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Kurt Schwitters and The Museum of Modern Art in New York

I would like to thank the Sprengel Museum for the invitation to give this talk and for proposing the topic, which draws heavily on research undertaken for the forthcoming book, Dada in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter, eds. (May 2008). I grateful to John Elderfield and Anne Umland of The Museum of Modern Art for reading this paper and offering useful suggestions, and to Ines Katzenhusen for generously sharing unpublished Schwitters correspondence related to the Museum with me. This paper was written for oral presentation and appears here largely unrevised; substantial alterations would be required to transform it into a proper article for publication. Works by Schwitters are referred to by catalogue raisonné numbers [O/S].

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“Kurt Schwitters and The Museum of Modern Art in New York” could be the subject of its own exhibition or book. Not only is the Museum’s collection rich in numbers of Schwitters’s work, including some forty unique objects by the artist,¹ but of these, many are iconic such as Merz Picture 32 A. The Cherry Picture [O/S 778] a work that Schwitters himself singled out as representative of his whole Merz enterprise in his ca.

¹ The Museum owns five works from the teens, thirty-three from the 1920s, two from the 1930s, and three from the 1940s. Of these, eight were purchases, nineteen from the Katherine S. Dreier Bequest, the others gifts: one from Lily Auchincloss; five from The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection; five from Philip Johnson; and two from The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation. In addition, the Museum owns a number of multiples including some Schwitters’s books, Merz magazine, Merz Mappe, and about thirty examples of graphic design from Jan Tschichold’s collection, donated by Philip Johnson.

1923 poster.² There is, perhaps, a certain poignancy to the fact that one of the world's richest repositories of Schwitters's work is located in New York, a city in a country the artist never visited, but long wished to.

What is presented here is a chronicle of Schwitters and The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), beginning in 1934, when the Museum was a mere five years old, and tracing the history of the institution's involvement with the artist and his works until the present. It is a history that sheds light not only upon Schwitters's late biography and the shaping of the public perception of his works, but also upon the development of the Museum itself.

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The first work by Schwitters to be exhibited at MoMA, Mz. 199 of 1921 [O/S 816], was borrowed from Katherine S. Dreier (1877-1952), the American collector and founder of the Société Anonyme, on the occasion of the Museum's "Fifth Anniversary Exhibition" in 1934.³ Alfred H. Barr, Jr. the Museum's founding director, never failed to acknowledge his debt to Dreier for his first-hand knowledge of many contemporary artists whose original works he saw in exhibitions of Société Anonyme.⁴ It may, in fact, have been Dreier, who recommended that Barr visit Schwitters in Hannover in 1935 to see his extraordinary Merzbau.⁵

² See reproduction in Hannah Höch: Eine Lebenscollage, Band II, 1. Abteilung (1921-1945), texts by Eberhard Roters and Heinz Ohff (Berlin and Ostfildern-Ruit: Berlinische Galerie and Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1995), p. 114.

³ "Modern Works of Art: 5th Anniversary Exhibition," The Museum of Modern Art, New York, MoMA Exh. #37 (November 19, 1934-January 20, 1935). Cat. no. 140.

⁴ See for example, Barr's "Preface," in Cubism and Abstract Art (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1935), p. 9: "Special acknowledgement should also be made of the work of Miss Katherine Dreier, the founder, in 1920, of the Société Anonyme, which brought to this country innumerable exhibitions of European abstract art long before the Museum of Modern Art was founded."

⁵Karin Orchard, "The Eloquence of Waste: Kurt Schwitters' Work and its Reception in America," In the Beginning was Merz - From Kurt Schwitters to the Present Day, Susanne Meyer-Büser and Karin Orchard, eds. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), p. 281.

