

JEAN ARP. THE NAVEL OF THE AVANT-GARDE**Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin****June 28 to October 11, 2015**

The retrospective exhibition "Jean Arp. The Navel of the Avant-Garde" is dedicated to one of the most significant artists of the 20th century. A co-founder of Dadaism and pioneer of Surrealism, this radical artist personality was a key participant in the development of modern abstract art. The large-scale show in Berlin's Georg Kolbe Museum traces the oeuvre of this lyrical and political artist. It features an abundance of sculptures, reliefs, prints, photographs, poems and texts, making a re-discovery of Jean Arp's work possible.

The German-French artist Jean Arp (1886–1966), known as Hans in the German-speaking world, was one of the key figures in the history of avant-garde art in Europe. Aspiring to unite art and life, Arp's artistic pursuits are reflected in his active role as a co-founder of influential networks. Numerous avant-garde artists from the first half of the 20th century sought new means of artistic expression in diverse groupings and found them in the radical formal vocabulary of abstraction with completely innovative intellectual approaches. In the process, the concepts they proposed in numerous manifestos were often extremely divergent and marked by strong ideological slants. Jean Arp, who always maintained his own autonomy and followed solely his own principles, was nevertheless accepted into various, in many cases contrary groups. He was thus a key figure in several pioneering avant-garde currents whose tendencies he united in his own distinctive oeuvre. Aside from the crucial role he played in Dadaism and his good contacts to the Surrealists, he was a central member of the "Abstraction-Création" association that also included such leading international avant-gardists as Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky and Max Bill.

Hans Arp developed an innovative abstract formal vocabulary featuring seemingly organic flowing lines, without being connected in any way to naturalism. He comprehended art as a creative process running parallel to nature. His art appropriated nature's growth processes and their principles, not to depict it but to shape it. He saw nature and art as autonomous but interrelated parts of a whole, viewing, as he himself stated, "the entire universe as art." The nucleus of his own artistic universe was the navel, which he comprehended both as the origin of artistic form as well as the symbol for the human bond to the biological cycle of life. Jean Arp already found a primordial shape of art in the oval around the mid 1910s and from then on the navel would play an exceptional role in his art. The singular and characteristic formal vocabulary Arp derived from this recognition gave him an exceptional position in the first half of the 20th century, one that still has an impact in the 21st century. Biomorph approaches have developed into a central substantive theme of contemporary art. The ongoing technologization of our everyday lives in addition to new insights into the biological contexts of growth processes allow Jean Arp's ideas and works to be seen in a new light.

Born Hans Arp in 1886 to a German cigarette manufacturer and his Alsatian wife in Strasbourg, the poet, painter and sculptor was at home in both German and French culture and was a committed pacifist and political artist from early on. Living in exile in Zurich during World War I, he and the writer Hugo Ball proclaimed Dadaism in 1916. He also met his future wife there, the artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp, with whom he intensely collaborated until her death in 1943. From 1919 he made up the Cologne Dada group together with the painters Max Ernst and Johannes Theobald Baargeld. In the early 1920s he turned to abstract Surrealism (after 1926 he lived as a French citizen in Meudon-Clamart near Paris) and was involved in important avant-garde associations and networks. He stood in close contact with other avant-garde artists such as Kurt Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg, and in 1925 he published "The Isms of Art" together with El Lissitzky. This famous book presenting the diverse simultaneous avant-garde currents of the time between 1914 and 1924 represents the attempt to inventory recent artistic developments. After German troops invaded France, Jean Arp first lived in the still unoccupied town of Grasse in the South of France, emigrating from there to Switzerland in 1942. Now extremely successful, he lived in Meudon-Clamart and Locarno after the war. Jean Arp died of a heart attack in Basel in 1966 and was buried in Locarno.

Despite the undisputed potency of Jean Arp's oeuvre, his underrepresentation in recent years is conspicuous. This can be attributed to the public debate concerning the posthumous casts of his works, putting them in the focal point of a fundamental discussion concerning the ties between sculpture and economic interests. Against this backdrop it is not easy but nevertheless still absolutely necessary to not lose sight of the innovative force of this major sculptor's oeuvre and pay tribute to Jean Arp and his art in this wide-ranging exhibition in Berlin's Georg Kolbe Museum.

The exhibition "Jean Arp. The Navel of the Avant-Garde" will be accompanied by an extensive catalogue featuring topical essays on Jean Arp's oeuvre by Astrid von Asten, Jan Giebel, Arie Hartog, Maike Steinkamp and Julia Wallner. It also contains a transparent documentation of the respective provenances of the exhibited works. A conference entitled "Hans Arp and the US" will furthermore be held by the Stiftung Arp e.V. Berlin/Rolandswerth in cooperation with the Georg Kolbe Museum and the American Academy in Berlin. The announced renovation phase of the Georg Kolbe Museums will begin after the conclusion of the exhibition in October 2015.

The exhibition is being organized in cooperation with the Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber-Arp e.V., Berlin/Rolandswerth and with the support of the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen. The exhibition has been made possible by the generous support of the Hauptstadtkulturfonds.