

Amiet

“Joy of my life”

The Eduard Gerber Collection

August 19, 2011 – January 15, 2012

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Cuno Amiet's death, the Kunstmuseum Bern is presenting the Eduard Gerber Collection, one of the most beautiful private collections of the artist's work. Besides the collection of this great admirer of the artist, we are also showing works from the Kunstmuseum Bern Collection that represent Cuno Amiet's "official" oeuvre. The exhibition therefore offers a representative overview of Amiet's work.

Cuno Amiet was born in Solothurn in March 1868 as the son of the secretary general of the Solothurn cantonal government. Fascinated by painting, he decided subsequent to learning painting and art with his teacher Frank Buchser to deepen his knowledge in the field by attending the Munich art academy. He met Giovanni Giacometti and they became lifelong friends. Together they further pursued their art studies in Paris in 1888. In 1892 Amiet left Paris and went to live in Pont-Aven, where he joined the artists' circle congregating around Paul Gauguin. During sojourns in other countries Amiet made valuable contacts, including *Brücke* painters of the artistic circle led by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner – considered to be the pioneers of German expressionism. In 1893 Amiet returned to Switzerland. The turning point in Amiet's career was his acquaintance with Ferdinand Hodler – his senior by 15 years – and additionally with the owner of a paper mill and art theorist Oscar Miller, who lived in Biberist, a town in the canton of Solothurn. After wedding Anna Luder, the daughter of an innkeeper, Amiet moved to the Oschwand in the canton of Bern in 1898. Far away from the great art centers of Paris and Munich Amiet worked on his extensive oeuvre of paintings.

In 1931 a fire in the Munich Glaspalast destroyed over fifty of his early works in a retrospective on show there. The young **Eduard Gerber** was greatly moved by the catastrophe and visited the artist and his wife on the Oschwand – a region marked by a plateau landscape. This was the beginning of a friendship upon which the unique Eduard Gerber Collection was built over the years. In July 1961 Cuno Amiet died, aged 93 years, in his adoptive home in the Oschwand after an eventful life.

Today Cuno Amiet is seen as having paved the way for **modern Swiss art**. There are not many Swiss artists who mastered such a diverse oeuvre. Amiet's pictures are marked by symbolism, Jugendstil, and also expressionism. They evidence his international relevance and his contacts to numerous artist friends, as well as reflect his later life on the Oschwand. He applied a great variety of different techniques in his art. They range from pencil and paint

drawings, as well as woodcuts or water color, to oil paintings and sculptures.

The **Eduard Gerber Collection** mirrors this variety with over one hundred works. The private collection is a testimony for his great intimacy with the artist and a profound respect for him and his work. Eduard Gerber (1917-1995) stemmed from a family that had no history in collecting art. He accrued his collection with the wages he earned as a laboratory assistant. Eduard Gerber's collection testifies to the fact that it is not necessary to be enormously wealthy to establish an important art collection but primarily must have the necessary passion for art and connoisseurship.

Amiet's works from the **Kunstmuseum Bern Collection** are integrated into the exhibition. Whereas Eduard Gerber's private collection was built up on emotional ties to the artist and therefore comprises mostly pictures that must be labeled as "intimate" and not meant for the public eye, the Kunstmuseum Bern owns largely his representative masterpieces – the masterpieces with which Amiet could underpin his status as *the new* Swiss national artist after Ferdinand Hodler passed away. Because both aspects are presented in the exhibition we can offer our visitors a general overview of the artist's oeuvre.

Stateroom

Amiet experienced one of his most productive phases during and after his stay in **Pont-Aven**. A key work from this time is the 1892 portrait of an artist friend as a musician with a mandolin (*Mandolinenspieler*) – the sculptor Charles Friberg who was born in Malmö. The musical instrument is hardly discernable, but, contrasting the monotone background, a mandolin strap stretches across the shoulders of the young man while he thoughtfully peers to the left. A painting executed in the same year, *Bretonische Landschaft (Breton Landscape)* evidences the experimental audacity of the artist, anticipating the first decade of the 20th century.

