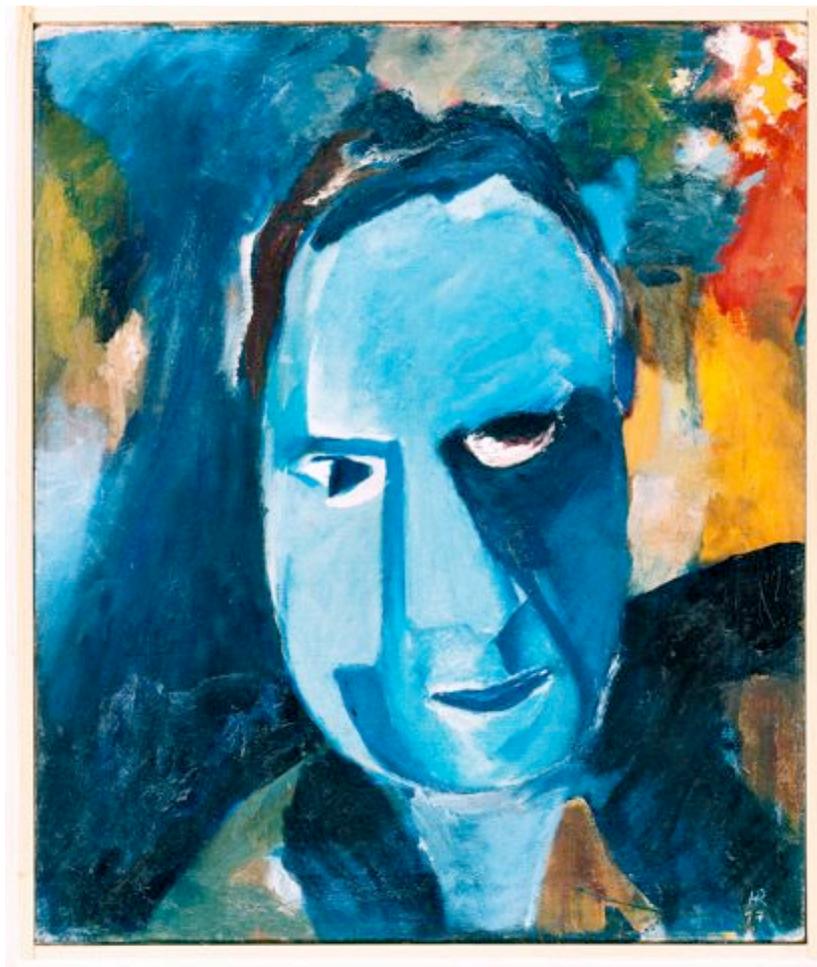


HANS RICHTER
THE CROSSING OF THE CENTURY

28 SEPTEMBER 2013 – 24 FEBRUARY 2014



Hans Richter, Blauer Mann [*Blue Man*], 1917
Oil on canvas, 61 × 48,5 cm
Kunsthaus Zürich, donation from Frida Richter, 1977
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1) PRESENTATION OF THE EXHIBITION

HANS RICHTER. THE CROSSING OF THE CENTURY

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GALERIE 2

Centre Pompidou-Metz presents the first major retrospective in France of the drawings, paintings and films of Hans Richter (1888–1976). Organized in partnership with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, this monographic exhibition views the artist in his broader context.

Hans Richter. The Crossing of the Century traces more than fifty years in the artist's career and collaborative practice, and includes works by Hans Arp, Theo van Doesburg, Marcel Duchamp, Viking Eggeling, Max Ernst, Marcel Janco, Fernand Léger, Kazimir Malevich, Man Ray, Gerrit Rietveld, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Tristan Tzara. Richter was a force in shaping art in the twentieth century in its social, political and formal dimensions. Alongside major avant-garde works of the twentieth century, the exhibition shows a vast body of documents such as photographs, books and journals.

Draftsman, painter, writer and editor of periodicals, Hans Richter was at the confluence of avant-garde art from the 1910s. He was also a pioneer of experimental film. *Rythmus 21* is a brief, three-minute film which Richter made in 1921, and which transports to the screen the radical and poetic qualities found in Malevich's *White on White* – indeed, Malevich and Richter worked together in 1927. The life of this versatile artist was caught up in the sometimes tangled thread of twentieth-century history. He was in Munich at the time of the Spartacist uprising, then in the USSR in the early 1930s. He was forced to flee Nazi Germany for Holland, France and Switzerland. During the Second World War he found refuge in the United States. All along this crossing of the century, as he often observed himself, Richter lived only for painting and film.

Film is a catalyst in Hans Richter's protean oeuvre; it is a meeting point where various media – painting, drawing but also typography, photography, even architecture – interplay. The films which Richter made using vast painted scrolls, derived from Chinese painting, influenced the modern architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Gerrit Rietveld. Hans Richter. The Crossing of the Century reveals this permeability between forms, and examines perception and interpretations of moving images within the museum space. It also traces the importance of film in twentieth-century art history which Hans Richter, so often at the crossroads of genres, pioneered.

While the exhibition does not claim to transcribe its full size and scope, it retraces Richter's crossing of the century step by step, from Dada in the 1910s and 1920s to its documenting in words and images by Hans Richter in a new role as the historian of the avant-garde of the 1920s and of his own time. From Dada experienced first-hand to a reconstituted Dada, the exhibition looks at the passing of time, political and artistic engagement, history and the repetition of history.



First shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art as Hans Richter: Encounters from 5 May to 2 September 2013, after Centre Pompidou–Metz the exhibition will travel to Martin–Gropius–Bau in Berlin where it will be on view from 27 March to 30 June 2014.

