The Museum of Modern Art

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"Morgan Russell: Synchromist Studies 1910-1922," an exhibition of paintings, notebooks and sketches by an important but little-known American artist, will be on view on the first floor of The Museum of Modern Art from March 19 through May 25. These studies, most of which are being exhibited for the first time, show the development of Russell's Synchromist style. The exhibition focuses on a selection of studies that Russell made for his two major abstract paintings, Synchromy in Blue-Violet (Synchromie en bleu violacé) of 1913 and Synchromy in Orange: To Form of 1913-1914. These studies provide insight to Russell's experiments with color and form and indicate the variety of art that influenced him--from Michelangelo to Picasso.

In 1909 Morgan Russell moved from New York to settle in Paris, where he studied sculpture with Matisse. He was aware of the avant-garde movements Cubism, Orphism, and Futurism. Turning his attention from sculpture to painting, he developed a style based on the rhythmic use of color, analogous to symphonic musical composition, which he termed Synchromism. Like his contemporaries Kupka and Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Russell was interested in color theory, but he also had a more personal basis for his abstractions--the three-dimensional forms of figural sculpture.

Russell exhibited his Synchromist paintings, along with those of another young American, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, first in Europe and then in New York in 1914 and 1916. Although Russell was discouraged by financial difficulties and abandoned his Synchromist style by 1930, his work had suggested to his American contemporaries the possibilities of a new style of abstract painting that emphasized color.

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The exhibition has been directed by Cora Rosevear, Assistant Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture. Gail Levin Theodore, Assistant Professor of Art History, Connecticut College, collaborated on the exhibition, making available her independent research on Morgan Russell. She is also the author of the texts which accompany the exhibition.

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