

Media Release
Basel, October 22, 2020

The Kunstmuseum Basel is pleased to announce three major special exhibitions for 2021. With Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Kara Walker, two strong artists of different generations will be taking part in the first half of the year. The year will conclude with one of the most important painters in 19th century France, Camille Pissarro.

As in the past, we will open three grand special exhibitions over the course of the year. After *Rembrandt's Orient*, the spring of 2021 brings an extensive retrospective of the art of *Sophie Taeuber-Arp* (1889–1943), one of the most important women artists of the twentieth century. A pioneer of abstraction, she made vital contributions to the development of modernist art. After its début in Basel, the show will travel to London and New York, introducing international audiences to the diverse output of this long-neglected artist. In the summer, the Kunstmuseum will be the first museum in Switzerland to mount a comprehensive presentation of the oeuvre of the American artist Kara Walker (b. 1969). In works that are aesthetically dazzling and brilliantly executed, Walker addresses the hot-button issues that societies debate today: racism, gender, sexuality, and violence. The exhibition will also include a selection of decades-old works that the artist has never shared with the public.

In the fall, we will showcase the art of *Camille Pissarro* (1830–1903), arguably the least known Impressionist. It will be the first retrospective of his oeuvre in Switzerland in more than sixty years. One of the most fascinating artist personalities of the nineteenth century, Pissarro ranks among the great facilitators and inspirers in the more recent history of art. It was largely thanks to his initiative that the Impressionists came together as a group in the first place. An obsessive painter who lived only for his work, Pissarro was a key figure also because of his intense and fruitful collaborative relationships with other artists, some of which were his juniors by decades, including Cézanne, Monet, Degas, Gauguin, and Seurat. Cézanne called him “le père de nous tous,” underscoring the significance of this still-underrated artist’s contribution to the genesis of modern art.

The exhibition programme will be supplemented by further exhibitions and collection presentations, which we will announce at a later date. Among them is the presentation *Antigone* by Tacita Dean, which will open in May as part of the three-part presentation of works from the collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation at the Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, *Continuously Contemporary*.

Media contact

Karen N. Gerig, Tel. +41 61 206 62 80, karen.gerig@bs.ch

Sophie Taeuber-Arp Living Abstraction

Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau, March 20–June 20, 2021

Curators: Eva Reifert, Kunstmuseum Basel; Anne Umland, The Blanche Hooker Rockefeller Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art; Walburga Krupp, Independent Curator, and Natalia Sidlina, Curator, International Art, Tate Modern



The Swiss artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943) was a pioneer of abstraction. With an air of playful ease, her interdisciplinary creations dismantled longstanding barriers between art and life. Fusing the experimentalism of the avant-garde circles in which she moved in Zurich and Paris with her technical training and experience as a teacher of applied art, she devised a form of abstraction brought to—indeed, integrated into virtually all domains of—life by expert craftsmanship. At the time of her death in a tragic accident in 1943, her oeuvre encompassed textile pieces such as pillows and tablecloths, bead works, a puppet theater, costumes, murals, furniture, architecture, graphic designs, paintings, drawings, sculptures, and reliefs.

Taeuber-Arp's characteristic lucid yet animated formal idiom is recognizable across the wide range of materials she availed herself of: long after she first discovered dance as an expressive register in the orbit of Zurich Dada, the lively interplay of equilibrium and motion remained a key feature of her art, inspiring her abstract compositions as well.

In 2021, the Kunstmuseum Basel dedicates the comprehensive retrospective *Living Abstraction* to Sophie Taeuber-Arp's oeuvre. The first exhibition to present her work to large international audiences beyond the German-speaking countries, it is organized by Kunstmuseum Basel, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Tate Modern, London. After decades of relative neglect—though the artist's face will be familiar to many visitors thanks to her presence on the 50 Swiss Franc note—it establishes her as one of classic modernism's leading avant-gardists.

The captivating survey allows visitors to experience the evolution of her work from her beginnings in applied art to the architecture-related projects of her Strasbourg years and the abstract paintings of her time in Paris. In 1937, Taeuber-Arp contributed numerous works to *Konstruktivisten*, an exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel that gave a major boost to the development and dissemination of abstraction. She figures prominently in the history of art in Basel also because several important collectors of her work called the city home.

Media Orientation Event

Thursday, March 18, 2021, 11 am

Facebook: @Kunstmuseum Basel

Twitter: @kunstmuseumbasel

Instagram: @kunstmuseumbs

Credit: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, 1920. Photo: Nic Aluf, Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin

Facebook: @Kunstmuseum Basel

Twitter: @kunstmuseumbasel

Instagram: @kunstmuseumbs

Kara Walker
A Black Hole Is Everything a Star Longs to Be

Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau, June 5–September 19, 2021
Curator: Anita Haldemann



US-American and Black artist Kara Walker's (b. 1969) first major exhibition in Switzerland, on view at the Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau, features over six hundred never-before-seen works on paper from her personal archive. These works, created over the past twenty-seven years, are presented alongside recent drawings that grapple with contemporary concerns such as Barack Obama's legacy.

Walker, who first caused a stir with room-size silhouettes in 1994, is now one of the most high-profile artists in the United States. Provocative and sometimes obscene yet aesthetically appealing scenes executed with extraordinary technical finesse bring racism, gender, sexuality, and violence into focus. Surveying American history from slavery to Barack Obama's presidency and the Black Lives Matter movement, Walker has no patience for political correctness and does not propose a conciliatory view of the past, instead prodding the viewer to question established accounts and entrenched myths. Unsparing in her analysis of deep-rooted conflicts that have never been resolved, she examines the genesis of collective self-images as well as her own identity.

Drawing on paper was and is the foundation of Walker's creative practice. By putting her private archive on display, she offers unprecedented insight into her approach. The rich diversity of the works on paper reveals that she deftly avails herself of a wide range of styles, be it Francisco de Goya's light-dark contrasts, James Ensor's vibrant line, or William Hogarth's flair for cartoonish emphasis. For many years, Walker determinedly eschewed color, drawing in black on white paper. Her most recent works, by contrast, prominently feature instances of old masterly white heightening on toned paper and even colored crayons. Her engagement with the art of earlier masters goes hand in hand with an astute analysis and ironic appropriation of the pictorial tradition that lets her stake out her own position in the history of art.

Media Orientation Event

Thursday, June 3, 2021, 11 am

Credit: Kara Walker, Barack Obama as Othello "The Moor" With the Severed Head of Iago in a New and Revised Ending by Kara E. Walker, 2019. © Kara Walker

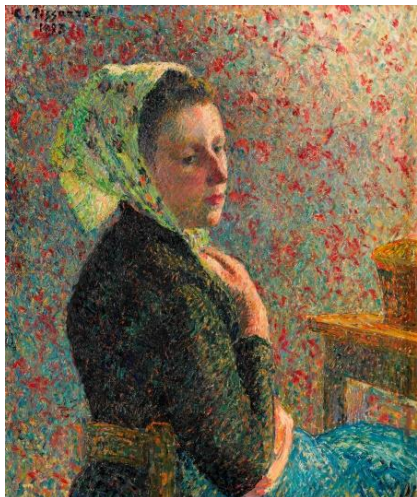
Facebook: @Kunstmuseum Basel

Twitter: @kunstmuseumbasel

Instagram: @kunstmuseumbs

Camille Pissarro The Studio of Modernism

Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau, September 4, 2021 – January 23, 2022
Curators: Josef Helfenstein, Christophe Duvivier



Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) ranks among the most distinguished artists of nineteenth-century France. To retrace the arc of his exceptionally diverse oeuvre is to witness the birth of modernism. And yet today's histories of art often cast Pissarro in a subsidiary role. It has been more than sixty years since a museum in Switzerland devoted a presentation to this eminent artist.

The comprehensive fall exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel offers an overview of Pissarro's output and puts the focus on his collaborative relationships with his contemporaries. As a friend and mentor, Pissarro was in close contact with artists of several generations, including Paul Cézanne, Claude Monet, Paul Gauguin, Edgar Degas, and Mary Cassatt. His sustained exchanges of ideas with his colleagues may be regarded as a vital catalyst for seminal developments in the painting of the second half of the nineteenth century. As a central figure in Impressionism, Pissarro exerted considerable influence over the movement's other members. He was the only one to dedicate himself to the landscape and the human figure with equal assiduity. In the 1880s, just as Impressionism was finally also finding favor with collectors and its exponents started to earn money with their art, Pissarro aligned himself with a second revolution in painting: his contributions to Neo-Impressionism gave fresh proof of his tenacious pursuit of artistic progress.

Like many of the Neo-Impressionists, Camille Pissarro took an active interest in anarchism. The extent to which his work reflects his political convictions has long occupied art historians informed by social history. We do know that he did not wish his pictures to be read as visualizations of a political program. Still, core ideas of anarchism resonate in Pissarro's revolutionary technique and his determination to break fresh ground against all resistance.

Camille Pissarro is an artist of particular importance to the Kunstmuseum Basel, which has eight of his paintings and numerous works on paper in its collection. In fact, *Un coin de l'Hermitage, Pontoise* (1878) was the first Impressionist painting to enter the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, the public art collection of Basel; it was acquired in 1912 on the initiative of several artists and art enthusiasts. The decision, which some contemporary observers viewed with skepticism, laid the foundation for the Kunstmuseum's collection of Impressionist art.

Media Orientation Event

Thursday, September 2, 2021, 11 am

Camille Pissarro, Femme au fichu verte, 1893. Paris, musée d'Orsay, Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) - © Franck Raux

Facebook: @Kunstmuseum Basel

Twitter: @kunstmuseumbasel

Instagram: @kunstmuseumbs

Tacita Dean *Antigone*

May, 8 – September 26, 2021, Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart
Curators: Heidi Naef, Isabel Friedli (EHS)



Antigone (2018), the latest and hitherto most complex work by Tacita Dean (b. 1965), makes its Swiss début at the Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart. The hourlong epic from the collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation reflects the British-European artist's keen flair for subtly interweaving mythological figures, personal history, and coincidental occurrences.

The idea for *Antigone* had haunted the artist's mind for decades: Antigone is the name of her older sister, but also of the eponymous tragic heroine of the play by the Greek tragedian Sophocles. Ever since her first encounter with the plot, Dean had wondered about the interval during which the blind King Oedipus, attended by his daughter and sister Antigone, wanders the desert—Sophocles offers no clues as to what happens in this gap between the two *Oedipus* plays. As early as 1997, Dean drafted the script for a film that would explore the curious blank, but then set it aside. Twenty years passed before she took up the ambitious project again.

The central concern in *Antigone* is blindness, whose artistic, technological, mythological, and natural dimensions—the latter represented by footage of a solar eclipse, which functions as the film's inner clockwork—all figure prominently in the work. The double projection intertwines its thematic threads in a dramaturgy whose unities of place, time, and action are prismatically fractured, yielding a panoply of radiant images.

The presentation will be complemented by works by Tacita Dean on loan from other collections and the artist herself. It takes place as part of the three-part presentation of new acquisitions by the EHS, *Continuously Contemporary*, the first part of which opened in September at the Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart. Part 2 of *Continuously Contemporary* (23.01. - 09.05.2021) presents selected groups of works by artists such as Klara Lidén, Monika Sosnowska, Fiona Tan, Paul Chan, Thomas Demand, Peter Fischli, Alexej Koschkarow, Steve McQueen and Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. From the end of May 2021 the presentation will change to a further selection of works from the collection, including works by Elizabeth Peyton, Steve McQueen and Anri Sala.

Media Orientation Event

Thursday, May 6, 2021, 11 am

Credit: Tacita Dean, Antigone (Film still), 2018. Emanuel Hoffmann-Stiftung, ©the artist

Facebook: @Kunstmuseum Basel

Twitter: @kunstmuseumbasel

Instagram: @kunstmuseumbs