Modern Couples: Art, Intimacy and the Avant-garde

Large print introductory text

barbican

Camille Claudel and Auguste Rodin

Relationship: 1882–92

More than any of his contemporaries, the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (b. France 1840 –1917) knowingly placed eroticism at the centre of his work. As his lover, pupil and muse for ten years, the French sculptor Camille Claudel (b. France 1864 –1943) played a significant role in shaping this legacy, assisting Rodin in his major projects and state commissions and inspiring some of his most passionate work. The pair worked side by side in the studio and their sculptures clearly show mutual influence and synchronicity, announcing a new kind of creative exchange within an artistic relationship.

Dating from when Claudel and Roding first met, *Je suis belle [I am Beautiful]* (1882) pairs two previously existing works and expresses the older artist's feelings of sexual prowess with characteristic bravura. Grafted together, this composite of female and male figures is now one of exultant abandon. Before the new century had even begun, Rodin had created one of the first pieces of modern assemblage. At the height of their intoxication for each other, Claudel and Rodin created delicate clay studies of entwined bodies. These sketches, touching in their gentleness and modesty, capture the intimacy they experienced. Rodin's study on display was for his most famous work, *The Kiss* (1882), while Claudel's terracotta sketches were for *Sakountala* (1886 – 89), her own version of an ecstatic embrace. Both also made poignant portraits of each other. In Claudel's tender vision of Rodin, we are faced with the man she loved rather than the genius sculptor who dominated the turn of the century. Rodin's plaster mask head of Claudel similarly demonstrates his profound feelings her. Rodin embraces the residual join lines of the casting process and in so doing embodies her vulnerability.

While their professional and intimate relationship fuelled their inspiration for a decade, Claudel ultimately sought her creative independence from Rodin. She continued to pursue a new direction in her own work until 1905, but their final break up and her precarious financial situation aggravated her mental health. At her family's request, she was incarcerated in 1913 and passed away after 30 years of solitary exile.

Maria Martins and Marcel Duchamp

Relationship: 1943–51

'Eros c'est la vie' [Eros is life] famously cried the French- American artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and like Auguste Rodin before him, Duchamp made sexual union the focus of much of his conceptually oriented work. When the Brazilian sculptor Maria Martins (1894–1973) met Duchamp on 22 March 1943 at the opening of her solo exhibition at the Valentine Gallery in New York, she was already a successful artist. He was 56 and she was 49. They were an unlikely match: he was a frugal artistic hermit while she was vivacious, sociable and married to the Brazilian Ambassador to the United States

The centrepiece of his infamously voyeuristic last work, the installation Étant donnés (1946–66), was initially modelled on Martins. The, inanimate, naked figure sprawled on a bed of twigs and only visible through a peephole was cast from her body, the result of a long artistic and erotic dialogue between the two artists. His Erotic Objects, dating from 1950–1, are fetishist relics from the casting process. Meticulous technical studies of Étant donnés have shown that Objet-dard was excised from the crease underneath Martin's left breast. Not a Shoe is sculptural imprint of her perineum and anus, while The Wedge of Chastity's concave shape made of dental plastic is a negative of the naked figure's genital area. The complex psychology of relationships was an arena in which Martins also excelled. Le Couple, 1943, draws on the world of Amazonian myth and depicts an animalistic male-female duo emerging from the terra firma, spewing tendrils of vegetal matter, arching away from each other but also locked in a seemingly timeless union of potent and unnamed forces.

In 1951, Martins found the relationship impossible and returned to Brazil with her husband and family. The Erotic Objects became sexually charged keepsakes for Duchamp. Small enough to fit in the hand and be fondled, and like Claudel and Rodin's intimate terracotta studies, they became talismanic reminders of these two modern partnerships.

Alma Mahler and Gustav Mahler

Relationship: 1901–11

Viennese born, Alma Mahler-Werfel (1879–1964) was one of the most charismatic and dazzling figures of European artistic and cultural life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A composer, writer and socialite, she was married three times; to the legendary Austrian composer and conductor Gustav Mahler (1902–11), then to the architect of later Bauhaus fame, Walter Gropius (1915–19), and finally to the novelist, playwright and poet, Franz Werfel (1929–45) and had a passionate affair with Oskar Kokoschka among others. Rather than being a passive muse to these towering figures, Alma was an active partner and engaged in helping them realise their talents.

Alma was a talented pianist and composer in her own right. Before Alma married Gustav in 1902, he wrote urging her to give up her own musical career and devote herself to his life's work, emphasising that a marriage between two composers would be 'ridiculous'. Although Alma complied this cast a long shadow over their relationship, which was marked by a series of estrangements, and passionate reunions which fuelled Gustav's Symphonies nos. 5, 6, 8 (1901, 1904, 1907).

Faced with the breakdown of their relationship when Alma began an affair with Gropius, and following his consultations with Sigmund Freud, Gustav belatedly started supporting his wife's work. He played her compositions and encouraged her to publish Fünf Lieder which she had composed before their marriage including the remarkable Ansturm [Assault], which he copied in his own hand. When Alma decided to remain at his side, Gustav hauntingly came to terms with the alternating alienation and intimacy that had characterised their relationship in his Symphony no. 10, which remained unfinished at his death in 1911. Alma became a fervent promoter of Gustav's legacy.

Alma Mahler and Oskar Kokoschka

Relationship: 1912–15

Some months after the death of her first husband, the composer and conductor Gustav Mahler, Alma Mahler (1879 –1964) met the Austrian painter Oskar Kokoschka (1886 –1980), seven years her junior. Of their passionate relationship which lasted three years, Mahler wrote; 'Never before had I savoured such convulsion, such hell, such paradise. I experienced his rise... I took care of him, as far as possible. He painted me, me, me!' Kokoschka's consuming passion went hand in hand with a compulsive jealousy, and as an independent and self-confident woman, Mahler ultimately found this excessive attention intolerable.

While Kokoschka was fighting in the First World War, where he narrowly escaped death from a bayonet injury, Mahler reconnected with her past lover Walter Gropius, who she then married in 1915. Kokoschka was bereft and until 1922, he channelled his unreciprocated love for her into countless works in which he attempted to reignite her love for him. 'I must have you for my wife or my genius will self-destruct. You must resuscitate my soul, each night, like an elixir' was one of his desperate pleas. Kokoschka gifted Mahler seven fans (three are exhibited here), each of them illustrating episodic adventures in their relationship. They were among Mahler's most prized possessions. Eventually, the loss of Alma drove Kokoschka to commission a full-scale stand-in from the celebrated Viennese doll-maker Hermine Moos in 1918. Kokoschka's doll turned out not to be anything like as beautiful as he had hoped. After incessantly portraying this 'second Alma', Kokoschka felt finally expunged from the all-consuming passion he had felt for his erstwhile lover. The doll achieved some notoriety on account of being resident for many years in the artist's home and was finally destroyed among much ribaldry.

Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf

Relationship: 1925–8

When Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) and Vita Sackville-West (1892–1962) met in 1922, Woolf had already published three novels but Sackville-West was the better known and more extensively published writer. Woolf was an intellectual with roots in the bohemian milieu of Bloomsbury, while Sackville West was of aristocratic origin and her family home of Knole in Kent was the largest Elizabethan house in England. Despite their differences, the two women forged a close friendship that lasted from 1923 to Woolf's death in 1941, although their intimate relationship was much shorter. The numerous letters between the two clearly evidence the importance of their personal and artistic relationship.

