

***Sonia Delaunay: Living Art* Features Never Before Exhibited Objects and Reveals New Research and Insights into the Influential French Painter, Artisan, and Designer**

Sonia Delaunay: Living Art

On view February 23 – July 7, 2024

Sonia Delaunay: Living Art explores the full sweep of one of the most remarkable and diverse artistic careers of the twentieth century with never before exhibited objects and groundbreaking research on Delaunay's life and work. The exhibition which opens at Bard Graduate Center on February 23, 2024, presents Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) as an artistic innovator, skilled entrepreneur, and a leading proponent of the avant-garde's pursuit to unite art with everyday life.

Many of the works in the exhibition have never been exhibited or are on view in the U.S. for the first time, including rare couture garments from the 1920s, exquisitely crafted furniture that Delaunay designed for her Paris apartment in 1924, and a tapestry commissioned by the French state in the 1970s. In total, *Sonia Delaunay: Living Art* includes nearly 200 objects showcasing Delaunay's masterful use of color across mediums—from paintings to playing cards and furniture to fashion. The exhibition also expands beyond her celebrated early career to include her lesser-known post-war output when she experienced a second golden age.

The exhibition illuminates Delaunay's ingenious strategies of promotion and branding, her embrace of new media, and how she broke down traditional barriers between the fine and decorative arts. Casting new light on the artist's career and cross-disciplinary approach to production that have never been investigated, *Sonia Delaunay: Living Art* demonstrates how the artist applied her unique language of color and light to a kaleidoscopic universe of objects and interiors.

"This exhibition traces Sonia Delaunay's lifetime of creative expression and presents a new perspective on an innovator who transcended conventional artistic boundaries and devotedly lived her art," said **Laura Microulis, Research Curator at Bard Graduate Center and co-curator of the exhibition**. "Delaunay worked in bold defiance of artistic hierarchies, merging realms of creation that art history has long divided into fine and decorative. *Sonia Delaunay: Living Art* presents an artist who combined an unbounded curiosity for ideas and techniques at the vanguard with a deep respect for artistic heritage and craftsmanship."

Independent art historian and co-curator of the exhibition, Waleria Dorogova added, "No one expressed it better than her own husband, the painter Robert Delaunay, when he wrote: 'We owe to Sonia Delaunay this art, which borrows nothing from the past and fully captures the spirit of our time.' We want visitors to experience how this is still true today. When the House of Dior re-created one of her 1920s dress designs in 1968, it seemed utterly of the moment. Looking at her printed fabrics, we can envision them on tomorrow's runways. Delaunay's art is a fusion of an astonishing modernity, sheer beauty, and a passionate freedom from convention, which makes it timeless and ever so relevant."

Microulis and Dorogova's approach to Delaunay and her work builds on Bard Graduate Center's commitment to championing new ideas and narratives in design history, the decorative arts, and

material culture that have been previously overlooked and unexplored. The exhibition's focus on recontextualizing Delaunay's career also reflects the BGC's long history of celebrating women artists and creators, with past exhibitions amplifying the work of Eileen Gray, Aino Marsio-Aalto, and Sheila Hicks, among many others.

Exhibition Highlights

Works on view include paintings, garments, textiles and tools for their production, furniture and a rug, varied works on paper, jewelry, books, avant-garde films, art multiples, and business and brand ephemera. Bard Graduate Center's intimate exhibition space in a historic townhouse, rather than a white cube gallery setting, is in harmony with Delaunay's dedication to creating art for the everyday and on a human scale. The exhibition design is inspired by the places in which Delaunay lived and worked.

The exhibition features many pieces that are on public display for the first time:

** Objects that have never been exhibited*

*** Objects that have never been exhibited in the U.S.*

Garments and Textiles

- The *Robe Simultanée* or Simultaneous Dress and a Simultaneous vest (1913), which Delaunay made by hand for herself and her husband Robert with the intention of creating garments that would translate her paintings into life. **
- A felted wool cloche hat and silk scarf set (1924–25) that show Orphism and abstract art in fashion*
- Two dresses from the 1930s made for the wife of Delaunay's business manager, Annette Coutrot*
- A rare hand-embroidered vest personally donated by Delaunay to the Union Française des Arts du Costume that has not been on view for decades**

Furniture and Design

- Original furniture designed by Delaunay for her home on Boulevard Malesherbes in Paris, including an armchair with hand-embroidered upholstery (1923) and sycamore dining room sideboard (1923)**
- A newly-discovered painted wood table (1930) commissioned for the bedroom of Jacotte Perrier, the young daughter of Delaunay's friends Robert and Madeleine Perrier**

