



Bing

Sonia Delaunay

Not on display

Title/Description: Bing

Artist/Maker: Sonia Delaunay

Born: 1967

Object Type: Rug

Materials: Wool

Measurements: h. 2030 x w. 1650 x d. 15 mm

Accession Number: 31175

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: France

Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979) was an important abstract artist and a key figure in the Parisian avant-garde. Her work crossed a range of disciplines including painting, printmaking, fashion and notably here textiles. This rug was purchased directly from Sonia in 1971, which she referred to by the title of *Bing*. It was woven in 1967 by Pinton apparently after a design dating from c.1925. [1] It is recorded in the Sainsbury Centre records as a Alpujarra rug, presumably after the region of Alpujarra in the Sierra Nevada mountains of Andalucía in Spain, renowned for the weaving of loop pile carpets.

Following the First World War, Sonia set up her Atelier Simultané in Paris and went on to produce 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. Later in life she revisited earlier designs. [2]

Delaunay was part of a tradition of Russian artists such as Liubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova who ignored the established hierarchies that had traditionally separated craft and art. Sonia Delaunay was born Sarah Stern (nicknamed Sonia) in Gradizhsk, Ukraine, 1885, where her father was a factory worker. At seven, she went to live with a wealthy uncle in St. Petersburg and took his surname, Terk. In 1909, Sonia took up embroidery, which she likely first learnt as part of her upper-class Russian girls' education. [3] In 1901 she went to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe, Germany, and in 1905 moved to Paris, where she spent most of the rest of her life.

Delaunay's abstract compositions were directly inspired by the traditional quilts she saw during her childhood in Russia and Ukraine. Her interest and application of craft techniques may also have been encouraged at the Academy, as during the period woman artists were often encouraged to apply themselves to such activity. Women artists were often expected to restrict themselves to applied arts, seen at the time as more 'appropriately woman's' work rather than painting or sculpture. In fact, this inadvertently served to advance further development and experimentation.

Sonia saw no distinction between fine art and applied art. She was happy to emphasise her Russian background at a time when folk arts were undergoing a revival. When Sonia's son was born, in 1910,

she made a patchwork quilt for his crib, "About 1911 I had the idea of making for my son, who had just been born, a blanket composed of bits of fabric like those I had seen in the houses of Russian peasants. When it was finished, the arrangement of the pieces of material seemed to me to evoke cubist conceptions and we then tried to apply the same process to other objects and paintings." [4] The quilt is now in the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, made intuitively and spontaneously as a pure expression geometric colour.

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).

Sonia had a close partnership with her artist husband Robert Delaunay until his death in 1941, although this meant her own artistic reputation was always treated subservient to that of Robert. For a long time, Sonia was regarded as simply wife-of-the-more-famous Robert. After the second world war Sonia's reputation began to come out from behind Robert's shadow and her own contribution as a pioneering artist was finally acknowledged.

In 1975 the University of East Anglia initiated a proposal for a decorative scheme of 15 wall hangings from designs of Sonia's to be made by Pinton. This was to decorate University buildings designed by the British Modernist architect, Denys Lasdun. Contact between the University and Sonia had been made when the artist Mary Webb introduced the University to the Sonia in 1970. Mary had known Sonia since 1962. Initially Sonia was enthusiastic and proposed making 15 designs for wall hangings for the price of 4 or 5. [5] Regrettably this project was never realised, possibly due to Sonia's frailty in age. We can only speculate on what a project might have been.

Calvin Winner, November 2021

[1] Recorded in Sainsbury Centre Archives

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

[3] Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti and Petra Timmer, p.26

[4]
<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-sonia-delaunay/delaunay-introduction>, accessed on 12/11/2021

[5] Sainsbury Centre Archives, recorded in a letter from Sonia, 18th December 1974, in the object files

Provenance

Purchased directly from Sonia Delaunay in 1971 and woven in 1967 by Pinton SA, France after a design of c.1925.
