

Press release

Zurich, 27 November 2015

Kunsthhaus Zürich digitizes Dada collection. Results online in 2016.

The Kunsthhaus Zürich holds around 700 historic Dada documents and artworks: paintings, sculptures, photographs, works on paper, letters, notes, books, magazines, flyers, posters and manuscripts. To mark 100 years of the Dada movement, all the documents and works on paper are being digitized, and in some cases restored, to make them accessible to a global audience.

LARGEST DADA COLLECTION AFTER NEW YORK, PARIS AND BERLIN

The Kunsthhaus Zürich holds one of the world's most extensive Dada collections. Following presentations in 1966 and 1980, many years of collection and research activity at the Kunsthhaus Zürich culminated in the 'Dada global' exhibition in 1994. The comprehensive catalogue of the exhibition and collection edited by Raimund Meyer documents all the holdings at that time in detail. Since 1994, the Kunsthhaus's Dada collection has continued to grow. The two largest groups are the approximately 180 works in the Collection of Prints and Drawings, and 540 Dadaist publications and documents in the library. The library also collects research literature on Dada. The original publications and documents of the historical Dada movement as well as the research literature are fully indexed in the library's online catalogue (opac.kunsthhaus.ch). There are also plans to publish the works on paper from the Collection of Prints and Drawings online.

MORE THAN 50 ARTISTS

In all, the Kunsthhaus holds works and records of over 50 artists who form the core of the Dada movement: Hans (Jean) Arp, Johannes Baader, Johannes Baargeld, Erwin Blumenfeld, I.K. Bonset (Theo Van Doesburg), André Breton, Serge Charchoune, Paul Citroen, Jean Crotti, Marcel Duchamp, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Julius Evola, George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Hans Richter, Christian Schad, Kurt Schwitters, Walter Serner, Marcel Słodki, Philippe Soupault, Sophie Taeuber, Tristan Tzara and many others.

PUBLICIZE, PROMOTE RESEARCH, CONSERVE

The digitization project, in which the restoration department and the library are heavily involved, is being overseen by curator Cathérine Hug supported by Dada specialist Raimund Meyer. There are a number of reasons for the digitization. Strong interest in Dada around the world means that the artworks and documents are frequently lent out to exhibitions at museums in Switzerland and

abroad. However, because paper was often of very poor quality in the early 20th century, and especially during the First World War, many of the originals are in fragile condition. For this reason, restrictions have to be placed on their use. In some critical cases, these irreplaceable objects cannot withstand any further wear. To promote future research internationally without the need to move the fragile originals and expose them to the bleaching effect of light, documents of more than one page are being digitized in their entirety – and not just the title page, as is common practice in many places. For the museum itself, the digitization project is an opportunity to compile up-to-date condition reports, collate new findings and initiate conservation measures where necessary.

FOCUS ON THE ESSENCE

The historical Dada movement lasted barely a decade; but the artists dubbed 'Dadaists' remained active after the period from 1916 to 1925 – mostly under different labels – and lived on into the second half of the 20th century. To maintain a focus on the core of Dada, however, the Kunsthaus team working with Cathérine Hug and Raimund Meyer have limited their work to specific time periods. The digitization project covers all the original documents – works on paper, manuscripts, vintage photographs, autographs and typescripts – created between 1916 and 1950, together with books and exhibition catalogues from the early days of the movement through to around 1950, as well as magazines up to roughly the same year. It does not include reprints or secondary literature. The holdings of drawings and prints from the precursors in the 1910s through to the final offshoots in the 1950s are planned to be digitized in full, too.

SCOPE OF THE DIGITIZATION AND FORM OF PRESENTATION

All the texts are being scanned in their entirety, including covers, spines and backs. A single volume may contain anything from a few dozen to several hundred pages, so the aim is to ensure that they will not need to be digitized again in the near future. Once the hue and brightness have been corrected to the best possible approximation of the original, they are therefore being saved as very high resolution TIFF files at 400 dpi. Many texts are intended to be used via OCR for easy content searches and manual commenting. The technical implementation of the digitization has been carried out by the Central Library (Zentralbibliothek) in Zurich.

PRESENTATION ONLINE AND IN EXHIBITIONS

The first results of this complex process will be presented from 5 February 2016 on a Kunsthaus microsite, with a second batch following on 3 June. Each illustration is accompanied by a text. Numerous cross-references illuminate the links between the artists, their works and the places where Dada found an audience. Documentation on the restoration process is already available at www.kunsthaus.ch, where Jean Rosston describes the challenges involved.

Some of the restored originals will be displayed in two exhibitions that curator Cathérine Hug is preparing for the anniversary year: 'Dadaglobe Reconstructed' (5 February to 1 May 2016) and 'Francis Picabia – A Retrospective' (3 June to 25 September 2016). Following their premiere in Zurich, both will be shown at the Museum of Modern Art New York.

The project has been made possible thanks to support from the Ernst Göhner Foundation, Helvetia Insurance and the Federal Office of Culture FOC.

INVITATION, NOTE AND CONTACT FOR EDITORS

The Dada projects will be presented at the annual media conference of the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, which takes place at 11 a.m. on 14 January 2016. You are also cordially invited to a preview of the 'Dadaglobe Reconstructed' exhibition at 11 a.m. on 4 February. Registration is not required. Visual material is available to download at www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/information/press/press-images/kunsthhaus-zuerich/.

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