

FINANCIAL TIMES UK + EUROPE

Arts

Archetype of a modern artist

Sophie Taeuber-Arp | Jackie Wullschläger on an overdue retrospective in Basel, London and New York for an artist whose work flowed between genre

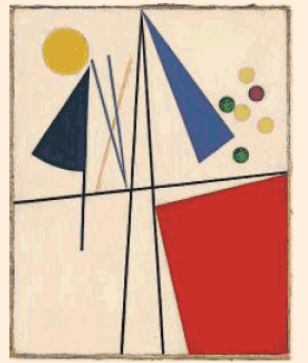
Grasse, November 1942: hungry and lacking paint or canvas, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and her husband Jean Arp are sitting out the war when news arrives of the Nazi invasion of France's free zone. Taeuber-Arp packs up her work: small, easily transportable, abstract drawings in coloured pencil. Their fluid whirling lines and impenetrable criss-cross meshes speak equally of yearning for freedom and barriers — of borders and barbed wire.

The couple are fortunate; they successfully flee to cramped conditions in Zurich — Taeuber-Arp stays with her sister, Arp with designer Max Bill. The Arps and Bill are creating a print portfolio and one evening in January 1943 Taeuber-Arp misses the last tram home. Bill suggests Arp give up his bed to his wife; Arp refuses and Taeuber-Arp, not uncheerfully, wades through the snow to Bill's summer house, lights the stove, forgets to uncover the flue, and dies of carbon monoxide poisoning. Arp's career surges: his optimistic biomorphic sculptures meet the mood of postwar recovery. Taeuber-Arp is forgotten for 50 years.

Taeuber-Arp had never had a solo exhibition but Arp, as well as friends and collectors, preserved every scrap of her eclectic output: textiles, jewellery, puppets, wooden reliefs studded with pegs like children's puzzles, photographs as a Dada dancer clothed in cardboard. These coexisted with, and fed, her major formal achievement: rhythmic paintings of circles, semicircles and rectangles, orchestrated in bright and muted colours. Their "greatest con-



trasts", said her friend Kandinsky, "are loud voice, low voice. Against the thunder of kettle drums and trumpets in a Wagner overture is set a quiet monotonous fugue by Bach". It is all there, the shouts and the whispers, in *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Living Abstraction*, launching Saturday at Basel's Kunstmuseum, then in July at Tate Modern. As the first UK retrospective, it is an important re-positioning — and one of the year's most keenly awaited shows. Taeuber-Arp could have been invented as a model for today. Her work



Voltaire in ungainly mask and elongated paper limbs "full of spikes and fish bones", she hobbles, lurches — the symbol of a broken world. The masks and costumes, said Dada impresario Hugo Ball, "represent not human characters and passions but characters and passions that are larger than life. The horror of our time, the paralysing background events, is made visible... The war is founded on a glaring mistake — men have been confused with machines".

This is the context for Taeuber-Arp's extraordinary polychrome wooden "King Stag" puppets (1918) for the Swiss Marionette Theatre: a golden-horned white deer, feathered Truffaldino the Bird Catcher, Smeraldina with artificial flowers, glass-beaded Brighella, stripy Dr Complex and Freudanalyticus the Magician. They are figures of pathos, manipulated into dramas beyond their own making, but so joyful — expressionist beauty enfolded into protest and mockery. So too the hat-stand parodic portraits "Dada Heads" (1920): Arp painted oval with widow's peak, Taeuber-Arp with dangling beads as curls. They are measured, meticulous, playful.

"My wife brandishes compass and ruler day and night" Arp reported. In Meudon outside Paris she was architect for the couple's house, a narrow ochre millstone cube crossing modernism with Alpine farmhouse. In Strasbourg she designed a café, an immersive environment of dots and rectangles, with Mondrian's colleague Theo van Doesburg. Repetitions of spheres for head, cylinders for torsos, angular corner shapes for arms leaning on tables, are syncretic forms evoking an animated interior in the painting "Cafe": constructivism with a human dimension. An exacting precision learnt through cross-stitch embroidery, the woven grid,

This page, clockwise from main: Sophie Taeuber-Arp with one of her 'Dada Head' pieces (1920); 'Equilibrium' (1932); 'Flight' (1937); 'Colored Gradation' (1939) Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin

flows between hybrid genres, she never acknowledged aesthetic hierarchies, she fused domesticity with avant-garde subversion. Early pieces include upside down "Dada bowls" and decorative insinuations such as crocheted bead bags — their opaque/glossy abstract designs become moveable sculptures simply by being carried, glass catching the light as their owners swing down the street. Taeuber-Arp made the fringes central: born in then obscure Davos in 1889, a teacher of applied arts in a

Taeuber-Arp connected abstraction to the everyday rather than to utopian idealism. She feels real

provincial Swiss school when her life collided with Zurich Dada in 1915, she remained true to local roots during a Paris career in the orbit of Kandinsky's and Mondrian's glamorous cosmopolitanism. Perhaps most importantly for contemporary audiences, she connected abstraction to the personal and everyday rather than to utopian idealism. She feels real.

