

# BLOUIN modernpainters

ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PER

APRIL 2019

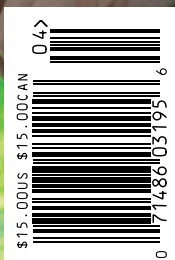
## PHILIPP FÜRHOFFER EXPLAINS HIS INSPIRATION

### TOP 10 ART BOOKS

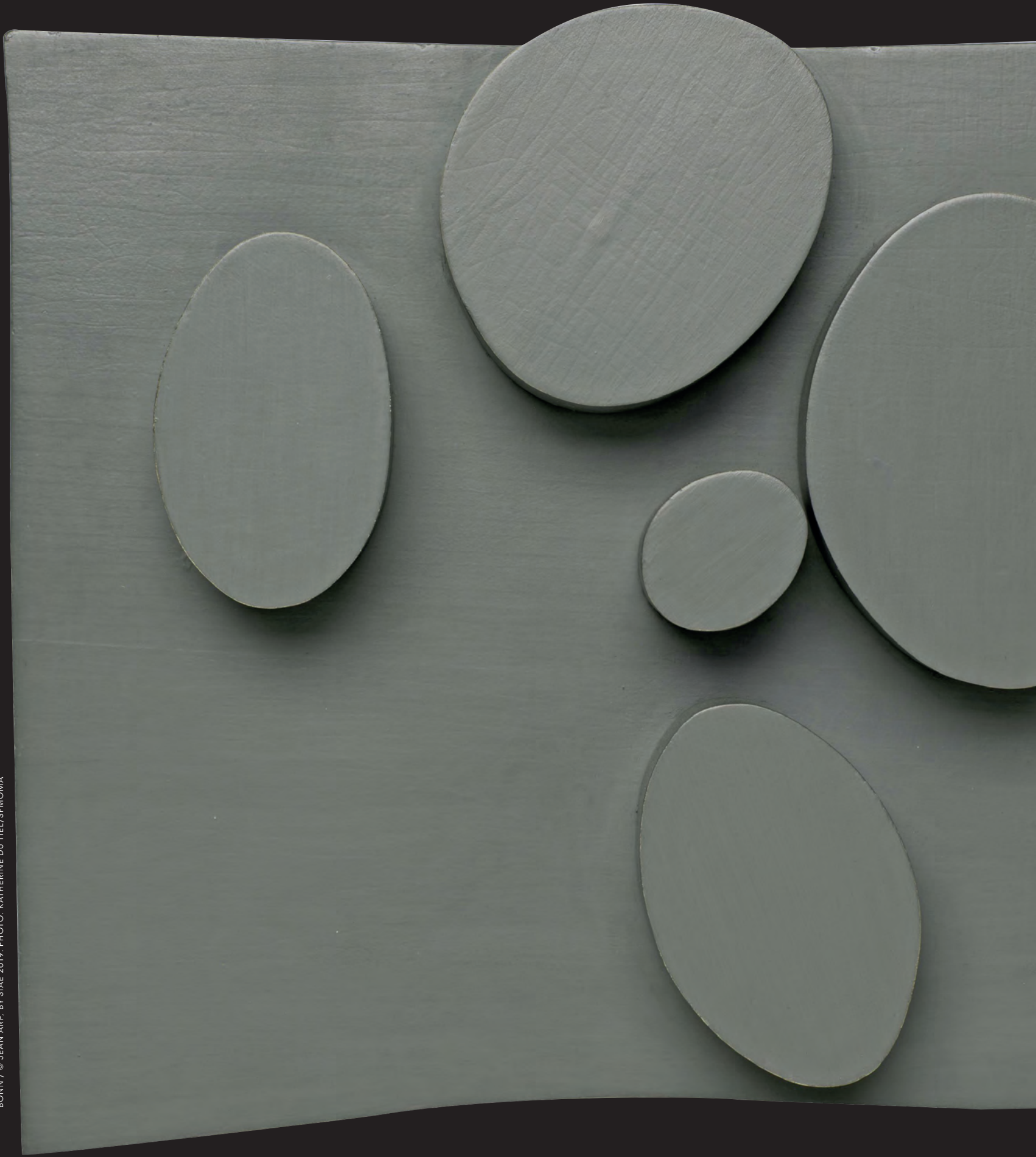
### KIM CHONG HAK: THE KOREAN VAN GOGH




TOP 10:  
CONTEMPORARY  
POETS TO  
READ IN 2019









Jean (Hans) Arp,  
"Objects Arranged  
according to the Laws  
of Chance III," 1931,  
oil on wood,  
10 1/8 x 11 3/8 x 2 3/8 in.,  
San Francisco Museum  
of Modern Art.

# THE NATURE OF ARP

THE SCULPTOR REFUSED TO BE  
CATEGORIZED, AS AN ARTIST OR AS  
A HUMAN BEING, MAKING A  
RETROSPECTIVE AT THE  
GUGGENHEIM IN VENICE A  
PECULIAR CHALLENGE TO CURATE

**BY SARAH MOROZ**



“I pursue this matter without knowing where I’m going,” Jean Arp once said of his intuitive approach. “This is the mystery: my hands talk to themselves. The dialogue is established between the plaster and them as if I am absent, as if I am not necessary. The forms are born, amicable and strange, that order themselves without me.”

