

EN

07.04. – 21.08.2016

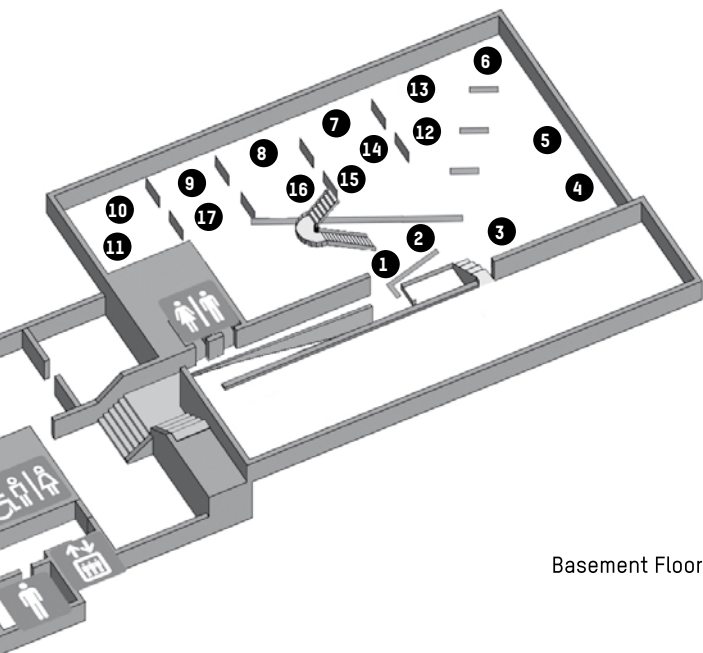
# MODERN MASTERS

**“Degenerate” Art at the  
Museum of Fine Arts Berne**

**KUNST  
MUSEUM  
BERN**

EXHIBITION GUIDE

# Floorplan



Basement Floor

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The Diversity of Modernism
- 3 The Kunstmuseum Bern as Art Buyer
- 4 Friends of the Kunstmuseum Bern Society
- 5 Bernese Art Society
- 6 The Georges F. Keller Bequest
- 7 The Hermann und Margrit Rupf-Foundation
- 8 The Nell Walden Gift
- 9 The Thannhauser Gifts
- 10 The Othmar Huber Foundation
- 11 The Anne-Marie and Victor Loeb Foundation
- 12 National Socialism and “Degenerate” Art
- 13 The *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art] Exhibition in Munich in 1937
- 14 “German” Art
- 15 “Intellectual National Defense” in Switzerland
- 16 The Sale of “Degenerate” Art in Switzerland
- 17 Four Ostracized Artists – Paul Klee · Ernst Ludwig Kirchner · Otto Dix · Johannes Itten

# Introduction

The Kunstmuseum Bern boasts a collection that includes outstanding works by Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Franz Marc, or Pablo Picasso. The museum only purchased a few of these artworks using its own funds. Numerous private collectors and institutions donated their works of art to the museum as endowments, bequests, gifts, or permanent loans. For the very first time, the Kunstmuseum Bern is mounting a special exhibition devoted to the accessions history of its collection. When and how did the pieces find their way to the museum?

We consecutively mount selections of our collection on the red walls of the exhibition level at the Kunstmuseum. The artworks are ordered according to the years in which it acquired them. Thus an order emerges that represents how our collection has grown and constitutes the basis for this exhibition: the so-called horizon of our collection.

Seven works of art in the collection hung in German museums until 1937. They were confiscated by the state authorities there and sold. In Germany, when the National Socialist German Workers' Party came to power in 1933, it resorted to a term derived from biology to discredit both artists and their art, slandering both as "degenerate." In Switzerland, too, some of the population rejected modern art as "degenerate." But there were also a number of avid modern-art enthusiasts who collected it too. Museums mount works of art for the public so it can be shared by everyone. The Nazis sought to crush

public interest in the German Reich for art that did not suit Nazi ideology. The seven pieces stemming from German museums were sold in Switzerland along with many others. An auction played an important role in this. It took place in 1939 at Fischer Gallery in Lucerne and was called *Gemälde und Plastiken Moderner Meister aus deutschen Museen* [Paintings and Sculptures of Modern Masters from German Museums]. Our exhibition takes its title from this auction. What had officially become worthless in Germany as “degenerate” was appreciated and purchased in Switzerland as art by modern masters.

We are focusing on this period due to the fact that the Nazis restricted the autonomy and diversity of modern art so radically, and this had repercussions for Switzerland as well. We are showing exclusively works by artists who were considered as “degenerate” in Germany. What is more, artworks of this category made their way to the Kunstmuseum from 1933 onwards and were executed prior to 1945. We only have the privilege of mounting these works by the modern masters because Switzerland was and remained a free, democratic nation—as it still is. Beyond its borders, democracies were all but eliminated in Europe in the first half of the 20th century. Only democracies protect liberty and diversity. It is for this reason that, in the exhibition, we are exploring subject matter such as: “What was ‘degenerate’ art supposed to be?” Or “in what way did Switzerland’s cultural policy respond to the threat posed by Germany?” And, not least, “how and why was art from German museums sold in Switzerland?”

