

## Press Release

**Xanti Schawinsky**

**7 September – 8 October 2016**

**Opening 3 September, 6 – 8 PM**

Karma International is enthused to announce the first solo exhibition of the late Swiss artist Xanti Schawinsky (1904 - 79) at the gallery.

The exhibition aims to highlight Schawinsky's work as a painter through his series of *Eclipses* and *Spheres* from the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with Photograms from the 1940s. Already noted by art historians for his work during the Bauhaus era, he shifted focus to experimental painting from the 1940s onwards.

Initially, Schawinsky was introduced to photography during his time at the Bauhaus and, as a result, he began experimenting within the field to create a series of photograms while living in New York. *Optical Transformation* (1943 – 45) features playful use of light and shadows in the tradition of Man Ray and László Moholy Nagy. *Statue of Liberty* (1943) portrays him as a predecessor of Pop art in his early experimentation with the Ben-Day dots printing process.

His photographic endeavours and process, resulting in photomontage and photograms, should be regarded as a continuation of his work as a painter. Similarly, his series of *Eclipses* and *Spheres* are concerned with themes and manipulation of colour. In *Vietnam* (1967) the work becomes an object as Schawinsky folds the canvas and uses an airbrushing technique, consequently creating creases and shadow-like relief tinted by vibrant hues of orange and yellow. *Vietnam*, placed between two photograms, allows the viewer to see his vast oeuvre; however, it must be emphasized that they are not a separate body of work. The exhibition intentionally mixes Schawinsky's *Eclipses*, *Spheres* and Photograms in order to eradicate a sense of hierarchy and illustrate how these works, collectively, represent the principles of performance and movement, light, and shadow that bind all of his mediums together.

In his decades-spanning practice, Schawinsky marked a pertinent position in the history of experimental and performance art. Working as a teacher in the 1920s at the Bauhaus along with other prominent artists such as László Moholy-Nagy and Joseph Albers, he then moved onto the esteemed Black Mountain College in North Carolina from 1936–37, where he established his model of theatrical art labeled *Spectodrama* – a concept of total theatre in which all aspects of the stage become independent agents. Time spent residing in New York between the 1950s and 1960s marked an important period in his oeuvre that widely focused on process and performance-based paintings, ranging from his relief-like paintings that experimented by crumpling the canvas in order to achieve abstractions, to his *Sphere* paintings based on Op Art and reductive elementary forms.

In 2015, Schawinsky had his first major institutional retrospective at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, which encompassed his prolific career in theatre and performance and how they relate to his work on canvas. Schawinsky is scheduled to have a major solo exhibition at the Hermitage Museum in Moscow in 2017.