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Artist biography MAX ERNST (1891-1976)

Max Ernst is a German painter, sculptor and poet. He's one of the brightest figures of Surrealism. The artist was born in 2 April 1891 in Brühl, Germany. He was a second child in a catholic family of Philipp and Luise Ernst (Fiedorek).

In 1908, Max Ernst graduated from the lyceum in his native town, and in 1909 he started studying philosophy in the University of Bonn. During his studies at university, Ernst thoroughly studied psychology and showed a great interest to the art of mentally ill people. Soon young Ernst left the university and fully devoted himself to art. A great influence on this decision had a famous expressionist August Macke. In his house Ernst met Hans Arp and they became friends (Fiedorek).

First works by Max Ernst were exposed in 1912 in Feldman gallery in Cologne. In the same year on Sonderbund exhibition Ernst first saw the works of Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso, Eduard Monet and Vincent Van Gog, that had a great influence on formation of his views. In the summer of 1913, Ernst exposed his works on the exhibition of Rein artists and the art exhibition in Berlin (Ernst, Spies).

Max Ernst served in the German army during the I World War. In 1915, he got a promotion and was transferred into the quiet zone, where he could paint. In March 1916, his personal exhibition took place in Berlin.

In 1918, Max Ernst married Luise Straus, an art historian, and in 1920 their son Jimmy was born. Then in 1919 Ernst came back to Cologne, where he got acquainted with Johannes Baargeld. In Italian magazine "Valori Plastici" he saw copies of paintings by Giorgio de Chirico that inspired him to create an

album of eight lithographs " Fiat modes - pereat ars". Ernst also illustrated the collection of poems by Johan Coleman and began to experiment with different materials and the collage technique. In these works Ernst tried to show his reaction on the world situation in 1919. The artist writes that he was trying to see process of organizing a meeting of two realities on an inappropriate background (Ernst, Spies).

Max Ernst together with Johannes Baargeld participated in creation of the Dada art group in Cologne (Keller 24). This movement appeared in literature, art, theatre and cinema as a reaction of creative people on terrible events of the World War I. Dadaists' works denied social, moral and artistic values. Creating his works, Ernst used prints from scientific publications and old catalogs, handouts and posters, pages of popular novels, etc. The plot, taken from its context and transferred to an absurd surrounding, turned into a surreal image.

In 1920, the next exhibition of Dada artists named " The Early Spring of Dada" (Dada-Vorfrühling) opened. It caused aggression of the audience that demanded to remove objects breaking public order. Dada exhibitions were like a bolt from the blue, and their echo reached Paris, New York and Zurich. This initiated the exchange of letters and works. Soon Andre Breton invited Max Ernst to Paris in order to organize his own exhibition. Ernst was very pleased, so he decided to agree (Ernst, Spies).

In 1921 Ernst met Paul Éluard, who became his close friend. Paul and his wife Gala helped Max Ernst in the early days of life in Paris. In the summer of 1921 Ernst went to Tirol, where he met other Dadaists: Hans Arp, Sophie Tauber, Tristan Tzara. In the same year Ernst created those works that

nowadays are considered the samples of the early Surrealism (for example, “Elephant Celebes”). At that time, the artist was in search of a special technique, more dependent on chance than collage. In that way he invented frottage - drawing with using hatching of paper laid over the textured object. Max Ernst also used other automated techniques. For example, he splashed paint on two canvases and put just painted pictures one over another. In this way the artist could get two paintings with unexpected patterns (Fiedorek). In 1922 Ernst creates his “Oedipus Rex”, and those, who know the content of the famous classic tragedy by Sophocles, would be astonished by this work and its name. Nothing on this painting reminds about the story of the Greek king or the well-known Freud's “Oedipus complex”.

It is quite difficult to interpret the images of “Oedipus Rex”, but using birds is a usual method for Ernst to depict people. Attempting to understand what the idea of this work is, we may assume, that the hand sticking out of a brick wall symbolizes somebody unknown (a hidden force), who's holding a walnut (that symbolizes a human mind). We can't see the owner of this hand, but we see an iron tool, a needle and an arrow, piercing both the hand and the nut. These iron elements may represent the struggle and contradictions that rend both the hand and the walnut. Fingers are immobilized with the iron tool, but they still are holding this almost ruptured nut.

It is interesting that we see only birds' heads but not bodies. It seems like they can't move; their eyes are red because of tension; their movements are restrained by the fence and the rope tied to bird's horns. It's likely that these heads embody human freedom to live, think and choose own way, confined by outward circumstances and forces.

Paintings of forest series (for example, "Forest") by Ernst give an impression of mystery and anxiety. Max Ernst used grattage technique to give his paintings the feeling of forest. These pictures are exciting and repulsive at the same time.

His forests are naked; they get dressed only in mystery and greatness. They're quite simple at first sight - repeating elements of composition: numerous tall dark trees and some space for the grey sky, the sun or the moon circle and sometimes a lonely bird. But the feeling of fear of the unknown is so strong. The symbol of forest itself represents human subconscious. The ladders of trees are rising to the sky, almost touching the sun. These pictures are more like frightful dreams. At the roots of trees you won't see the light.

In 1930, Max Ernst cooperated with Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel working on the film "An Andalusian dog". In 1932, Ernst had the first own exhibition in New York, and in 1936 his works were represented in the gallery of Dadaism and Surrealism in the New York Museum of Modern Art.

The Second World War forced Ernst to leave his favorite Paris. After two years of constant suspicions and persecutions (as Max Ernst was a German citizen) the artist fled to the United States with Peggy Guggenheim, who helped him (Max Ernst Biography). They got married in 1942, but this marriage didn't last long. They divorced in 1943, and the reason was a new love.

The artist met Dorothea Tanning, who also was an artist, and they fell in love. In 1943, Ernst was 52, when he painted his "Vox Angelica", inspired by his new relationship with Dorothea. This great work is divided on 52 parts

with different plots (Keller 24).

In 1944 Ernst was offered to participate in the film " Dreams that money can buy". The episode with Ernst was named " Desire"; he wrote dialogues for it and played the part of the president. That summer he spent with Dorothea in the Great River (Long Island). Ernst made a studio from a garage for working with sculptures of wood and plaster. At that time Ernst also created some of his best paintings, like " The Eye of Silence". The artist began experimenting with a style of natural forms.

In 1946, Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning got married in Hollywood. In 1948, Ernst published an essay " Beyond Painting". Together with Dorothy he finally moved back to Paris in 1950 and lived in France the rest of his life. In 1975, two great retrospective exhibitions of works by Ernst were opened in Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and in Grand-Palais National Gallery in Paris (Max Ernst Biography).

Max Ernst died on 1 April 1976 in Paris and was buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery.

Oedipus Rex, 1922

Forest. 1927

Vox Angelica. 1945

The Eye of Silence. 1943-1944

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