

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 2007

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WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS MAJOR EXHIBITION EXPLORING THE CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF TWO JAZZ-AGE LEGENDS

WILLIAMSTOWN, MA — SARA AND GERALD MURPHY ARE BEST REMEMBERED AS THE CAPTIVATING AMERICAN ‘EXPATS’ WHO INSPIRED F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S *TENDER IS THE NIGHT*. NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, A MAJOR MUSEUM EXHIBITION CONSIDERS THE TWO AS FORCES IN THEIR OWN RIGHT WHO HELPED DRIVE THE MODERNIST MOVEMENT OF THE 1920S.

THE WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART (WCMA) PRESENTS *MAKING IT NEW: THE ART AND STYLE OF SARA AND GERALD MURPHY* FROM SUNDAY, JULY 8, THROUGH NOVEMBER 11, 2007. THEREAFTER, THE EXHIBITION TRAVELS TO THE YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY AND DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART.

MAKING IT NEW EXPLORES HOW THE MURPHYS’ LEGENDARY STYLE—MODERN IN ITS APPARENT SIMPLICITY AND FREEDOM FROM STIFLING SOCIAL REGIMENTATION—WAS A KIND OF MANIFESTO, AND TOUCHSTONE, FOR THE ARTISTS AND WRITERS OF THE LOST GENERATION. THE EXHIBITION SEES THE MURPHYS’ FRIENDS F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, PABLO PICASSO, COLE PORTER, ERNEST HEMINGWAY, SERGE DIAGHILEV, AND JEAN COCTEAU AS AMONG THOSE

WHO ENCODED THE ETHOS OF THE MURPHY'S LIVES INTO PROGRESSIVE 20TH-CENTURY ART, LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND TASTE.

"THE MURPHYS HAD THAT RARE CAPACITY TO RECOGNIZE THE NEW AND TO ENCOURAGE IT WHOLE-HEARTEDLY AND FEARLESSLY," SAYS LISA CORRIN, CLASS OF 1956 DIRECTOR OF THE WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART. "BEING IN THEIR COMPANY, AS THE TITLE OF THIS EXHIBITION SUGGESTS, MEANT BEING AN ACTIVE AGENT IN MAKING THE WORLD ANEW, THAT IS TO SAY, FULLY INHABITING THE IDEALISM THAT WAS ALL THAT CAME TO BE KNOWN AS 'THE MODERN'."

MAKING IT NEW HAS BEEN CONCEIVED AND ORGANIZED BY DEBORAH ROTHSCHILD, SENIOR CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART. DR. ROTHSCHILD IS THE EDITOR OF THE COMPREHENSIVE CATALOGUE ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION, TO WHICH SHE CONTRIBUTES AN ESSAY ON THE MURPHYS' LIVES (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, BERKELEY, JULY 2007).

BESIDES SERVING AS AN INSPIRATION TO OTHER ARTISTS, GERALD MURPHY WAS HIMSELF A PAINTER, ONE WHO CREATED EXTRAORDINARILY ORIGINAL PAINTINGS OF MACHINES AND CONSUMER PRODUCTS THAT WERE WIDELY ACCLAIMED BY PARISIAN CRITICS. THE WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART HAS SECURED LOANS OF ALL SEVEN OF THESE SURVIVING CANVASES. UNLIKE PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (1974) AND DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART (1986), WHICH WERE DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO MURPHY'S *OEUVRE*, *MAKING IT NEW* PLACES HIS BOLDLY COLORED AND METICULOUSLY RENDERED OIL PAINTINGS ALONGSIDE WORKS BY MAJOR ARTISTS OF THE DAY AND A BROAD SPECTRUM OF NEVER-BEFORE-EXHIBITED OBJECTS AND ARCHIVAL MATERIALS REFLECTING THE PERIOD. LOANS HAVE BEEN DRAWN FROM PRIVATE AND PUBLIC COLLECTIONS, BOTH HERE AND ABROAD.

MAJOR PAINTINGS BY PABLO PICASSO, FERNAND LÉGER, JUAN GRIS, AND GEORGES BRAQUE, INCLUDING A NUMBER OF WORKS INSPIRED BY THE MURPHYS, ARE FEATURED, AS IS A SERIES OF WATERCOLORS DEDICATED TO GERALD AND SARA BY LÉGER; DRAWINGS BY JEAN COCTEAU, FRANCIS PICABIA, AND OTHERS; AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MURPHY FAMILY AND ITS CIRCLE BY MAN RAY.

