

Sonia Delaunay Terk, 1885-1979

Robert Delaunay, 1885-1941



Sonia Terk was born Sarah Stern, in a small Russian town where her father worked in a nail factory. Her mother had two rich brothers and was unhappy about her own lot.

When Sarah was eight, she was sent to St. Petersburg for adoption by her mother's wealthy attorney brother and his wife.

Sarah Stern becomes Sonia Terk, 1893 (age 8).



Sonia Terk, 1901 (age 16).

When Sonia Terk graduated from high school at eighteen, she persuaded the Terks to let her go to Germany to study art.



Sonia Delaunay: Finnish Peasant, 1904

After two years there, she talked them into letting her go to Paris—the center of “it’s what’s happening”—for a year.



Sonia Terk, 1907.

In Paris, Sonia saw the work of Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Fauves. Many years later she wrote of what she learned from them...

“The real new painting will begin when people understand that color has a life of its own, that the infinite combinations of color have a poetry and a language much more expressive than the old methods. It is a mysterious language in tune with the vibrations, the life itself, of color. In this area, there are new and infinite possibilities.”



Sonia Terk: Finnish Girl, 1907.



Robert Delaunay: Portrait of Wilhelm Uhde, 1907.

Wilhelm Uhde was a young, gay German collector/dealer. Sonia met him and they shared their passion for the new art. They married for, as she said, "Convenience." If she were married, the Terks would not insist she come back to St. Petersburg to marry "before she becomes an old maid." If he married, his very proper German family would be relieved of their concerns about him.

Sonia and Willy presented Willy's lover Constant as the butler so as to keep up appearances.

Sonia, who had always avoided sex, slept on a couch in the living room of their apartment while Willy slept in the bedroom with his lover Constant.

Robert Delaunay, a young friend of Uhde's had painted Uhde's portrait in an "advanced" mix of Neo-Impressionism and Fauvism.



Robert Delaunay, 1903 (age 18).

Robert was the only child of an arty Countess who had spent all her money. She thought Robert was her genius son. She gave him a generous allowance and, as Gertrude Stein said, "set out to make him famous."



Robert Delaunay: Self Portrait, 1909.

Robert and Sonia met through Willy, and Robert told Sonia, “I came to cubism the usual way, by way of Cezanne. But now I’m ahead of Picasso and Braque. I’m not just analyzing geometric forms; I’m trying to come to grips with the rhythm of modern life, trying to break down lines and architecture.

“Picasso and Braque are only applying cubist principles to guitars and fruit dishes, I will do it to the world’s tallest, most aggressively modern symbol, the Eiffel Tower.”



During the winter of 1909-10, Sonia went to Robert's studio every day. This is one of the first studies.

Sonia said of his work, "Before I took a physical pleasure in seeing his paintings, I understood and supported him. I learned to love his colors, while remaining truthful to myself and my difference."

The note on the top left of the painting says, "Universal Exposition 1889. A tower speaks to the universe."

The note on the top right says, "Franco Russian in-depth movement, 1909."

Robert Delaunay: Tower, First Study, 1909.



Robert Delaunay Eiffel Tower, 1910.

By June 1910, Sonia realized she was pregnant.

Willy said, “A friend of mine assumed he would be more skilled than I in making my wife happy, and it didn’t occur to me to be an obstacle to their splendid future.”

The only grounds for divorce were adultery. Willy invented a passionate affair he was having with a mistress, “B.E.” He wrote letters to her telling of his “growing aversion to the ample woman that a ridiculous chance-meeting made mine.” A fragment of the return missive remains: “I am yours, Guillaume, and I kiss you madly, stupid as I am for loving you.”

He left the letters where Sonia could use them for the divorce.

Sonia’s parents—the Terks—gave her an apartment house in St. Petersburg so that she (and Robert and the child) could live off the rents. Robert’s mother was against the marriage... “We’re descendents of the Crusaders, and he wants to marry a Russian Jew!” But she thought Sonia’s money was great.

Sonia and Robert married, and Charles was born January 1911.



