

Biografie Ernst Kreidolf

1863	Konrad Ernst Theophil Kreidolf is born on 9 February in Bern.
1868	The family moves to Konstanz, where Kreidolf’s father opens a toy shop. From the age of seven Ernst goes to live with his grandparents in nearby Tägerwilen (TG), whose farm he is supposed to take over. But having always been a good draftsman, he wants to be an artist.
1879–1882	Kreidolf trains as a lithographer at the Schmidt-Pecht Lithographic Institute in Konstanz, and takes drawing lessons.
1883–1889	Moves to Munich, where he attends the School of Applied Arts while also working as a lithographer. From 1885 Kreidolf takes lessons at Paul Nauen’s private art school. He is accepted into Munich Art Academy at his second attempt. Studies with Gabriel von Hackl und Ludwig von Löfftz. Makes the acquaintance of the artists Cuno Amiet and Wilhelm Balmer.
1889–1896	Kreidolf abandons his studies for health reasons and moves to Partenkirchen. Friendship with the author Leopold Weber. From 1890 Kreidolf gives Princess Marie von Schaumburg-Lippe lessons in landscape painting. To continue with these, he spends a month a year between 1895 and 1902 at the farm in Bückeburg.
1892/93	First exhibition at Munich Kunstverein.
1896	Return to Munich. Friendship with the painter Albert Welti.
1897	Exhibition of watercolours for the later picture books <i>Flower Fairy-Tales</i> and <i>Sleeping Trees</i> at Galerie Arnold in Dresden.
1898	Thanks to a loan from the Princess of Schaumburg-Lippe Kreidolf is able to publish the <i>Flower Fairy-Tales</i> ; the book is brought out by the Munich commission-publisher Piloty & Loehle wih pictures lithographed by Kreidolf himself
1900–1911	The Cologne publishing house Schafstein & Co. (Schaffstein from 1904) signs a exclusive contract with Kreidolf and publishes five picture books, including <i>The Sleeping Trees</i> (1901), <i>Summer Birds</i> (1908) and <i>The Garden Dream</i> (1911).
1905	Study tour to Italy.
1906	Solo exhibition in the Künstlerhaus Zürich.
1908	On a visit to Switzerland Kreidolf meets Paul Klee and Hermann Hesse, whom he visits in the Ticino in 1917 and supports in his experiments with painting.
1914	In St. Moritz Kreidolf surprised by the outbreak of the First World War. He is taken in by the Welti-Kammerer family in their rural palace, Lohn near Kehrsatz (BE).
1915	Returns to Munich in the winter.
1916	Health spa stay in St. Moritz, where he meets the author, translator and patron Emil Roniger, who later founds Rotapfel Verlag and becomes his publisher.
1917	Moves to Bern. Wilhelm Fraenger writes the first monograph on Ernst Kreidolf.
1920–1935	The Rotapfel-Verlag publishes at an almost annual rhythm new picture books including <i>Flowers: Ritornelle</i> (1920), <i>Alpine Flower Fairy-Tales</i> (1922), <i>A Winter Fairy-Tale</i> (1924), <i>Spring Companions</i> (1926), <i>The Dogs’ Party</i> (1928), <i>Among the Gnomes and Elves</i> (1929) und <i>The Kingdom of Heaven Meadow</i> (1935).
1922	Kreidolf becomes a member of Bern Art Society and the Commission for New Acquisitions at the Kunstmuseum Bern.
1923	Solo exhibition in Kunsthaus Zürich.
1933	Large retrospective at the Kunsthalle Bern. Bern University awards Kreidolf an honorary doctorate.
1935	Kreidolf writes his memoirs, which are published by Rotapfel Verlag a year after his death.
1956	Ernst Kreidolf dies on 12 August in Bern.

