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## First Major International Dada Museum Exhibition in the United States Opens at the National Gallery of Art February 19 – May 14, 2006



Raoul Hausmann, *Mechanischer Kopf (Der Geist unserer Zeit)* (Mechanical Head [The Spirit of Our Age]), c. 1920  
hairdresser's wig-making dummy, crocodile wallet, ruler, pocket watch mechanism and case, bronze segment of old camera, typewriter cylinder, segment of measuring tape, collapsible cup, the number "22," nails, and bolt  
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle, Paris. Purchase, 1974  
CNAC/MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY  
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Washington, DC - **Dada**, the first major museum exhibition in the United States to explore in-depth this influential avant-garde art movement, will be on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from February 19 through May 14, 2006. Responding to the disasters of World War I and an emerging modern media and machine culture, Dada artists led a creative revolution that profoundly shaped the

course of 20th-century art. Nearly 450 works will be featured in a dynamic media installation that includes paintings, sculptures, photographs, collages, prints, and film and sound recordings. The exhibition will also be presented with variations in Paris at the Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, October 5, 2005 through January 9, 2006, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, June 18 through September 11, 2006.

The exhibition explores the robust variety of Dada art that emerged between 1916 and 1924 in the movement's primary centers: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, and Paris. 50 artists will be represented, including many important figures in the history of 20th-century art: Hans Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Hans Richter, Kurt Schwitters, Sophie Taeuber, and Tristan Tzara. The work of other rarely seen, fascinating artists associated with the movement will be shown.

"A reevaluation of international Dada is long overdue. This exhibition enables the National Gallery of Art and its partner institutions the rare opportunity to define, for the first time, a major movement of the historical avant-garde. We are delighted with the collaboration among the three museums in mounting this landmark exhibition and are grateful to our many lenders and sponsors," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

### **Exhibition Support and Organization**

Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in collaboration with the The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation and the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation.

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### **Exhibition Background and Presentation**

One of the most significant movements of the historical avant-garde, Dada was born in the heart of Europe in the midst of World War I. In the wake of the most brutal conflict yet seen, dadaists raucously challenged tradition. The period marked a quantum leap into the modern era with the introduction of widespread marketing and industrialization, the photo-illustrated press, radio broadcasting, and commercial cinema. Dada artists boldly embraced and roundly criticized this media and machine culture, filling their work with references to contemporary life and using new materials and technologies. Proposing innovative strategies of art-making, including collage, montage, assemblage, chance, "readymades," performance, and media pranks, the movement created an abiding legacy for the century to come.

Dada's origins are linked to the founding of the legendary Cabaret Voltaire by Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in Zurich. Neutral Switzerland offered a refuge for iconoclasts of all kinds. Serving as a gathering place, the Cabaret's nightly performances grew more and more radical. "Every word that is spoken or sung here says at least one thing," wrote Ball, "that this humiliating age has not succeeded in winning our respect." The word "Dada" was most likely chosen by Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck from a French-German dictionary in Ball's Zurich apartment. The dadaists delighted in its multiple meanings, crossing the linguistic boundaries of the nations at war. Ball wrote in his diary: "Dada is 'yes, yes' in Romanian, 'rocking horse or hobby horse' in French. For Germans it is a sign of foolish naiveté, joy in procreation and love of the baby carriage." Championing internationalism, they fashioned themselves as a global network of artists.

Film is an important component of the exhibition. A brief silent film comprising World War I footage will open the exhibition and provide historical context. Images of modern industrialized warfare, including tanks, planes, trenches, and gasmasks remind the

visitor of the global crisis that produced widespread cultural disillusionment and sparked the Dada movement. Later in the exhibition, ten Dada films will be shown on a continuous loop. Several prominent Dada artists worked extensively with film in the 1920s, creating experimental works that were sometimes woven into landmark Dada performances. The films included are: Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* (c. 1921), *Rhythmus 23* (1923-25), *Filmstudie* (1926) and *Vormittagsspuk* (1927-28); Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie diagonale* (1923-24); Man Ray's, Marc Allégret's, and Rose Sélavy's (Marcel Duchamp's pseudonym) *Anémic Cinéma* (1926); Fernand Léger's *Le Ballet mécanique* (1924); Man Ray's *Emak Bakia* (1926) and *Retour à la raison* (1923); and Francis Picabia's, René Clair's, and Erik Satie's *Entr'acte* (1924).

### **Dada City Centers**

In the exhibition, each city-section brings together objects in various media including painting, sculpture, photography, collage and photomontage, prints and graphic work, and sound recordings. While activities were conducted under the banner of Dada in places as widespread as Spain, Romania, and Japan, the six cities represented in the exhibition—Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Hannover, New York, and Paris—were the most important centers.

