

Media release

Basel, 4 January 2022

Hermann Scherer
Grooves and Edges

January 15–April 18, 2022, Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau

Curator: Marion Heisterberg

“I dare not answer the question one is confronted with, whether life [...] is gay and happy, I feel and create what has become reality for me [...] when the experience presses in upon me with elemental force.”
(Hermann Scherer, 1925)

The woodcut plays a pivotal role in the oeuvre of the Expressionist Hermann Scherer (1893–1927), who worked in Basel. The Kunstmuseum Basel dedicates a special exhibition at the Neubau to the artist’s output in this medium, gathering his printing blocks as well as original prints from the collection and numerous loans.

The last two and a half years in Hermann Scherer’s life are a crucial period. It is during this time that he comes into his own as an artist, finally shaking off earlier influences (Aristide Maillol, Carl Burckhardt, Auguste Rodin) and charting a radically new course inspired by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. In the early summer of 1923, Kirchner drafts the thirty-year-old Scherer to assist him with setting up an exhibition of his work at the Kunsthalle Basel. As a reward, he invites his young colleague to Davos, thinking that he might enjoy carving “a little bit” of the local arolla. It is the first time that the trained stonemason works with wood.

Scherer is thrilled by the new material, which sparks a period of irrepressible creativity: in a mere twenty-two months, he produces over a hundred woodcuts and around twenty-five wooden sculptures. The woodcut helps him devise an abstract-planar reduction of form that subsequently also informs his drawings and paintings: curved silhouettes give way to angular forms and the gash-like indentations left by vigorous gouging. The themes that have been salient in the artist’s life and work—love and sexual

urges, intimacy and loneliness, existential angst and excess—arguably find their most forceful articulation in his woodcuts.

At the start of 2022, fifty-four of Scherer's printing blocks enter the collection of the Kunstmuseum Basel's Kupferstichkabinett (Department of Prints and Drawings) as a gift. A selection from this treasure makes its public début in *Hermann Scherer. Grooves and Edges*, together with original prints taken from the blocks. Another highlight in the exhibition are the three major portfolios *Raskolnikoff* (1924/25), *Baal* (1925), and *Die Zwölf* (1925/26), which have never been on public display as complete sets of original prints. The exhibition, which encompasses around a hundred and fifty works, is complemented by numerous wooden sculptures and sketches, including works on loan from Berlin, Cologne, Chur, Davos, the artist's estate, and private collections.

A richly illustrated catalogue with contributions by Margitta Brinkmann, Marion Heisterberg, Wolfgang Kersten, Stephan Kunz, and Martin Schwander will be released in conjunction with the exhibition, published by Scheidegger und Spiess and edited by Marion Heisterberg and Stephan Kunz.

The Kunstmuseum Basel is extraordinarily grateful to the Hermann Scherer estate for the gift of the fifty-four printing blocks.

The exhibition is supported by:
Anonymous patrons
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After the presentation at the Kunstmuseum Basel, the exhibition will (in a modified version) travel to the Museum of Fine Arts Chur (June 18–September 25, 2022) and the Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg (March 5–June 5, 2023).

Exhibition-related imagery

www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/media

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