Sackville-West, who was married with a family, was according to Woolf 'a known Sapphist.' Not published in Britain until 1974 due to its scandalous nature, Challenge (1920) was a thinly veiled celebration of her passionate relationship with the writer Violet Trefusis. In her confident embrace of female same-sex relationships, Sackville-West engendered desire in Woolf that then permeated her writing, whereas under the influence of Woolf, Sackville-West became a more experimental writer. Woolf's feminist polemic, A Room of One's Own (1929) was part of a shared endeavour to re-think the importance of women in literature and among its pages Woolf celebrates the androgyny that Sackville-West exemplified. Most influentially, the relationship gave rise to Woolf's Orlando (1929), a transformation of desire into writing.

Chloe liked Olivia

'Do not start. Do not blush. Let us
admit in the privacy of our own society that these things
sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.'
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929

Djuna Barnes
Natalie Clifford Barney
Sylvia Beach
Romaine Brooks
Luisa Casati
Rémy de Gourmont
Tamara de Lempicka
Liane de Pougy
Adrienne Monnier
Ida Rubinstein
Vita Sackville-West
Gertrude Stein
Alice B Toklas
Renée Vivien
Virginia Woolf

With 'Chloe liked Olivia' Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own made a thinly veiled reference to female like-with-like sexuality for those looking out for it. With Orlando (1928) she craftily weaved together one of the most important queer texts of the 20th century. At this time, male homosexuality was outlawed
and sex between women was viewed as something of an aberration. Indeed, women were encouraged to view sex as something to be explored only within marriage and for the purposes of procreation. Beyond its coded reference to
lesbianism, A Room of One's Own was a landmark feminist text, intended as a model for all women to be considered the creative, professional and social equals of men.

Woolf's activism and advocacy for same-sex love echoed what was happening on Paris's more tolerant Left Bank, where a community of lesbian and bisexual writers and artists were confidently adopting an uninhibited lifestyle based around the enabling spaces of Nathalie Clifford Barney's 'Temple of Friendship'; the Salon of Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas; and the bookshops run by Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier. They provided the 'room of one's own' that Woolf imagined were necessary for women to succeed. Similarly, in 1927, Barney founded l'Académie des Femmes (Women's Academy) as a
pointed response to the refusal of the Académie Francaise to admit women writers to their literary council. Both initiatives were made under the banner of the Greek poet Sappho.

These lively, cultural spaces attracted a variety of creative queer women such as the female modern dandy, the Symbolist inspired femme-fatale and the androgyne. As such they were key spaces for their identity formation. Portraiture became an important way of celebrating these identities, and the work of the American painter Romaine Brooks and that of the Polish artist Tamara de Lempicka captured their new found empowerment. As a result of these pioneering artists, the landscape of Paris was re-drawn on their own terms.

Nancy Cunard and Henry Crowder

Relationship: 1928–35

Nancy Cunard (1896–1965), the daughter of a British shipping industrialist, was one of Paris and London's queens of the Jazz age. She was a poet, editor and journalist; a fierce political activist; a model and muse for artists like Cecil Beaton and Man Ray; as well as an avid collector of non- Western art. She was close to the Dadaists and Surrealists and was known for her sexually liberated relationships with artists and writers including Louis Aragon, Aldous Huxley and Ezra Pound.

Inspired by Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press (Room 18), Cunard founded the influential Hours Press (1928–31) with the aim of publishing experimental poetry and 'new way of looking at things.' The same year, Cunard became passionately involved with the African-American jazz pianist Henry Crowder. With the assistance of Crowder, she published 23 limited-edition works in English, including her own poetry and the first text published by Samuel Beckett, Whoroscope, for which Crowder designed and set the typographic cover and pages. In 1930, she published sheet music for Henry-Music, having encouraged Crowder to put Modernist poetry to music.

Perceived as transgressive in the racist context of the 1920s and 1930s, their relationship was a source of profound enrichment for both of their careers and opened Cunard's eyes to the segregation in the United States as well as introducing her to Black American culture. In 1931, Cunard decide to devote herself entirely to what was to become Negro Anthology (1934), a large-scale documentary investigation designed to 'demonstrate and prove that racial prejudice has no justification'. She dedicated it to Crowder. The pamphlet Black Man and White Ladyship, An Anniversary (1931) was an uncompromising attack on her mother who had disinherited her due to her relationship with Crowder. After the relationship ended, Cunard continued to fight

against racism and colonialism. The end of her life was blighted by ill health and she died destitute in London in 1965, her incredible contribution to Modernism and political causes largely forgotten.

Lili Elbe and Gerda Wegener

Relationship: 1904–30

The Danish landscape artist Lili Elbe (1882–1931), who had enjoyed some early success as Einar Wegener, was one of the most famous trans women of the early 20th century and one of the first people to medically transition from male to female.

Much of the work of Lili's wife, the Danish painter and illustrator Gerda Wegener (1886–1940) was an ode to her partner, whom she supported throughout Lili's transition. After their marriage in 1904, Lili became one of Gerda's favourite female models, and as with Lili (1922), Gerda's portraits present her sitter as the epitome of the 1920s modern woman. This work suggests that Lili was intelligible as a woman to Gerda long before she transitioned. It also speaks of the way in which these intimate portraits were an act of co-creation.

Gender indeterminacy, sexual empowerment and the fight for safe spaces of becoming were part of the avant-garde currency and this couple were foremost among a vanguard of trailblazing pioneers. They have received renewed public interest in recent years, not least in the wake of the romantic drama The Danish Girl (2015).

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera

Relationship: 1927–54

In 1922, the Mexican artist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) was commissioned to paint a mural for a school in Mexico City where Frida Kahlo (1907–54) was a student. She confided in her friends that one day she would have his child. In 1929 they were married. The bride's father called it a union of an elephant and a dove. Rivera was 43 and Kahlo was 22 and recovering from a terrible accident that had left her body devastatingly broken. Rivera was the first to understand the importance of Kahlo's paintings, seeing her as a visionary whose work would speak to everyone. They regarded each other as equals. Together they were engaged in the rebirth of their country, following the decade-long Mexican Revolution. Both became active members of the Mexican Communist Party and wanted to create an art 'for the people'. While Rivera painted murals addressing politics and society, Kahlo painted her own reality, albeit one seen through her deeply imaginative and rich source of references.

André Breton's book Communicating Vessels (1932), describes Surrealism's ambition to reconcile the world of dreams and reality. Rivera's work of the same title promoted Breton's 1938 Mexican lecture on Surrealism. In it, Rivera portrays himself as a tortured being, uncomfortably poised between the worlds of waking and sleeping, viscerally mapping the metaphorical 'enabling capillary tissue' that Breton described as connecting both mental states. His inclusion of a female figure seemingly caught between those world alludes to Breton's idea that intimate relationships were a principal means to achieve supreme unity. Kahlo equally sought in her own idiosyncratic way, to find a fusion of the real and the imaginary, the sublime of Breton's theory. In Wounded Deer (1946), painted after a horrendously failed back operation and perhaps alluding to the fragility of her relationship with Rivera, Kahlo portrayed herself as a stricken animal, a hybrid creature, her head grafted onto the body of her pet deer, Granizo.

Dora Maar and Pablo Picasso

Relationship: 1936–43

The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) met the French photographer Dora Maar (1907–97) through Paul Éluard during the winter of 1935–6 at Les Deux Magots café in Paris, a popular artists' haunt on the Left Bank. Maar, who was an intellectual and highly political, was already an established photographer close to the Surrealists. Picasso was instantly bewitched.

Undoubtedly, Maar played a key role in the development of Picasso's work. The photographer's Surrealist inflected works demonstrate a love for the absurd, the uncanny and the hybrid. A similar Surrealist tendency emerged in Picasso's work at this time. Even though he later belittled photography as a medium, for a brief period at least, Maar's studio at Rue d'Astorg became the centre of Picasso's creative world. Together they experimented with the alchemical potential of photography.

