

Media Release

Ferdinand Hodler – Alberto Giacometti. An Encounter

April 21st – August 19th 2018, Kunst Museum Winterthur | Beim Stadthaus

For the first time ever, the Kunst Museum Winterthur unites the two great Swiss artists of the 20th century, Ferdinand Hodler and Alberto Giacometti, in a single exhibition. The painter of turn-of-the-century symbolism meets the artist of post-war existentialism. The exhibition resolutely breaks new ground by no longer simply contextualising Hodler as a national painter on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of his death, but by contrasting him with Giacometti in order to advance new intellectual and aesthetic approaches.

Media Information on the Exhibition

Thursday, April 19th 2018, 11 a.m. or individual guided tour by appointment

Kunst Museum Winterthur | Beim Stadthaus, Museumstrasse 52, 8400 Winterthur

Hodler and Giacometti

2018 marks the 100th anniversary of Ferdinand Hodler's death. A reason to pay tribute to the oeuvre of this great Swiss painter of the turn of the century and present it to a broad public with a radically different view. Accordingly, we are resolutely breaking new ground by no longer looking at Hodler in the context of his time, but rather in a dialogue with a second and equally outstanding artist. This advances unconventional intellectual approaches and allows us to study the artist's oeuvre as to its dimension in terms of content and relevance for future generations, including us. In a surprising exchange with Alberto Giacometti, the existential quality of his work is clearly perceivable. Fundamental questions about humanity, which make his work surpass the cultural phenomena of his era, come to the fore. It is precisely this intense preoccupation with man, one's own ego, as well as dying and death that are as relevant as ever for today's generations. The same applies to Alberto Giacometti, whose work has also been studied and researched under various aspects in recent years. In his encounters with Ferdinand Hodler, whose work he was well acquainted with, traditional lines emerge, from which Giacometti developed his genuine imagery that exemplifies the attitude towards life of the post-war period. Surprising analogies can be found in the permanent questioning of human existence. There are also parallels at a formal level. So far, these have been more or less ignored; this concerns for example the compositional schemes and the gradual form-finding process in his graphic work, which intensively revolves around and explores individual subjects. While Hodler's depiction of the impressive Alpine landscape has long since entered into Helvetic pictorial memory, Giacometti's figures exemplify the existentialism of the post-war era. Thus, the exhibition presents two icons of modernity, whose timeless pictorial inventions have significantly contributed to twentieth-century art. The dialogue between Ferdinand Hodler and Alberto Giacometti opens up unfamiliar perspectives on their work and promises to date unknown insights into the oeuvre of the two great Swiss artists.

The Exhibition

Ferdinand Hodler – Alberto Giacometti. An Encounter brings together more than seventy exhibits, including major works and particular ones that have never been seen in public before. In the extension of the Kunst Museum Winterthur | Beim Stadthaus, they are presented as part of a thematic structure that engages selected motifs of the artists in direct dialogue with each other.

The Figure

Individual, upright figures play a central role in Hodler's as well as Giacometti's oeuvres. While the latter places them as almost solidified, thin figurines on a base that merges with their feet, the former inserts them as monumental figures into a scarcely outlined part of the landscape. In the first dialogue pair, the filigree and, at the same time, static form of Giacometti's *Femme de Venise VIII* [Woman of Venice VIII] (1956), with her rigid arms held close to the body, meets the striking gesture of Hodler's pithy orator swearing an oath *Redner (Studie zur Einmütigkeit)* [The Orator – figure study for Unanimity] of 1913 and the

sweeping arm movements of *Lied aus der Ferne* [Song from Afar] of 1908 and *Linienherrlichkeit* [Linear Glory], also from 1908. So while in Hodler's paintings, man communicates with the world or cosmos, in Giacometti's case, the depicted man seems isolated, marked as it were by his own existence. Ultimately, Hodler and Giacometti find their own, unmistakable monumentality in their work via the grand gesture or formal reduction, respectively.

The Groups

At the level of form, repetition and rhythm represent the central themes of Hodler's figure groupings, as is the case in Giacometti's works. Giacometti's *Quatre figurines sur base* (1950) is the prelude to Hodler's symbolic ensembles of figures, represented in major works such as *Die Wahrheit* [Truth] (1902) and *Blick ins Unendliche* [View into Infinity] (1913–1916). In the sense of his finely balanced parallelism, five women's figures subdivide the pictorial space, i.e. the implied world stage, as a subtle movement from left to right. At the same time, Giacometti's group of figures, firmly fixed to its dominating pedestal, occupies the space in a comparatively static manner and rests in itself. This rigidity is challenged by *La clairière (Place 9 figures)* [The Glade] of 1950 with a decided shift in size and the free placing of the figures within the space. Their isolation bears witness to the dissonance of a world in which all order seems to have collapsed, while Hodler's gently rhythmicized ensemble of figures evokes a harmony that the art of the *fin-de-siècle* still sought to uphold – though not without a penchant for melancholy. Finally, grouping the figures served Giacometti, just as much as Hodler, to reinforce their artistic statement, as a reference to mankind.