Her art, as *Living Abstraction* implies, began as performance — yet is refreshingly ego-free. Dancing Dada at the Café

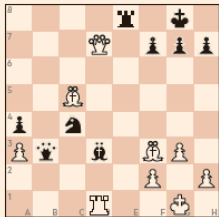
Diversions

CHESS LEONARD BARDEN

Since May 2012 Guildford's team has clocked up 81 wins and two draws in the Four Nations Chess League, but the Surrey club missed out on European competition because its star players had other commitments.

Now the pandemic has created an opportunity in the online 58-team European Cup on the weekend of March 27-28, when Guildford are seeded third behind Czech and Russian teams. The Russians

include Andrey Esipenko, the 18-year-old who defeated world champion Magnus Carlsen at Wijk. Guildford will field Michael Adams, David Howell, Luke McShane and Gawain Jones, effectively the England national team. The pandemic has greatly reduced playing opportunities for those outside the world top 20, who are eligible for Carlsen's Tour, so this will be seen as a chance to put English chess back on the map.



Meanwhile Carlsen is playing the fourth leg of the \$200,000 Meltwater Champions Tour after failing to win any of the first

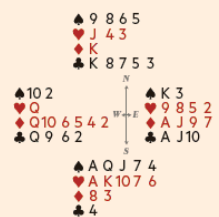
three. The champion won elegantly against France's No1, but more tests lie ahead. Games can be watched every afternoon until Sunday March 21 (4pm GMT start). 2411

Wesley So v Magnus Carlsen, Paris 2016. Black to move. White threatens an immediate end by Qxe8 mate. What was the world champion's move which defeated the threat and won quickly for Black? Solution, back page

BRIDGE PAUL MENDELSON

The excellent British software, RealBridge, allows you to see and converse with your partner and opponents. It is as close to playing live bridge as is currently possible online. Duplicate, Teams and informal hands can be played, with a chance to review every bid made and card played.

After East's Weak 1NT, many N/S pairs struggled to reach game. Where they reached 4S, perhaps seeking overtricks; they failed to



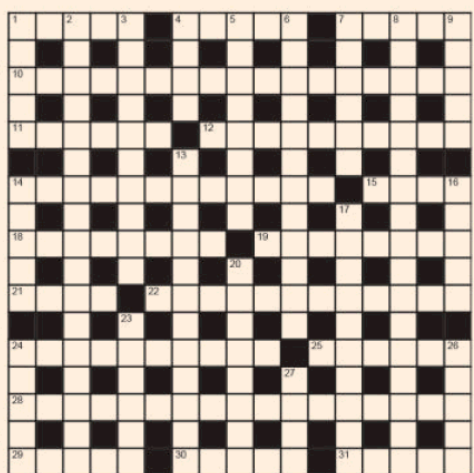
make it. Declarer can see ♠ in dummy, so West's ♠ lead is obviously a singleton. The good news is that declarer no longer has a heart loser —

Dealer: East E/W Game
North East South West
— 1NT 2S 3D
3S NB 4S
and, without that lead, finessing through the opener, you might have lost a trick to that singleton queen. South is pretty certain that East holds K♣, but trying to reach dummy to finesse it is fraught with danger, and this manifested itself pretty quickly. Playing a diamond allowed East to win with A♠ and return a heart for West

to ruff. West then returned a club, which East won and led another heart for a second ruff. Two down. Declarer should reflect that the lead has given her the contract. Without a heart loser, she can play A♠ and another, losing to East's K♣, but ensuring there can be no heart ruff. East can then cash her two red aces, but that is it for the defence. South can trump her second diamond in dummy later and her excellent game is secured.

