

The Butterflies' Ball and the Dogs' Party. Ernst Kreidolf and the Animals

June 21 to September 29 2013

Ernst Kreidolf (b. 1863, Bern—d. 1956, Bern) is considered one of the most famous illustrated-book authors in Switzerland. Young and old are fascinated by his books of his flower tales in *Blumen-Märchen* (1898), meadow gnomes in *Die Wiesenzwerge* (1902), alpine flowers in *Alpenblumen-Märchen* (1918/19), or of winter in *Ein Wintermärchen* (1924). On the occasion of this exceptional artist's 150th birthday, the Kunstmuseum Bern is, together with the Ernst Kreidolf Association and Foundation, mounting the exhibition *The Butterflies' Ball and The Dogs' Party: Ernst Kreidolf and the Animals*. After the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum, the show can also be viewed at the Städtische Wessenberg Galerie in Constance.

The exhibition *The Butterflies' Ball and the Dogs' Party: Ernst Kreidolf and the Animals* is especially attractive to an audience that is looking forward to, once again, viewing the universally famous and widely popular creations of this artist, following on from a number of exhibitions that comprehensively explored his artistic roots: *Ernst Kreidolf and Art History, Art and Children's Books Around 1900* (2002), and *Ernst Kreidolf and His Artist Friends* (2007).

Room 1: Early Work

Kreidolf grew up on a farm belonging to his grandparents in Tägerwilen. There plants and animals were an integral part of his childhood and already the key protagonists of his earliest drawings as a child. He wrote in his autobiography that "I would lie on the slopes of some mountain for half or even full days at a time. Sometimes I would witness an avalanche as some cliff opposite collapsed down a slope opposite, I observed the squirrels, the birds and other fauna busying themselves in the pines and firs. Because I kept quiet and motionless, stags and deer left the forest for the open meadows. I also scrutinized the grasses and herbs, the alpine flowers, the bees, bumblebees, beetles, and butterflies. (...) Every now and again a butterfly would settle on my hand and explore it by gently probing my skin with its delicate proboscis. (...) I found this miniature world at least as beautiful and delightful as the so-called 'wide world', and the impression left on my fantasy by alpine meadows laid the foundations for the pictures of my illustrated books." [Ernst Kreidolf, *Lebenserinnerungen* [Memoirs], 1957]

The fountainhead of Kreidolf's art was nature. This is clearly evidenced by his early work—in particular his sketches. They are the product of his scientific curiosity and follow realistic conventions of representation. He renders all creatures—grasshoppers, dragon-

flies, frogs, or snails—with wonderful precision. Kreidolf's great truth to nature in representation goes so far that we can even identify the gender of his grasshoppers as in *Heuschreckenweibchen* (Female Grasshoppers, n.d.). In a drawing of caterpillars Kreidolf calls them by their exact names, such as the larvae of the buff-tip and fox moths, and thereby points out his interest and knowledge in the natural sciences. Other drawings portray the same creature from various angles, as is the case in *Schnecken* (Snails, n.d.), *Frösche* (Frogs, ca. 1885), or the head of a wolf (*Wolf*, ca. 1890). These studies testify to Kreidolf's delight in observation and his search for capturing the typical stance or movements of different animals and insects.

The exact study of nature and an admirable proficiency in realistic representation constitute the foundations of Kreidolf's art. By means of his great sensitivity and understanding he was able to depict the specific character of all the creatures he portrayed.

In the 1890s he also painted several paintings including animals. Although they are not the prime subject matter of the works they are integral elements of everyday scenes. In *Morgenidyll* (Morning Idyll, 1893) cats sit peacefully on a windowsill or doze on the sewing table while Kreidolf's sister at the window waters the geraniums. In *Die Begegnung* (The Encounter, 1895), a pair of oxen harnessed to a cart in the background, staring dreamily and disinterestedly, is an evocative contrast to a young couple in the foreground. The two young people are blatantly shy, but their meeting obviously holds a strong note of erotic fascination for each of them.

Room 2: Dogs

Dogs play a prominent role in Ernst Kreidolf's work. A great number of highly diverse drawings, watercolors, paintings, and an entire illustrated book were inspired by the dachshund owned by his friend and author Leopold Weber, whom Kreidolf met while he was in Partenkirchen.

The greeting card to Leopold Weber (*Glückwunschkarte an Leopold Weber*, 1898) has a picture of Weber's part dachshund "Satan" portrayed on it. The author and the artist raised the puppy together and Kreidolf captured for posterity the animal in uncountable poses and situations. Leopold Weber had a dream that ultimately led to the painting *Dackelburg* (Dachshund Castle, 1892)—a homage to the adorable dachshund race. The painting is of a kind of dachshund's paradise in which even the buildings are shaped after dogs. It is one of Kreidolf's most bizarre artworks in the way it combines nature and surreal elements.