Each summer, Barr and his wife Margaret Scolari Barr, would sail to Europe in search of loans for upcoming exhibitions. In 1935, they sought works to be included in “Cubism and Abstract Art,” an ambitious survey of some four hundred works intended to represent the historical development of geometric abstraction as derived from Cubism. The Barrs sailed to Hamburg and began their “campaign,” as Barr called these trips, with a visit to Schwitters.⁶ Unfortunately, Schwitters was away in Norway when they arrived, but they were greeted by the artist’s seventeen-year old son, Ernst, who showed them the Merzbau (see O/S 1199, Abb. 30 and 31, for two photographs of the Hannover Merzbau taken by Ernst Schwitters in 1935). In a chronicle compiled in the early 1980s from earlier notes, Margaret Barr recounted:

At Kurt Schwitters's house a young man opens the door. He is the artist's son, a photographer of animals. Schwitters himself is already in Norway. Passing the cold, tiled kitchen where he has been eating bread and liverwurst, he shows the way to the famous *Merzbau*, installed in a back room by his father. It is like a cave; the stalactites and stalagmites of wood junk and stray rubbish picked from the streets are joined together to fill the whole room from floor to ceiling and walls to walls. A.[lfred] and M.[argaret] are silenced. The effect is mesmerizing. How did the artist intend to display it?⁷

The final question was of particular concern. Clearly the Barrs recognized the Merzbau to be a significant work, but its nature prevented its inclusion in an exhibition.

Fortunately, that year, acting anonymously, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller provided Barr with a fund of \$1,000, which enabled him to make purchases in addition to requesting loans.⁸

After leaving Hannover, the Barrs proceeded to Holland and then to Paris, where they visited many artists’ studios and purchased a number of works for the Museum including

⁶ The Barrs landed in Hamburg on May 28, 1935 and stayed in Europe through August 15, 1935. They traveled to Hildesheim, Hannover, and then Holland and Paris. See Margaret Scolari Barr, “Our Campaigns: Alfred H. Barr and The Museum of Modern Art, a Biographical Chronicle of the Years 1930-1944” The New Criterion, special issue (Summer 1987), pp. 39-43.

⁷ Margaret Barr 1987, p. 39.

⁸ Alfred H. Barr, Jr. “Chronical of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture,” *Painting and Sculpture in The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), p. 625.

Reichardt-Schwertschlag Father Christmas of 1922 [O/S 1030] for 100 francs, or about 6 dollars -- the first work by Schwitters to enter the collection. Barr's acquisition of a work by Schwitters in Paris has always seemed odd as the artist wasn't represented by a gallery there, but a recently discovered bank receipt reveals that Barr purchased the work from the poet Paul Eluard.⁹ Schwitters is not known to have corresponded with Eluard, so it is likely that Reichardt-Schwertschlag Father Christmas was among a group of twenty-one Merz drawings Schwitters had given to Tristan Tzara upon his visit to Hannover in 1922, which Tzara took back with him to sell in Paris.¹⁰

In 1936, Barr included five works by Schwitters in the exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art."¹¹ All of these dated from the early 1920s.¹²

According to Barr's famous chart tracing the development of modern art from 1890 to 1935 reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalogue, "(Abstract) Dadaism," to which Schwitters's work belonged, emerged in the late teens and early 1920s, and had already

⁹ This receipt was unknown until now because it was filed in Collection files, Max Ernst (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

¹⁰ In a letter of May, 4 1927, Schwitters wrote to Dreier, "In Paris traf ich auch Tristan Tzara wieder, den ich seit 1922 nicht gesehen hatte. Damals war er in Hannover, und ich gab ihm 21 Merzzeichnungen mit nach Paris zum Verkaufen." Ernst Nündel, Kurt Schwitters: Wir Spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt (Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna: Ullstein, 1974), p. 113. Tzara was in Hannover for a Dada soirée ("Dadarevon") with Schwitters and Arp at the Galerie von Garvens on September 29-30, 1933. See Karin Orchard and Isabel Schulz, "Biography," in Kurt Schwitters: Catalogue raisonné, Band 1 (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), p. 539. Apparently, Tzara sent a number of Schwitters's collages to Jean Heap in New York for an exhibition held at the Little Review Gallery, which closed in Spring 1924. See The Little Review, vol. X, no. 1 (Spring 1924), P. 58: "The Little Review has just closed an exposition of [Schwitters's] pasted-paper pictures." It is not known which works were included in this exhibition and what became of them. On June 27, 1927, Schwitters wrote to Tzara asking for these works back, but he never received them. It is conceivable that Der Weihnachstmann was sold by Tzara to Barr before he sent the rest of the works to Heap, or that Schwitters sold the work directly to Eluard. I am grateful to Karin Orchard for the information she provided about the Little Review exhibition and for the information that Eluard's name appears in Schwitters's address book, although no correspondence between them is known.

