

Jean (Hans) Arp (German-French, 1886-1966)

[Arp Museum, Germany](#)

[Arp at MoMA](#)



Arp in Paris studio, ca. 1948-50
Photography: Michel Sima

MoMA brought together over 100 sculptures, reliefs, and collages for their 1958 career survey of Arp, which the artist attended. The archival digital resources for the museum include a [PDF of the out-of-print catalogue](#), which features an essay by Arp.

A 2011-12 [exhibition of sculpture at the Chinati Foundation](#) in Marfa, Texas expressed the aspects of Arp's work that defined the ideals of the foundation's creator, Donald Judd, who first reviewed Arp's work in 1963, giving rare praise for its "lack of distinct parts," thus "[forcing] you to see the piece as a whole."

In the first London exhibition to focus exclusively on Arp since his death, [Luxembourg & Dayan](#) brought drawings, paintings, collages, textiles, and sculptures together for a survey of the artist's career after moving to Zürich in 1915 and becoming a leader [in the Dada movement](#).

The Netherlands' [Kröller-Müller Museum](#), home to Arp's 1953 sculpture [Berger de nuages \(Cloud shepherd\)](#), hosted the first retrospective of the artist's career in sixty years. 2017's [The Poetry of Forms](#) focused on Arp's sculpture practice between 1920-35 and his relationship with poetry.

The Barbican featured Arp's fruitful [collaborative practice and marriage with Sophie Taeuber](#) in a 2018 survey of [avant-garde artist couples](#).

In 2018, SF MoMA [documented the conservation](#) of three [Arp sculptures in their collection](#), which went through a rare process of re-patina to reduce, and eventually remove completely, the shiny façade from their previously polished life. Arp intentionally created his bronzes with matte finish because highly reflective surfaces obstructed his desired relationship between concave and convex forms and the comprehensive vision of the whole.

[Harvard Art Museums](#) conserved and reinstalled Arp's 1950 13-piece redwood relief, [Constellations II](#), in 2019. A [team of curators and specialists](#) discussed the work's relevance and process bringing it back to life after the damage it received in its original location in the university cafeteria.

Arp's innovative career in sculpture was showcased in China for the first time in [Hauser & Wirth's Hong Kong gallery](#) in 2019. Sprawling throughout the gallery spaces, woodcuts, cardboard collages, drawings, and bronze sculptures displayed the artist's creative explorations between 1918 and 1965.

More than 80 works were on view at the [Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas](#) and the [Guggenheim, Venice](#), in 2019, seeking to reveal Arp's relationship to the concept of chance and the inspiration he took from nature. "Chance was a way for him to kind of short-circuit artistic vanity, like giving up control of his work to forces beyond himself," noted curator Catherine Craft in [an exhibition video](#). "Chance was a natural force he felt he could collaborate with."

Scholars and curators discussed Arp's continuing relevance in [a closing conversation](#) for the Nasher's [The Nature of Arp Symposium](#), which explored the artist's multifaceted career, including his [cardboard reliefs](#), collaboration [with wife Sophie Taeuber-Arp](#), and [creativity as a poet](#).



Arp, 1925



Jean Arp (German-French, 1886-1966)

Plan Surélevé dit 'Tables-forêts' / Erhöhte Fläche, genannt 'Waldtische' (Raised Plane called 'Forest Tables'), 1926

Oak wood

Private Collection; L2022:75.1

Born in Strasbourg on the French-German border, Jean Arp studied in both France and Germany in his early career. Like many other likeminded artists, Arp moved to Zurich in 1915 to take advantage of Swiss neutrality at the onset of World War I. As a founding member of the Dada movement, Arp was interested in chance, nonsense, and the various forces that impact the experience of life.

Raised Plane called 'Forest Tables' expresses Arp's fascination with organic cycles of growth, reproduction, and death. The wooden sculpture manifests these natural processes, focusing on biological forms rather than the increasingly industrial aesthetic of the modern, interwar world. According to the artist: "Soon silence will have passed into legend. Man has turned his back on silence. Day after day he invents machines and devices that increase noise and distract humanity from the essence of life, contemplation, mediation."

On view October 19, 2022 – January 22, 2023

Extra Resources:

This sculpture was on view in [Hans Arp: Ovi Bimba](#) at Hauser & Wirth Zürich in 2012.

Jean Arp (German-French, 1886-1966)
Formes blanches sur fond noir, ca. 1917
Oil on wood panels

Private Collection; L2021:76.1

Jean Arp spent his early years entangled in World War I geopolitical tensions between France and Germany. Born in Strasbourg (on the France-Germany border) as Hans Peter Wilhelm Arp, French law dictated the artist's name change to "Jean" after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. When the World War was immanent, the artist moved to neutral Switzerland and joined a group of like-minded artists who rejected capitalism and the nationalism of war. Arp became a founding member of the Dada movement in Zurich, which embraced chance, nonsense, and irrationality in reaction to the violence of World War I. **Formes blanches sur fond noir** is an early example of Arp's experimentation with wooden material. The artist wanted to challenge traditional media – instead of a smooth canvas or board, this work embraces the raw, uneven, organic form of wood panels.

On view June 23 – September 26, 2021

