

Press Release

**max bill & georges vantongerloo. crossover**

27 January – 26 March 2022

Hauser & Wirth New York, 69th Street



**New York...**The lifelong friendship and extended written correspondence between Swiss artist Max Bill and Belgian-born artist Georges Vantongerloo united their independent artistic and intellectual endeavors and helped to push the boundaries of their work into new aesthetic realms. Beginning 27 January 2022, Hauser & Wirth New York will present ‘crossover,’ an exhibition devoted to the two polymaths art and ideas, at the gallery’s 69th Street location. Vantongerloo was, together with Piet Mondrian, a key member of the Dutch art movement de stijl. Bill, a former student of the Bauhaus, was deeply involved with the Paris-based abstraction-*création* artist collective beginning in 1933, a group that Vantongerloo was also a member of since 1931. The two first met in 1935 and felt an immediate appreciation and respect for each other’s distinct artistic practice. This bond would continue throughout their lifetime and influence subsequent generations of artists and thinkers.

‘crossover’ highlights the lasting achievements of Bill and Vantongerloo through an in-depth selection of paintings and sculptures, some of which are being shown in the United States for the first time since their major American traveling retrospectives in 1974-1975 and 1980-1981, respectively. The exhibition’s title not only refers to the artists’ relationship with each other, but also to the prolific and numerous connections and exchanges they had within the American art scene, and their lasting impact on art movements like minimalism. Curated by Dr. Angela Thomas Schmid, President of the max bill georges vantongerloo foundation, this presentation reveals how the progress of their extraordinary and constantly evolving creative exchange mirrors the artistic breakthroughs that defined the 20th century, particularly in the field of concrete art – which would echo throughout Latin America, in particular Argentina and Brazil, and support the development of many forward-thinking artists including Lidy Prati and her husband Tomás Maldonado, Almir Mavignier, Mary Vieira, Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica. Their approach stemmed from mathematics and modern scientific theories, but also allowed for the possibility of beauty and the role of intuition. This was expressed through their deep interest in the notions of continuity and infinity, as exemplified by works such as Bill’s ‘unendliche schleife’ (Endless Ribbon) (conceived 1935-1953 (executed 2015)) or Vantongerloo’s ‘Révolution’ (Revolution) (1946).

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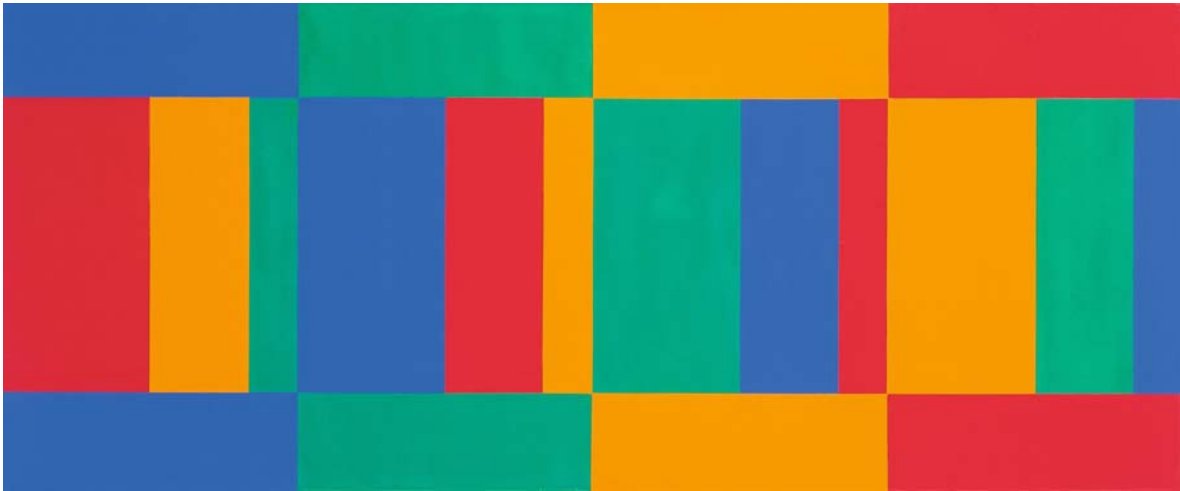