POLYMATH 1,118 SET BY FALCON

- ACROSS**
- 1 Charles G. US vice-president under Calvin Coolidge (5)
- 4 Large African fly harmful to cattle (5)
- 7 Country in the South Pacific (5)
- 10 The ----- band formed in 1964, briefly managed by Andy Warhol (6,11)
- 11 Mexican plant of the daisy family (6)
- 12 In Greek mythology, the name of one of the 50 daughters of Nereus and Doris (10)
- 14 World Chess Champion from 1969 to 1972 (5,7)
- 15 Satirical character created by Sacha Baron Cohen (3,1)
- 18 Novel by Herman Melville (4-4)
- 19 Lustrous paint found on some prehistoric Greek pottery (8)
- 21 In Norse mythology, the goddess of spring, wife of Bragi (4)
- 22 Marian, US sculptor who modelled bronze markers for the 1960 centennial of the Pony Express (12)
- 24 Max, German Impressionist painter (1847-1935) (10)
- 25 In Greek mythology, the twin brother of Artemis (6)
- 28 Nickname of Birmingham's Gravelly Hill Interchange (9,8)
- 29 ----- Wilkes, sister of Honey and Ashley in the novel *Gone with the Wind* (5)
- 30 Character who first appeared in the novel *First Blood* by David Morrell (5)
- 31 Singer-songwriter who received an MBE in 2013 (5)
- DOWN**
- 1 Elizabeth, English cookery writer (5)
- 2 Road from Santa Monica to Los Angeles (8,9)
- 3 Food sweetener (10)
- 4 Style of dance music (4)
- 5 Capital of Hungary (8)
- 6 Theme tune of the BBC Radio soap opera *The Archers* (7,5)
- 7 Pan-pipes (6)
- 8 Light woollen fabric (10-2-5)
- 9 The heron and bittern genus (5)
- 13 Instrument for measuring refractive indices (12)
- 14 1942 animated Walt Disney film (5)
- 16 Edmund, poet and author of the memoir *Father and Son* (5)
- 17 Purgative drug made from aloes and canella bark (5-5)
- 20 Rare light silvery-white metallic element (8)
- 23 Solid matter ejected during a volcanic eruption (6)
- 24 Marghanita, panellist on the BBC shows *What's My Line?*, *The Brains Trust* and *Any Questions?* (5)
- 26 Another name for snow leopard (5)
- 27 Mario, author of the novel *The Godfather* (4)

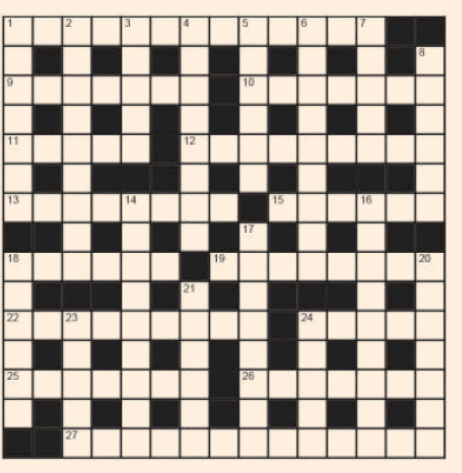


Solution Polymath 1,116



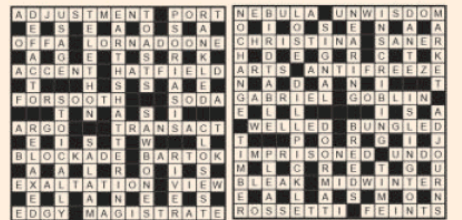
CROSSWORD 16,739 SET BY ARTELEN

- ACROSS**
- 1 Making appearance, friend is boxing boxer in ring (13)
- 9 Headwear goes over graduate (7)
- 10 Fare that's substance of dad jokes? (7)
- 11 Reportedly, fish important for dog (5)
- 12 Bird from lake caught by cunning cat turning (9)
- 13 Bad news, doom for fellers, perhaps (8)
- 15 Somewhat civil, if you knock (6)
- 18 Bishop spotted cubes on old garment (6)
- 19 Ace fast stuffing cuddly toy to be gifted (8)
- 22 Distress as criminal fires gun outside loudly (9)
- 24 Tile is about splitting risk (5)
- 25 Fix fiddle with timber beginning to mould (7)
- 26 Enthuse one gutted niece holding tears back (7)
- 27 Reach view why turbulent year's all over for Trump (5,5,3)
- DOWN**
- 1 Mother with dry chop for boy (7)
- 2 Hammer Thor's held making entry (9)
- 3 Cash examined with naked eye (5)
- 4 Named idiot regularly ringing journalist (8)
- 5 Harm creature of folklore, fairy getting wings removed (6)
- 6 Nasty lump is on this writer's rash (9)
- 7 Despondency of Grand Master drawing in game (5)
- 8 Hard king stuck-up, shaking head (6)
- 14 Enigmatic south-eastern island hiding activity at centre (9)
- 16 Put in grave challenge with appraisal (9)
- 17 Sink a gin, drunk with lush (8)
- 18 Purchase German booze we're told to divide (6)
- 20 Indecisive replacing article in journal with another (7)
- 21 Upset and sad I'm terribly unknown (6)
- 23 Enclose space in fine church (5)
- 24 Crude language (5)