Picasso made countless paintings of Maar, many of which she was profoundly ambivalent about. Little known is the fact that Picasso was also the subject of a number of works by Maar that expand our understanding of him. In her Portrait of Picasso, 29 rue d'Astorg, Paris (1935–6), Maar takes a glass-plate negative and hastily scratches around Picasso's face, as if creating a manic, electrified halo. In another photograph, taken in Mougins in the South of France in 1936, Maar metamorphoses her lover into the Minotaur. Capturing Picasso with his eyes closed and wearing only his bathing trunks while holding a bull's skull, Maar makes Picasso's famous machismo her subject. In a turnaround of gender expectations, Picasso becomes Maar's muse.

Their passionate relationship was a troubled one. One of the

reasons being that Picasso remained in a relationship with Marie-Thérèse Walter, the mother of his daughter. In 1943, Picasso left Maar for the younger painter Françoise Gilot. It took Maar many years to recover.

Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst

Relationship: 1937–9

In June 1937 the young British-born artist Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) and the German Surrealist painter Max Ernst (1891–1976) met at a dinner to celebrate the opening of his London exhibition. He was 46 and she was 19. It was love at first sight. Carrington had a particular gift for painting and writing and shared Ernst's interest in storytelling. Fairy tales and Celtic mythology fascinated her while Ernst drew on German literature and non-Western culture. They populated their art with images of themselves in the guise of alter egos; he was the 'Bird Superior' and she the 'Bride of the Wind'.

Ernst introduced Carrington to his Parisian Surrealist circle of friends and supported her work by creating illustrations for her first published writings. In search of a safe haven, the couple settled in Saint-Martin d'Ardèche in Southern France where they created a true domestic idyll decorated with the hybrid guardian creatures that populated their imagination. La Rencontre (The Encounter) (1939), perhaps a chimeric visualisation of their encounter, was a collaborative painting made in Saint-Martin. What Carrington described as the 'era of paradise' was short lived, as Ernst was interned as an enemy alien only two days after the outbreak of the War. Carrington tried to have him released before he managed to escape, only to be captured and interned again.

Traumatised by Ernst's sudden removal, her inability to save him, and the advancing German army, Carrington experienced a mental health crisis. She was placed in an asylum in Spain and underwent brutal treatment that would later be described in her searing autobiographical account, En Bas (Down Below) (1945) that merges lucid memories and hallucinatory passages. Resilience became a mark of her long and remarkably creative life that continued without Ernst. She died in Mexico in 2011, where she had lived and worked for most of her life.

Federico García Lorca and Salvador Dalí

Relationship: 1923–8

As young men, the Andalusian poet and playwright, Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), and the Catalan artist Salvador Dalí (1904–89) were both intoxicated with words and images as well as with each other. Lorca brought out the poet in Dalí and Dalí the draughtsman in Lorca. Most of Lorca's letters are now lost but the drawings and gifts they exchanged, as well as Dalí's letters to the poet — ripe with jokes, cultural references and innuendo — reveal the depth and complexity of their discussions and are multi-disciplinary works of art in their own right.

They first met in Madrid in 1922, at the Residencia de Estudiantes, a progressive cultural institution that turned traditional student accommodation into a stimulating intellectual environment. Lorca had already made quite an impact with his early plays and poetry, while Dalí had exhibited at group shows in Figueres and Barcelona and was known in Catalonia as an artist to watch. Very soon they were inseparable. The extent of their sexual relationship is unclear, although Dalí made a pointed reference to it in his later autobiography. Points of shared interest most notably included the concept of putrefaction that embodied all that was corrupt or queasily sentimental in society. Saint Sebastian became one of their coded signs, the preferred mascot for their different aesthetics. The saint's historical association with male homoeroticism and sado-masochism may also have been on their minds. In 1926, Lorca published his poem Ode to Salvador Dalí, a moving paean to friendship, and an embodiment of their emotional, creative and intellectual dialogue.

Although the pair remained in touch via letters until Lorca's assassination by Franco's militia in 1936, by 1928, there were

irreparable artistic differences between them, with Dalí being vociferously critical of what he perceived to be Lorca's
continuing adherence to Andalusian history and imagery.

George Platt Lynes, Glenway Wescott and Monroe Wheeler

Relationship: 1927–43

Male homosexuality was illegal in the United States when the American photographer George Platt Lynes (1907–55) was active from the mid-1930s until his death, and yet he trailblazed defiantly homoerotic works that celebrate male desire. During the time Lynes took many of his most iconic works, the photographer was in a seventeen-year three-way relationship with the acclaimed novelist Glenway Westcott (1901–87) and the publishing and art book supremo Monroe Wheeler (1899–88) who was enormously influential at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) where he was its Director of Publications and then Exhibitions. Wheeler and Westcott had been together since 1919 and the arrival of Lynes would prove problematic for Westcott.

Traversing continents in the 1920s, this adventurous ménage à trois escaped the intolerance of American society for Paris and Villefranche-sur-Mer where they met a diverse artistic and largely sexually liberated community that included Gertrude Stein and Jean Cocteau. While in France, Wheeler co-founded with Barbara Harrison, the short-lived but influential publishing house, Harrison of Paris (1930–4). Wheeler's most long-lasting legacy was at MoMA where he introduced a broad public to modern art. It was The Pilgrim Hawk: A Love Story (1940) that made Glenway Westcott's mark on Modernist literature. The decidedly cool and precise evocation of the hawk in the story reflects Westcott's own struggles with aging and sexual frustration.

After Lynes walked out of the relationship in 1943, Westcott and Wheeler continued one of the longest and most notable 'gay marriages' of the period. Their emotionally tangled existence became the subject of study of Dr Alfred Kinsey, a famous sexologist who published the landmark Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male in 1948. Kinsey also collected

Lynes' photographs of the male nude. Christian William Miller, who features heavily in Lynes' work of the 1940s, was the lover of both Lynes and Wheeler. Some similarities can be drawn, in work and life, between this ménage à trois and their close friends, PaJaMa.

PaJaMa: Paul Cadmus, Jared French and Margaret French

Relationship: 1937–57

Homophobic views were rife in post-war America when PaJaMa — an acronym for the collective formed by Paul Cadmus (1904–99), Jared French (1905–88) and Margaret French (1906–98) in 1937 — began taking their homoerotically charged photographs. The three first met at the Art Students League of New York, where Paul and Jared were lovers. Jared married Margaret in 1937, after which he sustained a sexual relationship with both partners. Their co-authored, carefully choreographed photographs allude to their close polyamorous relationship. Many of their images were taken on the beaches of Fire Island, Nantucket and Provincetown, offering a record of a long standing LGBTQ community in the United States, as Fire Island especially, was — and still is — a sanctuary for queer freedom. Their images, exclusively of themselves and friends, such as Lynes, Westcott and Wheeler, with nature as a backdrop, encapsulate a certain euphoria, while other more surreal images have a darker undercurrent.

Using Margaret's Leica camera, the photographs exist alongside a body of their own individually authored, decidedly figurative drawing and painting. This private photographic project, circulated among friends and kept in photograph albums, was only made public in the 1980s. George Platt Lynes took numerous photographs of Jared French and Paul Cadmus.

Lee Miller and Man Ray

Relationship: 1929–32

Lee Miller (1907–77) and Man Ray's (1890–1976) mercurial love affair has gained mythical status largely due to her beauty and the striking nature of Man Ray's images of her. Miller deliberately sought out Man Ray in Paris in the summer of 1929, inspired by his cropping, dizzying angles and radical lighting effects. She convinced him to take her on as his assistant. In 1930 she asserted her independence by taking up other lovers and renting a 'room of her own': a large duplex studio with a darkroom. She soon became a highly proficient photographer and photojournalist and undoubtedly co-authored a number of works that have often solely been attributed to Man Ray. Together they made the darkroom and studio a place of shared photographic and erotic experiment.

