

## ENTRE NOUS

### **The Oskar Reinhart Collection 'Am Römerholz' with Selected Works from the Museum Oskar Reinhart am Stadtgarten With a documentary section on Oskar Reinhart as collector**

**June 10 to September 30, 2012**

The heart of the exhibition *Entre nous* is a documentation of the collector's life. Much has been written in the last ten years on Oskar Reinhart's (1885–1965) activities as a collector. Research into his life is facilitated first and foremost by the great variety and cogency of written materials left by Oskar Reinhart himself; these have been preserved at the Römerholz and in other archives in Winterthur. The present concentrated yet in-depth exhibition now allows this precious fund of information to speak for itself and to tell the remarkable and gripping story of a life dedicated to art. New light is cast here on familiar ground and matters that have hitherto been ignored will be seen in their proper context.

The documentation covers the full chronological span of Oskar Reinhart's activities as a collector; it therefore also illuminates that part of the collection, which this Winterthur business man already donated to the City of Winterthur in 1940 as the Stiftung Oskar Reinhart. This generous gift now constitutes the core of the holdings of the Museum Oskar Reinhart am Stadtgarten. The integration of five major works from the Stadtgarten Museum (opened in 1951) into the Römerholz collection brings to life the contents of the documentary section of the exhibition, and exemplifies the outcome of a passion for collection driven by the highest of standards and a sure eye. The selection of outstanding guest paintings and the nature of their encounter with the holdings at the Römerholz highlight the significant correspondences between the two collections. Despite their more or less apparent differences, both grew from the same understanding of art, which was characterized by a special love of French art and *peinture*. Accordingly works from the Stadtgarten Collection find resonances in the Römerholz holdings. Symbolic of this connection, Wilhelm Leibl's masterpiece *Village Politicians* was acquired for the Stadtgarten collection in 1953, the same year as Manet's great painting, *Au café*, came to the Römerholz. These two acquisitions were to be the crowning glory of the two collections. Yet more than one work has returned from the Stadtgarten to its original place, where it lived—with protagonists from the Römerholz collection—until the two entities were separated. The encounter between the two collections is deliberately only exemplified in a few instances in order that a very important wish should also be fulfilled—namely that during the time of the exhibition visitors should still enjoy the contents of both houses as coherent presentations in their own right.

## The Museum Oskar Reinhart am Stadtgarten and the Collection 'Am Römerholz'

The collection that Oskar Reinhart housed in his villa Am Römerholz originally also contained the large number of works, which he donated to his home town in 1940 and which eleven years later found their home in the Museum Oskar Reinhart am Stadtgarten. This first “Reinhart museum” is now the proud keeper of around 500 works by German, Swiss, and Austrian artists from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries and an extensive collection of prints and drawings. Reinhart retained the core of his collection for his own villa and its picture gallery. Following the death of Oskar Reinhart, this collection, to which more acquisitions had been added and which now comprised around 200 paintings, drawings, and sculptures, was donated, as stipulated in the collector’s will, to the Swiss Confederation; it now forms the present-day Oskar Reinhart Collection ‘Am Römerholz.’ At the heart of this second “Reinhart museum”—opened in 1970—there are the French Impressionists and their immediate forerunners. This collection comes to an outstanding conclusion by paying its “respects” to the Old Masters. The Collection ‘Am Römerholz’ was built up on the basis of aesthetics rather than historical or geographical criteria. Accordingly, then as now, it presents the viewer with a multi-faceted, harmonious ensemble of masterpieces of European art. For its part, the Stadtgarten Collection adheres more to chronology and presents a more systematic and fuller overview of the history of painting.

## An Encounter in the Römerholz between Highlights from Two Reinhart Collections

Both collections are notable for their high quality and a preference for the “painterly” aspects of art. This preference was central to Oskar Reinhart’s taste in art. It derived from his fundamental interest in French Impressionism and largely determined the selection of German and Swiss art that he consistently collected later on. In this he was crucially influenced by the *Jahrhundertausstellung* presented in Berlin in 1906. Taking French modern art as their point of reference, the Berlin exhibition’s organizers sought out works with similar painterly qualities in the German-speaking world. Many of the artists selected on this basis for the *Jahrhundertausstellung* are also represented in the Stadtgarten Collection: the juxtaposition of the famous *Village Politicians* (acquired in 1953) by the German Realist Wilhelm Leibl—who was then celebrated for his pictorial characterization and fine feel for nature as Germany’s greatest realist—and works by Courbet demonstrates the affinity between the German artist and French Realist painters.

Albert Anker’s *Daughter Louise* (acquired in 1929), from the rich holdings the Stadtgarten Collection has of the work of this Swiss artist, shows that Reinhart’s preference for the “painterly” arose from his interest in French art. This portrait was one of the earliest acquisitions that would later become part of the Collection owned by the Stiftung Oskar Reinhart. It therefore does not come as a surprise that there is a particularly close relationship here with the French art in the Collection ‘Am Römerholz.’ This painting by Anker comes from that group of works in his œuvre that is closest to French nineteenth-century painting. Its pale tones are significantly reminiscent of Manet’s use of whites.

Ferdinand Hodler's early *Road to Evordes* (acquired in 1931) is also distinctly suggestive of French Impressionism. Some of its most radical manifestations, such as Monet's *Break-up of Ice on the Seine*, anticipate the underlying order in a realistic representation that Hodler sought and realized in his own painting.

Reinhart's intense interest in Hodler's work also awakened his interest in the generation that preceded this Genevan painter. The juxtaposition of a still life by Liotard (purchased in 1957) from the important group of works of his in the Stadtgarten Collection (acquired between 1934 and 1946) with an ensemble of paintings by Chardin in the Römerholz (acquired between 1922 and 1935) demonstrates the collector's desire to represent two fundamental positions in the late-eighteenth-century French still life. Although as a rule the collector was not interested in historical completeness, in the case of artists who were of particular importance to him, he liked to bring together important groups of works giving an impression of the wealth of their œuvre.

The exhibition *Entre nous* is different from the exhibition *In Dialog* that saw the two collections come together in the Museum am Stadtgarten while the Collection 'Am Römerholz' was closed during 2009–10. The intention is not to continue that same conversation between the two museums: the present exhibition documents the life of the collector and illustrates this with specific encounters between the two collections. Whereas the previous presentation covered the full range of the holdings of both museums, now we have deliberately selected certain highlights, which in turn allows both collections still to be seen as separate entities in their own home locations. This carefully staged reunion of certain works now takes place in the very location where the two collections once formed a single whole. Thus the basic idea of the previous exhibition at the other "Reinhart place" has moved forward and the public now has the opportunity to experience anew and rediscover selected works from both collections.

## **The Collector's Life**

A wealth of documentary materials, divided here into six sections, reflects the chronological development of Oskar Reinhart's activities as a collector. These materials also provide a glimpse into his private life, which was intertwined with his passion for art. Numerous photographs bring the documentation to life and ease access to it for the exhibition visitor. A free booklet provides pointers and guides the visitor through the extensive material on display.

The documentation of Oskar Reinhart's collecting places it in the international context where he was at home. This topic is also the theme of a wide-ranging symposium, for invited art professionals, to be held on September 7 and 8 on the history and dynamics of aesthetically motivated collecting in Europe and the United States of America. The symposium will explore new areas of debate, which—in view of the publication of various materials in 2015 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the collector's death—will in all likelihood also point to fresh avenues of research.