

KIRCHNER ^x KIRCHNER

12.9.25

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Press Kit

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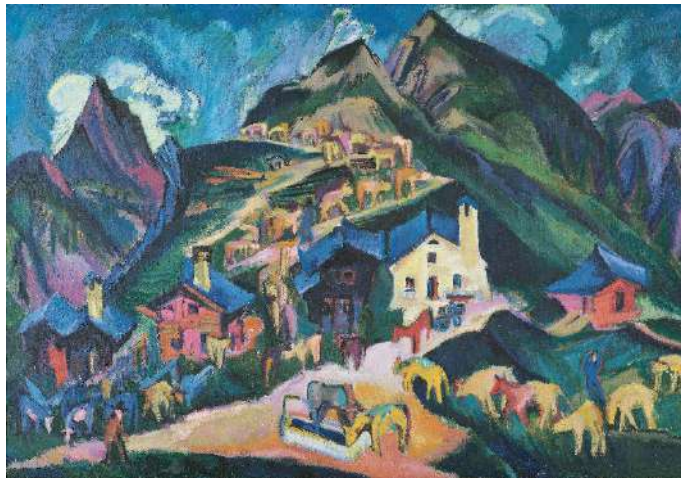


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Kirchner x Kirchner: colourful, powerful, pioneering

Between 12 September 2025 and 11 January 2026, Kunstmuseum Bern is showing the exhibition *Kirchner x Kirchner*. It features some 65 high-calibre works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) that have rarely been shown in Switzerland. The artist is one of the most outstanding protagonists of modern art. With this exhibition, Kunstmuseum Bern is recalling the most extensive retrospective in the artist's lifetime, which was held in 1933 in Kunsthalle Bern, and which he himself curated. For the first time, *Kirchner x Kirchner* places the artist as the curator of his own work at the centre, and shows how he interpreted and presented some works from his artistic career through deliberate juxtapositions and reworkings. One highlight is the reunification of *Sunday in the Alps*. *Scene at the Well* from the collection of Kunstmuseum Bern and its pendant, *Mountain Peasants on Sunday* from the German Federal Chancellery.

Kirchner x Kirchner: An extraordinary glimpse of the Expressionist

With *Kirchner x Kirchner*, Kunstmuseum Bern is devoting an unusual exhibition to the German Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938). At its centre is the big retrospective of 1933 in Kunsthalle Bern, which the artist himself curated. This was a rare procedure at the time, which allows us new insights today.

The exhibition shows how Kirchner attempted to use deliberate selection, hanging and reworking of his works not only to (re)form his artistic development, but also created a deliberately shaped spatial experience. Some 65 works from all phases of his career – including central loans from significant national and international collections – provide an insight into Kirchner's presentation of himself as artist and designer.

Sensational reunification of *Sunday in the Alps. Scene by the Well* and *Mountain Peasants on Sunday* from the cabinet room of the German Federal Chancellery

One central event in the exhibition *Kirchner x Kirchner* is the reunification of the monumental pair of works *Sunday in the Alps. Scene by the Well* (1923-24 / ca. 1929, Kunstmuseum Bern) and *Mountain Peasants on Sunday* (1923-24 / 1926, cabinet room of the Federal German Chancellery, Berlin). In 1933, these two paintings opened Kirchner's retrospective in Kunsthalle Bern, where they were presented side by side. With these powerful paintings, Kirchner lent expression to his idea of how monumentality and the design of the space could work together. At the same time he wanted to prove that he was in a position to create works with a public appeal – works that had an effect beyond the exhibition space and into the social space. That was of particular importance to him, because in 1933 his long-term project to decorate the banqueting hall at the Folkwang Museum in Essen had finally come to nothing.

Although they were conceived as pendants, the two monumental paintings have never been shown together since 1933. *Sunday in the Alps. Scene by the Well* (press picture 02) was acquired directly from the exhibition by Kunstmuseum Bern. A symbolic act: it was the first and only purchase of a painting by a Swiss museum in the artist's lifetime. *Mountain Peasants on Sunday* (press picture 01) entered the art collection of the Federal Republic of Germany first as a loan and finally as a permanent acquisition in 1985. The fact that the German Federal Chancellery is allowing the loan of this painting, prominently and permanently installed in the cabinet room, is an exception as rare as it is significant.

