

Kurt Schwitters, works in the museum collections

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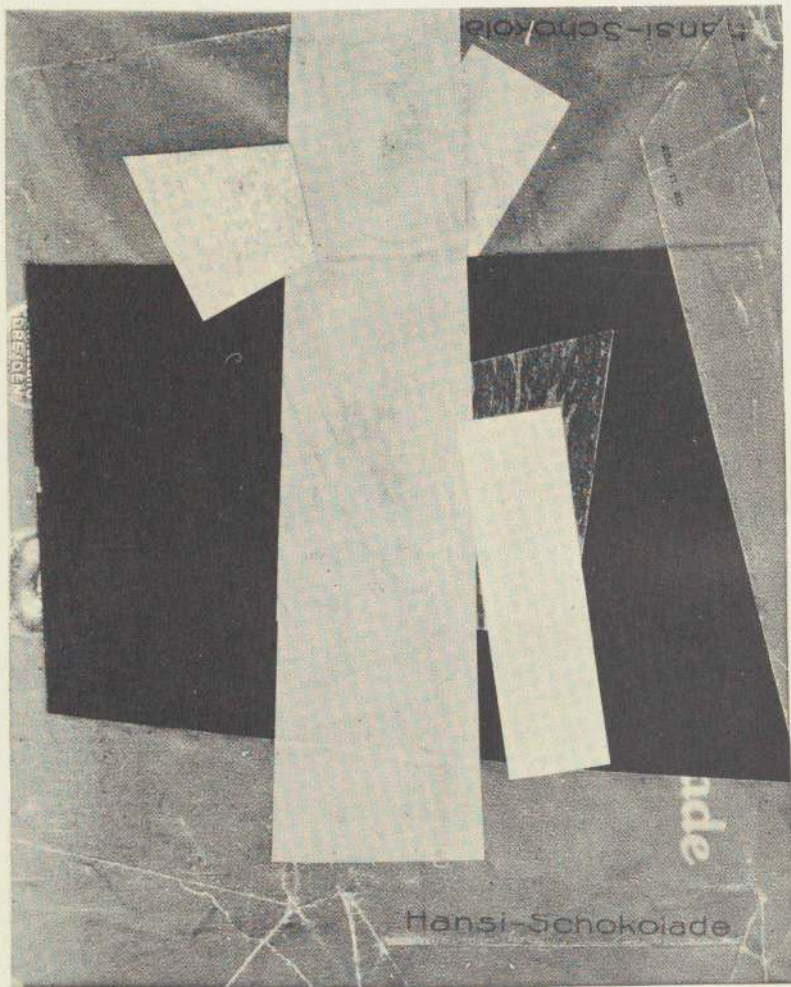
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Drawing A 2: Hansi-Schokolade, 1918

KURT SCHWITTERS

Works in the Museum Collections

July 31 - September 10, 1972

The Museum of Modern Art, New York



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Front cover: Kleine Dada Soirée, poster and program

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11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019

KURT SCHWITTERS was born in Hanover, Germany, in 1887. He lived and worked there for the formative years of his career until, in 1937, the Nazis having designated his art "degenerate" and World War II looming, he was forced to flee, first to Norway and later to England.

Traditionally Schwitters' work is considered in the context of Dada; yet he stayed somewhat apart from the various groups, although with his gregarious personality and exuberant humor he was naturally drawn by the extrovert nature of Dadaist activities, making trips to centers such as Berlin and associating closely with many Dada artists. In 1919 Schwitters devised the name Merz, from the last syllable of the word "Kommerz" (Commerce), which he had incorporated as a compositional element in one of his collages. He applied it in the beginning to his pictures and later expanded it to cover his other artistic output. The idea was certainly formulated in the Dada spirit, but in fact it allowed Schwitters to distinguish himself from other Dada groups and establish a separate identity.

As early as 1918 Schwitters had begun to make the collages incorporating rubbish and waste scraps, gathered in his daily environment, with which his work is popularly identified. Although artists before him had used the collage medium, for Schwitters it became the basis of his style. From this time the fundamental importance of the materials of his art, materials which brought with them a recognizable past and extraneous associations, asserted itself. He worked mostly in modest, even minute, scale, but such major works as the relief construction Revolving, 1919, are proof of the mastery he could exert in large-scale composition. Revolving exhibits his control in the fusion of extra-art elements with painting. The acts underlying composition, the processes of building a picture, are undisguised, and paint is freely combined with refuse materials to accomplish the pictorial aim.