**Zurich:** The neutral wartime refuge of Zurich was home to an expatriate community of politically dislocated individuals, including Hans Arp, Hugo Ball, and Tristan Tzara. In 1916 Ball established the legendary Cabaret Voltaire, the avant-garde nightclub whose unruly performances served as training grounds for the founding members of Dada and secured performance as a central Dada medium. Linked by their despair over cultural values that they believed led to World War I, the Dadaists founded a movement that rejected artmaking as it was known. Jettisoning the idea of painting as a picture, the Zurich dadaists embraced abstraction and primitivism, as seen in Hans Arp's *Untitled (Collage with Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)* (1916-17) and Marcel Janco's *Untitled (Mask)* (1919).

**Berlin:** In the capital of a defeated Germany plagued by food shortages and street fighting, Dada took on an overtly political tone. The work of the Berlin dadaists reflected their disgust and opposition to German nationalism, as expressed in John Heartfield's

and Rudolf Schlichter's *Prussian Archangel* (1920). Targeting the mass media culture that flourished in the postwar years, members of Berlin's Club Dada used fragments of the illustrated press and other printed matter as the material of art, pioneering the new medium of photomontage. In photomontage, the Berlin dadaists sought to expose the absurdities and paradoxes that lay beneath official words and images, exemplified by Raoul Hausmann's *Elasticum* (1920).

**Cologne:** In British-occupied Cologne, Max Ernst, Johannes Baargeld, and Angelika and Heinrich Hoerle founded a small Dada group that carefully skirted the censors. In their most scandalous appearance, they hosted an exhibition in the courtyard of a bar where visitors were encouraged to destroy an artwork with an ax. Max Ernst merged images from a newly revealed microscopic universe with machine diagrams to create a fantastic biotechnological world, exemplified in his *la bicyclette graminée... (The Gramineous Bicycle...)* (c. 1921).

**Hannover:** Kurt Schwitters launched a one-man Dada enterprise in Hannover. Denied membership in Berlin's Club Dada by Richard Huelsenbeck for being insufficiently political, Schwitters created an alternate form of Dada called "Merz," which he defined as "the principle of using any material." Schwitters created assemblages and collages from the things that were often overlooked: bus tickets, packaging, and other tossed-off scraps of modern life, such as *Merz Picture 46 A. The Skittle Picture* (1921) and *Untitled (Erfurt-Erfur)* (c. 1924-1926). Many of his collages functioned as a visual diary, offering traces of his daily activities and encounters.

**New York:** In New York, more distant from the destruction of war, dadaists focused on the machines and products that were icons of a new industrial economy. Using the language of plans and diagrams, members of the New York Dada group created images of machine parts, which served as metaphors for the modern psyche. Duchamp launched a revolution in art-making with the exhibition of his most famous "readymade," *Fountain* (1917), an inverted urinal shown at the Society of the Independent Artists.

**Paris:** After the war, as travel became easier, many of the dadaists who had departed earlier returned to Paris, bringing new ideas with them. They quickly made an impact with a series of performances, exhibitions, publications and press commentary that

became known as the “Dada season.” Cultivating spectacle and scandal, Paris dadaists created a counterpoint to the national “return to order” fashionable after the war. Francis Picabia's travels made him an important conduit for ideas, and he returned to Paris after participating in Dada activities in New York and Barcelona. There he created some of his most provocative work, such as *L'Oeil cacodylate* (*The Cacodylic Eye*) (1921), a blank canvas that the artist invited his comrades to sign.

## **Curators and Publications**

**Dada** is organized by Leah Dickerman, associate curator of modern and contemporary art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Laurent Le Bon, curator, Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, and is coordinated for The Museum of Modern Art, New York, by Anne Umland, curator, department of painting and sculpture.

The exhibition catalogue for the United States venues is published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with D.A.P. (Distributed Art Publishers, Inc.), and includes essays by Leah Dickerman, Brigid Doherty, Dorothea Dietrich, Sabine T. Kriebel, Janine Mileaf, Michael R. Taylor, and Matthew S. Witkovsky. The catalogue will be available October 2005 from the National Gallery of Art Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) (<http://www.nga.gov/index.htm>) or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 (\$65.00 hardcover, \$40.00 softcover, 536 pages, 403 color and 217 black-and-white illustrations) and distributed internationally.

**The Dada Seminars**, a collection of twelve essays, is the first in a series of publications based on scholarly seminars held by the National Gallery of Art's Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts. It was published by the Gallery in association with D.A.P, with support from the Paul Mellon Fund. The publication includes essays by Leah Dickerman, Matthew S. Witkovsky, George Baker, T.J. Demos, Uwe Fleckner, Hal Foster, Amelia Jones, David Joselit, Marcella Lista, Helen Molesworth, Arnauld Pierre, and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, and is edited by Dickerman with Witkovsky. The publication is currently available from the National Gallery of Art Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) (<http://www.nga.gov/index.htm>) or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 (\$45.00 hardcover, \$25.00 softcover, 320 pages, 136 black-and-white illustrations).

## **Related Activities**

The National Gallery of Art has planned a full program of related lectures, tours, and concerts (See press release "First-Time Student Guide and Related Activities" (<http://www.nga.gov/press/exh/202/related.shtm>)).

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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