

Media release
Zurich, 7 March 2024

Kunsthaus Zürich presents 'Apropos Hodler – Current perspectives on an icon'

From 8 March to 30 June 2024, the Kunsthaus Zürich examines the contemporary relevance of Switzerland's 'national artist', Ferdinand Hodler. 'Apropos Hodler' counters one-sided interpretations with the rich diversity of the painter's formal, cultural and political impact, and sets out to view the old and familiar with new eyes. Works by 30 contemporary artists are juxtaposed with some 60 paintings by the Swiss icon.

Few painters of his generation did more to shape Switzerland's cultural self-image than Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918). His name and work have become iconic. Although the concept of a 'national artist' is now considered obsolete, Hodler has embedded himself firmly in the collective consciousness.

CREATING SCOPE FOR NEW INTERPRETATIONS

That perception, however, is at best a half-truth or a cliché. Values such as rootedness (the 'woodcutter idyll') and national sovereignty have been linked together in ways that bear little relation to Hodler's original intentions. To underscore the topicality and complexity of this widely revered Swiss figure, a selection of contemporary artists enter into dialogue with Hodler through a mixture of existing works and others produced specially for this exhibition. Participating artists such as Caroline Bachmann (b. 1963) and Andriu Deplazes (b. 1993) became familiar with Hodler's oeuvre through growing up in Switzerland. Others, such as Asim Abdulaziz (b. 1996) and Dani Gal (b. 1976) are discovering him for the first time. This is the first large-scale exhibition to move away from an appreciation of Hodler focused rigorously on formal aesthetics and historical narratives that paint him as a national figure. This project places him in a creative dialogue with modern-day practitioners, and questions and expands his hitherto pristine status.

SCANDALOUS ARTIST AND NATIONAL ICON: FORGOTTEN AND REDISCOVERED

The reception of Hodler's work has ebbed and flowed. His 'scandalous' participation in the Secession exhibitions in Berlin and Vienna around 1900 marked him out as one of the most progressive artists of his time. Yet Hodler's success was hard-earned, given his upbringing in a family with little money and time for education. That background, and his early preference for subjects drawn

from the lives of craftspeople and workers, initially drew the approval of socialists such as Hans Mühlestein (1887–1969). When he died in 1918, Hodler was honoured as a great Swiss artist, yet his reputation faded after the Second World War. It was not until the 1980s that he came to be appreciated again in Switzerland. Although recognized by art historians as an innovator, Hodler has come to be seen by the public at large as symbolizing traditional values. For the Kunsthaus, that altering reception is an opportunity to present Ferdinand Hodler alongside and in conjunction with international contemporary artists. The exhibition concept was developed by Kunsthaus curators Sandra Gianfreda and Cathérine Hug as part of a collective, which also chose the 30 invited artists. This collective included artists Sabian Baumann (b. 1962), Ishita Chakraborty (b. 1989) and RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co; since 1983). They reacted to a list of Hodler paintings which was also drawn up collectively. The exhibition was designed in close collaboration with the artist Nicolas Party (b. 1980).

LANDSCAPES, CORPOREALITIES, BELONGING, ENIGMA/TRANSCENDENCE

Entitled 'Apropos Hodler – Current perspectives on an icon', this exhibition is the first to locate Hodler in the context of current discourses, bringing four themes of his work into the present day: landscapes; corporealities; belonging; and enigma/transcendence. Where did Hodler stand, and how do artists today position themselves in relation to these discourses? The topics covered include climate change, stewardship of resources, and the representation of human beings and their bodies against the backdrop of fluid identities. The presentation asks questions such as 'what role do the need for belonging and an awareness of origin play in a globalized world?'

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS AND NEW PRODUCTIONS

The Kunsthaus Zürich, which is home to the largest public collection of Hodler's works next to the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, is looking beyond its own holdings for this exhibition, and has secured the loan of key exhibits from other public and private collections in Switzerland. Some 60 pieces by Hodler are joined by the works of 30 contemporary artists from different cultural regions: Asim Abdulaziz, Laura Aguilar, Caroline Bachmann, Sabian Baumann, Denise Bertschi, Ishita Chakraborty, Andriu Deplazes, Latifa Echakhch, Eva Egermann & Cordula Thym, Marianne Flotron, Dani Gal, María Elena González, Hemauer/Keller, David Hockney, Sasha Huber, Roland Iselin, František Klossner, Nils Amadeus Lange, Izidora I LETHE, Urs Lüthi, André M'Bon, Uriel Orlow, Nicolas Party, RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co), Ugo Rondinone, Susan Schuppli, Selma Selman, Milva Stutz and Latefa Wiersch. Along with spectacular new productions by Nils Amadeus Lange, Izidora I LETHE, Nicolas Party and RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co).

Supported by UBS, Partner Kunsthaus Zürich, the Ernst Göhner Foundation and Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication in German and English containing essays, interviews and poems by art historians, writers and artists: Sabian Baumann & Olga Stefan, Diana Blome & Niklaus Manuel Güdel, Monika Brunner, Ishita Chakraborty, Kim de l'Horizon, Matthias Frehner, Sandra Gianfreda & Cathérine Hug, Siri Hustvedt, Mariam Kühsel-Hussaini, Rachel M'Bon and RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co). It is published by Wienand Verlag, Cologne and is available from the Kunsthaus shop, price CHF 49 and bookstores, price CHF 59.90.

EVENTS/EDUCATION

9 March, 2 p.m.: On glaciers: art and science in dialogue. Extended artist talk with Uriel Orlow (artist), Monika Brunner (art historian at SIK-ISEA, Zurich) and Samuel Nussbauer (researcher at the World Glacier Monitoring Service, Zurich), moderated by Marguerite Meyer (journalist); a cooperation as part of the nationwide 'Watching the Glacier Disappear' exhibition 2024, www.artforglaciers.ch.

25 May, 5 p.m. 'ἡ ἄλυστα ὁρᾷ'. Performance by Nils Amadeus Lange in the exhibition

8 June, 4 p.m.–4.30 p.m.: 'Yellow, or What Nature Implies'. Performance by Latefa Wiersch in the exhibition; 5 p.m.–7 p.m.: 'APROPOSITIONS ()'. Performance by Izidora I LETHE in the Chipperfield building and Moser building, both performances as part of 'Apropos Hodler' and Zurich Art Weekend

There will be four Sunday matinées at the Arthouse Piccadilly cinema, accompanied by a short discussion (dates and guests still to be finalized). The following films will be screened: 'L'enfant d'en haut – Sister' (2012) by Ursula Meier; 'Heimatland' (2015) by a collective of film-makers including Jan Gassmann; 'Angst essen Seele auf' (1974) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder together with 'Ali im Paradies – My name is not Ali' (2011) by Viola Shafik; 'On Body and Soul' (2017) by Ildikó Enyedi.

Guided tours in German take place on Sundays at 11 a.m. There are additional tours on Thursdays at 6.30 p.m. during March, April and June, and on Fridays at 3 p.m. in May. English: Sun 14 April, 11 a.m., French: Sun 19 May, 11 a.m.

An audioguide in four languages (German, French, English, Italian) is available for individual visitors, along with a dedicated audioguide and colouring sheet (free of charge) for children.

KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

GENERAL INFORMATION

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For admission prices, opening hours and events see www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/besuch-planen/ and www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/besuch-planen/agenda/.

Tickets can be obtained from the cash desk or in advance at www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Tickets purchased online (price CHF 24 / concessions CHF 17, admission free for children under the age of 14) include an audioguide.

Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, info@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com.

CONTACT FOR EDITORS

Illustrations are available for download at www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich.

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