

HARVARD'S FOGG ART MUSEUM PRESENTS RARE EXHIBITION OF WORKS BY FERNAND LÉGER

Exhibition Lends Insight into the Rise of Cubism and the Beginning of Abstract Art and is the First in the Boston Area in Sixty Years



Fernand Léger, *Contrast of Forms*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm. Private Collection. Photograph © Ellen Page Wilson/PaceWildenstein.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (February 20, 2007)—The Harvard University Art Museums present *Fernand Léger: Contrasts of Forms*, a tightly focused exhibition uniting two landmark paintings with eleven works on paper from major museums and private collections, at the Fogg Art Museum from **April 14 through June 10, 2007**. The selection of paintings and drawings from 1912–14 encompasses still-lives, landscapes, depictions of the figure, and abstractions, giving the exhibition great scope. These landmark works are arguably from Léger’s most important period, as they are central to both the cubist revolution and the emergence of abstract art. The last presentation of Léger’s works in the region was a 1945 exhibition at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design.

Fernand Léger: Contrasts of Forms is organized by the University of Virginia Art Museum, Charlottesville, where it is currently on view through March 18, 2007. The exhibition is curated by Matthew Affron, associate professor of art history at the University of Virginia and director of special curatorial projects for the University of Virginia Art Museum. The Fogg Art Museum’s presentation, the second and final venue of the exhibition, is cocurated by Harry Cooper, curator of modern art at the Harvard University Art Museums. “This is exactly the kind of exhibition we dream about hosting,” said Cooper. “It offers a focused look at a pivotal moment in the career of one of the great artists of the 20th century, and it gives special emphasis to rarely seen works on

paper that are as radical and powerful as anything Picasso, Braque, and Matisse were doing in the same years.”

Between 1912 and 1914, Fernand Léger executed a large cycle of works known as *Contrasts of Forms*. The series embraces the genres of landscape, still life, and figure, but at its core are numerous arresting compositions that sweep aside recognizable subject matter to focus on an abstract motif. The common denominator is a complex vocabulary of mingled cones, cylinders, cubes, and planes, vigorously outlined and scrubbed with color in the paintings and with black ink and white gouache in the works on paper.

Contrasts of Forms are essential to two great chapters in the history of modern art in the years before World War I: first, the development of cubism, and second, the emergence of abstract art. In 1915, the painter described some of the last works in this open-ended series of compositions as “fairly abstract investigations (contrasts of forms and colors).” These words highlight the experimental thrust of the series as a whole.

“Our collection contains only a few works by Léger, but none from this crucial early moment in his career,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “We are grateful to our colleagues at the University of Virginia Art Museum for giving us the opportunity to display these important works, as well as the lending institutions and private collectors that have generously lent them for this exhibition. The exhibition is significant for the Art Museums not only for its presentation of the history of modern art, but also for the role it plays in our teaching and research.”

Credits

The exhibition *Fernand Léger: Contrasts of Forms* was organized by the University of Virginia Art Museum, Charlottesville, Virginia, with the generous support of The Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Charitable Trust; University of Virginia Art Museum Volunteer Board; the Office of the Dean of Arts & Sciences and the Carl H. and Martha S. Lindner Center for Art History, University of Virginia; Nicholas Acquavella; Sheila and Ted Weschler; Sheridan W. and Thomas F. Nicholson; and an anonymous gift.

Catalogue

Fernand Léger: Contrasts of Forms is accompanied by a comprehensive fifty page catalogue featuring color illustrations of all works in the exhibition, as well as original scholarly essays by curator Matthew Affron and Maria Gough, associate professor of art history at Stanford University. The exhibition catalogue was made possible by the Oakwood Foundation.

Exhibition Programming

M. Victor Leventritt Lecture

Thursday, April 26, 6:30 p.m.

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, lecture hall

Free admission

Line, Shape, Color, Luster: Fernand Léger's *Contrasts of Forms*
Matthew Affron, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

Matthew Affron, guest curator of *Fernand Léger: Contrasts of Forms*, will explore a crucial period in Léger's art (1912–14). He will discuss the work of these years in terms of its radical formal language, its relationship to the cubist revolution in representation, and its significance for the development of abstraction in modern art.

Gallery Talks

Fogg Art Museum

Free with the price of admission

Sunday, April 15, 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 19, 11:30 a.m.

Harry Cooper, curator of modern art, Harvard University Art Museums

Friday, April 27, 2:00 p.m.

Matthew Affron, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, comprising of the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg Art Museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the HUAM Archives, and the U.S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours: **Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.;** closed on national holidays.

General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Paid admission includes entrance to all three Art Museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks.

Admission is free for Harvard University ID holders, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18 years of age. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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For more information about these exhibitions or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

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