Arp was, by his own admission, not one to tout the “artist-as-visionary” cliché or consider art as something hallowed. “The Nature of Arp,” on view April 13-September 2 at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, traces Jean (Hans) Arp’s six-decade career, and highlights the complexities he brought to the consideration of the art milieu itself. The exhibition showcases his diverse output, from sculptures to reliefs, drawings to textiles, collages to book illustrations, laid out in a roughly chronological circuit across 11 rooms. It encompasses his early production and the spearheading of Dada,

affiliations with Constructivism and Surrealism, 1930s-era sinuous sculptures, collaborative works with Sophie Taeuber-Arp (his wife, and an artist in her own right) and the work made from the après-guerre period up until his death in 1966. Two Project Rooms adjacent to the exhibition feature artists from the Peggy Guggenheim Collection — including Theo van Doesburg, Max Ernst, Jean Hélion, and Kurt Schwitter — whom Arp worked with and frequented. Collaboration, with both fêted artists and unsung artisans, was a recurrent practice: he revealed the gesture of collectivity and anonymity.

“Works of the Dada period are probably the most familiar to many viewers, but Arp was creating challenging, experimental, and fascinating art for most of his life,” said curator Catherine Craft. The show has traveled over from the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas, and maintains much of its preceding version. Key additions in Venice include a display of

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FACING PAGE COURTESY STIFTUNG ARP E.V., BERLIN/ROLANDSWERTH. THIS PAGE © 2019 ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/VG BILD-KUNST, BONN / © JEAN ARP, BY SIAE 2019.

"Portrait of  
Jean Arp,"  
1926.



Jean (Hans) Arp,  
"Classical Sculpture  
(Sculpture Classique),"  
1960, bronze,  
50 1/2 x 8 3/4 x 8 in.,  
Dallas Museum of Art,  
Foundation  
for the Arts Collection, given in  
memory of Mary Seeger O'Boyle  
by her family and friends.





Jean (Hans)  
Arp, "Three  
Disagreeable  
Objects on a  
Face," 1930,  
(two views),  
plaster,  
7 1/2 x 14 1/2  
x 11 5/8 in.,  
Museum Jorn,  
Silkeborg,  
Denmark.

Peggy Guggenheim's guestbooks, featuring signatures and drawings by Arp — the artist and collector were long-time acquaintances — and half a dozen Arp works from Guggenheim's own archives. One of these is a small 1936 sculpture made of newspaper and papier mâché, "Maimed and Stateless" ("Mutilé et apatride"), which, Craft stated, is "too fragile to travel and is not very well known" — yet "offers a wealth of insights into Arp's political and existential concerns." The exhibition also highlights

his torn-paper collages and split plaster cast sculptures, forms which Craft deems emblematic of "his lifelong interest in fragmentation and rupture."

These concerns related to fragmentation and rupture Arp often expressed through his embrace of hybridity. Born in 1886 in Alsace — situated between France, Germany, and Switzerland — his native turf was itself a kind of unresolved hybrid. (Even today, Googling the word Alsace turns up the query 'Is Alsace in Germany or France?').

Arp spoke German in school, French at home, and an Alsatian dialect socially. He often titled his works in both German and French (although their meanings did not always quite match). Arp referred to himself both as Hans and as Jean. Craft said: "World War I was really the two sides of his life going to war with each other, and he reacted not only by fleeing to Switzerland but also by rejecting nationalism and other views of reality that insist upon choosing between polarities with no middle ground."



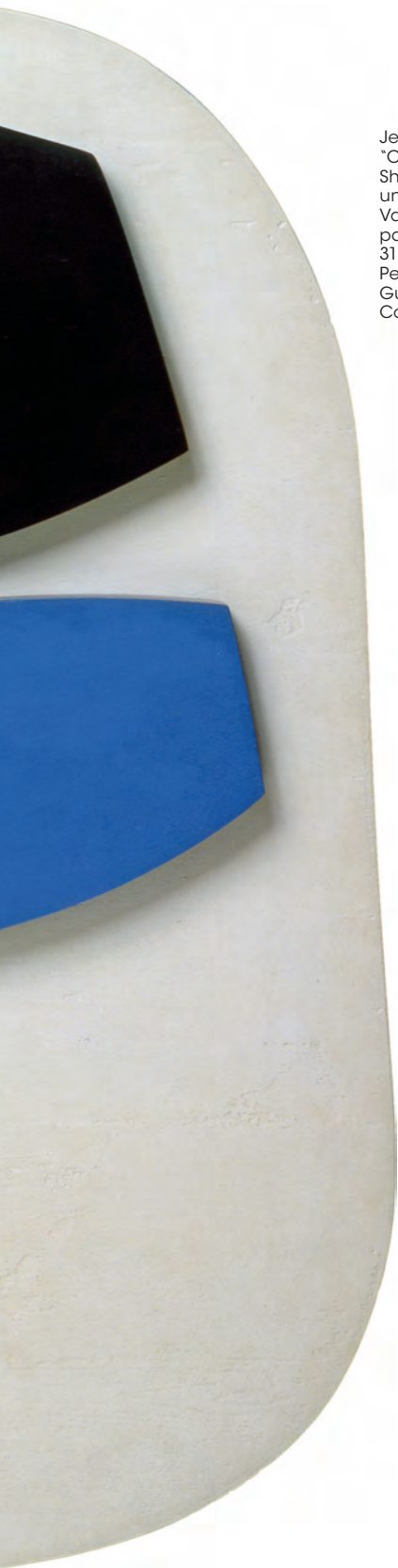
Jean (Hans) Arp,  
"Plant Hammer  
(Terrestrial Forms)," 1916,  
painted wood,  
24 1/2 x 19 1/2 x 3 1/8 in.,  
collection of the  
Gemeentemuseum  
Den Haag.





