

Media release
Zurich, 24 October 2019

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents the first Wilhelm Leibl retrospective in Switzerland.

Running from 25 October 2019 to 19 January 2020 at the Kunsthhaus Zürich, 'Wilhelm Leibl. The art of seeing' is the first Swiss retrospective dedicated to one of the pivotal figures of Realism in Europe. It will focus on portraits and figural works.

The Kunsthhaus presents the first Swiss retrospective of the work of Wilhelm Leibl (1844–1900), one of the most important painters of the 19th century yet one who, today, is known only to a small number of artists, collectors and art enthusiasts. Leibl mainly paints portraits and interiors with rural figures; but for him and a group of like-minded artists known as the Leibl circle, the emphasis is invariably on the 'how' of painterly execution. For these contemporaries of Manet and Degas, academic and narrative elements are very much a secondary consideration.

BREAKTHROUGH AND RECOGNITION IN PARIS

Born in Cologne, Leibl goes to study in Munich, where his talents soon attract attention. In 1869, aged 25 and still a student at the academy, he achieves his breakthrough at the 1st International Exhibition in the Bavarian capital. He is discovered by no less a figure than Gustave Courbet and is invited to Paris where, at the salon the following year, he wins his first gold medal for his portrait 'Portrait of Mrs Gedon'. A passionate painter and hunter, he settles in the countryside in 1873. From then on, he produces works largely based on the study of the rural population of Bavaria and is therefore often misleadingly referred to as a 'peasant painter'. At the 1878 World's Fair in Paris he offends the star critics of the Second Empire with the Holbein-like naturalism of his genre painting 'The Village Politicians', 1877, but nevertheless achieves an emphatic success.

His best works also include portraits of fellow artists, relatives and close associates from among the landed gentry and bourgeoisie. Regular participation in international exhibitions from the 1890s onwards in Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Budapest, Basel, Winterthur, Zurich, New York and Washington cements Leibl's reputation as one of the leading European realists. Van Gogh is profoundly moved by one of his key works, 'Three Women in Church', 1878–1882.

TRUTH AND ARTISTIC FORM ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN IDEALIZATION OF REALITY

Leibl credited his rigorous adherence to truth with the emergence of a distinct and modern form of figure painting in which faithfulness to nature and the study of the Old Masters are fully translated into the medium of art. For Leibl and his circle, what matters is to 'see well' – to realise without embellishment and free from 'isms' and ideologies. His approach to art, in which self-criticism, destruction and innovation are the driving forces, has influenced artists right up to the present day, starting with Liebermann and Corinth and continuing via Buri, Kollwitz, Beckmann and Lassnig to Tillmans. In his rigour and uncompromising quest for truth, Leibl looks ahead to the portrait series of Giacometti. The exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich, which brings together over 100 works including loans from Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and the US as well as items from the Kunsthaus Collection, accords the approximately 60 drawings equal status to the paintings. One of Leibl's most expressive self-portraits comes from the collection of the Kunsthaus. The exhibition will travel to the Albertina, Vienna after it closes in Zurich.

LEIBL AND SWITZERLAND

Bernhard von Waldkirch will be examining parallels and differences with the painting of Albert Anker in an event to accompany the exhibition at the Swiss Institute for Art Research SIK-ISEA.

Paintings by Albert Anker in the Kunsthaus Collection can be viewed in conjunction with the current Leibl exhibition, as can the works of artists who were inspired by Leibl – painters such as Lovis Corinth, Max Liebermann, Max Beckmann and Wolfgang Tillmans.

PUBLICATION

A 288-page catalogue published by Hirmer Verlag in German and English accompanies the exhibition. It includes mostly full-page reproductions of the over 100 paintings and drawings. Scholarly essays by Jonas Beyer, Zsuzsa Gonda, Thomas Ketelsen, Marianne von Manstein, Monique Meyer and Bernhard von Waldkirch shed light on Leibl's position between tradition and modernity, his contribution to European Realism, and his affinity for the colour black. Shorter articles discuss his relationship with Degas, his connections to Hungary (Merse, Munkácsy) and his importance to 20th- and 21st-century art. The publication is available for CHF 55 in the Kunsthaus shop and from bookstores.

Supported by the Hulda and Gustav Zumsteg Foundation, the WOLFGANG RATJEN FOUNDATION, Vaduz, for the catalogue and transport of four works, the Dr. Georg and Josi Guggenheim Foundation and another foundation that wishes to remain anonymous.

ACCOMPANYING EVENTS

'How to draw realistically'. Exploring Wilhelm Leibl's motifs through drawing: Zurich-based 'urban sketcher' André Sandmann offers practical advice on sketching the human figure in space. Audience participation welcome! 10.11.19, 11 a.m.–12.30 p.m.

CHF 25 / CHF 15 (members); includes admission and drawing tools. Places limited. Register at info@kunsthaus.ch or call 044 253 84 84.

'A beer with Wilhelm Leibl'. Guided tour in German with curator Bernhard von Waldkirch, followed by a drink. 21.11.2019, 6.15 p.m.–7.45 p.m.

CHF 30 / CHF 15 (members); includes admission, guided tour and a beer. Tickets can be obtained from the cash desk on the day. Places limited. No bookings or advance sales.

'...to this day I am still a pupil of Leibl...' Leibl's impact on art into the 21st century, vividly illustrated by originals from the Collection of Prints and Drawings of the Kunsthaus Zürich. Guided tour in German with curator Dr. Marianne von Manstein. 12.1.2020, 11 a.m.–12.30 p.m.

CHF 30 / CHF 15 (members); includes admission and guided tour. Tickets can be obtained from the cash desk on the day. Places limited. No bookings or advance sales.

'Anker and Leibl in Paris'. A talk by exhibition curator Bernhard von Waldkirch. 16.1.2020, 6.30 p.m.–8 p.m. In German. SIK-ISEA, Zollikerstrasse 32, 8032 Zurich. Attendance is free of charge. Booking is not required. Places are limited.

Public guided tours of the exhibition in German take place on Saturday 2 November at 1 p.m. and Saturday 7 December at 1 p.m. 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.kunsthaus.ch

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

KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

CHF 16 / CHF 11 (concessions and groups). Combination ticket including the collection and exhibitions CHF 26 / CHF 19. Admission free to visitors under the age of 17.

Advance sales: 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.

MEDIA CONTACT

Visual materials are available at www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich/media-corner/.

Contact: Kunsthaus Zürich, Press & Communications, Kristin Steiner, kristin.steiner@kunsthhaus.ch, +41 44 253 84 11.