

Press release

Zurich, 15 December 2011

## Kunsthaus Zürich presents Albert Welti – Landscape in Pastel

**From 16 December 2011 to 4 March 2012 the Kunsthaus Zürich is staging a cabinet exhibition of colourful landscapes by the Swiss painter, graphic artist and draughtsman Albert Welti (1862-1912). A pupil of Arnold Böcklin and a native of Zurich, Welti received numerous national commissions and is known both in Switzerland and abroad for his painting of the citizens' assembly in the chamber of the Swiss Council of States. His works express the turn-of-the-century mood: a time of transitions, as with the motif of the bridge, the cycle of ageing and the depiction of dream-like twilight scenes in nature.**

Albert Welti loathed the impressionistic in all its forms. He was reluctant to exhibit his pastel works, and most remained hidden away in his studio throughout his life. Reportedly, he never showed his colour improvisations even to his closest friends, regarding them as nothing more than 'pastel nature sketches' – study material at best, that served its purpose in terms of picture composition. Posterity has come to view them differently. The Kunsthaus Zürich was quick to recognize his genius, staging a major, comprehensive exhibition of his work as early as 1912. The most recent significant presentation, curated by Bice Curiger in 1984, featured drawings and graphic works from the Kunsthaus collection on the theme of 'Walpurgis Night.' Marking the 150th anniversary of Welti's birth, the new exhibition is centred around 45 pastel landscapes whose intense, hyper-natural chromatic effect speaks directly to the viewer. They helped Welti to break free from the influence of his mentor and model Arnold Böcklin and develop his own artistic style. In fact, these 'improvisations' are masterpieces in their own right. Using a selection of 13 studies for paintings and engravings – including one pastel that served as a draft for the celebrated mural of the citizens' assembly in the chamber of the Council of States at the Swiss Federal Parliament building – curator Bernhard von Waldkirch demonstrates the various functions of pastel drawing. The majority of the works are from the artist's estate in the Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen, the Kunsthaus Zürich and private collections.

### FLUID TRANSITIONS

Welti's art is imbued with the specific atmosphere of the turn of the century. Its Janus-faced quality is most productive where his pictures depict a transition, as with the motif of the bridge, the cycle of ageing and the depiction of dream-like twilight scenes. Welti is at his most carefree in his Post-Impressionist pastel landscapes; drawing on a still-fresh apprehension of the scenery and without recourse to Symbolist personification, he hints at the presence of the

unconscious. He exhibits a particular penchant for twilight scenes – those moments in nature at which chiaroscuro is utterly transformed into colour. In his boldest efforts, Welty ventures into the field of chromatic improvisation; but unlike with Kandinsky, he remains firmly anchored in the visible world.

### TALES, MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Throughout his life, Welty drew on the rich treasury of folk tales, myths and legends. Guided by the painting technique of the Old Masters, he became skilled in the iconography of classical history and landscape painting. Yet in many ways, his conception of the image is resolutely modern. His uncompromising advocacy of imagination opens up lines of communication with our earliest childhood memories and creates a bridge to the formal language of the preconscious. As brain research has taught us, dreams are not limited to sleep. Even when we are awake, many brain activities link us to the regions associated with dreaming: here too, the transitions are fluid.

### ARTISTS, TEACHERS, COMMISSIONS

Albert Welty was born in 1862 in Zurich-Aussersihl, an area that was still rural at the time. His father ran the successful Welty-Furrer transport company. In 1880, Albert embarked on an apprenticeship in photography with his uncle Oswald Welty in Lausanne, though he abandoned it after a year. His father allowed him to move to Munich where, from 1882 to 1886, he trained as a painter at the Academy. He received his first painting lessons from Ludwig von Löfftz, an outstanding pastel artist with whom Karl Stauffer-Bern and Lovis Corinth also studied. The Weltis' circle of close friends in Munich included Ernst Kreidolf and Wilhelm Balmer. Welty spent two years in the Zurich studio of Arnold Böcklin, to whom he retained a debt of gratitude throughout his life. In 1894 he married and settled in the Zurich district of Höngg. 1892 saw a fateful meeting with the East Prussian landowner Franz von Doehlau, who supported him until his death. Welty travelled to Berlin, Breslau, Dresden, Vienna, Paris and Venice. In 1901 he was commissioned to paint the glass windows in the stairway of the Federal Parliament building on the subject of 'the textile industry in eastern Switzerland.' In 1906 the family spent time in Innertkirchen and Vättis, where Welty painted numerous pastels from nature. Hermann Hesse was among those who admired his art. In 1907 he worked on the designs for the image of Wilhelm Tell's son to appear on the 25-centime stamp. The following year he moved to Berne to begin work on the commission for the painting of the citizens' assembly in the Council of States chamber of the Federal Parliament. The numerous sketches, drawings and cartoons that Wilhelm Balmer executed as a mural continued to occupy him until his sudden death in 1912. Hermann Hesse, who visited Welty on a number of occasions, published a monograph on him in 1917 for which he wrote the foreword.

## THE ART OF THE PASTEL: A UNION OF DRAWING AND PAINTING

Pastel painting has been a recognized technique in its own right since the 18th century. It was revived in the last quarter of the 19th century by artists such as Manet, Degas, Redon and Picasso, and experienced an upsurge in popularity in the context of Symbolism and Art Nouveau. In Switzerland Augusto Giacometti, with his decoratively abstract pastel paintings, is regarded by art historians as its chief pioneer. Manipulating the pastel crayon, a dusty, porous material that can be used on paper to create painterly nuances or spontaneous improvisations, requires supreme skill; and yet the technique's consummation is its union of drawing and painting.

## WORKS FROM THE KUNSTHAUS PRINTS AND DRAWINGS COLLECTION

The Collection of Prints and Drawings of the Kunsthaus Zürich is represented in the exhibition by four pastels and the engraving 'The Journey into the 20th Century,' a critique of the era. It was Kunsthaus director Wilhelm Wartmann who in 1912 – the last year of the artist's life – published the first catalogue raisonné of his graphic prints and organized an exhibition. He considered Welti to be the leading Swiss Symbolist, alongside Hodler. The Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft subsequently acquired the entirety of Welti's graphic prints. Today, the Kunsthaus possesses the most comprehensive collection of paintings, drawings and graphic works by the master and some of his contemporaries. The opening of the Kunsthaus extension will provide sufficient space for these treasures to be shown to the public at more frequent intervals than has hitherto been possible.

A 144-page book (Scheidegger & Spiess) accompanies the exhibition, featuring 70 colour illustrations and a text by Bernhard von Waldkirch. It is available for CHF 58 at the Kunsthaus Shop.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch)

Sat/Sun/Tues 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed/Thurs/Fri 10 a.m.–8 p.m., closed on Mondays

24/26/31 Dec 2011, 1/2 January 2012: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. 25 Dec 2011 closed

Admission: CHF 15 / 10 (concessions). Under-16s free

Public guided tours: 14 January 11 a.m., 27 January 6 p.m., 9 February 6 p.m.

Private guided tours: +41 (0)44 253 84 84 (Mon–Fri 9 a.m.–midday)

Advance sales: SBB RailAway combination ticket, discount on travel and admission: at stations and by phoning Rail Service: 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min.), [www.sbb.ch](http://www.sbb.ch)

## CONTACT FOR THE MEDIA

To download visual material go to [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch) > Information > Press.

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