Schwitters was, in a positive sense, an eclectic: he borrowed from many sources to achieve a personal amalgam. The collages in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art testify to the theoretical arguments that affected the artist during the course of his career. In the twenties, for example, persuaded by close ties with the

Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg and the Russian El Lissitzky, he resorted to a more formal, constructivist style. The recognizable content of words and juxtaposed variant images, typical Dadaist themes, were reduced in favor of pure structural forms. Schwitters' art continued to develop vigorously up to the end of his life, an exceptional time-span of vital artistic contribution. Isolated from his artist friends owing to the war, in his later work he successfully digested the influences of contemporary movements. His insistence on allowing the materials of art to speak and reveal remained the mainstay of his composition, but the references became less identifiable and were handled with greater subtlety and resolution.

Schwitters was extraordinary in the breadth of his expression and activity. As he said of himself, he desired "not to be a specialist in art, but an artist." The variety of his output in addition to the collages, relief constructions, and sculpture included prints, graphic design, poetry, and a deep involvement with abstract theater and architecture as well. In 1923 he began to publish his own magazine, Merz, stating in one issue, "circumstances permitting, design and layout of the printed page can be an art." Words fascinated Schwitters, both visually and aurally. The early collages often take a word or name as their basis of composition. As a consequence it does not seem unnatural that he should consider typography and graphic design as serious aspects of his creative work. In his magazine Merz, and too in his occupation as an advertising consultant (by which he supplemented his income for some years), he concentrated on using simple typographic devices in an unorthodox way: unexpected changes of type face and size, asymmetric organization of the written information, and directional placement of linear blocks, often at an oblique angle on the page. He had already begun to publish his poems, many of which evidence his preoccupation with graphic design, the optical effect forming an active, intrinsic aspect of the poem. His poetry became progressively more abstract, so that eventually, it was often simply phonetic and unrecognizable as language. Schwitters was famed as a performer, participating in many public Dada events; so the actual effect of the poems, especially

those that were purely sonic, relied heavily on the exhilaration of the author's own delivery.

Schwitters was intent on generating "an intensive relationship between Man and Space" through theater and architecture. The synthesis of his creative aims was his "life-work" and major artistic effort, the Merzbau, which he began to construct in his house in Hanover in 1923 and continued until he left Germany early in 1937. Described by Moholy-Nagy to his wife as "a sculpture of compound forms which extended from a corner of his studio through two stories of his house, winding in and out of doors and windows, and curling around a chimney on the roof," it perpetually absorbed memorabilia of the daily life of the artist, and was a record of his stylistic evolution. Schwitters' attitude toward architecture was defiant and antirational; thus the Merzbau appropriated the experiential space of architecture for an absolute sculptural environment. In 1946 Schwitters wrote from England to The Museum of Modern Art, asking for funds to enable him to return to Germany to save the Merzbau, which was damaged and exposed to the elements after his house in Hanover had been bombed. This was a unique instance of an artist being granted funds by the Museum for an extramural project. Schwitters, however, was prevented by his last illness from carrying out the rescue; he died in England in 1948.

Jennifer Licht
Associate Curator of
Painting and Sculpture

My thanks are due to the many members of staff who have contributed to this exhibition, but I am especially indebted to Cora Rosevear, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, for invaluable care in its research and preparation during my prolonged absence on a fellowship.

COLLAGES AND CONSTRUCTIONS

Unless enclosed in parentheses, dates appear on the works themselves. Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width.