Works on Paper

- A 1967 journal of personal reflections that contains Delaunay's never-before seen gouache compositions, on loan from Patrick Raynaud, an artist who worked as her assistant through the 1970s*
- A group of recently discovered works on paper from the 1930s that document Delaunay's textile and interior design work, from the family archive of the heirs of textile entrepreneur Robert Perrier**

Other Works

- An original mosaic (1954) that Delaunay created for an exhibition of the Groupe Espace**
- A tapestry commissioned by the French state, woven by the Manufacture de Beauvais (1975)**

Exhibition Themes

Sonia Delaunay: Living Art explores the artist's expansive and diverse oeuvre through the following themes:

- **“I have lived my art”: Self Promotion.** The introductory gallery presents Sonia Delaunay as an innovator—in art, in business, and in life—and makes the case for why she remains an enduring and influential figure. The artist's carefully constructed artistic identity and self-branding is explored through examples of works in which Delaunay boldly embedded her own name, using color and typography to make it the focus of her compositions. Delaunay's iconic *Simultaneous Dress* (1913) and Patrick Raynaud's 1972 film, *Sonia Delaunay, prises de vues pour une monographie (Sonia Delaunay, footage for a monograph)* provide the chronological bookends for this gallery—showing her consistent embrace of the vanguard throughout her career.
- **Living Art, Painting Light: Delaunay's Practice of Simultanism.** This gallery features important early career works and traces Sonia and Robert Delaunay's embrace of the chromatic theory of Simultanism, the optical effects made by the juxtaposition of different colors. Highlights of this gallery include the “first Simultaneous book,” *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* produced with poet Blaise Cendrars in 1913.
- **Performing Simultaneity.** This gallery explores Delaunay's projects for stage and screen through works on paper and other mediums. It features her costume designs commissioned by Ballets Russes impresario Serge Diaghilev for his successful production *Cleopatra* in 1918. The section also explores the performative aspect of Delaunay's designs, which gained new impetus upon her return to Paris in 1921 through collaborative relationships with avant-garde artists, poets, and writers. Examples include so-called “poem-dresses” that Delaunay created as an innovative way of including the written and the spoken word into her work and other striking avant-garde costumes for art soirées.
- **Maison Sonia Delaunay.** In 1924, Delaunay set up a fabric and fashion design studio under her name in her Paris apartment. This gallery is dedicated to Delaunay's commercial enterprise, showing the making and ground-breaking marketing efforts that she employed to promote her textiles and fashion for international distribution.
- **Interiors: The Art and Design of Space.** This gallery explores Delaunay's interior design practice—from rugs and curtains to the custom-made furniture created for her Paris apartment. Such spaces were considered as total works of art that united beauty and functionality.
- **Survival and Revival: The occupation.** While France was under occupation (1940-1944), Sonia Delaunay lived in exile in the South of France, where her life took an unexpected turn in 1941 when her husband Robert succumbed to illness. This gallery showcases how even in the face of difficult circumstances, Sonia persevered creatively, producing works that marked the beginning of a new period on her artistic path.
- **A New Age of Simultanism: the post-war years.** The final gallery of the exhibition highlights Delaunay's prodigious post-war production during the 1960s and 1970s in which she created designs for mosaics, tapestries, a Matra 530 sports car, and commercial multiples including scarves, ceramics, and jewelry.

Catalogue

Sonia Delaunay: Living Art, co-edited by Laura Microulis and Waleria Dorogova, offers new research and fresh perspectives on Sonia Delaunay and her work through a collection of 27 essays. Published by Bard Graduate Center in collaboration with Yale University Press, the catalogue features contributions from leading international scholars as well as an essay of personal reflections written by the last living member of Delaunay's atelier. The design by award-winning book creator, Irma Boom, embraces Delaunay's approach to color and typography.

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About Bard Graduate Center

As the leading research institute in the United States dedicated to the study of decorative arts, design history, and material culture, Bard Graduate Center has pioneered the study of objects to better understand the cultural history of the material world. Offering experiences for scholars, students, and the general public alike, Bard Graduate Center is built on multidisciplinary study and the integration of research, graduate teaching, and public exhibitions. Since its founding in 1993, Bard Graduate Center has established a network of more than 400 alumni who work in leading museums, universities, and institutions worldwide to advance new ways of thinking about material culture. For more information, visit bgc.bard.edu.

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