

Press release  
Zurich, 22 April 2009

## Kunsthaus Zürich shows 'Albert von Keller: Salons, Séances, Secession'.

**From 24 April to 4 October 2009, the Kunsthaus Zürich will exhibit paintings by Albert von Keller (1844–1920), a Swiss native who was a co-founder of the Munich Secession. Under the influence of music by Chopin and Wagner, during the Wilhelman era Keller painted interiors and society life, portraits and nudes, grandiose works of considerable moment. Keller attended spiritualist séances as an observer and was fascinated by the hypnotic state. His preferred subject was the realm of the feminine, at a time in which actresses, dancers and mediums were liberating themselves from social constraints. Closest to Auguste Rodin in his manner of expression, Keller had a broad repertoire. In addition to a painting style inspired by the Impressionists, he also chose symbolist motifs and developed a chromatic and formal vocabulary subsequently defined as Expressionist by exponents of the school such as Munch, Kirchner and Beckmann.**

### PAINTED TESTIMONY TO WILHELMIAN AND BELLE ÉPOQUE SOCIETY

Keller's art is a detailed account of Wilhelman and Belle Époque society. His oeuvre, which comprises more than 1000 works, constitutes Jugendstil in its most perfect form. His expressive range is astonishing, running the gamut from pleasing harmony all the way to alienating dissonance. Although Keller was celebrated by contemporary critics as an outstanding modern romantic, in his lifestyle the painter was anything but a starving artist. With his wife, whose father was the founder of the Bavarian Mortgage and Exchange Bank, Keller lived at one of Munich's best addresses and was a welcome guest in the most rarefied social circles. Writing in *Jugend* magazine in 1914, Fritz von Ostini praised the socially and professionally successful artist for training a «new and wonderful» light on women. Keller documented the elegant world of polite ladies, with their seductive habits and fashionable accoutrements. His likeness of the last Czarina, the most beautiful portrait of the monarch ever done, is a shining example – and one of the major pieces on show at the Kunsthauus. Not all of the painter's subjects, however, enjoyed quite as seemly a treatment at his hands.

### SPIRITUALIST PHENOMENA

Keller witnessed spiritualist phenomena courtesy of the psychiatrist Albert Baron von Schrenck-Notzing. He registered the effects of suggestion on the human countenance and featured subjects of hypnotism in his paintings. At the turn of the twentieth century the occult was the rage among all social classes,

enthraling scientists the likes of the Curies and men of letters such as Thomas Mann, as well as melodramatic quacks. For his part, Keller painted subjects ranging from the legendary Italian medium Eusapia Palladino to the much-admired French somnambulist dancer Madeleine Guipet. When he joined Munich's newly founded Psychological Society in 1886, Keller had the opportunity to investigate the expressive and gestural symptoms of various levels of consciousness. His renderings of affective states considered unrepresentable in painting exposed his subjects to the public eye, but not to its mockery.

### INTERIORS REMINISCENT OF THE NABIS OR VALLOTTON

Keller used his lavishly appointed residence as a model for extravagant interiors, whose composition and technique suggest the artist's intellectual affinity with Félix Vallotton and the Nabis group. He was attracted to landscapes dense with atmosphere, into which he would introduce his figures.

### THE LAST ARTIST BEFORE CLASSICAL MODERNISM

Keller's first exhibitions were held in 1870. He visited France regularly and was a frequent participant in the Parisian salon, and in 1892 he co-founded the Munich Secession. The exhibition of 145 of his works organized by the Munich Association of Visual Artists in 1908 was an artistic and social happening. Although Keller was considered an important painter during his lifetime, however, his oeuvre retreated into obscurity after the artist's death.

Now, a century later in Zurich, the first comprehensive one-man museum show offers an opportunity to discover Keller's work anew in all its sensual passion, ascetic evocativeness and mystical vision.

Keller's life and work are closely bound up with Switzerland. Oskar A. Müller, a Zurich chemist and enthusiastic art collector, published impressive volumes on Keller in the 1980s, and in 2006 his collection came to the Kunsthaus. The Kunsthaus show presents Keller's work, which was received and celebrated by contemporary curators for its modernity, as a forerunner of classical modernism. While Keller was more of a traditionalist than an innovator, the Fauvists, Cubists and Dadaists rebelled against the very same hedonistic, melancholy and self-centred haute bourgeoisie of which Keller and his associates were members.

### MORE THAN 130 WORKS DISPLAYED AND EXPLAINED

In addition to its expansive show of more than 130 pieces by Keller, the Kunsthaus exhibition also features a surprising collection of related work by other Secession artists, among them Franz von Stuck. The selection of Keller's work is enhanced by loans from private collectors and public institutions alike, such as Munich's Neue Pinakothek.

An abundantly illustrated catalogue is available at the Kunsthaus shop for CHF 43.-. It is published by Hirmer Verlag to coincide with the exhibition, examines Keller's position in 19th-century painting and his reception by contemporary critics. The main body of the catalogue is the work of guest curator Gian Casper Bott, who is mounting the show at the Kunsthaus Zürich in its historically reconstructed Moser galleries.

Visitors to the museum who prefer a personal introduction to Keller's work and would enjoy the chance to discuss it with others may take part free of charge in a public guided tour, or book a private tour for up to 20 people.

Supported by the Vontobel Foundation.

### VISITOR INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch)

Open Sat, Sun, Tues 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thurs, Fri 10 a.m.–8 p.m.

Holidays: 1 May, 20/21 May, 30/31 May, 1 June, 1 August 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Admission: CHF 14.- / 10.- (concessions) / CHF 10.- per head for groups of 20 or more (subject to change)

Advance Sales: RailAway/SBB Kombi-Ticket, with reduction on travel and entrance to the museum. Available at local stations and by phoning Rail Service: 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19 per min.), group rates possible. Magasins Fnac, tel. +33 1 4157 3212, [www.fnac.ch](http://www.fnac.ch)

Public Guided Tours: Friday 15 May, 12 June, 10 July, 21 August, 18 September, at 6 p.m.

For private guided tours for up to 20 participants apply on +41 (0)44 253 84 06 (Mon–Fri 9 a.m.–12 noon). Cost: CHF 175 not including admission.

For further information and visual materials, please contact  
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