

Press Release

Xanti Schawinsky

8 September – 22 October 2016

Opening 8 September, 6 – 8 PM

Karma International is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of the late Swiss artist Xanti Schawinsky (1904 - 1979) at the gallery. The exhibition primarily focuses on Schawinsky's series of *Sphere* paintings, as well as his work at the avant-garde Black Mountain College.

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 from 1936–37 after being invited by Josef Albers.

During his time at Black Mountain College, Schawinsky created his theory of non-narrative theater labeled *Spectodrama*, in which bodily spatiality is emphasized. The neologism brings together the words *Spectro* (Latin: observe) and *drama* (Latin: play), thereby combining the roles of audience and performer in a piece that treated the stage as a complete work of art rather than a structure.

The two works featured in the exhibition pose as examples of spectodrama in that the body is highlighted as an active functioning agent. In one work, Schawinsky captures two performers dressed in a costume of tense and intentionally-formed white paper rolls that mimic the props they stand beside, as if to blur the line between character and spatial formation. Represented by his collage work, Schawinsky also abstracts defining features of the human body and reduces them to simple shapes, a style which aims to remove societal hierarchies and judgment based on appearance that would otherwise separate.

Integral to his practice in their theatrical and dynamic nature, the *Spheres* are created by placing multiple gauze layers over the canvas, resulting in overlapping geometric forms. The viewer is invited to move around the canvas and explore its (due to their) optical playfulness. The applied colors and their different degrees of opacity on the fabric create the effect of depth and the optical illusion of a painting that is dynamically changing its shape.

Schawinsky developed the *Spheres* in the late-1960s while he was living in New York. These years 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 a major institutional retrospective at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich, 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. His works have been acquired by the Drawing Center in NY, the Harvard Art Museums, and the J. Paul Getty Museum, among others.