**Fellowship Report: Stiftung Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp e.V.**

**Simon Beeson, April 2019**

My broader interest in twentieth century horizontal relief and architectural representation includes a more detailed consideration of a single work by Sophie Taeuber, *Relief Rectangulaire* (1938/26). The opportunity at Stiftung Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp e.V. was to familiarise myself with any relevant material in the archive and scholarship that may be relevant to this study.

The relief is known to have been influential on Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, but unfortunately there is no evidence in the archive to support this. Even correspondence concerning the 1966 Sonsbeek Sculpture Exhibition fails to mention van Eyck, who was designer the pavilion. Neither is he mentioned in correspondence with Nelly van Doesburg, although it is known that van Eyck would stay with her when in Paris and visit Arp just a few minutes away. I had hoped to triangulate these three. Her close relationship with the young Dutch man is confirmed in her reference to him as a “spiritual son” in her biography, that I found in the library here (in Dutch and German).[[1]](#endnote-1)

The significance of this particular relief work was reinforced by the discovery of three further photos taken by Michel Sima in 1949 of Arp in the Garden at Clamart with the relief, in addition to one that has already been influential on my interpretation of the work.

On the development of the work itself, the most interesting issue has emerged around the use of *découpé,* paper cut-outs. Two collage works on 1938 (W1938/21&22) reveal that Taeuber had used coloured paper cut outs, alongside the gridded paper sketches, to develop compositions. This is given particular nuance when considering the current understanding of Arp’s use of cut-outs. I was particularly interested in the research of Tessa Paneth-Pollak[[2]](#endnote-2). While there is little formal relationship evident in the work of Taeuber and Arp, this possible similarity of studio practice raises interesting lines of research and speculation.

The other highly significant development in my own research is the story of the second version. This was sold to Carlos Raul Villanueva, a Venezuelan architect, who took great interest in Taeuber’s geometric reliefs. For the Stiftung Arp and the Kunstmuseum Bern the most important issue of this relief is one of ‘authenticity’ and whether it was created by Taeuber before her 1943 death, as stated in correspondence between Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach and Villanueva. Walberga Krupp (previously of Stiftung Arp) has cast considerable doubt on the provenance of this work, confirmed in my own recent exchange of emails with her while on the fellowship. For me, however, the significance lies not in this question of authenticity, but on the architectural appreciation of the work. Letters between Arp and Villaneuva in the archive, including the letters from the Villaneuva Foundation confirm this. Villaneuva was Venezuela’s most significant architect during the 1950s, especially on the international scene. He planned and designed the University of Caracas, including the 1956 Faculty of Architecture. The whole university included the integration of artworks, including sculpture and murals. As well as the Taeuber work, he also arranged the purchase of a large bronze Arp sculpture (*Shepherd of Clouds*, 1953) and recreated/reinterpreted Taeuber’s Aubette designs (1927), based on a relief at Clamart that he saw on a 1950 visit to Paris. Arp and Villanueva even discuss the location of *Relief Rectangulaire* in the new faculty of Architecture building. I’m keen to trace down images, which have not yet surfaced in the archive.

Unfortunately, there is no original work by Taeuber in Berlin. However, I took the opportunity of my fellowship to place my replica of the *Relief Rectangulaire* in the archive for a month. Additionally, I placed some of ‘Sophie’s blocks’ among the Arp’s. I also created a cut-out paper version of the relief. These images of ‘looking for Sophie’ perhaps return to one of the recurring themes of Taeuber/Arp research; the creative relationship of the couple. After a month here, among the volume and breadth of Arp scholarship, Sophie remains too often the ‘cut-out’ girl.

Berlin, a city I know very little, has been a joy. Even birch tree pollen allergies have not kept me from the streets and museums, especially several trips to the Max Ernst show at the Scarf-Gerstenberg Surrealist Collection and the Klee’s and Giacometti’s at Museum Berggruen. Bauhaus 100 celebrations have included the excellent Bröhan Museum furniture exhibit and *Bauhaus Imaginista* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt. I am grateful for the opportunity to spend such an intensive month considering Taeuber in such an inspiring context, for access to the library and archive at Wiebestrasse and the files at the Kaiserdamm office, for the help from Jan Klopfleisch and the guidance of Dr Jana Teuscher, both excellent hosts. My time here has, in addition to the generous stipend, been supported by my employer, Arts University Bournemouth, with accommodation and four-weeks research leave, and a Post Graduate Research Expenses Grant from University of Edinburgh in connection with my Doctoral studies (advisors Dr Dorian Wiszniewshi and Dr Neil Cox). Lastly, I will miss my daily walks past Peter Behren’s 1909 AEG Turbine Factory.

1. Wies van Moorsel, *Nelly van Doesburg 1899-1975*, Nijmegen; SUN, 2000, p185 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Paneth-Pollak, Tessa, *Strange Addition: The “Arpocryphal” Cardboard Reliefs*, 52-71, in Jeremy Strick et al, *The Nature of Arp*. Dallas, TX; The Nasher Sculpture Center, 2018. Also see the extensive scholarship in Paneth-Pollak, Tessa. *Definite Means: Arp’s cut-outs*, 1911-1930. PhD Dissertation, Princeton University 2015 (Advisor Hal Foster, and Rachel Z. deLue). [Hard copy, Stiftung Arp] [Pro-quest PDF download 8.4.19]. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)