Robert, Sonia and Charles Delaunay, 1911.

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Robert Delaunay Eiffel Tower, 1911.

Sonia wrote...

"We breathed painting like others lived in alcohol or crime."

Robert's need to paint came in waves like fever bouts that attacked him unawares. He disappeared into his studio at dawn and came back out, dead tired, in the evening. This sometimes went on for days.

At the time of the first Eiffel Towers, Sonia remembered, "he spent days without even washing himself. It made me raving mad."

But every night they went out or had friends in at home, with every Sunday an open house to mix Robert's French artist friends with Sonia's Russians



Robert Delaunay: The Red Tower, 1911/1923.



Robert Delaunay: Simultaneous Windows, 1912.

“Nineteen twelve, thirteen and fourteen, what rich and explosive years for Robert and me. Robert is prophesying and cannot be stopped. Before the outbreak of the war Robert was shooting off rockets in all directions. Back on earth I gathered the falling sparks. I tended the more intimate and transient fires of everyday life.”

Robert painted towers and windows, Sonia danced and painted the dance and made clothes for herself.



Sonia Delaunay: Tango Magic, 1913.



Sonia Delaunay: At the Bal Bullier, 1913.



Sonia Delaunay in her dance clothes, 1914.



Robert Delaunay: Homage to Bleriot, 1914.



Sonia Delaunay: Electric Prisms, 1913.



Sonia Delaunay: Electric Prisms, 1913.
Robert Delaunay: Homage to Bleriot, 1913

Their painting had been a big hit in the 1913 Fall Salon,
and on the suggestion of a wealthy friend they went to
Spain in the spring of 1914.

But, that August, World War I began.

