

Press release

Zurich, 22 September 2016

Kunsthaus Zürich presents 'Images of Architecture'

From 23 September to 11 December 2016 the Kunsthaus Zürich presents an exhibition on architecture as a subject for art. It comprises around 40 works from the 18th century to the present day – from small 'vedute' to magnificent paintings, photographs and sculptures by Berenice Abbott, Bernardo Bellotto, Max Ernst, Francesco Guardi, Beate Gütschow, Paul Klee, Claude Monet, Nicolas de Staël, Thomas Struth, Jane and Louise Wilson, Erwin Wurm and many others.

The latest in the 'Picture Ballot!' series, in which works from the collection are chosen by members as the focus for an exhibition, looks at classic cityscapes, which document the appearance of a place but can also evolve into an object of memory and longing for the viewer. The presentation also reveals how the construction of architecture in the image can become a playground for utopias and visions. Over the centuries, artists have navigated between these twin poles of naturalistic representation and pure fantasy to present various aspects of the architectural image, sometimes blurring the distinction between reality and vision. A prime example is Max Ernst, whose Surrealist work 'La ville entière' from 1935/36 forms the centrepiece of the exhibition designed by guest curator Manuela Reissmann.

THE VISIONARY CITY

In 'La ville entière', Max Ernst depicts a structure seemingly recollected from a dream and reminiscent of ancient temple complexes, fortresses or the Tower of Babel. Suspended above a ruin-like fortified city, a large celestial body bathes the scene in pallid light. Untamed vegetation proliferates in the foreground, while demonic creatures lurk in its depths. Painted in the mid-1930s, the image becomes an urgent metaphor for its times: amid the looming threat of another global conflict, fears of a renewed catastrophe become ever more acute. With its architecture redolent of cultures long departed, Ernst's depiction of this lifeless city offers up a vision of the future, exuding a sense of gloom even as it is illuminated by the vast celestial body. Invariably, cities devastated by war also symbolize human tragedies and collective traumas. The painting by Bernardo Bellotto, who was originally from Venice and enjoyed success at court in Dresden, depicts the city's Kreuzkirche, destroyed in the Seven Years' War. With painterly emphasis, Bellotto contrasts the church reduced to rubble and the ruins in the background with the undamaged civic buildings and the new constructions that are already taking shape. A chronicler of his times, he

creates here an image that is at once an admonition and a message of hope that the city will flourish anew, and with it his own career.

PLACES OF LONGING

Italy arouses a sense of yearning like no other country. From the 18th century onwards, the 'Grand Tour' came to be regarded as essential by the well-to-do, with a journey to visit celebrated art treasures serving to round off a wealthy young man's education. Views of the most important sites became sought-after souvenirs. In Venice, the undisputed centre point of every trip through Italy, the trade in views of the city flourished more than almost anywhere else. Francesco Guardi captured the city's morbid beauty in works that included numerous 'capricci': picturesque compositions assembled from elements considered typically Venetian. 'Old House on the Lagoon', for example, depicts a dilapidated building with a view of the sea, an image that to this day informs the romantic postcard cliché of Venice.

Having once attracted the affluent classes, Venice today is a place of pilgrimage for hordes of tourists, drawn not just by its seeming impermanence and the nostalgic idealization that goes with it, but also by its countless artistic treasures and magnificent buildings. In 'San Zaccaria', Thomas Struth places Giovanni Bellini's 'Sacra Conversazione' at the centre of a large-format photograph. In the painting, a trompe l'oeil construction creates the illusion of a niche opening into the wall of the church; the echoing of forms in the arches, columns and decorations renders the transition to the actual church space fluid. In Struth's photograph, the levels of reality are overlaid: the devotional scene in the painting is linked to the situation in the church interior, where people sit in the pews or stand before the painting, praying, silent or rapt. Ultimately the photograph opens out into the museum space, and so implicates us as viewers.

Nicolas de Staël reminds us that there is more to Italy than idealization, romanticization and longing. In 'Agrigente', only the title betrays the relationship to the eponymous city on Sicily's southern coast. The motif is reduced to the minimum number of surfaces and colours required amid the abstraction to suggest an architectural formation on a hill. The glistening light of the sun tips over into black, all colours have faded to a shimmering white in the heat, and only the orange of the roofs marks the transition from the city silhouette to the sky. Profoundly impressed by the Sicilian light, de Staël here paints the stylized metaphor of a southern city.

WALK THROUGH ARCHITECTURE, UNDERSTAND ART

Amidst the paintings and photographs, visitors will also encounter three-dimensional works. Built by Karl Moser in 1910 and expanded on the basis of plans by the Pfister brothers (1958) and Erwin Müller (1976), the Kunsthaus has – as both architecture and museum – repeatedly supplied the backdrop for site-specific works by artists from Ferdinand Hodler to Joan Miró and, most recently,

Pipilotti Rist; it is thus the perfect space to experience this theme. Both independent visitors and those taking a public guided tour of Switzerland's oldest combined art and museum institution will appreciate that architecture is far more than simply a shell, a housing that performs a wide range of functions. It is invariably also an expression of social realities and societal structures – a reflection of and play on its times, in which artists remain involved to this day.

Supported by Albers & Co AG

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Fri-Sun/Tues 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Wed, Thurs 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. For public holiday opening see www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Admission incl. collection: CHF 15/CHF 10 (concessions and groups). Admission free to visitors up to the age of 16.

Public guided tours in German: Thurs 29 September, 6 p.m. and Sat 5 November, 1 p.m. – through the exhibition with guest curator Manuela Reissmann. Sun 23 October, 11 a.m. and Thurs 8 December, 6.30 p.m. with Giacinto Pettorino on the architecture of the Kunsthhaus.

Publication: The exhibition guide (96 pages, 37 illustrations) with an essay by curator Manuela Reissmann is available at the Kunsthhaus shop for CHF 18.

Advance sales: SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on travel and admission: at stations and by phoning Rail Service 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min. by land line), www.sbb.ch/kunsthhaus-zuerich.

Zurich Tourism: hotel room reservations and ticket sales, Tourist Service at Zurich Main Railway Station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, information@zuerich.com.

NOTE TO MEDIA

Visual materials are available at www.kunsthhaus.ch > Information > Press.

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