GERALD MURPHY'S AWAKENING TO MODERN PAINTING LED HIM AND SARA TO THE PAINTER NATALIA GONCHAROVA, WHO HAD BEEN DESIGNING COSTUMES AND SCENERY FOR THE BALLETS RUSSES. GERALD WENT ON TO PAINT THE STAGE SET FOR *WITHIN THE QUOTA*, A MASTERFUL PARODY OF POPULAR CULTURE WITH A SCORE BY COLE PORTER, A FRIEND FROM HIS DAYS AT YALE UNIVERSITY. SET AND COSTUME DESIGNS, THEATER PROGRAMS, POSTERS, AND EVEN A CONSTRUCTIVIST-STYLE TICKET TO A BALL HELD TO BENEFIT EXILED RUSSIAN ARTISTS WILL BE EXHIBITED TO REPRESENT THIS PERIOD.

PERSONAL LETTERS, INCLUDING A HEARTBREAKING NOTE OF CONDOLENCE FROM FITZGERALD TO SARA AND GERALD, SENT UPON THE DEATH OF THEIR YOUNGEST SON, WILL BE DISPLAYED ALONGSIDE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS; FILM CLIPS FROM HOME MOVIES OF HEMINGWAY, JOHN DOS PASSOS, ARCHIBALD AND ADA MACLEISH AND THE MURPHYS; AND A TROVE OF SNAPSHOTS OF GERALD AND SARA AND FRIENDS.

GERALD MURPHY'S JAZZ-RHYTHMED PAINTING ENTITLED *RAZOR* (1924), THE SIX BY SIX-FOOT *WATCH* (1925), AND THE PRECISIONIST *COCKTAIL* (1927) WILL BE SHOWN ALONGSIDE THE EVERYDAY OBJECTS THAT INSPIRED THEM. SNAPSHOTS OF SARA MURPHY AND FRIENDS, POSING LIKE THE THREE GRACES, WILL BE EXHIBITED ALONGSIDE PICASSO'S SINUOUS LINE DRAWING OF THE SCENE. AND SEVERAL PICASSO PORTRAITS OF WOMEN, DEBATED AS SECRET IMAGES OF SARA MURPHY, WILL BE JUXTAPOSED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS THAT SUGGEST SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN ONE OF SEVERAL SOURCES THAT FED INTO HIS CONCEPTION OF IDEAL WOMANHOOD AT THE TIME.

TWO SHORT DOCUMENTARY FILMS CREATED FOR THE EXHIBITION WILL ALLOW VISITORS TO EXPERIENCE THE SPECIAL MAGIC OF THE MURPHYS' WAY OF LIFE THROUGH AUDIO REMINISCENCES BY THE MURPHYS, AS TOLD TO CALVIN TOMKINS, AS WELL AS INTERVIEWS WITH ARCHIBALD MACLEISH, LILLIAN HELLMAN, MARIAN SELDES, AND OTHERS. THESE SHORT FILMS WILL BE ENLIVENED BY MUSIC WHICH WAS A VERY LARGE PART OF THE MURPHYS' LIVES. THEY CHAMPIONED JAZZ AS AMERICA'S CLASSICAL MUSIC AND WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO STUDY AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALS—OFTEN PERFORMING THEM FOR THEIR GUESTS.

SARA (1883–1975) AND GERALD (1888–1964) MURPHY MOVED TO FRANCE IN 1921 WITH THEIR THREE YOUNG CHILDREN TO CARVE OUT A LIFE FREE FROM THE STRICTURES IMPOSED BY THEIR WEALTHY NEW YORK FAMILIES. THEY IMPROVISED THEIR OWN BRAND OF UNCONVENTIONAL MODERNISM THAT FOSTERED CREATIVITY AND INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM, EPITOMIZING THE MODERN AMERICAN TO BOTH THEIR COUNTRYMEN AND THOSE THEY ENCOUNTERED ABROAD. CALVIN TOMKINS IN HIS 1971 BOOK ABOUT THE MURPHYS, *LIVING WELL IS THE BEST REVENGE*, WROTE: “THOSE CLOSEST TO THE MURPHYS FOUND IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO DESCRIBE THE SPECIAL QUALITY OF THEIR LIFE, OR THE CHARM IT HAD FOR THEIR FRIENDS...THEY WERE UTTERLY CAPTIVATING.”

“SELF-INVENTION BECAME A WAY OF LIFE FOR GERALD MURPHY—SOMETHING THAT HE RAISED TO AN ART FORM. THE CREATION EXTENDED TO THE CONSTRUCTED PERFECTION OF FAMILY, HOMES, DRESS, WAYS OF ENTERTAINING, AND BEING IN THE WORLD,” SAYS DR. ROTHSCHILD.

SHE CONTINUES, “THE MURPHYS’ STATUS AS PROGRESSIVE MODERNS WAS TIED TO THE ELEGANT SIMPLICITY WITH WHICH THEY LIVED BUT ALSO TO THEIR AMERICAN-NESS AND THEIR ROLE AS TRANSCONTINENTAL INTERMEDIARIES, WHO MOVED BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE ATLANTIC BRINGING THE LATEST IDEAS AND PRODUCTS FROM ONE CULTURE TO ANOTHER. IN ONE WAY, I HOPE THIS EXHIBITION CONTRIBUTES TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE EURO-AMERICAN DIALOGUE HELPED SPAWN 20TH-CENTURY MODERNISM.”

THE MURPHYS ASTONISHED MANY WITH AN ULTRA-MODERN PARED-DOWN STYLE. IN THEIR PARIS APARTMENT, WOOD FLOORS WERE PAINTED BLACK, WALLS STARK WHITE, AND THE ONLY “ART” ON VIEW WAS AN ACTUAL STEEL BALL BEARING—THE LARGEST MADE—MOUNTED TO ROTATE ON A BLACK PEDESTAL SET ATOP AN EBONY PIANO.

BY SETTling DOWN IN VILLA AMERICA, THEIR HOME IN THE CAP D’ANTIBES, A BEACHHEAD IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE, THE MURPHYS INVENTED THE IDEA OF YEAR-ROUND LIVING IN THE RIVIERA: BEFORE THEIR ARRIVAL, THERE WAS NO SUMMER SEASON, NO SUMMER DAYS AT THE BEACH. GERALD’S RESORT WEAR

INSPIRED COCO CHANEL, AND SARA'S HABIT OF SUNBATHING WITH PEARLS DRAPED DOWN HER BARE BACK INSPIRED IMITATORS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC.

SMALL AND UNPRETENTIOUS, VILLA AMERICA FEATURED AMERICAN INNOVATIONS UNHEARD OF IN EUROPE AT THE TIME, LIKE SCREEN DOORS AND STAINLESS STEEL BATHROOM FIXTURES. LE CORBUSIER PRAISED THE MURPHYS' IMAGINATIVE RENOVATION OF THE HOUSE, PARTICULARLY THE NEW FLAT ROOF THAT SERVED AS A SUN DECK. THE INTERIOR WAS DECORATED WITH BLACK FLOORS, ZEBRA RUGS, LOTS OF MIRRORS, AND BIG GLASS BOWLS FILLED WITH FLOWERS. IN 1930 LÉGER CREATED A LARGE DOUBLE-SIDED SCREEN FOR THE VILLA THAT MARKED A CHANGE FOR HIM FROM GEOMETRIC/MECHANICAL TO BIOMORPHIC/CELESTIAL IMAGERY. ENTITLED *LARGE COMET TAILS ON BLACK BACKGROUND*, THE SCREEN IS FEATURED IN THE EXHIBITION.

"*MAKING IT NEW* OFFERS BOTH A LESSON IN HOW SOCIABILITY CAN FOSTER CREATIVITY AND AN ANTIDOTE TO THE ONGOING ROMANTIC NARRATIVE OF THE ISOLATED GENIUS." SAYS LISA CORRIN. "AS A MUSEUM THAT ENCOURAGES A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO LEARNING, WCMA IS PROUD TO MAKE THIS TIMELY CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURAL STUDIES."

SPONSORSHIP

MAKING IT NEW HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES: GREAT IDEAS BROUGHT TO LIFE; THE TERRA FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART; THE GETTY FOUNDATION; AND THE DEDALUS FOUNDATION, INC.

ANY VIEWS, FINDING, CONCLUSIONS, OR RECOMMENDATIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS EXHIBITION DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THOSE OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES.

NATIONAL TOUR

AFTER ITS SHOWING AT THE WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART, *MAKING IT NEW: THE ART AND STYLE OF SARA AND GERALD MURPHY* TRAVELS TO THE

YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY (FEBRUARY 26–MAY 4, 2008) AND THE DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART (JUNE 8–SEPTEMBER 14, 2008).

CATALOGUE

MAKING IT NEW: THE ART AND STYLE OF SARA AND GERALD MURPHY, PUBLISHED BY UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, BERKELEY, CONTAINS A BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY BY DR. ROTHSCHILD, ESSAYS BY MURPHY SCHOLARS CALVIN TOMKINS, AMANDA VAILL, KENNETH SILVER, AND LINDA PATTERSON MILLER; ART HISTORIANS DOROTHY KOSINSKI AND KENNETH WAYNE; ARTIST/WRITER TREVOR WINKFIELD; MUSICOLOGIST OLIVIA MATTIS; AND POET AND AUTHOR WILLIAM JAY SMITH.

WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

THE WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART IS OPEN TUESDAY THROUGH SATURDAY, FROM 10 A.M. TO 5 P.M., AND ON SUNDAY FROM 1 TO 5 P.M. ADMISSION IS FREE AND THE MUSEUM IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE. CONTACT: SUZANNE A. SILITCH, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, 413.597.3178; WCMA@WILLIAMS.EDU, WWW.WCMA.ORG