Solution 16,738

Solution 16,727



Jotter pad

Crossword competitions suspended
Dear readers — we have suspended the Crossword and Polymath competitions while our editors work from home. We hope you continue to enjoy completing them until normal newsroom services resume.

makeshift assemblage of fabrics – creative activities encouraged in childhood by a widowed, thrifty mother, then by studying textiles – thus carried over into very refined painting. You note the steady hand at the edge of her geometric shapes, the regularity of composition that allows flights of irregularity: tilting white on grey undulations, swaying as in a storm, in “Off Centre Gradation”; leaping spheres on poles in “Animated Circles” and “Animated Circle Picture”, gouache spiralling, melting, down the page in “Blue Form (Vase)”.

In her last years, limpid shell and leaf forms evolve into suggestions of tangled strings, cross shapes become jagged and unaligned: in “Crossing of Straight Lines, Planes, Green Cross and Fragment of Blue Cross” (1941) they twist like faces in pain. A new asceticism enters the Grasse work: orange and olive Mediterranean hues over-doodled with looping black curves in the series “Geometric and Undulating Lines”.

A memoir by the artist's great-niece Silvia Boadella, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: A Life through Art* (published by Skira in March), though sentimental, is illuminating on childhood associations in these late works. The figure of eight swirls connect to youthful drawings she made after skating. The equilibrium between lilting melody and austerity recalls her love of hearing Bach cantatas in (Swiss, unadorned) churches.

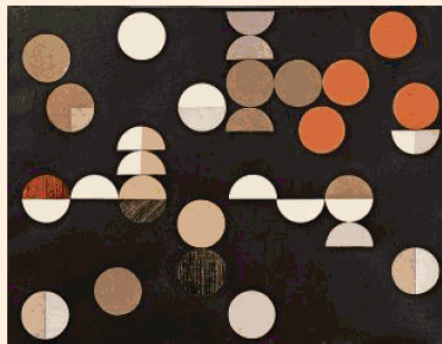
Miserable in Grasse, Taeuber-Arp wrote positively of their pink house among the fruit trees; Arp said they “lived between a well, a graveyard, an echo and a bell”. Taeuber-Arp preserves lyricism amid that menacing



soundscape in “Lines of Spring” and “Lines of Summer” (1942): open and closed forms, arcs and angles, hints of flowers, a wiry butterfly shape blocking and splitting a green spade. Taeuber-Arp was 53; the balance of obscurity and transparency, flatness and depth, is masterly, yet lightness of touch, something like innocence, remains.

“When the struggle of existence has become so difficult”, Taeuber-Arp asked, “why conceive ornaments and colour combinations when there are so many more practical and especially necessary things to do?” Her answer resonates with what has occupied many of us in lockdown homes and gardens: “a deep and primeval urge to make the things we own more beautiful”.

Kunstmuseum, Basel, March 20-June 20; Tate Modern, July 15-October 17; MoMA, New York, November 21-March 12 2022



Above: ‘Blue Form’ (Vase) (1935); left: ‘Composition with Circles and Semicircles’ (1938)
Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin; Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck

London galleries get together

The Art Market Monet’s ‘Waterloo Bridge’ at \$35m; no more Paris Biennale; on the NFT bandwagon. *Melanie Gerlis reports*

London will have a new Gallery Weekend in early June, with nearly 90 contemporary art dealers already signed up to participate. The initiative comes after more than a year of limited opportunities to galvanise attention on the capital’s art trade. “We are lots of little businesses but are a real community,” says Jeremy Epstein, co-founder of Edel Assanti gallery and initiator of the new event. “And when we come together, we are quite a force.”

A range of galleries, from the tiny to the mega, is on board; each will pay between £300 and £3,000, depending on their size. All will co-ordinate shows to open on Friday 4 June and, because of the sprawling nature of London’s galleries, each day will have a different geographic focus. Central London takes June 4, south London June 5, and east London June 6. Most spaces will also be open late: “It will have an all-day, all-night vibe,” Epstein says.

London’s galleries have been in their third lockdown since December, but are due to reopen from April 12. The aim is for this year’s London Gallery Weekend to widen the local audience and then to attract global visitors from 2022, Epstein says.