Bildnis Anna Amiet in Gelb mit blumengeschmücktem Hut (Portrait of Anna Amiet in Yellow Wearing a Hat Decorated with Flowers) from 1906 is one of the highlights in the Eduard Gerber Collection. The artist painted three versions of this motif. In all of them he used a pointillist technique, exploring the interplay between background and the figure of the sitter as well as between

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representation and abstraction. We find the same **neo-impressionism** likewise in his 1905 *Blumenstilleben mit roter Rispe (Flower Still Life with Red Panicles)*, a picture using close-set dabs of paint. The artist and his wife gave this small-format still life, called “ds’Zärteli” (delicate thing) to Eduard Gerber as a Christmas present in 1942. The composition features a long and delicate stem with red panicles, which contrast elegantly with the light-colored and textured background.

Amiet kept returning to the subject of **apple and fruit harvest** for almost his entire life. In the Eduard Gerber collection the subject can be found in a considerable number of studies, as well as two pastel drawings, and the small-format red-green *Obsternte (Fruit Harvest)* from 1914 (in the basement). Two years earlier Amiet painted the large-format *Obstlese (Fruit Harvest)* (the so-called Bern version; Kunstmuseum Bern Collection). The work on the façade of the Kunstmuseum Bern, *Apfeleernte (Apple Harvest)* from 1936, describes an ideological program of spiritual national defense and reorientation toward own traditions with which Switzerland sought to draw a clear dividing line between itself and its totalitarian neighbours. In such politically and culturally polarized times, the ideologically charged picture portraying stocky rural Bernese women while picking apples was not *only* interpreted in a positive way. It was besmeared with pitch shortly after completion and had to be restored. Since the summer of 2011 conservation and restoration measures are being carried out on the sgraffito in order to preserve this cultural heritage.

The painting *Toilette (The Bath)* from 1908 testifies to Amiet as a **Brücke painter**. The largely parallel lines also reveal Vincent van Gogh’s influence. In taking up this subject matter he referenced Manet’s or Degas’ bathroom scenes. The naked and shivering child is Amiet’s adopted daughter Greti, and the figure wearing a blue gown is his wife Anna. In the work the artist focuses on the palpable nature and proximity of the household. *Liegender Frauenakt (Reclining Nude)* from 1912 is also regarded as Amiet’s contribution to **German expressionism**. The young collector Eduard Gerber acquired this work, formerly belonging to Ferdinand Hodler, in 1943 with Professor Max Huggler’s help while it was on show in a sales exhibition in the Kunsthalle Bern. Amiet continued to innovatively develop his **expressionism** in paintings such as *Sonnenuntergang (Sunset)* from 1927, *Winterlandschaft (Winter Landscape)* from 1928, and *Landschaft Oschwand (Oschwand Landscape)* from 1929.

A further highlight of the exhibition are two **sculptures** made around 1920: Amiet’s adopted daughter Greti, and Tilly Wassmer, a rich art lover, laughing. These pieces demonstrate that the artist is due much more respect as a sculptor than has been hitherto generally acknowledged.

After the **fire in the Munich Glaspalast** in 1931 in which Amiet lost key early works, he painted for a considerable period in the Lake Thun mansion of Fritz Pochon-Jent, the publisher of the daily newspaper *Der Bund*. The paintings of this time reveal an inner peace. They appear bright and have the transparency of water colors. As in the case of the paintings *Thunersee mit Wolken (Lake Thun with clouds)* (on loan to the Kunstmuseum Bern) and *Gelber Niesen (Yellow Niesen)* from 1931 (Kunstmuseum Bern Collection) The Kunstmuseum Bern purchased the latter work – among others – with the money paid by the insurance for five of Amiet’s key works that were burnt in Munich. Amiet did, however, leave a sign referring to the catastrophe during the period after the fire – he prefixed his initials with a small flame.

