

Clair de lune. Pictures of the moon from the Collection of Prints and Drawings

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Apollo 11 landed on the moon fifty years ago. It wasn't Jules Verne's Barbicane or Hergé's Tintin who emerged from the capsule, however, but people of flesh and blood. What could have been disenchantment was the beginning of new dreams and fantasies, and the fascination that emanates from the Earth's satellite remains undiminished even today.

The exhibition *Clair de lune* shows highlights from the Collection of Prints and Drawings of the Kunstmuseum Bern about the moon, and includes some 50 works from the 16th century to the present day. Important names such as Albrecht Dürer, Franz Niklaus König and Paul Klee are represented alongside forgotten artists who deserve to be rediscovered.

A tour of the exhibition clearly reveals the different contexts in which the pictures of the moon were produced, and the great diversity of the various thematic facets that appear in them. For all their differences, not least in terms of artistic technique, they vividly reveal the extent to which the moon has inflamed the imagination of the artists time and again over the centuries.

Crescent Moon – Mary

In Christian art the moon is connected with Mary. The picture type of the crescent-moon Madonna dates back to representations of the Woman of the Apocalypse, described as 'clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head' (Revelation 12.1). In the copper engraving *Mary with Crown of Stars* (1508) >6, and in the title picture of his sequence of woodcuts on Revelation >3, **Albrecht Dürer** falls back on this medieval iconography. Another woodcut from Dürer's *Apocalypse* shows the scenic context >5: a seven-headed dragon threatens Mary, the woman of the sun on the crescent moon, and the child to which she has given birth, but both are saved – the child is 'snatched up to God', and Maria is given eagles' wings to escape (Revelation 12.5., 12.14). In the titular woodcut of *The Life of Mary* (around 1511), Dürer combines the picture type with a quite different understanding of Mary >7. Here he has placed a young woman, breast-feeding her child, on the crescent moon; as a result Maria appears both as a distant queen of heaven and close to us through her humanity.

Maria on the crescent moon remained a popular subject, not least in the variant in which she nurses her child. An Italian copper engraving from the 17th century, made from Agostino Carracci's reproduction of a drawing by Jacopo Ligozzi, is an example of this >8.

Ernst Kreidolf's watercolour *The Woman of the Apocalypse with the Child above the Waves against the Starry Night Sky (The Crescent Moon in the Firmament)* uses the same picture type but depicts an interpretation which is very much the artist's own >9: like an apparition that has developed out of the nocturnal landscape, Mary hovers fairy-like above the water, and the moon shines in the sky again.

Luna and the man in the moon

The worship of a personified moon is something that seems to have existed always and everywhere – the heavenly bodies are held to be deities. Sun and moon often appear as siblings or as a couple. Apart from depictions of the goddess of hunting Artemis/Diana, who often bears the attribute of a crescent moon, western art is particularly familiar with pictures of the moon goddess Luna. In the copper engraving *Luna Noctis Domina* (Luna, Lady of the Night) by **Hans Sebald Beham** (around 1540) she holds a crescent moon in her right hand and is accompanied by the astrological sign of Cancer >2. The small-format engraving is part of a 7-part sequence of the planets: Luna is joined by Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Sol/Sun >1. The (male) face of the crescent moon is a traditional pictorial invention, also used by **Dürer** >4. With its dark areas, which are due to the craters and the variations in intensity of reflected sunlight, the moon recalls a human face. Particularly when the moon is full the man in the moon is easily recognised (cf. the watercolour by **Ernst Kreidolf** >10). A closer look does not dispel the enchantment, quite the contrary. The three drawings by **Balthasar Anton Dunker** can be read as different ways of approaching nocturnal light: the silver-bright moonlight and the long shadows emphasise the elegiac scene at the mausoleum >11, while the warmer tone fits the romantic mood of the lute-player by the waterfall >12. On the other hand, the two men with the telescope are attempting to get to the bottom of the cause of the magic >13.

Full moon – nocturnal landscape

Nocturnal scenes in nature were depicted very early in western art. The birth of Christ, for example, or the flight into Egypt are popular subjects that are lit not only by fire and torches, but also by the moon. Chiaroscuro was especially popular in the Baroque, and in the Romantic era nocturnal landscapes went through a genuine boom. **Franz Niklaus König's** view of Bern in the light of the full moon (around 1810) is in this tradition >16. The moon has appeared between the clouds and casts its mysterious light on the city, reflections flash in the river Aare. The watercolour, painted on transparent paper, is shown in a replica of the so-called 'König box': König had designed this device to show his paintings by candlelight. He had great success with these presentations in Switzerland, Germany and France, and even Goethe was a fan.

