



# Porteur de vase

Sophie Taeuber-Arp

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Porteur de vase

**Artist/Maker:** Sophie Taeuber-Arp

**Born:** 1928

**Object Type:** Collage

**Materials:** Paper

**Measurements:** h. 165 x w. 75 mm Framed: h. 353 x w. 253 x d. 36 mm

**Inscription:** 'S. H. Taeuber-Arp' and 'oeuvre Sophie Taeuber-Arp nr 1928/24f'

**Accession Number:** 31286

**Historic Period:** 20th century

**Production Place:** France

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Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889 - 1943) is one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. Emerging from the European avant-garde, she was one of the pioneers of Constructivist art, Dadaism and Geometric Abstraction, and became one of the foremost artists and designers of the 1920s and 30s. Her multidisciplinary work has had an enduring influence, inspiring innovative artists and designers around the world. Her creative output was diverse, radical and defies categorization. A painter, sculptor, architect, performer, choreographer, teacher, writer, and designer of textiles, stage sets and interiors, maker of marionettes and puppetry, she combined traditional crafts with the vocabulary of modernist abstraction, challenging the boundaries separating art and design. During her relatively short life, she challenged traditional hierarchies between fine and applied art, and asserted art's relevance to everyday life.

Born in Davos, Switzerland, Taeuber-Arp began her studies at the School of Applied Arts in St. Gallen between 1906 and 1910, studying textile design and embroidery. She later moved to the experimental workshops of Hermann Obrist and Wilhelm von Debschitz in Munich, where she learned a variety of techniques in fine and applied art and architecture, before spending a year studying weaving at the School of Arts and Crafts in Hamburg. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 forced Taeuber-Arp to return to Switzerland, where in 1915 she took lessons in Ausdruckstanz (expressionist dance), with the choreographer Rudolf von Laban and the revolutionary dancer Mary Wigman. The same year, during a visit to the Galerie Tanner in Zurich, she met her future husband and fellow artist Jean Arp (Hans Arp), whom she married in 1922.

Between 1916 and 1919, Taeuber-Arp was a key member in the Zurich Dada movement, performing in modern expressive dances at the Cabaret Voltaire and the Galerie Dada. As relationships formed between the dancers and Dadaists, dance became an element of Dada. Sophie Taeuber performed expressionist dance and abstract choreographies at Dada evenings. At the opening of the Dada Gallery in 1917 she danced a solo, alongside the Dadaist poet Hugo Ball. At the same time she taught textile design at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts, where Max Bill was one of her students. Her teaching methods included colour theory and forms of multiple forms of abstraction whilst deliberately favouring mediums and techniques that challenged accepted hierarchies. [1]

In 1926 she was commissioned to design interiors of the Aubette, an historic building in Strasbourg's Place Kléber. This was a turning point in her career, consolidating her place as an early founder of Constructivist art. She collaborated with Jean (Hans) Arp and Theo van Doesburg and when completed in 1928, van Doesburg devoted an issue of his journal *De Stijl* to the ground-breaking design of a public environment that inextricably melded art with daily life. Behind an 18th century Baroque, the three artists were responsible for different sections of the building. Theo van Doesburg was in charge of the two cafés and two dance halls, Sophie Taeuber was responsible for the entrance aisle, tearoom, and two bars, and Jean Arp responsible for the basement, the passage, and billiard room. All three artists worked together designing the stairwell. [2] The Aubette was conceived to be a work of total art applying the esthetic theories of the *De Stijl* movement. The commission gave Taeuber-Arp economic freedom that allowed her to move with Jean Arp to Meudon, near Paris, where she conceived and designed their house and studio and some of its furniture. This marked the beginning of the most productive period in Taeuber-Arp's life.

*Porteur de vase*, 1928 or the 'vase carrier', is a collage created in this fertile period alongside a number of closely related works. Made from cut and collaged coloured papers, pencil and coloured pencil on paper, mounted onto card. The motif is in fact quite figurative although an abstraction on reality. There is clearly an abstracted geometric figure holding a vase, recalling ancient classical imagery, although this has been disrupted by further applied collaged elements. This is one of a series of six collages (a, b, c, d, e, f) of which this example is 'f'. Another example is in the Arp Foundation Archive. [3] Collage became a distinctive part of modern art and a technique closely associated with both Abstraction and Dadaism.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp was involved in various artistic collectives, *Cercle et Carré* (founded 1929), *Abstraction-Création* (founded 1931) and the Swiss group, *Allianz* (founded 1937), alongside fellow artists such as Georges Vantongerloo, Piet Mondrian and Max Bill. In 1937 she founded and edited the radical art magazine *Plastique*. In later life Taeuber-Arp's house in Meudon became a meeting place for artists, writers and other intellectuals. Their circle of friends included the artists Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miró, and Marcel Duchamp. However, when the Nazis invaded Paris, the Arps fled to Southern France, before crossing over to Zurich in late 1942. The following year she died tragically and prematurely from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning.

Calvin Winner, April 2021

1. Biographical information sourced from the Sophie Taeuber-Arp Research Project, <https://sophietaeuberarp.org/english/biografie/> [accessed 15/04/21]

2. information sourced about the Aubette commission,

<https://www.archdaily.com/791507/ad-classics-cafe-laubette-strasbourg-theo-van-doesburg> [accessed 15/04/21]

3. The Arp Archive in Berlin assigns the follow number STARP-ID:6389,  
<https://sophietaeubar.org/english/sans-titre-5/> [accessed 15/04/21]

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## **Provenance**

Collection Greta Stroh, Flensburg, Germany (long-time administrator for the Arp and Sophie Tauber-Arp estate)

Annely Juda Fine Art, London, 1984

Purchased by University of East Anglia (Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts), 1985

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