Ego – Alter Ego

More than forty self-portraits in oil on canvas accompany Hodler's artistic career from the age of 19 until his death. Only a very few painters have carried out such an intensive self-interrogation and, in ever newer variations of the self, captured the search for their own identity or their permanent acknowledgement as an artist in such impressive portraits. Of Giacometti, in comparison, there are relatively few self-portraits. The exception is his early work, in which the young artist repeatedly placed himself in the picture. This questioning of himself gives way to a preoccupation with the people closest to him in his mature work: his mother and, above all, his brother Diego. As an *alter ego*, the latter ultimately served to reflect his own existence.

Love and Suffering

The pictures and drawings of Valentine Godé-Darel during her illness and her slow dying belong among the most touching series of works in Hodler's entire oeuvre. At the same time, they can hardly be surpassed in their ruthless and sober depiction of suffering and physical disintegration. Increasingly, the body of his beloved collapses on her deathbed, until it finally rests on the deathbed as narrow, parallel fields of colour. Here, Hodler's existential dimension can quite clearly be felt. Alberto Giacometti's haunting portrait of his mother, whose emaciated head and body seem to disappear into the grey pictorial space, responds to this intense series.

Mountain Worlds

Alberto Giacometti grew up in the Bergell, in the midst of an Alpine mountain landscape. Therefore, it is astonishing that despite regular visits to Stampa and his own local studio, the exemplary picture motifs of Switzerland hardly play a role in his mature work. However, he addressed the mountain world in his early work in his father's style, drawing on Ferdinand Hodler's painting model, his brother Bruno's godfather. In his mature work, Hodler turned to monumental compositions. With them, he overcame the topographical accuracy of the mountainscape in favour of an almost tectonic style of painting marked by bright colours and a powerful brushstroke that structures the surface of the painting. In contrast, Giacometti's few late mountain landscapes with their subdued greys rather seem to sketch and describe the native mountain massifs than to spectacularly stage them. To Giacometti, the Bergell remained a place of retreat from his glamorous artist's existence in the metropolis of Paris.

Drawing as Form Finding

Alberto Giacometti sketched on all conceivable media. He captured the world with a dashing stroke and verve, circling around his classic themes, hinting at figures, interiors, and landscape details. Certain motifs appear repeatedly, such as his mother. With a powerful gesture, the artist approaches her face, almost literally circling around it, in order to penetrate, as it were, the human face. At the same time, in other works, he embeds them in the room as if part of a network, for example when the mother reads at the table. Ferdinand Hodler uses drawing to search for forms and clarify them, for instance in endless series of sketches and drawings for his monumental compositions, including *Blick ins Unendliche* [View to Infinity]. On countless sheets you can, so-to-say, watch the painter think. In the quick preparational sketches for his multi-figured allegorical representations, which he positions and rhythmically rearranges again and again, his ceaseless search for the final form becomes visible. This lengthy process of work is comparable to Giacometti's finding of form.

The New Kunst Museum Winterthur

The new Kunst Museum Winterthur, which was created by merging the former Kunstmuseum Winterthur and Museum Oskar Reinhart, is fortunate in that it owns important groups of works by Hodler and Giacometti. As a result of this institutional mergence, works from formerly seperate collections are brought together, now composing comprehensive groups of works, such as the newly arranged and outstanding group of Hodler's paintings. Along with numerous important loans from museums and private collections, including works that are rarely shown to the public, this unique encounter creates an event of exceptional quality.

The exhibition is also of politico-cultural significance for the city of Winterthur. The two institutions, the Kunstmuseum and Museum Oskar Reinhart with their first-rate collections, which had operated independently of each other for decades, will have to be repositioned as a joint institution. In this sense, the exhibition *Ferdinand Hodler – Alberto Giacometti. Eine Begegnung* is also to be understood as a visible sign of unification and as the new programmatic beginnings of the museum scenery in Winterthur.

Opening

Friday, April 20th 2018, from 6 p.m.

Kunst Museum Winterthur | Beim Stadthaus, Museumstrasse 52, 8400 Winterthur

You can find the entire supporting programme at kmw.ch/events.

Graphical material and information on the exhibition

Available from kmw.ch/presse or upon request

Catalogue

Hirmer-Verlag, Munich, publishes a richly illustrated scientific catalogue about the exhibition, with contributions by Konrad Bitterli, Matthias Fischer, Phillip Büttner, and David Schmidhauser.

Approx. 150 pages, approx. 80 illustrations in colour, 19 x 28 cm, CHF 30.00

Contact

Press Office

Martina Kratzer / Melanie Staub
kommunikation@kmw.ch
0041 (0)52 267 51 77

Director and Curator

Konrad Bitterli
konrad.bitterli@kmw.ch
0041 (0)52 267 51 71

Curator

David Schmidhauser
david.schmidhauser@kmw.ch
0041 (0)52 267 65 94