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BONN / © JEAN ARP, BY SIAE 2019. PHOTO: JÖRG MÜLLER/  
AARGAUER KUNSTHAUS, AARGAU





Jean (Hans) Arp,  
"Overturned Blue  
Shoe with Two Heels  
under a Black  
Vault," 1925,  
painted wood,  
31 1/4 x 41 1/8 x 1 in.,  
Peggy  
Guggenheim  
Collection, Venice.



Jean (Hans) Arp,  
"Awakening," 1938,  
Réveil Erwachen  
plaster, painted green,  
18 5/8 x 9 1/2 x 9 in.,  
Aargauer Kunsthau,  
Aarau, gift of  
Marguerite Arp-  
Hagenbach.



**"As a founder of Dada,  
Arp's 'unreliability' was  
spurred by his skepticism  
toward the systems of reason  
and convention that had  
contributed to the slaughters  
of World War I"**

Just as he switched between languages and would not be corralled into a single identity, Arp negotiated between media as well as artistic ideologies. "Arp subverted accepted modernist norms of authorship, originality, and production," Craft noted in the Nasher exhibition catalog, adding: "his works' mutability opposed their fetishization as masterpieces and the ego-driven celebration of the unerring touch of the artist." This mutability is such that Arp could be described as the artistic version of an unreliable narrator. In addition to giving works plural names, he tended to reupholster his own pieces, back-date them, and produce multiples. Craft assessed such shiftiness (a veritable source of curatorial agony) "as a sort of ethical position." She explained: "As a founder of Dada, Arp's 'unreliability' was spurred by his skepticism toward the systems of reason and convention that had contributed to the slaughters of World War I."

His tendency to revise his work and his scattershot approach to documenting it underscores "his refusal to accept any work as definitively finished," Craft said, "which left drawings, reliefs, collages, sculptures, and even his poems, open to ongoing consideration and change." She cited, as an example, a 1918 collage in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection that Arp entirely remade in the 1955, because the original had been damaged. The collage — one of very few works whose evolution was easily



Jean (Hans) Arp,  
"Marital"  
Sculpture, 1937,  
executed with  
Sophie  
Taeuber-Arp,  
lathe-turned and  
sawed wood,  
15 3/8 x 10 1/2  
x 10 5/16 in.



traceable — “has a sort of Janus-faced character, positioned as it is at two different moments in the artist’s career.”

Arp’s lack of preciousness about creating a one-off highlights how he “remained consistently hostile to overinflated views of the artist as a superior being,” Craft said. “His seriousness about his work,” she continued, “is matched by a refreshing willingness to laugh at himself.” He seized on the absurdity of life, and freely pivoted his approach as he saw fit. His Dada-era critique of the frame as an artistic tool was, in later years, overturned when he used them for his reliefs. “His concept of the work of art seems to me to have parallels with Duchamp’s readymades, in that it’s not the artwork’s unique, immutable identity as an object that’s crucial, so much as its embodiment of an idea that can be adjusted, remade, or re-presented.”

Arp’s adaptability resonates in today’s pluridisciplinary, remix-ready culture. Moreover, his elastic notions of identity in the face of early 20th-century nationalist rhetoric and socio-political borders feel prescient,

given today’s alarming reversion to such concepts. Craft said that when she began working on this exhibition seven years ago: “Europe seemed so stable that Arp’s bilingualism and ‘blended’ identity was taken for granted, if noted at all.” But with divisive debates about immigration and territory dominating the conversation, “Arp’s situation, and his response to it, now appear absolutely relevant.”<sup>MP</sup>



Jean (Hans) Arp,  
“Gnome, also called  
Kaspar,” 1930,  
plaster,  
193¼ x 11 x 7 1/2 in.,  
Franklin D. Murphy  
Sculpture Garden,  
University of California,  
Los Angeles,  
gift of Madame  
Marguerite Arp.



Jean (Hans) Arp,  
“Head and Shell,” 1933,  
polished brass (cast 1930s),  
height: 7 3/4 in.; length: 8 7/8 in.,  
Peggy Guggenheim  
Collection, Venice.