The exhibition

Duration of the exhibition: 04.09.2020 – 10.01.2021

Opening times: Monday: closed, Tuesday: 10 am – 9 pm
Wednesday – Sunday: 10 am – 5 pm
Holidays: Open on 24., 26. und 31. December 2020 and on 01. and 02. Januar 2021 from 10 am – 5 pm

Curator: Marianne Wackernagel

Exhibition design: Groenlandbasel Architektur und Ausstellungen, Matthias Schnegg

Audio 🎧: Poems by Ernst Kreidolf from *flower fairy tales*, *Alpine flower fairytale* and *garden dream*, narrator Raphael Clamer, realisation Idee und Klang Audio Design, Basel, 2020

Art education / Program

Public guided tours (in German):

Sunday, 11 am: 06. September, 04./25. Oktober, 06./20. Dezember 2020, 10. Januar 2021

Tuesday, 7 pm: 22. September*, 13. October, 03./24. November, 15. December 2020

* with the curator Marianne Wackernagel

Literary guided tours with Michaela Wendt:

Sunday, 1 am: 04. October, 08. November, 13. December 2020

Tuesday, 6 pm: 15. September 2020

Lectures:

Wundergärten. Ernst Kreidolf und die Pflanzen in der Kunst

Sunday, 15. November 2020, 11am

Lecture from Anna Lehninger

Als Flora regierte. Ernst Kreidolf und die Pflanzenbegeisterung seiner Zeit

Tuesday, 01. December 2020, 6pm

Lecture from Margrit Wyder

Film: *Ernst Kreidolf – Das Leben ein Traum*, written and directed by Monika Faltermeier, production mediastrand, Rainer Harjes, Munich, 2006
Projection during opening hours in the foyer

Further offers of art education (guided tours, school classes, workshops):
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/ernstkreidolf, T +41 31 328 09 11

Catalogue

Wachsen – Blühen – Welken. Ernst Kreidolf und die Pflanzen. Ed. Barbara Stark for the Ernst Kreidolf Verein, contributions by Marisa Fadoni-Strik, Anna Lehninger, Eduard Reinacher, Gabriella Rouf, Barbara Stark, Roland Stark, Marianne Wackernagel, Sibylle Walther, Michael Imhof Verlag, 2020

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Informationen zum Begleitprogramm unter
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch
Programmänderungen vorbehalten

Growing – Blossoming – Wilting. Ernst Kreidolf and Plants

04.09.2020 – 10.01.2021

In Switzerland and also in Germany, where he lived and worked for over thirty years, Ernst Kreidolf (1863–1956) remains unforgotten as a painter and picture-book artist. With his books *Blumen-Märchen* (Flower Fairy Tales) (1898), *Die schlafenden Bäume* (The Sleeping Trees) (1901) and *Gartentraum* (Garden Dream) (1911) he set new standards in picture book design. In these, as well as in later works such as *Alpenblumenmärchen* (Alpine Flower Fairy Tales) (1922) or *Bei den Gnomen und Elfen* (Among the Gnomes and Elves) (1929) personified plants occupy centre stage. Kreidolf himself wrote the poems and stories for these books, but he also worked as a sensitive illustrator, creating impressive settings for the flower poems of Adolf Frey with flowers at their centre (1920 and 1932). Kreidolf’s fantastical illustrations for the school reading book *Roti Rösli im Garte* (Little Red Rose in the Garden), first published in 1925, would make a lasting impression on the memories of generations of Swiss children. While the exhibition *Faltertanz und Hundefest* (Butterfly Dance and Dog Party), held in the Kunstmuseum Bern in 2013, was devoted to Kreidolf’s depictions of animals, this exhibition *Growing – Blossoming – Wilting* provides an entertaining foray through the varied cosmos of Kreidolf’s world of plants. It shows his studies, marked by scientific curiosity and a realistic style of depiction, but above all it presents the impressive original illustrations to his books. There will also be a chance to discover works on the theme of plants that have never – or only rarely – been shown before.