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The painting *Hundeschlummerlied* (Dogs' Lullaby, n.d.) illustrates the beauties of a paradise reserved for good dachshunds when they die—with great expanses of hilly countryside where they can satiate their hunting drive without restrictions, butcher shops literally bursting with sausages and an employee who is there especially to serve the dogs any specialties they desire; many plump good-natured women who allow the dogs to freely enjoy the comforts of sleeping on their soft laps. The final picture, however, depicts the horrors of hell: a pack of terrified dogs is fastened by rattling chains and a hell-raising farmhand brandishes a whip with muscular arms. In the illustrations for the poem Kreidolf reveals his entire knowledge about the different races of dogs. But the dachshund is almost always the focal point.

In *Hundepark* (Dogs' Park, 1899-1904) from *Buntscheck*, a book that was illustrated by Kreidolf, dogs of all races play and romp. They sport together with two pigs and a spotted calf in a green meadow, chase a white cat up a tree, and run through a playhouse in the background. A sheepdog looks as if it were training a dachshund (which is obediently standing on its hind legs at the top of the painting). A red-spotted calf tries to leap around with the chasing dogs. In the foreground a black dachshund is resting under broad leaves and observes the two dogs who are trying in vain to get at the white cat that has scuttled up a tree.

In the illustrations for the book *Das Hundefest* (The Dogs' Party, prior to 1928), Kreidolf has not only included dogs of many diverse races but also often scenes featuring dogs with very human characteristics. Despite the fact that the expressions and reactions of the dogs—as well as their somewhat ridiculous loincloths—were inspired by human behavior and mores, Kreidolf's compositions still always maintain a very natural quality that preserves the specifically canine qualities of his dogs even in the most bizarre scenes. As in several of his other books as well, Kreidolf thematically addresses the transitoriness of life in *The Dogs' Party*. After the dogs have finished playing (*Wettsspringen*/Jumping Competition, *Karussell*/Merry-go-round), swimming (*Bad*/Swim), eating (*Mahlzeit*/Dinner Time), and dancing (*Hundeball* / Dogs' Ball), they all return home (*Nach Hause*/Returning Home), and then, in the final illustration, to heaven. *Zurück ins All* (Back to the Celestial Spheres) shows the dogs waiting on a light-filled mountain meadow of their star before taking off. Large white ships made out of clouds are to take them through the blue ether of the sky after they have been transformed into radiant and "transparent" beings. The dogs return to the celestial spheres as serene beings—to where they originally came from like all the other creatures on our Earth as well.

Room 3: From Cats to Mice (all the other creatures)

Ernst Kreidolf was interested in almost all the members of the animal kingdom that he was able to observe for himself in nature or as a domesticated animal where he lived and worked. Besides dogs, cats fascinated him greatly too. The scope of cat representations spans the affectionate cat on his shoulder in *Selbstporträt mit Katze* (Self-Portrait with Cat, 1893, Room 1) to the wild hunter of the watercolor illustrating the children's verses in *S'Kätzchen läuft die Trepp hinan...* (The Kitten runs up the stairs, ca. 1905) in the book *Alte Kinderreime* (Traditional nursery rhymes). Holding a knife in its right paw, the cat silently and determinedly creeps up the stairs, focusing on the little mouse it foresees as its prey.

Sheep too play their part in Kreidolf's compositions. In *Schafweide* (Sheep Pasture, 1920/1921) he has illustrated them as domestic animals grazing on a green meadow together with a shepherd. In *Die Legende vom Gold* (The Legend of Gold, ca. 1924), a painting with a

somewhat enigmatic content, they must be interpreted in a Christian context. Whereas the devil with a cart full of gold on the bridge is followed by the greedy and appears to go directly to hell, the Holy Family struggles to steer a raft with a black-and-white sheep on it safely through the strong currents of the river.

Other works have probably been inspired by the many stories Kreidolf was told by huntsmen and foresters during his sojourns in Partenkirchen. St. Hubert, patron saint of the hunt, of nature and the environment, was possibly often present in their narratives. Kreidolf portrayed in *Hubertus* (St. Hubert, 1919) the crucial scene of the medieval legend, where the former Bishop of Liège and later hermit ran into a magnificent stag with a Crucifix between its antlers; an event that led to his conversion to Christianity. In the undated series of unpublished watercolors *Der Traum des Jägers* (The Dream of the Hunter, n.d.), alpine antelopes play the leading role.

