

Press Release

Arp. Heads or Tails

10 September – 17 October 2026

Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street



New York... This Fall, Hauser & Wirth presents 'Arp. Heads or Tails,' the first New York exhibition in nearly fifteen years dedicated to the seminal German-French modernist. Organized by Curatorial Senior Director Alexis Lowry, this presentation takes Arp's late Threshold sculptures as a point of departure, situating this pivotal but underexamined body of work within the trajectory of Arp's long career of aesthetic and philosophical inquiry. The exhibition traces a line from his early cut-outs and reliefs to his mastery of form as a tool for reconfiguring and transforming our perception of space.

'Heads or Tails' presents key examples from the Threshold series alongside a selection of rarely exhibited works on paper and late sculptures. The juxtaposition reveals how elements of Arp's visual language migrated across materials and forms, accruing new meaning through a process of perpetual reinvention. The exhibition coincides with the release of 'Arp: Paper' from Hauser & Wirth Publishers, a survey of nearly two hundred works—many never before exhibited or published—that situates paper at the very heart of the artist's practice.

Arp described the Threshold sculptures, which date from 1958 onwards, as an extension of his established practice of cutting and collaging paper, writing that the works resulted from 'the same principle of cut-out forms, now applied to space.' Unlike his earlier engagements with three-dimensional form—primarily self-contained, biomorphic structures—these objects appear as if torn directly out of a picture plane.

'Ruhende / Allongée (Reclining)' (1960), for example, enlarges and remixes motifs from drawings such as 'Stuhl und Flasche / Chaise et bouteille (Chair and Bottle)' (1926) and 'Vegetale Nacht / Nuit végétale (Vegetal Night)' (1938), becoming a 'threshold' not as a fixed boundary but as a point of passage into greater dimensionality—an opening out into the world. The freestanding object is animated by the viewer's movement around and through it, taking on a new shape and meaning as it is experienced from multiple points of view. The exhibition's namesake, 'Wappen oder Zahl / Pile ou face (Heads or Tails)' (1959) references this double-sided nature directly in its title while also invoking chance—a generative force throughout Arp's creative process.



'Das kleine Theater / Le petit théâtre (The Small Theater)' (1959) exemplifies the Threshold series' ability to draw surrounding space into the works themselves. An image within an image, 'The Small Theater' appears almost like a relief whose back panel has been removed, opening the composition to its environment. Here, the spaces between forms become as important as the forms themselves, transforming a principle central to Arp's collages into a fully realized spatial experience.

If Arp's early collages and reliefs informed his Threshold sculptures, the later paper compositions on view, including a selection of Diptychs and watercolors from the 1960s, suggest that the exchange was reciprocal. In dialogue, these works—ripe with motifs that recur throughout his sculptural practice—reveal an artist continually revisiting and reconfiguring his visual vocabulary across mediums.

The bronze sculptures presented in the round further underscore the fluidity of Arp's practice, demonstrating how forms first explored in relief, collage and drawing repeatedly found new expression in sculpture, where they were transformed by scale, material and three-dimensional space. Viewed alongside these parallel bodies of work, the Threshold sculptures take on new significance. Created during the final decade of his life, they reveal an artist working simultaneously across multiple threads of inquiry, revisiting longstanding motifs while continuing to generate new forms and ideas. For Arp, the threshold was not simply a point of passage but a space of possibility—a concept that remained central to his understanding of artistic creation and life until the end.

About the artist

Hans Arp is a familiar figure of classical modernism and was a key contributor in the development of dada and surrealism in the early twentieth century. Focusing his attention on everyday objects and parts of the body. Arp created his own unique 'object language' using a nonsensical vocabulary: plate, fork, knife, clock, tie, moustache, lips, breasts. With a playful hand he juggled the dominant art currents of the early twentieth century, combining seemingly contradictory geometric and organic formal idioms with the artistic '-isms' of his epoch.

Turning his back on the increasingly modernized turn-of-the-century society, Arp created biomorphic works whose organic, amoeboid forms highlighted his fascination with the physiological processes of procreation, growth and death, and counteracted the rectilinear structures of cubism. Arp studied the natural world for inspiration, while documenting the evolution of an imaginary world. Combined with his late bronze sculptures from the 1950s, these works sought to give form to natural forces—clotting, hardening, congealing and fusing—all of which were symbols of eternal cycles in nature for Arp.



Born in Strasbourg, in Alsace, then part of Germany (now France), in 1886 Arp was raised bilingual, French and German, and additionally Alsatian, which was fundamental for his work. After studying at Strasbourg's Ecole des Arts et Metiers, Kunstschule Weimar and Académie Julian, Paris he co-founded the Swiss Artists association 'Der Moderne Bund' and the dada movement in Zurich. Arp participated the first surrealist exhibition in 1925 in Paris alongside Klee, Picasso and many others. In the 1930s, the Zurich-based art historian Carola Giedion-Welcker recognized the relevance of Arp's vision of nature, and saw in his works the 'invisible made visible, the search for a visual language capable of capturing the spiritual realms beyond the world of appearances.' Arp's innovative and influential practice prefigured the fluxus movement, inspired artists such as Anthony Caro and Joan Miró, and made way for the great contemporary performance artists.

His first major solo exhibition in the USA was shown in 1949. Arp was awarded the Grand Prize for Sculpture at the Venice Biennale in 1954. In the 1960s he received the GrandPrix National des Arts and the German Federal Cross of Merit. The first Arp retrospective was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1958. Although his later practice is often overlooked, Arp continued to produce sculpture and poetry until his death in 1966, building an extraordinary body of work that evolved beyond Dada, particularly in his increasingly experimental poetry.

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Wappen oder Zahl / Pile ou face (Heads or Tails)

1959 (casting date unknown, before 1977)

Bronze

32 x 26 x 7.5 cm / 12 5/8 x 10 1/4 x 3 in

Photo: Roman März

Stuhl und Flasche / Chaise et bouteille (Chair and Bottle)

1926

Paint on cardboard

20 x 30.2 cm / 7 7/8 x 11 7/8 in

Photo: Jon Etter

Vegetale Nacht / Nuit végétale (Vegetal Night)

1938

Ink on torn paper on colored paper

24.4 x 21.9 cm / 9 5/8 x 8 5/8 in

Photo: Roman März

Ruhende / Allongée (Reclining)

1960 (cast 1960)

Bronze

65 x 102.5 x 10.5 cm / 25 5/8 x 40 3/8 x 4 1/8 in

Photo: Damian Griffiths

Untitled

1965-1966 c.

Graphite pencil and watercolor on board

36.1 x 22.4 cm / 14 1/4 x 8 7/8 in

Photo: Roman März

Das kleine Theater / Le petit théâtre

(The Small Theater)

1959 (cast 1972)

Bronze

115.1 x 75.2 x 24 cm / 45 3/8 x 29 5/8 x 9 1/2 in

Photo: Roman März