It was their shared belief in the transgressive and poetic potential of erotic imagery that had the biggest impact on surrealism. This body of work shows the female figure (in some cases Miller herself) vacillating between authority and powerlessness. Within the same photographs, polarities such as poetry and violence; submission and agency; and male and female are challenged. Miller's photographs show the extent to which she internalized Man Ray's working methods and interests but also how much she commented upon and questioned them. The photographs on show also shed light on Surrealism's theoretical interest in the Marquis de Sade and Bondage Discipline Sadomasochism at the time.

After Miller left Man Ray, she returned to New York where she established a successful photography studio with her brother Erik. Man Ray was devastated. In 1937 they reconciled as great friends but never made art or love together again.

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore

Relationship: 1909–54

The French photographer Claude Cahun (born Lucie Schwob, 1894–1954) and the illustrator Marcel Moore (born Suzanne Malherbe, 1892–1972) were partners in love and art for over 40 years. They were already lovers when Cahun's father married Moore's mother and they were still schoolgirls in Nantes, making them officially stepsisters. This family dynamic enabled them to live openly together from the outset of their relationship.

Throughout the 1920s, Cahun and Moore pursued a project of theatrical camera play that yielded hundreds of photographic images, mostly featuring Cahun in a variety of roles that challenged the established repertoire of gender stereotypes. In 1930 Moore integrated these photographs into a series of collages and these were published in lithographic form as illustrations for Cahun's Surrealist autobiography Aveux non avenus (1930). The book bears Cahun's signature alone, but Moore's crucial participation is incontestable. Throughout Cahun's oeuvre, formal devices of mirroring may be understood as artefacts of her creative partnership with Moore, whom Cahun referred to as 'the other me'. They also subverted the Greek myth of Narcissus (the tale of a young man who falls in love with his own reflection) to celebrate queer desire and refute historical ideas of feminine vanity.

Cahun and Moore are buried together in the churchyard next to their house. They share a tombstone bearing an inscription from Revelation 21: 'And I saw new heavens and a new earth.' The headstone is etched with both of their names and two Stars of David. Although Moore never converted to Judaism, and Cahun avowed secularism and agnosticism, the symbols on their gravestone mark their solidarity with the oppressed under the Nazi regime.

Mad Love

‘My wish is that you may be loved to the point of madness.’ André Breton, L’Amour fou, 1937.

Eileen Agar
Joseph Bard
Paul Nash
Dorothea Tanning
Max Ernst
Valentine Penrose
Roland Penrose
Alice Rahon
Lee Miller
Man Ray
Marcel Duchamp
Rose Sélavy
André Breton
Jacquleine Lamba
Paul Éluard
Gala
Salvador Dalí
Nusch
Nadja
Valentine Hugo
Grace Pailthorpe
Reuben Mednikoff
Kiki de Montparnasse
Toyen
Jindřich Styrský
Unica Zürn
Hans Bellmer

In the aftermath of World War I and inspired by Dada’s irreverent aesthetics, a group of young artists proposed a new world order in which uninhibited expressions of art, thought and desire could spearhead a revolution of the mind. By exploring the unconscious

where sexual drives reigned supreme, Surrealism hoped to liberate artistic expression from all ethical and aesthetic constraints. Their ethos was as much about freedom to desire, as desire for freedom. Surrealism's most significant poetry was made under the banner of love and was inspired by real relationships. Lovers often also became artistic partners.

For Breton and his male followers, women were 'innately Surrealist' and therefore became a principal subject and object of devotion. Artists and poets took to the streets, obsessively searching for love. The insatiable craving behind Breton's concept of 'mad love' — the title of his famous manifesto on the Surrealist art of love L'Amour fou (1937) — would force an individual to drop everything in the pursuit of desire. Inspired by the troubadour tradition of courtly love, the quest became as tantalising as the reward. The chance encounters that resulted were proof of the existence of the extraordinary within the ordinary and became the subject of some of the Surrealists' most notable poetry and writing. The illustrated book was the preferred Surrealist vehicle in which love could be celebrated in a way that also encapsulated their revolutionary ideas.

While the position of women within Surrealism was a complex one in which objectification abounded, the group's aspirations offered women a space to daringly assert themselves.

Toyen and Jindřich Štyrský

Relationship: 1922–42

In 1922, shortly after the birth of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia, the painter and illustrator Toyen (1902–80) met the artist, poet and editor Jindřich Štyrský (1899–1942). Although both artists purposefully left the exact nature of their relationship unclear, they remained devoted to collaborating and exhibiting together, while at the same time making independent works. In 1934, they founded the Czech Surrealist Group that was known for rejecting notions of gender entirely. Born Maria Cerminova, Toyen chose an ungendered pseudonym, which she claimed, came from the French word for citizen 'citoyen'.

Toyen and Štyrský believed in the political nature of eroticism, convinced that desire could transform human consciousness, fight bourgeois conformity, assault the hypocritical status quo, while opening up a liberated space unfiltered by aesthetic and moral constraints. Their work echoed contemporaneous Surrealist conversations and consciously referenced and celebrated the work of the 18th Century libertine writer the Marquis de Sade, whom they felt embodied radical freedom in life and in love. The two publications which Štyrský edited and published between 1930–3 Erotická Revue and Edice 69 were privately distributed in order to avoid confiscation. Toyen contributed some of its most explicit illustrations. Her use of phallic imagery is a rare example of a female artist humorously commenting on the standard erotic language of the time and subverting gender expectations.

Unica Zürn and Hans Bellmer

Relationship: 1953–70

In 1953, the German writer and artist Unica Zürn (1916–70) met Hans Bellmer (1902–75), a German artist best known for the disturbing life-sized pubescent articulated dolls he made in the 1930s. Erotically charged photographs of these dolls were celebrated in Surrealist circles and remain extraordinary relics of a 'mad love'. By all accounts, Zurn and Bellmer were magnetically drawn to each other and the intense and transgressive nature of their relationship is starkly evident in their respective works. The power and beauty of what Zürn created on her own is bewitching, but also difficult to divorce from the tragedy of her life circumstances.

Both artists were interested in flouting the division between the real and the imaginary, morality and immorality. Zürn shared Bellmer's fascination with mapping desires and fears onto the female body. Eyes, limbs and breasts, often entangled with hybrid animal forms are recurrent motifs in her work. These obsessive drawings are a personal exploration of her own mental health and at the same time reflect the Surrealists' interest in tapping into the unconscious in search of the 'marvellous', a unity of opposites, a reality beyond the rational. For Bellmer, Zürn was a living incarnation of his Poupée and so he played out his desires on her body in a number of works that are powerful but undeniably shocking. In Tenir au frais (1958), Zürn's flesh is lacerated by tightly bound string, her body rendered inanimate like a piece of meat. After a seventeen-year turbulent relationship, marked by poverty, seclusion and ill-health, Zürn decided to take her own life.

Emilie Flöge and Gustav Klimt

Relationship: 1892–1918

From the 1890s onwards, the influential Viennese fashion designer Emilie Flöge (1874–1952) and the renowned Austrian painter Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) were unwavering companions and for a short time at least they were also romantically involved. Klimt was well known for his sexual exploits and illegitimate children, but his relationship with Flöge was respectful and mutually enabling. As a duo, they became the standard-bearers of the new liberated man and woman, the alternative king and queen of fashionable turnof-the-century Vienna. They were also fervent advocators of the Secession's promotion of the Gesamtkunstwerk or 'total work of art' that championed an integration of art and design in every aspect of life.