In the paintings *Maientraum* (May Dream, 1921) and *Der Zaubergarten* (The Magic Garden, 1934), especially squirrels, majestic peacocks and other magnificent birds as well as butterflies make a paradise of the light-filled parks with their many flowers, creating landscapes we find in our dreams where life is carefree and happy without the burdens and worries of life.

Room 4: Mythic Creatures

Besides imaginatively transforming animals, Kreidolf likewise incorporated mythic creatures in his illustrated universe. They can be subdivided into two groups: on the one hand, creatures from mythology such as sirens, centaurs, fauns, elves, unicorns, and dragons; and, on the other, his creations that are not based on any traditional model. In contrast to the drawings and books of his own stories and ideas, which are characterized by a romantic and fairy-tale atmosphere, Kreidolf was more interested in the dark side of human existence in his illustrations for other authors. The mythic creatures of classical mythology seemed to have fulfilled this function—with a few exceptions. In the illustrations for Leopold Weber's book *Traumgestalten* (Dream creatures), which was first published 1900, we find mythic creatures of all kinds and sorts. The *Traumkönig* (Dream King) seems to occupy a pivotal position because Kreidolf depicted him three times in all in separate drawings. The huge bat with its vulture's head could be a combination of Morpheus, the Greek god of dreams (the son of Hypnos, the god of sleep) and a ghost. While ghosts were popularly believed to haunt the nights, making them dangerous, the Greek god is described as having wings with which he can noiselessly fly.

Kreidolf made two versions of his illustration for the story *Am Bergsee* (At the mountain lake). In them he depicted the mountain spirit as a faun—a hybrid creature, half human, half goat. It has a human rump and the hooves and tail of a goat. The water nymph is a mermaid. The gods of the forest in ancient mythology are often associated with water nymphs—an association that was very likely known to Leopold Weber and Ernst Kreidolf. Interestingly, the more pithy version was not chosen for the publication, that is, the version with a water nymph in the lower foreground combing her hair and thus making a show of her proverbial sensuality, while a lecherous faun ogles her demonstratively from the shore.

Elves are among the mythic creatures that play a predominant role in Kreidolf's art. They are interpreted as being entirely good. Kreidolf portrays them as graceful beings with wings. They differ from butterflies in that we find no equivalent for them in the real world. As spirits of nature elves are closely related to the various plants, and therefore Kreidolf has them accompany the laburnum or *Goldregen* (1930) in the book *Blumen: Ritornelle* (Flowers: ritornello). In the

painting *Berggruss* (Mountain Greeting, 1912), the elf, as a messenger of spring, seems to breathe new life into the barren alpine landscape with a bouquet of flowers. In the greeting card for Johanna Weber (*Glückwunschkarte für Johanna Weber*) from 1905, elves take on the form of winged children who gently rock a hammock in which a reading woman reclines. The traditional belief that only special people could see the beauty of elves makes this a very special birthday card—it is an expression of Ernst Kreidolf's close friendship with the wife of his friend Leopold Weber.

Room 5: Grasshoppers and Other Insects

Grasshoppers are Kreidolf's favorite protagonists in the animal kingdom. Already around 1900 he produced watercolor studies of grasshoppers: *Heuschreckenstudien* (ca. 1900, Room 1). It is possible to literally identify the different species he portrayed due to the great precision in representation, the colors he used, and the portrayal of the way the insects move. Even the gender of his grasshoppers can be clearly determined.

In later illustrations we find his grasshoppers in several greeting cards and drawings. The precision of nature studies predominates here as well. They stride like elegant hikers holding umbrellas and smoking cigars through a forest (*Glückwunschkarte* / Greeting card, 1914), bring a Christmas tree (*Glückwunschkarte* / Greeting card, 1913), play the violin for a woman sleeping in a rose (*Sommers letzte Rose* / Summer's Last Rose), or ice-skate while holding snowdrops (*Heuschrecke läuft Schlittschuh* / Grasshopper Ice-skating).

The grasshopper ultimately plays an important role in at least ten of his illustrated books. Whereas these insects take on the part of domestic animals and mounts in the book *Wiesenzwerge* (Meadow gnomes, before 1903), in the book *Grashupfer* (Grasshoppers, 1931) they are the main protagonists. Embedded in the course of the seasons from spring and autumn to winter they play ball, skittles, and balance on a tightrope, or play music as the sun sets and guard overnight. They are symbolic for the fate of humans, for love, war, death, and how we deal with happiness. In portraying them Kreidolf created—with his typical combination of scientific observation and artistic imagination—fairy-tale anthropomorphic beings. However, he did this with such truth to nature that we can identify the different species. Among the grasshoppers he drew we can find the large banded grasshopper in *Seiltänzer* (Tightrope Walkers), the meadow grasshopper in *Unwetter* (Storm) or in *Kegelclub* (Bowling Club), and the gravel bank grasshopper in *Nachtwache* (Night Watch).

