

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



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SONIA DELAUNAY

1885 Gradischk (Ukraine) - Paris 1979

## *Composition*

Gouache over pencil on card; executed 1942.

Signed in pencil: *Sonia Delaunay* and indistinctly numbered.

680 x 345 mm

PROVENANCE: Liatowitsch Gallery, Basel – Robert von Hirsch (acquired from the above in 1968) – By descent to his stepdaughter, Lolo Sarnoff – Thence by descent

EXHIBITIONS: *The Non-Objective World / La Peinture Non-Objective / Il Mondo della Non-Oggettività, 1924-1939*, Galerie Jean Chauvelin, Paris; and later at Annely Juda Fine Art, London; Galleria Milano, Milan; Galerie Liatowitsch, Basel 1971, no. 40

Sonia Delaunay-Terk [Fig. 1] was born in the Ukraine in 1885. The family moved to St Petersburg when she was seven years old. She travelled to Germany after finishing school to take painting classes at the Academy of Arts in Karlsruhe. In 1905 she moved to Paris, where she was to spend most of her life. She married Robert Delaunay, the French artist, in 1910.

In 1913, Robert Delaunay launched a new aesthetic by becoming the first French painter to produce completely abstract work. 'Simultaneism' was the term he invented to describe the abstract painting he and his wife Sonia were to develop. He described Simultaneism as a *total, formal aesthetic construction of all crafts: furniture, dresses, books, posters and sculpture [...]*,<sup>1</sup> to be representative of the age and to override the boundaries of painting.

From its beginnings as a theory of simultaneous colour contrasts, Simultaneism evolved into a formal method of artistic production and in a broader sense, came to define the polymorphism of Sonia Delaunay's artistic achievement.<sup>2</sup> She played a key role in the Parisian avant-garde as a co-developer of abstract painting in France. Overlapping and interlocking planes of contrasting colours are recurrent in her paintings. She used these to explore the interaction between colours. The dynamic forms and vibrancy of many of her compositions represent an attempt to envelop the pace of modernity – technology, urban life, travel and contemporary dance, such as the tango.

From a twenty-first century point of view, perhaps the most modern aspect of her *oeuvre* as a multi-disciplinary artist was her readiness to push the boundaries of fine art to work simultaneously in the fields of fashion; textile, costume and set design; contemporary interior decoration; architecture

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Delaunay, *Simultanisme de l'art moderne contemporain : peinture, poésie (suivis de rayés: sculpture, ameublement, architecture, robes ...)*, October 1913, BnF-Manuscrits, NAF 25673, M7149, fos. 44-76. Reprinted in *Du Cubisme à l'art abstrait*, Paris, 1958 pp. 109-12.

<sup>2</sup> Cécile Godefroy, *The métier of Simultaneism in Sonia Delaunay*, exhib. cat., Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 17 October 2014-22 February 2015 and Tate Modern, London, 15 April-9 August 2015, Paris 2014, p. 157.

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and advertising. Sonia Delaunay described the gradual development of her own creative career in the 1930s as *a-step-by-step process of discovery of harmonies and dissonances to give colours a life of their own, investing them with a pulse and vibrations which, when ordered, became rhythms*.<sup>3</sup> This dimension is central to the work she began to produce in the 1930s. The titles of many of her later series of paintings – *Rythme coloré* and *Rythme couleur* – reflect this [Fig. 2].

The present gouache, with its play of curves and counter-curves winding around a central axis, is at once fluid and ordered. The rotational motion of the helixes and spirals suggests endless rhythm. Recurrent, multiple use of helixes – as a powerful instrument to express rhythm – is frequent in her paintings.<sup>4</sup> This composition clearly belongs to the workgroup titled *Rythme coloré*.

The distinguished provenance of the work adds to its importance. Lili-Charlotte (Lolo) Sarnoff, née Dreyfus [Fig. 3] was born in Frankfurt in 1916. She was the daughter of the banker and art collector Willy Dreyfus (1885–1977) and his wife Martha, née Koch (1892–1965). Martha was the daughter of a leading Frankfurt jeweller, Louis Koch (1862–1930). The family later left Germany and went to Switzerland where Martha re-met, and in 1945 married a friend from her Frankfurt youth, the celebrated art collector Robert von Hirsch [Fig. 4]. On his death in 1977, Hirsch left an outstanding collection of Impressionist and Modern Art, Old Master Paintings and Drawings, Medieval and Renaissance Works of Art, Furniture and Porcelain. His will stipulated that most of his collection be made available to anyone who would appreciate it. Lolo and her brother, Richard, respecting Hirsch's wishes, consigned the collection for auction at Sotheby's in London. The sale was held in June 1978. It ran over six days and was a spectacular success. Seven hundred lots were sold. Lolo was a scientist, sculptor and arts patron. She married twice and met her second husband, Stanley Sarnoff, while working as a nurse in New York after the Second World War. Many items from the Hirsch collection, including this work by Sonia Delaunay, were not included in the Sotheby's sale and remained with Lolo at her home in Maryland until her death at the age of 98 in 2014.

Richard Riss has confirmed the authenticity of the work (19 March 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> Sonia Delaunay, quoted by Roger van Gindertael in 'Le passage de la ligne', *L'Art d'aujourd'hui*, no. 6, August 1952.

<sup>4</sup> Guitemie Maldonado, *A circular story*, in *Sonia Delaunay*, op. cit., exhib. cat. 2014, p. 189.

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Fig. 1: Florence Henri,  
*Sonia Delaunay*, 1931



Fig. 2: Sonia Delaunay,  
*Rythme couleur no. 1076*, 1939



Fig.3: Katherine Lambert,  
*Lolo Sarnoff* (1916-2014), photograph, 2005

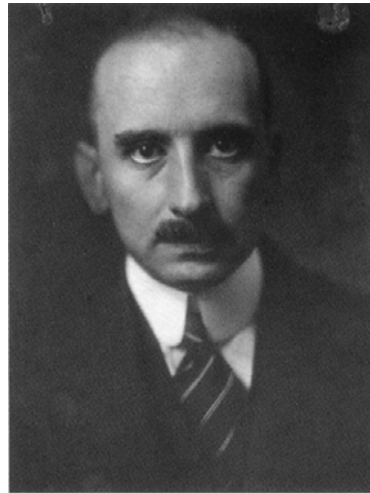


Fig. 4: Anonymous photographer,  
*Robert von Hirsch* (1883-1977)