Flöge was the chief designer and effectively CEO of the Schwestern Flöge, a couture house she ran with her sisters Pauline and Helene from 1904–38. The Salon, a precursor of today's concept store, sold the most fashionable clothing and accessories for women and was decorated with the latest trends by key designers of the Wiener Werkstätte. Klimt was one of Austria's most acclaimed artists, who put the female form centre-stage, celebrated desire and the human psyche and created luxurious canvases, murals and mosaics. Their shared love and collecting of textiles and decorative arts fuelled their creative dialogue, which in turn enriched and sustained their relationship. Just as Klimt created lavishly decorated paintings, inspired by a rich array of source material, Flöge incorporated antique folk textiles and patterns directly into her designs.

In support of Flöge's enterprise, Klimt became the first artist-fashion photographer en plein-air, photographing Flöge in her own creations and promoting jewellery by the Wiener Werkstätte, also on sale at the Salon and avidly collected

by the couple. Photographs of them together on holiday at Lake Attersee also show them having the time of their lives, effortlessly combining work with play. The most prominent sign of the new freedom for women was the so-called reform dress. Worn off the shoulder and with billowing lines, it allowed unconstrained movement of the body. The Schwestern Flöge capitalised on the new craze and together Flöge and Klimt may have even co-designed some of the more experimental kaftan-like creations.

Gabriele Münter and Wassily Kandinsky
Relationship 1902 - 1916

Marianne von Werefkin and Alexej von Jawlensky
Relationship 1892 - 1916

In 1908, the German painter Gabriele Münter (1877–1962) and her lover the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) visited the idyllic Bavarian outpost of Murnau, on Lake Staffelsee. They were joined by the Russian duo Marianne von Werefkin (1860–1938) and Alexej von Jawlensky (1864–1941) who were kindred creative spirits and good friends. This holiday marked a significant change in their artistic direction, which encouraged Münter to buy a house in 1909. Following local folk art traditions Münter and Kandinsky decorated it with simple furniture and lovingly tended the garden, a gentle utopia enfolded by mountains.

The four artists spent four summers together in Murnau and Münter and Kandinsky's home became a meeting place for their shared hopes of a spiritual renaissance that would counter contemporary materialism. In their own idiosyncratic ways, they each injected the numinous into their work and started developing a freer, more expressionistic style defined by a simplification of form and bold use of colour that departed from - Impressionism and tended towards the abstract. They believed in meditative contemplation as a means to create works that resonated directly with the soul. Kandinsky re-drafted parts of his important treatise Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1911). Münter took inspiration from the stained glass windows of local churches in Murnau. Werefkin and Jawlensky developed their interest in various humanist disciplines, from philosophy, psychoanalysis and mysticism.

The four all became key figures in the emergence of the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (Munich New Artist's Association) movement in 1909, and the Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider) expressionist group in 1910. As such, they were among the first to combine a passion for painting and the progressive search for a new visual language with an active commitment to establishing artistic circles. The outbreak of the First World War marked the end of these fruitful years. Kandinsky went back to Russia and would never

see Murnau again. Gabriele Münter chose to live permanently in Murnau in 1931 and died there in 1962. Jawlensky and Werefkin separated in 1921, when he left her for the couple's maid, Helene Nesnakomoff.

Sonia Delaunay and Robert Delaunay

Relationship: 1909–41

From the moment they met in 1907, the Ukrainian-born artist and designer, Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) and the French painter Robert Delaunay (1885–1941) formed an inseparable bond. They shared a fervent belief in the spiritual possibilities of art. From 1910 onwards, the year of their marriage, the duo sought to break loose from conventional approaches to painting. They heralded a form of abstract art based on light, colour and the musical qualities of painting, which they called Simultanism.

Both Sonia and Robert were committed to working at the forefront of avant-garde developments. As early as 1911, Sonia's collaged bookbindings abolished the boundaries between art and design. Her practice soon impregnated all aspects of life, experimenting with domestic interiors, dress, theatre designs and textiles in parallel with the chromatic fireworks found in Robert's painting. The couple's home in Paris became a hub of creativity, a joyous backdrop to the parties they hosted. Sonia's textiles took her avant-garde designs in the direction of a much more democratic and business-orientated production; and following World War I she opened her own fashion stores in Madrid and then Paris, earning the couple much-needed income. In the late 1920s and 30s she started designing manufactured fabrics for the Amsterdam based department store Metz & Co which further pushed her uninhibited exploration of colour and pattern in multifarious directions. It was the perfect vehicle for her to develop her own language of abstraction independent of Robert and in tune with the modern world.

Lilly Reich and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Relationship: 1925–37

The German Pavilion for the International Exhibition in Barcelona, inaugurated in the spring of 1929, was a building the likes of which had never been seen before. It has historically been solely attributed to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) despite the fact that his creative collaborator of three years, the established interior designer Lilly Reich (1885–1974) was also commissioned to be Artistic Director of the German contribution. The interior of the Pavilion bears Reich's trademark use of sensuous full-length drapes and lavishly contrasting coloured stone throughout and there is a clear aesthetic confluence between the Pavilion and Reich's German textile exhibit of the same year. It is now widely accepted that the famous 'Barcelona chair,' the only item of furniture to grace its minimal interior, which became a 20th century design icon, was in fact co-authored, the outcome of a relationship that was both intimate and professional. Mies himself said of Lilly: 'Her intellect was like a beacon which lit up my emotional chaos. She taught me to think.'

Virginia Woolf and Leonard Woolf

Relationship: 1912–41

Operating from the drawing room of their home, Hogarth House in Richmond, the British Modernist writer Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) and her husband, the political commentator and civil servant Leonard Woolf (1880–1969) founded the Hogarth Press in 1917. Initially conceived as a therapeutic distraction for Virginia, who had suffered a number of mental breakdowns, Hogarth Press went on to publish some of the 20th century's most significant and influential books of the first half of the century.

Free from the commercial constraints and censorship of more conservative editors, Hogarth Press enabled Virginia to publish her own experimental novels such as Mrs Dalloway (1925) and To the Lighthouse (1927). Hogarth was also able to publish works of a more polemical nature, most notably Virginia's A Room of One's Own (1929) (room 3) and Leonard's Quack, Quack! (1935). The Press was also well placed to support the work of fellow Bloomsbury writers and thinkers such as the economist Maynard Keynes, the art critic Clive Bell, and the art historian, artist and co-founder of Omega, Roger Fry. More generally it became a platform for promoting pioneering works of Modernist literature and poetry. They were the first to publish T S Eliot's The Waste Land (1923), as well as translate the work of radical new thinkers like the psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud.
A particular feature of the Press was the artistic nature of the book covers and illustrations, many by Virginia's sister, Vanessa Bell.

Virginia Woolf tragically Virginia Woolf drowned herself on 28 March 1941. In her last letter to Leonard, she tells him that he has given her 'complete happiness' and continues 'it was all due to you. No one could have been as good as you have been, from the very first day till now. Everyone knows that.'

Vanessa Bell, Roger Fry and Duncan Grant

Bell and Fry relationship: 1911–13
Bell and Grant relationship: 1913–61

In 1912, the British art historian, artist and writer Roger Fry (1866-1934) announced the birth of The Omega Workshops, which ran from 1913 to 1919. The lively workshop and store at 33 Fitzroy Square specialised in furniture, textiles and ceramics for a well-to-do clientele that was eager to get away from Edwardian conservative living. Fry was simultaneously introducing the latest Modern art from the Continent into Britain through his influential 1910 and 1912 Post-Impressionism exhibitions. With Omega he wanted to radically break the hierarchy between decorative and fine arts. From its inception, Fry invited the artists Duncan Grant (1885-1978) and Woolf's sister, Vanessa Bell (1879-1961), with whom he was madly in love and was having an affair, to be co-directors. Grant would soon in turn become Bell's lover and a veritable live-work love triangle ensued.