Until the Second World War in 1939 Amiet regularly stayed in Paris. At such times urban motifs attracted his eye. In his **Paris studio** his approach to subject matter was different to the way he treated it in Switzerland; he refrained from painting things that tourists could easily recognize and confined his portrayals to the daily bustle in the Parisian streets. A fine example of this can be

found in the 1935 painting *Place de la Porte de Châtillon*. It depicts the anonymous atmosphere of industrial and ordinary Paris in the 1930s. Amiet has the ability of alleviating the somber subject matter by playing with light and color. He also succeeded in transforming the thankless and banal everyday motifs into tension-filled paintings. The scope of variety in the city was also the subject of his figural pictures. Amiet portrayed Parisian personalities such as the proud *Liette* from 1932, and also ventured attempts at portraying more exotic subjects that were part and parcel of a cosmopolitan city like Paris. One of the outcomes was his portrait of a Japanese lady called Kikou Yamata (*Bildnis der Japanerin Kikou Yamata*). This lady visited him on the Oschwand in 1933.

Vestibule in the Basement

The large-format painting *Paradies (Paradise)* from 1958 (on loan to the Kunstmuseum Bern), with its mystical air, can be seen as succinctly representing Amiet’s **late work** in which his “colored light” had been developed to perfection. He otherwise hardly ever introduced new motifs into his late work, but instead adhered to depicting domestic atmospheres, such as we find in *Tulpenstrauß vor dem Atelierfenster mit Blick auf Winterlandschaft (Bunch of Tulips in Front of the Studio Window with a Winter Landscape View)* from 1955 or *Sonniger Morgen (Sunny Morning)* from 1960 (Kunstmuseum Bern).

Basement

There are a great number of very beautiful **water color paintings** in the Eduard Gerber Collection. The earliest work in the collection is the water color with the title *Strasse in München (Street in Munich)* executed 1887/88. The empty street and the schematic silhouette of the city emanate a magic and dream-like atmosphere. The water color was painted shortly after Amiet moved to the Bavarian metropolis in the fall of 1886. His *Bretonischen Landschaft (Breton Landscape)* from 1892 is just as empty as the street in Munich. In the landscape the artist creates a wonderful tension of contrasts by juxtaposing bright colors.

After Ferdinand Hodler died, Amiet became the leading Swiss artist. Now more than ever he strategically increased his claim to this distinction by exploring a new style in painting. But we can see Ferdinand Hodler’s influence clearly in the two water colors *Feld bei Hellsau (Field near Hellsau)* from 1897/98 and *Bildnis Frau Anna Amiet (Portrait of Anna Amiet)* from 1902.

The first work that Eduard Gerber acquired as a sixteen year old was the small picture *Landschaft mit Bergkette (Kleine Scheidegg, Blick auf Grosse Scheidegg) [Landscape with Mountain Range (Kleine Scheidegg, View of Grosse Scheidegg)]* from 1906. The young collector was quite enamored of the delicate water color when he first visited the artist on the Oschwand. And even though his savings were insufficient to pay for the artwork he was allowed to take it home.

The 1909 water color *Frau Schlangenhäuser beim Malen (Mrs. Schlangenhäuser Painting)* evidences with its hurried brushstrokes inspiration from other **Brücke** artists. In contrast, the ambience in his water color *Frau im Park (Woman in the Park)* from 1906 is much quieter, although it is characterized by equally bright colors. Early in the 1920s Amiet felt again impelled to use wild brushstrokes. His almost abstract composition *Landschaft (Landscape)* from 1920 is a good example.

The Eduard Gerber Collection has, besides its many water colors, also numerous **drawings** in colored and lead pencil, charcoal, pastels, or brush and ink. With just a few lines or brushstrokes Amiet could conjure up expressive moments of time on paper, as in his *Eilendes Mädchen unter Bäumen (Girl Rushing Under Trees)* from 1908 and *Reiter (Horseman)* from 1904. The artist filled sketchbooks with quick studies that he executed of things that

fascinated him during walks; later he used the sketches as motifs for pictures. Thus *Bretonisches Mädchen (Breton Girl)* from 1892 and *Dünenlandschaft bei Pont-Aven (Sandhills near Pont-Aven)* from 1892/93 were probably the results of such sketches. His favorite model was his wife Anna, who he drew numerous times. *Frau Anna Amiet*, viewed from the front, is a particularly intimate pen-and-ink drawing, which the artist probably drew around 1898. The inscription reveals that the sketch was for a dress for his bride Anna Luder who he married in 1898. Such works make up the uniqueness of the Eduard Gerber Collection – they are revelations of an unofficial and personal side of the artist.