For more information on the history of these two important paintings we refer to the media file [‘Reunited at last after more than 90 years! Sensational loan from Berlin’](#), from 2 July 2025.

Other highlights and high-calibre loans

The other highlights of the exhibition include masterpieces such as *Street, Dresden*, (1908/1919) (press picture 06) from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Street with Red Cocotte* (1914/1925) (press picture 09) from the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, *Mountain Landscape from Clavadel* (1927) (press picture 12) from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, *Color Dance I* [Project Essen] (1932) (press picture 14) from the Folkwang Museum, Essen and *Eaters* (1930) (press picture 04) from Galerie Henze & Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: curating as an artistic act

The *Kirchner x Kirchner* exhibition shows how aware Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was of his role as curator: in 1933, in close collaboration with Max Huggler (1903-1994), the then head of the Kunsthalle Bern and later director of Kunstmuseum Bern, he organised the most comprehensive retrospective of his career. He not only determined the selection of works and conceived the hanging, but also designed the exhibition poster and the catalogue – he even wrote the accompanying text under the pseudonym Louis de Marsalle. At the same time Kirchner structured his oeuvre deliberately, reworked individual works and used the exhibition space as an integral part of his artistic statement. The extent to which Kirchner saw the exhibition as an artistic act is apparent from a letter to Max Huggler from 21 December 1932:

‘Hanging an exhibition correctly in terms of colour and form is the same as composing a painting.’

The show in Kunstmuseum Bern pushed this curatorial perspective into the centre for the first time. Its goal is not to reproduce the historical retrospective of 1933 in line with the original, but to illuminate its structure, intentions and effect from a contemporary perspective. The guiding principle is the question of what it means when an artist writes his own history – and why Kirchner chose this particular form of representation in 1933. What were his intentions, and how does this deliberate way of representing himself shape the view of his work even today?

‘The 1933 retrospective was much more than an exhibition – it was an artistic manifesto. Condensed in it was Kirchner's struggle for a pictorial language of his own as well as a need to relocate himself artistically.’

Nadine Franci, Curator of Prints & Drawings at Kunstmuseum Bern and curator of the exhibition

In confronting the established art-historical interpretation of Kirchner with the artist's own view of his oeuvre, *Kirchner x Kirchner* opens up a new reading of his artistic understanding of himself – and at the same time reveals his creative will as a curator.

Historical context of the 1933 retrospective

The exhibition in Kunsthalle Bern was held between March and April 1933 – at a crucial time for Kirchner, both politically and personally. In Germany, his works were increasingly defamed and removed from museums after the Nazis came to power. In Switzerland, where he had lived since 1917, he was offered an opportunity to present his work in its entirety.

With over 290 works, the 1933 retrospective was the most comprehensive exhibition in the artist's lifetime. Many works were owned by the artist himself – but Kirchner insisted on also including loans from public and private collections, in order to convey the image of himself as an already established artist.

'I would easily be able to make the whole exhibition from works in my own position, but it looks better if some unsaleable works from public or private collections are also included (...)'

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in a letter to Max Huggler, 20 November 1932

Kirchner x Kirchner: from the time of Die Brücke (1905-1913) to the late work in Davos (1917-1937)

As in 1933, *Kirchner x Kirchner* covers the arc from the artist's Expressionistic beginnings within the artists' group *Die Brücke* to the late works in Davos. Unlike in the historic exhibition, here the individual phases of the artist's career are represented in a more balanced form. The exhibition also includes works that were missing in Bern in 1933, whether because Kirchner deliberately excluded them or because they were not available. This makes it clear what decisions Kirchner made at the time – and why.

The presentation is divided into five thematic rooms. They show central groups of works, and at the same time reveal Kirchner's curatorial thinking. The first room is devoted to the years in Dresden and Berlin, with paintings of nudes, street scenes and the world of cabaret. Today these works are seen as the peak of his work. In the 1933 exhibition they appeared individually: Kirchner showed mostly works with which he had already found recognition in Germany, or works that made stylistic innovations particularly clear.

