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Rosenberg & Co. presents a special exhibition of thirty-five Modernist artists:

## EUROPEAN MASTERS OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

May 28 – September 21, 2019

A selective survey ranging from the fin de siècle to the 1950s, *European Masters of the Early Twentieth Century* is a sketch of the political and artistic upheaval that shaped the character of our world today.



Henry Valensi, *La Casbah d'Alger* (1930s)

From late Impressionism and early Cubist experimentation, to the inter-war return to figuration, the pieces in this exhibition both epitomize and push the boundaries of the era's movements. They also demonstrate the aesthetic and social interconnectedness of the great artists over decades. *Quai d'Auteuil*, an early drawing of Henri Rousseau, demonstrates his intuitive eye for the inherently abstract forms of foliage. Rousseau had given this drawing to the artist Max Weber, an early admirer and friend of the Naïve artist—and a 1921 work on paper by Weber, very simply depicting a woman in a purple scarf, carries through some of the “eloquence, clarity, social and spiritual intimacy” that Weber publicly praised in his friend.

Around the time that Weber met Rousseau, he was also introduced to the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire, who served as a major intermediary between the artistic communities of early twentieth century Paris. Though primarily a writer, Apollinaire experimented between forms, and a rare finished watercolor depicting items on a writing desk is on display in this exhibition: *Sans titre (nature morte à l'encrier, paquet de tabac, cendrier et boîte d'allumettes)*, signed and dated 1916, is an alluring figurative study completed just two years before the poet's death.

Apollinaire was crucial to the identification of contemporary artist movements, and named several artists the leaders of the famed Section d'Or: including Juan Gris, Fernand Léger, and Albert Gleizes, whose work is also featured. Gris, an influential Cubist, is an important exemplar of the post-war “return to order” movement, which is evident in his featured still life from the 1920s. Léger, another case of a Cubist who modified his work to become more figurative and populist, has been since hailed as a forerunner to Pop art: his *Composition d'éléments mécaniques* (c. 1930) is an example of his groundbreaking form and subject matter. Gleizes, who exhibited frequently at Léonce Rosenberg's Galerie de l'Effort Moderne, initially painted in the Impressionist tradition but became a forerunner of Cubist practice and theory. His 1915 *Portrait de Florent Schmitt*, a study for his famed *Le Chant de guerre* (which was featured on French postage stamps in 2012), is an example of Cubism's peak—as defined by Gleizes himself in his many writings.

However, attempts to define and demarcate the many artistic currents of these decades yield terms that often prove more obscure than useful. Henry Valensi's *La Casbah d'Alger* combines the unearthly qualities of Surrealism, the structural play of Cubism, and the artist's own designation of Musicalism (the synchronization of color and form as a musician would sonic matter)—and yet Valensi is usually categorized as simply a Cubist. The label is ultimately not as important as recognizing that the work unquestionably fits within the aesthetic values of the period, as the reinvention of form, color, and composition were crucial for depicting and deconstructing a newly-global era in political flux.

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