¹¹ MoMA Exh. #46 (March 2 - April 19, 1936).

¹² Listed in the exhibition catalogue as: no. 251. Radiating World, 1920 (Dreier); no. 252. Rubbish Construction, 1921 (Gallatin); no. 253. Rubbish Picture 199, 1921 (Dreier); no. 254. Rubbish Picture 369, 1922 (Dreier); no. 255. Santa Claus: rubbish picture, 1922 (MoMA); no. 256. Portrait of Lissitzky: rubbish picture 17, 1926 (Dreier). Probably due to space constraints, according to Registrar records Reichardt-Schwertschlag Father Christmas was not exhibited.

been succeeded by an entire “generation” of Surrealist and Bauhaus production.¹³ To, Barr -- ever the historian -- Schwitters’s work, in other words, already belonged to a past historical moment.

Shortly after the closing of “Cubism and Abstract Art,” the Barrs returned to Europe to begin work on the exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism.”¹⁴ This show, conceived in opposition to “Cubism and Abstract Art,” represented the development of an alternate tendency in modern art: biomorphic rather than structural; emotional rather than rational; derived from Fauvism rather than Cubism. In June, they visited Berlin where they purchased two works by Schwitters for the Museum: Drawing A 2: Hansi (Zeichnung A 2: Hansi) of 1918 [O/S 285] and Mz. 379. Potsdamer of 1922 [O/S 972], respectively from the Galleries Nierendorf and Der Sturm.¹⁵ The deliberate acquisition of such early works -- both already over a decade old -- reiterates Barr’s view of Schwitters’s historical position.

Unfortunately, no notes survive from the time of its purchase to indicate that Barr believed Drawing A 2: Hansi to be among Schwitters’s very first collages, indeed predating the invention of Merz.¹⁶

¹³ For reproductions of both the cover and a draft of the chart, in which Schwitters’s name is written under the term “Abstract Dadaism,” see Harriet S. Bee and Michelle Elligott, eds. Art in Our Time: A Chronicle of The Museum of Modern Art (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004), p. 45.

¹⁴ The Barrs began their trip in Paris on May 18, 1936 and traveled to Brussels, Rotterdam, Berlin, and London until August 1, 1936. See Margaret Barr 1987, pp. 44-48. The exhibition, “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” MoMA Exh. # 55, took place at the Museum between December 7, 1936-January 17, 1937.

¹⁵ On June 20, 1936, a month before the opening of the infamous 1936 summer Olympics and, coincidentally, Schwitters forty-ninth birthday, the Barrs stopped in Berlin for five days to meet with the architect Mies van der Rohe, to determine if he might be interested in designing the Museum’s new building. See Margaret Barr 1987, p. 47.

¹⁶ In a letter of November 29, 1946, MoMA curator Margaret Miller asked Schwitters: “The Museum owns a small very beautiful collage made from a Hansi chocolate wrapper. It is dated 1918, Zeichnung 2. Is this actually your second collage?” On December 11, 1946, he replied: “1918/2 should be the second collage.” Both letters in Collection files, Schwitters (general), Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

These two works were included in “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” along with Dreier’s Radiating World Merzpicture 31 B of 1920 [O/S 602], and another work cryptically described in the catalogue as: “No. 497. Merz 1920, collage. Lent anonymously.” Long unidentified, this fourth work was likely Mz 33 of 1920 [O/S 623]: a loan from Alfred Barr’s private collection.¹⁷ Apparently, Barr had acquired this work in Paris in 1935 or Berlin in 1936 at the same time that he was making official purchases for the Museum.