## The Diversity of Modernism

Modernist art is not restricted to a single style. Rather, art of the modernist era is characterized by its diversity. In pre-modernist times, art was defined by rules that prescribed the subject matter and composition of the various genres: landscapes, portraits, images of saints, history paintings, or still lifes. But even then, artists continually let rein to poetic license. In the 19th century, however, “the rules of art” lost their binding force. Instead, artistic autonomy became a defining characteristic of modernism.

Max Huggler was director of the Kunsthalle from 1931 until 1946 and, furthermore, of the Kunstmuseum Bern from 1944 forward. Privately he collected art as well. In 1966 he donated his collection to the Kunstmuseum Bern. The artworks in the exhibition impart an impression of the diversity of modernist art. A work by Pablo Picasso portrays the human body in a very different way to a painting by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Paul Klee’s use of geometric forms was very unlike Piet Mondrian’s.

The diversity intrinsic to modernist art irritated many people. The Nazis were among the groups that were particularly aggressive in their fight to annihilate the diversity and autonomy of art. In 1933, National Socialism was instituted as the state doctrine in Germany. There was only to be one kind of art, which had to conform to the dogma of National Socialism. It was to be no longer possible to create works of art such as those collected by Max Huggler.

## The Kunstmuseum Bern as Art Buyer

In 1849, when the former Dominican Church (today known as the French Church) housed the Kunstmuseum Bern, it was the first museum in Switzerland with its own collection. The collection was made up of Bern's national trove of paintings and the collection of the Bernische Kunstgesellschaft BKG. This art society still purchases artworks for the Kunstmuseum Bern today. In 1879 the Kunstmuseum Bern was able to move into its own building, constructed especially for the museum. It was designed by the architect Eugen Stettler. The first record of the Kunstmuseum Bern as a buyer of art is from 1892: under the direction of Edouard Davinet, who called himself "inspector," the Kunstmuseum Bern purchased Arnold Böcklin's painting *Meeresstille* [Calm Sea] from 1886. The painting is not on show in our exhibition as none of Böcklin's paintings were confiscated from German museums.

The directors of the Kunstmuseum Bern had various titles. Initially they were called inspectors, keepers, or chief curators, and, since the 1940s, directors.

1849 – 1880	Christian Bühler (1825 – 1898), Inspector, keeper, or chief curator
1880 – 1890	Emil Luz (1824 – 1890), Inspector
1890 – 1919	Edouard Davinet (1839 – 1922), Inspector
1920 – 1943	Conrad von Mandach (1870 – 1951), Chief curator
1944 – 1965	Max Hugger (1903 – 1996), Chief curator, director
1965 – 1980	Hugo Wagner, Chief curator, director

1981 – 1995	Hans-Christoph von Tavel (*1935), Director
1996 – 2001	Toni Stooss (*1946), Director
2001 – 2002	Felix Baumann, Director ad interim
2002 – 2016	Matthias Frehner (*1955), Director

The Kunstmuseum's direction during the acquisition period from 1933—the period of interest in the exhibition—begins with Conrad von Mandach. However, the executive board, which makes decisions about acquisitions, consists of several people who represent various institutions: from the city and Canton of Bern, the Burgergemeinde Bern, the BKG, artists' associations, and others. All of them played their part in the foundation of the Kunstmuseum Bern and they are still represented today in the board of trustees. Also the later director Max Huggler, as director of the Kunsthalle Bern, was a member of the executive board. In 1933, the board decided to purchase for the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern one of the largest paintings ever executed by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner from an exhibition of his work at the Kunsthalle Bern: *Alpsonntag. Szene am Brunnen* [Alpine Sunday: Fountain Scene] from 1923–25. The artist additionally gave the museum works on paper as a gift.

Only works of art that the Kunstmuseum Bern purchased, or that were bequeathed or donated to it, are also the property of the museum. The works of art belonging to foundations and other institutions remain the property of the same and have been entrusted to the Kunstmuseum Bern as loans.



## Friends of the Kunstmuseum Bern Society

The Bernisch-kantonale Kunstverein, to whom we owe the Kunstmuseum building, was dissolved at the close of 1919 after 66 years, and, half a year later on July 1, 1920, the Verein der Freunde Kunstmuseum Bern was founded. While the museum curator at the time, Conrad von Mandach, was present, Rudolf von Tavel was elected the first president of the new art society. According to the statutes of the society, its goal was “to promote and sponsor the Kunstmuseum Bern and foster interest in strengthening its growth and success.” To implement its objectives, since its foundation the society also purchased works of art, “which it entrusted to the Kunstmuseum Bern for safe-keeping and for exhibition,” but which remained the property of the society. For example, already in its very first year, the society purchased Giovanni Giacometti’s *Erwachen* (Awakening) from an exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern. In our exhibition two exceptional works of art represent the holdings of the Verein der Freunde: in 1935 it purchased Paul Klee’s *Ad Parnassum*, in 1966 Oskar Schlemmer’s drawing *Reihung* [Sequence]. Both cases present a veritable stroke of luck for the Kunstmuseum Bern. *Ad Parnassum* is one of Paul Klee’s most important late works and, today, one of his most famous pieces. As Hugo Wagner wrote, who was later to become chief curator, that the Verein der Freunde “had, from an abundance of options, selected the painting with astounding astuteness.” Schlemmer’s *Reihung* (the drawing can be viewed among the works that were acquired in 1966) is the only work by this artist at the Kunstmuseum Bern.

