WIDEWALLS

When Peggy Guggenheim Opened a Gallery in London

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Balasz Takac is alias of Vladimir Bjelicic who is actively engaged in art criticism, curatorial and artistic practice.

Aside from artists themselves, the development of the 20th century modern art wouldn't be possible without **the art patrons** who truly believed in the purpose of art and supported the artistic production by investing in it and collecting it. The leading figure of the time was a person of distinct taste and clear vision – **Peggy Guggenheim**.

Her contribution to the arts and culture of the past century is grand, yet **the early gallerist attempts of the renowned collector** somehow remained overlooked. Namely, **in 1938 Guggenheim opened her first exhibition space in London**, where she set the foundations of her later activity. Although the **Guggenheim Jeune** gallery lasted only eighteen months in a former pawnbroker's shop at 30 Cork Street, critically it was well accepted and publicly perceived with great interest.

Now, **Ordovas gallery** is hosting an anniversary exhibition simply titled *Peggy Guggenheim in London*, **to revisit the patron's explicit interest in Abstraction and Surrealism** by showing the works by Yves Tanguy and Jean (Hans) Arp which were initially showcased at Guggenheim Jeune.

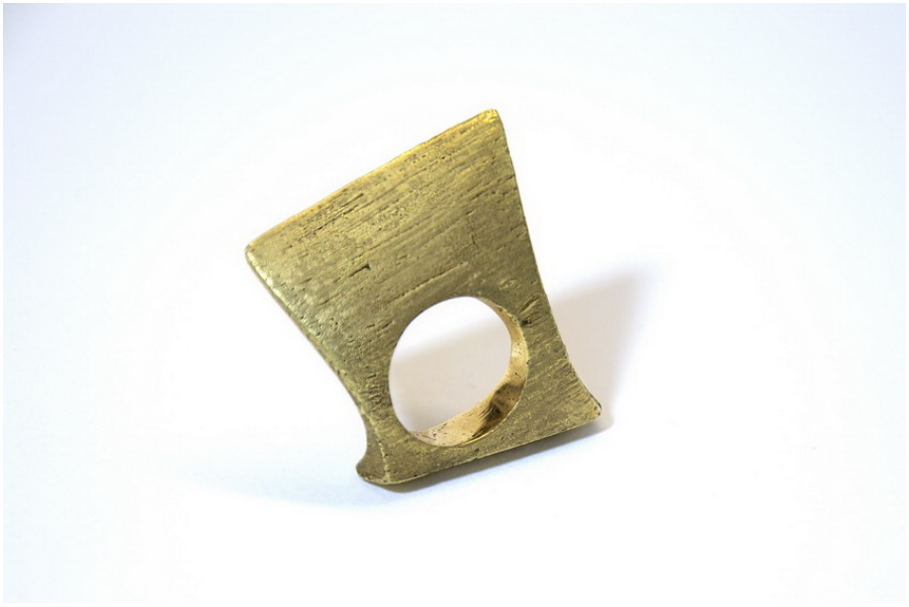
Left: Jean (Hans) Arp – Tête; Objet à traire (Head; Object to Milk), 1925 © DACS 2019 / **Right:** Yves Tanguy – En le temps menaçant (Time of Foreboding), 1929 © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2019

Towards Guggenheim's Collecting Activity

After the death of her mother in 1937, Peggy Guggenheim focused more on her interest in art and becoming a gallerist, an activity which later led her to become a prolific collector. The same year, after following a piece of advice by her friend Marcel Duchamp, she spent a few days at the Paris International Exposition where she got thoroughly acquainted with the latest avant-garde tendencies. That is when **Guggenheim acquired her first work of art**, and it was Jean (Hans) Arp's small biomorphic sculpture titled *Tête et coquille* (circa 1933).

Guggenheim figured out she wants to open exhibition space, so she asked a friend, the publisher Winifred (Wyn) Henderson to be the gallery's spokesperson/manger, and he was the one who named the new business. Guggenheim Jeune referred to the fact Peggy was the younger (jeune) Guggenheim present in the art world (her uncle Solomon being the elder) and to Bernheim-Jeune, the name of the leading Parisian gallery at the time.

