

«... Crossing Borders»

Hermann Hesse the Painter

March 28 – August 12, 2012

Together with the Hermann Hesse Museum in Montagnola, the Kunstmuseum Bern is presenting the first retrospective of Hermann Hesse's paintings to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death (July 2, 1877 – Aug. 9, 1962). Hesse is one of the most famous and most-read German-language authors. What is little known to date, however, is that he also produced an immense number of drawings and paintings. This part of his creative life played a crucial role in his overall artistic development.

Hesse saw himself not just as an author or painter but rather as an *artist*, and his comprehensive notions of art blurred dividing lines between the various arts. Painting played a central part in the author's life and work. Hesse explored intensely the work of other artists, wrote numerous art critiques and reviews, and was also an art collector. He commented on the characteristics of artists, their role in society, and on the meaning and function of art. His insights in art likewise found their way into his literary work. Artists' existences even became a central motif in a number of his narratives.

When Hesse began to paint he was already famous as an author, which allowed him special freedoms. Hesse's artistic development is very unusual. His first works are small-format graphite and pastel drawings done solely for his own perusal. From 1919 he continued working in the pictorial arts with watercolor wash drawings to illustrate poems, letters, or manuscripts. Often these so-called illustrated manuscripts were dedicated to specific persons. Simultaneously he painted numerous watercolors until well into the 1930s. Then, however, Hesse began to restrict his use of watercolor to large-format wash drawings after discovering a preference for plein-air painting. And finally he gave up large-format painting too. Thus Hesse's artistic career began and ended with drawing. The contrast of nature and culture is a theme that can be found throughout Hesse's work since 1919.

In his oeuvre we can only discern the suggestion of general trends in his artistic development. His oeuvre relates to contemporary art movements without being strongly integrated into any of them. He liked to paint directly from nature primarily as a perceptive process, but also as a form of expressing his inner self.

During the preparations for the exhibition, over 2000 pictures and illustrated sheets were viewed that were executed by Hesse between 1917 and 1935. Many of the some 150 works being exhibited in Bern will be on show to a larger audience for the very first time. One of the focal points of the show is Hesse's artistic activities in Bern. We are presenting his dream images for the first time ever. Additionally, our visitors will be able to view many of Hesse's illustrated poems, letters, and manuscripts. But the exhibition focuses above all on Hesse's visual language – a language

that is marked by alienation of subject matter; by invented, imaginary forms; unreal colors; a great diversity of styles; and repetition of compositional patterns.

Room 1

Hesse's two earliest pictures (of which one is included in the exhibition) were executed in 1911 during his journey to the "Indian countries" together with the painter Hans Sturzenegger. However, Hesse first really began his artistic pursuits in 1916/1917 in Bern during a crisis in his life, when his psychotherapist Josef Bernhard Lang encouraged him begin a dream diary to record his dreams in visual form. The dream images, which have not been viewed in a public exhibition prior to this, are, to a great extent, small-format wash and pastel drawings. They illustrate the dream image either from the point of view of the dreamer or from the point of view of a fictive beholder: They depict Hesse's struggle with loneliness, the threatening unknown, unbearable burdens, or the invisible forces of nature. Two painted faces have a special status among his dream images. They surprise on account of the symmetrical frontal view, their lack of individual traits, the representation being restricted to the face alone, and alienation due to the surreal coloring.

Hesse painted and drew his surroundings in a highly personal way, such as of "Ougspurgetgut" on Melchenbühlweg in Bern (also called "House of Dreams") where he lived from 1912 to 1919 after Albert Welti died. He also painted in the Locarno district in Ticino where he occasionally retreated for recreation. As a farewell to Bern he painted a watercolor of the Welti house and then painted a cross over it. Among his early works there are a group of self-portraits in a sketch book from 1917 with unrelenting graphite drawings and numerous paintings and watercolors of his face, revealing emotions ranging from fear and sadness to desperation.

In the painting *Berg und Baum (Mountain and Tree)* from 1919 he highly reduced form and color to illustrate the turning point in his tale *Der schwere Weg (Path of Tribulations)*, 1916). Situated on a barren mountain, a black bird alights from a lonely tree and invites the narrator of the tale and its companion to follow and throw himself into the abysmal depths.

Room 2

In the first years of his stay in the Casa Camuzzi in Montagnola in Ticino, Hesse began more intensively to explore problems of compositional design, and experiment with color combinations, spatial representation, interrelations between lines and planes, and abstraction.