The Verein der Freunde has been purchasing works of art right through to the present. These pieces greatly enhance the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern as they supplement the museum's purchasing activities. The Verein's key focus today is on contemporary art. Additionally, the Kunstmuseum Bern enjoys backing from the Verein der Freunde through their participation in committees and the widespread support among the public in general .

## Bernese Art Society

The Bernische Kunstgesellschaft (BKG) is the fourth-oldest art society in the German-speaking world. It played a pivotal role in the foundation of the Kunstmuseum Bern. The Bernische Kunstgesellschaft was called the Bernische Künstlergesellschaft [Bernese Society of Artists] when it was established in February 1813. The reason for this was probably that seven of its eighteen founding members were specified as “artists” or “drawing professors.” From the very outset of its activities, exhibiting also played a prominent part.

Since 1854, the Bernisch-kantonale Kunstverein [Canton of Bern Art Association], existing alongside it, took over this task, and the BKG began to devote itself to new fields of activity, such as the foundation of the Kunstmuseum Bern, which exists since 1848; the purchasing of works of art; and, from 1942, organizing the Aeschlimann-Corti Grant. The generous prize money of the latter has a determining influence on promoting contemporary artists. Jointly with the so-called Bernischer Staatsbilderschatz [Bern National Picture Trove], the BKG collection laid the foundations of the Kunstmuseum’s collection.

Important BKG acquisitions, invariably focusing on recent art, supply an additional enrichment of the collection. Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s *Weiblichen Torso* [Female Torso] represents the BKG in our exhibition. It is the only work by this sculptor that became part of the Kunstmuseum Bern holdings. The BKG purchased the sculpture in 1949. It is a cement cast after the 1913/14 original. Before the

latter was confiscated by the Nazis in 1937, it was the property of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck's Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte. The Kunstmuseum commissioned the cast, which was carried out by the cast maker Viktor Dallo in Zürich-Wiedikon. The Bernese sculptor Walter Linck supervised its production.

## The Georges F. Keller Bequest

While Georges Frédéric Keller (1899–1981) was still alive, the Kunstmuseum Bern already housed the collection of this Swiss-Brazilian art dealer over three decades as an anonymous loan. After his decease it was incorporated in the collection of the museum as a bequest. From an art-historical angle, this is the most remarkable collection that has been donated to the Kunstmuseum Bern. During Keller's early years he began collecting African sculptures. He accrued his painting collection in the course of his vocation as an art dealer, and it comprises virtually only works of French modernist artists. Among them we find represented Henri Matisse, Chaim Soutine, Roger de La Fresnaye, Pablo Picasso, and Auguste Renoir. Keller had a special interest in Salvador Dalí and collected many of his works. Because none of Dalí's pieces were confiscated from German museums, we haven't included his works in the Kunstmuseum's collection in our exhibition.

Keller worked as an agent for the artists he represented, selling their works to both museums and private collectors. From 1927, he was a key consultant for a major United States collection belonging to Albert C. Barnes. We have to thank Ernest Hubert, Thurgovian painter and Bernese-by-choice, for the fact that Keller's collection was initially entrusted to the Kunstmuseum Bern and was finally gifted to it. It was through him that the collector and museum became acquainted. Besides the paintings he owned, together with eight of his African masks and sculptures, Keller bequeathed the museum funds to expand its holdings in keeping with his distinctive collecting

profile. In 1998 the Kunstmuseum Bern presented, for the first time, the Georges F. Keller Bequest in the supplemented state in a comprehensive exhibition, and paid tribute to the donor in the shape of an accompanying catalogue.

## The Hermann and Margrit Rupf Foundation

Since around 1905, the Bernese businessman and collector Hermann Rupf (1880 – 1962) began accruing one of the leading Swiss collections of modern art, which he continued from 1910 together with his wife Margrit, née Wirz (1887 – 1961). He purchased his first paintings by André Derain und Pablo Picasso in 1907/8, in the very year they were painted, from his friend, gallery owner Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. Rupf was his first client, and Kahnweiler remained his lifelong circumspect and critically discriminating art consultant.

Besides cubist works by Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, and Juan Gris, after the First World War the Rupfs likewise collected Paul Klee's work—and were friends of his from this time on—as the collector couple was also with Fernand Léger, Henri Laurens, and André Masson. But the Rupfs were also interested in Swiss art production. Hermann Rupf's involvement went way beyond collecting, however, especially in regard to Swiss art. He was both a member of the Klee-Gesellschaft and the Bernische Kunstgesellschaft (BKG) as well as the Bieler Kunstverein, und acquired a reputation as a committed middleman, art critic, and an authority on the art scene. The Hermann and Margrit Rupf Foundation contributes to an exceptional degree to the consequence of the Kunstmuseum Bern Collection.