It is organized by Centre Pompidou–Metz and Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

A catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

Curators

Timothy O. Benson, Curator of the Rifkind Center, LACMA, Los Angeles

Philippe–Alain Michaud, Curator, Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, head of the experimental cinema department

Assistant curator

Cécile Bargues, art historian



2) STRUCTURE OF THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is chronologically structured as a line but also a circle (not unlike a reel of film), as Hans Richter's practice is marked by repetition. He reprised works, extended the principles of avant-gardism as established in the 1920s, and documented his own history in books and exhibitions. The circle is complete when, having been one of the major Dada artists, Hans Richter writes its history and so becomes its guardian.

The exhibition begins in 1916 when an 28-year-old Richter arrived in Zurich. Seriously injured at war and recently discharged from active duty, he obsessively drew pigs devouring corpses brought back from the front. Hans Richter met Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara and Hans Arp, in an atmosphere of excitement and enthusiasm that would make this "island in the midst of fire, iron and blood" the home of Dada. The revolution of which he was a part was not, he would later write, "an artistic movement in the accepted sense; it was a storm that broke over the world of art as the war did over the nations". Richter was part of *Die Aktion*, a group forged around Franz Pfemfert's periodical of the same name, and joined protests against the slaughter of war, yet he challenged the established order first and foremost in his *visionary portraits* which he painted at twilight, allowing colour to freely flow and the hand to work almost unguided. His *Dada Head* ink drawings went further still in their simplification of form and rapid gesture. These black and white drawings introduced a representation of positive and negative, and were a preliminary to future experiments in the then wide-open field of cinema. Richter's encounter with Viking Eggeling would be hugely influential in this respect.

Following the last Dada evening, Hans Richter joined the newly formed Munich Republic of Workers' Councils, escaping the outpouring of violence which put an end to the Spartacist uprising. This section also shows the collaborative work of Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling. Together they explored representations of movement, and the appearance and disappearance of pure forms using sequenced scrolls. This led them from painting to the kinetic image and, beyond this, to the exploration of space-time which Richter named the "fourth dimension". Abstraction is the least observed aspect of Dada: *Rythmus 21* (1921) and *Rythmus 23* (1923) are composed of an abstract arrangement of rhythmically alternating rectangles and squares. Both films find resonance with the De Stijl aesthetic. At the crossroads of avant-gardism, Hans Richter shows how Dada reconciles political and formal subversion; his work invites us to consider the history of art beyond the confines of categorisation. Thus the exhibition shows side by side work by artists of the De Stijl (Theo van Doesburg, Gerrit Rietveld, Georges Vantongerloo...) and Dada movements (Hans Arp, Raoul Hausmann, Marcel Janco, Kurt Schwitters...).

Between 1923 and 1926, Richter published *Periodical G*, which is the subject of the next section. *G* is the first letter of *Gestaltung* (form); the title was thought up by El Lissitzky who also designed the typography for the first two issues. Richter was involved with a multitude of journals in the 1920s, from *Ma* to *Contimporanul*. However, *G* stands apart for the wide spectrum of contributors (Hans Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Werner Gräff, Raoul Hausmann, Piet Mondrian,

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Kurt Schwitters...) and for the diversity of subjects it engaged, from the form of clothes to that of buildings, letters or engines. *G* gave equal consideration to the role of concrete poetry as to that of film, describing what film had been and what it could become. The last issue, titled simply *Film*, was both tribute and testament.

On one of its covers, *G* published a composition by Kazimir Malevich that gives an elevated view of floating elements shown in counterpoint of an aerial view. On a visit to the Bauhaus, Malevich had intended asking Richter to give movement to Suprematist elements and deploy them in space. His forced return to the USSR prevented him from giving Richter the script he had prepared. The film was never made and the script thought to have been lost. It resurfaced many years later and was realised by Richter himself in the late 1960s, assisted by Arnold Eagle. The entire project is on view in the exhibition.

Hans Richter's prominence in avant-garde filmmaking, together with the impact of his 1920s productions such as *Vormittagsspuk*, *Filmstudie*, *Alles dreht sich* and *Inflation* led him to a new role as film curator for *Film und Foto*, an exhibition held in Stuttgart in 1929. This was an ecumenical history of cinema which, surprisingly, extended as far as scientific and experimental film; a militant vision too, which was illustrating and defending film's social role. This same vision continues in *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen* (*Film Enemies of Today, Film Friends of Tomorrow*), the book which Richter published that same year and which is also the catalogue for the exhibition.

In the early 1930s, Hans Richter began working on an anti-Nazi documentary, *Metall*, in Russia. It would remain uncompleted. Realising that he was in danger in Germany, he took refuge in Switzerland then in Holland where he earned a living from lectures and commissioned films. It was during this exile that the Nazis organised an exhibition of "degenerate art" which included Richter's work. Little is known of these years of rupture and isolation, when many of Richter's works were destroyed. After reaching the United States, via Chile, Hans Richter returned to painting, producing historically charged scroll collages with titles such as *Stalingrad* or *The Liberation of Paris*.

The next section shows how Hans Richter reformed, in New York, avant-gardism's broken circle with *Dreams that Money Can Buy*, a film composed of sequences by Fernand Léger, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Man Ray and Richter himself as the *Blue Man*, named after a striking portrait painted in the Zurich years, with which Richter particularly identified. Thus began an aesthetic based on the repetition and reactivation of forms. As a teacher, Richter helped shape a new generation of artists and filmmakers, while rekindling a past he had witnessed first-hand, and which France and Germany had forgotten: Berlin before Nazism, and the Dada movement. He brought his friends together in *Dadascope* (1956–1961), remade destroyed works, wrote essays and *Dada, Art and Anti-Art* (1965), a history of the Dada movement. He also staged *Dada 1916–1966*, a vast compilation of reproductions which toured Europe, the United States and Japan.