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Press release

EXHIBITION

TURNING POINTS. FROM NOLDE TO OPPENHEIM.

100 YEARS OF SCHWEIZERISCHE GRAPHISCHE GESELLSCHAFT

7 February – 8 April 2018

Opening: Tuesday, 6 February 2018, 6 p.m.

The Schweizerische Graphische Gesellschaft (SGG) strikes a balance between constancy and change. For a hundred years, it has been commissioning selected contemporary artists to create an original work that is then published in a limited edition of 125 and distributed to all SGG members. Moreover, for a hundred years, this society has not only been supporting and promoting both traditional and new approaches to the art of the print, but has also been rigorously challenging and debating its own decision criteria. The centenary jubilee exhibition reflects this by placing the focus on crucial turning points in the history of the SGG, presenting works that have marked a new departure and have, at times, caused controversy.

The Schweizerische Graphische Gesellschaft (SGG) is now celebrating its 100th anniversary. Since 1918, the society has been commissioning several artists each year to create an original print. In doing so, the SGG actively supports and promotes the art of the print, enabling emerging and established artists to explore the medium. In the course of 100 years, this has led to the production of more than 250 works, provided to its 125 members for a modest annual fee.

The ETH Zürich's Collection of Prints and Drawings is marking the centenary of the SGG with an exhibition that looks back on decades of patronage devoted to the art of the print and examines the selection criteria applied by the society. At what times were these criteria the subject of intense debate? And in what ways have the selection criteria changed? In six chapters, the exhibition charts the most notable turning points. These include, for example, the moment at which the SGG reached out beyond the boundaries of Switzerland in 1937 by commissioning **Emil Nolde** (1867 – 1956) as the first foreign artist with no particular ties to the country, even though some critical voices insisted at the time that the SGG should instead be supporting Swiss artists in such an economically challenging climate. Nevertheless, a majority approved the Nolde commission. In 1957, the statutes were duly amended. As a result, international positions are an accepted and welcome feature of the annual editions today. Thanks to this decision, subsequent editions have included works by such artists as **Claes Oldenburg** (*1929), **Peter Doig** (*1959) and **Alex Katz** (*1927). Within the framework of the exhibition, such works are grouped around the respective turning point to provide added context.

A century of art patronage also signifies a century of diversity. In addition to showcasing specific turning points, the exhibition features works – one each, respectively, from two alternate years – by way of example, as a means of highlighting various trends, aims and changes in the course of 100 years.

The Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich is closely associated with the SGG. So much so, indeed, that the Collection's former director Paul Tanner was also a long-term president of the SGG. In addition, to this day the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich still houses the SGG archives – including the printing plates. Some of these can be seen in the exhibition, representing yet another turning point. According to a decision by the 1920 General Assembly, all the printing plates were to be destroyed. However, the then president, Prof. Dr. Paul Ganz, could not find it in his heart to carry this out. His instinct proved right. Thanks to him, **Ian Anüll** (*1948) was able to use the printing plate of **Paul Klee** (1879 – 1940) once again in order to create an independent work for the 1995 annual edition.

In retrospect, it is evident that, throughout its 100 years, the SGG has tenaciously pursued its founding aim of «supporting and promoting contemporary original prints, primarily by Swiss artists». Moreover, artists working in other genres have also been introduced to the possibilities offered by print techniques, and this has been instrumental in co-authoring the art history of Swiss printmaking.

The question of patronage remains as topical as ever. In an age in which the possibilities extend even into the spheres of 3D printing and biotechnology, it is crucial to bear in mind the potential offered by printed works in the field of contemporary art. This is, in no small part, due to the fact that, in an age of copy-and-paste, such issues as reproducibility and distribution are of ever-increasing significance. The result of the SGG's endeavours – in the form of its annual edition – has become increasingly attractive to institutions and collectors alike due to the key artistic positions represented and the limited editions issued. This indicates why the limited edition prints are represented in so many leading Swiss collections. As a member of the SGG since its inception, the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich is able to explore the full scope of creative ideas that have come to fruition thanks to the SGG – from **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner** (1880 - 1938) to **Roman Signer** (*1938) and **Rosemarie Trockel** (*1952).

Practical Information

Events	The exhibition will be accompanied by numerous guided tours, an Artist's Talk and the «Im Focus» panel discussion. For more details, visit https://gs.ethz.ch/agenda/
Opening hours	Daily, 10 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. Closed: Friday 30 March to Monday 2 April 2018 (Easter)
Entrance	Free
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