The inclusion of Schwitters in both the “Cubism and Abstract Art” and “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” exhibitions, indeed his representation by the same work -- Dreier’s Radiating World, in both catalogues¹⁸ -- undermines Barr’s own dichotomizing scheme. Schwitters was, in fact, one of fifteen artists to appear in both shows.¹⁹

Although it, too, surely defied the categories Barr had established, Schwitters’s Merzbau was not included in the Cubism show, but in only the Fantastic Art exhibition. Two images of the structure were reproduced in the catalogue (as figs. 670 and 671) and six photographs were included in the exhibition, in a section on “Fantastic Architecture” mounted on a black panel, seen in an installation photograph to the left of Giacometti’s Palace at 4 a.m.²⁰

¹⁷ The loan card for this work identifies it as Merz 33, coming from Barr’s collection. The exhibition fails to appear in the catalogue raisonné entry on this work.

¹⁸ The work was reproduced in both catalogues: Cubism (cat. no. 251, fig. no. 196), Fantastic (cat. no. 494).

¹⁹ These artists included: Arp, Calder, De Chirico, Duchamp, Ernst, Giacometti, Kandinsky, Klee, Malevich, Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy, Miró, Picabia, Picasso, and Schwitters. In Barr’s concluding paragraph of the introduction to the “Cubism and Abstract Art” catalogue, p. 19, he wrote: “Often, of course, these two currents intermingle and they may both appear in one man.”

²⁰ MAID no. IN55.1B, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

Perhaps encouraged by the Museum's request for photographs of the Merzbau,²¹ in November 1936, Schwitters wrote an intriguing proposal to Barr. He suggested building a new version of his Merzbau, or alternately a column (sketched in the letter), at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.²² Schwitters described this proposed structure as "abstract" and "cubist," and insisted that the work had nothing to do with "interior design" and "decorative style," thus distinguishing it from architecture. Schwitters's careful selection of words -- indeed, his employment of exact phrases used by Barr in the introduction to "Cubism and Abstract Art" -- suggests that he may have conscientiously read Barr's essay and deliberately offered a work that exemplified Barr's category of geometrical abstraction.²³

²¹ On July 14, 1936, three months after the closing of the Cubism exhibition (April 19, 1936), Barr wrote to Schwitters (in German) expressing his regret that Schwitters had been away when he and his wife visited Hanover, and requesting a copy of Arp's Arpaden portfolio, along with photographs of Schwitters's "Grotto" for the Museum's Library. "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," Reg. Exh. #55, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

²² November 23, 1936 Schwitters letter to Barr (in German). Location of the original letter is unknown. I am grateful to Rachel Churner for alerting me to this letter is quoted (in translation) in John Elderfield, Kurt Schwitters (New York and London: Thames and Hudson), pp. 156, 401 (n. 68), 404 (n. 20), which led me to a photocopy of the letter in the "Kurt Schwitters," MoMA Exh. 1400, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY. The letter is also cited in Gwendolyn Webster, Kurt Schwitters: A Biographical Study (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1997), p. 284.

²³ It is interesting to compare the terminology used in of Barr's text with that used in Schwitters's letter, albeit written in German. I have underlined the terms to be compared:

Barr, introduction to "Cubism and Abstract Art" (April 1936), p. 19: "At the risk of grave oversimplification, the impulse towards abstract art during the past fifty years may be divided historically into two main currents [...]. The first and more important [...] finds its sources in the art and theories of Cézanne and Seurat, passes through the widening stream of Cubism and finds its delta in the various geometrical and Constructivist movements [...]. This current may be described as intellectual, structural, architectonic, geometrical, rectilinear and classical [...]. The second [...] current has its principle source in the art and theories of Gauguin and his circle, flows through the Fauvisme of Matisse and the [...] paintings of Kandinsky [...] [and reappears in] Surrealism. This tradition, by contrast with the first, is intuitional and emotional rather than intellectual; organic or biomorphic rather than geometrical [...]; curvilinear rather than rectilinear, decorative rather than structural, and romantic rather than classical in its exaltation of the mystical, the spontaneous and the irrational."