Despite the bias towards European contemporary art in New York following World War II, Bill and Vantongerloo's crossovers continued through relationships with gallerists and collectors Hilla von Rebay, Peggy Guggenheim, Madeleine Chalette Lejwa and Rose Fried, and encounters with artists like Donald Judd, Andy Warhol, and Ellsworth Kelly, who visited both Vantongerloo's Paris studio and Bill's exhibition at Galerie Denise René in 1950. Bill's first solo exhibition in the United States, at the Staempfli Gallery in New York, caught the eye of artist Donald Judd in 1963, who then singled him out for a review in *Arts Magazine*. But it was Bill's traveling retrospective, organized by the Albright Knox Art Gallery in 1974, that would earn him the most critical acclaim stateside, with positive reviews from the *Los Angeles Times* and *TIME* magazine, which called it 'a revelation.'

After Vantongerloo's death, Bill continued his work as an ardent advocate of his friend's profound influence and legacy of innovation, helping to organize a travelling retrospective with the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C. The *New York Times* reviewed the show, writing Vantongerloo 'was a pioneer in creating the conventions of the kind of minimal art that continues to command a large following among living artists.' More than forty years later, 'crossover' reintroduces an American audience to the two remarkable artists' pioneering contributions to the history of modern art.

### **A new publication**

On the occasion of the exhibition, Hauser & Wirth Publishers is pleased to present the first volume of a comprehensive Max Bill monograph by Dr. Angela Thomas Schmid – art historian and widow of the artist – translated into English for the first time. 'A Subversive Gleam: Max Bill and his Time. 1908–1939,' retraces Bill's biography, from his childhood to his training at the Bauhaus, his return to Zurich, and on until the late 1930s. Part biography, part art-history handbook, and part memoir, it is a generous, multifaceted, and extensively researched book that proposes new insight into the cultural milieu of a European community of artists, designers, and architects on the eve of the Second World War. In it, Thomas meticulously dissects Max Bill's journey through his exchanges with his family, teachers, and contemporaries—and their individual respective life trajectories. A highly unconventional meander through extraordinary biographies, this monograph also aims to specifically bring to light the often forgotten professional and personal trajectories of women artists, art critics, and authors who were in Bill's circle. The non-linear narrative reveals the author's curiosity and compassion for lives which intersected with her late husband, and sometimes her own.



### About Max Bill

Max Bill was born in Winterthur, Switzerland in 1908. Originally studying as a silversmith's apprentice, he became fascinated with modern architecture upon encountering Le Corbusier's *L'Esprit Nouveau* at the Paris Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in 1925. After finding Bauhaus materials in a bookshop in Zurich, Bill applied and was accepted to the Bauhaus school in Dessau, studying under the guidance of such teachers as Josef Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Oskar Schlemmer from 1927 to 1928. The tenets of the Bauhaus, including a modern, scientific approach to color and constructivist form, would inform his interdisciplinary work in art, architecture, and design for the rest of Bill's life.

After leaving the Bauhaus, Bill moved to Zurich and began experimenting with and expanding the margins of constructivism. He would eventually popularize the term concrete art (first coined by Theo van Doesburg) to further define his fascination with mathematical and geometric foundations utilized in the creation of objects – whether sculptures, paintings, or functional objects – that he considered the physical manifestations of rationalism. Bill never disregarded the social implications of the work he made; against the backdrop of Nazi Germany and World War II, Bill insisted, 'if you design something for the public, you must assume social responsibility.' Bill was a key member in several artist groups, including the *allianz* group in Zurich and *abstraction-création* in Paris.

Bill executed many public sculptures in Europe and his work was exhibited extensively in galleries and museums during his lifetime, including a retrospective at the Kunsthaus Zürich in 1968-69. His first exhibition in the United States was presented at the Staempfli Gallery in New York City in 1963; a U.S. traveling solo exhibition was presented at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1974, followed by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC in 1975. In 1993 he received the *Praemium Imperiale* for sculpture. Bill exerted great influence on Brazil's neo-concrete art movement with his 1951 retrospective at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art, where he also was awarded the international sculpture prize at the first São Paulo Biennial.



### About Georges Vantongerloo

Georges Vantongerloo was born in Antwerp, Belgium in 1886. A member of the association abstraction-cr ation, he studied at the Acad mie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels until the first World War. One of the 900,000 refugees who fled Belgium in 1914, Vantongerloo produced early figurative paintings and sculptures in Holland, but faced personal and political turmoil during these early years. This turbulent period of Vantongerloo's life in exile would leave a lasting impression on his life and work.

