

PRESS INFORMATION

PER KIRKEBY

November 25, 2018 to February 10, 2019
Kunsthalle Krems



Per Kirkeby, *Untitled*, 2000, Mixed media on Masonite, 122 x 120 cm © Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne & New York

Opening: Sat, November 24, 2018 6 p.m.
Press conference: Fri, November 23, 2018 11 a.m.

Press images: <https://bit.ly/PerKirkeby>

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“I have ruined a lot before, which really became better ... What has always annoyed me is a certain kind of niceness.” (Per Kirkeby, Artist)

“The focus of his art lies primarily on nature – as an elemental quality that is translated into pure painting.” (Florian Steininger, Artistic director of Kunsthalle Krems)

“Per Kirkeby is one of the most essential and original innovators of landscape painting.” (Robert Fleck, Professor of Art and Public Life at the Düsseldorf Art Academy)

The Kunsthalle Krems had planned a comprehensive exhibition for Per Kirkeby's 80th birthday this fall. Now Kirkeby died on May 9, 2018, and the Kunsthalle Krems is commemorating a great artist with this show. Per Kirkeby is one of the patron saints of contemporary art, most of all of painting. From in the late 1960s, he consistently built an oeuvre that, while always being informed by landscape and nature, still centered on the abstract quality of painting. He is considered as one of the innovators of postmodern painting who gave the panel painting self-confidence and strength again. Kirkeby's intuitive gestural painting naturally combines abstraction and figuration. Structures of landscape and suggested objects and living creatures like tree trunks or camels mingle in the painterly-graphic color field. The work is seen as an open process, a becoming and passing away—deposited in multiple layers.

The exhibition brings together more than one hundred representative paintings, sculptures and drawings in an encompassing personal exhibition. Based on the hardboard paintings that the artist worked on from the very beginnings of his painting, it outlines Kirkeby's ramified and stylistically pluralistic genesis. Another focus is on his still less known overpaintings, Kirkeby's painterly appropriations of pictures by others. In the 1980s, he intensively occupied himself with bronze sculpture. These are organic sculptures, whose main subject matter is human corporeality. The sculptural works may also turn out colossal, as mighty bodies, gates, and walls. At the center of Kirkeby's sculpture, there is always the processual element and the disclosure of materiality. A sculpture of a wholly different kind has been on view since 1993 in the garden of the Minorite Church in Stein, not far from the Kunsthalle Krems. It is an example of Kirkeby's brick sculptures—pseudoarchitectural objects without any specific constructional function, which, with their minimalist-constructive form language, are in stark contrast to the expressive nature-related bronze sculptures. It is one of the numerous international artworks in the public space of Lower Austria. Kirkeby's works have already been to Krems on several occasions, for example, for the 1996 exhibition *Chaos, Madness: Permutations of Contemporary Art*. It was about the confusion and the pluralism in art at the turn of the millennium, or the discrepancy between a harmonizing sense of order and the expressive subjectivism of artistic positions. Kirkeby combines intuition and structure in his painting, organic openness and constructive order. In the following year, he was in the exhibition *The Gravity of Mountains: Mountains and Inner Worlds from Romanticism to the Present* with his paintings of nature. In Florian Steininger's inaugural exhibition as director in summer 2017, *Abstract Painting Now! Gerhard Richter, Katharina Grosse, Sean Scully ...*, he also presented Kirkeby in the section “Abstract Figure and Nature” next to Eugène Leroy, Herbert Brandl, and Franz Grabmayr.

Curator: Florian Steininger

PER KIRKEBY

Paintings from the 1980s

The exhibition of Per Kirkeby at the Kunsthalle Krems starts out with a representative selection of paintings from the 1980s, 1981 to '86. It is a time in which Kirkeby brings tectonics, structure, and multiple color layers to his painting, and his painterly work consolidates. A tension-charged interplay between constructivist clarity and the emotional-intuitive unfolds. Nature and landscape rather define the picture area as a field, a rhythmic array with dissonantly interspersed breaks. It was particularly the paintings from the 1980s that were characterized by a subdued, broken overall atmosphere; they speak of the darkness of the north.