Plant studies

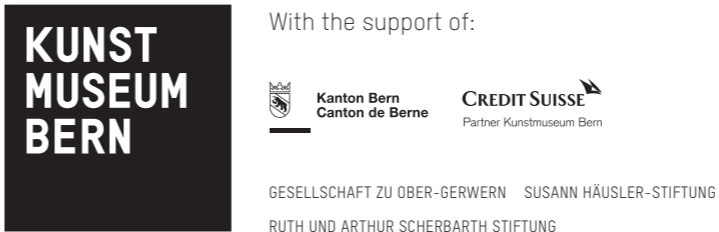
Since his childhood on his grandparents’ farm in Tägerwilen, Ernst Kreidolf had studied nature and attempted to capture everything that grows and blossoms with his drawing pen. He also acquired a wide botanical knowledge. As the 15-year-old’s carefully kept botanical notebook reveals, he was familiar with the conventions of scientific floral description >2. In those days many people arranged herbariums, and particularly in the countryside they were acquainted with the local flora and knew when what grows where or what therapeutic or harmful effects might be produced by the consumption of certain plants by humans and animals. The precise and ideal record of a plant species is the intention of numerous preliminary drawings in which Kreidolf provides a detailed depiction of herbs from root to spadix >4. But he is also interested in deviance, in variations in colour and form – early

in his artistic career he drew portraits of very particular specimens. Portrait-making involves immersing oneself in the sitter, recognising oneself in them – and, if it succeeds, we are moved by the subject, genuinely ‘inspired’. At play here is an understanding of nature that involves human beings and perceives them as a part of nature.

In the *Bergblumen* (Mountain Flowers) of the artist’s later years we encounter particularly impressive individual plants which, in their isolation, raise existential questions >19. Kreidolf would find another possible way of giving his deep connection with nature in the personification of plants. Earlier on he had experimented with developing an artistic language of his own on the basis of plant studies; these include the 1881 *Still Life* in oil which applies the elevation strategies of the genre >3, or the landscapes resembling tourist posters (ca. 1887), which combine flower painting with a narrative element >5. Meanwhile he found the way out of the crisis which, in his *Memoirs*, he describes as a ‘disparity (...) between fantastical painting and naturalism’ when he found late-blossoming flowers in the mountains and recorded them in a watercolour: while painting cowslips, gentians and edelweiss, he had the idea for the picture *Der Schlüsselblumengarten* (The Cowslip Garden), in which for the first time he depicted flowers in human form. This painting heralds the *Blumen-Märchen* (Flower Fairy-Tales) in which the observation of nature merges with the imagination. The ‘key work with cowslips’ was particularly important to Kreidolf; years later he noted on it: ‘The whole of my picture-book art is based on this piece of paper.’ >6

Flower Fairy-Tales

So this is where ‘Mr Cowslip and Mrs Gentian Sky-Blue’ first make their appearance. Kreidolf designed a cycle of 15 watercolours which, when he was unable to find a publishing house, he brought out on commission with the Munich-based publishers Piloty & Löhle in 1898. *Flower Fairy-Tales* is a picture book by a single hand: as a trained lithographer, Kreidolf was responsible not only for the lithography of the watercolour originals, he also designed the cover, the end papers, the monochrome intermediate illustrations and the texts >8. In most of his picture books Kreidolf remained true to the principle of juxtaposing the paintings with a self-written poem. He saw these poems as an ‘accompaniment to the pictures, not an end in themselves’. In his *Memoirs* he said: ‘In all my picture books (...) the picture is always the primary thing, the one that was produced first, the text always the secondary, the accompaniment to it.’ So it is that little stories are spun around the flower creatures, often with a surprising twist; for example the poem that goes with *Cowslip Garden* ends with a dark premonition: ‘Until in autumn, what a shame, both leaf and petal sink into the grave – Even Mr Cowslip and Mrs Gentian Sky-Blue’. These are poems suited to being read out loud, stories so concise as to invite precise examination and a further elaboration of the narrative. They made a considerable contribution to the success of Kreidolf’s picture books.



