

THE NEW KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH CURATORIAL CONCEPT

DISPLAYING THE COLLECTION IN THE ENLARGED KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

The opening of the extension by David Chipperfield marks the start of a new era for the collection of the Kunsthaus Zürich. The nuanced layout of the Moser building from 1910/1925 and the spacious 1976 Müller building are now complemented by the timeless enfilades of the Chipperfield building, which open up entirely new possibilities.

The concept for the new collection presentation is based on preparatory discussions involving Director Christoph Becker and the whole curatorial team. The details were worked out in consultation with the Director by collection curator Philippe Büttner, together with the head of the Department of Prints and Drawings and curator Mirjam Varadinis, who is responsible for many areas of post-1960 art, notably the most recent and contemporary production.

The Kunsthaus Collection brings together high-quality ensembles representing the most important eras in art, from the late Middle Ages to the present day; in some areas, they include groups of global importance. Since the Moser building opened in 1910, the collection has thrived on being displayed constantly together with important holdings that have been deposited with the Kunsthaus either permanently or at least on long-term loan. In addition to items from private collections, they include works from the collections of the Kunstfreunde Zürich (VZK), the City and Canton of Zurich, the Alberto Giacometti Foundation and the Betty and David M. Koetser Foundation. This broad spectrum of ownership has always been a characteristic feature of the exhibition galleries at the Kunsthaus – as has the constantly reinvented entity fashioned from them.

A new model: private collections presented separately

This model will change markedly, however, when the enlarged Kunsthaus opens. The reason is the integration of four major private collections, a process which concludes with the inauguration of the new building. They are the Knecht Collection, comprising some 45 works of 17th-century Dutch and Flemish painting; the Emil Bührle Collection of around 170 Impressionists, early modernist works and Old Masters; the Merzbacher Collection, with approximately 75 works of mainly Expressionism and Fauvism; and the Looser Collection, containing around 70 works of Abstract Expressionism, Minimal Art and Arte Povera.

The integration of these collections is both the continuation of a tradition at the Kunsthaus and a unique enhancement to it. At the same time, it permanently changes the structure of the holdings on display: for the opening presentation, the collections are not being shown with matching holdings from the Kunsthaus, but rather in separate rooms specifically assigned to them.

When the extension opens, then, the activities of private collectors will receive greater prominence than ever before at the Kunsthaus. Private collecting will be emphasized as an activity clearly distinct from the acquisition policy of a museum. The essence and particular characteristics of these two different forms of collecting will thus be displayed in all their contrasts, enabling them to be studied adjacent to each other under museum conditions.

The ideas behind the presentation: clusters, storytelling, intervention spaces

The decades of experience working with the Moser and Müller buildings played a key role when deciding how to display the Kunsthaus Collection in the new complex. The constant need to accommodate the significant differences between the sections dating from 1910/1925 and 1976 had encouraged the development of strategies that could handle those stark distinctions. In particular, it meant that any attempt to arrange the holdings in chronological order throughout would not work as an underlying structure. That circumstance is accentuated

still further by the arrival of the Chipperfield building. While the new construction ideally complements the buildings on Heimplatz, unlike the existing structures between which visitors can circulate freely, the Chipperfield building is connected to them only via a passage and public spaces. As a result, there are now two distinct breaks in continuity to deal with when deciding how to organize the exhibits.

It therefore seemed expedient to keep the chronology of artistic development in mind but, as far as possible, to display the individual holdings where they work best, and where they are supported by the architectural context. Groups of works were identified that constitute entities in their own right – ‘clusters’, as we refer to them – and these were allocated to the rooms best suited to them. In this concept, the individual clusters (acting as narrative units in a kind of ‘storytelling’) function autonomously; they can – but need not – adjoin other clusters that are thematically or stylistically related to them. This sets up contrasts between individual clusters and encounters between divergent contexts that encourage new ways of seeing. That is the basis of the new overall presentation. This approach is especially evident in the ‘intervention spaces’: defined rooms in the existing buildings and the extension that, unlike those containing settled and enduring ensembles from the collection, regularly play host to new exhibits. They are designed as abrupt departures from the content of the adjoining rooms that will invigorate the classic, canonical holdings with art that is new, very often female and not infrequently controversial.