In 1918, Vantongerloo became a co-signor of the de stijl manifesto and a founding contributor to the movement's publication de stijl, along with a principal group of artists including Theo van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian, and Vilmos Husz r. In the following years, Vantongerloo would come to define his practice using mathematical equations, science, and ethics. He theorized an equation, 'volume + void = space', and began experimenting with abstract linear and geometric works which gave form to his series of works Construction in a Sphere. As his practice developed through the 1920s, Vantongerloo became more invested in scientific-like methods and research; he gave mathematical titles to his works, employed Cartesian analytical geometry, and used parabolic and hyperbolic functions to invent complex shapes and forms, realized in a multifaceted oeuvre of paintings, sculptures, and architectural designs.

After moving to Paris from Menton, France, Vantongerloo joined abstraction-cr ation in 1931; he served as vice-president of the artists' association until 1937, organizing frequent exhibitions and producing annual booklets with contributions from an international group of artists. His models of bridges and a proposed airport were exhibited at the Mus e des Arts D coratifs in Paris in 1930. In 1936 he participated in the exhibition Cubism and Abstract Art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His first solo show was held at the Galerie de Berri in Paris in 1943, in an act of resistance to Nazi occupation. From the end of the 1930s onward, Vantongerloo distanced himself from the straight line in favor of the curved line, producing influential work characterized by greater lyrical compositions and plays of transparency, color, and light.

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Max Bill  
rot und grün aus blau und gelb  
(Red and green from blue and yellow)  
1970  
Oil on canvas  
120 x 60.5 cm / 47 1/4 x 23 7/8 in  
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(ARS), New York  
Collection of Angela Thomas, Zumikon. Courtesy the  
max bill georges vantongerloo foundation and Hauser  
& Wirth

Max Bill (1908 - 1994)  
unendliche schleife  
(Endless Ribbon)  
Conceived 1935-1953 (executed 2015)  
Black granite  
Sculpture: 115.5 x 125 x 81 cm / 45 1/2 x 49 1/4 x  
31 7/8 in  
Base: 9.7 x 132 x 84.5 cm / 3 7/8 x 52 x 33 1/4 in  
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Collection of Angela Thomas, Zumikon. Courtesy the  
max bill georges vantongerloo foundation and Hauser  
& Wirth  
Photo: Stefan Altenburger

Max Bill  
system mit vier gleichen farbquanten  
(System with Four Equal Colour Quanta)  
1970  
Oil on canvas  
75 x 180 cm / 29 1/2 x 70 7/8 in  
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& Wirth

Georges Vantongerloo  
Composition émanante de l'ovoïde  
(Composition from the Ovoid)  
1917  
Mahogany painted  
16.5 x 6.5 x 6.5 cm / 6 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in  
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& Wirth  
Photo: Jon Etter

Georges Vantongerloo (1886 - 1965)  
Révolution  
(Revolution)  
1946  
Nickel wire  
21.2 x 20 x 20.5 cm / 8 3/8 x 7 7/8 x 8 1/8 in  
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Collection of Angela Thomas, Zumikon. Courtesy the  
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& Wirth  
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Georges Vantongerloo  
Variation sur le carré inscrit et le carré circonscrit  
d'un cercle  
1929  
Cement, painted  
28.5 x 52 x 19 cm / 11 1/4 x 20 1/2 x 7 1/2 in  
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Collection of Angela Thomas, Zumikon. Courtesy the  
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& Wirth  
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Georges Vantongerloo  
Couleurs dans l'espace  
(Colours in Space)  
1951  
Plexiglas, oil paint  
78.5 x 57 x 26 cm / 30 7/8 x 22 1/2 x 10 1/4 in  
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Collection of Angela Thomas, Zumikon. Courtesy the  
max bill georges vantongerloo foundation and Hauser  
& Wirth  
Photo: Jon Etter

Georges Vantongerloo and Max Bill at the first  
Sculpture Biennial in Athens, September 18, 1965  
archiv georges vantongerloo, haus bill, zumikon  
Courtesy the max bill georges vantongerloo  
foundation and Hauser & Wirth  
Photo: Carmen Martinez