



Project for a cover for Vogue

Sonia Delaunay

Not on display

Title/Description: Project for a cover for Vogue

Artist/Maker: Sonia Delaunay

Born: 1916

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Gouache, Graphite, Paper

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 345 x w. 233 x d. 1 mm) Framed: (h. 550 x w. 405 x d. 22 mm)

Accession Number: 31174

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Spain

Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979) was an important abstract artist and a key figure in the Parisian avant-garde. Her work crossed an extraordinary range of disciplines including painting, printmaking, textiles and notably here fashion. In 1914, just as the war broke out, Sonia was travelling in Northern Spain with her artist husband Robert. They decided not to return to Paris and based themselves in Portugal and Spain. In 1916, whilst based in Vigo in Spain, she painted a series of projects for covers for the fashion magazine Vogue. [1] As well as this example, Sonia made as many as twenty sketches for Vogue, two are in the Collection du Centre Pompidou. [2] This gouache sketch is painted in bold primary colours with a few lines of pencil and pencil crayon. The figure is barely visible beyond the dramatic costume design consisting of a series of coloured concentric rings.

The painting, *Prismes électriques* (Electric Prisms), 1914, (Georges Pompidou Centre) is perhaps the best example of Sonia's use of concentric circles. The hoop-style skirt has a brightly coloured fringe. The topographical treatment of the word Vogue is dominated by the expressive letter 'u' created by a dramatic cross. In 1918, Sonia set up her own boutique in Madrid called 'Casa Sonia' and expanded her practice to clothes and interior design. She also met Serge Diaghilev and he commissioned her to design the costumes for the ballet, *Cléopâtre* performed by the Ballets Russes'. This new production opened at the London Coliseum Theatre on 5 September 1918. [3] The spectacle was recorded by the critic Cyril Beaumont who recalled that the mirror on the girdle winked like a heliograph every time it caught the light. [4]

On her return to Paris after the First World War, Sonia set up her Atelier Simultané and went on to

produce radical and progressive designs for scarves, umbrellas, hats, shoes and swimming costumes throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Her fashion house called simply 'Sonia', had clients including the Hollywood star Gloria Swanson and the architect Erno Goldfinger, as well department stores like the Amsterdam luxury store Metz & Co and Liberty. [5]

Sonia Illinitchna Stern was born in Gradizhsk, Ukraine, 1885, to a Jewish Ukrainian family. At the age of seven she went to live with her wealthy uncle Henri Terk and his wife, Anna, in St Petersburg, Russia. The Terks offered her a privileged and cultured upbringing in St Petersburg. Nevertheless, her childhood memories of Ukraine remained with her and she often referred back to the 'pure' colour and bright costumes of the Ukrainian peasant weddings. In 1901 she studied art in Karlsruhe, Germany, and in 1905 moved to Paris, where she spent most of the rest of her life. In 1908 she entered into a "marriage of convenience" with German art dealer and gallery owner Wilhelm Uhde, allowing her access to a dowry, and Uhde cover for his homosexuality. In 1909 they divorced, and Sonia and Robert Delaunay married on 15 November 1910 and their son Charles was born on 18 January 1911. They were supported by an allowance sent from Sonia's aunt in St. Petersburg.

Uhde remained a lifelong friend, but in Robert was a likeminded pioneer of abstraction. Together they created the movement called Simultanism, in itself a strand of Orphism. The name comes from the work of French scientist Michel Eugène Chevreul who identified the phenomenon of 'simultaneous contrast', in which colours look different depending on the colours around them. For example, a grey will look lighter on a dark background than it does on a light one.

The Delaunays aimed to create rhythm, motion and depth through overlapping patches of vibrant hues. Orphism is a term originating from 1912 when French poet and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire identified the new style of Cubist painting. Apollinaire was inspired by the work of František Kupka and the Delaunay's, who, although channelling the Cubist vision, prioritised colour in their work. Apollinaire felt this use of colour brought movement, light and musical qualities to the artwork and therefore referenced the legendary poet and singer of ancient Greek mythology, Orpheus, when naming the movement. [6]

Sonia Delaunay was highly successful and had numerous solo and group exhibitions during her lifetime. She was also honoured with many awards, such as the *French Légion d'Honneur* (1975), *Chevalier des Arts et Lettres* (1958), and a gold medal for her two murals at the Paris World's Fair (1937). The work was purchased directly from Sonia in 1970.

Calvin Winner, November 2021

[1] Veronica Sekules, The University of East Anglia Collection, 1984, p.5

[2] Alistair Grieve, University of East Anglia - Collection catalogue, 1972, p. unpaginated

[3] Sekules, p.5. Robert Delaunay designed the set.

[4] Sekules, p.5

[5] Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti and Petra Timmer, *Colour Moves: Art and Fashion by Sonia Delaunay* (Published by Thames and Hudson 2011), p.9

[6]
<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-sonia-delaunay/delaunay-introduction> accessed on 12/11/2021

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Sonia Delaunay is my heroine, since her entire life was absorbed in brilliant colour - and she was still working at her brightest and best in her nineties. Her art extended from painting to cars and stage costumes. She was a pioneer of geometric abstraction, and of modernist design integrating furniture, fabrics, wall coverings and clothing.

This burst of colour is a 1916 idea for a Vogue cover, when the magazine was launching in Britain and Sonia was in Spain. It's a thrilling counterblast to the horrors of the first world war.

Born in Tsarist-ruled Ukraine and raised in St Petersburg, Sonia enjoyed a privileged upbringing, but her approach to art was always revolutionary. Her first pictures were in the Fauvist style, with intense colours influenced by Gauguin and van Gogh.

In 1910 she married the artist Robert Delaunay and theirs was to be an enviably close partnership, in art and life, until his death in 1941. Soon after Roger Hilton and I got together, in 1959, he said: "It's working, you and I, but I'm the painter in this set-up." It may sound shocking now, but more artists have shared Roger's view than Robert's. Roger had great integrity as an artist, which was something I needed in my life. I also had two sons, so was fulfilled in another way. I came back to painting later.

When Sonia's son was born, in 1910, she made a patchwork quilt for his crib, created spontaneously and using geometric colour. It was a flag for Orphism, the Delaunays' version of Cubism, as christened by their poet friend, Apollinaire. The quilt is now in the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, but I love this piece in the Sainsbury Centre.

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Rose Hilton (d.), artist