November 23, 1936 Schwitters letter to Barr (Elderfield's translation): "When you came to see me in Hannover 2 years ago, I was unfortunately in Norway and regrettably did not meet you. My son afterward told me that you had very much liked my interior and that you had expressed the wish to have such an interior in America. Professor Dorner has already written to you to offer such an interior. It would give me very great pleasure if you would give me the opportunity to design such an abstract (cubist) interior [Raum abstrakt (kubistisch)] in your museum or in a private collection in America. [...] In order to avoid mistakes, I must expressly tell you that my working method is not a question of interior design [Raumgestaltung], i.e. decorative style [dekorativer Art]; that I do by no means construct an interior for people to live in, for that can be better done by the new architects. I am building an abstract (cubist) sculpture [abstrakte (kubistische) Plastik] into which people can go. [...] I am offering now to design an abstract interior,

Indeed, at Barr's request, Alexander Dorner (1893-1957) had forwarded a copy of the Cubism and Abstract Art catalogue to Schwitters two months before Schwitters wrote to Barr, which likely included the "compliments of" card included in Schwitters's untitled collage of 1937 [O/S 2247].²⁴

Schwitters's proposal to Barr included a time-frame: he could complete a column in five to six weeks or a niche in two to three months. He politely added: "Please think it over thoroughly -- there is no hurry."

On the same day, however, Schwitters made a similar request to Joseph Albers, by then living in the United States, which conveys an entirely different sense of urgency.

Schwitters informed Albers that his works were currently exhibited in one of the first Entartete Kunst shows, and he had great fear that some "150 percent [Nazi] will destroy my [Hannover] room, and then I'll be left with nothing more."²⁵

In what was perhaps a tactical error, Schwitters addressed Barr politely, as one would a potential employer, appealing to his preferences and avoiding mention of inappropriate, personal matters. Had Schwitters been aware of Barr's concern for the fate of

or, if that is not possible, a niche or a column. As to the costs, we would surely come to an agreement. In the interest of the project, I would keep the expenses as low as possible. [...].

When Schwitters wrote this letter, he had not yet received a copy of the Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism catalogue, which Barr announced that he was sending via Dr. Freudenthal in a letter of December 10, 1936. Collections files, Schwitters (general), Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY. The Museum sent the Fantastic Art catalogue to Schwitters a second time on January 16, 1942. Unsigned letter, Barr Papers, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

²⁴ July 14, 1936 Barr letter to Dorner asking him to forward one of three Cubism and Abstract Art catalogues to Schwitters, and July 23, 1936 Dorner letter to Barr assuring him that he had done so, but informing him that Schwitters was traveling. Both letters Dorner Papers, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums. I am grateful to Ines Katenhusen for bringing these letters to my attention.

²⁵ The original German reads: "Sie können es sich denken, dass ich Angst habe, dass mir irgend ein 150 prozentiger meine Räume zerstören wird, dann habe ich nichts mehr." November 23, 1936 Schwitters letter to Albers. Albers Papers, Yale University. I am, again, very grateful to Ines Katenhusen for bringing this letter to my attention.

contemporary art in National Socialist Germany and appealed to directly him on that front, he might have fared better.²⁶

As it was, however, Barr responded with a brief note, thanking Schwitters for his “interesting letter” and adding: “I wish very much that we might carry out the project which you propose but unfortunately the Museum has no space or fund. Believe me, I regret very much that we can do nothing.”²⁷

Schwitters’s situation was, in fact, so urgent that, just over a month after writing to Barr, he emigrated to Norway where he would remain for three years.²⁸ There he built a column resembling that which he had sketched in the letter to Barr [O/S 2105; destroyed]. He also constructed a second Merzbau, destroyed in 1951 without a photographic trace, which presumably came close to realizing the structure he had offered Barr.²⁹

In early 1940, with the help of Käthe Steinitz (1889-1975),³⁰ Schwitters attempted to get an American visa. Steinitz sent Schwitters paperwork for the visa along with materials pertaining to MoMA’s newly opened building, to which the artist responded:

That looks very pompous indeed. Do you believe it possible that such a museum, that produces such art, commits itself to artists? [...] A museum that *really* wants to promote modern art might give the artist a guarantee, on certain

²⁶ In Spring 1933, Barr spent four months in Stuttgart where he observed and recorded the National Socialist “revolution” in the cultural realm. Unfortunately his article on the subject was not published for over a decade, finally appearing as “Art in the Third Reich -- Preview, 1933” Magazine of Art, vol. 38, no. 6 (October 1946), pp. 212-222.

