

SCHINKEL PAVILLON e.V. AUSSTELLUNGSRAUM FÜR ZEITGENÖSSISCHE SKULPTUR

Schinkel Pavillon e.V.
OberwallstraÙ 32
10117 Berlin

Press Release

Berlin, 12.09.2023

The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time. Artistic Testimonies of War and Repression

A Cooperation between the Brücke-Museum and the Schinkel Pavillon

Duration: 1 September 2023 – 7 January 2024

Venues: Brücke-Museum, Bussardsteig 9, 14195 Berlin / Schinkel Pavillon, Oberwallstrasse 32, 10117 Berlin

Press Preview: Brücke-Museum, September 13, 2023, 11 am–3 pm / Schinkel Pavillon, by individual arrangement with Hans Krestel per email: hans@heyhans.xyz

Opening: Brücke-Museum, 13 September 2023, 5–8 pm / Schinkel Pavillon, 13 September 2023, 7–10 pm

The exhibition *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time. Artistic Testimonies of War and Repression* presents works of art from classical modernism and the present that address state violence and oppression. The focus is on the aspect of testimony as a recurring theme that transcends time. Against the backdrop of the war unleashed by Russia in Ukraine, the exhibition understands the past as a continuum and the present.

The project is a cooperation between the Brücke-Museum and the Schinkel Pavillon. Some eighty-five works by twenty-five international artists are on display. Works from the 1930s and 1940s by Käthe Kollwitz, Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, and Johanna Schütz-Wolff enter into a dialogue with contemporary positions such as Simone Fattal, Nora Turato, and Lawrence Abu Hamdan. On view are paintings, drawings, prints, watercolors, and sculptures, as well as video works, installations, and a performance—including a total of seven new productions created especially for the exhibition.

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Mi. – So. 11 – 19 Uhr
und nach Vereinbarung

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Artists

Lawrence Abu Hamdan (b. 1985), Etel Adnan (1925–2021), Dora Bromberger (1881–1942), Leo Breuer (1893–1975), Isaac Chong Wai (b. 1990), Simone Fattal (b. 1942), Forensic Architecture (active since 2011), Parastou Forouhar (b. 1962), Lea Grundig (1906–1977), Erich Heckel (1883–1970), Hannah Höch (1889–1978), Eric Isenburger (1902–1994), Dana Kavelina (b. 1995), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler (1899–1940), Maria Luiko (1904–1941), Kateryna Lysovenko (b. 1989), Otto Mueller (1874–1930), Felix Nussbaum (1904–1944), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976), Johanna Schütz-Wolff (1896–1965), Sung Tieu (b. 1987), Nora Turato (b. 1991), Oscar Zügel (1892–1968)

Point of Departure

The point of departure for this collaborative exhibition project is the complexly interwoven history of these two seemingly disparate Berlin institutions: As a Kunstverein founded in 2007, the Schinkel Pavillon is dedicated to contemporary art, while the Brücke-Museum, established in 1967, collects, researches, and presents Expressionist art. Historically, however, the connections between the two institutions go back to the first half of the last century. The Schinkel Pavillon is located in the garden of the former Kronprinzenpalais on the boulevard Unter den Linden. From 1919 onwards, it housed the New Department of the Nationalgalerie, the world's first museum for contemporary art. Works by the Brücke artists were also collected and exhibited here early on—until 1937, when the National Socialists confiscated hundreds of mainly Expressionist works of art as “degenerate,” removed them from public collections, and even destroyed some of them. Some of the works by the defamed Brücke artists found their way via detours into the Brücke-Museum, which was founded thirty years later—including Karl Schmidt-Rottluff's painting *Römisches Stilleben* (Roman Still Life), which was prominently displayed in the Kronprinzenpalais in the early 1930s. During the exhibition *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*, the work will be on view in the Schinkel Pavillon, returning for the first time to the place where it was once celebrated as an outstanding work of modernism.

Questioning the Linearity of Time

The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time. Artistic Testimonies of War and Repression explores the role of works of art as testimonies of war and political oppression, while challenging the idea of a linear experience of time.

“The exhibition does not aim to construct a typology of testimonies by categorizing experiences. Rather, it serves as a non-linear space of exchange between modern and contemporary artists, between events and memory. These aspects converge at a certain

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point, breaking the linearity and consistency of time. The past becomes the present—and vice versa—in order to project the future.

(Katya Inozemtseva, curator of the exhibition)

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from an episodic film by Alexander Kluge from 1985, in which representatives of different generations are confronted in their present with the tragic events of the past—in this case, the Second World War. Similarly, the war of aggression against Ukraine unleashed by Russia in the heart of Europe gives historical art from the 1930s and 1940s an unexpected relevance. The artworks that bear witness to the horrors of the Nazi regime can now no longer be viewed primarily retrospectively or academically. In this respect, the curatorial concept of the exhibition is based on a fundamental questioning of the linearity of time.

Brücke-Museum: Works of Art as Documents—Documentation as a Work of Art

To what extent can a work of art function as a testimony and as a document of a catastrophe? Does the act of documenting itself have an artistic value? These questions are the focus of the exhibition at the Brücke-Museum.