The loose collection of artists and writers that formed Bloomsbury, from which Omega was born, was known for its belief in free love, bohemian living, intellectual debate, exuberant decoration across all surfaces and a hand-made aesthetic. As an expression of this, Omega was an optimistic gesture, an uninhibited celebration of colour, form and sensuality before the First World War cast its inevitable shadow. By working on rug and carpet designs, Bell, Fry and Grant momentarily abandoned figuration in favour of abstraction. Even though Grant was essentially homosexual, Bell remained with him for the rest of her life, setting up home in Charleston, in East Sussex. Bell found an easy companionship and creative dialogue with Grant whom she respected greatly as an artist. Charleston was transformed into a total work of art from floor to ceiling and was their greatest collaboration. They had a daughter together, Angelica. At a time when homosexuality was illegal and

extra-marital sex scandalous, the unusual household at Charleston was discreet. The art critic Clive Bell, Vanessa's resident first husband, claimed paternity of Angelica. Fry remained a close family friend, his devotion to Bell undimmed. In 1926, Fry wrote to Vanessa about her life at Charleston, '*It seems to me the only really successful family life I've ever seen which ought to be made known to all those good people who think that family life depends on the sanctity of marriage*.'

Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Jean Arp

Relationship: 1915–43

The Swiss artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943) was a genre-crossing artist and true pioneer, schooled in the applied arts and the anarchic performance work of Dada. She thrived on inter-disciplinarity, confidently experimenting with dance, costume, puppet making, wood sculptures, embroidery and tapestry. It was her early simplification of forms and geometric abstraction, developed through her applied textile art, that caught the attention of the Swiss-German artist Jean Arp (1886–1966) who admired Taeuber's 'courageous use of rectangles.' They met in 1915 at the opening of Arp's exhibition in Munich and married in 1922. Over the following decades they profoundly influenced each other's work.

They immediately began collaborating as well as maintaining their own distinct approaches to art. Taeuber-Arp's puppets for King Stag (1918) show the importance of performance and dance within her practice as well as her interest in exploring materiality, space, movement and gesture. Jean Arp is best known for his move towards fluid, organic lines which he developed in shallow-relief and sculpture.

Their collaboration was tragically curtailed by Sophie's premature death. Devastated, Arp retreated to a monastery. He eventually returned to making art, initially through writing, and dedicated a number of his poems to Taeuber-Arp. He also took some of her drawings as well as those they had made together, tore them up and re-assembled them as if to rekindle the creative partnership that they had once enjoyed. As he gained international recognition, which would continue to grow until his death in 1966, Arp committed himself to promoting Taeuber-Arp's work.

Winifred Nicholson and Ben Nicholson

Relationship: 1920–31

The British painter Winifred Nicholson (1893–1981) was married to Ben Nicholson (1894–1982) before he embarked on his better known relationship with Barbara Hepworth. They were kindred spirits who met in their mid-twenties, had three children together and worked alongside each other in their shared studio throughout the 1920s. Initially living between London and Lugano, they then moved to the wild fells of Cumberland, where Winifred had bought a remote farmstead in 1923.

While their respective works are still principally figurative, like many of their European contemporaries, they were experimenting with reduction and flattening of the picture plane as a means of discovering the intrinsic essence of things. Their respective bodies of work clearly, and unusually, celebrate family life, while also drawing inspiration from landscape and the decorative value of everyday objects. While Ben Nicholson's mature work is characterised by a formal simplicity and the drawn line, his paintings while he was with Winifred are often joyful experiments in painterly composition, saturated with colour. The evocative Jake and Kate on the Isle of Wight (1931–2) by Winifred, and Ben's Fireworks (1927–8), demonstrate their close affinity.

When Ben embarked on his relationship with Hepworth, he and Winifred stayed on cordial terms. Indeed, as the mother of his children, and as an artist deeply engaged with avant garde developments on the Continent — close to figures such as Piet Mondrian and Jean Hélion — Winifred remained an influential figure in her former husband's life.

Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson

Relationship: 1931–51

The British sculptor Barbara Hepworth (1903–75) and the painter Ben Nicholson lived and worked together for over a decade. Although both were already married and had children when they first met in 1931, by 1932 Nicholson was sharing Hepworth's Mall Studios in Hampstead and they exhibited their work in dialogue the same year. In 1934 Hepworth gave birth to the couple's triplets. Together, surrounded by the work of the other, they swiftly developed as artists, each exerting a profound influence on the other and their photographic albums show a remarkable exchange of ideas. Asked about his feeling for Hepworth, Nicholson exclaimed; 'Barbara and I are the SAME.' They would, he said, 'live, think & work & move & stay still together as if we were one person'. Many of the works that Nicholson made during the first few years of the relationship, such as 1933 (Saint Remy de Provence), are double portraits and as such are a celebration of their togetherness.

The first half of the 20th century was witness to a pervasive move towards abstraction in art. Hepworth and Nicholson both made visits to the Continent where they met and were influenced by Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Jean Arp. Here was another artist couple on which they could model themselves and Jean Arp's shallow reliefs were especially influential on Nicholson. Abstraction became a bastion of freedom in a Europe scarred by the rise of Fascism and they kept that beacon alight in Britain, influencing each other throughout the 1930s to be increasingly radically reductionist in search of a universal essence. For instance, the focus on eyes in Nicholson's figurative works of the early 1930s was reduced to simple circles as the decade progressed. Under the influence of Hepworth, Nicholson's work became more sculptural and Hepworth conversely introduced incisions into her sculptures. While Nicholson didn't altogether give

up figuration, the ‘white reliefs’ that he started making alongside Hepworth mark the absolute highpoint of his oeuvre. The couple separated, each following their own path.

Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann
Relationship: 1915–22

Til Brugman and Hannah Höch
Relationship: 1926–35

The German artist Hannah Höch (1889–1978) met the 'Dadasopher' and fellow countryman Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971) in 1915. Together, they were among the first to hijack the photomontage and collage techniques for their artistic and political potential. Höch especially made the technique her own, employing irony and wit to comment on the new Weimar Republic that they both believed was sorely in need of a social and political revolution. As standardbearers for the new man and woman, Höch and Hausmann presented their work at the celebrated First International Dada Fair in Berlin in 1920. Hausmann insisted that Höch's work be included and she became, due to his efforts, the only woman in the exhibition.

Central to the vision, was the over-turning of patriarchy at a time when German women had just obtained the right to vote. Hausmann also upheld that a sexual liberation would enable a life unconstrained by monogamy and so was happy to maintain a relationship with Höch while still married to his wife. In Hausmann's eyes, Höch needed to free herself from the bonds of bourgeois morality and as he wrote to her, 'kill the father in yourself'. Höch neither wanted to nor could follow this concept of life. The tensions created by this scenario fuelled a number of Höch's works. Two aborted pregnancies also resulted, which she addressed repeatedly in later works. They separated in 1922.

From 1926 to 1936, Höch found a different kind of love with the Dutch writer Til Brugman (1888–1958). They were reciprocally responsible for their first big debuts. Brugman arranged the first solo exhibition of works by Höch in The

Hague. Höch, for her part, illustrated Scheingehacktes, a collection of writings by Brugman in 1935. With new inspiration, Höch continued to comment on the battle of the sexes, gender and the 'new woman' as an engine of social renewal. In the spring of 1936, after ten years together, the two women went their separate ways.

Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov

Relationship: 1907–62

From 1910 to 1915 Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962) and Mikhail Larionov (1881–1964) were the undisputed leaders of the Russian avant-garde. Although they only married in 1955, they lived and worked together for sixty years, first in Moscow and later in Paris. They were prolific and versatile, engaging in a Russian form of expressionist practice known as Neo-Primitivism, but also developing a highly distinctive form of abstraction inspired by Futurism which they called Rayism – their very own art movement.