Kreidolf was not the first to make pictures with anthropomorphic plants (comparable examples can be found in the catalogue to the exhibition); however, his plant creatures differ from those of other artists in that they are not simply ladies and gentlemen in flower costumes. Kreidolf has developed them out of the precisely observed and adapted morphological properties of the plants. *The Flower Fairy-Tales* made Kreidolf famous, and he became successful as an artist of children’s books. He was commissioned to make illustrations, and by 1911 – now with the Schaffstein Verlag in Cologne – he published six books, lithographing the pictures himself.

A good twenty years after his first book Kreidolf, who had by now moved from Munich, where he had lived since his student days, back to Switzerland, designed the 18 watercolours of the *Alpine Flower Fairy-Tales* >7. In preparation for this he made the plant drawings on black paper, mentioned above, and which were published in 1924/25 as the portfolio works *Mountain Flowers I* and *Mountain Flowers II* (and, like the *Alpine Flower Fairy-Tales* as photo-lithographs with Rotapfel Verlag in Zürich) >19. With the *Alpine Flowers* Kreidolf arrived in Switzerland, and more than in the earlier books the pictures refer to contemporary history. So, for example, *Eisenhüte, Rittersporn und Germer* (Aconite, Larkspur and Corn Lily) shows the protagonists as generals looking out over a war-torn landscape bathed in dramatic red, with an army of grasshoppers and insect fighter-planes: ‘There is a whirring in the air – that is war. (...) There is a sad and heavy breath upon the land – a terrible sea of blood and horror.’

Trees and dreamscapes

Pencil sketches reveal the extent to which Kreidolf engaged with trees. He studied their growth, from which one can read what sort of weather they have withstood >9. In the Dutch landscape painting of the Baroque and even more so in the Romantic era, the lonely, wind-swept tree serves as a symbol of exposure and also the resilience of human life. Comparisons between trees and human beings are far from rare – we may only think of ‘tree-giants’ and ‘knotty old men’. Kreidolf exploits this affinity for his ‘Fairy-tale with pictures and verses’, captured in dark colours, named *Die schlafenden Bäume* (The Sleeping Trees) >10. Here the pages are shared by picture and text, and a continuous story is told: During the night a storm approaches, fire breaks out, but the rain extinguishes ‘everything bad’. ‘When we feel frightened at night, in the morning everything is fine.’

Kreidolf’s plant pictures do not exclude dying and death, violence and various kinds of threat. In all of his books, as well as lighter passages there are scenes that are dark and uncanny. This contrast, this emotional reversal, is typical of the arrangement of the pictures. And children are bound to have liked, and to like, the gruesome stories every bit as much as the cheerful ones.