1. Drawing A 2: Hansi-Schokolade (Zeichnung A 2: Hansi). 1918. Collage of colored papers and wrapper, 7 1/8 x 5 3/4". Purchase
2. Picture with Light Center (Bild mit Heller Mitte). 1919. Collage of paper with oil on cardboard, 33 1/4 x 25 7/8". Purchase
3. Revolving (Das Kreisen). 1919. Relief construction of wood, metal, cord, cardboard, wool, wire, leather, oil on canvas, 48 3/8 x 35" (sight). Advisory Committee Fund
4. Merz 22. 1920. Collage of railroad and bus tickets, wallpaper, ration stamps, 6 5/8 x 5 3/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
5. Merz 39: Russian Picture (Russisches Bild). 1920. Collage of colored papers, tickets, wrappers, 7 3/8 x 5 5/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
6. Merz 83: Drawing F (Zeichnung F). 1920. Collage of paper wrappers, announcements, tickets, 5 3/4 x 4 1/2". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
7. Merz 88: Red Stroke (Rotstrich). 1920. Collage of colored papers, tickets, labels, stamps, 5 1/4 x 4 1/8". The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection
8. Untitled (for Hohlt on the occasion of his wedding). 1920. Collage of printed papers, 9 7/8 x 7 1/4". Gift of Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, Inc.
9. Merz 458. (ca. 1920-22). Collage of streetcar tickets, wrappers, ration stamps, colored paper, 7 x 5 5/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
10. Cherry Picture (Das Kirschbild). 1921. Collage of colored papers, fabrics, printed labels and pictures, pieces of wood, etc., and gouache on cardboard, 36 1/8 x 27 3/4". Mr. and Mrs. A. Atwater Kent, Jr. Fund



11. Merz 252: Colored Squares (Farbige Quadrate).
1921. Collage of colored papers, 7 1/8 x 5 3/4". The
Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection
12. Merz 460: Two Underdrawers (Twee Onderbroeken).
1921. Collage of colored papers, ribbon, printed cotton,
candy wrapper, 8 x 6 3/4". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
13. Famiglia. 1922. Collage of colored and printed
papers, 5 3/4 x 4 1/4". The Sidney and Harriet Janis
Collection
14. Merz (with Emerka wrapper). (1922?) Collage of
colored papers, carbon paper, mattress ticking, 13 3/4 x
10 3/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
15. Merz: Santa Claus (Der Weihnachtsmann). 1922.
Collage of papers and cloth, 11 1/4 x 8 1/4". Purchase
16. Merz 370: Blue Spark (Blauer Funken). 1922.
Collage of colored papers with pencil, 8 1/8 x 6 3/4".
Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
17. Merz 379: Potsdamer. 1922. Collage of papers and
cloth, 7 1/8 x 5 3/4". Purchase
18. Merz 448: Moscow. 1922. Collage of cardboard and
wood, 6 x 6 1/4". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
19. Merz 704: Bühlau. 1923. Collage of colored
papers, wrappers, tram ticket, linen, 5 1/4 x 3 5/8".
Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
20. Merz Drawing (Merzzeichnung). 1924. Collage of
colored and printed papers and a button, 7 3/4 x 6 1/8".
Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
21. Merz 8. 1924. Collage of colored papers, 5 1/2 x
4". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
22. Merz 32. 1924. Collage of photographic paper,
5 x 3 3/4". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest
23. Merz 2005: Constantinople. 1924. Collage of

colored papers, cardboard, tram tickets, pellet of wood,
5 1/8 x 4 1/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

24. Merz (with black rectangle). 1925. Collage of
colored papers, 5 5/8 x 4 1/2". Katherine S. Dreier
Bequest

25. Merz (with letters "elikan" repeated). (1925?)
Collage of colored papers, candy wrappers, advertisement,
17 1/8 x 14 1/4". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

26. Merz (with paper lace). 1925. Collage of colored
papers, paper lace, paper top of cigarette box, 4 3/8 x
3 3/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

27. Merz 17: Lissitzky. 1926. Collage of colored
papers, 5 1/4 x 4 1/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

28. Merz 48: Berlin. 1926. Collage of tickets,
colored and painted papers, 4 3/4 x 3 1/2". The Sidney
and Harriet Janis Collection

29. Merz Drawing E (Merzzeichnung E). 1928. Collage
of colored and printed papers, 5 3/4 x 4 1/4" (irregular).
Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

30. V-2. 1928. Collage of colored and printed papers
with pen, ink and crayon, 5 1/8 x 3 1/2". The Sidney
and Harriet Janis Collection