Aligning their art with developments in science, Rayist painting was about depicting the energy vibrations emanating from all objects and capturing an immateriality that existed beyond the range of the human eye. Excited by the discovery of x-rays and particle photography, Goncharova and Larionov sensed that modern mankind stood on the verge of a new spiritual revelation, in which the problems of the human condition could finally be overcome. The duo had the ambition of disassembling the view of the world that art traditionally represented. Art, they believed, had the capacity to open people's eyes and to transform life. They extended the practice of Rayism beyond painting, to their clothing and physical appearances. Most notable, was their adoption of face painting as a means of upsetting established conventions and celebrating what they considered the multi-dimensional and magical qualities of modernity.

Varvara Stepanova and Alexander Rodchenko

Relationship: 1916–56

Varvara Stepanova (1894–1958) and Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956) first met as students in Moscow. Their devoted relationship spanned one of the most turbulent and exhilarating periods of Russian history. In the aftermath of Russia's 1917 Revolution which had overthrown the Tsarist imperial autocracy and placed the Bolcheviks in power, the couple saw themselves as 'creator rebels' and comrades in love. They were intent on shaping themselves as the 'new man' and 'new woman' of the revolution. In this new utopian context, inspired in part by their friend and collaborator Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1921 assertion that henceforth 'the streets shall be our brushes, the squares our palettes', bourgeois representation was to be eliminated and photography and design were to be valued equally with painting and sculpture. Constructivism was the name they and their fellow community of artists gave to their art movement. It represented point zero, with Rodchenko claiming 'we are the beginning'.

Mid-way through a decade of experiment, Rodchenko found himself adrift in Paris, a Capitalist world with 'a bidet in every room'. He was especially outraged by the West's 'cult of woman as an object', reporting that in Paris, 'only a man is a person but women aren't people … you can do whatever you want with them.' Back home, things were different. Living the dream, Stepanova and Rodchenko shared an immensely productive multi-disciplinary studio where they frequently collaborated. Stepanova's textiles and Rodchenko's paintings are formally and conceptually aligned, but they also developed their own favoured disciplines — Stepanova excelling in theatre design and Rodchenko in photography. Although active in propagating the aims of the new Communist state, they still satirised themselves, dressed each other up and fooled around in front of the camera,

stars in their own kaleidoscopic utopian vision of the world. By 1930, the year marked by the suicide of poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and the closure of Vkhutemas, the Russian equivalent of the Bauhaus, innovation had been stifled by Stalin. While Stepanova and Rodchenko zealously continued making art, the beacon of hope guiding them had been put out.

Lilya Brik, Osip Brik and Vladimir Mayakovsky

Relationship: 1915–28

In July 1915, the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930) met the literary critic, writer and editor Osip Brik (1888–1945) and his wife Lilya Brik (1891–1978), which triggered the start of a tumultuous fifteen-year relationship between the three of them that would give rise to some of the most important art of the Russian Revolution. Their unconventional relationship placed friendship, love and creativity at the centre of a way of life that paid no heed to the bourgeois conception of marriage. At 22, Mayakovsky was already a major figure in the modern, anti-establishment aesthetic current that was sweeping through Russia, one that hoped to create a new society following the advent of Russian Futurism. Lilya and her husband belonged to the same young generation driven by revolutionary ideals and both fell passionately in love with him. Lilya was Mayakovsky's muse, even in times of separation, while Osip was the poet's most ardent supporter. He was also the man behind the periodicals LEF and Novy LEF which were effectively the cultural mouthpiece of the Revolution and a magnet for the best Russian avant-garde talent. All three friends were co-collaborators of Varvara Stepanova and Alexander Rodchenko.

Margrethe Mather and Edward Weston

Relationship: 1913–23

'In artistic matters Margrethe was of course the teacher, Edward the pupil.' — Imogen Cunningham

The American photographer Margrethe Mather (1886–1952) was instrumental in the development of her fellow countryman Edward Weston's (1886–1958) practice as a photographer. Mather introduced Weston to her bohemian circle and their political and aesthetic ideas while he urged her to share her talent with the world. By 1916 she began to advertise herself as a photographer. Over the course of their twelve-year relationship, they were also business partners in the photographic studio he operated in Glendale, California. Together they founded the influential 'Camera Pictorialists of Los Angeles' camera club and exhibition venue in 1914.

Although their respective works from this period are characterised by a soft focus, an emphasis on beauty, tonality and composition rather than on documenting reality, an aesthetic associated with 19th century Pictorialist photography; the couple soon adopted striking innovations. Mather made several portraits of Weston and others, employing unconventional cropping and capitalising on the formal qualities of shadow. In a number of intimate nude portraits of Mather, Weston did the same. By 1921, their emotional and physical attachment had evolved into friendship and professional admiration and both photographers agreed to form an equal partnership. A number of photographs from that period are jointly signed, the only time Weston co-signed a work in his career.

After Weston began an affair with Tina Modotti, and their relationship ended, Mather continued working, her reputation eclipsed by his.

Tina Modotti and Edward Weston

Relationship: 1921–7

In 1916, the Italian actress Tina Modotti (1896–1942) moved to Los Angeles in the hope of pursuing her acting career. Through her work in silent films and modelling, she met the American photographer Edward Weston (1886–1958) in 1921. A series of sensual portraits of Modotti reciting a text encapsulate her charismatic presence and announce their intense romantic and professional involvement. While starting out as his muse, Weston's practice inspired Modotti to become a photographer and in July 1923, they relocated to Mexico and built a shared photography studio. Modotti learnt from Weston's sense of composition, framing devices and incredible mastery of light while quickly developing her own pictorial language.

Their travels around Mexico were an incredible source of inspiration for both artists who portrayed the country and its people from various perspectives. Weston continually fought against genre scenes and picturesque depictions of Mexican nature, focussing instead on the abstract potential of its landscape, ruins and native folk art. Modotti on the other hand grounded her Modernism in the material reality of the Mexican people; the country's post-revolutionary context; and the tangible signs of the birth of Communism. Their conceptions of photography diverged over time, but Weston and Modotti collaborated on Anita Brenner's Idols Behind Altars in 1926 before separating in 1927.

Lavinia Schulz and Walter Holdt

Relationship: 1920–4

The German dancer and costume-maker Lavinia Schulz (1896–1924) met her fellow countryman Walter Holdt (1899–1924) in Hamburg in 1920. Together, they created a distinctive performative body of work that marked out new territories for the body. Their work quickly veered away from Expressionism, a movement Schulz had affiliations with, and instead developed an aesthetic that merged abstract, organic, grotesque and sculptural forms with references to Nordic mythology and mysticism. Schulz designed the costumes while Holdt created the elaborate choreography.

They worked for no money, refusing payment for their performances so as to preserve the spiritual character of their work. Their costumes were heavy and purposefully difficult to manoeuvre, mimicking the challenge in art and life that must be overcome. This zealous dedication meant that they lived in extremely precarious conditions and had to work from repurposed materials such as papier-mâché, plaster, rope, canvas, metal and cardboard. The costumes were of exquisite technical quality.

Although their art flourished, by 1924 they were living in extreme poverty following the end of World War I and the inflationary context of the Weimar Republic. Both experienced mental health issues and eventually Schulz killed Holdt before ending her own life.

Benedetta and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti

Relationship: 1918–44

In Manifesto of Futurism (1909), the Italian founder of the Futurist movement Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) called for 'a disrespect for women' whom he saw as responsible for a kind of sentimentalism. According to him they impeded on his vision of a virile society governed by speed and machines. In 1918 he met his future partner, the Italian artist Benedetta (1897–1977) who would have a transformative effect on his art. While Benedetta was part of the Futurist Movement, she refused to be constrained by it, writing to Marinetti: 'I am too free and rebellious — I do not want to be restricted. I want only to be me.'