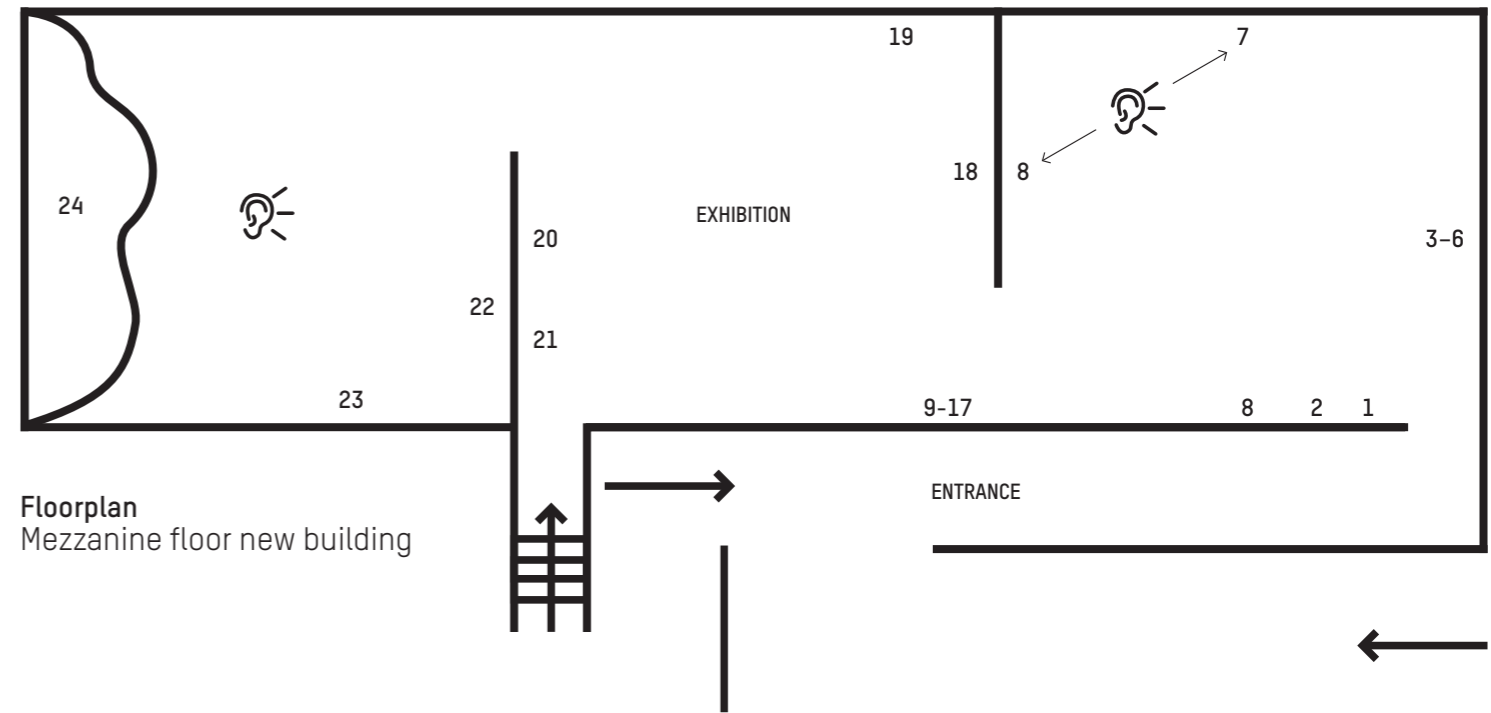
Examples of the dark and mysterious depictions of trees are the paintings *Frühling* (Spring) and *Gartenfest* (Garden Party) (1945) >11, 12. On the window pane – between the life-threatening cold and the warmth in the comfortable home – the ‘ice-flowers’ are growing, with their needle-sharp points >13: it is what happens at such boundaries that attracts Kreidolf’s attention. Often these are ambivalent feelings, particularly impressive, for example, in the drawing *Vom Erlöser* (Of the Saviour) >16. The gouache *Wurzelspuk* (The Root Haunting) also shows a nocturnal dream landscape in which the roots of dead trees recall bones and prehistoric animals. Death is present, even if it is not always immediately recognised >17. Gardens and cemeteries stand close to one another, implying the cycle of life >14. In dreams and visions, passing away is just as present as becoming.

In *Der Traum von den Händen* (Dream of the Hands) >15 we can discern both: pale hands grow from the vegetable field, or do they belong to people who have been buried alive? Are they threatening the young farmer with his wheelbarrow, or calling him for help? What does the woman holding the baby plan to do? And the figure in the sky: is it a shepherd or a judge? In both dream and image things that are mutually exclusive are simultaneously present and true. The drawing belongs to the cycle of paintings *Schicksalsträume und Gesichte* (Dreams of Fate and Visions), for which Kreidolf wrote poems (the 1902 manuscript is kept in the Collection of Prints and Drawings of Kunstmuseum Bern).