Le Petit Parisien

Tête de Boche

Grand Roman National



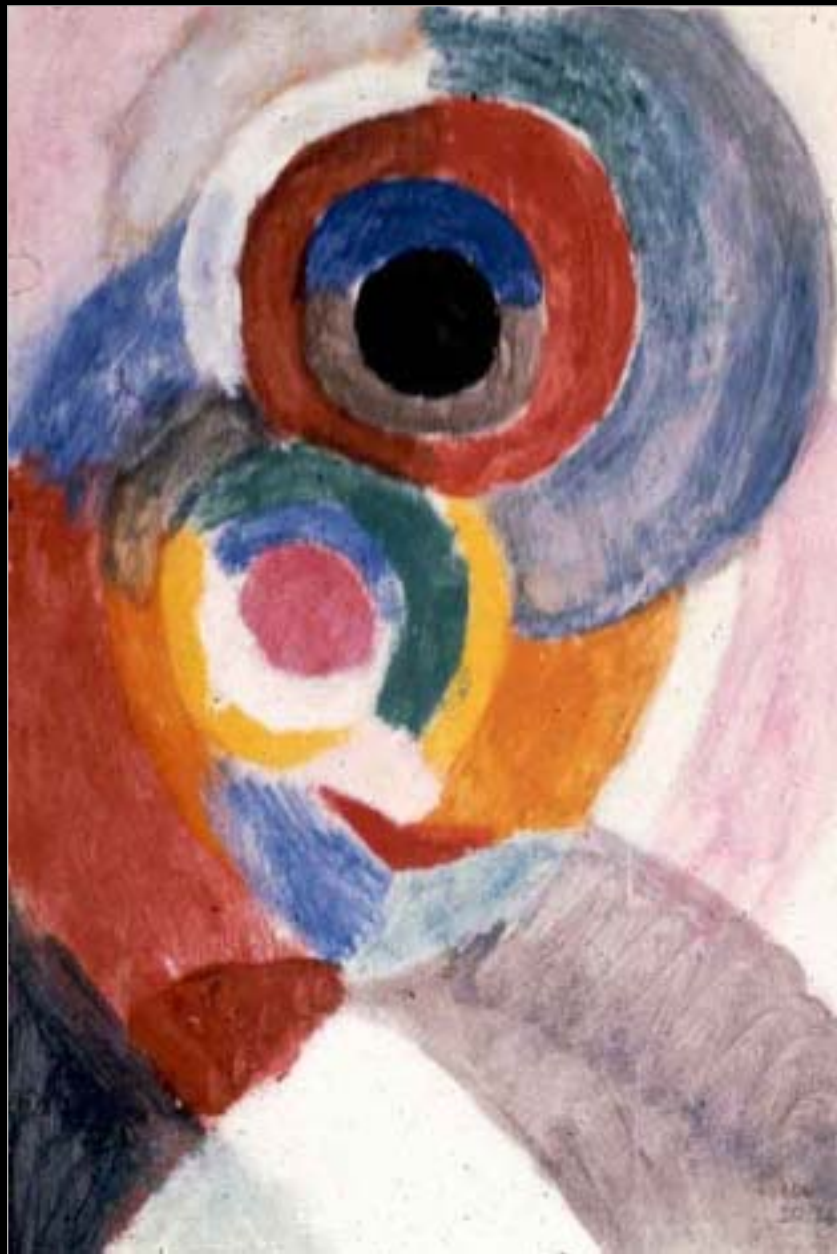
par *ARISTIDE BRUANT*



Sonia Delaunay: Market in Minho, 1915.



Sonia Delaunay: Flamenco Singers, 1915.




Sonia Delaunay: Self Portrait, 1916.



Sonia Delaunay: Flamenco Singers, 1916.



Sonia Delaunay, 1916.



СВОБОДА!
РАВЕНСТВО!
и БРАТСТВО!

Russia, 1917



Sonia Delaunay: A costume for the ballet "Cleopatra", 1918.



