

Handout EN

Image & Word

Artistic-literary references in the Collection

Jan 25–Jun 8, 2025

“I believe every artist has to be a poet”, wrote Egon Schiele in a letter in 1918. We don’t need to go that far to recognise that the relationship between words and images has been productive since the Modernist era. Our exhibition “Image & Word” traces this diverse, open, exciting field using works from the Collection of the Kunsthaus Zug. Artists and writers of early Modernism went in search of new forms of expression, determined to break with conventions, and found inspiration in each other’s discipline. Schiele wrote his own verses, inspired by the modern French poetry that was very popular in Vienna at the turn of the century. Alfred Kubin illustrated books by Edgar Allan Poe, Elias Canetti and others. In 1909, Kubin himself published his one-and-only novel, entitled “Die andere Seite” (The Other Side). Language was also a core element of art to the Dadaists. They carved it up, created sound poems and experimented with rhythms and sonorities. The Surrealists, too, combined elements of

visual art and language that did not naturally belong together. And they used methods such as “écriture automatique” (automatic writing) to explore their subconscious by committing words, images and emotions to paper in an associative process. In the second half of the 20th century, this dialogue between images and words continued in various forms, and continues into our own time. Linguistics and language, for example, have provided an important basis for the œuvre of the contemporary artist Bethan Huws. Since 2020, the outside walls of the Kunsthaus have been illuminated by her neon work “I’ve forgotten to feed the cat, I haven’t got a cat”. This exhibition accordingly spans an arc from Viennese Modernism to the present day. Sometimes playful, sometimes poetic, disconcerting and humorous, it explores the relationship between visual art and language.

Curated by Jana Bruggmann

Kunsthaus Zug

General information

The supplementary sheet provided at the reception offers detailed information on the specific printing techniques employed.

You can find further information on selected works from the Collection of the Kunsthaus Zug by using the QR-Codes provided in the exhibition.

(N1) Nature poetry

This exhibition is organised according to seven principal topics that make manifest how images and words are no opposites. Instead, their two disciplines have long been closely intertwined, and remain so today. Egon Schiele (1890–1918), for example, saw himself as a poet and a visual artist at one and the same time. To him, words and images were simply two different ways of expressing himself. Schiele wrote expressive poems that were influenced by the modern French poetry that was attracting a great deal of attention in fin-de-siècle Vienna. There are also striking parallels between his paintings and his poems. The sparse vegetation that we see in his two works “Kahle Bäume” (Bare Trees, 1912) and “Frühlingslandschaft mit rotem Himmel” (Spring landscape with a red sky, 1911) finds an associative echo in poems of his such as “Nasser Abend” (Rainy Evening) or “Tannenwald” (Forest of Fir Trees; both 1910). An underlying melancholy is characteristic of both his landscapes and his poems. Schiele’s texts were published posthumously by Arthur Roessler (1877–1955), whose portrait Schiele drew in 1914. Even during Schiele’s lifetime, Roessler had been an important advocate and collector of his works.

Roessler brings us to a fundamental function of words that goes beyond individual artistic expression, namely that the Modern was always accompanied by debates about art. We can observe this, for example, as early as the book that was published when Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) first exhibited his “Seelandschaft mit Kapuziner” (Seascape with a Capuchin Monk, now known as “Mönch am Meer”, Monk by the Sea). Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), Clemens Brentano (1778–1842) and Achim von Arnim (1781–1831) collected the public’s reactions at the time and put them into a book together with a dash of humour. Artists have often intentionally antagonised their public by calling bourgeois tastes into question and by breaking previously accepted taboos. But networks of artists, critics (such as Roessler), publishers and galleries emerged that offered avant-garde trends an indispensable platform.

(N2) The Total Work of Art (the Vienna Secession)

Modernist artists and their different groupings wanted to explain both themselves and their art. Their literary engagement with the visual arts resulted in numerous texts, manifestos and textbooks. Each group was determined to set itself off from others and to embark on a new beginning – and so they ended up defining clear boundaries and rules for themselves. We can already observe this in the Vienna Secession, a revolutionary movement co-founded in 1897 by Gustav Klimt (1862–1918),

Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956) and Koloman Moser (1868–1918) that wanted to bring about a fundamental redefinition of the very concept of art. Their core idea was to create a “Gesamtkunstwerk” – a “total work of art” – in which architecture, painting, graphic art and design would merge into a harmonious unity.

