

6. Bruce Altshuler, "Instructions for a World of Stickiness: The Early Conceptual Work of Yoko Ono," in Munroe, *Yes: Yoko Ono*, 65. Altshuler cites an e-mail to him from Ono, November 3, 1999.
7. For more on the anti-conformist tendency

in post-WWII Japan, see Midori Yamamura, *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 9–44.

8. Aside from her informative text, Yoshimoto translated two important

articles in the volume: Donald Richie, "Stumbling Front Line: Yoko Ono's Avant-Garde Show," and Toshi Ichiyanagi, "Voice of the Most Avant-Garde: Objection to Donald Richie" (122–25).

## Sonia Delaunay

Edited by Anne Montfort, with contributions by Jean-Claude Marcadé *et al.*  
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Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

The Tate Modern catalogue and exhibition is a visual tour de force, with over 250 mostly full-color illustrations that highlight Sonia Delaunay's artistic range working in diverse media, materials, and processes as well as her leadership and participation in new arts movements, including Orphism, Simultané, Abstraction-Création, and Nouvelles Réalités. Its scope is larger than the 2011 fabric and fashion-oriented *Sonia Delaunay: Color Moves* catalogue and exhibition at the Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. The Tate Modern catalogue, a collaboration with Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris (where the exhibition originated),<sup>1</sup> offers fourteen short essays by leading and younger Delaunay scholars, primarily from France, with one from England and two from the United States.<sup>2</sup> An excellent chronology for each decade is interspersed between the essays to present the timeline of Sonia Delaunay's life (1885 Ukraine – 1979 Paris) and main artistic achievements. Instead of a grounded narrative overview and analysis of Delaunay's body of work in relation to her century (and our own), the chronology, images, and essays spotlight key artistic achievements.

Céline Chicha-Castex and Brigitte Leal open by summarizing the huge, important donations of art and documents by Sonia and Charles Delaunay, her son, to the National Museums of France in 1963 and 1977. The primary written materials include masses of letters, and over thirty years of Sonia's journal entries, most stored at the Bibliothèque nationale. One sign of

Delaunay's international stature are these primary materials along with others at institutions in France, Germany, United States, Russia, Portugal, and Spain.

The first essays, "In St. Petersburg" by Jean-Claude Marcadé and "Being Russian in Paris" by Sherry Buckberrough, touch on Sergei Diaghilev's *Mir Iskusstva (World of Art)* magazine as an important part of the young artist's formative influences, and on the Ukrainian and Russian needlework and craft traditions that it re-popularized. Neither mentions that the artist's family had its own seamstress, and that costume parties were part of her youth. Importantly, the Hermitage Museum, near her home, offered an optimal view of great international art.<sup>3</sup> Marcadé discusses that few documents survive in relation to Sara Stern Terk's Ukrainian birth heritage and the Jewish intelligentsia culture in which she was raised in St. Petersburg, after age five, by her aunt and uncle Terk. Marcadé notes that after she moved to Paris, the artist did not frequent Jewish circles, considered herself a 'Russian Ukrainian,' and celebrated the Orthodox Christian Easter "culturally rather than religiously" (19). Buckberrough's essay argues that Delaunay was consciously androgynous because she may have met with Valentine de St-Point in Paris in 1914, because Natalia Goncharova painted hieroglyphs on her bare breasts in Moscow the same year, and because she "wears a man's working jacket ... personalized by her patchwork" in one 1914 photo (47–48). In my opinion, Buckberrough neither defines androgyny nor provides sufficient evidence that it applies here. Delaunay was not consciously choosing to adopt a male/female persona, and the word androgynous is being retro-imposed. She was functioning simultaneously as a wife, mother, artist, and income-produc-

er just as many of my (baby boomer) generation experienced this same requirement without necessarily self-identifying as androgynous.<sup>4</sup>

