

Press release

Zurich, 13 December 2018

Kunsthaus Zürich stages Oskar Kokoschka retrospective

From 14 December 2018 to 10 March 2019 the Kunsthaus Zürich presents Oskar Kokoschka – Expressionist, migrant and pacifist – in the first retrospective of his work in Switzerland for 30 years. The highlights among the more than 200 exhibits include the monumental 'Prometheus Triptych' and the 'Mural for Alma Mahler', which have never before been seen in Switzerland.

Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980) is, along with Francis Picabia and Pablo Picasso, one of a generation of artists who retained their allegiance to figurative painting after the Second World War, even as abstract art was consolidating its predominance. It is also thanks to them that non-representational painting and figurative art can now be practised side by side without partisan feuding. Artists of the present day acknowledge their debt to Kokoschka in particular. For Nancy Spero, Georg Baselitz, Herbert Brandl and Denis Savary, his expressionistic style is an explicit or implicit source of inspiration. They value the gestural articulation of his brushwork, praise his open-minded, cosmopolitan attitudes or share the pacifism that, especially after the traumatic experiences of the First World War, runs like a thread through Kokoschka's work, life and legacy. Following his last major solo show in 1986, the Kunsthaus now sets out to acquaint a new generation of visitors with this artist, who died by Lake Geneva in 1980 and whose works are held in substantial numbers in both Vevey and Zurich.

MIGRANT, EUROPEAN, LOVER

The retrospective traces the motifs and motivations of a painter who felt at home in no fewer than five countries. Curator Cathérine Hug has brought together 100 paintings and an equal number of works on paper, photographs and letters from all phases of his career. They reveal that while Kokoschka's art was defamed as 'degenerate' by the Nazis, the artist himself came through the ordeal relatively unscathed, making a living executing commissions for celebrated figures in the worlds of literature, architecture and politics. Some works were created simply out of love. Kokoschka painted a four-metre-long mural for Alma Mahler, which adorned the winter sitting room of her house in Breitenstein on the Semmering Pass for a number of decades. It depicts the couple as lovers in the midst of their tempestuous relationship. It was rediscovered in 1989 hidden beneath layers of paint and wallpaper by the owners of the house from 1987 to 1995, and was carefully uncovered and removed from the wall for conservation by

restorers. Currently privately owned, the 'al secco' image has only been exhibited once before and is now on show in Zurich.

In exile Kokoschka becomes an indomitable champion of freedom, democracy and human rights; a humanist whose work is broad enough to encompass everything from landscapes and portraits to mythological figures and metaphors denouncing the horrors of war and defending the power of love and the beauty of nature. It is this independent-minded artistic language of political protest that makes Kokoschka unique.

TRIPTYCHS ON SHOW FOR THE FIRST TIME OUTSIDE BRITAIN

Two impressive triptychs, each around eight metres wide and two metres high – 'The Prometheus Triptych' (1950, Courtauld Gallery, London) and 'Thermopylae' (1954, University of Hamburg) – are the high point of Kokoschka's mature oeuvre, and of this retrospective. The two works have only been shown together once before, at the Tate in 1962. They were created during a transitional phase: after a decade of wartime exile in London Kokoschka moved in 1953 to Villeneuve in Switzerland, where he lived until his death in 1980. The imposing 'Prometheus Triptych' – originally a ceiling decoration for an aristocratic client in London – has not been shown outside the British Isles since 1953, when it travelled to the Venice Biennale. Like the 'Thermopylae' triptych the depiction of Prometheus, originator of human civilization, enjoins human beings to come together as brothers and sisters in peace and freedom. Aside from their content, these works also document the creative process that set Kokoschka apart from his contemporaries. The brushwork and colour progressions reveal the artist's movements – a performative production process unusual in figurative painting. Kokoschka, the Expressionist who remained faithful to figurativism and founded a 'School of Seeing' that endures to this day in Salzburg, was regarded by many at the time as anti-modern; in fact he fought for democratic access to education and an open society.

Conceived by Cathérine Hug and curated with Heike Eipeldauer, the exhibition is a collaboration with the Leopold Museum, Vienna, where it will be on show from 5 April to 8 July 2019.

