

KURT SCHWITTERS: A SELECTION OF COLLAGES

July 2 – August 24, 2019

I could see no reason why used tram tickets, bits of driftwood, buttons and old junk from attics and rubbish heaps should not serve well as materials for paintings; they suited the purpose just as well as factory-made paints. ... It is possible to cry out using bits of old rubbish, and that's what I did, gluing and nailing them together.

– Kurt Schwitters

NEW YORK—Nahmad Contemporary is pleased to announce ***Kurt Schwitters: A Selection of Collages***, scheduled to run **July 2 through August 24, 2019**. Presenting the works of 20th century's great master of collage and forefather of assemblage, the exhibition will highlight a collection of abstract collages that the artist created between the 1920s and 1940s.

Associated with the rise of European Dadaism, a movement rooted in the defiance of bourgeois art conventions, German artist Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) unearthed poetic beauty amid the discards of a broken society. Beginning in 1918 in the wake of the First World War, the artist assembled collages out of trash—ranging from receipts and bus tickets to labels and stamps—found in Hannover's war-torn streets. In an attempt to reconcile with the destruction of the old-world order and the debris of a modern, industrial, war-torn Europe, Schwitters championed a complete reevaluation of material values. He used the banal as his medium to defy the boundary between fine art and everyday objects. Schwitters uniquely referred to these works as “Merz,” a term he derived from the German word “kommerz” (commerce), visible in an appropriated advertisement from one of his early collages.

In an account of his works, Schwitters explained: “I called *Merz* this new process whose principle was the use of any material. It was the second syllable of *Kommerz*. It first appeared in *Merzbild*, a painting in which, apart from its abstract forms, one could read Merz, cut and pasted from an advertisement for *Kommerz- und Privatbank*. ... I was looking for a term to designate this new genre, for I could not classify my paintings under old labels such as expressionism, cubism, futurism and so on.”

The dates of the collages selected for this exhibition range from 1920 Germany at the onset of Schwitter's Merz series to his forced exile to Norway in 1937 and his relocation to England in 1940 where he lived and worked for the remainder of his life. His earliest works appropriate fragments of German society, such an advertisement for a chocolate brand in *Eine Kräftige Nahrung Für Meinen Freund Wilhelm Metzsig (A Strong Food for my Friend Wilhelm Metzsig)* (1928), as well as artifacts that reflect the devastation of the war, including a prescription for antiseptics visible in *Mz 291. Doktorchen (Mz 291. Doctor)* (1921).

In his later works, the impacts of exile are palpable through his use of newfound materials, language, and aesthetics. Created during his “British period,” collages such as *Untitled (Standard with wood)* (1947) and *Autumn* (1942–43) incorporate natural materials like wood, stone, and shells. A shift from German to English magazines and advertisements is evidenced in works like *No Charge for Delivery* (1947) and *Try Camel* (1947). Created in the last years of his life and at the climax of his career, these works evoke a more liberal and intuitive construction that are distinct from his early geometric compositions, and thus reflect a refined command of his medium.

Schwitters’s oeuvre is marked by the keen juxtaposition of abstraction and figuration, the union of traditional and found media, and the convergence of fine art and detritus. The artist’s embrace of the banal materials and iconography that defined his everyday life positions Schwitters as one of the great progenitors of pop art. As a segue to Nahmad Contemporary’s *Jean-Michel Basquiat | Xerox* exhibition, this show unearths a line of influence from Schwitters’s early 20th-century collages to the post-war assemblages of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol’s commercial appropriations, and the contemporary Xerox collages of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Kurt Schwitters was born in Hanover, Germany, in 1887. He is known for defying categorization by working in a wide range of genres and media, including Dadaism, constructivism, surrealism, poetry, sound, painting, sculpture, graphic design, typography, and what came to be known as installation art. He is most famous for his collages, called “Merz,” that he created until his death in 1948. His work is held in major institutional collections worldwide, including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; the Art Institute of Chicago; Cleveland Museum of Art; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Harvard Art Museums, Massachusetts; the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands; the Kunstmuseum Basel; the Kunstmuseum Bern; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Norton Simon Museum, California; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Seattle Art Museum; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Sprengel Museum, Hannover; the Tate, London; and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid.