquired, making it the first museum to collect Oppenheim's work. Unique to MoMA's presentation of *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition*, this groundbreaking object catapulted Oppenheim to fame within French Surrealist circles, and subsequently provoked an intense response from American audiences when it was included in the landmark MoMA exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (1936–37).

During her early years in Paris, Oppenheim created doodle-like drawings, enigmatic paintings, uncanny objects, collages, and designs for jewelry and other fashion accessories. In 1937, she returned to Switzerland, where she trained as an art conservator and created relatively few works until an artistic reemergence in 1954, when she creatively flourished once again. The exhibition, which will be organized chronologically, will situate the artist's remarkable work of the 1950s to the mid-1980s in relation to her precocious 1930s Surrealist production, giving parity to all moments and aspects of her career.

One of Oppenheim's final projects was a series of 12 drawings, later titled by the artist *M.O.: My Exhibition (M.O.: Mon Exposition)*, which provided the inspiration for the current retrospective's title. In these drawings, the artist imagined an exhibition of her life's work,

drawing in miniature approximately 200 works she had selected for inclusion. She presented a version of this exhibition in 1984, in her adopted home city of Bern, but always emphasized that it was “only an example” among many possibilities. *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition* will showcase the artist’s expansive imagination and remarkably open concept of art, which is united by the singularity and force of her vision and which defies neat categorizations of style, medium, and historical movement.

“The subversive humor and imaginative range of Oppenheim’s decades-long artistic practice has yet to be fully appreciated,” said Umland. “We are delighted to partner with the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Menil Collection in sharing the unruly expanse of her work with a larger audience.”

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, to be published in English and German, that surveys work from the Swiss artist’s celebrated debut in 1930s Paris, the period during which her notorious fur-lined *Object* was made, through her post–World War II artistic development, which included engagements with international Pop, Nouveau Réalisme, and Conceptual art, and up to her death in 1985. Essays by curators Nina Zimmer, Natalie Dupêcher, and Anne Umland critically examine the artist’s wide-ranging, wildly varied body of work, and her active role in shaping the narrative of her life and art, providing the context for her creative production pre– and post–World War II.

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