This ideal of a total work of art was also reflected in the journal “Ver Sacrum” (“Sacred Spring”), published from 1898 to 1903, which served as the mouthpiece of the Secessionists. In it, texts – including essays, poems and manifestos – were deliberately embedded in an overall visual context. The typography, layout and illustrations of the journal together formed a harmonious composition in which the text was not just intended as a bearer of information, but also as an aesthetic element itself.

And at the same time, these artists were not afraid to scandalise. Klimt, for example, caused a scandal when he was commissioned by the faculties of Vienna University, but delivered work that was not at all to the taste of its bourgeois professors. The essay “Against Klimt” (1903) by Hermann Bahr (1863–1934) bears witness to this.

(N3) Typography

Typography encompasses all aspects of the design and layout of type. Fonts are drawn and then set to create a specific typeface. Typography itself can become an artistic element – and this is particularly true of the exhibition posters created by the Vienna Secessionists on their quest for a total work of art. They wanted to dissolve the boundaries between art and design.

Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980) was a student of Klimt who on the poster for a lecture depicted himself as the “Man of Sorrows”, “Ecce Homo” (1912). Kokoschka presented himself as a scourged figure of Jesus – an allegory of suffering and sacrifice. He must have been aware that this would provoke a scandal – which of course it did.

On Expressionist posters, such as those by Max Pechstein (1881–1955), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976), the text was set crudely and impulsively in order to emphasise the urgency and radicalism of what they wanted to say. For this, they often used woodcut techniques. Cubism revolutionised the integration of words in art. Typographic elements, newspaper clippings and lettering were incorporated into collages and paintings. Words became a design element that was devoid of any intrinsic informational value, as in “Le Siphon” (The Siphon, 1919) by Juan Gris (1887–1927).

However, the Bauhaus movement, founded in 1919, once more took up the concept of the total work of art, albeit in a more unfussy, rectilinear fashion, subjecting everything to an overarching design principle. One of their important representatives, Herbert Bayer (1900–1985), designed iconic fonts that were strongly influenced by Modernist aesthetics and philosophy. The best known of them is probably his “Universal” font (1925).

The final section of the room is devoted to Dadaism. The cataclysm of the First World War

clearly left its mark on the texts and works created by the Dadaists. The illusion that there could be a better world – one in which art reigns as a means of renewal – now disintegrates. This becomes obvious in the works “Abteilung: Inserate” and “Schwank: II. Teil” (Department: Advertisements and Farce: 2nd Part, both 1919) by Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948). After people’s experiences of propaganda, language itself began to be questioned – which led in turn to Dadaist texts. With his poetry collection “Anna Blume” (1919), Schwitters created a provocative work that posed radical questions of traditional literary conventions and can be seen today as a reaction to the profound upheavals of his time.

(N4) Narration

Literature and art were closely intertwined in the Modernist era – not just in subject matter, but also on account of the close relationships that existed between writers and artists, who found each other mutually inspiring. The exhibition space in the lower floor is dedicated to these close relationships and to this reciprocity.

Like many of his contemporaries, Alfred Kubin (1877–1959) had close ties to literature. He was a writer himself and penned a novel: “Die andere Seite” (The Other Side, 1909) – a dark, fantastical work for which he provided his own illustrations. Kubin also illustrated numerous books by other authors including Elias Canetti (1905–1994), Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) and Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915). The last of these was also an artist who crossed the boundaries between text and image. The visual language of Kubin’s illustrations is dark, expressive and often nightmarish. He was also inspired by the literature of his time. Kubin’s artworks have a highly narrative quality to them, often taking up themes that were current in the fantastical, Symbolist literature of his time.

James Ensor (1860–1949) was similarly influenced by the literary aspects of Symbolism. He drew inspiration from literary motifs, especially from the Bible and its symbols. Ensor also made an etching (1895) depicting the story of Poe’s novel “King Pest”. His dark, fantabulous visual world tells of tales both known and unknown. The Bible and mythology were popular literary sources for Modernist artists in general – despite their being keen to distance themselves from bourgeois traditions and influences (or perhaps they were thus inspired precisely in order to create such distance). Oskar Kokoschka, for example, created his own version of the Book of Job (1917), Paris von Gütersloh (1887–1973) rewrote the story of “Cain and Abel” (1924), while “Elektra” (1939) by Max Ernst (1891–1976) refers back to Greek mythology.

Georg Grosz (1893–1959) was influenced both by James Ensor and by the social criticism and the Expressionist literature of his day. His experiences in the Weimar Republic left a deep impression on him. In his portfolio “Ecce homo” (1923), he used strong, powerful lines to sketch out a new image of humanity. He was merciless in his observations of those around him, and as a critic of society. Grosz illustrated literary texts and also published essays

of his own, along with autobiographical writings and poems in which he gave expression to his critical views on politics, art and society.

(N5) Metamorphoses

Metamorphosis is an important motif in Surrealism. It serves as a means of expression that can make visible the unconscious, the mysterious and the inexplicable. In his six-part series of works entitled thus – “Metamorphosis” (1929) – Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) grapples with his interest in transformation and in the transition between different states of being. The sheet “Hebdomeros” refers to his own eponymous Surrealist novel. De Chirico’s works were influenced by literary ideas, and they in turn inspired writers and poets.

The works of Paul Klee (1879–1940) often have something playful about them, and tell stories through their imagery. But their titles can give what he depicts an unexpected twist and send things in a different direction. Here, the title – the words – can change the work itself.

Max von Moos (1903–1979) was influenced by Klee. In his drawings presented here, he starts off with natural forms such as single-cell organisms, polyps, crustaceans or fish and leads them into abstraction. Sometimes these forms dissolve utterly, while at other times they merge into each another. They are constantly changing and transforming. Von Moos drew very quickly in an endeavour to bypass the conscious aspects of the creative process and to access his unconscious.

Max Ernst (1891–1976), in contrast, developed the technique of “frottage” in an effort to translate the process of “automatic writing” into the field of drawing; he understood drawing and writing as related disciplines. In frottage (from the French “frotter” = to rub), he would place a sheet of paper on a surface and rub over it with a soft pencil, charcoal or chalk. This created an image of the structure beneath the paper. It makes chance the decisive factor. Ernst wanted to make images that he would have been unable to create with his intellect. His “Histoire Naturelle” (Natural History, 1926) pretends to be a scholarly book on biology, but in fact the plant world depicted in it is a product of imagination and chance.

(N6) The Art of Mixing

Arnulf Rainer (*1929) and Dieter Roth (1930–1998) often worked together, even occasionally merging their styles and their art. This is why they called their collaboration “Misch- und Trennkunst” (The Art of Mixing and Separating, a play on “Mischkost” and “Trennkost”, two different types of diet). But this term could actually be applied to all the other artists represented in this room: Gerhard Rühm (*1930), Dominik Steiger (1940–2014), Günter Brus (1938–2024), Dieter Roth and Arnulf Rainer all worked together in various constellations at different times, each combining images and words in their *œuvres* after their own fashion.

The book was an important medium to Dieter Roth. Some of his books contain primarily text, others mostly pictures. It is impossible to discern

any clear hierarchy across his œuvre. Günther Brus, too, combines images and words in an innovative way. His work “Das Aulicht” (Floodlight, 1977) is an example of his so-called picture-poems. This work is reminiscent of a children’s book, but breaks with any such idealised world. The same is true of his 12-part picture-poem “Gedanken-Rast” (Resting Thoughts, 1977). It’s not just in his actionist art, but also in his stories and books that existential questions and borderline experiences come very much to the fore. And for Brus, as for others, coming to terms with the Second World War played an important role in this.

Gerhard Rühm was also concerned with shifting the boundaries between literature and the visual arts. In his visual poetry, Rühm used letters, words and textual elements as visual forms, thereby giving his words two different levels of meaning: as images and as text. In “Bleistiftmusik” (Pencil Music, 1981), he takes up the topics of drawing and writing in an auditory way. We hear the sounds of a pencil on paper on the cassette. His comrade-in-arms Dominik Steiger approaches words as spoken language, combining literature, music, visual arts and performance. His works are characterised by a playful, versatile, free approach to both text and image, quite consciously abandoning any hierarchy between

(N7) The end?

Since postmodernism, words have assumed a core role as a means of (self-)referentiality, with artists increasingly referring to existing works and concepts – often with a hint of irony. For Bethan Huws (*1961), for example, linguistics and language constitute an important basis for her work. Many of her works are also based on wordplay, linguistic logic or quotations that she presents in the form of signs, texts or performances. Huws also engages intensively with the work of Marcel Duchamp, whose œuvre raised questions that remain relevant today. What is art? What constitutes the object? Who is the subject? Duchamp’s revolutionary ideas and works laid the foundations for many later trends in art. Huws reinterprets his concepts, creating works that refer to his readymades, linguistic games and philosophical deliberations.