As participating south London gallerist Sid Motion puts it: “It is so important for young galleries, emerging artists and new voices to be shown alongside internationally established names from the very beginning.” Central London exhibitor Niru Ratnam, who opened a new space mid-pandemic last year, says: “It’s an excellent initiative to get that sense of community back and get people doing that thing they used to do, visiting a round of galleries over the weekend.”

Christie’s art historical categories – Impressionist, Modern, Post-War and Contemporary, etc – are to be dropped in favour of “20th-century art” and “21st-century art”. The boundaries were already blurred – and yet the new categories are still simplified misnomers. The 20th century, according to Christie’s, begins with Claude Monet (who was active from the late 19th century), while the 21st century starts with Jean-Michel Basquiat (whose golden period was in the early 1980s).

Alex Rotter, Christie’s chairman of 20th- and 21st-century art, says it’s about art that “shares a vocabulary”, as well as responding to the market. “The buyers of [young artists] Amoako Bofofo and Dana Schutz are not necessarily the same as for Warhol and Picasso,” he adds.

The rebranding rolls out on May 11, marked by an evening auction of 20th-century work led by Claude Monet’s “Waterloo Bridge, effet de brouillard” (1899-1903), the view from his Savoy Hotel window, estimated at \$35m. This painting last sold in 1999 – then as an Impressionist work – for \$9.4m. Christie’s evening auction of 21st-century work will be on May 13.

It’s *adieu* to the Paris Biennale art fair, which opened in the Grand Palais in 1962 and ran until Covid-19 cancelled its 32nd edition in 2020. Over the years visitors have included

film stars Greta Garbo and Catherine Deneuve, and the event boasted a legendary gala dinner for all its exhibitors and big-name supporters.

But the mixed-category fair had already begun to lose its focus, faced with increasing competition, and then in 2016 it suffered a blow on the back of a faking scandal involving furniture and decorative arts. The Biennale’s organisers, the Syndicat National des Antiquaires (SNA), tried to rejuvenate their fair, including making it an annual *rendezvous*, but it seems the pandemic proved too much. In a statement, the SNA says it is “turning the page” and will instead co-organise a new arts and crafts event in November 2021.

The New York gallerist Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, founder of Salon 94, this week opens a 17,500 sq ft headquarters in a five-storey Beaux Arts building on Manhattan’s “Museum Mile” (3, East 89th Street). “It’s a stone’s throw from the Guggenheim,” she says with an excitement that belies her 19 years at the helm.

The move uptown from the Lower East Side has the sense of a seismic shift, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically changed how galleries do business. Earlier this month, another New York City gallery, Metro Pictures, announced that it

would close by the end of 2021 after a demanding year.

Rohatyn describes her new building as “radical and beautiful, an extension of what I have done all along”. But she concedes: “There is a requirement at some point to grow with the artists.”

She had committed to the new building before the pandemic, but says it has convinced her even more of the importance of a destination gallery. A café and shop will follow as she awaits planning permissions. Renovations of the space, including the installation of a new lift, have cost nearly \$30m, she confirms. The new building opens on March 20 with three solo-artist shows: Niki de Saint Phalle (who has a coinciding exhibition at MoMA PS1), the Brooklyn-based painter Derrick Adams and the Japanese ceramicist Takuro Kuwata.

The rest of the art world is, unsurprisingly, rushing to announce their Non-Fungible Token (NFT) projects after Beeple’s “Everydays: The First 5000 Days” (2021) sold for \$69.3m (with fees) to Metakovan, an anonymous crypto fund investor based in Singapore. Beeple’s sale, paid for in the cryptocurrency Ether through Christie’s last week, turned the relatively unknown graphic designer into the third-priciest living artist at auction, after Jeff Koons and David Hockney.

Rival auction house Sotheby’s says it is working on its “first venture” in the field with the digital artist known as Pak. What exactly this means remains a mystery, though chief executive Charles Stewart told CNBC that a sale would come next month and consist of unique and editioned NFTs. Nor do we know much about the anonymous Pak, other than being the first such artist to sell \$1m-worth of art, back in the old days of December 2020. But then we don’t know much about any of this apparently democratic and open alternative world, other than that it doesn’t seem to be going away fast.



New York’s Salon 94 is relocating to a new building on Manhattan’s ‘Museum Mile’
Jason Schmidt

Art | Basel

Media Partner:

FT
FINANCIAL
TIMES

OVR: Pioneers
March 24–27, 2021

artbasel.com/ovr