²⁷ December 10, 1936 Barr letter to Schwitters. Collection files, Schwitters (general), Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

²⁸ Schwitters left for Norway on January 2, 1937. See Orchard and Schulz 2000, p. 551.

²⁹ Elderfield 1985, p. 204

³⁰ According to her own account, Steinitz and Schwitters first met January 1918. Kate Trauman Steinitz, Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), p. 4. By 1944, Steinitz had moved to New York and by 1946, she had settled in Los Angeles. See January 5, 1946 Steinitz letter to Barr, Collection files (Schwitters general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

conditions, so that he can get on with his life and his creations. Or do you believe that the museum is more interested in the artist's death, in order to see the price of his paintings go up?³¹

Polemics aside, Schwitters posited key questions about the Museum's mandate: Was it dedicated to the art of the present, or to the art of the past? To the artist, or exclusively to the art? For Schwitters, these questions had an immediate impact: "Who," he implored in the same letter, "will help me before it's too late?"

Within two months, the Germans had invaded Norway, and Schwitters fled to Scotland and England where, as a German, he was interned at a series of camps.³² In early 1941, Steinitz contacted the Museum in an attempt to obtain an emergency visa for Schwitters, but was informed by Margaret Barr, who had by then taken on MoMA's so-called "rescue operation" of European artists as a full-time job³³ -- that this would not be possible because, living in England, the State Department did not consider him to be in imminent danger.³⁴ Oliver M. Kaufmann, uncle of Edgar Kaufmann, a curator at the Museum, generously granted Schwitters an affidavit of financial support,³⁵ but in January

³¹ February 26, 1940 Schwitters to Steinitz. Nuendel 1974, p. 160. Translated from German to English in Gunda Luyken, "Schwitters and America of Planning a Career in the Land of Boundless Opportunities," *Kurt Schwitters: I is Style* (Rotterdam and Amsterdam: Nai Publishers and Stedelijk Museum, 2000), p. 44 (n. 47). It is interesting to note that in a collage of 1947, *Untitled (Y.M.C.A. Official Flag Thank You)* [O/S 3396], Schwitters included a fragment of an envelope with MoMA's return address, which included the Museum's "Support the Building and Program Fund" stamp with a schematic drawing of the new building.

³² Orchard and Schulz 2000, p. 553.

³³ See unpublished article by Margaret S. Barr, "Rescuing Artists in W.W. II" (January 7, 1980). Special Interest: Emergency Rescue Committee, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

³⁴ March 11, 1941 Margaret Barr letter to Kate Steinitz: "I am in charge of all refugee cases that come to the Museum. I am quite au courant with the case of Schwitters up to the period in which my husband wrote him a letter that was supposed to be helpful in getting him out of the concentration camp [...] in a general way let me say that the Museum has endeavored during the last months to help artists who were in danger -- most of them in southern France. I do not see at all how you can hope to get an emergency visa for Schwitters who is in England. I do not think the State Department considers England dangerous." Quoted in Luyken 2000, p. 44 (n. 49).

³⁵ In a later letter of April 30, 1946 Schwitters recounted to Oliver Kaufmann: "You once gave me kindly a guarantee for living, when I could come over to USA, for saving my life. I am very grateful to you, but could not come over, because I had my wife living in Germany." In July 16, 1946 he wrote to Edgar Kaufmann: "I wrote to your uncle, who was so very kind to me to be a sponsor for me coming over to America, when I was here in England in danger to be captured by the Nazis." Both letters, Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

of 1942, the Museum regretfully informed to Schwitters that the United States State Department looked unfavorably upon applications from people whose relatives remained in the occupied zones.³⁶

Out of the internment camps, but struggling to make a living, Schwitters wrote to Barr again a few months later, asking him to please purchase a work, which could be delivered after the War.³⁷ Barr's response was brief: "I wish that we could be of help to you by buying another of your works, but we already have 3 and I am afraid I could not persuade the committee to purchase another sight unseen."³⁸

