

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## FACT SHEET

- EXHIBITION** KURT SCHWITTERS
- DATES** June 10 - October 1, 1985
- ORGANIZATION** John Elderfield, Director, Department of Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art
- SPONSORSHIP** Made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts; The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany; indemnity provided by the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities.
- CONTENTS** This is the most comprehensive exhibition ever assembled of the work of the pioneering modern artist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). Schwitters combined in his work the two salient innovations of twentieth-century art: pure abstraction and the free use of materials. He has long been recognized as one of the most original spirits of the twentieth century, but the true extent of his achievement is still imperfectly known, especially in the United States, where there has never been a full-scale Schwitters retrospective. This exhibition for the first time draws on major collections in both Europe and America and includes examples of the artist's work in all mediums and from all periods.
- The artist is best known for his highly evocative collages made from worthless cast-off materials, of which over 100 are represented in the exhibition. Also featured are approximately fifty of his dramatic, large-scale assemblages, twenty-five drawings, and twenty sculptures, as well as prints, typography, advertising designs, and documentary photographs of his environmental projects and other lost works. Although the exhibition emphasizes his pioneering art of the early twenties, popularly associated with the Dada movement, it also includes work made within the aegis of international Constructivism and--for the first time in this country--many important late works, which have only recently been recognized as among the most daring he ever made.
- THE ARTIST** Born in Hannover, Germany in 1887, Schwitters came to prominence in 1919 when he first exhibited his assemblages and collages in Berlin. There he was associated with Der Sturm, an organization of Expressionist painters and poets, and was refused membership by the Berlin Dada group, which repudiated Expressionism as a movement concerned too purely with art and too little with social and political affairs. Schwitters's early work is nevertheless as close to Dada as it is to Expressionism:

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in fact he combined the juxtapositions of unregarded materials characteristic of other Dada artists with the angular Cubo-Futurist structures characteristic of much German Expressionist painting of the period. To separate his work from both camps he described it as Merz, a word fragment cut out of the phrase "Commerz- und Privatbank" (Commercial and Private Bank) which he had featured in an early assemblage. Merz collages, Merz poetry, a Merz magazine, and finally a Merzbau (building) followed.

In the mid-twenties, Schwitters was drawn into the international Constructivist community through his contacts with Theo van Doesburg and El Lissitzky, and his work reflected the influence of De Stijl and avant-garde Russian art. Even at his most Constructivist, however, his highly personal touch is evident; by the end of the twenties, it had led him back to a more allusive form of assemblage. Declared a "degenerate artist" by Hitler's regime, he was forced to leave his native country in 1937. His late work, made in Norway (1937-40) and England (1940-48) reflects his new rural surroundings.

Only in the fifties, when interest in Dada was revived, did Schwitters's art begin to attract the attention it deserved. Artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg recognized his importance for their own work. Since then--and especially recently, as interest in German art has grown--Schwitters has been increasingly acknowledged for his remarkable contributions to twentieth-century art. New collages and assemblages are still coming to light. This exhibition, which includes some magnificent discoveries, will finally allow us to appreciate him as one of the century's key creative figures.

TOUR

After closing at The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition will travel under the auspices of the International Council of the Museum to The Tate Gallery, London and to the Sprengel Museum, Hanover, West Germany.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a detailed monograph published for The Museum of Modern Art by Thames and Hudson Ltd., June 1985. Written by John Elderfield, the publication breaks new ground in its examination of the full range of Schwitters's art, including recent discoveries. 11-3/4 x 8-1/4"; 288 pp.; 324 black-and-white and 34 color illustrations; clothbound, \$45; paperbound, \$22.50.

PRESS PREVIEW

Wednesday, June 5, 1985, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

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For additional information and photographic materials contact the Department of Public Information at The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9750.