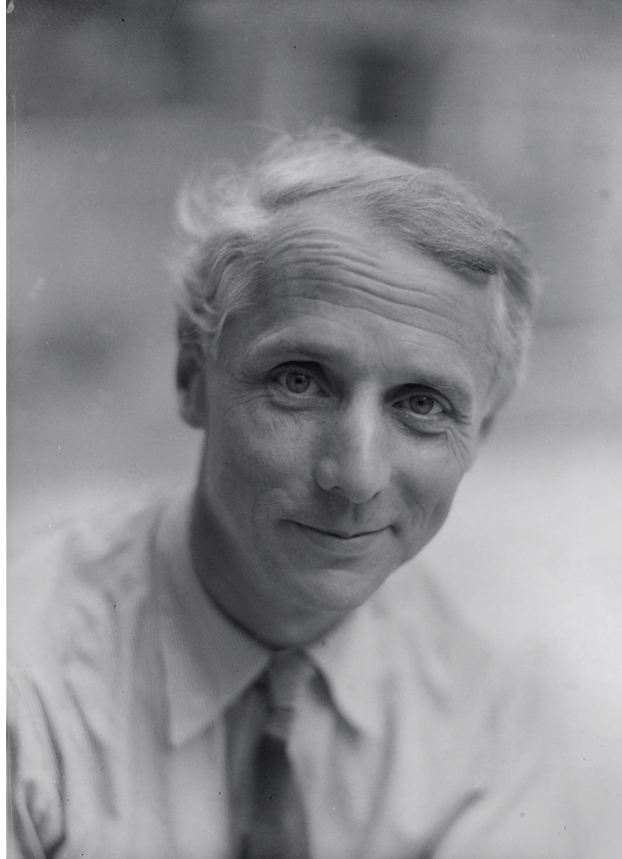


Anna Riwkin, Max Ernst, Paris 1933



MAX ERNST: AN INVITATION TO LOOK
THE ARTIST'S CAREER SURVEYED IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

OCTOBER 2 – NOVEMBER 29, 2019

Private view | October: 6-8pm

LECTURE | OCTOBER 5PM

The art historian Professor Dawn Adès, Professor Emeritus at the University of Essex and an authority on Surrealism will discuss Max Ernst and his legacy

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Max Ernst's entire oeuvre is an invitation to look. His desire for expanded, interpretive perception transforms reality, because he is not interested in copying the realities of the external world.

- Dr Jürgen Pech, Editor of the Max Ernst Catalogue Raisonné and Chief Curator, Max Ernst Museum, Brühl

No diver knows before he springs what he will bring back. In the same way the painter does not look for his subject.

- Max Ernst

M&L FINE ART

LONDON -- M&L Fine Art presents a survey exhibition dedicated to Max Ernst (1891 – 1976), a giant of twentieth-century art and leading Surrealist artist. The show features fifteen works from an exceptional private collection, covering Ernst's entire career from 1925 to 1971, acquired largely in the 1950s and 1960s by a prominent Italian collector and friend of the artist. Characterized by its personal, domestic and intimate character, this body of works aptly elucidates Ernst's belief that the artist should be a diver in subterranean depths, probing the mysteries of the unconscious and its imagination.

Unseen in public for two decades, the works on display come from key periods of Max Ernst's career and have appeared in the some of the most important exhibitions of the artist's work, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York and Art Institute Chicago exhibitions, 1961; Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 1966; and Haus der Kunst Munich, 1979. The works' exceptional provenance, linked to major galleries and dealers of Ernst, Alexander Iolas and Arturo Schwarz, further testifies the scope and breadth of the collection.



Max Ernst, *Le sexe d'un ange*, 1968. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2019

This show includes works that encompass the full range of different techniques investigated by the artist, including oil on canvas and panel, frottage, collage, grattage, drawing and gesso. With this show, M&L Fine Art aims to not only represent the life and work of the artist, but also to transmit the intimate vision of the collector who assembled this significant group of works reflecting every aspect of the artist's career.