The landscape as an echo-chamber of human emotions – at night and in the moonlight everything appears enchanted. In the foreground of his etching *Night*, **Max Klinger** shows a man in profile,

his head resting thoughtfully on his hand, a self-portrayal >46. Even if it is not exactly ‘*monstruos*’ [monsters] that are born out of the sleep of reason, as in Goya’s famous etching, there is something unpredictable about the night, and the moon intensifies that effect. Clouds pile up in front of it and assume uncanny forms.

One particularly impressive work was made by the German Expressionist **Maria Uhden**, who died young, and whose work has recently been attracting renewed attention >21. Her figures, naked people and animals, are exposed to a cosmic event. They rise, fall and dance while sun, moon and the stars stand in the sky and a small town lies there in strange tranquillity. A poetic metaphor for the worlds of dream.

In **Marc Chagall’s** monotype *Profil et oiseau sur fond bleu* [Profile and Bird against a Blue Background], the moon appears as a cipher for a mood lost in dreams >20: does the young woman really see the bunch of flowers that seems to have grown out of her hand? And what about the bird on her head? Nesting in her hair, it spreads its wings, ready to fly. A confluence of memory, vision and longing that pauses time for the duration of a wing-beat.

Paul Klee’s *Mondlied* (Moonsong) is poetic and humorous >23. The setting develops out of a single pencil line; we follow it with our eye, we recognise a bush or a tree and the singer, a dog howling at the full moon. Its eyes correspond with the circle of the celestial body that casts its spell over all living creatures.

New moon

Even if it can’t be seen, the moon continues to fascinate. *Kein Wasser – kein Mond* [No Water – No Moon] (2004) is the name of **Judith Albert’s** video work >47. But the circular projection high up on the wall evokes associations with the moon. The image is shot from a low-flying aeroplane. In sparkling light, the landscape glides away below the viewers – not a view of the earth from the moon like the one seen by the astronauts, more as if the ‘good old moon’ was looking down on them. The majestic beauty of the moment makes us dream – the engine noise of the plane and the projector reminds us how the image came into being.

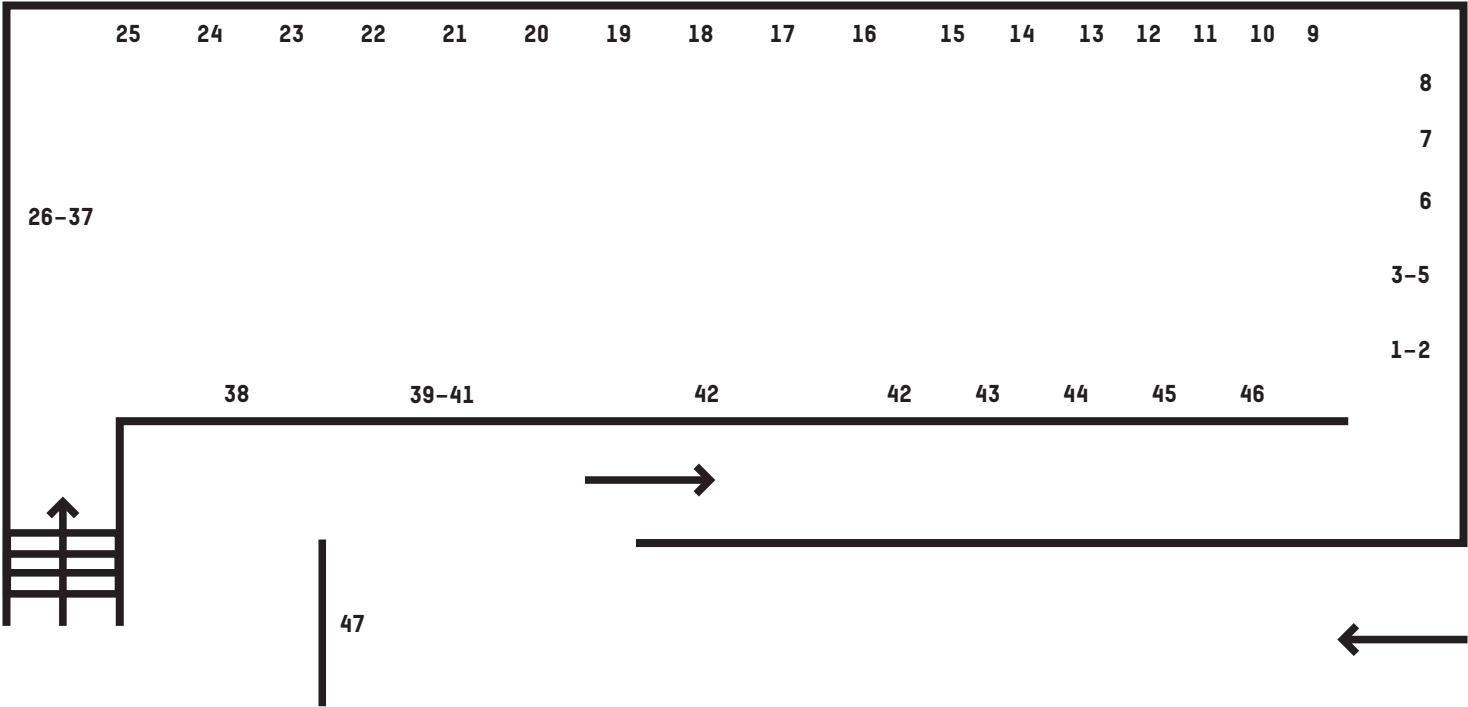
Depictions of the moon from the 20th and 21st century are well represented in the Print Collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern. Twelve works are shown from the 30-part cycle *Mr. Sun and Mrs. Moon* (1973) by **Claude Sandoz**, which encompasses colourful watercolours, pencil drawings and two paintings on fabric >26–37. Sandoz works with signs that look like symbols, flat, repeated ornaments that cover the whole page, free symmetries and corresponding forms. Amidst this opulence and rich diversity (glitter is used on the fabric pictures) the sun and the moon can be experienced as polar opposite forces. What occurs between them is a narrative game of attraction and repulsion that repeatedly spreads itself anew.

