

**Press release  
Zurich, 11 August 2016**

## **Kunsthhaus Zürich presents 'Hans Jakob Oeri. A Swiss Artist in Paris, Moscow, Zurich'**

**From 12 August to 23 October 2016 the Kunsthhaus Zürich is staging the first exhibition of the work of Zurich artist Hans Jakob Oeri (1782-1868). During his lifetime, Oeri was respected and admired throughout Europe. His works are among the finest and most innovative examples of Swiss art in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibition includes 75 paintings, watercolours, drawings and prints.**

Oeri's testimony and reception of his work shed light on some of the Swiss art scene's most fascinating involvements in art and cultural history as the Ancien Régime gave way to the new Federal State. The most recent research reveals Oeri to be the prototype of a Swiss artist who operated beyond genres and state boundaries. He was an early modern artist, influenced by French neoclassical style, whose multifaceted work defies stylistic categorization.

ZÜRICH, PARIS, MOSCOW, KAZAN, ST. PETERSBURG, ZÜRICH

Oeri spent much time abroad, but was also active in the society of his home city. He was born in Kyburg (canton of Zurich) in 1782 as son of a pastor and scion of a long-established Zurich family whose ancestors included a number of artists, and died in Zurich in 1868. He lived at a time of radical change, in which the cultural zeitgeist was in permanent and rapid flux. When French troops marched into Switzerland in 1798 and the Free Republic of the City of Zurich collapsed, he went to Paris to train as an artist; there he witnessed the transition from the French First Republic to the First Empire. Returning to Zurich in 1807, he was admitted that same year into the ranks of the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft (now the patron association of the Kunsthhaus Zürich) and joined in its numerous activities. Beginning in 1809, Oeri spent eight years as a painter and teacher of drawing in the service of distinguished patrons in the Russian Empire – in Moscow for the diplomat and imperial counsellor Count Arkady Ivanovich Markov and later on the country estate of the chamberlain Nikolai Mikhailovich Mussin-Pushkin in Kazan, from where he travelled extensively. Oeri had a strong interest in Russian culture, as evidenced by a series of watercolours, and spent much of his eight years in Moscow, Kazan and the countryside. His journeys culminated in a visit of the capital St. Petersburg during the final weeks of his Russian sojourn. Hans Jakob Oeri experienced the growing distance between Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon after the Congress of Erfurt, the Napoleonic War, known in Russia as 'Patriotic War', with its emotional outpourings, the establishment of the Holy Alliance, and finally Russia's expansion into the

Caucasus. Back in Switzerland, he was both a witness to and active participant in the formation of the modern Federal State.

#### TRAINING UNDER JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID

Oeri received his first lessons in draughtsmanship in Zurich from the respected portraitist and former academy professor Johann Heinrich Lips. After studying under the landscape painter Johann Kaspar Kuster from Winterthur, and amid the growing debate over the reformation of art education in Switzerland, Oeri moved for four years to Paris, where he was accepted into the *École des beaux-arts* and the studio of Jacques-Louis David, the successful history painter and portraitist of Napoleon. The artistic exchange between teacher and pupil led to a series of exceptional works that could not be more contrasting.

#### 'CHLOE', 'THE STUDIO IN PARIS' AND THE PORTRAIT OF OERI BY HIS MASTER JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID

Around 1806/1808 Oeri completed his masterpiece 'Chloe', possibly still under David's guidance. This painting in the French neoclassical style is based on an idyll by Salomon Gessner. 'The Studio in Paris' was probably painted immediately before his return to Switzerland (around 1807). In this relief-like composition he portrays himself along with the portrait painter David Sulzer from Winterthur and his two brothers, the engineer Hans Georg Oeri and the artisan Hans Oeri. Despite the narrowness of space and the poverty in evidence, Oeri managed to produce an evocative image of family and friendship in which the dignity of art triumphs over privation, enforced competition and rank. At the same time Jacques-Louis David painted a portrait of his student Oeri: a remarkable work of art in which he places his subject's face at the very centre and focuses attention entirely on his psychology.

#### NEOCLASSICISM, ROMANTICISM, REALISM – HETEROGENOUS STYLE

Oeri's work, which largely falls into the categories of history, genre and portrait painting, breaks with tradition and transgresses boundaries in all kinds of ways. Not content with correctly reproducing historical subjects and achieving an accurate likeness in his portraits, he deliberately crossed the frontiers of genre. He developed a new drawing technique and painted small-format history pictures with a focus on cultural history and an interdisciplinary approach. The 'Kostüm-Studien aller Jahrhunderte christlicher Zeitrechnung' ('Costume Studies of All Centuries of the Christian Era') and 'Collectaneen' held at the Kunsthhaus Zürich reveal Oeri to be a typical artist-antiquarian, whose passion for scholarship and collecting placed art in the service of education. The sheer versatility of his output renders his works difficult to classify. His prints consist primarily of works based on texts in the portrait and history genres as well as graphic reproductions. Although in style he remained sympathetic to

Neoclassicism, he created numerous works that bear closer affinities to Romanticism, Biedermeier and Realism.

## FIRST EXHIBITION. WORKS LARGELY UNPUBLISHED

Starting with 'Chloe' and 'The Studio in Paris', two of the highlights, a selection of 19 paintings – including a number of portraits of rare distinction – as well as 56 watercolours, gouaches, drawings and prints provides the first-ever overview of Hans Jakob Oeri's work. They are joined by the works of other artists – including the portrait by his teacher David which, like many of the exhibits, has never been seen in public before. Many of the works are in the collections of the Kunsthaus Zürich; they are complemented by loans from public and private Swiss collections. The research findings contained in the dissertation of guest curator Valentine von Fellenberg, which will be published in book form in 2016, supplied the basis for this ambitious exhibition project, which has been realized in collaboration with the curator of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Kunsthaus, Bernhard von Waldkirch. The presentation is accompanied by 'Hans Jakob Oeri (1782–1868). A Swiss Artist in Paris, Moscow, Zurich', published by Scheidegger & Spiess (112 pages, about 80 illustrations) and available in German language in the Kunsthaus shop for CHF 24.

Supported by the A-Charity Foundation and the Dr. Georg and Josi Guggenheim Foundation.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

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

Fri-Sun/Tues 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Wed, Thurs 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. Public holiday opening see [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch).

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

Public guided tours in German: 27 August at 11 a.m. with Bernhard von Waldkirch; 17 September at 2 p.m. with Valentine von Fellenberg and Bernhard von Waldkirch; 15 October at 2 p.m. with Valentine von Fellenberg.

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](http://www.sbb.ch/kunsthhaus-zuerich).

Zurich Tourism: hotel room reservations and ticket sales, Tourist Service at Zurich Main Railway Station, +41 44 215 40 00, [information@zuerich.com](mailto:information@zuerich.com), [www.zuerich.com](http://www.zuerich.com).

## NOTE TO MEDIA

Visual materials are available at [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch) > Information > Press.

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