31. Merz (with British censor's seal). (1940-45).
Collage of colored papers, envelopes, censorship forms,
7 3/8 x 6 1/8". Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

32. Untitled. 1946. Collage of papers, with fragments
of an etching, on corrugated cardboard, 9 3/4 x 8 3/8".
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Auchincloss (the donors
retaining a life interest)

32a. Merz 6: "on." 1947. Collage of colored and
printed papers, 2 x 1 5/8" (irregular). Promised gift
of an anonymous donor

PRINTS

33. Die Kathedrale. (1920). Hanover: Paul Steegemann Verlag. Book containing seven lithographs, and lithograph cover with collage, page size $8 \frac{3}{4} \times 5 \frac{5}{8}$ ". Gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.
34. Merz Mappe. Hanover, 1923. Portfolio of six photolithographs printed in black and in color, two with collage, sheet size $21 \frac{7}{8} \times 17 \frac{1}{2}$ ". Purchase, 1955 (Plate 1), and Gift of J. B. Neumann, 1939 (Plates 2-6)

PUBLICATIONS

Works written, designed and published by Kurt Schwitters unless otherwise noted. Included are books, poems, a song and issues of Merz magazine.

35. Elementar. Die Blume Anna. Die neue Anna Blume. Berlin: Verlag Der Sturm, 1922. 32 pp., 9×6 "
36. Memorien Anna Blumes in Bleie. Freiburg (Baden): Walter Heinrich, 1922. 26 pp., $7 \frac{3}{8} \times 4 \frac{1}{2}$ "
37. Tran Nr. 30. Auguste Bolte (ein Lebertran). Berlin: Verlag Der Sturm, 1923. 48 pp., 9×6 "
38. Merz 1. Holland Dada. Hanover, January 1923. $8 \frac{3}{4} \times 5 \frac{5}{8}$ "
39. Merz 2. nummer i. Hanover, April 1923. $8 \frac{3}{4} \times 5 \frac{5}{8}$ "
40. Merz 6. Imitatoren watch step! Hanover, October 1923. $8 \frac{7}{8} \times 5 \frac{3}{4}$ "
41. Merz 7. Tapsheft. Hanover, January 1924. $12 \frac{3}{8} \times 9 \frac{1}{4}$ "
42. Merz 8/9. Nasci. Edited by Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky. Typography by El Lissitzky. Hanover, April/July 1924. $12 \frac{1}{4} \times 9 \frac{1}{4}$ "

43. Merz 11. Typoreklame. Pelikan-Nummer. Hanover, (1924). 11 1/2 x 8 5/8"
44. Merz 16/17. Die Märchen vom Paradies. Text by Kurt Schwitters; drawings by Kate Steinitz. Hanover, 1924. 10 3/4 x 8 1/4"
45. Merz 20. Kurt Schwitters. Katalog. Hanover, 1927. 9 5/8 x 6 1/4"
46. Der Zinnoberschläger. Song by Kurt Schwitters. Sheet done in collaboration with Kate Steinitz, Ferdinand Osten and Christof Spengemann, 12 1/4 x 9"
47. Merz 21. erstes Veilchenheft. Hanover, 1931. 8 1/2 x 12 1/4"
48. Merz 24. Kurt Schwitters: Ursonate. Typography possibly by Jan Tschichold. Hanover, 1932. 8 1/4 x 5 7/8"

GRAPHIC DESIGN

All works from the Jan Tschichold Collection, gift of Philip Johnson, 1950. They are printed in letterpress unless otherwise indicated, and were executed between 1922 and 1937.

49. Advertising card for Merz Werbezentrale, 4 1/8 x 5 13/16"
50. Advertisement for Werbe-Gestaltung, 5 15/16 x 8 1/2"
51. Advertisement for Merz-Werbe, 4 15/16 x 6 5/16"
52. Advertisement for Merz Werbezentrale, 4 1/8 x 6 1/16"
53. Advertisement for Merz Werbezentrale, 11 x 11"
54. Advertisement for Die Märchen vom Paradies, 2 7/8 x 3 15/16"



