FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 4, 2015
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NEW EXHIBITION SERIES AT ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
LOOKS AT MODERN ART COLLECTION WITH A FRESH PERSPECTIVE
Debut exhibition Shatter Rupture Break Unites Works In a Variety of Media
Around the Idea of Fragmentation In the Early 20th Century

CHICAGO – The Art Institute of Chicago is introducing an innovative new series of exhibitions that presents works from the museum’s acclaimed collection of modern art in reimagined ways that demonstrate the continued vitality and significance these works have today.

*The Modern Series* debuts with *Shatter Rupture Break*, opening Sunday, February 15, in Galleries 182 and 184 of the museum’s Modern Wing. The exhibition unites such diverse objects as paintings, sculpture, works on paper, photographs, decorative arts and designed objects, textiles, books, and films.

“We wanted to explore how the idea of rupture permeated modern life in Europe and the Americas,” said Elizabeth Siegel, Associate Curator of Photography, who, with Sarah Kelly Oehler, the Gilda and Henry Buchbinder Associate Curator of American Art, took the lead in organizing the first exhibition. “It served as an inspiration for revolutionary formal and conceptual developments in art making that remain relevant today.”

A century ago, society was changing as rapidly and radically as it is in today’s digital age. Quicker communication, faster production, and wider circulation of people, goods, and ideas – in addition to the outbreak of World War I – produced a profoundly new understanding of the world, and artists responded with both anxiety and exhilaration. Freeing themselves from the restraints of tradition,
modern artists developed groundbreaking pictorial strategies that reflected this new shift in perception.

Responding to the new forms and pace of cities, artists such as Robert Delaunay (French, 1885-1941) and Gino Severini (Italian, 1883-1966) disrupted traditional conventions of depth and illusionism, presenting vision as something fractured. Delaunay’s *Champs de Mars: The Red Tower* fragments the iconic form of the Eiffel Tower, exemplifying how modern life – particularly in an accelerated urban environment – encouraged new and often fractured ways of seeing. Picturesque vistas no longer adequately conveyed the fast pace of the modern metropolis.

The human body as well could no longer be seen as intact and whole. A devastating and mechanized world war had returned men from the front with unimaginable wounds, and the fragmented body became emblematic of a new way of understanding a fractured world. Surrealists such as Hans Bellmer (German, 1902-1975), Claude Cahun (French, 1894-1954) and Salvador Dalí (Spanish, 1904-1989) fetishized body parts in images, separating out eyes, hands, and legs in suggestive renderings. A more literal representation of the shattered body comes from Chicago’s own Ivan Albright, who was a medical draftsman in World War I. In his rarely shown *Medical Sketchbook*, he created fascinatingly gruesome watercolors that documented injured soldiers and the x-rays of their wounds.

Just as with the body, the mind in the modern era also came to be seen as fragmented. Stanisław Witkiewicz (Polish, 1885-1939) produced a series of self-portraits as an act of psychological exploration. His work culminated in one stunning photograph made by shattering a glass negative, which he then reassembled and printed, thus conveying an evocative sense of a shattered psyche. The artistic expression of dreams and mental imagery perhaps reached a pinnacle not in a painting or a sculpture, but in a film. Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí’s film *Un chien andalou (An Andalusian Dog)* mystified viewers with its dreamlike narrative, dissolves from human to animal forms, dismembered body parts, and shockingly violent acts in an attempt to translate the unconscious mind onto a celluloid strip.

Kurt Schwitters (German, 1887-1948) and George Grosz (German, 1893-1959) explored collage, which took on new importance for avant-garde artists thanks to the aesthetic appeal and widespread availability of mass-produced media. Schwitters used the ephemera of German society to create what he called Merz, an invented term signifying an artistic practice that included collage, assemblage, painting, poems, and performance. The Art Institute owns a significant group of these collages by Schwitters, and six will appear in the exhibition. The use of thrown-away,
ripped up, and scissored-out pieces of paper, divorced from their original meaning and reassembled with nails and glue into new objects, was an act that exposed the social and political disruptions of a German society that seemed broken and on the edge of collapse in the aftermath of World War I.

*Shatter Rupture Break* is unusual in that it unites objects from across the entire museum – from seven curatorial departments as well as the library. This multiplicity is significant because modern artists did not confine themselves to one medium, but explored different visual effects across a variety of media. As well, the show prominently features the voices of artists, writers, scientists, and other intellectuals of the period. The goal is to create a dynamic space that evokes the electrifying, disruptive, and cacophonous nature of modern art at the time.

“We hope to excite interest in the modern period as a crucial precursor to the changes of our own time, to show how what might seem old now was shockingly fresh then,” said Oehler.

Considered one of the finest and most comprehensive in the world, the Art Institute's collection of modern art includes nearly 1,000 works by artists from Europe and the Americas. The museum was an early champion of modern artists, from its presentation of the Armory Show in 1913 to its early history of acquiring major masterpieces. This show highlights some recent acquisitions of modern art, but also includes some long-held works that have formed the core of the modern collection for decades. *Shatter Rupture Break* celebrates this history by bringing together works that visitors may know well, but have never seen in this context or with this diverse array of objects.

**THE MODERN SERIES**

A quintessentially modern city, Chicago has been known as a place for modern art for more than a century, and the Art Institute of Chicago has been central to this history. The Modern Series exhibitions are designed to bring together the museum’s acclaimed holdings of modern art across all media, display them in fresh and innovative ways within new intellectual contexts, and demonstrate the continued vitality and relevance of modern art for today.

**Images:**


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The Art Institute of Chicago gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the citizens of Chicago.