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

Reflecting the rich diversity of Kokoschka's life – his periods abroad, his plays, his friendships with literary figures and Dadaists and with Wilhelm Wartmann, the first director of the Kunsthaus Zürich – the programme accompanying the exhibition is extensive and multifaceted:

December 2018 – March 2019

Public guided tours in German take place at 6 p.m. on Wednesdays, 3 p.m. on Fridays and 11 a.m. on Sundays (with curator Cathérine Hug on 20 December at 6 p.m.). Guided tours in French on 26 January at 4 p.m. and in English on 12 January and 9 February, at 4 p.m.

January 2019

Screening of the film 'Kokoschka: Leben und Werk' (2017), by Michel Rodde. First screening in German-speaking Switzerland. Followed by a discussion (French/German) between director Michel Rodde and curator Cathérine Hug. Saturday 12.1.2019, 11 a.m. (discussion from 12 p.m.)
KOSMOS cinema, Lagerstrasse 102, 8004 Zurich

Hermine Moos's 'Alma Mahler doll' for Kokoschka. Special guided tour with curator Cathérine Hug featuring a performance sequence by the artists Talaya Schmid and Angela Walti.
Wednesday 16.1.2019, 6 p.m.–7 p.m.
Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, 8001 Zurich

KOKOSCHKA/KRAUS/JURCZOK: Slam poet Jurczok1001 reacts to paintings and texts by Kokoschka and his writer friend Karl Kraus.
Thursday 24.1.2019, 6.30 p.m. – 7.45 p.m. In German.
Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, 8001 Zurich

'Salon Dürrenmatt' – Friedrich Dürrenmatt's poem 'To Oskar Kokoschka' – an encounter between two artists. A discussion with Régine Bonnefoit (curator and professor, Université de Neuchâtel), Philipp Keel (publisher, Diogenes Verlag) and Peter Nobel (lawyer and executor). Introduced by Madeleine Betschart (Director of the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel, where the exhibition 'Kokoschka – Dürrenmatt: Myth as Parable' will be on show from 16 December until 31 March 2019) and moderated by Cathérine Hug (curator, Kunsthhaus Zürich).
Thursday 31.1.2019, 8 p.m. – 9.15 p.m. In German.
Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

February 2019

'The panopticon of perversion. Kokoschka and the exhibition Entartete Kunst contextualized.' Lecture by Bernadette Reinhold (Head of the Oskar Kokoschka Research Centre, Vienna), followed by a conversation between Bernadette Reinhold, Aglaja Kempf (curator of the Fondation Oskar Kokoschka, Vevey) and Cathérine Hug (curator, Kunsthhaus Zürich).
Thursday 7.2.2019, 6.30 p.m. – 8 p.m. In German.
Swiss Institute for Art Research, Zollikerstrasse 32, 8008 Zurich

Presentation of the new Kokoschka biography by Rüdiger Görner (Professor of German with Comparative Literature, Queen Mary University of London). Followed by a conversation between the author and Jolanda Heller (doctoral student working on the literary oeuvre of Kokoschka, University of Zurich German Department), moderated by Cathérine Hug. In association with Paul Zsolnay Verlag, Vienna.

Thursday 21.2.2019, 6.30 p.m. – 7.45 p.m. In German.

Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, 8001 Zurich

'Kokoschka and his Art Dealers': A conversation between Walter Feilchenfeldt (co-editor of the online Kokoschka catalogue raisonné and board member of the Fondation Oskar Kokoschka, Vevey) and Juri Steiner (art historian and curator, Lausanne).

Wednesday 27.2.2019, 8 p.m. – 9.15 p.m. In German.

Auditorium of the Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, 8001 Zurich

PUBLICATION

A catalogue in English and German (320 pages, 500 colour illustrations) published by Kehrer Verlag, Heidelberg, is available for CHF 59 from the Kunsthhaus shop and bookstores: 'Oskar Kokoschka. Expressionist, Migrant, European' with new scholarly essays by Régine Bonnefoit, Iris Bruderer-Oswald, Martina Ciardelli, Birgit Dalbajewa, Heike Eipeldauer, Katharina Erling, Cathérine Hug, Aglaja Kempf, Alexandra Matzner, Raimund Meyer, Bernadette Reinhold, Heinz Spielmann and Patrick Werkner.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

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

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

Admission to the exhibition: CHF 23 / CHF 18 (concessions and groups).

Combination tickets including the collection and exhibition CHF 26 / CHF 19.

Free admission for children and young people up to age 16 and members of the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft.

KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

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/kunsthhaus-zuerich.

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

INFORMATION FOR THE MEDIA

This press release and visual materials are available at www.kunsthhaus.ch > Information > Press.

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