In his painted landscapes he juxtaposed brushstrokes of the primary colors red, yellow, and blue. By applying paint in this way in his art, we are reminded of French divisionism, a movement that took ideas from the science of optics and applied them to painting. Hesse must have known about this direction in art and its theoretical background.

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In various landscapes with villages and lakes from 1919/1920, trees and plants depicted in the foreground echo shapes delineated by distant roads in the background and the colors of the roofs of houses. Or a tree with heart-shaped red leaves guides our gaze into the patchwork-structure of a landscape (*Glasiger Herbst. Blick auf Caslano / Crystal Autumn: View of Caslano*), or we find the stylized representation of a tree in a rather oriental landscape (*Ohne Titel / Untitled*, 1919), as well as a tree with luminous yellow foliage adorning the view of a village (*Blick ins Dorf / Village View*).

From 1919 to 1921 Hesse focused on linearity, so that lines became a dominant feature in his art. In the compositions of this period we find that he distinctly defined areas of color.

Hesse's linear style culminated in two works from 1920 and 1921. *Ohne Titel (Untitled)* depicts a body that reminds us of a lighthouse with beacon. He displayed a high degree of abstraction in the artwork *Traumbild III (Dream Image III)* – the undulating shapes are repeated in various elements throughout the composition in a maze of cross-references, imbuing the whole with a sense of movement. Again the artist has taken up the subject matter of dreams. The linear and planar quality of representation crops up again in his art for a small series of miniature-like oval images set in small gold frames. Each of them displays an imaginary world. In a number of landscapes dating from 1921/1922 we can discern a tendency towards abstraction in parts of his landscapes. There the houses become dysfunctional buildings with a block-like appearance. In the watercolor *Terrasse (Terrace)*, *Montagnola*, from 1921 the tree looks like it is made of stone. In the oval-format of *Garten bei Cassina (Garden near Cassina)* the silhouette of a house resembles a crystal. Crystals play an important part in his work as a writer and an artist. We unfortunately cannot say if he was acquainted with the then current discourse in modern art on the symbolism of crystals.

Room 3

Hesse expressed his great love of nature in plein-air painting and a passion for working in the garden, which acquired a new significance for the artist after 1931 when he moved into Casa Rossa. He was convinced that humankind found truth by observation and understanding nature. Hesse's depictions of nature are therefore not imitations of his natural surroundings, but instead metaphors of his personal and emotional state.

The illustrated manuscript *Tessiner Bilderbuch (Ticino Picture Book)* from 1922/1923 reveals insights into his preferred landscape motifs. He expressed his affinity to nature most lucidly in 1922 in a love story he wrote and illustrated: *Piktors Verwandlungen (Pictor's Metamorphoses)*, which he dedicated to his second wife Ruth Wenger. For the union of humankind and nature that takes place in this fairytale-like narrative, Hesse produced illustrations in which text and watercolor wash drawings visually interact and complement one another. The living beings are subject to constant transformation processes and able to simultaneously unite characteristics of diverse species in one being. This merging of species triggers a process in which things become imbued with life – it can often be traced in Hesse's work. As he put in his own words: "In my poems one often misses the usual reverence towards reality, and when I paint, then the trees have faces or the houses laugh or dance [...]." (Hermann Hesse, *Kurzgefaßter Lebenslauf (Brief Curriculum Vitae)*, 1921/1924)

The easiness permeating Pictor's imaginary world can likewise be recognized in the landscapes Hesse painted around the same time he wrote the story. In these landscapes he applied color using the stamp technique, filling whole compositions or just parts of them with shaped dabs of color. This method of applying the paint made, out of the facades of houses, a brilliant array of nuances of color tones and the trees look like surreal silhouettes. In works conveying a threatening atmosphere the relationship between nature and culture is discordant. We find this especially in the works *Blauer Baum und Häuser (Blue Tree and Houses)* and *Ohne Titel (Untitled)*, both from 1922.

Forms in the poem manuscript for *Pictor's Metamorphoses* have been simplified. A similar mode of representation can be found in Hesse's landscapes of the same period, in which he has reduced the elements of the landscape to geometric forms (*Bocciabahn im Wald / Forest Boccia Court*, 1921; *Tessiner Landschaft / Ticino Landscape*, 1922; *Ohne Titel / Untitled*, around 1922).