Two self-portraits stand at the end of the exhibition. In the 1950 *Selbstbildnis (Self-Portrait)* the face is only slightly accentuated against the background while the body seems to merge with it. In one of his very last self-portraits, the 1959 oil-pastel painting, Amiet amplified the ephemeral quality of the work even further by scratching his face out of the layers of oil pastels. The ghoulish presence of the 91-year-old painter seems to dissolve almost entirely. His 1922 *Selbstbildnis (Self-Portrait)* is totally the opposite. In it he staged himself as a self-confident artist, elegantly dressed in a dinner jacket. Such a comparison distinctly illustrates the artist's balancing act between official representation and acute vulnerability.

Biography

Cuno Amiet (1868 – 1961)

1868 Cuno Amiet was born March 28, son of Josef Ignaz Amiet (1827-1895), secretary general of the Solothurn cantonal government and historian, and Katharina née Kuster (1835-1870) in Solothurn.

1882 Amiet started grammar school in the Solothurn canton school. He obtained his high-school diploma there in 1886.

1883 Fifteen years of age, he painted his first self-portrait.

1884 After getting to know Frank Buchser, Amiet attended his art classes for the next two years.

1886 In the fall Amiet moved to Munich together with the watercolor artist Paul Demme. At the Academy he attended the elementary course for drawing from plaster casts taught by the Swiss artist Caspar Ritter from Marthalen, Professor Gabriel Häckl's anatomy classes, and studied drawing and art history with Karl Raupp and Nikolaus Gysis.

1887 In January Amiet met Giovanni Giacometti. The same age, they became lifelong friends. Amiet was associated with a circle of Swiss people, including Wilhelm Balmer, Franz Baur, Max Buri, Emil Dill, Walter Mettler, Charles Welti, Hans Beat Wieland, as well as Felix Calonder, later member of the Executive Federal Council. During his holidays he painted at Frank Buchser's.

1888 Amiet and Giacometti were impressed by French painting at the International Art Exhibition in the Munich Glaspalast. In their eyes the work of Jules Bastien-Lepages and James McNeill Whistler embodied this art. They decided to continue their studies together in Paris after the summer break.

1888 to 1892 Amiet shared an apartment and studio with Giovanni Giacometti from October 1888 to May 1892. He executed portraits of his friend. Amiet studied art at the Académie Julian with Adolphe-William Bouguereau and Tony Robert-Fleury, later also under Gabriel Ferrier's guidance. During the summer months he stayed in Solothurn (his "qualifying painting": *Erdbeermädchen [Strawberry Maid]*, 1889), in Stampa at Giacometti's abode, and in Hellsau (*Heuerin [Female Farmhand]*, 1891, destroyed by fire in 1931). 1891/92 Amiet attended the school for NCOs.

1892/93 Amiet returned to Paris in spring. He grew more and more dissatisfied with what he was taught in the Academy and moved, following the advice of the Hungarian artist Hugo Poll, to Pont-

Aven. From May 1892 onwards he lived in the center of Pont-Aven. Among others he met Emile Bernard, Paul Sérusier, and Roderic O'Connor there. He became friends with the latter as well as with Armand Séguin, who taught him etching techniques. In Brittany he gave up tonal modeling for applying paint in fields of colors within distinct contours, as in Bernard's painting, or in stripes of pure color resembling O'Connor's style. He lost many key paintings of this phase in his career in the 1931 fire in the Munich Glaspalast.

1893/94 Amiet returned to Switzerland in June 1893 for financial reasons. In the following year he moved into a studio in Hellsau. Through the assistance of his Basel artist friends Emil Beurmann, Wilhelm Balmer, and Franz Bauer as well as the art critic Hans Trog he was offered a number of decoration commissions – and in 1894 was able to put on an exhibition in the Kunsthalle Basel. The exhibition was, however, badly received except for one affirmative critique written by Hans Trog in the *Nationalzeitung*.

1896 Amiet came to the notice of the paper mill proprietor and art theorist Oscar Miller. Miller bought the competition design *Das Paradies (Paradise, 1894)* for the Lausanne Federal Court. In the June of 1896 Amiet spent, together with Giacometti, six weeks in an Alpine hut situated at the foot of Piz Duan in Bergell. There he met Giovanni Segantini.