Alongside Benedetta's shared enthusiasm for machines, which like Marinetti had a formative effect on her poetry, she also injected a sensorial dimension into Futurism. In 1921, they co-created a new movement called Tactilism, inspired by the sensitivity of the skin. It celebrated spiritual and physical communication, as well as love and friendship, a beacon of hope against the emergence of Fascism in Italy after World War I. The same year Marinetti wrote an ode to Benedetta which highlighted a clear shift in his poetic sensibility: 'Blessed one / dear hawthorn / blood red carnation [...] and flesh at war [...] Blessed holy water / which is overflowing [...] Divine milk / in my rough bark'.

The fusional art created by the couple reflects their relationship: an erotic union of opposing energies. Sudan-Parigi (Sudan-Paris) (1920) was made by both artists in an act of extraordinary co-authorship and is one of the few surviving exemplars of their short-lived and now largely forgotten art movement. During that time, the emerging industrial world still remained a source of fascination for both artists. Benedetta's Le Grand X (1925-30) responds to the technical advancements in aviation that were glorified by Mussolini's government.

Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz

Relationship: 1917–46

Soon after they first met, the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) gave the painter Georgia O'Keeffe (1887 to 1986) a box of photographs that he had taken of her, accompanied by a letter that read: 'I think I could do a thousand things of you — a life's work to express you.' O'Keeffe replied to Stieglitz: 'The box came ... and I love myself ... it makes me laugh that I love myself so much — Like myself as you make me.' Over the course of their years together, Stieglitz tenderly photographed every changing facet of his lover. They married in 1924. Naked or semi-naked photographs of O'Keeffe contrast with other more androgynous or Puritan looking portraits. In these works, O'Keeffe acts as both subject and artist, performing for the camera with an agency in her own identity construction.

Stieglitz interpreted O'Keeffe's early paintings as embodying female sexuality and O'Keeffe, perhaps in an attempt to counter such an interpretation, began painting New York City, challenging the popular perception of urban motifs being essentially masculine territory. In 1925, O'Keeffe and Stieglitz moved to the Shelton building, one of New York's earliest skyscrapers. In paintings, such as East River from the Shelton (East River No. 1) (1927–28), O'Keeffe appropriated photographic techniques perfected by her husband such as halation, the blurred effect around edges of highlighted areas, and lens flares, merging them with a spiritual depiction of the sky. The series rekindled Stieglitz's interest in the city. Conversely, Stieglitz's Equivalent, part of a series of photographs of clouds and the sky taken at Lake George, appears to have been at least in part influenced by O'Keeffe's internalised and meditative painting and her love of nature and the organic as encapsulated in Red, Yellow and Black Streak (1924).

O'Keeffe moved to New Mexico in 1929 in a search of artistic and personal independence. Nonetheless, she and Stieglitz remained close and in a sense devoted to each other until his death in 1946.

Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici

Relationship: 1921–9

The Irish-born architect and designer Eileen Gray (1878–1976) and the French architect and writer Jean Badovici (1893–1956) maintained an enigmatic relationship for nearly thirty years. At the time they met, Gray, had just opened the Jean Désert gallery in Paris from which she sold her own brand of sensuous furniture and interiors. For over ten years she had worked successfully in lacquer and textile art, creating unique designs for wealthy collectors. Badovici instantly recognised Gray's talents, where some others were sceptical. This belief in her work was instrumental in her development as a Modernist architect.

The two friends or possibly lovers, as discreet as they were passionate, shaped one of the most exotic stories in modern architecture. In 1926, Badovici commissioned Gray to design a villa for a young man who enjoyed working, exercising and entertaining his friends. She designed the Villa E 1027 on the terraces overlooking Lude beach at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin but it was essentially a joint project. The coded name of the villa alluded to the combined first and last name of its architects — E for Eileen, 10 for J, the tenth letter of the alphabet, meaning Jean, 2 for B for Badovici, and 7 for G representing Gray — undoubtedly echoing the relationship between them. Far from Le Corbusier's machine for living, E 1027 was meant as an organic unit where fixed and mobile furnishings could slide, fold and unfold, blurring and redefining the space. Gray and Badovici believed that the bodies and souls of a building's occupants were central to its architecture: living, moving components that completed and extended its spaces.

With villa E 1027 completed, Gray chose to build her own house, Tempe a Pailla above the town of Menton not far from Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, a poetic refuge for an independent

woman. The extent of their intimate relationship remains unknown but they clearly remained devoted to each other. In 1950, Badovici named his lifeboat E7 for Eileen Gray and six years later, when he died, stranded in a hospital in Monaco, she was at his bedside, the last person to pay homage to this leading figure of modernity.

Aino Aalto and Alvar Aalto

Relationship: 1924–49

The Finnish designers Aino Marsio (1894–1949) and Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) both graduated in architecture from Helsinki University of Technology and were married in 1924, shortly after Aino joined Alvar's recently founded practice. Their studio was informed by the European avant-garde such as the work of the Bauhaus and they became close friends with László Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Moholy. Collaborating closely, the Aaltos spearheaded a move away from Nordic Classicism towards an international Modernism that was based on organic lines. They became the only fully trained architect couple to achieve international prominence in the Modern Movement.

They injected their progressive ideas about the importance of modern interiors into their furniture, seeking to merge architecture, design and life. Their mutual, artistic and intellectual inspiration culminated in the creation of their design company, Artek in December 1935, in association with the gallerist and art patron Marie Gullichsen and the art historian Nils-Gustav Hahl. The company name reflected its founders' ambition to combine art and technology under one roof and Artek quickly became the centre of their shared creative life. Both of their names appeared on the company letterhead until long after Aino Aalto's premature death in 1949. Aino served as Artek's Administrative Director and Head of the Interior Division while Alvar focused on the international distribution network, using his connections to build awareness of Artek abroad. By the end of the 1930s Artek had distribution centres on five continents. The first Artek shop opened in Helsinki in 1936, and was also home to a design studio and contemporary art gallery. Aino conceived the commercial space as a showroom with huge windows, cleverly lit to display Artek's furniture and tableware collections to fine effect.

Aino is especially known for her glassware design which is still in production today. Her familiar Bölgeblick range of glassware, like Alvar Aalto's furniture, blends the functional and the organic. A unique vase, shown here, combines designs by both Aino and Alvar, making it a work of true coauthorship. Their optimistic, sensuous brand of Modernism is a result of their fulfilling life together.

Lucia Moholy and László Moholy-Nagy

Relationship: 1920–9

The Czech-born artist Lucia Moholy (1894–1989) and her partner, the Hungarian-born artist László Moholy-Nagy (1895 –1946) met in Berlin in the spring of 1920. They married soon after and moved to the famous Bauhaus school in Weimar and then in Dessau where they shared a darkroom. Until 1928, they were fully devoted to their work and to each other. Although László taught metalwork at the Bauhaus, it is his work as an experimental photographer, which he developed during the 1920s alongside Lucia and at first under her tutelage, which has provided his most lasting legacy.

Historically, the photograms have solely been attributed to László, yet a double portrait of both artists is evidence enough of their collaborative practice. Lucia published László's theoretical writings in German, playing a significant role in the dissemination and recognition of their work. She also developed her own distinctive photographic work, specialising in recording the Bauhaus buildings, interiors and designs in a coolly objective style. Their work evolved in complementary directions and it is in Lucia's more intimate and psychological portraiture that her work comes closest to László's where both explored the potential of cropping and extreme angles to dizzying effect. Although for a long time Lucia's images of the Bauhaus remained unattributed they have profoundly shaped the legacy of this legendary school.

After the couple left the Bauhaus for Berlin, they presented photograms, photomontages, portraits and architectural photographs in the exhibition Film und Foto held in Stuttgart in 1929. The hang brought out the complementarity and distinctive differences between them before their separation later that year. Their divorce was made official in 1934. László fled Germany for the States in 1937 where he continued to work and consolidate his reputation.