Postmodernism has also made permissible every form of artistic expression, including the highly poetic and the personal. The delicate watercolours of Trudi Demut (1927–2000) manage to do without words altogether. The very title of her six “Tagebuchblätter” (Diary Pages, 1999) nevertheless suggests that there’s a story behind them, though it’s our imagination that fills the emptiness where words aren’t. With Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985), words were an integral component of her œuvre – even an invitation to the opening of an exhibition could become a story to her. And in “Liebe, dunkler Erdteil” (Love, Dark Corner of the Earth, 1989), Irma Ineichen (*1929) refers to the poem of that name by Ingeborg Bachmann, one of the most significant poets in the German language. In the foreground of the work, we can see the cover of the poetry volume in question. However, the texts inside the envelope that we see

remain hidden from view – perhaps in keeping with the motto “Enjoy the Secret” (2008). The Austrian artist Brigitte Kowanz (1957–2011) uses light as an artistic medium, combining language with formal aesthetics in her work, with light playing a vital role in shaping them.

The relationship between literature and art continues. The Erker Gallery in St. Gallen was especially supportive of this interplay and published numerous books and editions that united words and images. The “Erker meetings” that brought together writers and artists there in the 1970s are legendary today. Even Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921–1990) worked with this gallery. He was not just one of Switzerland’s most important writers, but also drew and painted – as did the Franco-Romanian author Eugène Ionesco (1909–1994).

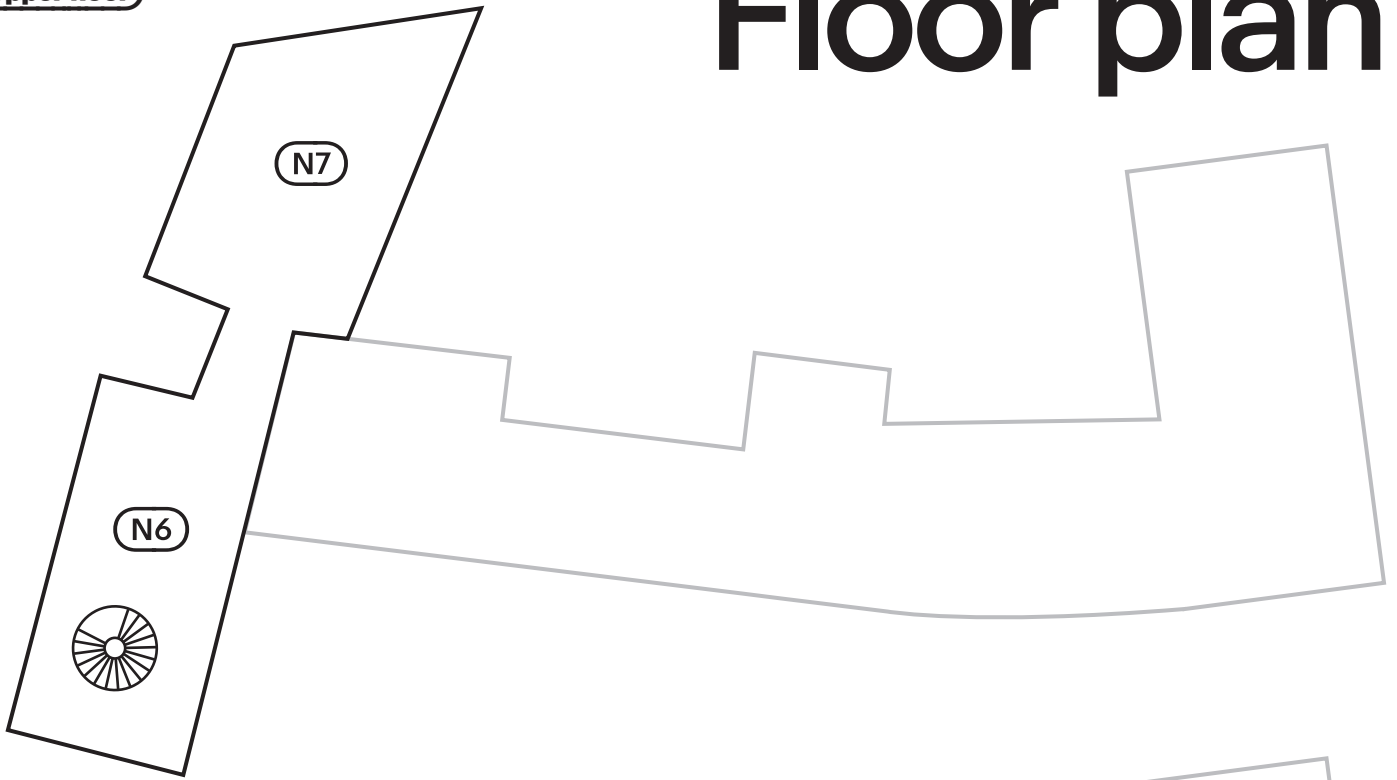
So is this the end? The gravestone we see is actually a stool – a piece designed by Maurizio Cattelan (*1960) and Pierpaolo Ferrari (*1971). It hasn’t been carved out of stone, but has been “frothed up” in plastic, so to speak, and then coated with a special paint. The final room for our topic “Word & Image” is entitled “The End?” and takes up the moment of irony that is characteristic of Postmodernism. Conveying truth is no longer the aim here. Grand narratives seem to have come to an end (at least according to the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard). And yet the story continues, because pens and brushes never lie idle. And we can look forward in joyful anticipation of where the next developments will lead us.

