

Growth, 1938

Jean Hans Arp, 1886-1966



Bronze with gold patina, Edition of three
75th PSDM Anniversary Gift of Gwendolyn Weiner, in honor of Executive
Director Steve Nash

Synopsis by Patricia Richie, 2018

Jean Hans Arp was born of a French mother and a German father, in Strasbourg, Alsace, which converted back to France from Germany, post WW1. His dual heritage coupled with the contrasting cultural sensibilities from both countries, and the political and social conflict of the post-war period, highly influenced his works. He was an artist, poet and philosopher. Best known for his biomorphic sculptures, a style he introduced and developed in the 1930's, he was a primary contributor to the Dada and Surrealism movements that preceded.

BACKGROUND

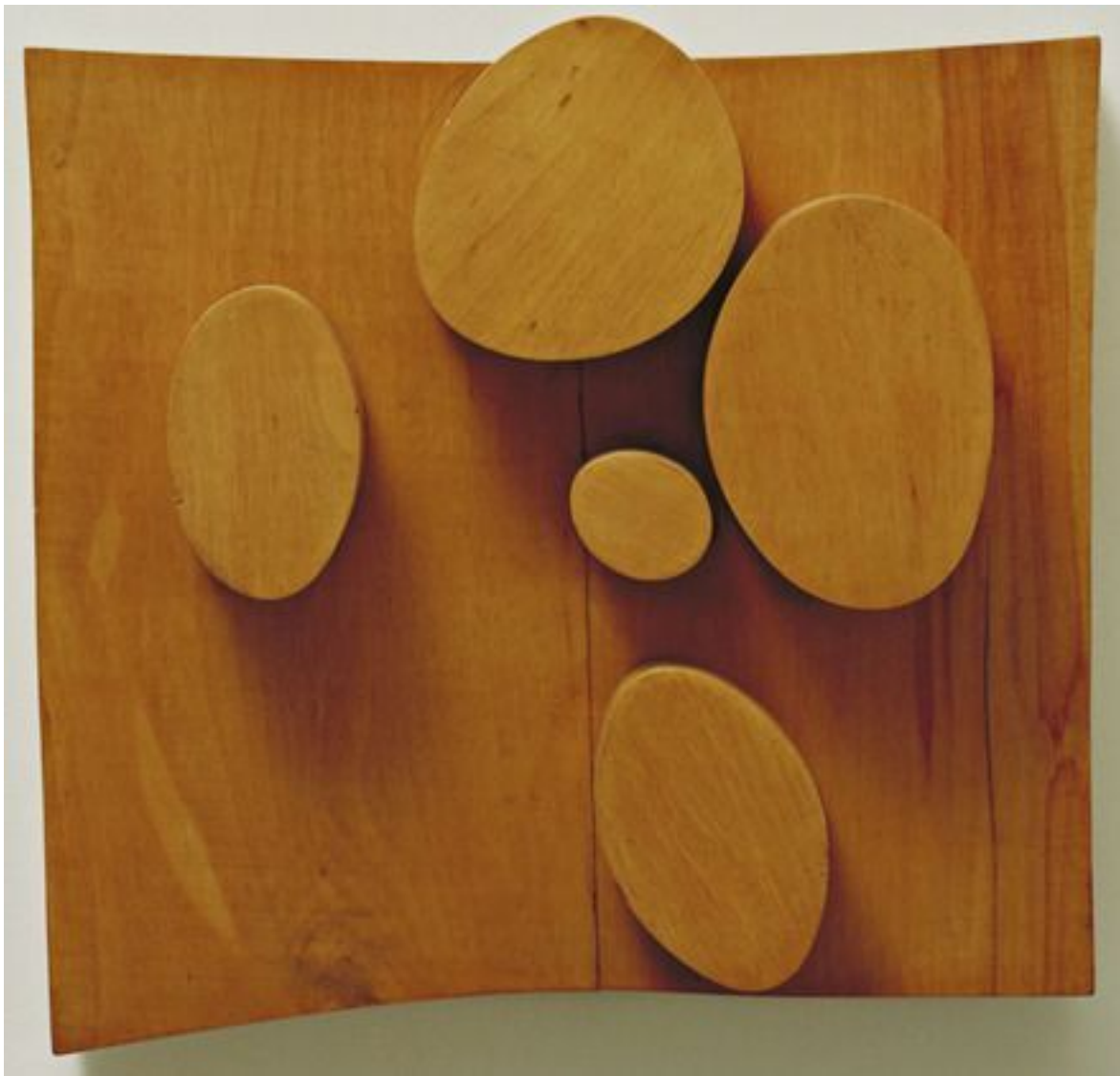
The Dada movement (C. 1915-1925's), of which Arp and Max Ernst were significant founders, was born out of WWI. Artists rejected what they considered the evils of mankind that were responsible for the war—nationalism, the bourgeois, and what they believed was man's greed, competitive nature and craving of technology. The artist's objective was to shock people, through the creation of a style they proudly deemed the "anti-art". Moving away from traditional art styles in realism and controlled applications, they expressed their views using irrationality, absurdity, intuition and humor.

During this period, Arp was one of the first artists to use chance and accident through his compositions, for example dropping irregular pieces of paper onto a flat surface. The concept was a radical break-through of its time, as depicted below. Albeit, it does appear that some re-arranging by Arp may have occurred, again, perhaps his German DNA a factor.



Collage with Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance (1916-17)

Upon the demise of Dada, Arp joined the Surrealism movement, continuing his use of fabrics, wood reliefs, paintings, and collages. The Surrealism movement (C. 1920'-30's) also used the illogical and contradictory. Examples include photographically detailed visual images in juxtaposition with various elements and characters, manmade and otherwise. Samples follow.



Top: "Persistence of Memory, 1931, Salvador Dali"

Bottom: "Objects Arranged According to the Law of Chance", 1930, Jean Arp

It was when Arp was in his early forties, that his work incorporated two significant new directions. His inspiration and messages shifted away from the dissatisfaction related to the shortcomings of mankind, to celebration of his long-time reverence for the beauty, purity and truth in nature and the human form. His themes expressed transformation, growth, fertility, and metamorphosis within natural life. (*Stephanie Buhmann*) His forms became more organic, albeit still abstract, with undulating, curving forms. At the same time, he also expanded from two-dimensional artworks into sculpture, using marble, plaster and bronze. It was in this period that he played a leading role in developing and establishing what came to be known as biomorphism.

The sculpture “Growth” is an important artwork that clearly demonstrates his new biomorphic signature style. There is a strong sense of movement and thrust upwards, suggestive of growth.

The abstract form could be a plant reaching to the sun, or a human form evolving. (*Margherita Andreotti*) The smoothness of the form along with the mirrored gold patina further entice. The slick, polished surface reflects the light, enhancing the voluptuous nature of the form. The organic abstraction style allows the viewer to translate for themselves what the allusive images may embody.

I was immediately drawn to Arp’s sculpture because it reflected my own passion of all things design - particularly when expressed in organic “bulbous” natural shapes and forms. My own paintings have been influenced by Georgia O’Keefe and John Singer Sargent, and certainly now, by Jean Arp. I also seek to give subtle nods to the sensuality, beauty and elegance of nature via curvaceous forms, lighting and shadows. An example follows below.



Unfolding Series; Patricia Richie, 2017

QUOTES

"Arp was concerned with purity, with being free, being independent of everything unpleasant and limiting, and with the active, constant emission of positive energy as well as its perception."

Stephanie Poley

"Art is a fruit that grows in man like a fruit on a plant or a child in its mother's womb."
Jean Arp

"Structures of lines, surfaces, forms, colours. They try to approach the eternal, the inexpressible above men. They are a denial of human egotism. They are the hatred of human immodesty, the hatred of images, of paintings. Wisdom [is] the feeling for the coming reality, the mystical, the definite indefinite, the greatest definite." Jean Arp

STORIES

In 1915, he moved to Switzerland to take advantage of Swiss neutrality. Arp later told the story of how, when he was notified to report to the German consulate, he avoided being drafted into the German Army: he took the paperwork he had been given and, in the first blank, wrote the date. He then wrote the date in every other space as well, then drew a line beneath them and carefully added them up. He then took off all his clothes and went to hand in his paperwork. He was not drafted. *

Arp destroyed all of his artwork done prior to 1915, because he felt it was not good enough. His drive for perfection perhaps reflecting his German roots.

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