

of either artist solely from reading this volume, but such completeness was not the aim. Perhaps the most refreshing and bracing element of this catalogue is its focus on transatlantic travel. This is a fruitful area for study, relating to artistic training, careers, patronage and the art market. It may also lead to consideration of the altered sense of space, time and weather that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists experienced 'between worlds' on their increasingly rapid sea voyages.

Despite such differences in tactility, scale and nationality, the common ground for both artists is the atmospheric backdrop in which their respective clusters of forms are staged – be it the dunes of an everlasting coastline, the sublime expanse of an ancient desert or the sunken realm of marine bedrock. They dovetail in this substantial catalogue edited by Victoria Noel-Johnson and Marzina Marzetti, which was published to coincide with an exhibition at Helly Nahmad Gallery, New York (closed 29th July

2023).² At first sight, the concept of this project appears outmoded: a feminist Surrealist perspective surely calls for the relinquishing of 'significant others', as this has perpetually proven unhelpful in establishing a profile for creative women.³ Sage and Tanguy have already been put into curated dialogue at least twice: at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, in 1954, where their work was compartmentalised; and in the travelling exhibition *Double Solitaire: The Surreal Worlds of Kay Sage and Yves*

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

Edited by Victoria Noel-Johnson and Marzina Marzetti. 176 pp. incl. 120 col + b. & w. ills. (Skira, New York, 2023), £48. ISBN 978-88-572-5061-8.

by CATRIONA MCARA

The visionary paintings of Kay Sage (1898–1963), with their decidedly elaborate titles, have often been described as dreamscapes underpinned by a poetic sensibility.¹ From the jagged perspective of *Three thousand miles to the point of beginning* (1947; private collection; cat. no.5) to the associative content of *Unicorns came down to the sea* (no.9; Fig.15), her paintings are striking for their stark embodiment of Surrealist principles of dislocation. Her husband, Yves Tanguy (1900–55), meanwhile, took a biomorphic approach to Surrealist painting, merging automatic abstraction with meticulously rendered figuration, as seen in *Aux aguets le jour* (no.51; Fig.16) and *Parce que* (1951; Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown; no.62). His signature polychromatic monoliths, pods and jumping beans tend to congregate in the foreground and often cast long shadows behind them. Even in the diminutive domain of the Surrealist visual narrative, Sage (an American woman) paints the monumental, whereas Tanguy (a French man) is microcosmic. Sage is precise, sharp and frequently architectural; Tanguy paints quicksilver.



Exhibition catalogues

Tanguy in 2011, in which the analysis was more comparative.³ One must ask, therefore, whether another show of this pairing is justified.

Refreshingly on this occasion, it is Sage who commands attention. The titular painting, *Ring of iron, ring of wool* (no.7; Fig.17) – which, the introduction explains, references the couple's seventh wedding anniversary – is by Sage, and was acquired by the

16. *Aux aguets le jour*, by Yves Tanguy. 1939. Oil on canvas, 40.6 by 30.5 cm. (Private collection).

Mint Museum, Charlotte after the closing of the 2011 exhibition. This emphasis creates new perspectives, not merely on how to showcase creative cohabitation but also on the very textures and intricacies of their relative positions within the Surrealist canon. One must commend curatorial practices that recognise and commission new scholarship that deepens and nuances the interpretative

content of a temporary exhibition, as well as gallerists who are patient enough to await detailed installation photographs for record. Noel-Johnson and Marzetti get both right, and the resulting publication, which features leading voices in the field, is a lavish and satisfying experience for the Surrealism specialist.

Sage's output is re-evaluated in two essays, which go some way to redressing the imbalance. The first is by the show's curator, Noel-Johnson, who both challenges the lonely widow narrative and points out the prevalence of 'the idea of the journey' for Sage (p.15). The second is by Stephen Robeson-Miller, an artist and prolific Sage scholar. He discusses Sage's Surrealist wartime context and provides a selection of primary accounts, shored up by the catalogued rare and out-of-print archival material. Ara H. Merjian's essay investigates the objecthood and spatial coordinates of Tanguy's later paintings made in the company of Sage, reminding us that 'a degree of petrification, calcification, and sedimentation had proven integral to Tanguy's Surrealist imagery from its inception' (p.47). Noel-Johnson then delivers a synthesising essay in which she argues for creative dialogue.

