

## **RETHINKING KIRCHNER. AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH, 28 June - 1 July 2018, Davos Switzerland**

This is the first international and interdisciplinary conference on the work and life of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. We aim to bring together the various international clusters of Kirchner research.

The conference was conceived as a prelude to the retrospective exhibition on Ernst Ludwig Kirchner at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, Germany. Opening on 15 November 2018 this exhibition entitled Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Imaginary Travels will present more than 180 artworks and takes the motif of 'the search' as its starting point. The exhibition follows the stages of Kirchner's life and the artistic developments implied. It seeks to demonstrate how Kirchner, through the synthesis of different non-Western artistic influences, achieved a blend of art, life and work which materialised itself within his oeuvre as exotic Gesamtkunstwerk. The exhibition is curated by Katharina Beisiegel (Art Centre Basel) in cooperation with Dr. Thorsten Sadowsky (Kirchner Museum Davos).

### **Call for Papers:**

We invite scholars, experts and interested parties to participate in the conference and visit Kirchner's chosen home in Davos. On the 18th of June we commemorate the 80th anniversary of Kirchner's death. The conference takes this occasion to revisit previous assumptions on Kirchner's work. New approaches to the Kirchner discourse will be presented and new research introduced. Topics from the exhibition as well as from other fields of current research interest will be discussed by leading scholars. By deliberately opening the conference to many academic disciplines we aim to open the discussion on Kirchner and welcome new insights and theses.

### **Papers submitted to the 2018 conference may address one of the following topics:**

- **'I Am a Trademark': Self-promotion and the Artist**

The fact that contemporary artists are trying to establish themselves as brands and thereby deliberately influence their reception is no longer a rarity today – thinking, for example, of artists such as Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons or Banksy. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's attempts to present himself as an artistic leader and develop his image as a 'trademark' is an area that needs a closer and more nuanced look. He insisted on proclaiming his leading role in the world of the arts and actively and willingly influenced, like few others of his era, the public's perception of his work. He is thereby not only creating his own image but also influencing lastingly and fundamentally the understanding of his works. To be discussed are the methods and strategies Kirchner uses to achieve this goal. Just some of the approaches Kirchner chose include subsequently backdating his own works; creating an alter-ego critic named 'Louis de Marsalle' who positively reviewed his art; or repeatedly overpainting his canvases to harmonize inconsistent forms of artistic expression and stylistic breaks to create a unique and coherent oeuvre.

- **Illness and Anxiety**

This part of the conference follows on from the first topic 'I Am a Trademark': Self-promotion and the Artist by looking closely at Kirchner's illness and the resulting 'split' in his biography. Kirchner's personal crisis coincided with the international crisis of the First World War, which had both a physical and psychological effect on the artist. During that time, Kirchner struggled with his self-image and consciously engineered a legend-building and self-mythologizing of his life story through artworks and writings. This struggle is accompanied by

numerous changes of residence – he began a very real odyssey through various sanatoriums – and is embedded in the contemporary neurasthenia debate that is echoed in new treatment methods, especially those of Dr Ludwig Binswanger in Kreuzlingen.

This section of the conference will reflect the importance of Kirchner's ailments for his further artistic development and his reinvention in Davos. Due to the loss of Kirchner's patient files, the cause and nature of his illnesses have not yet been fully discovered and researched. Despite various one-off research attempts, many questions are left unanswered, giving reason for speculation. The conference provides a forum to present and discuss new discoveries.

- **Constructions of Identity: The Self and the Other / Identity and Alterity**

The constructed self as well as the Other take on central importance in Kirchner's artistic process and oeuvre. As vital elements in his creative method, they accompanied him throughout his entire life. He made playful use of identity and alterity – for example to compose imagined landscapes, interiors and arrangements of figures and space.

Further, Kirchner designed his studios in Dresden and Berlin, and later his homes in Davos, as carefully arranged places of refuge. Through his eclectic mix of textiles, objects of various origin, woodprints, photographs, paintings and self-made furniture, these places became Gesamtkunstwerke in their own right. In this section, the conference addresses the role of identity construction and Kirchner's relation to the Other. Influences on Kirchner's work in general as well as his creation of places of refuge will be analysed.

To contextualize Kirchner's interest in the Other, one part of this section will be dedicated to German Expressionist artists and their interest in non-Western cultures and art. This interest was not only instigated by Germany's colonies in the South Seas and Africa, but also and especially by the establishment of ethnographic museums in large German cities in the second half of the 19th century, which was accompanied by an array of new specialist literature and magazines.

- **Portraits of Women / Portraits of Men / Portraits of Children**

Depictions of nudes play a crucial role in Kirchner's oeuvre throughout his career – be it as the central element of his compositions or more subtly in the background, as sculptures or as parts of furniture. At the beginning of his career Kirchner started out with classical studio nudes, but quickly passed on to the depiction of nudes in nature or in self-designed studio settings. Especially in his early creative phases in Dresden, the adolescent Lina Franziska Fehrmann (Fränzi) and Marcella Albertine Sprentzel were frequent visitors to his studio as well as to those of his fellow Brücke members. They also accompanied the artists on their trips into nature and to the lakes of Moritzburg. Often dismissed as an innocent interest in childish spontaneity and in the natural relationship of children to their own body, this taboo subject will be tackled by the conference from different scientific angles, such as the socio-historic viewpoint and the sexuality discourse, as well as from art historical perspectives.