In the colour photograph *Moonraker* from the well-known *Wurstserie* [sausage series] by **Fischli/Weiss** (1979) in which household objects were arranged into witty and mysterious images >38, space travel and the James Bond film of the same name appear in a domestic refrigerator: little plasticine figures scurry around the bottle-rocket with its glass engines. The scene is bathed in dramatic chiaroscuro, and the countdown is running. The irresistible humour of the work comes from the miniaturisation and banal ‘domestication’ of a great longing, the journey into space.

Franz Gertsch’s watercolour *Bei Neumond* [At the New Moon] connects with the tradition of Romanticism >44. From a slightly elevated viewpoint we look out over a hilly landscape with a peaceful little lake. The scenery looks remote and untouchable, with no apparent trace of civilisation. A pale light draws a greyish, pearl-coloured veil over the topography. The fine crescent of the waxing moon appears beside the mountain peak – a new morning, a new beginning.

The photogravures *Reflexion I-III* (1991) by **Markus Raetz** can be seen as a complex engagement with the moon, with our projections, longings and fears >39–41. They were made by exposing the light-sensitive printing plate to sunlight. First, though, the light hit a mirror on which the artist had drawn a face. What we see is reflection and shadow.

We know that the moon is a cold, lightless lump of rock in space which circles our planet and reflects the light of the sun, and yet it illuminates our nights, and we see the man in the moon.