Per Kirkeby, *Untitled*, 1986
Oil on canvas, 200 × 240 cm
© Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne & New York

From 1957 to 1964, Per Kirkeby studied geology at the University of Copenhagen. He participated in expeditions to Greenland, Central America, and the Arctic. The painterly process, the application of layer after layer, correlates with the sedimentary depositing of earth and stone. Kirkeby writes about this, "*Like I said, I think of my paintings as a summation of structures. A depositing of thin, thin layers. [...] In principle, an endless process of sedimentation.*"¹ Kirkeby was his own harshest critic, rejecting anything too nice, too superficially beautiful and attractive. "*I have ruined a lot before, which really became better ... What has always annoyed me is a certain kind of niceness.*"² He did not want to make it easy for himself or for his painting; he had no interest to be brilliant, with facile and casually churned-out bravura pieces.

Scribbly drawings of light on wood panels

In the Krems exhibition, a selection of hardboard panels surveys Kirkeby's development from the 1970s to his very last artistic expressions of 2016. As a substrate, the Masonite boards are a constant in his oeuvre. They look like school blackboards on whose dark surfaces graphic information is spontaneously chalked out, revised, and erased. Kirkeby sketches out the original idea, the *disegno*, then reworks it, covering it under additional layers of drawing. Mostly, these are graphic symbols, sketches for architectural brick sculptures, graphisms, signs, shapes, or figures. Stark colors glaringly light up the nightly space of the dark hardboard panels, discharging streaky dynamic drawings of light. Unlike his paintings on canvas which develop in a very slow sedimentation process, the Masonite pictures are created in an act of spontaneous notation. Kirkeby ascribes to them a measure of frivolity, recklessness, and instability.

¹ Per Kirkeby, "Geology," in Per Kirkeby, *Writings on Art*, ed. Asger Schnack (Putnam, Conn., 2012) n. p. (e-book).
² Per Kirkeby, in *Per Kirkeby. Der Natur auf der Spur*, TV documentary, writer-director: Evelyn Schels, BR TV, 2014



Per Kirkeby, *Untitled*, 1999
Mixed media on Masonite, 122 x 122 cm
© Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne & New York

Drawings and brick sculptures

Kirkeby's drawings show various different characteristics: they range from sketchy notations to well-composed dense works on paper. Already in the 1960s, Kirkeby captured nature and landscape in field-book drawings on his geological research trips. Included in them are renderings of delta cones, which he kept using in the following decades as a cipher in his drawings and paintings. Many of the expedition drawings of glaciers turn out to be classical landscapes, they are views of mountainous formations. The structural rendering of nature with a propensity for flatness and abstraction only begins in the course of the 1970s and '80s. The exhibition presents drawings from widely different portfolios, among them those showing motifs that resemble tree trunks as well as design sketches for brick sculptures, one of which is found in the sculpture garden behind the choir of the Minorite Church in Krems-Stein.

At first sight, the group of brick sculptures appear like a foreign body in Kirkeby's oeuvre. They are slightly reminiscent of Minimal Art, of Carl Andre's uniform non-relational series of floor tiles or Donald Judd's serialized wall works. On the other hand, they evoke associations of buildings, if without practical usability; absurd structures between sculpture and architecture. And they also have an autobiographical aspect to them, because Kirkeby grew up in a red brick housing estate in Copenhagen.



