

50 franc note: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, 1889-1943 Painter, Sculptress, Craftswoman

As a representative of concrete, rhythmic geometric art, Sophie Taeuber-Arp is one of the leading female abstract artists of the 20th century. But her creative activities found artistic expression in extremely varied fields well beyond the bounds of the fine arts: education, journalism, architecture, interior design and arts and crafts. On account of her pioneering achievements, she is internationally recognized as one of the most influential and representative figures of classical modern art.

Vertical horizontal compositions, 1915-1926

Around 1915, she produced her first fabrics - embroidered and woven flat compositions with strictly vertical and horizontal structures. These early works make no claim to art. They are not conceived in terms of content, but are determined simply by the technique used. Hence, they are genuine precursors of concrete art.

Dada Heads and King Stag, 1916-1918

Two decisive influences on Sophie Taeuber's later work were her own concept - letting the nature of her materials and techniques structure her creative expression - and the intellectual programme of the Zurich Dadaists. Her approach to the plastic arts was also expressed in her dancing for Dada soirees at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. Her Dada Heads and puppets date from this period. Sophie Taeuber's Dada sculptures - turned wooden pear-shaped heads on small pedestals, painted in bright colours to present a side or frontal view - are pure parodies. They also have a dual function as works of art and as everyday objects: they are both portraits and hat-stands. Her work in these years expresses her concept of simplifying, going back to the basic elements and then constructing from scratch in the manner best suited to the task at hand. Sophie Taeuber also applied this principle in her designs for the puppets for Carlo Gozzi's tragicomic fairy-tale *King Stag* in 1918.

The «Aubette», 1927-1928

The design and decoration of the rooms of the «Aubette» in Strasbourg constitute one of the principal works of early Geometric Constructivism. Sophie Taeuber, who worked on this project with her husband and the Dutch architect Theo van Doesburg, strove to bring the clarity of Constructivism even to architectural details. The room no longer functions simply as an indeterminate backdrop upon which formal elements are ordered, but is itself an intrinsic element of the composition.

Static and dynamic compositions with circles, squares and rectangles and the «Reliefs», 1931-1939

At the centre of Sophie Taeuber's work are the static and dynamic compositions of circles and rectangles she created from 1931 to 1939. With these «Reliefs», the artist breaks new ground. The interplay of circle, cone, cube and cylinder mounted on a rectangular base with elevations and depressions, hollow spaces and solids is optically balanced by careful distribution of the accents of colour. In 1937, the artist experimented with round reliefs, later including shell-like spirals - what she herself called *Coquilles*.

The «Lignes» series of pictures, 1938-1942

The last period of her work was devoted to the series of line pictures. Initially, the «Lines» are studies of stylized shells, parasols and leaves. As they acquire their own dynamics, they develop into clusters, bows and ribbons. Her final works are geometric compositions of overlapping circles and diagonally intersecting angles.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp's work had a far-reaching effect on artistic developments of her time, especially in Switzerland, and was a leading precursor of important art movements of this century, including concrete, serial and minimalist art.

Biographical notes

1889	On 19 January Sophie Taeuber was born in Davos. Her father was of Prussian descent, her mother Swiss.
1891	Sophie Taeuber becomes a Swiss national.
1907 - 1914	Attends the School of Arts and Crafts in St. Gallen, Wilhelm von Debschitz's Studio for Training and Experiment in the Applied and Fine Arts in Munich and the School of Arts and Crafts in Hamburg.
1915	Sophie Taeuber meets her future husband, the poet, painter and sculptor Hans Arp, in Zurich.
1915 - 1918	Start of her artistic career. First duo-works together with Hans Arp. Teaching position in textile design at the School of Arts and Crafts in Zurich (until 1929). Studies dance with Rudolf von Laban. Regular appearances as a dancer in Dada events at the Cabaret Voltaire and the "Dada" Gallery.
1918	Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp sign the Dadaist Manifesto. First important works: <i>Têtes Dada</i> , <i>Triptyque</i> and puppets for Carlo Gozzi's tragicomic fairy-tale <i>Le Roi Cerf</i> (King Stag).
1922	Marries Hans Arp.
1925	Starts working on her geometric figurative compositions.
1926	The Arps move to Strasbourg and become French citizens.
1927	Design and decoration of the «Aubette» in Strasbourg.
1928	Designs and builds her own studio house in Meudon near Paris.
1929 - 1937	Gives up her teaching post in Zurich and moves to France. Joins the <i>Cercle et Carré</i> group, the <i>Abstraction-Création</i> group and, later, the <i>Vereinigung Moderner Schweizer Künstler Allianz</i> .
1935 - 1939	<i>Creates the «Reliefs».</i>
1940	Flees from the advancing Germans, first to Grasse (southern France) and then to Switzerland. Creates her «Lignes» series.
1943	On 13 January Sophie Taeuber-Arp dies in Zurich.