## The Nell Walden Gift

The first number of the art and literary periodical *Der Sturm* was published in 1910 by Herwarth Walden (1879 – 1941) in Berlin. From 1912, *Der Sturm* was also an exhibition location for contemporary art. It soon developed into one of the most important platforms of avant-garde tendencies. In 1911, Herwarth Walden met Nelly Roslund (1887 – 1975), who was born in Landskrona, Sweden, and was a musician, painter, and writer. From this time on she called herself Nell. In the following year they married and remained a couple until the mid-1920s. Nell, too, exhibited her work at Sturm-Galerie. Simultaneously she compiled a collection of paintings, water colors, drawings, and prints of Sturm artists, among them names like Franz Marc, Oskar Kokoschka, Johannes Itten, and Otto Nebel.

During the Second World War, Nell Walden managed to take her collection with her to Switzerland. In the Kunstmuseum Bern it was exhibited in 1944/45 for the first time. Max Huggler wrote about it in the accompanying catalogue that “For years this collection has been dispersed throughout Switzerland at different locations. The owner, in her forthcoming way, decided to leave her reunified collection to the Kunstmuseum in Bern for exhibition.”

In 1963, Nell Walden—in the meantime married to Hannes Urech, a Swiss physician—decided to donate what remained of her collection as well as a selection of her own works to the Kunstmuseum Bern. On the occasion of gift, in 1966 the Kunstmuseum Bern mounted the exhibition *Nell Walden. Her Collection and Own Work*. Despite the fact



that many key works from the collection were auctioned off as early as 1954 in Stuttgart or landed at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and the Landskrona Museum, the part of the collection in Bern offers a comprehensive overview of Herwarth Walden's practice and, at the same time, presents an important documentation of the Sturm movement.

## The Thannhauser Gifts

In 1904, Heinrich Thannhauser (1859-1934) started up as an art dealer in Munich. After five years the Moderne Galerie was founded. Right from the start, the gallery exhibited the great names of French modern art, with Paul Gauguin, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, and Vincent van Gogh. In 1912, Heinrich's son Justin Thannhauser (1892 – 1976) joined the family business. Prior to this, he traveled to Paris, where he made the acquaintance of Pablo Picasso, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, as well as Gertrude and Leo Stein. Back in Munich, Justin Thannhauser's enthusiasm reached out to the artists of his generation in particular. At the turn of the year 1911 – 12, the Blue Rider exhibition heralded the start of a series of shows that brought about a shift in the focus of the gallery to the more recent art of the expressionists. The First World War temporarily put an end to the assiduous activities of father and son.

In 1919, Justin Thannhauser moved to Switzerland with his family and opened up a new branch of the business in Lucerne. Henceforth, he had collectors such as Hedi Hahnloser-Bühler, Oskar Reinhart, Emil Georg Bührle, and Gottlieb Duttweiler among his clientele. When he returned to Munich in 1921, he left his cousin Siegfried Rosengart in charge of the Lucerne gallery, who ran it under his own name from the early 1930s. In 1927, Thannhauser created an additional branch in Berlin.

The political situation in Germany grew precarious for Thannhauser when the Nazis came to power in January 1933. Portions of the

gallery holdings were transferred to Paris, at a later date to the US and South America. In 1940, the family emigrated to New York, where Thannhauser reestablished himself as an art dealer. In 1965, he gifted a large part of his collection to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Early in the 1970s, Thannhauser and his second wife Hilde, née Breitwisch (1919 – 1991), moved to Bern. He donated four artworks from his collection to the Kunstmuseum Bern in 1973, among them Vincent van Gogh's *Bildnis einer Brabanter Bäuerin* (Portrait of a Brabant Farmer's Wife). On the occasion of the commemorative exhibition on the Thannhauser Collection, Hilde Thannhauser donated additional works to the Kunstmuseum Bern. Additional pieces she bequeathed not only to the Guggenheim Museum but also the Kunstmuseum Bern.

## The Othmar Huber Foundation

Already while still a medical student in Zürich and Geneva, Othmar Huber (1892 – 1979) had his exhibition reviews published, established close ties to artists, and was given their first artworks as gifts. With pleasure Huber often told the story of how he purchased the first painting in his collection in Geneva, where he actually intended to buy a car. Instead he bought Ferdinand Hodler's *Frau mit Nelke* [Woman with a Pink].

Initially Huber was rather conservative as a collector of art, chiefly focusing on Swiss landscape painting and purchasing works by Fred Stauffer, Reinhold Kündig, and Albert Schnyder. But Huber's collection was in a state of permanent flux. Often he would finance new acquisitions by selling works he had accrued at an earlier date. Thus we cannot find, at the end of Huber's collecting activities, a single work by the artists who shaped his collection in its first years. In part the exhibition reviews he wrote over the years facilitate an understanding of Huber's ideas about art. At the end of the 1920s and in the early 1930s he was intensively engaged with "classic modernism," with Picasso in particular, who represented a turning point for Huber. Whereas he was still exceedingly critical of abstraction in 1929, three years later he no longer viewed it as being a merely fashionable prevailing trend.