By way of comparison, the late work, seen for a long time as less significant, is in the last room. For Kirchner himself, however, in 1933 it marked the high point of his development – and consequently dominated the historical retrospective.

Kirchner's goal was to display his stylistic range, and to tell the story of his development through the works themselves. He deliberately juxtaposed works from different phases of his career, and avoided a chronological hanging. To some extent he even reworked early works to show lines of development more clearly. *Kirchner x Kirchner* also adopts this approach, to mark out both the stylistic diversity and the conceptual considerations behind Kirchner's presentation.

The large main space is devoted to the historic retrospective. Kirchner's curatorial approach is taken up with reconstructed pairs of works, deliberate views through into other spaces and the use of colour accents. At the same time, however, through the selection of the works, the history of the purchase of *Sunday in the Alps. Scene by the Well* by Kunstmuseum Bern and hence a piece of collection history is made visible.

The two smaller adjacent rooms are concentrated on formal and compositional aspects. Selected works on paper show how Kirchner experimented for centuries with colour, plane, line and movement, and how his formal language remained true to itself even when changing.

The selection of exhibits, the combination with the historical background and the perspective on the artist make the ambitious exhibition project *Kirchner x Kirchner* a unique experience.

Opening

The opening of the exhibition will take place on **Thursday, 11 September 2025, from 18:30.**

Admission to the exhibition is free on this evening.

Curator

Nadine Franci, Curator of Prints & Drawings at Kunstmuseum Bern

With the support of

Kanton Bern, UBS, Swisslos-Kultur Kanton Bern, Ursula Wirz-Stiftung, Uniqa Versicherung, Ruth und Arthur Scherbarth Stiftung, Roman Norbert Ketterer Stiftung, Minerva Kunststiftung

Media preview

We cordially invite you to the media preview with Nadine Franci, Curator of Prints & Drawings at Kunstmuseum Bern and curator of the exhibition, on **Wednesday, 10 September 2025 at 10:00 at the Kunstmuseum Bern.**

Please register via press@kunstmuseumbern.ch.



Catalogue

Kirchner x Kirchner

Published by Nina Zimmer et Nadine Franci

With contributions by Nadine Franci et Katharina Neuburger and a preface by Nina Zimmer

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Available in the museum shop for CHF 49

Digital Guide

There is a freely accessible Digital Guide to accompany the exhibition. It can be accessed from Wednesday, 10 September 2025 via QR code or

guide.kunstmuseumbern.ch/en/kirchner-kirchner



Biography of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

1880

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner is born in Aschaffenburg on 6 May 1880.

1901

After leaving school, Kirchner begins to study architecture in Dresden. His first paintings come from this period.

1905

In June Kirchner founds the artists' community Die Brücke with his fellow students Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff.

1906

Die Brücke publishes its programme in a woodcut by Kirchner. He now also makes his first sculptural works and numerous prints. Experimenting with technique and colour is of great importance to him.

1912

Kirchner meets his partner Erna Schilling in Berlin.

1913

Die Brücke breaks up over differences surrounding the Chronicle of Die Brücke written by Kirchner.

1915

With the outbreak of World War I, Kirchner volunteers for military service despite previous anxieties. He is soon dismissed on the grounds of his poor psychological constitution and declared unfit for service.

1917

After stays in various sanatoria in Germany and Switzerland, the search for a cure brings Kirchner to Davos for the first time.

1918

Kirchner moves into the farmhouse 'In den Lärchen' ('In the Larches').

1923

Along with Erna, Kirchner moves into the 'Wildboden' house. There he designs artistic furniture, and paints the surrounding alpine panorama. His so-called new style is apparent in clear, abstract forms and gleaming contrasts.

1933

The National Socialist seizure of power in Germany hits him badly. His works are decried as 'degenerate'. For fear of an invasion he destroys many of his paintings, sculptures and printing blocks.

1938

On 15 June 1938 Kirchner shoots himself, having fallen prey to illness again, not far from his house.

Press images

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01

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Sonntag der Bergbauern [Mountain Peasants on Sunday], 1923-24/26

Oil on canvas, 170 x 400 cm

Federal Republic of Germany

© **Bundesrepublik Deutschland**



02

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Alpsonntag. Szene am Brunnen [Sunday in the Alps. Scene at the Well], 1923-24/around 1929

Oil on canvas, with original painted frame, 168 x 400 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern

© **Kunstmuseum Bern**



03

Franz Henn

View of the Kirchner exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern with *Alpsonntag. Szene am Brunnen* (left) and *Sonntag der Bergbauern* (right), 1933.

Photograph

© **Erbengemeinschaft Eberhard W. Kornfeld**



04

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Esser [Eaters], 1930

Oil on canvas

150 x 121 cm

Galerie Henze & Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

© **Galerie Henze & Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern**



05

Franz Henn

View of the Kirchner exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern, 1933

Photograph, Erbengemeinschaft Eberhard W. Kornfeld

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06

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Strasse, Dresden [Street, Dresden], 1908/19

Oil on canvas

150,5 x 200,4 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
purchase, Acc. No. 12.1951

© Digital image, The Museum of Modern
Art, New York / Scala, Florence



07

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Russisches Tänzerpaar [Russian Dancers],
1909

Colour lithograph on wove paper

Image size: 32,5 x 38,2 cm

Sheet size: 43,5 x 53 cm

Community of heirs Eberhard W. Kornfeld

© Erbgemeinschaft Eberhard W.
Kornfeld



08

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Sich kämmender Akt [Nude Woman
Combing Her Hair], 1913

Oil on canvas

125 x 90 cm

Brücke-Museum, Berlin

© Brücke-Museum, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
CC-BY-SA 4.0



09

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Strasse mit roter Kokotte [Street with Red
Cocotte], 1914/25

Oil on canvas

125 x 90,5 cm

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid

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10

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Alpaufzug [Ascending the Alps], 1918/1919

Oil on canvas, 139 x 199 cm

Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, acquired 1955

© Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, photograph:
Stefan Rohner



11

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Schlittschuhläufer [Ice Skaters], 1924/25

Oil on canvas

125 x 168,5 cm

Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt

© Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt,
photograph: Wolfgang Fuhrmannek, CC
BY-SA 4.0



12

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Berglandschaft von Clavadel [Mountain
Landscape from Clavadel], 1925-26/27

Oil on canvas

135 x 200,3 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Tompkins
Collection – Arthur Gordon Tompkins Fund

Photograph © 2025 Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston



13

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Wiesenblumen und Katze [Meadow Flowers
and Cat], 1931/32

Oil on canvas

135 x 90 cm

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Neue
Nationalgalerie, Stiftung Preußischer
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14

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Farbentanz I (Entwurf für Essen) [Color Dance I (Project Essen)], 1932

Oil on canvas

100 x 90 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen, acquired in 1968 with the support of the Folkwang-Museumsverein and the Alfred und Cläre Pott-Stiftung

© Museum Folkwang Essen / ARTOTHEK



15

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Bildnis Max Huggler [Portrait of Max Huggler], 1933

Woodcut on paper

Image size: 50 x 34,8 cm

Sheet size: 53,7 x 36,3 cm

Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Professor Dr Max Huggler - Donation 1966

© Kunstmuseum Bern



16

Aura Hertwig-Brendel

Portrait of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1913/14

Photograph

The Estate of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

© Nachlass Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
courtesy Galerie Henze & Ketterer,
Wichtrach/Bern



17

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Self-portrait in front of the Wildbodenhaus,
after 1935

Modern Print, 24,3 x 15,7 cm

© courtesy Ernst Ludwig-Kirchner Archiv,
Wichtrach/Bern / Kirchner Museum Davos

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Kunstmuseum Bern of the Future. The Architectural Competition

until 28 September 2025

Intervention in the collection by Amy Sillman

until 2 November 2025

Kirchner x Kirchner

12.9.25–11.1.26

Enter here

20.2.–5.7.26

Franz Gertsch. Blow Up

14.8.26–17.1.27

Opening hours

Tuesday

10:00–20:00

Wednesday–Sunday

10:00–17:00

Monday closed

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