- 1–2 Hans Sebald Beham (1500–1550), *Sol, Diei Praefectus* and *Luna, Noctis Domina*, copper engravings from a 7-part planetary cycle
- 3–5 Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), ‘Apocalypse’, German edition 1498, Latin edition 1511, series of 16 woodcuts, from it *The Virgin appears John*, title page of the Latin edition *The Opening of the Fifth and Sixth Seals*, sheet 4, German edition *The woman clothed in the sun and the seven-headed dragon*, sheet 9, Latin edition
- 6 Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), *Mary with Crown of Stars*, 1508, copper engraving
- 7 Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), *Mary on the crescent moon*, c. 1511, title page of ‘The Life of Mary’, woodcut
- 8 17th century copper engraving, *Mary with the Child on the Crescent Moon*, after the copper engraving by Agostino Carracci (1557–1602) after a drawing by Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1626)
- 9 Ernst Kreidolf (1863–1956), *Das apokalyptische Weib mit dem Kind über den Wogen vor gestirntem Nachthimmel (Die Mondsichel am Firmament)* (The Woman of the Apocalypse with the Child above the Waves against the Starry Night Sky (The Crescent Moon in the Firmament)), watercolour and gouache
- 10 Ernst Kreidolf (1863–1956), *Mond und Sterne* (Moon and Stars), 1925, illustration for the reading book ‘Roti Rösli im Garte’, Lehrmittelverlag des Kantons Bern, 1925, ink and watercolor with opaque white
- 11 Balthasar Anton Dunker (1746–1807), *Moonlight Landscape, kneeling Woman in front of Mausoleum*, 1791, gouache
- 12 Balthasar Anton Dunker (1746–1807), *Moonlight Landscape, Lute-player*, 1794, watercolour
- 13 Balthasar Anton Dunker (1746–1807), *Moonlight Landscape, two Men with Telescope*, 1794, watercolour
- 14 Jean-Henri-Marie (called Franck) Prevost-Ritter (1810–1898), *Rock Road by the Sea by Moonlight*, Indian ink, pencil
- 15 Rudolf Meyer (1803–1857), *Coast of Sorrento by Moonlight*, ink, opaque white on brown paper
- 16 Franz Niklaus König (1765–1832), *The City of Bern in the Moonlight, taken from the Muristalden*, c. 1810, watercolour on transparent paper, shown in a replica of the showcase designed by König

- 17 Johann Ulrich Büchel (1753–1792), *Court of a Renaissance castle by moonlight*, 1781, ink and watercolour
- 18 Otto Nebel (1892–1973), *Die Stadt der tausend Anblicke: – unterm abnehmenden Monde* (The city of a thousand sights: – under the waning moon), March 1938, ink, coloured pencil, sprayed with grey
- 19 Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Flottille am kalten Morgen* (Flotilla in the Cold Morning), 1927, watercolour and gouache
- 20 Marc Chagall (1887–1985), *Profil et oiseau sur fond bleu* (Profile and Bird against a Blue Background), 1962, monotype on Japan paper
- 21 Maria Uhden (1892–1918), *Komposition*, 1915, tempera
- 22 Franz Gertsch (*1930), *Katze holt Mond vom Himmel* (Cat takes moon from heaven), 1947/48, woodcut on Heizaburo-Japanese paper
- 23 Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Mondlied* (Moon Song), 1927, 73 (Q 3), pencil on paper on cardboard
- 24 Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Hinweis auf den halben Mond* (Reference to the Half Moon), 1939, 1025 (DE 5), chalk on paper on cardboard
- 25 Franz Eggenschwiler (1930–2000), *Der Mann im Mond* (The Man in the Moon), 1972, pencil, collage
- 26–37 Claude Sandoz (*1946), *Mr. Sun and Mrs. Moon*, 1973, 2 fabric paintings (gouache and mica), 4 watercolours, 2 large and 4 small pencil drawings from a 30-part work (consisting of 2 fabric paintings, 10 watercolours, 6 large and 12 small pencil drawings)
- 38 Peter Fischli (*1952) / David Weiss (1946–2012), *Moonraker*, 1979, color photograph from the 10-part ‘Wurstserie’ (Sausage Series)
- 39–41 Markus Raetz (*1941), *Reflexion I–III*, 1991, heliogravures
- 42 Alexander Hahn (*1954), *Niki’s Moon – the Dark Side*, 1996, inkjet print
- 43 Franz Gertsch (*1930), *Nachtlandschaft* (Night Landscape), c. 1954, colour woodcut and relief printing
- 44 Franz Gertsch (*1930), *Bei Neumond* (At the New Moon), watercolour
- 45 Max Klinger (1857–1920), *Mondnacht* (Moon Night), 1881, etching, aquatint with Chine collé, sheet 4 of 7 from the portfolio ‘Intermezzi’
- 46 Max Klinger (1857–1920), *Nacht* (Night), 1889, etching, sheet 1 of 10 from the portfolio ‘Vom Tode. Erster Teil’ (From Death. First Part)
- 47 Judith Albert (*1969), *Kein Wasser – kein Mond* (No Water – no Moon), 2004, video projection, DVD, color, sound, 4 min 30 sec

Information about the accompanying program at
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch

Program changes reserved

Kunstmuseum Bern

Hodlerstrasse 12, CH-3011 Bern

T +41 31 328 09 44

info@kunstmuseumbern.ch

www.kunstmuseumbern.ch