Room 6: Butterflies

For Kreidolf butterflies were magical creatures. In the journal *Der Türmer* (1931) he describes them as "flowers that have the ability to fly" and how his fascination for butterflies intensified over the years: "As a ten-year-old I saw a showcase of beautifully displayed butterflies at my teacher's place. Among them were kinds I had never seen before but were indigenous to the area and should be there, he told me. I listened enthralled, asking him how one came to own such a collection." Kreidolf then also began his own butterfly collection, but had a guilty conscience in doing so: "Actually we should not kill such beautiful creatures." Kreidolf acquired, already this early in life, a substantial knowledge about different species, their appearance, and life-cycles, and all this flowed into his pictures.

In the book *Sommervögel* (Summer Birds, 1908), butterflies are the key protagonists. Kreidolf has all the native species he knew from his childhood days play a role in the publication. In the drawing *Der Frühlingstag* (Spring Day) alone we can already witness 15 different species of butterflies: the large and small tortoise shell, the dark-

green fritillary, the cabbage white, and the black-veined white, the common brimstone, the purple tiger, the speckled yellow moth, the magpie moth, the gossamer-winged butterfly, and the comma, to name only a few. The individual butterflies have been rendered both very realistic and highly imaginatively. Kreidolf sought inspiration for the drawings in the names of the large and small tortoise shell, which in German are called the equivalent of "small and large fox", and the purple tiger, which in German is called the equivalent of "purple bear".

Kreidolf was not only interested in the butterfly stage of the life cycle of this insect but also in the other stages of its metamorphosis of caterpillar and chrysalis or, in the case of the moth, cocoon. The larvae in *Puppengrab* (Larvae Grave) is depicted just as zoologically correctly as the caterpillars in *Raupengarten* (Caterpillar Garden) and in *Raupentheater* (Caterpillar Theater).

Kreidolf attached a symbolic meaning to the life cycle of the butterfly or moth from the larvae stage to a seemingly lifeless chrysalis or cocoon, and finally a magical and delicate flying insect. In this metamorphosis he saw the primal principle of life in which birth, growth, and death are closely interlinked. For this reason Kreidolf called his watercolor of butterflies emerging from their chrysalises *Die Auferstehung* (The Resurrection). In *Die Fahrt des Trauermantels* (The Journey of the Mourning Cloak) the butterfly is a symbol of the human soul and the emotions it experiences from melancholy to euphoria. The mourning cloak—a species of butterfly that is also found in Europe—is a sad king who, by inner enlightenment, learns to be at peace with himself and transcend his worries and grief, henceforth living happily and looking confidently to the future.

Biography: Ernst Kreidolf

1863	Konrad Ernst Theophil Kreidolf was born February 9 in Bern.
1868	The family moved to Constance, Germany, where the father opened up a toy store. Ernst Kreidolf grew up close by with his grandparents in Tägerwilen in Switzerland.
1879	Kreidolf began an apprenticeship in Constance as lithographer at the Lithographische Anstalt Schmidt-Pecht; at the same time he studied drawing.
1882	After completing his apprenticeship, Kreidolf continued at Schmidt-Pecht as an assistant to support his parents after their shop went bankrupt. With the proceeds from the sale of a lithography landscape of Tägerwilen he established a financial basis for studying art.
1883–1885	He attended the Kunstgewerbeschule (applied art college) in Munich. On the side he earned an income as a lithographic draftsman. From 1885 he studied art at the private art school run by Paul Nauen.
1887	The Munich Art Academy first accepted Kreidolf as a student on his second application. He studied under Gabriel von Hackl and Ludwig von Löfftz.
1889–1895	He discontinued his studies for health reasons and moved to Partenkirchen. There he met the author Leopold Weber and they became friends. In 1889 he painted the walls and ceiling in the house of the author Walther Siegfried in Partenkirchen (destroyed).
1890	Kreidolf taught heirress to the throne, Princess Marie von Schaumburg-Lippe, how to paint. The lessons were continued on in the following years. From 1895 to 1902 Kreidolf stayed a month of each year at court in Bückeberg.
1892	First exhibition of his works is mounted at the Münchner Kunstverein.
1894	Met the Swiss painter Wilhelm Balmer and became friends. They went on excursions together to the Bavarian Alps to paint.
1895	Met and became friends with the Swiss painter Albert Welti and his wife Emeline. Met Ferdinand Avenarius, who supported him in the area of publishing.