Poem illustrations

In 1917 the Swiss literary historian and author Adolf Frey (1855–1920) asked Kreidolf to create images for his poems *Flowers – Ritornelle*, published the previous year. Kreidolf happily complied with the idea and suggested the publication in two parts. In 1920 the first volume of 16 poem-picture pairs was published by Rotapfel Verlag >18. For this first cycle Kreidolf adapted the illustrations in differently curved cartouches reminiscent of art nouveau ornaments like the ones he himself had used in earlier books. But here the precisely captured flowers burst from the frame, emphasising the power of their growth. Kreidolf repeatedly enriches the depictions of flowers, set in appropriate landscapes, with animals, human beings and fabulous and fantastical creatures. They are ‘small pictorial narratives which locate the plants seasonally and morphologically and transfer what is depicted in analogy to the poet’s words into an overarching existential context’ (Barbara Stark in the exhibition catalogue). In 1932 this was followed by the second Ritornelle volume, once again with 16 poems and paintings which are clearly distinguished from the earlier illustrations >21. This time there were no ornamental frames, and the flowers radiate in clear, reduced lines and powerful colours.

<p>Clematis</p> <p>High on the trellis the vine is blooming, The shape of its blossom compelling. I hear the evening breezes tuning A melody gradually swelling.</p> <p>Clematis white, clematis blue, In the luminous summer night, Have given a musical interview In the garden for my delight.</p> <p>From: Ernst Kreidolf, <i>Dream Garden</i>, A Star and Elephant Book, 1976</p>
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Floorplan
Mezzanine floor new building

Reading book and children’s party

In 1925 the Staatlicher Lehrmittelverlag of the Canton Bern published *Roti Rösli im Garte – ein Lesebuch für Kinder des III. Schuljahres* (Little Red Rose in the Garden – a Reading Book for Third Year Schoolchildren), ‘with pictures and decorations by Ernst Kreidolf’, as it states prominently on the title page >22. With their choice of illustrator the publishers were relying on an established children’s book artist – and they calculated correctly: the reading book was successful too, and new editions followed in 1936 and again in 1948. The texts in the anthology are arranged according to the sequence of the year, and as well as whole-page pictures for each season Kreidolf provided many smaller illustrations and vignettes. The esteem in which Kreidolf was held is also apparent in the fact that one of his poems, ‘The First Flowers’ from the *Alpine Flower Fairy-Tales* was included in the book.

Kreidolf – the children’s artist: that simplification had already begun to appear in the reception of his work before, and it increasingly became a commonplace. One other factor that may have contributed to this may have been the children’s parties at which children appeared in flower costumes, as for example at the anniversary celebrations of the Swiss Booksellers’ Association 1924 in Berne or the Kreidolf Children’s Party in Davos in 1927. Here, apart from costume designs and photographs showing Kreidolf in the midst of the flower children, we present five costumes that were made in the 1930s and 40s in the Atelier Couture Raimonde in Zürich >23–24.

Self-portraits

At the beginning and the end of the exhibition there are self-portraits which demonstrate the close relationship that Ernst Kreidolf had with plants. At the entrance we see the artist sitting at a table in his suit, clutching his brush and palette, and with a sheet of paper bearing the beginnings of a drawing in front of him >1. A portrait in which modesty and pride are held in balance: Kreidolf adopts the pictorial formula popular since the Renaissance, showing the sitter majestically behind a parapet, but it is ‘only’ the watercolourist and book-artist’s desk. A vase of flowers stands in front of him; he is probably – his gaze directed

more inside himself than at his subject – busy grasping its essence and conveying it to the paper. The other self-portrait also shows inspiration from flowers >20: a butterfly with an unmistakable Kreidolf beard holds up its palette to capture the colours of overwhelming flowers. Both a dreamy melancholy and a sense of humour can be found in Kreidolf’s work.

Text: Marianne Wackernagel

The exhibition has been organised in collaboration with the Ernst Kreidolf Association and Foundation and the Städtische Wessenberg-Galerie, Konstanz. After its presentation in the Kunstmuseum Bern it will be shown at the Städtische Wessenberg-Galerie, Konstanz, from 29 January until 11 April 2021.