Par deux fois j'ai tenu et vaincu sur la Marne.
Civil, mon frère,
La sournoise offensive de la "paix blanche" va l'assautir à tout le.
Comme moi, tu dois tenir et vaincre, sois fort et malin.
Méfie-toi de l'hypocrisie boche.

Union des Comités Antimilitaristes Français
21, rue de Valenciennes, Paris



Robert and Sonia Delaunay, 1923.



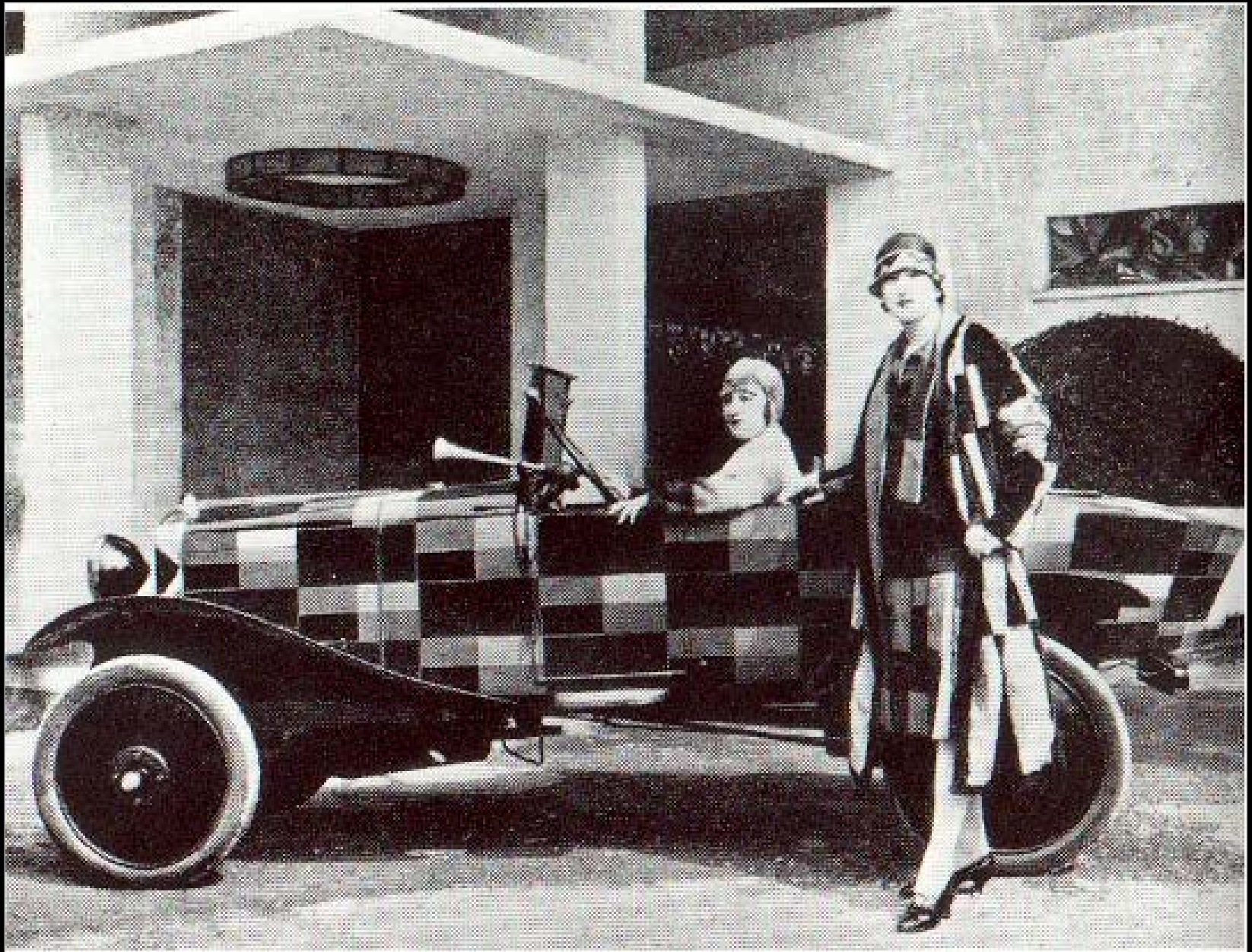
Sonia Delaunay: Fabric Design, 1923.