Othmar Huber likewise purchased works of art that were taken out of German museums and sold as "degenerate" art, as for example, Pablo Picasso's *Buveuse assupie*: "The so-called 'degenerate' art-

works comprise the basis of my collection.” When asked if he had ethical scruples about purchasing works that were the property of German museums, Huber responded in a conversation with Roman Norbert Ketterer: “I never thought twice about it myself, but I was cautious enough after the war not to hand out a single picture on loan to a German exhibition because I could never be sure of getting it back again.”

In 1979, the Othmar Huber Foundation was established, of which the most outstanding part landed in the custody of the Kunstmuseum Bern after the decease of the collector. The exceptional quality of this portion of his collection is an expression of a determined, very individual collector personality.

## The Anne-Marie and Victor Loeb Foundation

Victor Loeb (1910 – 1974), a Bernese businessman, was devoted to the fine arts throughout his life. Already as a young man he developed a pronounced interest in painting. His father Eugen Loeb (1877 – 1959) was a collector who focused principally on Swiss artists. Later his fascination shifted to the French post-impressionists, namely to Camille Pissarro, Pierre Bonnard, or Edgar Degas. Presumably his son played a part in instigating this change, as he stayed in Paris for a longer period. On the other hand, other private collections may have inspired him, collections such as that of the Bernese businessman Hermann Rupf. Already during his lifetime, Eugen Loeb made gifts of paintings by Cuno Amiet and Hans Berger to the Kunstmuseum Bern and, in 1933, he also contributed to the purchase of Ludwig Kirchner's *Alpsonntag* [Alpine Sunday] together with his brother Arthur. Additionally he bequeathed further works to the collection of the Kunstmuseum on his decease.

Victor Loeb accrued the greatest part of his collection between 1964 and 1974. In this calling, on the one hand, he followed the path his father had taken and collected both Swiss and French art of the late 19th century. Simultaneously, together with his wife Anne-Marie, née Haymann (1916 – 1999), he put together an extensive collection of international contemporary art. Harald Szeemann praised it as having “museum quality.” Victor Loeb was mainly interested in the constructivists—to whom also Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart belonged—and in surrealism.

In 1967 and 1968, Anne-Marie and Victor Loeb purchased some 100 works of art for their collection, including Alexander Archipenko's *ohne Titel* (Stehende) [Untitled (Standing woman)] from around 1919, which we are showing in the exhibition. This was a comparatively late acquisition and is rather the exception in the foundation's collection of works. The Loeb's always put great value on contemporaneity and were less concerned with art-historical completeness.

In keeping with Victor Loeb's last will and testament, the Anne-Marie and Victor Loeb Foundation was established in 1976 and the Kunstmuseum Bern assumed the custody of the Foundation's holdings.

## National Socialism and “Degenerate” Art

From 1933 the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) governed Germany. It suspended basic civil rights in the German Reich and established a dictatorship. All aspects of public and private life were to conform to party and Nazi principles. National Socialist ideas guided the National Front party in Switzerland. After successes in Zürich and Schaffhausen, the popularity of the National Front movement in Switzerland diminished rapidly in 1933. In contrast to Germany, Switzerland remained a democratic nation.

The Nazis took the term “degenerate art” from the pseudo-science of “racial biology.” According to the Nazis, art was to function like a tree where the Aryan “master race” functions as the nourishing roots that make it fruit. In this model, artists are only representatives of the people. The Germans regarded the Jews as an “alien race” despite the fact that many artists, scholars, and scientists with a Jewish background had made pivotal contributions to culture in Germany. Now they were alienated, deprived of their rights, and systematically murdered in the Holocaust. Regardless of style, art by Jewish artists was defamed on principle as “degenerate.” All those works of art were condemned as “degenerate” that did not fit in with a *völkisch*—or populistic—view of the world. They could be impressionist, expressionist, new objectivity, Dada, constructivist pieces, or executed by a free spirit such as Paul Klee. It was asserted that the work of such artists was the product of Jewish or Bolshevik influence.



There is no such thing as “degenerate” art and there never was. The term is a repulsive and defamatory; it was invented by the Nazis to discredit all the art they did not like, did not understand, or did not want to understand. With it, they sought to destroy the diversity and autonomy of art. How a society approaches art is always a sensitive barometer indicating how much liberty a society can tolerate.

## The *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art] Exhibition in Munich in 1937

In 1937, in two sweeps, around 20,000 works of art by at least 1,400 artists were confiscated as “degenerate art” from eighty German museums. They became the property of the German Reich. The immense efforts that many museums in Germany had made to display the diversity of early 20th-century movements and styles to the public were nullified within a very short time. Regardless of how reprehensible the reasons for these “cleansing activities” in German museums were, they were never *ex post facto* considered unjust or legally contested. The resulting change of ownership was and still is legitimate and valid. Therefore, the works that the Nazis confiscated from German museums must be viewed in a different light to looted art that they appropriated from the victims they persecuted.