This exhibition is being generously supported by:

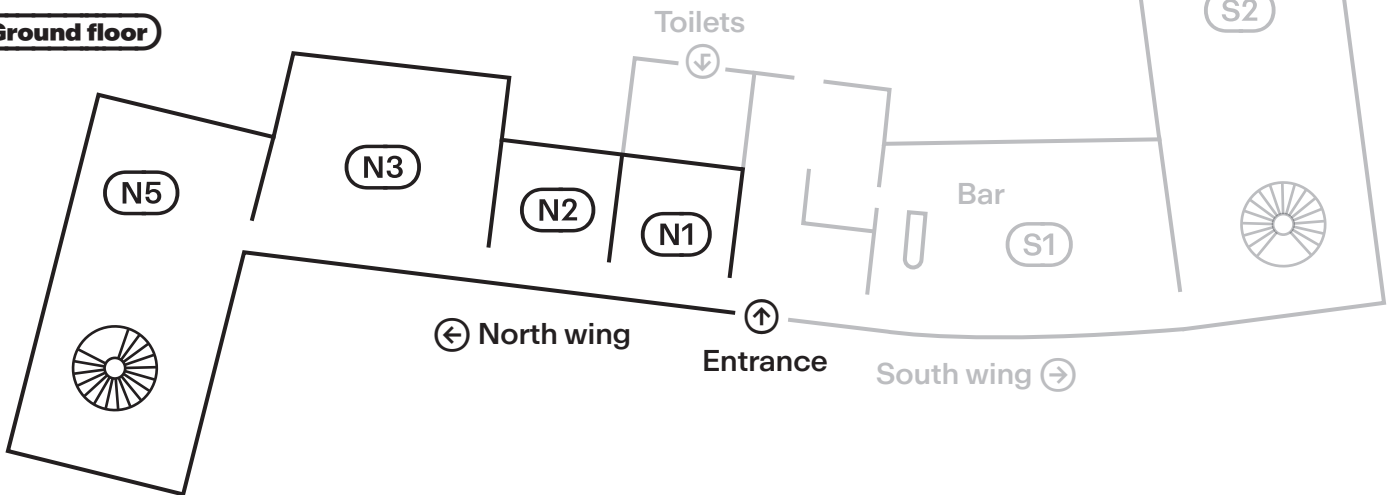
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Floor plan

