

Media release
Zurich, 1 October 2020

Kunsthaus Zürich devotes an exhibition to the female painter Otilie W. Roederstein

She was one of the leading female painters of her generation and the most important Swiss female portrait artist of the early modern era. Her name: Otilie W. Roederstein. From 18 December 2020 to 5 April 2021, a retrospective at the Kunsthaus Zürich honours an artist who was often the only woman representing Switzerland abroad, alongside her contemporaries Hodler, Amiet and Giacometti.

During her lifetime, Otilie Wilhelmine Roederstein (1859–1937) was the most important female Swiss painter. Her portraits and still lifes were widely admired not only in her homeland but also in Germany and France, and from 1883 onwards she successfully exhibited her work in Paris, London, Frankfurt am Main and Chicago. In 1912 she was the only female artist representing Switzerland at the seminal 'International Art Exhibition of the Sonderbund' in Cologne – alongside male colleagues including Ferdinand Hodler, Giovanni Giacometti and Cuno Amiet. Yet despite her considerable international renown, Roederstein lapsed into obscurity almost immediately after her death. More than 80 years on, the exhibition of some 70 works at the Kunsthaus Zürich is the first monographic presentation in Switzerland to place this artist's stylistically diverse oeuvre once again before a wider audience.

FROM CONVENTIONAL TO ADVENTUROUS

Roederstein, who signed her works with the initials OWR, worked specifically for the art market, in order to make her living as a freelance artist. She adhered to the conventions that female artists were expected to abide by. Early in her career, that meant employing a dark-toned palette of colours and choosing portraits and still lifes as her subjects. Yet she soon found herself venturing beyond the allotted domain of women painters, producing religious images and nudes. Around 1893, encouraged by her study of works from the Italian and German Renaissance, she began painting in tempera. This technique, which underwent a revival across Europe in the closing years of the 19th century, was regarded as at once traditional and avant-garde. In her more mature work, Roederstein exhibited a growing openness to other trends, incorporating both Impressionist and Symbolist elements into her art. Then, in the 1920s, she adopted her signature,

objective and sober visual language. Her many self-portraits played a large role in her work. Designed by curator Sandra Gianfreda to include a representative selection of paintings and drawings, the exhibition visits the principal locations of Roederstein's career – Zurich, Paris, Frankfurt am Main and Hofheim am Taunus – in chronological order, and is enhanced by previously unpublished photographic and archive material. It also includes around a dozen paintings held by the Kunsthaus itself, which began collecting Roederstein's works in the 1890s and showed them in fifteen solo and group exhibitions up until 1934.

AN IMPORTANT PORTRAIT PAINTER FOR GERMANY AND SWITZERLAND

Ottilie W. Roederstein was an artist with close ties to the Kunsthaus Zürich. Born in Zurich to German parents, she lived and trained in her home city as well as Berlin and Paris before moving in 1891 to Frankfurt am Main. In 1909 she and her partner Dr. Elisabeth H. Winterhalter, a gynaecologist and Germany's first female surgeon, settled in rural Hofheim am Taunus. Roederstein and Winterhalter supported each other, venturing into disciplines that were traditionally male preserves and making careers for themselves in art and medicine respectively. Roederstein became an established name in the German and Swiss cultural scene. Much in demand as a portrait artist herself, she promoted other artists by purchasing their works for her own collection, supported exhibitions of modern French and Swiss art, and encouraged their wider dissemination in Germany and Switzerland. In 1920, she donated works from her collection of modern French and Swiss art to the Kunsthaus, laying the foundations for a department of contemporary art from France.

FIRST SWISS RETROSPECTIVE FOR MORE THAN 80 YEARS

Commemorative exhibitions of Roederstein's work were staged in 1938 in Frankfurt, Zurich and Bern in recognition of her artistic legacy and tireless work as a mediator between Switzerland and Germany; but the rift opened up by the Second World War and the art world's general focus on abstract painting caused Roederstein's work to be forgotten. Now, her multifaceted oeuvre is waiting to be rediscovered in an overview exhibition in Switzerland. The retrospective at the Kunsthaus Zürich pays tribute to Roederstein's remarkable career and locates her in the context of her time. It also coincides with the recent re-cataloguing of her estate. Among its documented findings is that Ottilie W. Roederstein was active not just as a painter but also as a promoter of women's education, and was also a leading figure in an extensive network of free-spirited artists and intellectuals.

The exhibition is a cooperation between the Kunsthaus Zürich and the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.

Supported by the Elisabeth Weber Foundation

PUBLICATION

The publication accompanying the exhibition (Hatje Cantz, approx. 208 pp., approx. 230 ill.) includes essays on the life and work of Ottilie W. Roederstein by Alexander Eiling, Sandra Gianfreda, Eva-Maria Höllerer, Barbara Rök and Iris Schmeisser. In addition to illustrations of the works, it contains contemporary photographs documenting the career of this self-confident artist. It is available in bookstores and the Kunsthaus shop.

EVENTS

A range of events are planned to accompany the exhibition, including a podium discussion on the female artist as profession, then and now. Details will be available when the exhibition opens on www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Public guided tours in German take place on Saturday 16 January 2021 at 1 p.m. and Thursday 11 March 2021 at 6 p.m. Registration is required. The Kunsthaus will be happy to arrange private guided tours on request.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthhaus.ch

Fri-Sun/Tue 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thu 10 a.m.–8 p.m. For public holiday opening see www.kunsthhaus.ch

Admission from: CHF 16 / CHF 11 (concessions and groups). Admission free to visitors under the age of 17. Information subject to change.

Free admission, discounts and other benefits with a 2021 annual membership (valid from 1.10.2020 until 31.12.2021): adults CHF 115 / couples CHF 195 / children and young people up to 25 years of age CHF 30.

Advance ticket sales: www.kunsthhaus.ch

Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, info@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com.

SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on admission when travelling by public transport: www.sbb.ch/kunsthhaus-zuerich.

INVITATION AND CONTACT FOR EDITORS

The press preview will take place on 17 December at 11 a.m. Registration is not required. Media releases and images to download as well as an overview of dates for media briefings in the new year can be found at www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich/media-corner/.

For further information, contact: Kunsthaus Zürich, Kristin Steiner, kristin.steiner@kunsthhaus.ch, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 13