55. Proof of an advertisement for Rheinhütte, $3 \times 9 \frac{7}{8}$ "
56. Advertisement/specification sheet for Weise Söhne, offset lithography, $12 \times 8 \frac{5}{8}$ "
57. Advertisement for the Hanover tramways, $11 \frac{3}{4} \times 16 \frac{1}{2}$ "
58. Advertisement for the Hanover tramways, $12 \times 14 \frac{1}{2}$ "
59. Brochure for Edler and Krische, Kleines Liniaturen Musterbuch, $5 \frac{3}{4} \times 8 \frac{1}{4}$ "
60. Brochure/price list for Edler and Krische, Das Lose-Blatt-Buch, $11 \frac{5}{16} \times 7 \frac{7}{8}$ "
61. Booklet, Die neue Gestaltung in der Typographie, $5 \frac{7}{8} \times 4 \frac{1}{4}$ "
62. Tear sheet with phonetic alphabet, photoengraving, $5 \frac{1}{2} \times 5 \frac{3}{8}$ " (irregular)
63. Letterhead for Die Abstrakten Hannover, $11 \frac{1}{2} \times 8 \frac{1}{4}$ "
64. Letterhead for Die Abstrakten Hannover, $11 \frac{1}{2} \times 8 \frac{3}{16}$ "
65. Envelope for Die Abstrakten Hannover, $4 \frac{1}{2} \times 6 \frac{3}{8}$ "
66. Envelope for Weise Söhne, $8 \frac{3}{4} \times 12$ "
67. Envelope for Merz-Werbe, $4 \frac{1}{2} \times 6 \frac{3}{8}$ "
68. Envelope for Kurt Schwitters, $5 \times 7 \frac{1}{4}$ "
69. Envelope for Aposs Verlag, $4 \frac{15}{16} \times 6 \frac{1}{8}$ "
70. Card order form for Aposs Verlag, $5 \frac{7}{8} \times 8 \frac{1}{2}$ "
71. Aposs Verlag order form for Die Märchen vom Paradies, $5 \frac{3}{4} \times 12 \frac{1}{2}$ "
72. Bill form for Merz Werbe, $11 \frac{1}{4} \times 8 \frac{1}{4}$ "

73. Mailing wrapper for Merz Werbezentrale, 18 1/4 x 11 1/2"
74. Postcard for Dr. Steinitz, 4 1/8 x 5 3/4"
75. Invitation to Merz matinee, 4 7/8 x 8 1/8"
76. Announcement for Kunstverein, Jena, 5 7/8 x 11 3/4"
77. Advertisement for Merz program, 12 x 8 1/4"
78. Poster and program, Kleine Dada Soirée, color lithograph. Done in collaboration with Theo van Doesburg. 11 7/8 x 11 13/16"

This is a complete catalogue of works by Schwitters in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art. All collages and constructions appear in the exhibition and a selection of the prints, publications and graphic designs. Also included are photographs of the Merzbau and Merzbarn and taped readings of Schwitters' poetry.



Untitled, 1946

Frühjahrs-Ausstellung 1925

K. V. H.

576

ML netto 100 d 6

K. S. DREIER'S COLLECTION

1925 - 1926

BANALITÄTEN

Was, und Sie wollen jetzt wissen, immer noch ein ge- be- be- bildeter Mann sein? FLEGEL!

3) welche Farbe hat der Vogel?

KUENSTLER!

erklärt auch solidarisch mit der Kunst!

MERZ

klebt, leimt, klistet alles und

MERZ kämpft gegen Extremos!

revon-d-a-d-a

Der Mann, der Euphonien auf der Tuba

ANNA BLUME - AUGUSTE BOLTE

Franz Müllers Drahtfrühling

1.) ANNA BLUME hat ein Vogel

DIE BLUME A-N-K-A

Sie können, klistet, klistet, klistet, klistet

zu gemalten Schweine, Sie können, Sie können

Sie können, Sie können, Sie können, Sie können

MAMA, DA STEHT EIN MANN!

Das WEIB erzieht durch seine Beine, ich bin ein MANN, ich habe klistet

MEMOIRE ANNA BLUMES IN BLEIE

KURT SCHWITTERS



5. *Merzzeichnung* Kurt Schwitters.
Es steht zu meinen *Merzzeichnungen*

Photograph of the artist, reverse of Merz Drawing, 1924