Brigitte Leal discusses the important 'Fauve' works the artist created after her studies with Ludwig Schmid-Reutte in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1904, her studies with Rudolf Grossmann in Paris in 1907, and her introduction to the art of Braque, Picasso, Derain, Dufy, Metzinger, Pascin, and her future husband, Robert Delaunay (they married in 1910). First, though, in 1908, Sonia married German gallerist Wilhelm Uhde (a marriage of convenience to an openly gay friend) rather than return to St. Petersburg as her relatives urged. Leal's short essay centers on the post-Cézanne context for *Nu jaune (Yellow nude, 1908)*, "in which colour prevails over form, and narrative over iconicity," and which, along with work by (Czech painter) Frantisek Kupka,

marked the simultaneous arrival in the work of both the Czech and the Russian artist of an art of colour which would dominate the century in all its dimensions—expressive, psychological, physiological and musical—and of which they shared equal status as the undisputed pioneers (40).<sup>5</sup>

To a remarkable degree, Delaunay's inventions were ahead of her time. Pascal Rousseau's essay, "Voyelles: Sonia Delaunay and the universal language of colour hearing," first quotes Apollinaire's close-up view as the guest of Sonia and Robert, "As they wake up, the Delaunays speak painting" (71). Rousseau emphasizes that the artist's pioneering use of color had an international impact, in part, because Sonia grew up with German, English, and French governesses, and she, Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, and others in her circle were polyglots, fluent in



Fig. 1. Sonia Delaunay, *Autoportrait* (1916), cover of the catalogue for the Stockholm exhibition, pochoir, 13 3/8" x 17 7/8". Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Gift of the artist, 1977.

several languages. Rousseau concludes that Sonia "was to find in colour an authentic substitute for the expressive deficiencies of language" (72). He argues that artists and thinkers of the period posited correspondences among vowels, colors, and *sounds* and that "this helps to explain Sonia Delaunay's very 'physiological' taste for coloured vowels, in particular during her pre-war 'simultanist' period, which led both her and Robert towards 'pure painting'" (75). Nearby, dozens of color illustrations related to this essay demonstrate Rousseau's points that the emotional resonances of Delaunay's contrasting juxtaposed colored shapes communicate vividly, as he suggests, more akin to music than to verbal language.

Each essay contributes another layer, color, and point. Sophie Goetzmann's essay supports Rousseau's view of Delaunay's international language of painting as it explores the stir caused by her art *objects* with "pure tones and humble materials" (90) (rather than oil paintings) at Herwarth Walden's important 1913 *Der Sturm* salon in Berlin. Sonia Delaunay introduced five paintings along with painted boxes, cups, a curtain and cushions with

abstract titles such as *Coussin Astral* (*Astral Cushion*). The art objects were a shocking departure from painting and made a huge impact on the fifty avant-garde artists exhibiting at *Der Sturm*. These decorative objects stirred a hearty debate about "what is art?" Because Sonia was fluent in German, she and Robert Delaunay navigated the Berlin scene so well that Lyonel Feininger called the couple "almost scientific, an optical corporation" (90).

In "On time: Sonia Delaunay's sequential Simultanism," Juliet Bellow addresses how some of Delaunay's art was both created and performed in relation to time, including performances for which Sonia created costumes that would literally be moving in time with their wearers. She mentions the Delaunay family's six-year 'vacation' in Portugal and Spain during and just after World War I. This period was artistically rich beyond the scope of Bellow's fine essay. Sonia learned to support her family by designing fashions for their friends, including members of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. She opened Casa Sonia, a fashion boutique.

Cécile Barques next discusses Sonia's relationships with Romanian Dada

founder Tristan Tzara, Russian Futurist Iliadz, and others after the Delaunays returned to Paris in 1921. Some old friends were bitter that the Delaunays had decamped during the War. Sonia became friends with Tzara, who had brought the Dada movement to Paris in 1919. In 1923, she designed cardboard costumes (which were not easy to wear) for *Le Couer á Gas* (*The Gas-Powered Heart*), a Dada romp that caused the surrealists in the audience to riot and storm the stage. André Breton broke one actor's arm with his cane. Lush drawings of the period follow: dress poems, photos of sets and costumes for René Le Somptier's film *Le P'tit Parigot* (*The little Parisian*), the Delaunay's living room, Sonia's fashions and fabrics.