Six paintings from the collection of the Brücke-Museum—by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, and Otto Mueller—are presented in this context. These works were confiscated from public collections by the National Socialists as part of the propaganda campaign against “degenerate art.” Extensive “biographical” information on the works allow visitors to trace the history and provenance of each painting.

In contrast to the Brücke artists, countless of their artistic contemporaries were violently persecuted—both professionally and personally—and even murdered by the Nazis. The exhibition focuses on several of these individuals, including Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler. The portraits by Lohse-Wächtler on display show the people who surrounded her during her forced stays in a psychiatric clinic. Like herself, many of her fellow patients fell victim to the Nazis’ state-organized, systematic mass murder of people with physical and mental impairments. The partially colored, finely lined, and often experimental studies depict people marked by helplessness, isolation, and silent despair. In addition, the artist painted floral still lifes that counter the horror of her situation with something comforting in the best sense of the word.

Thanks to generous loans from the Zentrum für verfolgte Künste (Center for Persecuted Arts) in Solingen, a number of other impressive modernist works can be seen in Berlin—including works by artists who were largely forgotten after the Second World War, such as the Expressionist painter Dora Bromberger, who was one of the best-known artists from Bremen in the 1920s. Several prints by Lea Grundig are also part of the presentation. In her cycle of etchings entitled Unterm Hakenkreuz (Under the Swastika), the Jewish artist recorded the horror of her everyday experiences during the Nazi dictatorship. In doing so, she addressed both the anti-Semitic pogroms and the omnipresent fear of the Gestapo, as well as mutual distrust, eavesdropping, and clandestine communication.

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The theme of the work of art as a document can also be experienced in the exhibition through contemporary artistic positions. In the case of the Chinese German artist Isaac Chong Wai, this is also done in confrontation with historical works of art. In his series *Breath Marks*, he refers to modern artists whose works bear witness to war and oppression. Using the media of photography and sculpture, Chong pays homage to Käthe Kollwitz, whose works are also on view in the exhibition at the Brücke-Museum.

With her installation entitled *Documentation*, Parastou Forouhar demonstrates that not only can works of art be understood as documents, but that the act of documenting can also be part of an artwork. For twenty-five years, the German Iranian artist has been collecting newspaper clippings, letters, and official documents related to the murder of her parents by the Iranian secret service. On the one hand, witnessing is a subjective interpretation; on the other hand, it can also be experienced objectively by visitors. They can use the artist's personal archive and draw their own conclusions: A photocopier is available for taking away and distributing the collected information.

Nora Turato is represented at the Brücke-Museum with the sound installation *sleep! it's good for you*, which was developed especially for the exhibition. The artist reflects auditorily on how language—for example, in the case of propaganda—can be abbreviated, distorted, and instrumentalized. With her own voice, she draws attention to the use of language and the resulting influences on postwar generations.

Schinkel Pavillon: The Metaphysics of Testimony

The exhibition in the Schinkel Pavillon focuses thematically on the metaphysics of testimony. One of the core themes connecting the artists in the Schinkel Pavillon is the reflection and experience of catastrophe as an extra-historical, universal event. This does not take place in real time and space, but rather in a kind of non-place and non-moment.

With the onset of persecution and war in the 1930s and 1940s, many modern artists radically changed their language, turning increasingly to the figurative, symbolic, and allegorical. Among them were Johanna Schütz-Wolf and Hannah Höch, both of whom are represented in the Schinkel Pavillon. Neither Johanna Schütz-Wolf's figures, which shine through the black backgrounds of her impressive tapestries as if from nowhere, nor Hannah Höch's allegorical landscapes are tied to real events. Rather, the exhibition concept conceives them as metaphysical statements that can hardly reconcile people with what has happened, but rather give suffering and loss a completely different value and status.

The contemporary Ukrainian artist Kateryna Lysovenko employs similar strategies when she creates fictional dreamscapes in which anthropomorphic images, animals, and plants act simultaneously. For *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*, she has created the site-specific installation *Wartezimmer* (Waiting Room), in which she gathers portraits of the artists Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler,

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Charlotte Salomon, Felix Nussbaum, and Vyacheslav Mashnitsky, depicting them at the age of seventy—an age they never reached, having previously fallen victim to totalitarian regimes.

Another new production is Sung Tieu's installation Subtext, part of the presentation at the Schinkel Pavillon: a fictional, wood-paneled living room with objects from the former German Democratic Republic, such as a telephone and a radio, and a wall full of original Stasi documents testifies to the surveillance and spying on Vietnamese workers by the GDR regime.

The works of Simone Fattal, on the other hand, such as the bright red pastel painting Vous avez fait un paysage moral exact, do not refer to specific structures, landscapes, or destroyed buildings. Rather, they coalesce into a general image of what war always leaves behind: wounded cities, nature, and people. This is also evident in her ceramic sculptures. Here, the firm embrace of a mother and her child, or the search for shelter under destroyed architecture, recall war scenarios also found in the works of Käthe Kollwitz and Lea Grundig.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion.

The accompanying program is supported by Berlin's State Agency for Civic Education.

Partner of the Berlin Art Week