

Press release

Basel, June 2, 2025

## Kunstmuseum Basel to Show E. L. Kirchner's *Tanz im Varieté*

June 3, 2025–July 27, 2025, Kunstmuseum Basel | Hauptbau, ground floor

Curator: Géraldine Meyer, Curator, im Obersteg Foundation



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Tanz im Varieté*, 1911, Im Obersteg Foundation, deposit at the Kunstmuseum Basel

The Kunstmuseum Basel will show the painting *Tanz im Varieté* (Dance at the Varieté, 1911) by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner for the first time. The significant work was acquired at auction by the Im Obersteg Foundation on June 7, 2024, for approximately seven million euros. Then, across a period of many months, it was thoroughly and painstakingly restored at the Kunstmuseum Basel.

For decades, *Tanz im Varieté* was considered lost. It was last on view in 1923 in an exhibition in Berlin. After that, it was only known in a black-and-white photograph, until it was put up for auction at Ketterer Kunst in Munich and purchased by the Im Obersteg Foundation. Now it will be presented to the public again for the first time in over a hundred years.

*Tanz im Varieté* is Kirchner's homage to the golden age of entertainers before the First World War. The depicted cakewalk emerged during American slavery. In competitions, enslaved people satirized the dances of white slaveowners and the winning couple was awarded a cake. Because Kirchner's work was considered "degenerate" art under the National Socialist regime, *Tanz im Varieté* was hidden on a farm during the Second World War. In 1945, French soldiers discovered it. They violently opened the crate containing the painting and damaged its decorative frame. The avant-garde painting evidently made the soldiers furious: a bullet struck the head of the dancer at far left in the picture. The Black dancer's torso was punctured with a bayonet.

Kirchner's *Tanz im Varieté* will be shown on the ground floor of the Kunstmuseum Basel | Hauptbau and in that location will enrich the *Paarlauf (Pairings)* exhibition. In the exhibition, selected works from the collection of the Im Obersteg Foundation encounter works from the museum's own collection. Since its opening in August 2024, the exhibition has developed through several rehanging in the manner of choreography. The presentation of *Tanz im Varieté* will now mark the final rehanging.

### **Publication**

In parallel to the final stage of the exhibition, the book *Paarlauf* will be published by Hirmer. The publication assembles 37 short text contributions by different authors. Especially noteworthy are texts by Géraldine Meyer, curator of the Im Obersteg Foundation, Magdalena Ritler and Esther Rapoport, conservators at the Kunstmuseum Basel, and Beat Stutzer, former director of the Kunstmuseum Chur, who illuminates the newly acquired work by Kirchner from various perspectives. In addition, the book offers access to the pieces of music integrated in the exhibition by means of a QR code.

German, 204 pages, 100 illustrations, 17 x 22 cm, hardcover  
ISBN: 978-3-7774-4616-5

### **Images and information on the *Pairings* exhibition**

[www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/medien](http://www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/medien)

### **Media contact**

Karen N. Gerig, Tel. +41 61 206 62 80, [karen.gerig@bs.ch](mailto:karen.gerig@bs.ch)  
Olivier Joliat, Tel. +41 61 206 62 55, [olivier.joliat@bs.ch](mailto:olivier.joliat@bs.ch)