

Press release
Zurich, 9 February 2017

Kunsthaus Zürich presents 'Vibrant Metropolis/Idyllic Nature. Kirchner – The Berlin Years'

From 10 February to 7 May 2017 Switzerland sees its first major exhibition devoted to the Berlin years of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938). The Kunsthaus Zürich has gathered together some 160 paintings, pastels, drawings, prints, sketchbooks and a selection of textiles, sculptures and photographs for a survey of Kirchner's work in Germany's bustling capital city and on the idyllic Baltic Sea island of Fehmarn. Between 1912 and 1914, these two contrasting places of inspiration marked the high point of Kirchner's Expressionist oeuvre. The co-founder of the artists' association 'Brücke', who is best known in Switzerland for his images of the 'unspoilt' mountain scenery around Davos, appears here in what, for Swiss audiences, is a less familiar, edgier guise.

LOANS FROM BERLIN, SYDNEY, NEW YORK, MADRID ...

The Kunsthaus Zürich has teamed up with the renowned Brücke-Museum in Berlin to bring together works on loan from many continents in a dialectical exploration of Kirchner. Important exhibits come from the Städel (Frankfurt), the Pinakothek der Moderne (Munich), the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid), the Guggenheim Museum and Museum of Modern Art (both New York), the Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles), the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney) and the popular Kirchner Museum Davos. Private lenders are supplying works that, in some cases, have never before been shown in public. There is also a full-size reconstruction of the mansard niche of Kirchner's second Berlin live-in studio – again, for the first time in Switzerland. The artist decorated it with textiles he designed himself, featuring Fehmarn motifs.

BERLIN AND FEHMARN: PLACES OF INSPIRATION

The exhibition is arranged chronologically, alternating between Berlin and Fehmarn – the two places of inspiration. They are often viewed as diametric opposites: on the one hand the frenetic lifestyle of a city that never rests, on the other the relaxing peace of a rural retreat; the hardship and alienation of the city dweller versus a harmonious existence in union with nature. Our exhibition, together with the accompanying catalogue, presents these two poles – metropolis and idyllic nature – as two conjoined aspects of Kirchner's life and work. Both exemplify his longing for an existence removed from bourgeois norms and for a new and contemporary form of expression. In addition to exhibits from Kirchner's time in Berlin, the presentation also includes a

representative selection of his early paintings from Dresden and some of the first pieces produced in Switzerland. They provide the context without which it is impossible to comprehend the profound changes in Kirchner's art between 1911 and 1917. The focused presentation investigates this pivotal phase in Kirchner's work, and with it the socio-political changes of the early 20th century.

EARLY 20TH-CENTURY ATTITUDES TO LIFE

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's move from Dresden to Berlin in autumn 1911 marks a turning point in his art. In the years from 1912 to 1915, in thrall to Europe's most modern metropolis, the young artist created works that, in their exaggerated and condensed way, can be regarded as metaphors for an early 20th-century attitude to life. In this era of radical transformation, the imperial capital held out the prospect of progress and limitless potential, but also isolation and a struggle to survive. It was the centre of unbridled industrial growth, the rise of the automobile and, with two million inhabitants, the largest 'tenement city' in Europe. Yet Berlin was also the metropolis of art, hedonism and prostitution. In this melting pot of opportunities and risks, Kirchner created works of breathless, existential directness that took aim squarely at Wilhelmine conventions. His motifs were also shaped by these observations: fashionably dressed passers-by; motorised traffic and industrial plants 'eating' their way through the city; café and brothel scenes. Movement, dynamism and multiple perspectives typify Kirchner's work during the Berlin years, in what, looking back, he described as a 'painting of motion'. The prime example – 'Street, Berlin' (1913) from the Museum of Modern Art, New York – will be on show at the Kunsthaus, as will the double-sided canvas 'Two Women on the Street (recto)/'Two Bathers in Surf' (verso) from the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

In the summer months of 1912 to 1914, Kirchner left Berlin for the Baltic Sea island of Fehmarn, which he already knew from an earlier visit. Here, together with his new companion Erna Schilling and his fellow painters, he led an uninhibited life close to nature. Far from the big city and freed from all conventions, they enjoyed an Arcadian existence. It was in this idyll that, in 1912, he painted the long-lost and recently rediscovered square painting 'Mexico Bay, Fehmarn', which is in private ownership. The celebrated 'Three Bathers' (1913, from the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney) also bears witness to their bond with nature. Contrasts of warm and cold, colours that range from muted to strong, and dynamic forms express this exalted sense of harmony with nature.