Sonia Delaunay: Fabric and Clothing Design, 1924.



Sonia Delaunay: Fabric and Clothing Design, 1925.



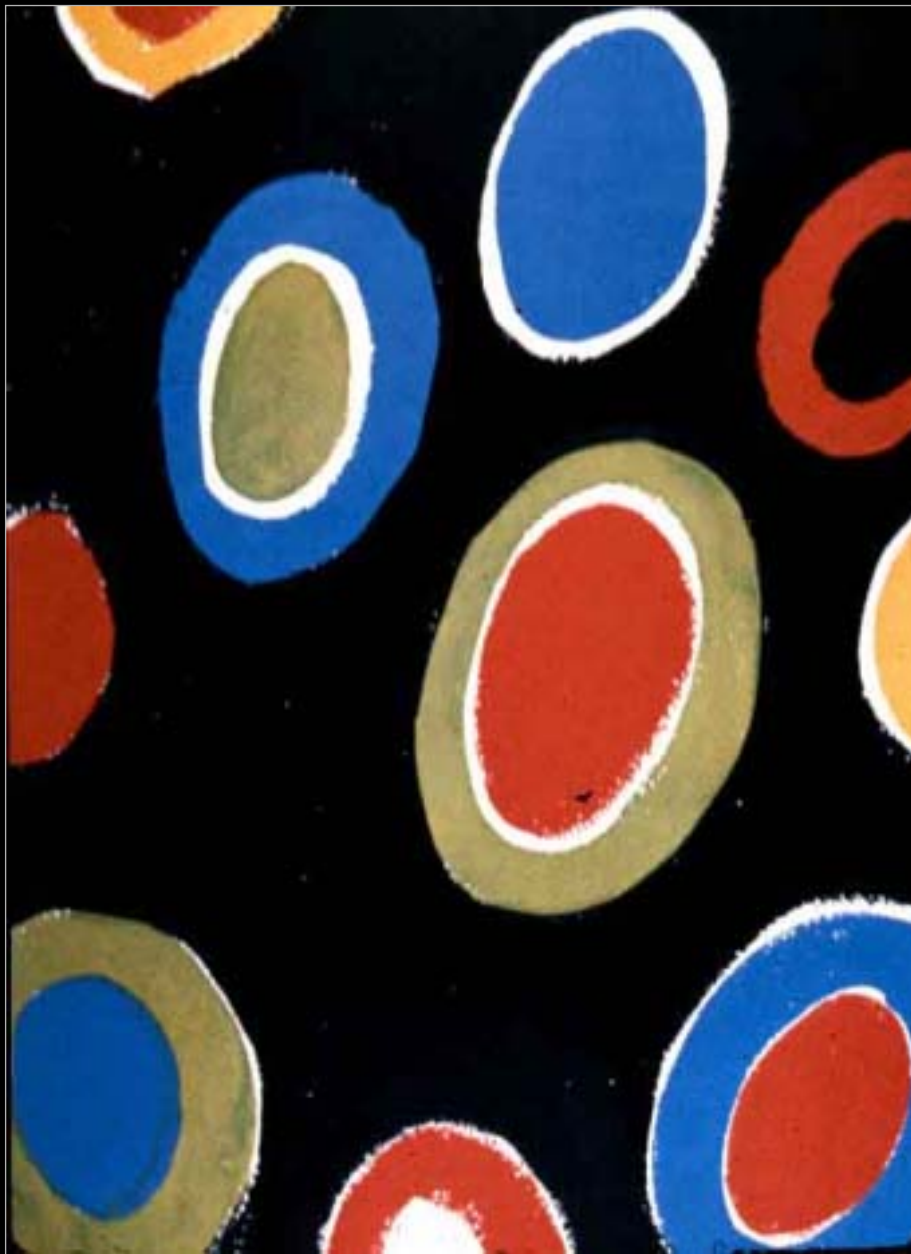
Sonia Delaunay: Material, Clothes, Cars, 1925.



