

**SPECIAL EXHIBITION EXPLORES THE CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF MODERNIST  
ICONS GERALD AND SARA MURPHY**

*Making It New: The Art and Style of Sara and Gerald Murphy* on view February 26–May 4, 2008



Gerald Murphy, *Bibliothèque (Library)*, 1926–27. Oil on canvas, 72 5/8 x 53 in. Yale University Art Gallery, Purchased with a gift from Alice Kaplan in memory of Allan S. Kaplan, B.A. 1957, and with the Leonard C. Hanna Jr., B.A. 1913, Fund. © Estate of Honoria Murphy Donnelly/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Sara and Gerald Murphy are best remembered as the captivating American expatriates who inspired F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*. This exhibition is the first to explore the couple's relationships with some of the pivotal figures in avant-garde circles in Paris in the 1920s. Their legendary style – modern in its apparent simplicity and freedom from stifling social regimentation – was a touchstone for many artists, writers, and musicians of the period – among them their friends Fitzgerald, Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso, Cole Porter, Ernest Hemingway, Serge Diaghilev, and Jean Cocteau.

Gerald Murphy himself was a brilliant and inventive painter, recognized by contemporary French critics for his American audacity. Although he produced just a small body of work, many of his images anticipate Pop Art. His seven surviving canvases are brought together here for the first time with paintings, watercolors, drawings, and photographs by artists within his circle – Picasso, Léger, Juan Gris, and Amédée Ozenfant. Also included are a series of watercolors dedicated to Gerald and Sara by Léger; and

photographs of the Murphy family and its circle by Man Ray. Personal photographs, home movies, letters, and other memorabilia reveal the warmth, charm, and charisma of the family, and further bring this dynamic era to life.

Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Yale University Art Gallery states, “Sara and Gerald Murphy’s ever apparent love of art and life inspired all those who came in contact with them. During their now legendary decade spent abroad in Paris and on the French Riviera, the young American couple’s remarkable social graces and intellectual curiosities created a circle of friendships that helped fuel creative interactions among many artists whose work was then boldly expanding the boundaries of visual art, theater, music, dance, and literature. This exhibition provides a rare opportunity to view all of Gerald Murphy’s surviving paintings within the context of a great modernist moment in time and the art of his illustrious peers.”

*Making It New* was organized by the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Mass. Its presentation at the Yale University Art Gallery has been organized by Helen A. Cooper, the Holcombe T.

Green Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture.

### The Murphys

Sara and Gerald Murphy moved to France in 1921 with their three young children to live free from the conservative mores of their wealthy families. They made their home in Cap d'Antibes, then a little-known fishing village in the south of France, and named their home Villa America.

Here they created a way of life whose informality and generosity of spirit

fostered creativity and intellectual freedom for a notable group of American expatriates and avant-garde European artists, writers, and musicians.

Encouraged by Pablo Picasso and further inspired by the revolutionary aesthetics of Juan Gris, Fernand Léger, and Amédée Ozenfant—whose works are featured in the exhibition—Gerald began painting unique canvases in a style midway between realism and abstraction. His *Bibliothèque (Library)* (1926–27), which the Yale University Art Gallery acquired in 2006, is perhaps the most personal of his paintings, incorporating elements of his father's library, including books, a globe, and a Roman bust. The work is joined here by his six other extant paintings, including *Razor* (1924), *Watch* (1925), and *Cocktail* (1927), all riffs on American advertising and commercialism.

Sara had a stunning effect on the people she gathered around her. Her beauty, coupled with a refreshing originality, inspired Ernest Hemingway and Picasso. Sara's creative flair for making life into art also translated into artistic creations of her own. Her delicate costume designs were an important contribution to the ballet *Within the Quota*, for which Gerald created the stage-set design. The ballet also featured a score by Cole Porter, a friend of Gerald's from his days at Yale.

The Murphys' joyful existence at Villa America lasted just a decade, as their son Patrick's battle with tuberculosis and the Great Depression required their return to America in 1934, where Gerald resumed the presidency of the family business, the Mark Cross Company. The tragic deaths of both their sons as teenagers, coupled with the financial responsibilities of the firm, left Gerald without the will or time to pursue his art.

In trying to define the Murphys' special allure, their friend, writer Archibald MacLeish, noted: "There was a shine to life wherever they were: not a decorative *added* value but a kind of revelation of inherent loveliness."

### Exhibition Support

*Making It New: The Art and Style of Sara and Gerald Murphy* was organized by the Williams College Museum of Art and supported 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



Fernand Léger, *Portrait of Gerald Murphy* and *Portrait of Sara Murphy* from *Weatherbird Portfolio*, 1934. Watercolor and pencil on paper, each 12 3/4 x 9 1/2 in. Honoria Murphy Donnelly Collection. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Foundation, Inc. The presentation at the Yale University Art Gallery is made possible by John, LG 1975, and Barbara Robinson, of the Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation; Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, B.A. 1956; the Eugénie Prendergast Fund for American Art, given by Jan and Warren Adelson; and the Friends of American Arts Exhibition Fund.

### **Related Programming**

In keeping with the Murphys' spirit of collaboration, numerous music groups on campus are including pieces from the 1920s in their regular schedule. Please check the Gallery's Web site (<http://artgallery.yale.edu>) in February for details. The Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque Memorial Symposium, "A Freshly Invented World': Art and Innovation in the 1920s," takes place on Saturday, April 12, from 9:15 AM to 5:00 PM, with a keynote lecture given on Friday, April 11, at 5:30 PM, by Wanda Corn, the Robert and Ruth Halperin Professor Emerita in the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University.

### **Related Publication**

This exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, *Making It New: The Art and Style of Sara and Gerald Murphy*, edited by Deborah Rothschild and published by the Williams College Museum of Art and the University of California Press, available at the Gallery's Bookstore.

### **National Tour**

Following its presentation at the Yale University Art Gallery, *Making It New* travels to the Dallas Museum of Art (June 1–September 14, 2008).

### **Yale University Art Gallery**

Founded in 1832, the Yale University Art Gallery is the oldest college art museum in the United States. Today, the Gallery's encyclopedic collection numbers more than 185,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present day. These holdings comprise a world-renowned collection of American paintings and decorative arts; outstanding collections of Greek and Roman art; the Jarves, Griggs, and Rabinowitz Collections of early Italian paintings; European, Asian, and African art from diverse cultures; art of the ancient Americas; the Société Anonyme Collection of early twentieth-century European and American art; and Impressionist, modern, and contemporary works. The recently completed renovation of the Gallery's 1953 Louis Kahn building is part of a comprehensive renovation and expansion of the museum's entire facility, scheduled for completion in 2011.

Located at 1111 Chapel Street in New Haven, Conn., the Gallery is open to the public free of charge: Tuesday–Saturday 10:00 AM–5:00 PM, Thursday until 8:00 PM (September–June); Sunday 1:00–5:00 PM. For additional information, the public may visit <http://artgallery.yale.edu>, or call 203.432.0600.

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For additional press information or visual materials, please contact Ana Davis, Associate Director of Public Information, at 203.432.0611 or [ana.davis@yale.edu](mailto:ana.davis@yale.edu).