During the 1920s, Sonia invented coordinated designs for hats, scarves, coats, shoes, swimsuits, beach coats and umbrellas, purses, and even a matching Citroën B 12 sports car. Cécile Godefroy, overall Curator of this exhibition, contributes a short essay, "The métier of Simultanism," discussing Sonia Delaunay's polymorphic output. She participated in the 1924 Salon d'Automne and the 1925 Exposition of Industrial and Decorative Arts. She also produced an album of pochoir prints that advanced the field of printed reproductions. Robert Delaunay had patented the Simultané brand in 1925. After the stock market crash of 1929, Sonia's main market became fabric designs for Metz & Co, a boutique department store based in Amsterdam. Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti, the grandson of its founder, Joseph de Leeuw, picks up the story in "Sonia Delaunay – the designs for Metz & Co." After Joseph de Leeuw met Sonia at the 1925 Paris Expo and placed his first order, their business collaboration and friendship prospered. Sonia's friends during this period included the American photographer Florence Henri and artists Mondrian, Chagall, Gabo, Gleizes, Kandinsky, Léger, Pevsner, and Vantongerloo. The author, Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti, first met Sonia Delaunay much later—in 1956 when he was four years old; in addition to his own career, he has devoted part of his life to researching and preserving Delaunay's art and legacy.

During the 1930s, Sonia became involved with the Abstraction-Création artists led by Auguste Herbin and Georges Vantongerloo and with plans for the 1937 Paris International Exposition. She was part of the Réalités Nouvelles group of abstract artists that formed in 1939. Even though she was born Jewish and France was occupied by Nazis, during the war she managed to care for her husband Robert (who died in Montpellier in 1941), to preserve their and their friends' art, and to remain in France—she lived with the Magnellis and the Arps in Grasse. Sonia also created new art, including a work for the International Red Cross. Guitemie Maldonado discusses the circular rhythms of Delaunay's art of the 1930s, and does a good job summarizing this important period and her abstract murals and oil paintings of 1938 and 1939. I wish she could have further emphasized the genius of painting airplane propellers, dashboards, and engines for the 1937 Paris International Exposition and have further answered her own question about how and why Delaunay moved from abstract representations of travel to pure large abstract paintings and murals in the late 1930s.

"Confused origins" by Laurence Bertrand Dorléac reviews what biographer Dominique Desanti has written about Sonia Delaunay's Jewish origins, roots, and early education in relation to the aftermath of World War II. Because her Civil Status Record from 1910 marking her legal presence in France suggested, but did not list, her Jewish heritage, she was lumped into the 'métèque' (foreigner) status with other Russian emigrants after World War II. Dorléac quotes from the artist's 1941 diary at the Bibliothèque nationale and other sources and concludes that she identified as Russian but not Jewish during a difficult period. By January 1945, Delaunay had returned to Paris and was busy exhibiting as well as starting a "friends of Robert Delaunay" young artists group. Their son, Charles Delaunay (1911–88), who became a jazz critic and joined the Resistance during the War, started a journal *Le Jazz Hot*.

Griselda Pollock, in "Art criticism and the problem of the non-modern

story of modern art," critiques the ways in which critics of various stripes—from French to traditional to feminist—slant their views of Sonia Delaunay's accomplishments. She quotes Michel Seuphor's 1950 book on the origins of abstraction in which Seuphor suggests that sometimes Sonia appeared to be "ahead" of Robert in her art-making, and that she was best of show in 1948 when she turned from decorative arts back to painting (220).<sup>6</sup> Pollock says Sonia was more supportive of her husband's art than he may have been of hers. She does not mention that Sonia both restored Robert's art and worked to secure his place in the French pantheon, nor that Robert was the son of French Countess Berthe de la Rose, who had 'discovered' Henri Rousseau. Delaunay was modest about her achievements until later in life. Her role as a pioneer of chromatic abstraction was overlooked or downplayed because she had left the Russian art scene, was not French, and was a woman in an art world dominated by men. Pollock suggests that traditional art historians including Guy Weelen did not give Sonia equal stature with her husband in 1960, and that feminist Cindy Nemser's later conversation with Delaunay "is full of a feminist discourse of discrimination and difficulty" that misread her historic role. Pollock concludes: "Sonia Delaunay lived a life of partnership, generosity, necessity and sustained research into the field in which she must now be understood as historically an innovator, a creator, a first" (222).