More weight for contemporary art

Overall, the enlarged Kunsthaus will give considerably greater weight to contemporary art, and in particular the work of women artists. Visitors will also note how the Kunsthaus’s collecting activities have expanded over recent years to encompass non-European art and issues such as colonialism and gender.

With art from the Middle Ages to the present day, works both canonical and non-canonical, numerous exhibits by male artists and – at last – many more by female artists, the enlarged Kunsthaus will cover a vast spectrum.

With its holdings grouped into clusters, the new setting will form a living matrix of contrasts and paint a multi-layered picture of the capabilities of art. Highlighting the contrasts between the activities of museums and the passion of private collectors, it also explicitly tackles the topic of art collecting in general, and the background to it. The Kunsthaus is thus linked to historical processes and constellations that call for in-depth engagement, in the best sense of the term. The enlarged Kunsthaus, with its multifaceted collection, offers time and space for that, too.

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PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

The Emil Bührle Collection

Some 70 years after its creation, the collection that Emil Bührle mostly put together while living in Zurich after the Second World War is still regarded as one of the most important art collections of the 20th century. At its heart are French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. It also includes works by the Nabis, Fauves, Cubists and other figures from the French post-1900 avant-garde. Earlier art is represented by the remarkable Dutch 17th century, Venetian masters and a group of Gothic wood sculptures. The Emil Bührle Collection contains world-famous paintings such as Vincent van Gogh's 'The Sower', 'Little Irene' by Auguste Renoir, 'Poppy Field near Vétheuil' by Claude Monet, 'The Boy in the Red Waistcoat' by Paul Cézanne and a 'Reclining Nude' by Modigliani. The artists represented include Canaletto, Ingres, Delacroix, Manet, Degas, Gauguin, Signac, Vlaminck, Braque and Picasso. The presentation of some 170 paintings and sculptures, in rooms designed to reflect their character, underscores the continuity of eras even as artists explore their incipient freedom in early Classical Modernism. The 203 works are on loan under a long-term agreement which can only be cancelled after giving a number of years' notice, and not before the end of 2034.

The Werner and Gabriele Merzbacher Collection

Werner Merzbacher shares his passion for art with the public at large, with a cooperation comprising some 75 works and planned to last at least 20 years. The Kunsthau Zürich was permitted to select paintings and sculptures from a total of almost 200 to complement its own, similarly important collection. The artists represented include leading figures from some of the key 20th-century European art movements: Impressionism (Monet, Sisley, Renoir), Picasso's 'Blue Period', the Fauves (Derain, Matisse, Vlaminck, Braque), the 'Brücke' artists Heckel and Kirchner, Germans persecuted in the Third Reich such as Beckmann, the 'Blauer Reiter' artists Jawlensky, Kandinsky, Klee, Marc and Münter, Italian Futurists (Severini, Boccioni), Russian Constructivists (Malevich, Goncharova and others), the Cubist Léger and the Surrealist Miró. More recent practitioners from the 1950s to the 1990s include Sam Francis as well as Calder, Tinguely and Bridget Riley. The starting point of the collection is the exclusive group of exceptional works that Gabrielle Merzbacher-Mayer inherited from her grandparents Bernhard and Auguste Mayer and that, since the 1960s, has been progressively enriched through joint acquisitions of great art. Werner Merzbacher picks out works that touch him because, as he says, they resemble his own character. The selection that will be coming to the Kunsthau therefore tells a dual story, of both art and a family.

The Hubert Looser Collection

The 70 works chosen from the Looser Collection are an outstanding addition to the Kunsthau Zürich. Of the three fundamental elements making up the long-term loan – Abstract Expressionism, Minimal Art and Arte Povera – the initial presentation focuses on the first two. Five exceptional works by the American artist Cy Twombly complement the important group already at the Kunsthau. The Kunsthau's existing holdings of Abstract Expressionism by Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Jackson Pollock are juxtaposed with the works of David Smith, John Chamberlain and, in particular, Willem de Kooning, with an outstanding ensemble of five paintings by the latter (including a triptych from 1985) and two bronze sculptures, one of which is the masterpiece 'Hostess' from 1973. For the first time, the Kunsthau is able to display a representative wall-