The first surge of confiscations took place with an exhibition in mind. Before the works of art were to disappear from Germany forever, they were shown once more in a hurried exhibition that was thrown together in order to be exposed to public contempt. The show, bearing the title *Entartete Kunst*, took place from July 19 to November 30, 1937, in the rooms of the Institute of Archeology of the University of Munich in the arcades of the Hofgarten near the Münchner Residenz, Munich’s royal palace. Some 650 pieces, in addition to photographs and books, were thrown together in nine provisionally arranged rooms and were provided with populist, derisive, and cynical commentaries, such as “insane at any price” or “this is how sick minds saw nature.”

This “shame exhibition” in Munich had its precursors, and a modified version of it was sent to at least a further thirteen cities of the German Reich until 1941: Berlin, Leipzig, Düsseldorf, Salzburg, Hamburg, Frankfurt on the Main, Chemnitz, Stettin, Weimar, Vienna, Waldenburg (and probably further stops in Silesia), as well as Halle on the Saale. The show was one of the most frequented exhibitions of modernist art. According to official information, over two million visitors came to see it, although these figures could be dressed up a bit. It is today one of the most thoroughly researched exhibitions. The catalogue accompanying our exhibition contains additional information about it.

## “German” Art

The day before the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* mounting “degenerate” art began, the opening of the first *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* [Great German Art Exhibition] took place at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, the building that had been especially erected for the show in Munich. The two exhibitions were held simultaneously. The artworks and artists in the Hofgarten arcades were maligned and discredited, whereas, only just around the corner, the birth of a new “German” art was to be celebrated on Prinzregentenstrasse. What exactly “German” art was supposed to be was by no means clear even four years after the Nazis seized power. The Nazis only knew that it definitely should be nothing like “degenerate” art. For the cultural policy of the Third Reich the latter art had importance as a kind of detrimental foil.

The *Großen Deutschen Kunstausstellung* took place annually from 1937 until 1944 in the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich, and if we view the art mounted in these exhibitions more closely, the problem the Nazis faced grows more concrete: there was no “National Socialist” art as such. It served as a general heading for everything that was realistic to a tolerable degree, conventional, and often reminiscent of art styles prevalent in the 19th century. The Nazi dictatorship hardly encouraged artists to venture into unknown spheres, as the many kitschy, idyllic works of the time illustrate by example.

There were also works of art that were explicitly intended to be political and committed to National Socialism: portraits of Adolf

Hitler, history and genre paintings that complied with Nazi ideas and ideals, images of humanity that coincided particularly with Nazi racial theory. An artist who was especially esteemed and promoted was Arno Breker (1900-1991). The sculptor had a state-sponsored studio in Berlin, and was also a recognized artist beyond Germany's borders. For example, in 1940 he received the Mussolini Prize at the Venice Biennial and, in 1942, held a successful exhibition in Paris at the orangery in the Tuileries Gardens. Breker's art concentrates fully on an heroic image of mankind, which it characteristically combines with monumentality.

The photograph on the wall is of Arno Breker's sculpture *Bereitschaft* [Ready and Waiting]. It was executed in 1939 for the third *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung*. In the exhibition it had a height of 3.20 meters, while in its final form it was intended to be enlarged to a height of 15 meters. The figure aggressively opposes everything that does not comply with its obtrusively displayed ideal body image. Contemporary accounts praised it as an especially successful example of Nazi "German" sculpture.

## “Intellectual National Defense” in Switzerland

Many Swiss people had ambivalent feelings about Germany after the First World War. Some feared being run by the “large canton,” as Germany was called there for a time as a joke, and subordination to it. From 1933 forward, the German Reich morphed into a Nazi dictatorship and, in 1939, Germany triggered off the Second World War, so that Switzerland felt existentially threatened. Besides military measures, it was attempted to counter the threat also by means of typically Swiss cultural values.

The nation’s “intellectual national defense” was to embrace all areas of culture. In art this involved promoting conservative trends that leaned toward the monumental, heroic, or idyllic, which, paradoxically, bore distinct similarities to so-called “German” art. Hans Brandenberger’s statue *Wehrbereitschaft* [Ready for Action] in our exhibition represents the heroic style of art. This work came to symbolize the 1939 *Exposition nationales suisse*. However, aesthetic variety was the real hallmark of this particular Swiss national exhibition. While orthodoxy and heroic realism dominated among the sculptures and wall paintings, architecture and design were often avant-garde, modern creations. To the greatest extent they would have been unthinkable in Germany. Furthermore, avant-garde artists were not actively censored in Switzerland.

Executed in the same year, several fundamental subtleties mark the difference between Brandenberger’s *Wehrbereitschaft* and Arno Breker’s statue *Bereitschaft* [Ready and Waiting], the latter receiving the

overt praise of the Nazis. Whereas Breker aggressively presented an extreme ideal of the human body, Brandenberger illustrated an ideal concerning behavior and attitude: in view of imminent danger, a normal compatriot prepares to do what seems natural—he does not, for example, take to arms, but simply puts on his jacket. You can find a detailed comparison between Breker’s and Brandenberger’s statues as well as further information on “intellectual national defense” in our exhibition catalogue.

## The Sale of “Degenerate” Art in Switzerland

In 1937, in two sweeps, government authorities confiscated some 20,000 works of art deemed “degenerate” from German museums. They were then the property of the German Reich. This initiative, regardless of how reprehensible it was at a cultural policy level, was within the law and legally valid. The second sweep of confiscations from August 1937 also had the target of raising the state’s revenue and obtaining foreign currency. Accordingly, Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda, wrote in his diary: “We hope that this junk brings in some revenue.” Goebbels’s ministry was in charge of cultural affairs and presided over the confiscations and sales of modern art from German museums. Four art dealers had the privilege of cooperating: Karl Buchholz and Ferdinand Möller from Berlin, Bernhard A. Böhmer from Güstrow, as well as Hildebrand Gurlitt from Hamburg. They sought buyers for modernist art, which officially had become worthless in Germany. In all of this, Switzerland played a leading role for a variety of reasons:

1. Germany and Switzerland shared a common border and this made transportation easy.
2. Switzerland not only had financially strong domestic buyers but also enjoyed an international public through tourism, and was, besides, a location for international organizations.
3. The international contacts were enhanced and developed by emigrant art dealers who were driven out of Germany by its racism, such as Alfred Flechtheim (from 1934 forward in London), Walter Feilchenfeldt, and Fritz Nathan.
4. Swiss francs could be exchanged without any problems.



5. The customs regulations for importing works of art were uncomplicated and favorable—a lump sum was paid according to weight.
6. Switzerland was a politically neutral country, which was convenient for selling modernist art that was confiscated from various sources already prior to the war breaking out in September 1939.

Independent of the four art dealers, the Ministry of Propaganda additionally implemented a “sale commission” to organize an auction in Switzerland as well. It was planned in order to test sales opportunities. The Ministry of Propaganda made a deal with Galerie Fischer in Lucerne to hold the auction there. It took place on June 30, 1939, and 125 works of art were called for auction. This auction was the most prominent sales event involving so-called “degenerate” art. A considerably larger number of artworks from German museums were in fact sold at more or less fixed prices. But the auction of June 1939 was the only sale where it was stated what kind of art was involved, which already the name of the auction revealed: *Gemälde und Plastiken Moderner Meister aus deutschen Museen* (Paintings and sculptures of Modern Masters from German museums). What had become officially worthless in Germany as “degenerate” was prized and purchased in Switzerland as works by modern masters. For more information on the confiscation of modernist art from German museums and how these works were sold during the Third Reich see our catalogue for the exhibition.

## Four Ostracized Artists – Paul Klee · Ernst Ludwig Kirchner · Otto Dix · Johannes Itten

Artists suffered poignantly under the dictatorship in Germany. Their autonomy was restricted, many were slandered as “degenerate,” they were forbidden to exhibit and even to produce art. A good number retreated from public life altogether and lived largely isolated in a sort of “inner emigration.” Some were able to flee abroad. Others, who didn’t manage to get away, were murdered by the Nazis, particularly if they were categorized as Jews, communists, or homosexuals. Artists who were highly esteemed prior to 1933 have all but disappeared from the public eye since the barbarous acts of the Nazis, such as Johannes Molzahn, who fled to the United States, or Otto Freundlich, who was murdered while interned at Maidanek Concentration Camp.

There is much controversy about Switzerland’s refugee policy prior to and during the Second World War, although we will not be outlining the debate here. However, the four artists whom we have chosen are representative of quite a number of artists who found, in exceptionally difficult times, prospects of security and liberty in Switzerland.

**Paul Klee** was suspended from his teaching post at the Düsseldorf academy of art in 1933 and moved in the same year back to Bern, to the place of his childhood. One hundred and forty-one works of art by Paul Klee were deemed as “degenerate” and confiscated from German museums, and fifteen of them were exposed to public contempt in the 1937 “shame exhibition” *Entartete Kunst* in Munich.

Paul Klee intensively explored the topic of the “National Socialist Revolution” in his work. It left its mark on his art, which is a testimony of the frailty of human certainties—tenets and convictions that fanatics, extremists, or demagogues are keen to refer to in their questionable activities.

**Ernst Ludwig Kirchner** moved to Davos as early as 1917. From 1933 forward he was among the artists whom the Nazis targeted in particular and whom they maligned as “degenerate” especially often. Seven hundred and twenty-two of Kirchner’s artworks were confiscated from German museums, and at the Munich “shame exhibition” *Entartete Kunst* in 1937 Kirchner was, with thirty-two pieces, one of the most well-represented artists. From 1933 it would have been dangerous for Kirchner to travel back to Germany. However, Davos had already long been home to a very active colony of Germans who increasingly came under the influence of National Socialism. The situation came to a head in 1936 when Wilhelm Gustloff was murdered in an act of resistance and the Nazis made a martyr of him. This person had been, in Davos, for Switzerland a sort of National Socialist German Workers’ Party “gauleiter”—as district leaders were called in Nazi Germany.