- 1896 Returned to Munich.
- 1897 An exhibition of his watercolors for the later illustrated books of flower fairy tales *Blumenmärchen* and sleeping trees *Schlafende Bäume* at Arnold Gallery in Dresden. His first contacts with publishing houses were without success.
- 1898–1900 With the financial support of Princess Marie von Schaumburg-Lippe, Kreidolf had the Kommissionsverlag Piloty & Loehle in Munich publish his *Blumenmärchen*. In 1900, Verlag Schafstein & Co. took over publication of the book and Kreidolf signed an exclusive contract with the publishing house.
- 1900 Art historian J.A. Beringer acquainted Kreidolf with the poet Richard Dehmel. Kreidolf illustrated the volume of his work *Fitzbutze*.
- 1901 and 1902 His illustrated books *Die schlafenden Bäume* and *Die Wiesenzwerge* were published.
- 1904 Together with K.F.E. von Freyhold, Karl Hofer, and E.R. Weiss, Kreidolf illustrated the children's book *Der Buntscheck* published by Richard Dehmel. Because of cardiac problems he stayed in Trebschen, Brandenburg, for treatment. In the sanatorium there he painted the walls of the bowling alley (destroyed).
- 1905 The illustrated book *Alte Kinderreime* was published.
- 1906 Solo exhibition at the Künstlerhaus Zürich.
- 1908 The illustrated book *Sommervögel* was published. Kreidolf dedicated it to his friend Albert Welti. Met Paul Klee.
- 1910 Kreidolf participated at the Zürcher Kunsthaus opening exhibition.
- 1911 Death of Emeline Welti. Kreidolf's illustrated book *Der Gartentraum* was published (the same book that Hermann Hesse addresses in his novel *Rosshalde*).
- 1912 Death of Albert Welti. Kreidolf organized his memorial exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich.
- 1914 Kreidolf was taken by surprise by World War I while in St. Moritz, and at first could not get back to Munich. He stayed then with Swiss friends. It was not until the winter of 1915 that he was able to return to Munich.
- 1916 Kreidolf was forced to go for treatment to St. Moritz. He became friends there with the publisher Emil Roninger. His publishing house, Rotapfel-Verlag, published Kreidolf's books after World War I.
- 1917 Kreidolf left Munich and settled in Bern. Together with Gustav Gamper he supported Hermann Hesse during a stay in Ticino with the author's first attempts at painting. Wilhelm Fraenger published the first monograph on Ernst Kreidolf.
- 1920 until 1935 Rotapfel-Verlag published an illustrated book almost annually, among them were classics such as *Alpenblumenmärchen* (1922), *Ein Wintermärchen* (1924), *Lenzgesind* (Spring creatures) (1926), *Das Hundefest* (1928), *Grashupfer* (1931).
- 1921 and 1923 Solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern and at the Kunsthaus Zürich.
- 1933 On the occasion of his 70th birthday a large retrospective at the Kunsthalle Bern was mounted. Also the Kunsthaus Zürich organized an exhibition honoring Kreidolf's work. Kreidolf was awarded an honorary doctorate by Bern University.
- 1935 Kreidolf wrote his *Lebenserinnerungen* (Memoirs)
- 1956 Kreidolf died on August 12, 1956 in Berne. He was buried at Schosshalden Cemetery in Berne.

INFORMATION

Co-Curators

Claudine Metzger, Kunstmuseum Bern
Barbara Stark, Städtische Wessenberg-Galerie, Konstanz

Entrance Fee

CHF 14.00/red. CHF 10.00

Private Guided Tours

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Opening Hours

Tuesday: 10h – 21h
Wednesday – Sunday: 10h – 17h
Monday: closed

Public Holidays

01.08.2013: closed

Further venue of the exhibition

Städtische Wessenberg Galerie, Constance, 15.03.-11.05.2014

CATALOGUE (in German)

Faltertanz und Hundefest. Ernst Kreidolf und die Tiere.

Reich illustrierter Katalog mit Beiträgen von Matthias Frehner, Claudine Metzger, Sebastian Schmideler, Peter Schmid, Barbara Stark, Roland Stark und Sibylle Walther. 192 Seiten, zahlreiche Farbabbildungen. Deutsch. Imhof Verlag, Petersberg. ISBN 978-3-86568-893-4. Ca. CHF 25.00

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A joint exhibition project of the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Städtische Wessenberg Galerie, Constance, and the Ernst Kreidolf Society and Foundation