Sage has been a quieter presence in mid twentieth-century art and literary history – another argument for the necessity of this project and its bolstering of her legacy. The authors still deem it appropriate to articulate Sage's compositions in relation to the archaeological and uncanny nature of the work of Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978), whose *La surprise* (1914; Williams College Museum of Art) she was able to purchase. Although de Chirico's influence is undeniable, especially if one considers the mysterious personage in Sage's *Shivering mountain* (1943; Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury; no.4), it might be timely to look elsewhere and consider the cultural significance of Sage herself. For example, she might be fruitfully compared to fellow Americans Peggy Guggenheim (1898–1979), on account of her philanthropy, and Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012), whose desert landscapes and compositional devices have much in common with Sage's works.⁴





17. *Ring of iron, ring of wool*, by Kay Sage. 1947. Oil on canvas, 137.2 by 97.2 cm. (Mint Museum, Charlotte).

What one is surprised to learn is that, at various moments in her life, Sage was affiliated with the poet Ezra Pound (1885–1972), the painter Jean Dubuffet (1901–85) and even the feminist curator Lucy Lippard (b.1937). Without overstating this contact (Sage named her duck after Lippard), this connection is imaginatively underplayed in scholarship and exhibition-making to date.¹ We also learn from Robeson-Miller’s comprehensive chronology that Lippard was hired by Pierre Matisse in 1961 to prepare Tanguy’s catalogue raisonné. Lippard is now famous for her curation of *Eccentric Abstraction* at Fischbach Gallery, New York, in 1966, which articulated the post-minimal aesthetic. Collage reliefs by Sage, such as *Contraband* (1961; private collection; no.20), forecast Lippard’s expansive coterie of fudged grids and eccentric geometry after Surrealism.

Sage’s life story is already replete with coincidences and chance encounters – as Noel-Johnson notes, Sage’s first sighting of Tanguy’s work was his *Je vous attends (I await you)* (1934; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; no.4). The juxtaposition of material

properties suggested by *Ring of iron, ring of wool* – hard and soft, metallic versus organic – might have been repositioned in the catalogue as a prelude to *Eccentric Abstraction*. Merjian is shrewd, therefore, in his observations concerning Tanguy and post-war synthetic plastics. Tanguy churned out such soft forms, which were frequently interpreted as feminine in the practice of the next generation. Had he lived longer, it is conceivable that Tanguy could have worked against the grain of a macho minimalism. Sage toyed with this gendering of surfaces too, wrapping and looping drapery through her hard-edged scaffolds and lattices. Is it possible, therefore, that Sage unlocked a door for Lippard?

1 See K. Conley: “‘Pavilions of dreaming’: bodies as structures in Kay Sage’s ‘Demain, Monsieur Silber’”, *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 13, no.2 (2022), pp.148–73, esp. p.157.

2 See G. Pollock: *Killing Men & Dying Women: Imagining Difference in 1950s New York Painting*, Manchester 2022.

3 C.E. Buckley: exh. cat. *Yves Tanguy, Kay Sage*, Hartford CT (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art) 1954; and S.R. Miller, ed.: exh. cat. *Double Solitaire: The Surreal Worlds of Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy*, New York (Katonah Museum) and Charlotte (Mint Museum) 2011.

4 Kay Sage showed at Peggy Guggenheim’s *Exhibition by 31 Women*, held at Art of This Century, New York, in 1943 and helped André Breton and Yves Tanguy reach the United States. Dorothea Tanning’s lithograph series *Seven spectral perils* (1950) might be compared with Sage’s *The Minutes* (1937–43; nos.21–44).

5 See S. Robeson-Miller: *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology and Four Surrealist One-Act Plays*, New York 2011, esp. p.74.

accompanying catalogue attempted to grapple with Cambridge’s long historical entanglement with racism, enslavement and empire. It is the first in a series of exhibitions and gallery interventions that will take place at Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, until 2026, in which the museum seeks to address problematic racial imbalances in its displays and collections. But, considering Lorde’s warning, is this enough for the museum to truly decolonise its collections and interpretation?

The catalogue is edited by the two main curators of the exhibition: Victoria Avery, Keeper of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Fitzwilliam, and Jake Subryan Richards, a historian of law, empire and the African diaspora in the Atlantic world at the London School of Economics and Political Science. It begins with a foreword from Luke Syson, the museum’s director, in which he contextualises the project within broader questions of choice and omission, privilege and prejudice, especially in relation to the museum’s displays. This is followed by a concise definition of the term ‘Black Atlantic’, which was first used by the art historian Robert Farris Thompson in 1983 to ‘describe the shared artistic practices and belief systems among people of the African diaspora’ (p.10). The curators use the

Black Atlantic: Power, People, Resistance

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by SAFFRON EAST

At the 1979 Second Sex Conference, Audre Lorde delivered what is perhaps her best known speech: ‘Can the master’s tools dismantle the master’s lodge?’ In it, she argued that, although the master’s tools ‘may allow us to temporarily to beat him at his own game [. . .] they will never enable us to bring about genuine change’.¹ This exhibition (closed 7th January) and its

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