**Otto Dix**, too, lost his teaching position at the Dresden academy of art as soon as the Nazis came to power in 1933. He went into seclusion to the remotest borders of the Reich, to Hemmenhofen, a village on Lake Constance near Switzerland. From there he always had

Switzerland within view over the “Broad Rhine,” the moniker locals there gave the lake. German museums were forced to deaccession 369 artworks by Dix, and he was likewise well-represented with twenty pieces at the Munich smear campaign exhibition *Entartete Kunst* in 1937. From this time on, Dix increasingly found his buyers in Switzerland with the help of Kunstsalon Wolfsberg in Zürich.

Thirty-three works of art by **Johannes Itten** were removed from German museums in 1937 because they were deemed “degenerate,” and two of his works from the first portfolio of Bauhaus prints were showcased in Munich in 1937 as examples of “degenerate” art. You can view two further prints from this portfolio in the section *Degenerate Art*. Itten, a Swiss, fled from Germany in 1939. He first of all went to Holland, where he professed his commitment to the autonomy of art with the work *Velum* for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. When he arrived back in the country of his origins, he formulated his commitment to Switzerland and to intellectual national defense with *Tellenwacht*.



# Agenda

## Öffentliche Führungen

**Sonntag, 11h:** 10. April, 1./22. Mai, 5./26. Juni, 3./10./17./24./31.

Juli, 7./14./\*21. August

**Dienstag, 19h:** 19. April, 10./31. Mai, 14. Juni, 5./26. Juli, 9./16. August

\*mit dem Kurator Daniel Spanke

## Reihe «Kunst und Religion im Dialog»

**Sonntag, 17. April, 15h**  
Daniel Spanke im Dialog mit Brigitta Rotach (Haus der Religionen).

## Gespräche in der Ausstellung

**Dienstag, 10. Mai, 18h:** Magdalena Schindler, Kunstmuseum Bern, im Gespräch mit Esther Tisa Francini, Provenienzforscherin am Museum Rietberg Zürich

**Sonntag, 22. Mai, 13h:**  
Ausstellungskurator Daniel Spanke im Gespräch mit Franz Müller, Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft

**Dienstag, 31. Mai, 18h:**  
Beat Schüpbach, Kunstmuseum Bern, im Gespräch mit Matthias Frehner, Direktor Sammlungen Kunstmuseum Bern

**Sonntag, 5. Juni, 13h:**  
Beat Schüpbach, Kunstmuseum Bern, im Gespräch mit dem Kunsthistoriker Andreas Meier

**Sonntag, 3. Juli, 13h:**  
Andreas Meier im Gespräch mit Herbert Winter, Präsident Schweizerischer Israelitischer Gemeindebund

**Sonntag, 21. August, 13h:**  
Ausstellungskurator Daniel Spanke im Gespräch mit Wolfgang Henze, Mitinhaber der Galerie Henze&Ketterer in Wichtrach

## Volkshochschulkurs

**Mittwoch, je 15h–16h:**  
18. und 25. Mai, 1. und 8. Juni 2016  
Anmeldung: Volkshochschule Bern, T 031 320 30 30, info@vhsbe.ch

## Einführungsveranstaltung für Lehrpersonen

**Dienstag, 26. April, 18h**  
**Mittwoch, 27. April, 14h**  
Anmeldung: T 031 328 09 11, vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

# Katalog

## **Moderne Meister. «Entartete»**

### **Kunst im Kunstmuseum Bern**

Hrsg. Matthias Frehner und Daniel Spanke. Mit Beiträgen von Claudia Blank, Bettina Brand-Claussen, Matthias Frehner, Meike Hoffmann, Andreas Hüneke, Georg Kreis, Franz Müller, Daniel Spanke, Esther Tisa Francini und Christoph Wagner.

Ausgabe in deutsch und englisch, gebunden, ca. 360 Seiten, Prestel Verlag, 978-3-7913-5535-1 (dt.), 978-3-7913-5536-8 (engl.)

# The Exhibition

<b>Duration</b>	07.04. – 21.08.2016
<b>Opening</b>	Thursday, April 6, 2016, 6:30 p.m.
<b>Entrance Fee</b>	CHF 18.00/red. CHF 14.00
<b>Opening hours</b>	Monday, closed Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Wednesday – Sunday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
<b>Public holidays</b>	Ascension 05.05.2016: 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Pentecost 15./16.05.2016: 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. 01.08.2016, closed
<b>Private guided tours</b>	T +41 31 328 09 11, F +41 31 328 09 10 vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch
<b>Curator</b>	Daniel Spanke

With the support of:

  
**CREDIT SUISSE**  
Partner Kunstmuseum Bern



**Bürgergemeinde  
Bern**

**SWISSLOS**  
Kultur  
Kanton Bern

**RUTH & ARTHUR SCHERBARTH STIFTUNG**

Kunstmuseum Bern  
Hodlerstrasse 8 – 12, 3000 Bern 7  
Di 10h – 21h, Mi – So 10h – 17h  
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch  
info@kunstmuseumbern.ch  
T +41 (0)31 328 09 44