ARMY AND DRUGS: THE CRISIS

The outbreak of the First World War took Kirchner by surprise during his 1914 summer retreat on Fehmarn, forcing him to break off his stay abruptly and

return to Berlin. His army training as a field artilleryman in Halle and his general experiences of war plunged him into a deep psychological and physical crisis in 1915, with large-scale alcohol and drug abuse threatening his artistic identity. The works that arose despite – or perhaps because of – this crisis, such as the celebrated 'Schlemihl' woodcut cycle or the drawing 'Self-Portrait under the Influence of Morphine' (1917), made using a reed pen and ink on gesso paper, form a further key focus of the exhibition. Following a number of stays in sanatoria in Königstein, Berlin and Kreuzlingen, Kirchner moved to Switzerland in 1918, embarking on his long road to recovery in the mountains of Davos, where he remained until he took his own life in 1938. The exhibition closes with this new turning point in Kirchner's career.

KIRCHNER AND THE KUNSTHAUS

The Kunsthaus Zürich first exhibited works by Kirchner in a group exhibition in 1918, from which two woodcuts were acquired. Projects for major solo shows in 1926 and 1936 did not come to fruition. After Kirchner's death there were monograph exhibitions in 1952 and 1954 followed, in 1980, by the biggest retrospective to date. Now, a hundred years on from Kirchner's move to Switzerland, the Kunsthaus Zürich is devoting an exhibition to the master of Expressionism, with a particular focus on the Berlin years (1911–1917). Kunsthaus curator Dr. Sandra Gianfreda has designed the presentation together with Prof. Magdalena M. Moeller, director of the Brücke-Museum, Berlin.

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME AND PUBLICATION

A programme of events accompanies the exhibition (in German language):

7 March, 6.30 p.m. 'Kirchner ausstellen – damals und heute'. Podium discussion with Dr Lucius Grisebach (art historian), Dr Felix Krämer (curator at the Städel Museum, Frankfurt) and Dr Sandra Gianfreda (curator, Kunsthaus Zürich).

28 March, 6.30 p.m. 'Flanerie und Nervosität. Ernst Ludwig Kirchners Strassenbilder der 1920er-Jahre'. Lecture by Dr Thorsten Sadowsky (Director of the Kirchner Museum Davos).

4 April, 6.30 p.m. 'Er war doch ein Grosser'. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's relationship with Ferdinand Hodler. Lecture by Dr. Sandra Gianfreda (curator, Kunsthaus Zürich).

Admission to the events: CHF 10 / CHF 7 (concessions). Free for members and those with a ticket to the Kirchner exhibition.

2 May, 6.30 p.m. 'Mirko Bonné – Mein Fehmarn'. A reading in association with the Literaturhaus Zurich. CHF 20 / CHF 14 (concessions). Free for members and those with a ticket to the Kirchner exhibition. Members of the Literaturhaus Zurich: CHF 12.

Public guided tours in German are offered at regular intervals: Wednesdays and Thursdays at 6 p.m., Fridays at 3 p.m., and Sundays at 11 a.m. Guided tours in

English take place on Saturday 4 March at 1 p.m. and Sunday 19 March at 4 p.m.
There will be a guided tour in French on Saturday 11 March at 1 p.m.
We will be happy to arrange private guided tours (including other languages) on request.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue in German and English, with contributions by Günther Gercken, Sandra Gianfreda, Charles W. Haxthausen, Martina Pfister, Karin Schick and Uwe M. Schneede. Hirmer Verlag, 272 pages, approx. 220 illustrations in colour and black & white. Available from the Kunsthaus shop, price CHF 59.

The exhibition was conceived in cooperation with the Brücke-Museum, Berlin.

Supported by the Vontobel Foundation and with contributions from the Federal Office of Culture, Ars Rhenia, the foundation for the transregional promotion of art and culture, the A-Charity Foundation, the Truus and Gerrit van Riemsdijk Foundation and the Dr. Georg and Josi Guggenheim Foundation.

ADMISSION, ADVANCE SALES, OPENING HOURS

Admission to the exhibition including audioguide in English, French or German: CHF 23 / CHF 18 (concessions and groups). Combined ticket including the collection: CHF 26 / CHF 19 (concessions and groups). Children and young people up to the age of 16 free of charge.

Advance sales: SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on travel and admission: at stations and by phoning Rail Service 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min. by land line), www.sbb.ch.

Zurich Tourism: hotel room reservations and ticket sales, Tourist Service at Zurich Main Railway Station, tel. +41 44 215 40 215 40 00, information@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com.

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthaus.ch

Open: Fri-Sun/Tues 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Wed, Thurs 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. Public holidays: Easter 14 – 17 April, 1 May: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Current information available on the exhibition website at www.kunsthaus.ch

NOTE TO MEDIA

This press release as well as images are available at www.kunsthaus.ch > Information > Press.

Contact: Kunsthaus Zürich, Press and Public Relations

Kristin Steiner

kristin.steiner@kunsthaus.ch

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 13