

Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy Ring of Iron, Ring of Wool

9 May – 29 July 2023

The Helly Nahmad Gallery is pleased to present Kay Sage & Yves Tanguy: Ring of Iron, Ring of Wool (9 May – 29 July 2023), curated by Victoria Noel-Johnson. The exhibition, which gets its title from a Kay Sage painting referencing the couple's seventh wedding anniversary, highlights how the personal and artistic trajectories of these two eminent Surrealists gave rise to a reciprocal and dynamic exchange of ideas. Constituting the third joint show of their work ever to be organized (with the first held at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in 1954 shortly before Tanguy's unexpected death), the displayed artwork weaves together a delicate narrative spanning several decades, interspersed with a silent dialogue provided by their respective poetic titles.

Each artist encountered the others work before meeting; Sage saw Tanguy's prophetically titled *Je vous attends* (I Await You) in 1935 and Tanguy saw Sage's work for the first time in 1938. The two eventually married in 1940. Though numerous artist couples come to mind, such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning, Lee Miller and Man Ray among others, Sage and Tanguy have remained relatively obscure until recently—Sage even more so, her work often overshadowed by Tanguy's greater fame.

Over the last 20 years, the male bias has been acknowledged within the art world, with art historians, curators and museum institutions seeking to analyze the historic phenomenon with fresh eyes and assess the female partner's artistic contribution in their own right and the challenges that they encountered. With regard to Sage and Tanguy, the present exhibition will address difficult questions including the obstacles and/or denied opportunities Sage dealt with at the time as an artist, writer and poet, including the prejudices she faced as an aspiring female artist in stifling aristocratic circles in Italy during the 1920s, the avant-garde Parisian milieu of the 1930s, as well as the competitive market of New York in the 1940s and 1950s.

Featuring 60 artworks lent by prestigious museums, institutions and private collections, the decision to display their work side by side (which they intentionally avoided during their lifetimes in order to assert the semblance of separate artistic entities) emphasizes such aesthetic points of contact but, at the same time, reinforces clear differences in stylistic and conceptual approaches in a parallel game of give-and-take. Here, Tanguy's constantly evolving and responsive inner world of fantastic landscapes populated by a vast array of biomorphic forms and anthropomorphic personages harmoniously co-exists with Sage's universe of metaphysically-charged dreamscapes featuring barren plains, architectural scaffolding and latticework structures adorned with brightly-colored cloth.

Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy: Ring of Iron, Ring of Wool was made possible through the generous participation of loans from museums, institutions and private collections such as the Mattatuck Museum, Mint Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Colorado Springs Fine Art Center at Colorado College, Williams College Museum of Art, the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation, Mark Kelman, Enrico Donati family, Esther Grether Family Collection, John Cavaliero Collection. It will also be accompanied by a richly-illustrated publication published by Skira with texts by Victoria Noel Johnson, Stephen Robeson Miller and Ara H. Merjian.

KAY SAGE (1898 – 1963)

Kay Sage was born in 1898 near Albany, New York. Her mother and father, a wealthy senator, divorced in 1911, with Sage and her elder sister Anne experiencing a peripatetic childhood with periods spent in San Francisco, New York and Florida, with lengthy trips with her mother to Europe (principally London, Paris, Lucerne and Rapallo) as well as Egypt (1907). She attended the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC, before moving to Rome in 1920. There, she joined the 'I Venticinque della Campagna Romana' group in 1921, followed by the British Academy of Arts in 1922, and the 'Scuola Libera del Nudo dell'Accademia di Belle Arti' the following year. In 1925, she married Prince Ranieri di San Faustino in Rome. In c. 1930, she met the poet Ezra Pound in Rapallo and in c. 1933-34, she began painting again. By 1934, she decided to return to art and left her husband. In 1935, she saw Tanguy's *Je vous attends (I Await You, 1934)*, which would prove prophetic. In 1936, she exhibited her work for the first time at the Galleria del Milione in Milan. In 1937, Sage moved to Paris where she was inspired by Giorgio de Chirico's work and came into contact with Surrealism. In 1938, she met Tanguy and they began a relationship, marrying in 1940. After co-founding 'The Society for the Preservation of European Culture', she returned to New York in late 1939. In 1940, she had her first solo exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, the first of 14 solo exhibitions organized during her lifetime. Further to her and Tanguy's move to Woodbury, Connecticut, in 1941, she remained there for over 20 years. Following Tanguy's death in 1955, she continued to paint and work in collage and make objets due to her deteriorating eyesight, as well as wrote her memoirs *China Eggs (1955)*, published poetry, and edited *Yves Tanguy. A Summary of his Works* (published by the Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1963). Left distraught by Tanguy's death and inability to paint, she tragically ended her life in 1963.

YVES TANGUY (1900 – 1955)

Classed as "the most surrealist of the Surrealists" by the artistic movement's leader André Breton, Yves Tanguy was born in Paris in 1900 at the Ministère de la Marine, Place de la Concorde, where his father, a retired sea captain, worked. He spent summers in his family's home in Finistère, Brittany, with the Breton landscape of his youth playing a decisive role in his later surreal dreamscapes. After a brief period working as a merchant marine (including travels to South America, Africa and England), Tanguy was drafted into French military service in 1920, where he met and befriended the poet Jacques Prévert. Released from their duties in 1922, the two spent time in Paris searching for an artistic or literary purpose. In 1923, Tanguy caught sight of Giorgio de Chirico's Metaphysical work in a window of Paul Guillaume's gallery, a revelation that prompted him to become an artist, even though he possessed no formal training. Moving to 54 rue du Château with Prévert and Maurice Duhamel in 1924, the apartment soon became an important center of Surrealist meeting and activity. In 1925, he met Breton, who became a close friend. The reproduction of his work *The Ring of Invisibility* in 'La Révolution Surréaliste' (June 1926) officially cemented Tanguy's association with Surrealism. In 1927, he married Jeanne Ducrocq and was given his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Surréaliste, Paris. He participated in the Exposition du Groupe Surréaliste (Galerie Sacre du Printemps, Paris) the following year. Travels to Africa in 1930, where he admired curious rock formations proved inspirational. In 1938, Tanguy met the American artist Kay Sage and the two soon began their life together. Due to gathering tensions in Europe, Tanguy joined Sage in New York in late 1939 in order to 'officially' attend the opening of his first US solo exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, the inaugural show of 'The Society for the Preservation of European Culture'. Further to his marriage to Sage in 1940, they moved to Woodbury, Connecticut (1941). In 1946, they bought 'Town Farm', a 19th century farmhouse with studio-barn where Tanguy lived and worked. Tanguy, however, remained in close contact with fellow Surrealists, such as a 1951 trip to visit Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning in Sedona, Arizona, as well as his 1954 involvement in Hans Richter's film *8 x 8* with other Surrealists in New York). He died unexpectedly in 1955.