

Press Release

Amstelveen, April 27, 2011

‘Jacques Doucet, le Cobra français’

International exhibition

For the very first time, a major international exhibition is being devoted to the work of the French avant-garde artist, Jacques Doucet (1924-1994). The exhibition can be seen from at the Cobra Museum from 21 May, 2011, and is the first important presentation of Doucet's work in the Netherlands. A travelling exhibition, it will be presented at three locations, the first opening on October 10th, 2010, at the Lieu d'Art et Action Contemporain (LAAC) in Dunkirk, France.

The exhibition is a collaborative effort by three museums: the LAAC, in Dunkirk, the Cobra Museum of Modern Art and the Musée de Beaux-Arts in Quimper, France. The intensive collaboration amongst these museums has made it possible to present an exhibition that brings together the many exceptional aspects of the art of Jacques Doucet.

Jacques Doucet's work is inextricably bound with twentieth-century avant-garde and the freedom it generated, allowing artists to be able to spontaneously arrange forms, colours and materials, unimpeded by academic traditions.

Jacques Doucet and Cobra

This French-born Cobra artist played a striking role in the years leading up to the Cobra phenomenon. In turn, the Cobra period offered him unique experiences that would have a major influence on his later work. In June, 1947, in Budapest, Jacques Doucet met Corneille, the young Dutch painter, who was impressed by the maturity of the young Frenchman's work. Doucet was a fan of the work of Max Jacob, Alfred Jarry and Paul Klee. Corneille would later write, 'I was immediately enthusiastic about his style. He drew like a child who could set a whole world at his feet. ...a drawing with lines that range free, colourful, unashamed, like the everyday naked truth.'

Doucet joined the Cobra artists because the spirit of the movement gave him the freedom to depart from directions dictated by reason and to more deeply investigate the primal origins of creativity.

The exhibition highlights the broad, multi-sided oeuvre of this French artist. It includes more than 80 works, from the beginning of his artistic career in the early 1940s through and including his last works.

The works are on loan for the exhibition from the artist's estate, from numerous private collectors, and from various French and northern European art institutions.

They include paintings, prints, gouaches, small spontaneous collages from the 1960s, a number of sculptures, ceramics and a carpet. Together, they give an excellent impression of the multifaceted expression of the artist and his unending curiosity and desire to experiment with all kinds of techniques and materials.

The Exhibitions

Lieu d'Art et Action Contemporain (LAAC), Dunkirk, France, 10 October, 2010-5 March, 2011

Cobra Museum of Modern Art, Amstelveen, the Netherlands, 21 May-18 September, 2011

Musée de Beaux-Arts, Quimper, France, 14 October, 2011-9 January, 2012

Publication

A full-colour, three-part catalogue accompanies the exhibition. The authors include Katja Weitering, artistic director of the Cobra Museum, Sophie Warlop, curator at the LAAC in Dunkirk, Nathalie Galissot, curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Quimper, Andrée Doucet, the artist's widow, Michel Ragon and Erik Slagter.

Brief Biography *Erik Slagter*

Jacques Doucet was born on 9 April, 1924, in Boulogne, in the Hauts-de-Seine, near Paris. His parents were from Brittany. He died in Paris on March 11, 1994.

From a young age, Doucet drew and wrote poems. In 1942, he visited the poet, Max Jacob, in Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire. Jacob encouraged him to develop his talents, but left him completely free in his choice of style. Doucet began painting and exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1943 and 1944. He was politically active during the German occupation and was betrayed, arrested and imprisoned by the Vichy militia. His works were confiscated. This period of imprisonment would have a major influence on his painting.

After the war, Doucet resumed his artistic activities and exhibited in 1945 and 1946 at the *Salon des Surindépendants*. Like the Dutch painter, Corneille, in Amsterdam, Doucet met a Hungarian collector in Paris, who invited him to visit Budapest. There he met the philosopher-writers Imre Pan and Arpad Mezei, who were the most important founders of the *Europai Iskola*, or *European School*. He also met Corneille there. Both were interested in the Hungarian surrealists and the *Freedom Art* movement. They became fascinated by the work of Paul Klee, which had previously been exhibited at the *Europai Iskola* and which they discovered in a book in the small bookshop owned by Imre Pan. Both were also fond of Gypsy music and Hungarian folk art and they became friends.

In 1947, Jacques Doucet exhibited for the first time at the *Europai Iskola* building. When he returned to Paris, he joined the *Revolutionary Surrealists* group. At the same time, in Amsterdam, together with Constant and Appel, Corneille formed

the *Experimental Group in Holland* and published the first issue of *Reflex*. In 1948, Doucet had his second exhibition at the *Europai Iskola*. When the *Revolutionary Surrealists* group was disbanded, Doucet immediately joined the Cobra artists in the *International Experimental Art* movement. Jean-Michel Atlan and Doucet were the only members from France. Their friend,

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Michel Ragon, writer and art critic, succeeded Édouard Jaguer in the role of editor for these French representatives. Atlan and Doucet were present at all the Cobra events, from the first *Experimental* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1949 to the last, in Liege, in 1951. Appel and Corneille invited Doucet to illustrate the second and final issue of *Reflex*.

Doucet's first Paris exhibition took place in 1948 at the Colette Allendy gallery, an avant-garde venue where he would continue to show his work for six years. In 1949, he exhibited at Galleria Rotta in Genoa. In 1950, he took part in the *Les Mains éblouis* exhibition at Galerie Maeght. In 1951, Doucet exhibited at the Suzanne Feigel Gallery in Zürich. From 1954 through 1989, he was represented by Galerie Ariel, in collaborations with the Dina Vierny Gallery, a period in which his collages were the determining factor in his work.

Doucet also participated in all the *Salon de Mai* exhibitions. His work was moreover presented in Italy, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, Lebanon, the United States, Luxembourg and Denmark. Each summer, he would travel to central Europe, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal or Morocco to participate in numerous group exhibitions. His work was included in the major Cobra exhibition in 1983 at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, as well as the Cobra exhibitions in Liege and Amstelveen. Jacques Doucet's work is included in museum collections in the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Macedonia, Hungary, Israel, Denmark, the United States and Mexico.

A note to editors:

An invitation is included for the combined presentation for the press on 12 October, 2010, at 11:30 a.m., at the Institut Néerlandais in Paris. For special requests and digital images for publication, please contact Lieke Fijen, Public Relations & Education Manager, Cobra Museum of Modern Art, by email at l.fijen@cobra-museum.nl or by telephone at +31-(0)20-5475038, or +31-(0)6-11432399.