

Media release
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Maria Lassnig and Edvard Munch in dialogue for the first time

From 2 October 2026 to 21 February 2027, the Kunsthhaus Zürich presents the first exhibition to directly relate the works of the Austrian painter Maria Lassnig and the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch. Some 150 exhibits open up a fascinating dialogue around the body, perception and the cycle of life – and establish a new relationship between two exceptional artistic stances. At the same time, the presentation is a reminder that the Kunsthhaus is the custodian of a remarkable treasure: the largest collection of Munch paintings outside Norway.

‘Maria Lassnig and Edvard Munch. Flow of Paint = Flow of Life’ at the Kunsthhaus Zürich is the first-ever double presentation showcasing the work of Austrian artist Maria Lassnig (1919–2014) alongside that of Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (1863–1944). The exhibition title borrows from the name of a 1996 painting by Lassnig, and references a central idea common to both artists: painting as the expression of existential experience and a means of self-reflection.

Although separated by more than half a century, Lassnig and Munch share an interest in the great questions of humanity. In their art, both investigate bodies, emotions and the relationship between humans and nature. While Munch focuses on the cycle of life, death and renewal, Lassnig consistently directs her gaze inwards. Her ‘body awareness pictures’ are born out of a direct sense of her own body, conferring unmistakable painterly form on inner states.

FIRST DOUBLE EXHIBITION OF TWO EXCEPTIONAL ARTISTS

The exhibition highlights for the first time the many and varied affinities between the two bodies of work, but also the differences between them. Created as part of a four-year collaboration with the Hamburger Kunsthalle initiated by the museums’ respective directors Ann Demeester and Alexander Klar, it also explores the close historical ties between the Kunsthhaus Zürich and Edvard Munch dating back to the 1920s. In 1922, under the aegis of its then Director Wilhelm Wartmann, the Kunsthhaus devoted a comprehensive survey exhibition to Munch, including over 70 paintings and more than 430 works on paper. In retrospect, the artist described this as one of his ‘most comprehensive and best solo exhibitions’, and among his finest artistic experiences. The first Munch works

entered the Kunsthaus Collection that same year. Further exhibitions followed, as well as numerous purchases that, to this day, distinguish the museum's important Munch holdings.

Maria Lassnig is also closely linked to the Kunsthaus Zürich. In 2002, she received the Roswitha Haftmann Prize, Europe's best-endowed award for contemporary visual art, which is presented each year at the Kunsthaus. The following year, the Kunsthaus staged a solo exhibition of her work, and in 2004 acquired the painting 'Geballte Gewalt' (Balled-Up Violence). Other works entered the Collection of Prints and Drawings.

This dialogue was the brainchild of the Berlin-based scholar and curator Hans Dieter Huber, who initiated the project. A collaboration with Sandra Gianfreda, curator at the Kunsthaus Zürich, and Brigitte Kölle, curator and head of collection at the Hamburger Kunsthalle, has led to an exhibition that opens up new art-historical perspectives. Peter Pakesch from the Maria Lassnig Foundation provided extensive assistance to the project from the outset.

COLOUR AS THE LANGUAGE OF PERCEPTION

Maria Lassnig engaged intensively with art history – and Edvard Munch was one of her most important points of reference. She described him as an artist who 'reached the deepest layers of the soul and its threat.' His influence can be seen not just in her expressive treatment of colour but also in her free brushwork and lifelong passion for experimentation.

'Chain of Tradition', from 1983, shows just how consciously Lassnig inscribed herself within a painterly heritage. Behind her we see Diego Velázquez, Edvard Munch and Vincent van Gogh – like an artistic family tree within whose artistic succession she positions herself. For this exhibition, the work has been successfully located and is being made accessible to the public for the first time after a lengthy absence.

The presentation pursues this dialogue through surprising parallels of motif and theme. Both artists explored human vulnerability, illness and death, the connection between human beings and nature, and the relationships between humans and animals. Striking resonances emerge in those very same differences of style and period.

The immediate juxtaposition of the two situates familiar works by Munch in a new context. His deployment of line and colour, as well as his picture compositions, emerge in a new light when seen in the mirror of Lassnig's painting. At the same time, it becomes clear just how deeply Munch's work is embedded in Lassnig's artistic thinking. The presentation allows us to view Munch through Lassnig's eyes – and discover both artists' work in fresh, new ways.

GENEROUS LOANS FROM OSLO AND VIENNA

Comprising some 150 works including 78 paintings, the exhibition offers a comprehensive insight into both artists' work. Exceptional loans from the

Munchmuseet in Oslo and the Maria Lassnig Foundation in Vienna set up numerous unprecedented juxtapositions.

CATALOGUE AND ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

The exhibition is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue containing essays, an interview with the writer Siri Hustvedt conducted by Sandra Gianfreda, as well as quotations from Maria Lassnig and Edvard Munch, poems by their contemporaries and brief statements by artists of our time. The catalogue is available from the Kunsthaus shops for CHF 54.

A wide range of events, including a film programme in cooperation with the cinema ARTHOUSE Kino Piccadilly, a concert by the Zürcher Kammerorchester with a talk, and a podium discussion, accompany the exhibition.

Public guided tours in German: October/November/January/February: Thu 6.30 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. December: Fri 3 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. (not 25 December). Guided tour with curator Sandra Gianfreda: Thu 15 October, 6.30 p.m. English: Sat 31 October and 2 January, 11 a.m. French: Sat 7 November and 20 February, 11 a.m.

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An exhibition by the Kunsthaus Zürich and the Hamburger Kunsthalle.

In cooperation with the Maria Lassnig Foundation, Vienna, and the Munchmuseet, Oslo.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz, CH-8001 Zurich, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthaus.ch/en. For admission prices, opening hours and events see www.kunsthaus.ch/en/besuch-planen/ and www.kunsthaus.ch/en/besuch-planen/programm/.

Tickets can be obtained from the cash desk or in advance at tickets.kunsthaus.ch. Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, info@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com

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