

RARELY LOANED DADA MARIONETTES EXHIBITED IN THE UK FOR THE FIRST TIME



For the first time in the UK, all 17 of Sophie Taeuber-Arp's *King Stag* string puppets are being shown together as part of her major retrospective at Tate Modern. Rarely loaned by the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, these playful icons of the dada movement form a centrepiece of the exhibition, presented alongside original set designs also created by Taeuber-Arp.

The marionettes were created in 1918 for an avant-garde adaptation of Carlo Gozzi's play *King Stag*, an ironic take on psychoanalysis. Crafted from geometric turned wood shapes and hand-painted in vibrant colours, the puppets marked a radical new direction in theatre design. With her unique

background in contemporary dance, their unnaturally loose and disjointed movements echoed the performances Taeuber-Arp and her contemporaries were pioneering in Zurich during the First World War.

Against the backdrop of the Spanish flu, the play was scrapped after just three performances, with the director claiming that Taeuber-Arp's infamous creations were too modern and daring. However, the puppets became some of the most celebrated artworks of the dada movement, their unique sculptural quality lauded by artists including Marcel Duchamp and Hugo Weber. The Guards puppet from the series was included in El Lissitzky's and Hans Arp's seminal 1925 publication 'The Isms of Art' to illustrate dadaism.

Now over 100 years old, these incredibly delicate objects are too fragile to be operated regularly, however, a film of the marionettes in action will be screened outside of the exhibition entrance, giving visitors an insight into how they can be activated. This exhibition offers a remarkable opportunity for UK audiences to see the marionettes for the first time, situating them within the context of Taeuber-Arp's wider artistic practice.



1948 VÉZELAY ESSAY ON TAEUBER-ARP PUBLISHED FOR THE FIRST TIME



A previously unpublished 1948 essay by British abstract artist Paule Vézelay on her late friend Sophie Taeuber-Arp has come to light. Published in a new Tate book to accompany the Sophie Taeuber-Arp exhibition, Vézelay's text offers an intimate portrait of the Swiss artist just five years after her untimely death. In the essay, which was gifted to Tate's Archive in 2000, Vézelay details Taeuber-Arp's talents and "dignified, natural yet friendly" manner. Discussing her friend's work, she warmly describes that "every colour, line and form has been made with the utmost conviction ... the Hand which placed them as both sure and sensitive, while the Mind which created them, had already solved the problems presented by the work in its conception". She continues to consider Taeuber-Arp's "accomplishments", stating they "ranged far; her knowledge of modern art, with its multiple forms of expression, had few, if any, secrets for her."

Born in Bristol in 1892, Vézelay moved to Paris in 1926. She became one of the few British members of the Société Abstraction-Création in 1934, forging a close friendship with Taeuber-Arp and Arp and exhibiting alongside them and other artists including Wassily Kandinsky. Her work was featured in a 1937 issue of *plastique/plastic*, the international abstract art journal edited by Taeuber-Arp. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 Vézelay returned to Bristol but remained in correspondence with Taeuber-Arp and Arp who were exiled in France.

In addition to Vézelay's text, the book features letters by Taeuber-Arp to her sister Erica Schlegel Taeuber between 1911 and 1939. The correspondence details her early interest in architectural design and her success at the Kunsthalle Basel exhibition in 1937: "My colleagues told me that the biggest surprise of the exhibition was my room. It really means a lot when a colleague says something like that, and above all to a woman."

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Images, from top:

Ernst Linck. *Sophie Taeuber and Jean (Hans) Arp with her marionettes for King Stag, Zurich*. 1918. Kunsthau Zürich Library

Ernst Linck. *Antechamber of the King (scene from Sophie Taeuber-Arp's King Stag)*. 1918. Fondation Arp, Clamart, France

Sophie Taeuber-Ap. *Composition with Squares, Circle, Rectangles, Triangles*. c.1918–31. Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin