

Media release

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The Kunstmuseum Basel brings together all of Böcklin's 'Isles of the Dead'

September 4, 2027–January 23, 2028, Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau

Curator: Eva Reifert

On occasion of the bicentennial of Arnold Böcklin's birth, the Kunstmuseum Basel devotes a grand exhibition to the Basel-born painter. In the fall of 2027, the presentation of around 150 works will offer insight into the fascinating oeuvre of one of the most outstanding Swiss artists of the nineteenth century. A special highlight in the exhibition will be the first ever gathering of all four extant versions of the *Isle of the Dead*, which are now in Basel, Berlin, Leipzig, and New York—a sensation not likely to be repeated!

Luminous colors, creatures of legend, eerie and fantastical landscapes, and haunting portraits: Arnold Böcklin, who was born in Basel on October 19, 1827, and died in Fiesole, Italy, in 1901, was a painter, sculptor, and inventor. The Kunstmuseum Basel now houses the most important collection of his works. His best-known motif, one of the most celebrated landscape paintings in history and an icon of Symbolism, is the *Toteninsel* (Isle of the Dead). The five versions of the mystical motif the artist painted between 1880 and 1886 still rank among the most important works of the nineteenth-century art. The first version is in the Kunstmuseum's collection. Four versions exist today; the fifth was destroyed during the Second World War.

The exhibition, initiated by the Kunstmuseum Basel and organized in cooperation with the Alte Nationalgalerie of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, will bring a feat never accomplished before: it will be the first to convene the four extant versions of the motif—a sensation that may well never be repeated, as three of the important paintings leave their collections only for this rarest of occasions. Even Böcklin himself never saw the works together.

Bringing the four paintings together will create an opportunity to study what they have in common and what makes each distinctive and to shed light on their context. The presentation will reveal how one of the most famous motifs in the history of art came into being and why it is still considered so exceptionally significant today.

The four Islands of the Dead will be on view in the exhibition *Böcklin: Beyond the Myth*, first at the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin and then at the Kunstmuseum Basel. Following the Basel exhibition, the four works will travel to the United States for a small presentation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

This exhibition was initiated by the Kunstmuseum Basel and realized in cooperation with the Alte Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Imagery

www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/media

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