Upper floor



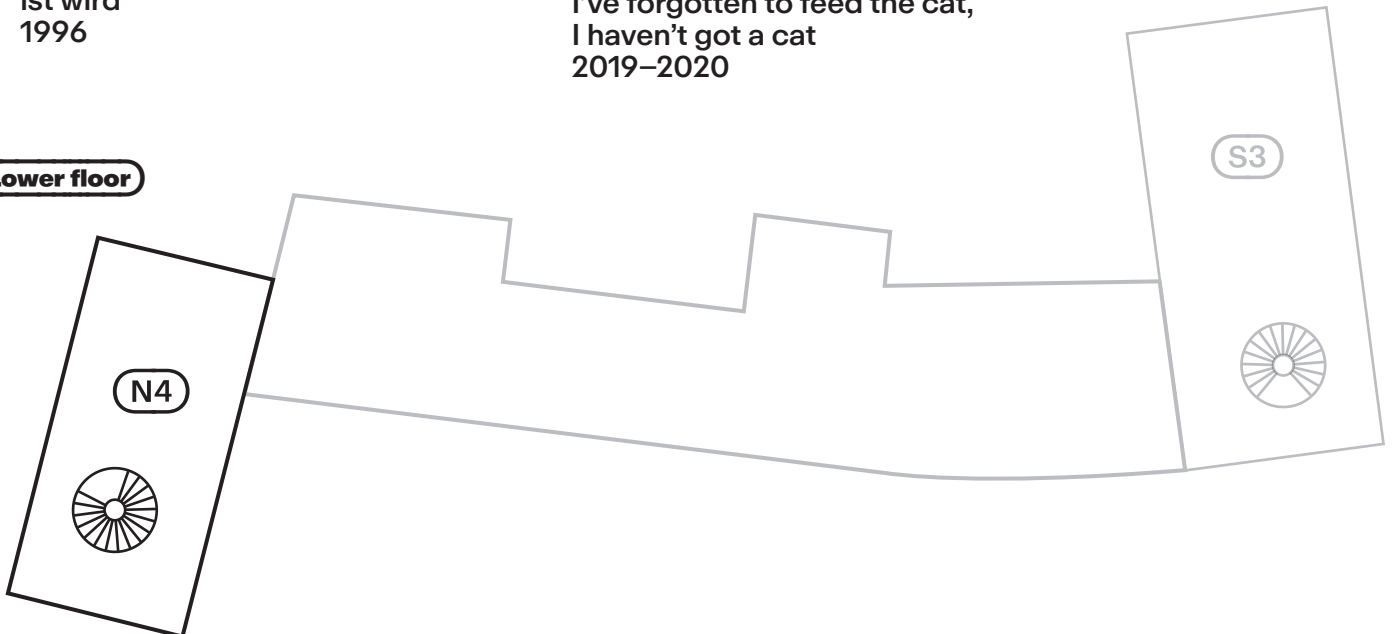
Ground floor



i Heinz Gappmayr
ist wird
1996

i Bethan Huws
I've forgotten to feed the cat,
I haven't got a cat
2019-2020

Lower floor



S1 Kunsthaus Bar

A self-service station offering coffee, tea and further drinks is available where you can help yourself. You can pay directly at the desk using card, cash or Twint. Enjoy your visit.

The Kunsthaus Zug extension

Right next to the Bar, you can view the architects' model of the pre-project for the Kunsthaus Zug. Come and discover more about the vision propelling this pre-project and its background. You can also find all the information on our website:



Publications

Publications relevant to our exhibitions are available at the reception, offering deeper insights into the works of our collection. You can also buy these publications at the reception in order to expand your knowledge, or as a souvenir of the exhibition. All the publications of Kunsthaus Zug are also listed on our website and can be ordered direct from the publishers.



Events

There is a multifaceted accompanying programme for this dual exhibition. It includes "Art at Lunchtime" events, guided tours and family workshops in German and English, plus the newly introduced format "Art at Evening" that offers extended opening hours until 20:00 on the last Thursday of every month.

Our new trimester flyer (covering January to April) is available at the reception. It offers a comprehensive overview of all our exhibitions, events and art education program. Alternatively, you can find out more by consulting our online events calendar. You can plan your visit and enter your favourites directly into your own online calendar.



Art education

Why not come and discover the art education programme at Kunsthaus Zug and engage creatively with art yourself. In our level-specific workshops, children and young people alike can explore our exhibition together with our art education experts and record their impressions in our workshop in a creative fashion. These offers are free of charge to classes from state schools of Canton Zug. If you are interested, please contact our art education experts directly, or book online.



Voice Collection

What moved you in our exhibition? Why did a particular work appeal to you? – or perhaps it didn't? What did you see? Why not share your personal viewpoint and impressions of selected artworks with other visitors? You can record your audio commentary by simply using the "Voice Memo" app on your smartphone, then send us the audio file by e-mail. Please ask at the reception for more information.

This feature invites you to enter into a participatory dialogue. Come and discover art from a personal perspective, engage with others in doing so, and become a participant in this special project. You can hear the voices of other visitors here:

