Alexander Dickow

**Jacob, Max** (1876—1944)

The poet and painter Max Jacob was a major figure in the Parisian artistic movements of the early 20th century. With his friends Apollinaire and Reverdy, Jacob produced some of the Esprit Nouveau’s most radical works. Jacob’s writing is often described in terms of formal play, burlesque humor and zany imagination of his most famous work, *Le Cornet à dés* (*The Dice Cup*, 1917), an avant-garde collection of prose poems. Yet other works reveal a stylist of considerable range. Blending parody and lyricism, he appropriates both popular and classical forms. A master of masks, he can seem a whimsical innovator, or a stern religious moralist of classical inspiration. These contrasting orientations have made him a riddle to some, while giving him lasting appeal. An eccentric wit, Jacob spent most of his life in poverty. Raised in a secular Jewish family in Quimper, Brittany, he moved to Paris and became a close friend of Picasso. Mystical visions in 1909 prompted his later conversion to Catholicism, in 1915. He remained a devout Catholic until his death at the Drancy deportation camp in 1944. Jacob produced novels, plays, meditations, maxims, poems, and a rich correspondence of some 30,000+ letters.

References and further reading

Paratextual material