mounted sculpture by Donald Judd. Ellsworth Kelly, whose graceful 'White Curve' transforms the large hall of the extension, has never before been so well represented at the Kunsthhaus. Two pictures by Agnes Martin alongside a large painting by Sean Scully bring this important female abstract artist to the Kunsthhaus for the first time. A pair of exceptional small-format paintings by Robert Ryman complement those already at the Kunsthhaus. A magical work by Pablo Picasso and another by Yves Klein, sculptures by Lucio Fontana and a characteristic piece by the French painter Fabienne Verdier, whom Hubert Looser has supported for many years, round off the first ensemble from the Fondation Hubert Looser to go on display. It is the collector's hope that the long-term loan will enhance Zurich's status as a centre for art and, through temporary presentations, keep the dialogue between private collectors, public institutions, art and its audience very much alive.

The Ferdinand and Karin Knecht Collection

Under an agreement with the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, collectors Ferdinand and Karin Knecht from Zurich have loaned 45, mostly small-format cabinet pieces by Jan Brueghel the Elder, Hendrick Avercamp, Adriaen Coorte, Jan van Goyen, Aert van der Neer, David Teniers and many others to the Kunsthhaus for more than 20 years. This long-term arrangement enhances the Kunsthhaus's already exceptional holdings of Dutch and Flemish painting from the prestigious Koetser and Ruzicka foundations. The compositions – cheerful genre scenes, magnificent still lifes and masterfully composed landscapes – are of exquisite quality and remarkable in their wealth of detail, conveying the magic of an era in which Dutch art broke new ground. Thanks to the Knecht Collection, the 17th century in the Netherlands – a major epoch in European art history – will be a highlight of the Kunsthhaus Collection for decades to come.

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THE CHIPPERFIELD BUILDING: KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

Owner

Stiftung Zürcher Kunsthaus (SZK)

Operator/user

Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft (ZKG)

Key dates

Architecture competition	2008
Popular vote	25 November 2012
Start of construction	August 2015
Construction completed	December 2020
Opening	October 2021

Construction costs

Costs including reserves	CHF 206 million
of which from the City of Zurich	CHF 88 million
of which from the ZKG	CHF 88 million
of which from the Canton of Zurich	CHF 30 million from the lottery fund + plot of land with building rights

Dimensions

Length x width x height	60 m x 60 m x 21m (south side, Heimplatz / 17 m on north side)
Net floor space	18,700 m ²
Space for art	5,040 m ² , including French art and Impressionism 550 m ²
Foundation E.G. Bührle Collection	960 m ²
Classical Modernism	1,070 m ²
Contemporary art since 1960	900 m ²
Temporary exhibitions	710 m ²
Public areas	2,980 m ² , of which art education 330 m ²
Ballroom incl. catering	800 m ²
Visitor services / hall	1,610 m ²
Bar	120 m ²
Shop	120 m ²

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KEY FIGURES – OPERATIONS*

Budget	2019	2022	Increase in %
Annual budget in CHF	20 million	25.1 million	25

Admissions	Average 2014–2020	2022	Increase in %
Visitors	286,527	375,000	31

Staff	2020	2022	Increase in %
in full-time equivalents	106	136	28
of which attendants	25	52	108

Income in CHF	Average 2014–2020 in millions	2022 in millions	Increase in %
Ticket sales	3.1	4.1	32
Shop	1.4	1.7	21
Sponsorship	2	2.2	10
Rentals	0.3	0.7	133
Contributions from City of Zurich	8.4	12.8	52
Membership fees	1.9	2.1	10

Surface area (existing buildings + extension)	2020	2021	Increase in %
Public areas, of which art education	2,500 m ² 120 m ²	5,480 m ² 370 m ²	119 208
Space for art	6,480 m ²	11,520 m ²	78
Technical facilities, art storage, work areas	11,050 m ²	21,740 m ²	97
Total	20,030 m ²	38,740 m ²	93

Collection	2020	2021	Increase in %
Works on display (paintings and sculptures, excluding private collections)	Approx. 400 (10% of holdings)	Approx. 700 (17.5% of holdings)	75

* rounded, expected for 2022

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