Sonia Delaunay: Shop Window, 1920's.



Sonia Delaunay: Woman's Cape, 1920's.



Sonia Delaunay: Fabric Design, 1930.



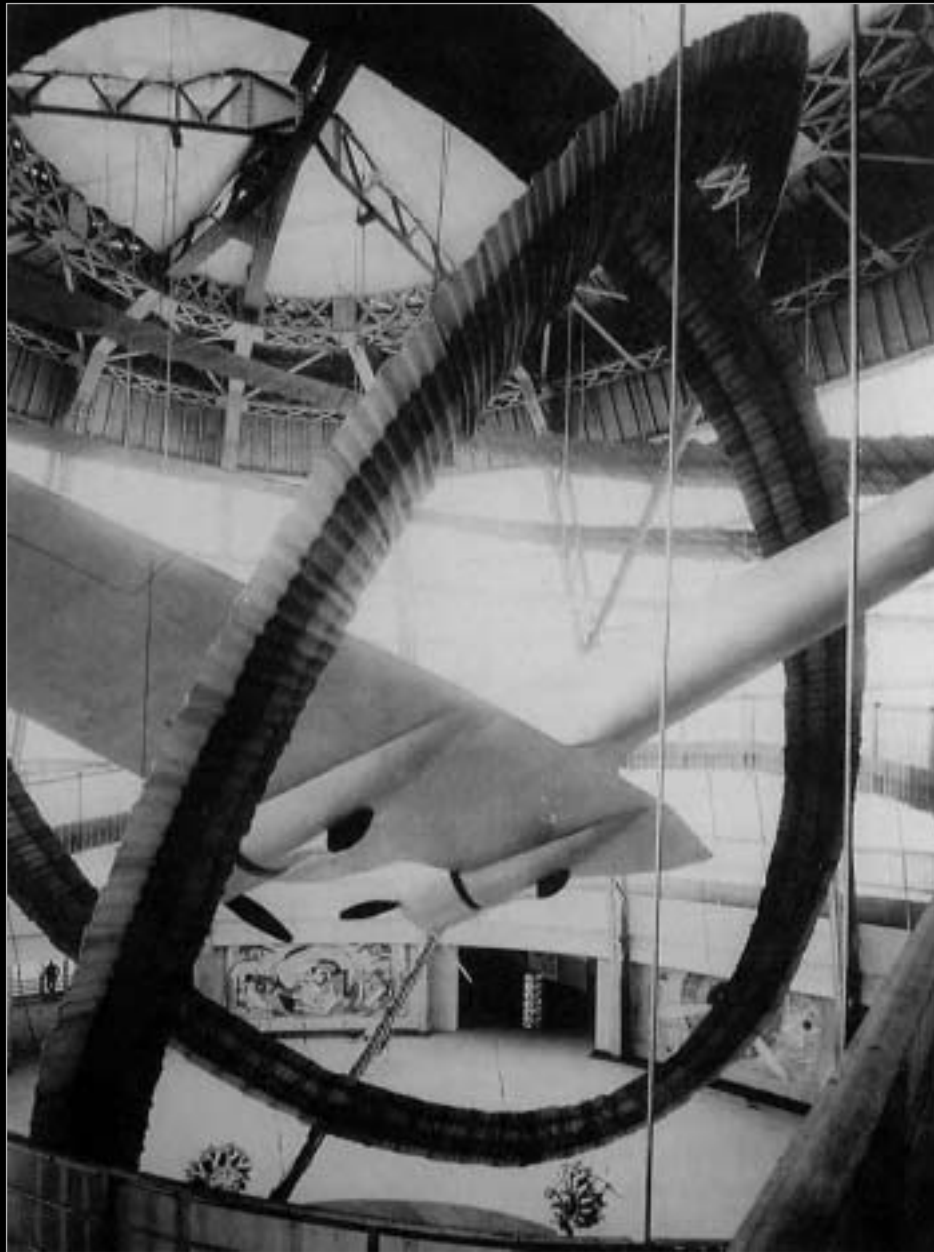
Robert Delaunay: , 1931.



Sonia Delaunay: 1936 designs for murals for the *Pavillon des Chemins de Fer*,
Exposition International des Arts et Techniques dans la vie modern
(1937 Paris World's Fair)



Sonia Delaunay: 1936 design for mural for *Palais de l'Air*
Exposition International des Arts et Techniques dans la vie modern
(1937 Paris World's Fair)



Sonia Delaunay: 1936 mural for *Palais de l'Air*
Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la vie modern



Robert Delaunay: Mural for *Palais de l'Air*, 1937.



*Palais de l'Air
Exposition International des Arts et Techniques dans la vie modern*



Sonia Delaunay: Composition, 1939.



Salon des Tuileries with Sonia Delaunay: Composition, 1939.



Robert Delaunay with some of his Self Portraits in the late 1930's.





Sonia Delaunay: L'Affreux jojo ('Sallywag'), 1947.



"I must catch hold of time and devote myself only to my work."

I've decided to see useless people as little as possible and to work as much as possible in order finally to bring out what I have inside of me."

Sonia Delaunay, 1948.

Up to the present, painting has been nothing but photography in color, but the color was always used as a means of describing something. Abstract art is a beginning towards freeing the old pictorial formula.

But the real new painting will begin when people understand that color has a life of its own, that the infinite combinations of color have a poetry and a language much more expressive than the old methods. It is a mysterious language in tune with the vibrations, the life itself, of color. In this area, there are new and infinite possibilities.

Sonia Delaunay, 1949.



Sonia Delaunay, 1959.



Sonia Delaunay: Ceramics, 1950's.



Sonia Delaunay, 1964.



Sonia Delaunay, 1964.



Sonia Delaunay, 1969.



Sonia Delaunay: Rythme-coloeur, 1969



Sonia Delaunay in her studio in the 1970's.



Sonia Delaunay, installation view of her one person show
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1971.

“I have lived three lives: one for Robert, one for my son and my grandsons, a shorter one for myself. I have no regrets for not having been more concerned with myself. I really didn’t have the time.”

---Sonia Delaunay

