

Devoted to Humanity

The French sculptor Germaine Richier (1902-1959) is indeed an exceptional 20th-century artist. Especially her insect women brought her fame—hybrid figures of ants, grasshoppers and spiders with human faces, limbs and breasts. The exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bern gives us the opportunity to rediscover Richier and her highly original art, an art that has lost none of its relevance today.

Richier studied art with Antoine Bourdelle in Paris, where she focused intensively on figurative sculpture. She pursued such an independent path in art that even today it is difficult to classify her art as belonging to a specific movement or category.

Human beings as part of creation

Richier's entire oeuvre engages with the topic of humankind. "Only humanity counts," Germaine Richier once said about her work. Her cracked and fissured figures, frequently also including wired structures, impress us as being sensitively vulnerable and insecure. This in particular led to Richier's art often being linked to existentialism. But her image of humanity goes beyond the views of this line of thought too—she makes humankind part of creation and not its subjugator. In her hybrid beings Richier puts humanity on par with animals. And although she spent much of her life in Paris, her work does not engage with the issues associated with urban life. Her strong affinity to nature is closely connected to the Provence region where she originally came from. She very often collected stones and pieces of wood that she would use in her sculptures. Justifiably today we see in Richier one of the first ecologically minded and motivated artists. The relevance of her work thus endures beyond the artist's lifetime through to the present.

Close ties to Switzerland

Germaine Richier's ties to Switzerland were strong. She met her first husband, the Zurich sculptor Otto Charles Bänninger, at Bourdelle's studio while both were studying art there. And she stayed with Bänninger in Zurich when World War II broke out in 1939. There she again met up with Alberto Giacometti, Marino Marini, Hans Arp, Le Corbusier and Fritz Wotruba. They participated in many exhibitions together, and an intensive exchange of ideas took place among the group. She was likewise close to Cuno Amiet, who painted a portrait of her and often visited Richier after she returned to Paris in 1946. Richier's ties to Switzerland remained strong throughout her life and she also taught many Swiss art students.

Collaboration with the Kunsthalle Mannheim

Around 60 pieces of sculpture will be on show and thematically arranged in an overview of Richier's oeuvre. The main part of the exhibition comprises key works from the collections of the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Kunsthalle Mannheim, where the exhibition will be on show from May 2014. Bern owns Richier's bronze sculptures *Escrimeuse avec masque* (1943) and her major work *La Sauterelle*, which she executed 1955/56; Mannheim owns the large bronze sculpture *La Mante* (1946). We are augmenting the presentation with works from the collections of the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Kunsthalle Mannheim in order to cover the many issues raised by Richier's extensive oeuvre.

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Exhibition

Duration: Nov. 29 2013 – April 6 2014

Opening: Thursday, Nov. 28, 2013, 6:30 p.m.

Curators: Daniel Spanke, Jean-Louis Prat

Admission: CHF 18.00 / reduced CHF 14.00

The exhibition will subsequently be on show at:

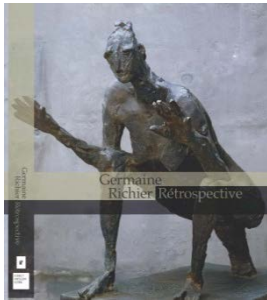


Kunsthalle Mannheim,
May 9– Aug. 24 2014

The exhibition was organized under the patronage of:

His Excellency Mr. Michel Duclos, Ambassador of France to Switzerland

Catalogue



Germaine Richier: Retrospektive / Rétrospective. Eds. the Kunstmuseum Bern, Matthias Frehner, Daniel Spanke and the Kunsthalle Mannheim, Ulrike Lorenz, Stefanie Patrino. With essays by Matthias Frehner, Corinne Linda Sotzek, Jonas Jecker, Stefanie Patrino, Jean-Louis Prat and Daniel Spanke. German and French, ca 200 pages and ca 90 plates. Wienand Verlag, CHF 35.00.

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Poster



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