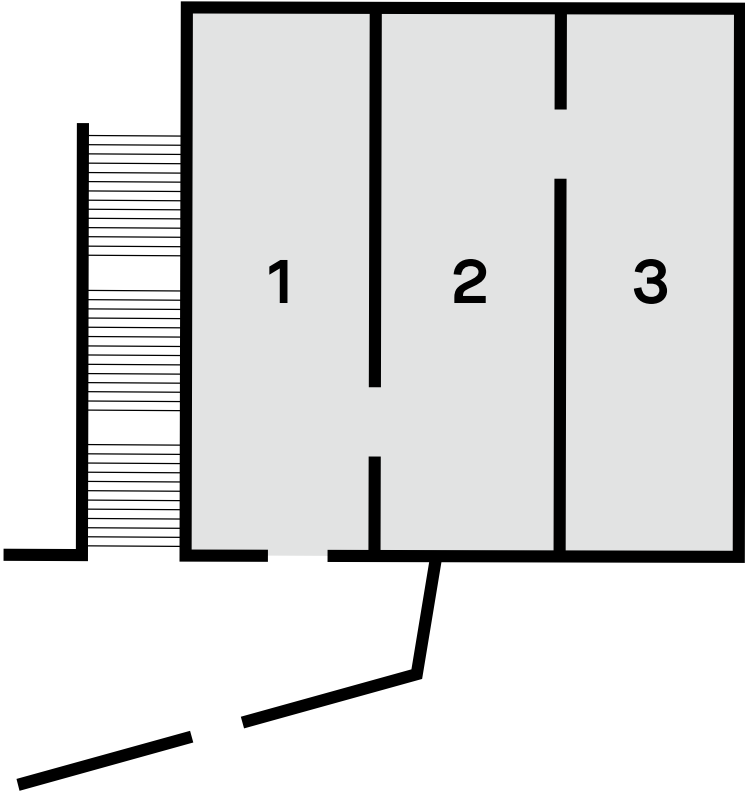


kunstmuseum basel

Hermann Scherer

Grooves and Edges

Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau Lower level



Hermann Scherer (1893–1927) is one of the most famous representatives of Expressionism in Switzerland. Born in Rümmingen, Germany not far from the Swiss border, he spent most of his brief life in Basel. The prevailing taste there in the early 1920s favored balanced forms and muted colors: painting was dominated by “somber” tones, and in sculpture, the preference was for elongated stone figures in the late classical manner. Scherer gradually broke with this tradition: his stone sculptures became jagged and in painting he increasingly relied on glaring color contrasts. Starting in 1924, he became inspired by a particular material that he had never used previously: wood. By the end of September 1926, he had created 25 wooden figures and over a hundred woodcuts. The organic substance became for Scherer the conjunction of expression and abstraction.

1 Role Model and Freedom

In June 1923, the 43-year-old Ernst Ludwig Kirchner exhibits his Expressionist paintings and woodcuts at the Kunsthalle Basel and the 30-year-old Hermann Scherer assists him with mounting the exhibition. To thank him, Kirchner invites Scherer to Davos, where he might “carve a bit [...] in our superb Swiss pinewood.” On his second visit to Davos, the trained stonemason begins to carve figures in wood and to make printing blocks.

The work releases his creative energies and also has an impact on how he will draw and paint from then on: Many works take on a degree of abstraction that would be inconceivable without the energetic work in wood. Scherer develops an increasingly idiosyncratic visual language.

2 Wood! Cut! Print!

Through drawing, Scherer plays out many pictorial ideas in an infinite number of variations. In a woodcut, however, every notch inevitably becomes printed reality. Committing to inscribing the wooden plate is for Scherer the outcome of a hard-won decision—and an overcoming. Scherer writes that the woodcut is by no means easy for him—and yet he keeps working.

The transitions between light and dark in his drawings become black and white contrasts in the process of cutting. Contour lines form edges and ridges. Scherer increasingly dispenses with internal organization and interlocks angular surfaces to form structures full of tension. He creates friendship portraits of his artistic associates and theatrical landscapes, but above all he deals with the fundamental conflicts of human existence. Themes such as loneliness, togetherness, libido, existential angst, and excess are expressed in Scherer’s woodcuts in their most intense culmination.

3 The Portfolio Works

The pinnacle of Scherer's woodcut work is represented by his three portfolios: *Raskolnikoff* (1924/25), *The Hymn of Baal the Great* (1925), and *The Twelve* (1925/26). The literary sources for these works are the novel *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, the play *Baal* by Bertolt Brecht, and the expressionist poem *The Twelve* by Alexander Block.

For the first time, Scherer is faced with the challenge of inventing associatively without visual models and in this way he arrives at his most innovative pictorial solutions. Common to all three portfolios is the tendency toward abrupt "scene changes." Scherer was greatly influenced by Expressionist silent film and its aesthetic of shock. The gaze swings abruptly from one intense image to the next.

© Kunstmuseum Basel, Department of Prints and Drawings
Texts: Marion Heisterberg
Translation: Anna Brailovsky

A selection of the printing blocks have been scanned in 3-D in advance of this exhibition. Here you can follow the traces of Scherer's cutting tools close up:



Short biography

8.2.1893	*Born in Rümmingen in the Kander valley
1907	Begins stonecutter apprenticeship with Gustav Schwab in Lörrach
1910–11	Works for the Basel sculptor Carl Gutknecht
1914–17	Assists the Basel sculptor Otto Roos
1920–22	Sculptures and drawings by Scherer are included in four exhibitions at the Basel Kunsthalle
1918–21	Assists Carl Burckhardt with work on the fountain sculptures <i>Rhein</i> and <i>Wiese</i> at the Badischer Bahnhof Basel
1920	Scherer organizes drawing sessions with a nude model twice a week at his studio at Steinenbachgässlein 38
1920	Scherer designs a title page for the Communist newspaper <i>Neue Jugend</i> and posters for the <i>Hilfskommittee der Kommunistischen Partei für das hungernde Russland</i> [Communist Party Aid Committee for the Hungry in Russia]
1922	Travels to Germany with the Basel theologian Fritz Lieb (itinerary includes, among other stops, Göttingen, Berlin and Jena)
June 1923	The Edvard Munch exhibition in Zurich and Basel makes a deep impression on Scherer and he undertakes his first attempts at painting Scherer helps Ernst Ludwig Kirchner with set up of the latter's exhibition at the Kunsthalle Basel
July 1923 – April 1925	Several extended working visits with Kirchner in Davos
From 1924	Obsessive drawing, turn to working with wood: first sculptures and woodcuts (nudes, portraits)
May–August 1924	Exhibition <i>Neue deutsche Kunst</i> [New German Art], Stuttgart Scherer is represented outside of Switzerland for the first time with three wooden sculptures

Spring 1924	Begins work on the <i>Raskolnikov</i> portfolio
September 1924	Exhibition of drawings, watercolors, and woodcuts at the Basel Kunsthandlung Rath, Aeschenvorstadt 38
End of 1924	Scherer is represented with a sculpture at the <i>Juryfreien Ausstellung am Lehrter Bahnhof Berlin</i> [Non-Juried Exhibition at the Lehrter Bahnhof Berlin]
New Year's Eve 1924/25	Founding of the <i>Künstlervereinigung Rot-Blau</i> [Red-Blue Artists Group] with Albert Müller and Paul Camenisch; Werner Neuhaus joins a bit later. Passive members supporting the group are to receive a woodcut annually.
April 1925	62 works by the Rot-Blau group are included in the exhibition <i>Jüngere Basler Künstler</i> [Young Basel Artists] at the Kunsthalle Basel. Five of Scherer's sculptures are banished on "moral grounds" to the storage rooms, where they are however available to view upon request The friendship with Albert Müller breaks apart over disagreement about exhibition space. Müller resigns from <i>Rot-Blau</i> .
Likely 1925	Works on the portfolio <i>The Hymn of Baal the Great after Bertolt Brecht</i> ; begins work on the portfolio <i>The Twelve by Alexander Block</i>
Summer 1925	Scherer, Camenisch and Neuhaus in Mendrisiotto
March 1926	<i>Rot-Blau</i> exhibition at Kunsthaus Zürich
June 1926	Through Kirchner's efforts, Scherer is represented at the international art exhibition in Dresden with a wooden sculpture and some paintings
June 5.– 27.	Second <i>Rot-Blau</i> exhibition at the Basler Kunsthalle
October 1926	Taken to the Basel city hospital
December 1926	Albert Müller dies of typhoid at 29
13.5.1927	Scherer dies from sepsis at 34

The Exhibition is supported by:
Samuel Werenfels, Basel
Foundation for the Kunstmuseum Basel

Opening Hours

Tue–Sun 10 am–6 pm / Wed 10 am–8 pm

Admission

Adults CHF 16 / Reduced CHF 8

Free entrance

Sat 15. and Sun 16. January 2022

Tue–Sun 5–6 pm / Wed 5–8 pm

KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL

St. Alban-Graben 16, CH-4010 Basel, +41 61 206 62 62

info@kunstmuseumbasel.ch / kunstmuseumbasel.ch



#kunstmuseumbasel