Room 4

The ambience pervading Hesse's watercolor landscapes varies according to a limited visual vocabulary. They are in fact countless variations of the dominating motifs of trees, mountains, lakes, and houses integrated into a natural environment. Hesse incorporated Jung's theory of dreams in which a "house" generally stands for the human body; a tree is an archetypal symbol for fertility, birth, and death; a mountain represents difficulties and obstacles; and a lake, as part of the collective unconscious, signifies live-giving and -preserving powers. In his landscapes Hesse created spaces for the exploration of his experiences and emotions.

He succeeded in depicting a balanced-out relationship between the various elements of nature in his symmetrical compositions from 1924: *Blick nach Italien [Richtung Porto Ceresio] (View to Italy [Direction of Port Ceresio])*; *Monte Bre, Luganersee u. M. Bre, M. Boglia, v. oberhalb Bigogno aus (Monte Brè, Lake Lugano and Monte Brè, Monte Boglia, viewed from from above Bigogno)*; and *Felder, Bäume, Berge (Fields, Trees, Mountains)*. Trees and houses play a central part in Hesse's work, sometimes featuring as key motifs or setting the tone for the whole composition. Like in his compositions with detailed motifs, such works figuring mannered shapes and contrasting colors (*Carona, Verso Arasio*, 1925) reveal the traces of black chalk contours shimmering through the paint. These lines function similarly to those in the works executed by the French cloisonnists. The same is true for the art of German artist groups Hesse felt special affinity to – he was partial to the Blue Rider group of artists after his artistic experiments related to August Macke's art, and he had his friend Cuno Amiet to thank for his connection to the Bridge group.

Room 5

In Hesse's work we can recognize certain specific compositional models:

- an empty center framed by elements around the outer edges of a picture (*Ohne Titel / Untitled*),
- a wide pictorial space in which a single motif dominates the center (*Scairolo*, 1927), and
- a space with compositional elements concentrated in the center of the picture forming a core (*Strasse in Montagnola (Street in Montagnola)*, 1927).

In the compositions with an empty central space the artist emphasized diagonals in the composition. In contrast, compositions with a central focus tend towards depicting rounded motifs. They appear to be rather two-dimensional with an overall linear quality and are rather abstract. Two of his key works are based on compositions that focus on the picture center: the unique *Wendeltreppe zum Turm der Casa Camuzzi (Spiral Staircase of the Tower of Casa Camuzzi)* and *Maskenball (Masked Ball)* from 1926. In 1926 and 1927, Hermann Hesse stayed in Zurich during the winters. His life was marked by the polarity of north and south, of the mundane pleasures of the city and the seclusion of Ticino with its proximity to nature.

For the representation of his visual and emotional impressions of artistic circles in Zurich, Hesse chose a collage-like conglomeration and compression of motifs that were in part figurative, in part abstract. Hereby he connected with the then nascent surrealist art movement, making use of what it could offer his own artistic goals.

Hesse repeatedly portrayed paths and roads in his watercolors. They allude to hidden layers of meaning – just as they do in his literary work.

Room 6

Hesse painted unusual views around his house from the tower of Casa Camuzzi and, after he moved in 1931, from the veranda of Casa Rossa (also called “Casa Bodmer”). He remained in this house for the rest of his life.

He copied views of the countryside and nature around him and then rendered them in way that made them appear unfamiliar. Often he made drawings and also colored versions, or two watercolors with diverging degrees of realism, of one and the same view. Certain motifs in his watercolors we find again in his illustrated manuscripts.

Since the 1930s the watercolor wash drawing became the key mode Hesse used when painting. We find it, on the one hand, in his illustrated manuscripts, and, on the other, in works such as *Blick von der Casa Rossa auf Montagnola (View of Montagnola seen from Casa Rossa)* from 1931 in the largest format Hesse ever produced. The same is true for *Pictor schenkt Ninon sein Kristallgebirge (Pictor gives Ninon his Crystal Mountains)* and *Bildnis eines Cactus (Portrait of a Cactus)*.

Hesse dedicated *Pictor schenkt Ninon sein Kristallgebirge*, a landscape of sparkling colored crystals, to his third wife Ninon Ausländer. They were married in 1931, in the same year Hesse painted the watercolor, and remained together until his decease in 1962. Hesse saw himself as the fairytale figure Pictor and depicted his wife, alluding to her nickname “Keuper” – a kind of stone that produces a strongly colored earth and fascinating landscapes – as a brilliant crystal mountain range.

In contrast to his painter friend Ernst Kreidolf who gave plants anthropomorphic features, Hesse characterized himself by means of a metaphor taken from the world of plants. In his *Bildnis eines Cactus* Hesse portrayed himself via the title and the fact it was situated in his house, Casa Bodmer in Montagnola, in the form of a flowering cactus.

Hermann Hesse: Biography

1877

Hermann Hesse was born July 2 in Calw in Württemberg. Prior to his birth both parents, Johannes Hesse and Marie Gundert, lived as missionaries in India. His maternal grandfather was the famous indologist Hermann Gundert. Because his father stemmed from the Baltic States his son had Russian citizenship by birth.

1883

The Hesse family lived in Basle for five years and became Swiss citizens.

1890

Hesse became a German or Württemberg citizen to be able to sit for the regional exams “Landexamen” there.

1892-94

Severe conflicts resulted between him and his parents because they wanted him to become a theologian against his will.

1895-98

Hesse successfully completed an apprenticeship as a bookseller in Tübingen. In 1898 his first book was published, a volume of poems *Romantische Lieder (Romantic Songs)*.

1899-1903

Worked as a bookseller in Basle.

1901

Like all the following, his first trip to Italy took him to the regions in the north of the country.

1903

Second trip to Italy accompanied, for a while, by Maria Bernoulli.

1904

He was able to marry Maria Bernoulli because of his great success with the narrative *Peter Camenzind*. The couple moved to the German shores of Lake Constance and lived in the village Gaienhofen. Three sons were

born in 1905, 1909, and 1911. In the subsequent years Hesse published numerous stories, poems, and newspaper articles on literature.

1906-1914

Hesse went on another four trips to Italy in the company of painters and musicians.

1911

From September to December Hesse travelled through Ceylon and Indonesia together with the painter Hans Sturzenegger.

1912

The Hesse family moved to Bern.

1914

His novel *Roßhalde* was published.

1914-1918

In the course of the War, Hesse turned into a decided pacifist and defended this position in a number of newspaper articles. He was attacked by the German press as a traitor to his country.

1916

Began psychoanalytic treatment with a student of C.G.Jungs. Started painting and drawing.

1919

Separated from his wife. Hesse moved to Montagnola in the Ticino region into Casa Camuzzi. He began to paint and draw a lot more. *Demian* was published.

1920

Publication of the story *Klingsor's last Summer*

1921

Therapeutic sessions with C.G. Jung

1922

Siddhartha was published.

1923

Divorced Maria Bernoulli.

1924

Second marriage to the singer Ruth Wenger. Hesse became a Swiss citizen again.

1927

Divorced his second wife. *Steppenwolf* was published.

1931

Moved into Casa Rossa in Montagnola. Third marriage, now to Ninon Dolbin.

1932

Journey to the East was published.

1932-42

Wrote for his mature work the *Glass Bead Game*.

1933-45

During the twelve years of National Socialist Dictatorship in Germany, Hesse and his wife supported numerous refugees and persecuted Jews who were trying to flee.

1943

The Glass Bead Game was published in Switzerland.

1946

Hesse is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1962

August 9 Hesse died after a stroke.

AGENDA

Öffentliche Führungen:

Sonntag, 11h: 1./15./29. April, 20. Mai, 17. Juni, 1./15. Juli, 5./12. August
Dienstag, 18h: 15./29. Mai, 12. Juni, 24. Juli

Einführung für Lehrpersonen:

Dienstag, 1. Mai, 18h

Anmeldung: T 031 328 09 11, vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Kurs in Zusammenarbeit mit der Volkshochschule Bern:

Mittwoch, 2./9./16./23. Mai, 15h

Anmeldung: info@vhsbe.ch

Kunst und Religion im Dialog: Sonntag, 3. Juni, 15h30

Mehr Informationen: www.kunstmuseumbern.ch

SPECIAL EVENTS

Dienstag, 10. April, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

«Eigensinn macht Spass» – Szenische Lesung mit Saxophon-Improvisation

Graziella Rossi, Helmut Vogel und Harry White (Saxophon)

Dienstag, 24. April, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

«Herzlich verbunden» – Hermann Hesse und Thomas Mann in Briefen – Szenische Lesung

Rudolf Guckelsberger, Benedikt Schregle

Dienstag, 8. Mai, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

«Zweisedlerliebe» – Ninon und Hermann Hesse im Dialog – Szenische Lesung

Nina Hesse-Bernhard, Matthias Walter und Andi Peter (Live-Vertonung)

Samstag, 12. Mai/Samstag, 30. Juni – Besammlung 14h beim Parkplatz Zentrum Paul Klee

«Hermann Hesse in Bern» – Literarischer Spaziergang rund um seinen Wohnort im Melchenbühl (1912-1919)

Rudolf Cornelius, Bärbel Reetz, Ernst Süss

Anmeldung: ru-vi.cornelius@sunrise.ch

Dienstag, 22. Mai, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

«Liebes Herz» – Hesses Leidenschaft für Ruth Wenger – Szenische Lesung

Cornelia Bernoulli, Peter Holliger und Marcel Ege (Gitarre)

Dienstag, 29. Mai, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

Das AMAR-QUARTETT spielt Streichquartette von Fritz Brun und Joseph Haydn

Anna Brunner (Violine), Igor Keller (Violine), Hannes Bärtschi (Viola), Péter Somodari (Violoncello)

Dienstag, 5. Juni, 20h – Buchhandlung Stauffacher, Neuengasse 25-37

«Heimweh nach Freiheit» – Autorenstimmen zu Hesse-Texten

Peter Bichsel, Guy Krneta, Klaus Merz, Peter K. Wehrli

Eintritt: CHF 15.00, Reservation: info@stauffacher.ch

Dienstag, 19. Juni, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

«Im Tessin scheint die Sonne inniger» – Musikalische Lesung

Graziella Rossi, Helmut Vogel und Ambra Albek (Violine), Fiona Albek (Klavier)

Dienstag, 3. Juli, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

«Der Jahrhundertgeiger Fritz Kreisler im Spiegel seines Zeitgenossen Hermann Hesse» – Musikalische Lesung

Graziella Rossi, Helmut Vogel und Noëlle Gruebler (Violine), Andrea Wiesli (Klavier)

Dienstag, 31. Juli, 19h – Kunstmuseum Bern

«Hermann Hesse und die Politik» – Szenische Lesung

Graziella Rossi, Helmut Vogel

Eintritt:

Alle Veranstaltungen im Kunstmuseum Bern CHF 30.00/red. CHF 25.00 (nur Abendkasse). Bei Abgabe des Rahmenprogrammtickets: Ausstellungseintritt CHF 7.00/red. CHF 5.00, Angebot gültig während Ausstellungsdauer

Reservierungen: info@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Mit Unterstützung der Hermann Hesse-Stiftung Bern / Erben Fritz Brun / Jürg-George Bürki-Stiftung, Bern

CATALOG

«... die Grenzen überfliegen». Der Maler Hermann Hesse. Hrsg. Kunstmuseum Bern, Matthias Frehner, Valentine von Fellenberg und Museum Hermann Hesse Montagnola, Regina Bucher. Mit Textbeiträgen von Regina Bucher, Thomas Feitknecht, Valentine von Fellenberg, Matthias Frehner, Volker Michels, Konrad Tobler und zahlreichen farbigen Abbildungen. Gestaltung: Marie Louise Suter, Kunstmuseum Bern. Deutsch. Kerber Verlag, Bielefeld. ISBN 978-3-86678-635-6

INFOS

Admission fees: CHF 14.00/red. CHF 10.00
Bei Abgabe des Rahmenprogrammtickets:
Ausstellungseintritt CHF 7.00/red. CHF 5.00
Angebot gültig während Ausstellungsdauer
T 031 328 09 11

Private guided tours vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Opening hours Tuesday: 10h – 21h

Wednesday – Sunday: 10h – 17h

Karfreitag, 6.4.2012: closed

Ostern, 8./9.4.2012: 10h – 17h

Auffahrt, 17.5.2012: 10h – 17h

Pfingsten, 27./28.5.2012: 10h – 17h

Curators Matthias Frehner (Direktor Kunstmuseum Bern, Kurator),
Valentine von Fellenberg (Gastkuratorin Kunstmuseum Bern),
Regina Bucher (Direktorin Museum Hermann Hesse Montagnola, Co-Kuratorin)

Further stations:



Museo Cantonale d'Arte

August 31
– October 21
2012

November 3 2012 – January 20 2013

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