

Cole Collins

Project: 'Abstract Feminine Forms in the Works of Hans Arp and Kurt Schwitters'

Fellowship Duration: 4 Months

My research focused on the representations of women's bodies between mediums in the works of Hans Arp and Kurt Schwitters. It focuses namely on the representations of the navel in Arp's sculptures and reliefs and its un-formed appearance in relation to theories of motherhood, compared with Schwitters' formation of abstract feminine forms which also engage with these theories.

During my time at the Stiftung Arp, I benefitted greatly from the resources in the library and archives to research my project. The research is for a stand-alone project, not entirely dislocated from my PhD thesis which examined female and feminine forms in Kurt Schwitters' collages, and therefore I required time and space in which to develop my ideas. My research began by creating a database of works which featured the navel, circle or eye. These shapes often appear similar (either circular or elliptical) and are only differentiated by Arp's titling of the works. In some cases, although still a less frequent occurrence, the eye and navel can be determined by their position on the corporeal form (even in the most abstracted of Arp's forms, the body is cited). These forms are assumed human by Arp's references in his titles to eyes, mouths, navels, hair and moustaches. I then narrowed this down to only the works which Arp considered to be representative of the navel and organised these by date created. Organisation of the data showed periods where the navel featured intensely and others when it was less his focus.

After completing the initial object-based research, I worked through the secondary literature. Beginning with the exhibition catalogue *Der Nabel der Avantgarde* (2008), I built my research out of this publication, discovering that it addressed namely the formal qualities of the navel in Arp's work – discussing these in relation to positive and negative space. Other discussions of Arp's navel root their analyses based on Arp's apparent interest in classical and Greek philosophy. However, these interventions ignored any consideration of gender in their discussions. Therefore, my project seeks to build upon these findings and to include an examination of the complexities of gender which are incurred when exploring abstracted forms and in particular the navel which, by its function, connects the child (regardless of its gender) to the mother.

It was a pleasure to have access to the comprehensive library of Arp texts available at the Stiftung, the preservation of letters—many unpublished—and other archival ephemera, especially catalogues, photographs, sketches, casts and unfinished sculptures which allow for a deeper understanding of Arp's process and give insight into his personal politics.

The Stiftung offers a quiet and open space in which to work. It also benefits from regular visits from other Arp scholars with whom I had numerous insightful and beneficial conversations about my own project, their work, and Arp more generally. My project has, without doubt, benefitted from these conversations and sense of community afforded by working at the Stiftung Arp. My final word is of thanks to Jana Teuscher for her unwavering support and guidance in the archive.

Cole Collins
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