Per Kirkeby, *Untitled*, 1993-95
Brick sculpture in the sculpture garden of the Minorite Church
Bricks, 210 x 300 x 87 cm (per wall element)
© Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne & New York, Photo: Sascha Osaka / NÖ Festival

The overpaintings

His overpaintings of works of other artists seem equally foreign both in Kirkeby's work and in the Krems exhibition. Already before him, Asger Jorn and Arnulf Rainer had appropriated other people's pictures by marking, covering up or obliterating their surfaces. Kirkeby sees his overpaintings not as bad painting, a derision of kitsch pictures, but as a breakaway from his personal style of painting through confrontation with the work of another hand. It is the collision of two different personal styles. Kirkeby is confronted with the motif, form, and structure of a picture and responds by attacking it. So he overpaints romantic landscapes with garishly blue picket fences and makes the original picture subject disappear. In his text

on “Overpaintings,” the artist writes that he saw this as a “striving towards the true essence of the picture in question. It’s much like painting your ‘own’ pictures.”³



Per Kirkeby, *Untitled*, 2013
Overpainting, oil on canvas, 58 × 81 cm
© Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne & New York

The bronze sculptures

The exhibition at the Kunsthalle Krems ends with the juxtaposition of a monumental painting from the 1980s in panorama format with a bronze cast sculpture from the same decade. Kirkeby was a *peintre-sculpteur* in the classical sense. His bronzes developed out of the paintings. The bronze texture is reticulated with expressive cracks, which correlates with the informalist, jerky surfaces of the painted pictures. It is a processual sculptured expression in plaster and clay, an adding and removing, forming and deforming. The exhibition also includes smaller bronzes; in part, they have the shape of arms, legs, and torsos, which mutate into something more plant-like and natural.



Per Kirkeby, *Gate I*, 1987
Bronze, 220 × 150 × 75 cm, ed.: 4/6
© Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne & New York

³ Per Kirkeby, “Geology,” in Per Kirkeby, *Writings on Art*, ed. Asger Schnack (Putnam, Conn., 2012), n. p. [e-book].

PER KIRKEBY

Born on September 1, 1938 in Copenhagen

Died on May 9, 2018 in Copenhagen

Biography

- 1957-64 Studied natural history at the University of Copenhagen
- 1958 Participates in an expedition to Narssak, Greenland, followed in the 1970s by further expeditions to Greenland, Middle America, and in the Arctic
- 1962 Enrolls at Den eksperimenterende Kunstscole (experimental art school) in Copenhagen; works in painting, graphic art, 8 mm film, and performance art
- 1965 First solo exhibition at Den Frie Udstillingsbygning, Copenhagen; receives a three-year painting scholarship from the Statens Kunstfond (state art fund); publishes his first book of poems
- 1967 Publishes his first novel *2, 15*;
- 1978-88 Professorship of painting at the State Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe
- 1989-2000 Professorship at the Städelschule, Frankfurt a. M.
- 1990 Receives the NORD/LB Art Award for outstanding achievements in contemporary art
- 1993 Ars Fennica Award der Henna and Pertti Niemistö Art Foundation
- 1996 Receives the Coutts Contemporary Art Foundation Award and the Henrik Steffens Award of the Alfred Toepfer Foundation F. V. S; does the stage design for the Royal Danish Theater's production of *Swan Lake*
- 2000 Receives Wilhelm Hansen Fonden's honorary prize for his stage and costume design for *Swan Lake*
- 2003 Receives the Herbert Boeckl Prize for lifetime achievement, awarded by the Friends of the Rupertinum Association, Salzburg
- 2011 Honored as Royal Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts, London