1897 Amiet participated in the International Art Exhibition in Munich with three pictures. Ferdinand Hodler suggested that Amiet share a studio with him in Geneva, but Amiet declined. A collaborative project with Segantini, Giovanni Giacometti, and Hodler for a planned panorama to be shown in the 1900 Exposition Universelle, the Paris world fair, was discarded for financial reasons.

from 1898 Together with Hodler and Giacometti Amiet exhibited in the Künstlerhaus Zürich. In June 1898 Amiet married the daughter of an innkeeper, Anna Luder from Hellsau, and the couple moved to the Oschwand near Herzogenbuchsee, where they lived in an apartment on the upper floor of the local inn.

1899 Amiet finished the large-format painting *Richesse du soir*, with which he won a silver medal at the 1900 Exposition Universelle.

1901 Amiet participated in the 12th exhibition of the Vienna Secession (Union of Austrian Artists) and also in the 7th National Art Exhibition in Vevey. Together with Wilhelm Balmer, Amiet was responsible for carrying out the Basel Town Hall façade decorations for the 4th-centenary celebrations for Basel joining the Swiss Confederacy. In response to his child being stillborn he executed *Die Hoffnung (Hope)* – also called *Die Vergänglichkeit (Transience)* – in 1902 (Kunstmuseum Olten). Amiet became godfather to Alberto Giacometti.

1902 Amiet travelled to Dresden and other German cities. In this year he painted *Selbstbildnis mit Apfel (Self-Portrait with Apple)*, a confession-like picture featuring Amiet's leitmotifs of apple and orchard. However, the painting is nevertheless reminiscent of Hodler's art by adhering to strict frontality and in its overall air.

1904 In the 19th Vienna Secession exhibition Hodler's influence not only reached its peak but also its end. The Amiets adopted their niece Greti Adam (1900-1979).

1905 An exhibition took place in the Künstlerhaus Zürich. The Dresden Richter Gallery subsequently exhibited the same show, which was very probably viewed by the *Brücke* artists. This would explain the fact that Amiet was invited by Erich Heckel to become a member in the September of the following year. The Amiet family grew again through Lydia Friedli's (1896-1976) adoption.

1906 Amiet participated in the first *Brücke* exhibition in the Seifert lamp factory in Dresden. In the following year the same exhibition was shown in Richter Gallery.

1907 Amiet travelled to Paris to see the Cézanne exhibition. He greatly admired not only Cézanne but also especially van Gogh.

1908 He had the opportunity of studying van Gogh in more depth with the van Gogh exhibition in the Zürich Künstlerhaus. Additionally the collectors Richard Kisling and Gertrud Dübi-Müller gave him leave to study and copy the paintings *Les deux Fillettes (Two Young Girls)* and *Der Irrenwärter von Saint-Rémy (Portrait of Trabuc; Chief Orderly at Saint-Paul Hospital)*.

1909 Amiet visited Florence accompanied by Oscar Miller. He participated in both the Vienna and the Munich International Art Exhibitions.

1910 Amiet was given the commission for decorating the loggia of the Zürich Kunsthhaus building. The project wasn't finished until 1917 and was called *Jungbrunnen (Fountain of Youth)*.

1911 Amiet participated in the International Exhibition in Rome. He journeyed to Munich where he met Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and also August and Helmut Macke and others.

1912 Amiet had a barn converted and altered. It was not far from where Amiets lived in a house built by the architect Otto Ingold in 1908. Subsequently the Oschwand became a meeting place for artists, collectors, literary figures (such as Wilhelm Worringer, Arther Weese, Hermann Hesse and others) representing modern art trends, as well as students such as Hans Morgenthaler, Werner Miller, or Peter Thalmann. As Swiss delegate Amiet also visited the Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne.

1912/13 Amiet participated in several exhibitions that were shown in Germany (e.g. Hans Goltz Gallery and Moderne Gallery, Munich; Gurlitt Gallery, Berlin; Commeter Gallery, Hamburg; Bangel Gallery, Frankfurt, and others). In May 1913 the *Brücke* was dissolved because of contrary opinions among the members. The Amiets took in Mineli (Hermine) from Ballmoos (1905-1990) as a foster child.

from 1914 After the outbreak of the First World War Amiet mostly participated in exhibitions in Switzerland.