The title of Domitille d'Orgeval's essay, "Conquering the Paris art scene in the 1950s and 1960s," refers readers to the last chapter of Cécile Godefroy's doctoral thesis on Delaunay. In the post-WWII years, Paris artists both rallied around those who had died during the War (including Robert Delaunay), and also held salons presenting abstraction as Réalités Nouvelles. Given Sonia Delaunay's friendships, by now, with curators who had risen to become directors in the French museum system, and her innovative prints and paintings shown by the Denise René Gallery, she "achieved in stages the different objectives she had set for herself at the

end of the war" (247). The culmination came in 1967, with a Sonia Delaunay retrospective at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

From her 1963 meeting with Jacques Damase, who published a range of her art books and prints until her death in 1979, Delaunay continued to receive major exhibitions, prizes, and recognitions. Juliet Bingham, Curator of the Tate Modern exhibition, returns readers to Delaunay's historically important early achievements in the context of modern art. Ann Montfort, Curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris exhibition, closes the essays with "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui," which is translated as a Mallarmé poem's title "The Virgin, Vivacious and Beautiful Today."<sup>7</sup> Montfort's essay moves in many directions; at one point, she proposes that a 1967 painting in three parts, *Le serpent noir*, draws its inspiration from Delaunay's art works from three different periods. She discusses the freedom Delaunay found, in 1973, by returning to making art in relation to favorite poetry, such as nine of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, and quotes the artist's 1968 view: "Just as, in written poetry, it is not the way the words are put together that counts, but the mystery of creation that gives, or does not give, an emotion ... so with colours, it is poetry and the mystery of an inner life that emerges, radiates and communicates" (274).

This major exhibition and catalogue from Paris and London boldly asserts that earlier critics were biased, and these critics collectively hail Sonia Delaunay (and Kupka) as *the pioneers of modernist color*. The essays on her fashions, mixed media, and decorative arts stop short of making the same claims in these media, even though the evidence is just as strong or stronger. The prints, drawings, paintings, and pochoir deserve further discussion as the 250 images and the essays propel Sonia Delaunay's body of work into the forefront of early modern art. Another major achievement, thanks to Griselda Pollock's and Brigitte Leal's strong views, is new ways to view early twentieth century achievements and new ways to dissect and reflect on early modern art history.

Jean-Claude Marcadé, Sherry Buckberrough, and others quote from the 1978 autobiography *Nous irons jusqu'au soleil* (*We Will Go Right Up to the Sun*), which Delaunay dictated in the year before her death; however, this seems to me to be a less reliable source than earlier primary documents and accounts. Buckberrough hints but does not directly state that the name Sonia is Russian for sun, making the artist's identification with the sun personal as well as symbolic in her art—as seen in her important Self-Portrait series of 1916 (Fig. 1), in which her circular abstract 'head' consists of nests of multi-hued half-circles. One critic mentions another early innovation—breaking electric light into circular patterns of prismatic diffracted colors related to light and sun. Juliet Bellow and a few others mention the artist's 1913 abstract art/text collaboration with Blaise Cendrars, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (*The Tale of the Trans-Siberian Express and Little Jeanne of France*), a vertical scroll two meters tall. Although it is amply illustrated in the catalogue, this historically significant work would benefit from a fuller analysis.

I will elaborate on one small quibble because it's at the core of modern art history. Belgian artist and writer Michel Seuphor, born Fernand Berckeaers in 1901, played an important role in featuring Delaunay's earliest art, including the interior for a bookstore, in his periodical *Het Overzicht* in Antwerp in the early 1920s. He told me, in 1991, about his frequent visits to the Delaunays' salons, starting in 1925, after he had moved to Paris. In the following decades, he was instrumental in developing abstraction as a concept. With Joaquin Torres-García, he co-founded the 1929 Cercle et Carré group to which Robert and Sonia belonged (a footnote on p.188). Seuphor is pictured with Mondrian, Sonia Delaunay, and others in the Abstraction-Création group, 1931 (on p. 191). After World War II, the main focus of many of his books became to establish *abstract painting* as a concept. Nevertheless, in his book *L'art abstrait 1. 1910/1918* (Paris: Maeght, 1971), in his chapter 'Les premiers maîtres de l'art abstrait' (*Masters of Abstract Art*),

Seuphor lists Sonia second after Kandinsky—three places above Robert Delaunay—in a field of two women and thirteen men. Even though Seuphor suggests Sonia should have stuck to painting (p. 29, same quote Pollock uses), Seuphor includes images of her early collages, prints, fashions, and paintings. In the same book, Seuphor's chapter 'Les origines de l'art abstrait,' includes only painting and one woman in the group of fourteen. Seuphor's championing of Sonia's design work in the 1920s and its inclusion, despite his seeming preference for painting, in his 1971 book exemplifies one way that one quote may not fully represent a critic's valuation of an artist's work.

Finally, most of the illustrations are not discussed. The evolution of Sonia Delaunay's art is clearly outlined, yet there is no hint that the essayists have observed the embedded signs and symbols present throughout her work—from the image in the 1911 cradle cover for her son Charles to the late prints and paintings. •

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#### Notes

1. The exhibition opened at Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Oct. 17, 2014–Feb. 22, 2015) and traveled to the Tate Modern, London (April 15–Aug. 9, 2015).
2. The contributors to the catalogue and their credentials, as listed in the catalogue, are as follows: Juliet Bellow: Assistant Professor of Art History, American University, Washington, D.C.; Juliet Bingham: Curator International Art and curator of Tate exhibition; Sherry Buckberrough, Chair of Art History, University of Hartford, CT; Chris Dercon, Director, Tate Modern; Domitille d'Orgeval, Art Historian; Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, Art Historian, Professor at Sciences-Po, Paris; Cécile Godefroy, Curator of the exhibition, art historian; Fabrice Hergott: Director, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti;

Sophie Goetzmann, doctoral student, Université Paris IV – Sorbonne; Brigitte Leal, Deputy Director, Musée National d'Art Moderne/ Centre Pompidou; Jean-Claude Marcadé; Guitemie Maldonado, Professor, History of Art, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris; Anne Montfort, Curator of exhibition at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Griselda Pollock, Professor of Social and Critical Histories of Art, University of Leeds; Juliette Rizzi, Assistant Curator, Tate; Pascal Rousseau: Art History Professor at Université Paris I- Panthéon-Sorbonne.

3. See Mikhail Piotrovsky, *My Hermitage How the Hermitage Survived Tsars, Wars, and Revolutions to Become the Greatest Museum in the World* (New York: Rizzoli, 2015). Sonia, in St. Petersburg between 1890—around 1905, visited its international collection. She experienced how increasing anti-Semitism affected even circles of wealthy assimilated Jewish people, and this probably affected her decision to not identify as Jewish. She was in Paris during the 1905 workers demonstration in front of the Winter Palace, and she identified with this movement, even though it affected her family and eventually ended her income from them. This book documents the Hermitage's grand collection and how it was preserved during evacuations in 1812, 1917, and 1941.
4. Bernard Dorival, in his excellent biography *Sonia Delaunay Sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris: Damase editions, 1980) mentions that Sonia Delaunay was more 'masculine' than her husband Robert: "C'est elle qui fut virile et, lui, féminin" (p. 84). In this, he seems to refer to the fact that Sonia was organized, calm, and supported the family while Robert could be temperamental and never earned his own living. Dorival was using French cultural and generational norms. Sonia, Coco Chanel and many women of their generation were, either from necessity or choice, financially responsible for themselves and others. It seems to me that considering this (and some other traits) "masculine" often refers to cultural biases of a period/country rather than gender-exclusive traits/ behavior.
5. Note: all quotes use the British spelling colour, and I use the American spelling color.
6. Quote on p. 220 from Michel Seuphor, 'Robert Delaunay,' *L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres*, Maeght, Paris, 1950, pp. 41-47. For more on this quote from Seuphor, see second to last paragraph of this essay.
7. C. F. MacIntyre translates this as "The lively, lovely, and virginal today": *Stéphane Mallarmé Poems* (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1971), 83.