Selected Exhibitions

- 1976 Participates in the Venice Biennale, showing paintings and brick sculptures
- 1977 *Per Kirkeby: Bilder. Backsteinskulpturen. Bücher*, Museum Folkwang, Essen
- 1980 Participation in the Venice Biennale
- 1982 Participates in the documenta 7, Kassel
- 1984 *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1989 *Per Kirkeby. Pinturas, esculturas, grabados y escritos*, IVAM, Centre del Carme, Valencia
- 1990 *Per Kirkeby*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk
- 1992 Participates in the documenta IX in Kassel, showing a brick sculpture
- 1993 Teilnahme an der Biennale von Venedig
- 1994 *Per Kirkeby. Imagens Posteriores*, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo
- 1995 *Per Kirkeby*, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, Nantes
- 1996 *Per Kirkeby. Peintures 1992–1996*, Maison des Arts Georges Pompidou, Centre d'art contemporain, Cajarc
- 1998 *Per Kirkeby*, Tate Gallery, London
- 2002 *Per Kirkeby. 122 × 122. Maleri på Masonit*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk
DC: Per Kirkeby. 122 × 122. Gemälde auf Masonit, Museum Ludwig, Köln
- 2003 *Per Kirkeby. Dreimal werden*, Rupertinum, Salzburg
- 2007 *Per Kirkeby. Solo Exhibition*, Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Schanghai
- 2008 *Per Kirkeby, Louisiana 2008*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk
- 2009 *Per Kirkeby*, Tate Modern, London, and Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf
- 2015 *Per Kirkeby. Backstein: Skulptur und Architektur*, KUB Sammlungsschaufenster, Bregenz
- 2018 *Per Kirkeby*, Kunsthalle Krems
Per Kirkeby. Machines for Light and Shadow, Museum Jorn, Silkeborg
Per Kirkeby. Paintings and Bronzes from the 1980s, Michael Werner Gallery, New York
Per Kirkeby, Almine Rech Gallery, Paris

CATALOGUE

The catalogue for the exhibition *Per Kirkeby* (€ 29,80) will be available at the shop of Kunsthalle Krems.

Title: *Per Kirkeby*

Editor: Florian Steininger

Date of publishing: 2018

Publisher: Verlag für moderne Kunst

Dimensions: 230 x 280 mm

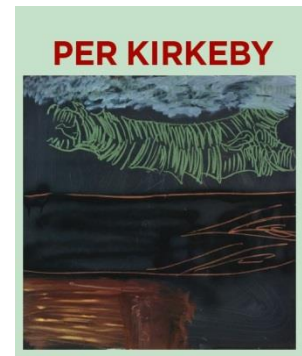
Cover: Softcover

Languages: German / English

Pages: 192

Authors: Robert Fleck, Per Kirkeby, Florian Steininger

Price: € 29,80



HYGGE?!

Pop-up store at Kunsthalle Krems

Danish design is taking up residence in Kunsthalle Krems' shop. In the run-up to Christmas, shoppers can look forward to a range of exciting gifts and books with Scandinavian flair. Visitors are also welcome to enjoy current exhibitions whilst their gifts are wrapped in the shop.

EXHIBITION DATES

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OPENING

Sat, November 24, 2018 6 p.m.

Address of welcome and presentation by

Florian Steininger, Artistic director of Kunsthalle Krems

About Perrine Lacroix. Kontext(e)

Andreas Hoffer, Curator of Kunsthalle Krems

Jacque-Pierre Gougeon, Counsellor for Cultural Affairs of the French Embassy and director of the French Culture Institute

About Per Kirkeby

Florian Steininger, Artistic director and curator
Robert Fleck, Kunstakademie Düsseldorf

Official opening by

Lukas Mandl, Member of the European Parliament, on behalf of Johanna Mikl-Leitner, Governor of Lower Austria

DJ line-up by Sebastian Brauneis *le dernier cri*

OPENING HOURS

Tue-Sun, Mon when holiday: from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

ADMISSION

Adults € 10

Reduced € 9

Family ticket € 18

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PRESS CONFERENCE

Fri, November 23, 2018 11 a.m.

with Florian Steininger, Andreas Hoffer and Perrine Lacroix, and the opportunity to visit the studios of the AIR - ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich programme together with Sabine Güldenfuß, project leader of AIR.

Shuttle to the press conference from Vienna
10 a.m. at Friedrich-Schmidt-Platz / Lichtenfelsgasse,
Vienna
1 p.m. at Kunsthalle Krems, Krems

PRESS MATERIAL

Press images

<https://bit.ly/PerKirkeby>

Press images may be used only for press purposes in connection with reporting on the exhibition and accompanied by the name of the artist, the title and date of work, the copyright holder and photo credit. The images must not be cropped, overprinted, tinted.

Interview with Perrine Lacroix

<http://bit.ly/InterviewFlorianSteiningerZuKirkeby>

Video of Perrine Lacroix

(available after the opening)

<https://www.kunsthalle.at/videtour>

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