1918 For his 50th birthday Amiet's wife Anna gave him a block of sandstone as a present. He made a bust of her out of it.

1919 Amiet was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Bern.

1920 The Amiets took in Bruno Hesse (1905-1999), Hermann Hesse's son, as a foster child.

From 1925 Amiet was given several commissions for wall paintings: *Engelskonzert (Concert of Angels)* (1925, country estate of the Pochon-Jent family in Gunten), *Das Entzücken (Delight)* (1925/27, summer house of the Trüssel family in Bern), *Symbolische Figur (Symbolic Figure)* (1926, the crematorium in Langenthal), *F. Hodler, Th. Kocher, J. Stämpfli, Ph. E. von Fellenberg, J. Gotthelf* (1927, Städtisches Gymnasium, Bern), *Familienszenen (Family Scenes)* (1929, Villa Stämpfli in Bern).

1931 In a fire in the Munich Glaspalast Amiet lost over 50 of his artworks, among them key pieces from Brittany (such as *Die alte Bretonin (Old Breton Woman)* and *Zwei bretonische Mädchen (Two Breton Girls)* from 1892 or *Die strickende Bretonin (Knitting Breton Woman)* from 1893, as well as other pivotal works such as two versions of his fruit harvest paintings from 1912 and 1919, or *Kartoffelernte (Potato Harvest)* from 1914).

from 1932 The exhibition organized by Max Kaganovitch in the Parisian Georges Petit Gallery revealed a rebirth and reconsideration of the French aspect of his art. In Paris during the summer months – until 1939 – he painted numerous figurative pictures of women and nudes as well as cityscapes.

1933 The Amiets meet the sixteen-year-old Eduard Gerber who visited them on the Oschwand after the fire catastrophe in Munich.

1936 Amiet finished the sgraffito *Apfelernte (Apple Harvest)* on the façade of the Kunstmuseum Bern.

1953 In February Amiet's wife, friend, and faithful companion Anna died.

1961 On July 6 Cuno Amiet died on the Oschwand in the canton of Bern.

Biography

Eduard Gerber (1917 – 1995)

1917 Eduard Gerber was born March 29 as son of Johann and Marie Bertha Gerber-Steffen. He grew up with his brother Hans and sisters Marie and Anna on Längenberg near Belp, from 1928 onwards in an outlying suburb of Bern.

from 1932 Eduard Gerber began an apprenticeship as a gardener.

1933 In the summer Eduard Gerber read about the fire in the Munich Glaspalast in a newspaper article, which reported Amiet's loss of 50 works of art. Shocked by the news of this stroke of fate Eduard rode on his bike to the Oschwand where he met the Amiets for the first time. He purchased his first artwork, the water color *Landschaft mit Bergkette (Kleine Scheidegg, Blick auf Grosse Scheidegg)* [Landscape with Mountain Range (Kleine Scheidegg, View of Grosse Scheidegg)] from 1906. From then on he supplemented his income by working in the studio of the painter, ordering photographs and water colors chronologically and according to subject matter.

from 1936 Lung disease forced Eduard Gerber to convalesce in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Davos. There he did jobs in the laboratory. Afterwards the director of the sanatorium helped his former patient get a position as laboratory assistant for a doctor in Bern.

1942 The Amiet family gave Eduard Gerber "ds'Zärteli" [*Blumenstilleben mit roter Rispe (Flower Still Life with Red Panicles)* 1905] for Christmas, the collector's first oil painting.

1943 With the turmoils prior to and during the Second World War Eduard had the opportunity of acquiring top-class Amiet artworks at prices he could afford. With Max Huggler's help, the then director of the Kunsthalle Bern and later director of the Kunstmuseum Bern, he purchased *Liegenden Frauenakt mit Blumen (Reclining Nude with Flowers)* from 1912 and *Toilette (The Bath)* from 1908.

1995 Eduard Gerber died November 28 in Bern.

Curators: Matthias Frehner and Regula Berger

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