Like many European artists of his generation, Ernst's youth was profoundly marked by the trauma of World War I, which interrupted his art studies, begun in 1912 as an autodidact when he discovered Picasso, Van Gogh and Gauguin's work at exhibitions in Cologne. After serving in the war, Ernst returned to Cologne and became interested in Paul Klee and Giorgio de Chirico, co-founding the Cologne Dada movement in 1919. In 1921 he met André Breton, father of Surrealism, and Paul Éluard, who would remain a lifelong friend. Following a lengthy ménage-a-trois with Éluard and his wife Gala (the soon-to-be muse and wife of Salvador Dalí) which took Ernst as far as Saigon, he settled in Paris. In 1925 Max Ernst officially began his career as an artist.



Max Ernst, *Ci fut une hirondelle*, 1927. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2019

The earliest works in this show come from this first Parisian sojourn, starting with *L'arbre*, 1925, a delicate work on paper that demonstrates the artist's interest in developing the techniques of collage and frottage, invented by him that same year.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Ernst produced three illustrated books: *La femme 100 têtes*, 1929, *Reve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel*, 1930, and finally *Une semaine de bonté*, 1934. The visual lexicon of these novels, comprised of collaged images sourced from scientific works, medical encyclopaedias and other illustrated volumes, demonstrate the density of Ernst's formal and narrative investigations of those years. Positioned half-way between Dada and Surrealism, chance and narrative logic, text and image, the two collages on display, in the words of Ernst's fourth wife and translator Dorothea Tanning, "add a new dimension of psychic violence to the already fraught pictures in which night and dream are the sovereign forces that not only colour but provoke the inexorable procession of events that defines the dilemma of *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil*."



Max Ernst, *La horde de barbares*, 1934. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2019

In 1934, Ernst paints the oil on paper *La horde de barbares*, a composition fraught with layered meanings, in which *grattage* reveals a group of indistinct fantastical figures immersed in a dark forest. Ernst first coupled birds and windblown, apocalyptic animals in a series of small works entitled *The Horde* (1927), reprising the theme in 1934 in a series of even smaller paintings called *The Barbarians*, to which the painting on show belongs. The forest, an archetypal symbol in Germanic culture, in Ernst's work becomes a metaphor for the unconscious, and for imagination's most wild and recondite states. Crucially, in his biography of the artist, art critic John Russell also identifies these creatures, painted the year following Hitler's rise to power in Germany, as expressions of Ernst's fearful anticipation of the impending devastation in Europe during World War II.

The artist's presciently ominous imagery sadly came to life, and, having already been branded a 'degenerate artist' in his native Germany in 1937, in 1939 Ernst was imprisoned in Vichy France as an 'undesirable foreigner' alongside fellow German Surrealist Hans Bellmer. Luckily for the artist, Peggy Guggenheim had, in that same year, begun purchasing art in Paris at her famous 'one picture a day' rate, discovering and buying many Ernst masterpieces now in her collection in Venice. Thanks to her intercession and to the tireless efforts of Varian Fry, the journalist who during World War II helped obtain American visas for countless European artists and intellectuals including Marcel Duchamp, Hannah Arendt, and Marc Chagall, Ernst emigrated to the United States in 1941. Leaving behind his then-lover Leonora Carrington, and causing her to experience a near-fatal psychological and physical breakdown, Ernst eloped with Peggy Guggenheim and the two were almost immediately married. Asked why she loved Max Ernst, Guggenheim replied: "Because he's so beautiful and because he's so famous."

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Max Ernst and Peggy Guggenheim, Surrealist Gallery, Art of This Century, c. 1942. Works shown: Max Ernst, *The Kiss* (1927); and *Zoomorphic Couple* (1933). Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

Joined by his son Jimmy, Ernst became a driving force behind Peggy Guggenheim's prodigiously influential "The Art of This Century" Gallery, founded in 1942. In 1943, Guggenheim organized a ground-breaking, all female group show titled *Exhibition by 31 Women*, dispatching her husband to select works for the exhibition. The encounter between Ernst and one of the artists, Dorothea Tanning, soon gave rise to a passionate love affair which put an end to Ernst's romantic and professional involvement with Guggenheim. After her husband left her for Tanning, Guggenheim commented, "I realized I should have had only 30 women in the show."



Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning Playing Chess, Sedona, Arizona. Photograph by Bob Towers, 1948

Ernst and Tanning lived in New York for a few years before moving to Sedona, Arizona, drawn to the expanse of the great American landscape after the tumultuous experience of life in New York. In this period Ernst's work was strongly influenced by what he saw as the poetic imagery of the American desert, clearly discernible in the burnt amber tones of the two canvases on view, *Dancers under the starry Sky* and *Birds in the Forest*, both 1951.

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These works are also significantly a tribute to the Native Americans whom Ernst celebrated in a 1953 poem applauding their adherence to their tribal identity and harmony with nature. Far from living in isolation, however, Ernst and Tanning were at the centre of a vibrant community where they invited a roster of high-profile friends including Henri Cartier-Bresson, Lee Miller, Roland Penrose, Yves Tanguy, and George Balanchine. Married in 1946, in a double wedding with Man Ray and Juliet Browner in Hollywood, their romance was only interrupted by Ernst's death in 1976.



Max Ernst at his Paris studio, 1953

After obtaining American citizenship in 1948, Ernst returned to Europe in 1953, and in 1954 won the Grand Prize for Painting at the Venice Biennale. During his later years in Europe, living mainly in Paris, Ernst renewed his intense interest in collage, which he used both in works on canvas as well as in works on paper. The works in on view made from the 1960s onwards display a nimble and heterogenous variety of references to his work of the preceding decades, for example the found object in *Julia Baisers* (1968), or the sun motif in *Eine Heringsschule* (1965) and *Floral* (1968). The latest of the works on show, two collages from 1971 titled *Ou donner la bobine* and *La vie quotidienne*, were presented in Italy in an important exhibition at Alexander Iolas' Milan gallery. Titled *Lieux Communs*, the show featured twelve collages by Ernst which accompanied eleven poems by the Italian author Sergio Tosi, also published as a limited edition artist's book in 1000 copies. Once again, illustrating the artist's career-long interest in the possibilities and limits of metaphor and symbolism in literature and art, this exhibition confirmed Ernst's near-endless capacity for invention.

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Max Ernst died in Paris on 1 April 1976 at the age of 88, following an influential career that straddled the twentieth century and much of the western hemisphere. Ernst's legacy, inextricably linked to Surrealism and Dada but also extending to Abstract Expressionism and beyond, is also based on his capacity to innovate the German tradition of romantic culture and imagery by 'activating' everyday subject matter to dazzling and fantastical effect. In this regard, his work exemplifies the process of 'romanticisation' defined by Novalis, the early German romantic poet and philosopher, in 1798, whose aim is to lend "a higher meaning to what is common, a mysterious guise to the ordinary, the dignity of the unknown to the known, an infinite appearance to the finite."

This exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with an original essay by Dr Jürgen Pech, one of the leading authorities on Ernst and the editor of the artist's catalogue raisonné. Max Ernst continues to be shown in institutional exhibitions worldwide, including a 2018 survey at MoMA, *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting*, and a solo exhibition at the State Hermitage Museum titled *Max Ernst. The Paris Years*, until 15 June – August 18, 2019.

ABOUT M&L FINE ART

Founded in October 2015, M&L Fine Art is a partnership between Matteo Lampertico and Luca Gracis, bringing to London the wide-ranging art market experience and connoisseurship established by each through their respective galleries in Milan. Following a successful series of solo and group exhibitions presenting important, rarely seen works by twentieth-century masters, in a variety of mediums, the 2019 programme will develop an even greater offering of high quality presentations and cultural initiatives. The gallery's tightly curated exhibition schedule is complemented by an educational programme of events and lectures.

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