

PRESS INFORMATION

TOKENS OF FRIENDSHIP: ULRIKE CRESPO'S GIFTS TO THE STÄDEL MUSEUM

24 NOVEMBER 2021 TO 6 MARCH 2022

Exhibition Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings

Press preview: Tuesday, 23 November 2021, 11 am

Frankfurt am Main, 22 October 2021. It is one of the most important bequests of the past decades: the photographer and philanthropist Ulrike Crespo of Frankfurt left more than 90 outstanding paintings and works on paper to the Städel Museum. Spanning modern and international post-war art, the bequest includes outstanding works by Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Otto Dix, Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, Jean Dubuffet, Cy Twombly, and many others. One great example is Oskar Schlemmer's watercolour for his world-famous painting *Bauhaus Stairway* (New York, Museum of Modern Art).

The Städel Museum is now honouring Ulrike Crespo's impressive gesture with an exhibition titled "Tokens of Friendship: Ulrike Crespo's Gifts to the Städel Museum". From 24 November 2021 to 6 March 2022, selected works from the bequest will enter into dialogue with works from the Städel's collection. A total of 72 works will be on view, including 44 from the Ulrike Crespo bequest. The donated individual works and workgroups form an excellent complement to the collection of the museum. They enhance existing holdings and close gaps – including those left behind by the Nazi confiscation of artworks within the framework of the 'degenerate art' campaign. In the exhibition, selected 'new arrivals' and works from the Städel's collection thus correspond and correlate with one another to the mutual enrichment of both.

'With her bequest, Ulrike Crespo picked up on the best of Frankfurt's civic traditions – after all, the Städel Museum owes its very existence to just such an act of patronage. And the masterworks from her legacy could hardly be a more fitting complement to the museum's holdings. With our special exhibition, we would like to commemorate the donor and celebrate her wonderful gift to Frankfurt. The Städel is deeply indebted to Ulrike Crespo', commented Städel director Philipp Demandt.

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‘One thing was very important to Ulli Crespo: she wanted art to be accessible to the whole society. She wanted to enable even more people to develop their personalities by way of the sensorial-aesthetic experience of art and culture. And to that end, she founded the Crespo Foundation. Her bequest to the Städel Museum is keeping up with that logic. We are extremely delighted about this exhibition in honour of Ulli Crespo’s works and values’, remarked Christiane Riedel, the chairwoman of the Crespo Foundation’s board of trustees.

It was in 2001 that the photographer, psychotherapist, and philanthropist Ulrike Crespo (1950–2019) founded the Crespo Foundation in Frankfurt, which carries out a wide array of projects to the benefit of socially disadvantaged persons with a focus on education and creativity. She also provided assistance to artists as well as art institutions, and amassed a collection of contemporary art. The visual arts were a matter of existential importance to Ulrike Crespo – and a family tradition. The works bequeathed to the Städel Museum originally belonged to the far more extensive collection of Karl Ströher (1890–1977), Ulrike Crespo’s grandfather. After World War II, inspired by his own penchant for works on paper – he himself loved to draw –, but also by his contacts to artist friends such as Willi Baumeister, art historians such as Will Grohmann, and gallerists, Ströher began purchasing works ranging from classical modern to the latest in contemporary art, from Expressionism to American Pop.

A tour of the exhibition

The exhibition is organized in seven sections by workgroup and, for the most part, in chronological order, and gets underway with what are perhaps the most important new additions to the Städel Museum collection: works by the onetime **Bauhaus teachers** Oskar Schlemmer, Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, and László Moholy-Nagy. Founded as an interdisciplinary art school in 1919, the Bauhaus called upon all members of its teaching staff to convey their own personal aesthetic visions to the students, and thus brought together many formally independent artistic standpoints bearing importance for modern art. Even if not every work in this section has its origins directly in the Bauhaus, they are all distinguished by the school’s characteristic search for new forms. Landscapes and figures undergo reduction to sign-like shapes, Cubist-style fragmentation, or geometric construction. Until now, drawings by Schlemmer and Moholy-Nagy have been entirely lacking in the Städel’s Department of Prints and Drawings, or present only in the form of loans. Schlemmer’s watercolour for *Bauhaus Stairway* (1931), meanwhile long an iconic image, and his two figural groups of 1942, both painterly experiments in oil on oil paper, now join

Moholy-Nagy's geometric-abstract composition *Grey Overlappings* (1930) to close this gap at the highest level of quality.

Adolf Hölzel and artists of the Blauer Reiter had already set off on **Paths to Abstraction** in the early years of the twentieth century. Hölzel departed from purely representational painting around 1905 and, in his capacity as a teacher in Stuttgart and an important art theorist, exerted a formative influence not only on Oskar Schlemmer, Johannes Itten, and Ida Kerkovius – who would all become prominent figures at the Bauhaus – but also on artists such as Willi Baumeister. At around the same time, the artists' association Blauer Reiter in Munich found its way to new formal possibilities as well. For Kandinsky, who later likewise taught at the Bauhaus, true art came into being as an inner necessity, independently of the outer world. Thanks to Ulrike Crespo, his oeuvre can now be experienced at the Städel Museum in the early landscape in *Kallmünz – Light-Green Mountains* (1903) and since 2016, in an *Improvisation* (1911/12) in watercolour, and the draughtsman Franz Marc in a sensitive pencil study of horses from a sketchbook of 1910/11.

In addition to Hölzel in Stuttgart and the Blauer Reiter in Munich, the Brücke artists' community in Dresden formed yet another important centre of modernism around 1905. There, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Emil Nolde, and others strove to work in an 'immediate and undistorted' manner. The works in the bequest by these artists as well as by Christian Rohlf, who shared their approach in many respects, integrate seamlessly into the Städel Museum's rich **Expressionism** holdings, and thus into the onetime collection of Carl Hagemann (1867–1940). What is more, the Städel now has the only known print of Kirchner's rare 1912 woodcut *Head of Erna* to call its own. And the expressive and splendidly colourful watercolour of anonymous city dwellers by Otto Dix introduces a new aspect: while it bears an affinity to Nolde in terms of creative expression, it reveals an entirely different colouristic temperament and image of humanity.

Apart from these larger classical-modern workgroups, a number of prominent independent and **Individual Works** also made their way into the Städel Museum's holdings with the Crespo bequest. The works by Gustav Klimt and Paula Modersohn-Becker, Fernand Léger and Max Ernst, Ben Nicholson and Alberto Giacometti on view in this section span over half a century of international creativity. A highlight here is Max Ernst's surrealist painting *Fishbone Forest* of 1927, which combines 'classical' painting with experimental methods: chance and free association have become part of the process of pictorial invention.

Jean Dubuffet, to whom the next section is devoted, pursued a similarly experimental approach. He saw greater credibility in the immediacy and openness of the art of children and the mentally impaired than in the formal language of trained artists. Earthy and crusted-looking substances – apparently formless matter – sparked his interest. Sand, plaster, and other unusual materials served him as mediums which he applied with a spatula-like tool, formed, or incised. This is strikingly apparent in the two works from the bequest, a painting and a papier-mâché relief, which engage in dialogue with graphic works from the Städel collection.

From Dubuffet, the tour continues to the workgroup around Willi Baumeister, one of the most important protagonists of German **Post-War Modernism**. Works by Baumeister himself, but also by Julius Bissier and Fritz Winter, form an important facet of the bequest. They are enhanced by examples of **American Art**. In 1968, having already acquired works by Sam Francis and Cy Twombly, Karl Ströher went on to purchase the Pop Art collection of the insurance broker Leon Kraushar of New York, which contributed decisively to shaping the international reputation of his collection. It was in roughly the same period that the Städel Museum began acquiring American art on paper as well, an area it has continued to pursue to this day. The works from Ulrike Crespo further reinforce this Städel collection focus. And the exhibition thus not only allows visitors to experience the multifariousness of international art between 1905 and 1965, but also the dynamic process of art collecting.

All of the works donated or bequeathed to the Städel Museum by Ulrike Crespo await discovery in an album of the Digital Collection. In the study hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings, visitors can view works on paper by request that are not on display in the exhibition.

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Exhibition dates: 24 November 2021 to 6 March 2022

Press preview: Tuesday, 23 November 2021 at 11 am

Curator: Dr. Regina Freyberger (Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings from 1750, Städel Museum)

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de/en

Visitor services: +49(0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays 10.00 am–6.00 pm, Thu 10.00 am–9.00 pm

Study Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings: Wed, Fri 2.00–5.00 pm, Thu 2.00–7.00 pm, previous registration is requested to graphischesammlung@staedelmuseum.de

Special opening hours: For information on special opening hours, for example on Christmas and New Year's, see www.staedelmuseum.de/en

Admission: Prices during the special exhibition 'Call Me Rembrandt!' (until 30 Jan 2022): Tue–Fri 16

EUR, reduced 14 EUR; Sat, Sun + holidays 18 EUR, reduced 16 EUR; free admission for children under 12. Tickets can be booked online at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en.

Digital Collection: sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en

General guided tours of the exhibition (in German language): Starting 28 November 2021: regular one-hour guided tours of the exhibition every Sunday at 12.00 noon. Tickets for the general guided tour are available exclusively in the online shop at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. Please consult www.staedelmuseum.de/en for the latest information on the general guided tours, special offers during the holidays, and the opening hours.

Film: A video portrait of Ulrike Crespo and her bequest to the Städel Museum will be on view in the exhibition and at the Städel's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/staedelmuseum

Current COVID information for visiting the museum: An overview of the current regulatory requirements applying to individual visitors and groups can be found at www.staedelmuseum.de/en/covid-info. We advise you to check for updates immediately prior to your visit.

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Städel Blog (in German): for more background, don't miss a post: blog.staedelmuseum.de/blog-abonnieren