



KUNST
MUSEUM
BERN

Press kit

Franz GERTSCH

Blow-Up
Part I

14.8.26 —
17.1.27

With the support of:



Kanton Bern
Canton de Berne



UBS

Partnerin Kunstmuseum Bern

SWISSLOS
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Bürgergemeinde
Bern



Franz Gertsch (1930–2022) is seen as a pioneer of photorealism and a master of the modern woodcut. One of the most important Swiss artists of his time, he achieved world fame with monumental works. *Franz Gertsch. Blow-Up* was developed by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in close collaboration with the artist and his family, and shown recently in the Deichtorhallen Hamburg. After this European rediscovery, the exhibition now comes to Switzerland as a two-part retrospective. It provides a comprehensive overview of more than six decades of artistic work. From 14 August 2026 to 17 January 2027, the Kunstmuseum Bern is showing *Franz Gertsch. Blow-Up (Part I)* and from 19 September 2026 to 28 February 2027 the Museum Franz Gertsch in Burgdorf is showing *Franz Gertsch. Blow-Up (Part II)*. Gertsch's work moves between attention to detail and monumentality, close-up and distance, the human and the natural, and remains impressive even today with its scale, photographic precision and immersive effect.

Focus on painting: early work, seventies and late work

The Kunstmuseum Bern concentrates exclusively on painting. Around 40 paintings reveal Gertsch's development from his realistic beginnings via nearly abstract works and iconic paintings from the youth and music scene of the 1970s to portraits, family paintings and epic representations of nature from his later work.

The exhibition opens with the juxtaposition of Gertsch's two largest works (each one four by six metres): the family painting *Maria with Children* (1971) and the work *Medici* (1971-1972), which made history as a cult image. The exhibition then moves chronologically from his early work via the 1970s to his late work. Private photographs are being shown for the first time in a slide show, as well as the slides from which Gertsch painted in his darkened studio.

'My painting are hybrids – half real, half abstract. From a distance photographic reality, from close up abstract painting.' Franz Gertsch

Between the poles of truth and authenticity, reality and perception

The exhibition owes its title to Michelangelo Antonioni's famous film *Blow-Up* (1966). Like the film, Gertsch's work asks the question where truth begins in a painting. For Gertsch, photography guaranteed reality, while painting did the same for truth. From a distance his works look like photographic reality; from close up they dissolve into abstract painting, and the scene becomes more focused the further one moves away. 'Every detail has equal rights', Gertsch stressed. This tension between close-up and distance shapes the visual experience one has before Gertsch's paintings, and forms the heart of his method. In times of artificial intelligence and virtual worlds his work is thus acquiring a new topicality.

Early work: from the Old Masters to the discovery of Pop Art

Franz Gertsch was born on 8 March 1930 in Mörigen on Lake Biel. Early on, he discovered works by Ferdinand Hodler and Paul Klee at the Kunstmuseum Bern. His teacher Hans Schwarzenbach also awoke his enthusiasm for the Flemish Old Masters and the Italian early Renaissance, and taught him their techniques, particularly the glazing application of egg tempera paint.

Gertsch's early still lifes, landscapes and mythological scenes were made in egg tempera or mixed technique, and are characterised by their naturalistic style and old-masterly precision. In the mid-1960s, Pop Art opened up new pictorial worlds and methods to him: from now on, motifs from popular culture served as models, for example photographs of musicians such as Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger, the Rolling Stones and Françoise Hardy from youth and music magazines. At first, he worked these into reduced collages of coloured paper, which he then transferred to a large format with spray paint.

His painting *Huaa...!* (1969) marks the beginning of a new creative period of large-format photo-realist works. The painting shows a British captain in the Crimean War but was read as a commentary on American policy in the Vietnam War. Inspired by, amongst other things, Antonioni's film *Blow-Up* (1966), Gertsch developed his 'Blow-Up' technique while working on the painting: he took photographs of magazine pages, projected the slides onto the canvas and painted from these models. In this way he established a radically new approach to painting, producing monumental paintings over months and sometimes years of work.

1970s: from fleeting moments to monuments to the spirit of the age

From 1969, Gertsch worked almost exclusively from his own photography. He came to see narratives and contemporary content as a distraction from his goal of creating authentic pictures of the world as it appears. His attention shifted to his own family in everyday, private moments. Works such as *Brecht*, *Hanne-Lore*, *Silvia* (1970) or *Maria with Children* (1971) show his children in the bathtub or picnicking. Gertsch transferred fleeting moments to a monumental scale and condensed them into universal pictures of experience. Family paintings of this kind had not existed until now in the history of 20th-century Swiss art.

At the same time, he developed a fascination with Luciano Castelli, just twenty years old at the time, and his circle of friends. This group was exploring the dissolution of social conventions, the permeability of art and life, women and men, me and you – symbols of a

radical upheaval in Switzerland in the 1970s. As an attentive and non-judgmental observer, Gertsch captured these moments photographically and translated them into monumental paintings such as: *At Luciano's House* (1973), *Marina Making Up Luciano* (1975) and *Luciano I* (1976). With *Medici* (1971-1972) he attracted great attention at documenta 5 in Kassel and won international recognition.

Also significant are the works produced in the Camargue: Roma children playing on the beach and in the sea in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer became icons of Gertsch's photorealism. At the same time, Gertsch also made a change in his material: for the first time he painted on ungrounded cotton, which he had discovered on Canal Street in New York. This painting technique does not allow for corrections – every brushstroke has to stay. Each dab becomes the 'bow-shot of a Zen master', and 'slow painting got off the ground' Gertsch observed.

Late work: intoxicated by nature, pigments and beauty

In 1976, Gertsch moved with his family to an old farmhouse in Rüschegg in the Canton of Bern, which remained the centre of his life until his death. It was there that he started working with woodcuts. In the 1980s, he moved away from contemporary themes and found new pictorial worlds in the natural surroundings of his home. From then on, he came to see both the human and the natural as 'essences', and gave them equal weight.

This worldview culminated in the large-scale *Guadeloupe Triptych* (2011-2013), an homage to his wife Maria: the naked, dreaming figure is embedded in the shadow-play of tropical vegetation. In an art world that demands innovation and critical awareness above all, Gertsch deliberately turned towards beauty – as a counter-movement.

Kunstmuseum Bern

Franz Gertsch. Blow-Up (Part I)

14.8.2026–17.1.2027

Opening

The opening of the exhibition will take place on

Thursday, 13 August 2026, from 18:30.

Admission to the exhibition is free on this evening.

Curator

Dr. Kathleen Bühler

Curatorial assistant

Nina Liechti

Cooperation

An exhibition by Kunstmuseum Bern and Museum Franz Gertsch in collaboration with Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark, and Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Germany

With the support of

Kanton Bern, UBS, Amt für Kultur (Swisslos), Stiftung GegenwART, Bürgergemeinde Bern

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Media preview

We cordially invite you to the media preview with Chief Curator and exhibition curator Kathleen Bühler on **Wednesday, 12 August 2026 at 10:00 at the Kunstmuseum Bern.**

Please register via press@kunstmuseumbern.ch.

Please note that Kathleen Bühler is available for interviews in English. If you are interested in an interview after the press tour, please inform us in advance for organizational reasons.



Catalogue

Franz Gertsch. Blow-Up

German and French edition (2026) published by Kathleen Bühler, Kirsten Degel, Lærke Rydal Jørgensen, Arno Stein, Anna Wesle and Nina Zimmer

English edition (2024) published by Kirsten Degel and Lærke Rydal Jørgensen

With contributions by Tobia Bezzola, Kathleen Bühler, Florian Illies, Dora Imhof and Ulrich Loock, as well as a conversation between Franz Gertsch and Hans Ulrich Obrist

168 pages, 94 illustrations, 21 × 30 cm, hardcover

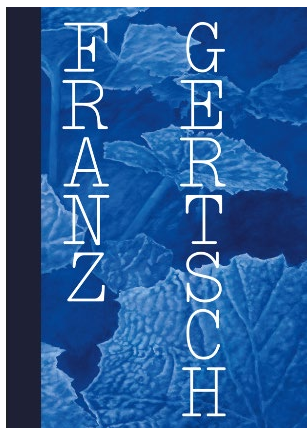
Munich: Hatje Cantz Publishers

German edition (2026): ISBN 978-3-7757-6296-0

French edition (2026): ISBN 978-3-7757-6297-7

English edition (2024): ISBN 978-87-93659-80-3

Available in the museum shop for CHF 48



Digital Guide

There is a freely accessible Digital Guide to accompany the exhibition. It can be accessed from Wednesday, 12 August 2026 via QR code or guide.kunstmuseumbern.ch/en/franz-gertsch.

Press images

Download press images:

kunstmuseumbern.ch/press

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01

Franz Gertsch

Luciano I, 1976

Acrylic on unprimed cotton

198 x 298 cm

Private Collection

© Franz Gertsch AG



02

Franz Gertsch

Harlekina (Renate), 1965

Oil on canvas

109,3 x 75 cm

Private Collection

© Franz Gertsch AG



03

Franz Gertsch

Alle fünf Rolling Stones [All Five Rolling Stones], 1968

Dispersion on canvas

175,5 x 175,5 cm

Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau / Donation of the

Friends of the Aargauische Kunstsammlung

Photo: Beate Dobrusskin

© Franz Gertsch AG



04

Franz Gertsch

Huua...!, 1969

Dispersion on unprimed half-linen

170 x 261 cm

Estate of Franz Gertsch

Photo: Dominique Uldry

© Franz Gertsch AG



05

Franz Gertsch

Vietnam, 1970

Dispersion on unprimed half-linen

213 x 294 cm

Hess Art Collection GmbH, Switzerland

© Franz Gertsch AG



06

Franz Gertsch

Saintes Maries de la Mer III, 1972

Acrylic on unprimed cotton

260 × 370 cm

Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, permanent loan from a private collection

Photo: Dominique Uldry

© Franz Gertsch AG



07

Franz Gertsch

Maria mit Kindern [Maria with Children], 1971

Dispersion on unprimed half-linen

400 × 600 cm

Museum Kurhaus Kleve, permanent loan from the Estate of Franz Gertsch

© Franz Gertsch AG



08

Franz Gertsch

Medici, 1971–1972

Dispersion on unprimed half-linen

400 × 600 cm

Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, permanent loan from the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation

Photo: Dominique Uldry

© Franz Gertsch AG



09

Franz Gertsch

Marina schminkt Luciano [Marina Making Up Luciano], 1975

Acrylic on unprimed cotton

234 × 346 cm

Museum Ludwig, Cologne, loan from the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation, 1976

Photo: Historisches Archiv mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv

© Franz Gertsch AG



10

Franz Gertsch

Pestwurz [Butterbur], 2014–2015

Egg tempera on unprimed cotton

220 × 320 cm

Collection of Dr. h.c. Willy Michel

© Franz Gertsch AG



11

Franz Gertsch

Meer I [Sea I], 2016–2017
Tempera on unprimed cotton
240 × 340 cm
Estate of Franz Gertsch
© Franz Gertsch AG



12

Franz Gertsch

Gräser VIII [Grasses VIII], 2019–2020
Egg tempera on unprimed cotton
240 × 340 cm
Estate of Franz Gertsch
© Franz Gertsch AG



13

Franz Gertsch in his studio in the Gassner Brewery in Bern, working on *Maria mit Kindern [Maria with Children]*, 1971
Photographer unknown



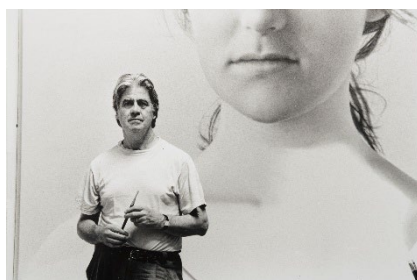
14

Franz Gertsch in his studio in the Gassner Brewery in Bern working on *Medici*, 1972. On the left-hand side, the paintings *Aelggi Alp* and *Saintes Maries de la Mer I* can be seen.
Photo: Jürg Bernhardt



15

Franz Gertsch, 1970
Photo: B. P. Stähli, Lucerne



16

Franz Gertsch in his studio in front of the painting *Silvia I*, 1998
Photographer unknown



Franz Gertsch, *Patti Smith IV*, 1979, acrylic on unprimed cotton, 285 × 420 cm, private collection, Switzerland
© Franz Gertsch AG

The Kunstmuseum Bern and the Museum Franz Gertsch have collaborated to take over from the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (DK) and the Deichtorhallen Hamburg (D), who presented the first comprehensive retrospective on Franz Gertsch (1930–2022) since his death. The artist himself was still able to participate in this project. While the Kunstmuseum Bern is providing an overview of important works and creative periods from 1956 to 2021, the Museum Franz Gertsch is presenting a selection of works from 1970 to 2021 that features the models Patti Smith, Luciano Castelli, and Irene Staub. The show includes female portraits and representations of nature in paintings and woodcuts. Two exhibits are on display in Switzerland for the first time, and some groups of works have been reunited after decades.

With works by Franz Gertsch, Luciano Castelli, and Roswitha Hecke

During the last autumn/winter season 2024/25, Franz Gertsch was not only celebrated as a world-class artist at the Museum Franz Gertsch. In November 2024 the comprehensive exhibition *Franz Gertsch. Blow-Up* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark came to end after having drawn the sensational number of 336'874 visitors, only to reopen in December at its second venue, the Deichtorhallen Hamburg in Germany, where it attracted another 70'000 visitors.

It is the last show in which the artist was able to participate and the first comprehensive retrospective since his death in 2022, and thus, especially significant. Hence our wish to revive the exhibition in 2026/27 by bringing it back to two venues in Franz Gertsch's home country, the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Museum Franz Gertsch in Burgdorf.

While the Kunstmuseum Bern is providing an overview of important works and creative periods from 1956 to 2021, the Museum Franz Gertsch is focusing on a selection of themes: One room is dedicated to the rock poet Patti Smith, whom Franz Gertsch portrayed five times between 1978 and 1979. Besides four large-format paintings, the display includes photos by the artist, some of which he used as templates, as well as the self-portrait he created shortly after this series in 1980.

The second room showcases the model Luciano Castelli, a young artist from Lucerne Franz Gertsch painted thirteen times between 1971 and 1977. Now on display at the Kunstmuseum Bern, the iconic Castelli pictures were already part of the Museum Franz Gertsch's comprehensive exhibition *Franz Gertsch. Die Siebziger* [Franz Gertsch. The Seventies] (21.03.–04.10.2020). For this presentation, the museum chose two paintings that have never been shown in Switzerland, *Luciano Castelli II* (1972) and *Spiegelkabinett* [Mirror Cabinet] (1974), as well as rarely exhibited loans from public and private collections, namely the monumental *Aelggi Alp* and the first painting from the series, *Luciano Castelli I* (both 1971). Visitors can also look forward to two seldomly shown small still lifes from 1970. The exhibition not only features Luciano Castelli (*1951) as a model, but also as an artist with a large-format painting and photographs that inspired Gertsch.

The group of works in the third exhibition room revolves around Irene Staub. She belonged to Luciano Castelli's circle of friends and was known as a high-class sex worker in Zurich, who went by the name 'Lady Shiva'. The painting *Irène* (1980) is the highlight in this room. It is accompanied by a selection of works the artist also dedicated to the model 'Irène' (spelled with an accent because Gertsch preferred this version) and carried out on paper with different techniques in 1981/82. Three pictures by the German photographer Roswitha Hecke (*1944), who dedicated a photo book to Irene Staub, complement the presentation.

The fourth room unites large-format paintings featuring Franz Gertsch's main models Johanna (1983–1985) and Silvia (1998–2004), as well as important landscape motifs the artist revisited time and again, both in his paintings and in his woodcuts: *Waldweg* (Campiglia Marittima) [Forest Path (Campiglia Marittima)] and *Gräser* [Grasses].

The subjects Silvia, *Waldweg* (Campiglia Marittima), and *Gräser* also feature in a collection of woodcuts presented in the smaller rooms in the annex of the Museum Franz Gertsch. Thematically *Sommer II* [Summer II], a late work from 2019, belongs to the monumental paintings of the *Vier-Jahreszeiten-Zyklus* [Four Seasons Cycle] (2007–11), which is part of the museum's permanent display.

Visitors can also watch the 52-minute film *Der Zeit die Zeit geben. Franz Gertsch* [Giving Time to Time. Franz Gertsch] (2023, German with English and French subtitles) in the annex, where it will be showing several times a day. The script was written by the Czech Swiss director Dana Maeder, who accompanied Franz Gertsch, his wife Maria Gertsch-Meer, as well as the exhibitions at the Museum Franz Gertsch with her team from 2019 to 2021. Her atmospherically dense film gives an audience to the artist's companions and provides a sensitive portrayal of the studio, the paintings, the woodcuts, but above all, the protagonists Franz and Maria Gertsch.

Louisiana Publications issued an exhibition catalogue in English with contributions by Tobia Bezzola, Kathleen Bühler, Dora Imhof, Florian Illies, Ulrich Loock, and others. German and French versions of the same content were developed for the Swiss shows and published by Hatje Cantz.

Museum Franz Gertsch

Franz Gertsch. Blow-Up (Part II)

19.9.2026–28.2.2027

Opening

The opening of the exhibition will take place on

Friday, 18 September 2026, at 18:30.

Admission to the exhibition is free on this evening. Doors open at 16:00.

Media conference

Thursday, **17 September 2026**, 10:30

Please register via info@museum-franzgertsch.ch until Tuesday, 15 September 2026. Reference: 'Media preview'

Curator

Anna Wesle

Scientific assistant

Catharina Vogel

Cooperation

An exhibition by Kunstmuseum Bern and Museum Franz Gertsch in collaboration with Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark, and Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Germany

With the support of

Dr. h.c. Willy Michel, Kanton Bern, Regionalkonferenz Emmental, Stadt Burgdorf, Swisslos Kultur Kanton Bern, Ursula Wirz-Stiftung, Dr. Georg und Josi Guggenheim-Stiftung, Burgergemeinde Burgdorf, Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft Burgdorf, Ypsomed, Haller + Jenzer AG

Media contact Museum Franz Gertsch

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Biography

1930

Franz Gertsch was born on 8 March in Mörigen, on Lake Biel. Five years later, the family moved to Bern.

1937–1940

Hans Gertsch frequently took his son to the art museum, which would leave a lasting impression on Franz and in particular works by Ferdinand Hodler and Paul Klee.

1947–1952

Gertsch attended the art school run by Max von Mühlenen, a renowned modern painter in Bern. He subsequently studied the techniques of the Old Masters under the Bern artist Hans Schwarzenbach and had access to his extensive library of art history.

1955

Gertsch married Denise Kohler who gives birth to their daughter, Renate Suna.

1955–1960

Gertsch experienced a creative crisis that included periods of depression and a lack of direction.

1963

Franz Gertsch divorced Denise Kohler and married Maria Meer. Their daughter Silvia Maria was born; in the subsequent years, another daughter, Hanne-Lore, and two sons, Hans Albrecht and Bendicht Mattia, follow.

1966

Gertsch began drawing inspiration from the contemporary and figurative qualities of Pop Art. He created some initial collages of family scenes, painted freely in gouache, which he later translated into large-scale works using emulsion paint.

1967

Gertsch created collages and paintings based on photographs from popular magazines featuring, among others, Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones.

1969

Gertsch reached an artistic dead end, producing nothing for several months. He abandoned abstraction and began translating photographs into paintings. Large-scale, realist paintings were created based on imagery from the media and his own photographs, which he projected as slides, rendering them in paint on canvas in the light of the projection.

1970

Gertsch began painting portraits of his family and artist friends.

1971

The Swiss curator Jean-Christophe Ammann organised the first major solo exhibition of Gertsch's work for the reopening of Kunstmuseum Luzern in 1972. During the preparations, Gertsch became acquainted with the art student Luciano Castelli and his friends.

Gertsch rented a huge loft at the Gassner brewery in Bern to work on his monumental paintings on bedsheets that had been sewn together. He began with group portraits such as *Maria mit Kindern* (*Maria with Children*) and *Medici*.

1972

The collector Peter Ludwig acquired *Medici*. Gertsch participated in documenta 5 in Kassel where *Medici* was greatly admired.

1973

Gertsch attended parties hosted by Luciano Castelli and his friends at their shared house on Reckenbühlstrasse in Lucerne. The photographs taken there inspired a new series of works.

1974–1975

Gertsch received a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service and moved to Berlin with his family for 18 months.

1976

Gertsch moved with his family into an old farmhouse in Rüschegg, in the canton of Bern, where he continued to live until his death.

1977–1978

Gertsch photographed Patti Smith during a performance; the shots result in the images *Patti Smith I–II*, which were exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1978.

1980

Gertsch painted *Selbstbildnis* (Self Portrait) based on a photograph taken by Maria Gertsch-Meer, marking the beginning of a portrait series. Over the next six years, he painted six large portraits of women.

1986–1994

Gertsch began working on woodcuts and temporarily stopped painting. Gertsch turned to nature in his new large-scale woodcuts, finding inspiration in the immediate surroundings of his home in Rüschegg.

1995–1999

In the summer of 1995, inspired by inconspicuous grass at the edge of his garden, Gertsch began painting again.

1999

A solo exhibition at Venice Biennale.

2002

The opening of Museum Franz Gertsch in Burgdorf.

2005–2006

Opening of his retrospective, a joint exhibition by Museum Franz Gertsch (works up to 1976) and Kunstmuseum Bern (works from 1977–2005). The exhibition subsequently travelled to Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Kunsthalle Tübingen as well as the Albertina and mumok (Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig) in Vienna.

2011

Solo exhibition at Kunsthaus Zürich.

2011–2013

Gertsch worked on the triptych *Guadeloupe*. The photographs that provided the source were from a trip that Franz Gertsch and Maria Gertsch-Meer had taken to Guadeloupe in 1985.

2018–2021

With *Gräser V–VII* (Grasses V–VII) Gertsch gradually moved away from using realistic colour. By using pure lapis lazuli as the only pigment for *Gräser VIII–IX*, *Blauer Sommer* (Blue Summer), *Blaue Pestwurz* (Blue Butterbur) and *Blauer Waldweg* (Campiglia Marittima) [Blue Forest Path (Campiglia Marittima)] he achieved the monochrome palette he had been striving for in his painting.

2020

On the occasion of the artist's 90th birthday, Museum Franz Gertsch and Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz organised an exhibition focusing on his work from the 1970s.

2022

On the occasion of the artist's 90th birthday, Museum Franz Gertsch and Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz organised an exhibition focusing on his work from the 1970s.

Complete biography: franz-gertsch.ch/en/curriculum-vitae/biography

Current and upcoming exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Bern

Life in Full. Old Masters from Duccio to Liotard

until 27 September 2026

Journey into Freedom. Capri – Skagen – Monte Verità

30.10.2026–31.1.2027

The Collection. From Fra Angelico to Pablo Picasso, from Ferdinand Hodler to Meret Oppenheim

until 31.12.2026

Opening hours

Tuesday
10:00–20:00

Wednesday–Sunday
10:00–17:00

Monday closed

Public holidays

Closed on 24 and 25 December 2026

Open on all other public holidays and on Monday, 28 December 2026, 10:00–17:00

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Accreditation for media representatives

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