The show which **gained significant commercial success** was *Exhibition of Paintings by Yves Tanguy*, the artist's first London solo exhibition. It presented twenty-five paintings and five gouaches throughout eleven days and was quit reviewed, visited and almost all the works were sold out. Interestingly so, Guggenheim offered four remaining works to the Tate Gallery, but they **declined her generosity** (the collector bought three works which are part of her grand collection).



Yves Tanguy – Sans titre (Bague) / Untitled (Ring), circa 1938. The Penrose Collection © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2019

The Works

A number of the works in the Ordovas exhibition were shown at Guggenheim Jeune, while some of them were **never before exhibited in the UK** until now. Yves Tanguy's *Le Ruban des excès (The Ribbon of Excess)* from 1932 is loaned from the National Galleries of Scotland (it was initially shown within the first UK presentation of Tanguy's at Guggenheim Jeune), and a gouache on paper *Sans titre (Untitled)* made by the artist in 1933, and *Sans titre (Untitled)* from 1935 are loaned from the Wakefield Permanent Art Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield). Tanguy's *En le temps menaçant*, 1929; *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1931 and *Titre inconnu (Title Unknown)* are the works **exhibited for the first time in the UK**.

A painted wood relief titled *Flocons aux rayons jaunes (Flakes with Yellow Rays)*, made by Jean (Hans) Arp in 1946 is **also displayed for the first time in the UK**. Alongside this work is the Surrealist bronze sculpture *Trois objets désagréables sur une figure (Head with Annoying Objects)* made by the artist in 1930, as well as a painted collage *Tête; Objet à traire (Head; Object to milk)* executed in 1925 and a cement sculpture *Fruit de pagode (Pagoda Fruit)*, produced in 1949.

The exhibition highlight is **a rosewood ring made by Yves Tanguy in 1937**. That year, while preparing his solo exhibition, the collector began a love affair with the artist, so this particular object is practically a symbol of their affection and is related with Guggenheim's obsession with peculiar jewelry. Tanguy made several delicate objects for the collector throughout their relationship such as a small drawing for her Dunhill cigarette case and painted miniature oval earrings.

Left: Yves Tanguy – Titre inconnu (Title Unknown), 1929 © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2019 / **Right:** Jean (Hans) Arp – Fruit de pagoda (Pagoda Fruit), 1949 © DACS 2019

Peggy Guggenheim at Ordovas gallery

After eighteen months, Guggenheim closed the doors of the gallery with **the plan to transform it in London's first museum of modern art**, a very much required venue for the city. Allegedly, she hired Herbert Read, highly acclaimed British art historian and critic, to make a list of artists which could be included in distinguished collection Guggenheim called *M.M.M.M – my much misunderstood Museum*.

However, the circumstances on a global scale didn't go into her favor – just after arriving in Paris to purchase the works for the museum **the Second World War started in September 1939**. Guggenheim had to postpone her plans, and so she showcased some of the intended artworks at her second exhibition place titled *Art of This Century* in New York in 1942. The collection was finally housed in a Venetian Grand Canal a palazzo in 1949 where they remain today.

Nevertheless, Guggenheim Jeune remains **an important historical gallery** aimed to establish an international survey of the latest art tendencies. It shows Guggenheim's outstanding focus and willingness to endorse, promote, and support the artists. The gallery owner Pilar Ordovas stated:

I have been wanting to organize an exhibition about Peggy Guggenheim since I established my gallery in Savile Row, just around the corner from where Peggy set up Guggenheim Jeune in 1938", says. "No one has really paid much attention to what the London experiment meant to her as a collector and as a gallerist and, most importantly, her

intention to open a 'Museum of Modern Art' in London. Marking 80 years since the brief but seminal tenure of Guggenheim's West End gallery this exhibition, which has been curated by Ordovas and Susan Davidson, tell the story of the gallery's activities through artworks by Jean (Hans) Arp and Yves Tanguy – artists that she championed and collected.

The exhibition is accompanied by **an illustrated catalog** including an essay written by the curator and art historian Susan Davidson, and previously unpublished material (numerous copies of key gallery documents, including unseen floor plans of the Guggenheim Jeune).

Peggy Guggenheim and London will be on display at Ordovas gallery in London until **14 December 2019**.

Featured image: Yves Tanguy – Le Ruban des excès (The Ribbon of Excess), 1932. National Galleries of Scotland. Accepted in lieu of tax and allocated to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art 1998 © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2019. All images courtesy Ordovas gallery.