

Press release
Zurich, 10 August 2017

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents 'Praised and Ridiculed. French Painting 1820-1880'

From 10 November 2017 to 28 January 2018, the Kunsthhaus Zürich exclusively presents the first exhibition in Switzerland to explore the tensions in French painting between 'academic art' and new approaches that sought liberation from its constraints. As Academism's influence waned during the 19th century, artists turned instead to the pursuit of individual impulses. Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, 'plein air' painting and Impressionism vied for the favour of audiences. Artists whose work was dismissed at the time are now seen as stars, and vice versa.

With a little over 100 paintings, the presentation at the Kunsthhaus Zürich brings various currents of 19th-century French painting face to face, revealing not just stark contradictions but also commonalities. This more nuanced perspective on a key period in art history is an especially useful corrective to perceptions in the German-speaking world, where the reception afforded to French art has hitherto been rather one-sided: Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, 'plein air' and Impressionism are still the stylistic labels used to classify French painting of the 19th century.

INNOVATIVE NEOCLASSICISTS AND TRADITIONAL AVANT-GARDISTS

The artists working in these new styles – figures such as Géricault, Delacroix, Corot, Daumier, Millet, Courbet, Manet, Sisley, Monet and Renoir – turned their backs on the officially sanctioned painting of the era, with its academic and neoclassicist style. Despite their revolutionary approaches, however, some of them also have a traditional side. Highly controversial in their day, they are now hailed worldwide as the 'precursors of Modernism'. Yet 19th-century French painting offers a profusion of other equally important artists who, at the time, enjoyed greater recognition and the plaudits of art critics and audiences alike. Although indebted to traditional painting techniques, artists such as Delaroche, Couture, Meissonier, Cabanel, Gérôme and Bouguereau were in some cases highly innovative; but in the canon of French painting from that period laid down in the German-speaking countries at the start of the 20th century, these outstanding figures came to be sidelined.

THE SALON: ARBITER OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The exhibition focuses on the years between 1820 and 1880. 1822 saw Delacroix's first appearance at the Salon, the official exhibition platform for artists, at which he issued a challenge to Ingres and his fellow neoclassicists; 1880 marked the end of the Salon as a government-sponsored event. The role of 'kingmaker' then passed to other forms of organized exhibition, the art market and the public. At the turn of the 20th century, the influence of art criticism was still every bit as great as theirs; today, it is a much less crucial determinant of artists' fortunes.

FIRST TIME IN SWITZERLAND

For the first time in Switzerland, this exhibition brings together some 60 artists representing various movements in French painting to create a rich and diverse panorama of the era's genres. Some of the exhibits are receiving their first showing in Switzerland. They include loans from the Musée du Louvre and Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Art Institute, Chicago, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Supported by Credit Suisse – Partner Kunsthaus Zürich as well as the Hulda and Gustav Zumsteg Foundation.

EVENTS AND PUBLICATION

Public guided tours in German take place on various days each week: Wed and Thurs 6 p.m., Fri 3 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. There are guided tours in French at 11 a.m. on 18 November and 4 p.m. on 9 December, and in English at 4 p.m. on Saturday 25 November.

Private guided tours (60 minutes), at a cost of CHF 190 (German) / CHF 220 (other languages) plus admission (group rate for parties of 20 or more: CHF 18), can be organized on request.

These and other events will be announced on the exhibition website.

The exhibition catalogue in English and German (approx. 240 pp. / 180 ill.) with contributions by O. Bächtli, S. Gianfreda, M. Koos, M. Krüger, M. Leonhardt and J. H. Rubin is published by Hirmer and will be available from the Kunsthaus shop, price CHF 49, and bookstores from November.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthhaus.ch

Opening hours: Fri–Sun/Tues 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thurs 10 a.m.–8 p.m. Public holidays: 24/26 December, 31 December 2017, 1/2 January 2018: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Exhibition including audioguide in English, French or German: CHF 23 / CHF 18 (concessions and groups). Combined ticket including the collection: CHF 26 / CHF 19 (concessions and groups).

Visitors up to age 16 and annual members of the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft free of charge.

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, www.zuerich.com.

INVITATION TO THE MEDIA BRIEFING, CONTACTS

A media briefing with curator Sandra Gianfreda and Kunsthhaus Director Christoph Becker will take place at 11 a.m. on Thursday 9 November. Registration is not required.

We will be happy to arrange interviews on request. Please contact us well in advance to discuss scheduling film and photo reports.

A selection of images is available for download at www.kunsthhaus.ch > Information > Press. We will be happy to send you a PDF of the catalogue once it has gone to print. Bound copies are only available to those attending the exhibition.

Contact and further information: Kunsthhaus Zürich, Kristin Steiner kristin.steiner@kunsthhaus.ch, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 13