The ubiquity of nudes in his artworks as well as in his studio settings also indicates that the sexuality Kirchner carries to the outside world might also be part of his image cultivation. With this as a backdrop, the conference wants to question the concept of sexuality in the early 20th century and try to update it from a contemporary perspective. Being caught between these aspects, the conference will collect critical positions and thereby bring this important topic back into the discourse.

- **Kirchner and Literature**

Kirchner was not only an avid reader, with an extensive library of his own, but was also very interested in various kinds of writing and literature, which offered him the possibility of experimenting with new means of artistic creativity. The diaries Kirchner sporadically wrote during his time in Davos, between 1919 and 1928, give a unique and first-hand insight into

his emotions, his impressions of the new environment and the creative process of making new works. This part of the conference therefore focusses on Kirchner's own testimonies in the form of diary entries, letters and other correspondence.

Furthermore, he was also strongly influenced in his artistic production by his reading experiences. Through the various stages of his life he continued illustrating short stories, novels and poems. Peter Schlemihl's wundersame Geschichte (Peter Schlemihl's Miraculous Story) by Adelbert von Chamisso takes up a special position in this context and inspired Kirchner to create his famous 'Schlemihl-Cycle' (1915). The artist not only identifies with the title character but projects his own situation and feelings onto the story and thereby creates a unique mélange of reading experience, illustration and self-representation.

Kirchner's invention of an alter-ego critic, 'Louis de Marsalle', who critiqued his own work, can also be considered as a novel literary idea in this context. Literature as an integral part of Kirchner's oeuvre is an aspect that has been largely neglected by the academic research and the conference will try to fill that gap

Additional workshops will be held on the following topics:

- **Exhibiting Kirchner**

Curators will offer insights into how Kirchner's works can be exhibited nowadays, particularly with regard to the ongoing digitalization of his oeuvre (such as the project involving digitalization of Kirchner's sketchbooks conducted by the Kirchner Museum Davos) and new and inventive approaches of knowledge and content transfer.

- **Kirchner and Fragility / The Burying of Artworks**

This second workshop focusses on questions around conservation and restoration. It looks at developing strategies and best-practice approaches to deal with the fragility of Kirchner's oeuvre. Because of their overall condition, some Kirchner works haven't left museums and their storage facilities for many years. Institutions are trying hard to find a practicable way of protecting and safeguarding their possessions on the one hand and yet providing access to the artwork and exhibiting it on the other.

What are the options for curators regarding organizing Kirchner exhibitions that meet these challenges but enable a worldwide audience to see Kirchner's works on-site? Starting from these thoughts we can enlarge the discourse and identify this as a general problem that affects many artists.

- **Masters-, PhD- and Postdoc-Workshop**

This workshop offers young professionals and researchers the opportunity to present their projects and questions in a panel situation. Participants therefore gain not only the possibility of exchanging ideas and innovative approaches with fellow researchers, but also of receiving feedback from scholarly experts and curators.

## **Paper submission**

We invite proposals for 30-minute presentations (20 minutes presentation and 10 minutes for discussion) from various disciplines such as: art history and theory, visual sociology, anthropology, museology, conservation, philosophy, ethnography, gender studies, cultural studies, medicine, psychology, literature, fine arts and others.

Your abstract must clearly explain the topic and theses of your presentation, in no more than 3500 characters / 500 words. The language of the Kirchner conference is English. Please submit your abstract as well as a short résumé no later than **2 May 2018**. Paper submission is possible on the conference website [www.kirchner2018.ch](http://www.kirchner2018.ch).

Submitted proposals will be reviewed by the conference organizing committee and speakers will be notified of the acceptance of their proposals by **20 May 2018**. Abstracts will be selected for publishing in the conference proceedings.

## Travel Grants for Students and PhD Candidates

Students and PhD candidates may apply for a grant to help cover expenses associated with travel and accommodation. The organizers offer two kinds of grants:

- 20 travel grants for European applicants of CHF 500
- 8 travel grants for non-European applicants of CHF 1000

To apply for a travel grant, candidates are required to write a letter of motivation, highlighting their special interest in the work and life of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, as well as submit a résumé and a verification of their status (certificate of study or certificate of PhD candidature).

**Deadline for applications is February 19, 2018.**

The conference committee will select the stipendiaries. Recipients of the scholarships will be notified before **March 6, 2018**.

Please submit your application to [info@kirchner2018.ch](mailto:info@kirchner2018.ch)

## Organizers

The conference is hosted by the Kirchner Museum Davos, Switzerland, in cooperation with the Art Centre Basel, Switzerland and the University of Constance, Germany.

For further information please visit the conference website [www.kirchner2018.ch](http://www.kirchner2018.ch).

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Museum  
Davos**



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