When the war was over, Schwitters contacted Barr yet again to ask if the Museum might be interested in exhibiting and circulating a selection of his recent works that had been on view in London's Modern Art Gallery. "I think your public would be interested, especially as most of my works before 1940, also [...] the Merzbau, have been destroyed by bombing during the war."³⁹ The devastating destruction of the Merzbau on October 8-9, 1943, coincidentally occurred the very same week that Barr was dismissed as director of the Museum.⁴⁰ Barr wrote back to Schwitters: "I must tell you [...] that I am no longer Director of the Museum so that I must pass on your suggestion to one of your admirers, James Johnson Sweeney, who is now director of Painting and Sculpture [...]."⁴¹

³⁶ In an unsigned letter of January 16, 1942 to Schwitters, the Museum wrote to Schwitters: "The State Department is very strict on that point and no applications are any longer considered for people whose relatives are in the occupied zones." Barr papers, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

³⁷ April 12, 1942 Schwitters to Barr, Barr papers, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

³⁸ May 14, 1942 Barr to Schwitters, Barr papers, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

³⁹ November 1, 1945 Schwitters letter to Barr. "Kurt Schwitters" Exhibition Files, #1400, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

⁴⁰ Schwitters provides the precise date of the bombing in a July 16, 1946 letter to Edgar Kaufmann. Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY. Regarding Barr's dismissal, see Bee and Elligott 2004, p. 81. Barr was named Director of Research in Painting and Sculpture in 1944.

⁴¹ November 26, 1945 Barr to Schwitters. Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

With Barr's dismissal, the structure of the Museum had changed. Sweeney wrote back to Schwitters, expressing his personal admiration for the artist's work, but adding "the schedule of exhibitions is not in the hands of any individual [...] [a]ll proposals must be put formally before a group and voted upon."⁴² The Schwitters's exhibition appeared before the committee at the same time that Margaret Miller, then a Research Associate in the Department of Publications, presented a proposal for a retrospective exhibition of the medium of Collage.⁴³ Miller's show was approved, and in June 1946, Sweeney informed Schwitters that due to this important collage exhibition, in which the artist would be well represented, the Museum would not be able to present a one-man show of his works for some time.⁴⁴

This disappointing news was somewhat alleviated by the positive report from Schwitters's friend Christof Spengemann that part of the Hannover Merzbau had survived the war after all.⁴⁵ In April 1946, Schwitters wrote to Spengemann that he would do everything possible to return to Hannover to save what he could.⁴⁶ This letter included a drawing from memory, of Waldhausenstraße 5, with shading at top indicating the area where the Merzbau was installed. Although saving the Merzbau would be laborious, he wrote to Spengemann, "[...] it is truly worthwhile since it was my life's work

⁴² May 21, 1946 Sweeney letter to Schwitters. "Kurt Schwitters" exhibition #1400, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

⁴³ See Miller's proposal, in the form of a May 20, 1946 memo to Monroe Wheeler. Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY. Miller, who began working at the Museum around 1943, later switched to the Department of Painting and Sculpture, where she retained the title of "Research Associate" until becoming "Associate Curator" in 1948. Miller remained at the Museum until at least 1954.

⁴⁴ "[...] [I]n view of [this] important collage exhibition [...] there would not be an available opening for another one man show of art in that medium for some time, and particularly in view of the fact that the show we are planning for next year should include a major important representation of your work." June 14, 1946 Sweeney letter to Schwitters. Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA NY.

⁴⁵ April 30, 1946 Schwitters to Kaufmann: "First I heard in 1944, that it was destroyed by bombing. Now writes me my friend Christof Spengemann from Hanover, that it is covered by debris, but only partly destroyed." Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁴⁶ April 25, 1946 Schwitters to Christof and Luise Spengemann. Nündel 1974, pp. 193-194, with Schwitters's floorplan reproduced on p. 195.

and it has considerable value as a new domain in art so far as foreigners are concerned. I shall raise money in America. I could sift through the fragments or remains the way ancient ruins are excavated, and sell them to Americans. I could live on the proceeds while this was going on."⁴⁷

A few days later he wrote directly to Oliver Kaufmann, the sponsor of his affidavit some five years earlier, asking for \$3000 to cover the expense of his travel to Germany and for the materials and manpower to restore the Merzbau. "If I don't act quickly," he wrote, "the debris would be taken away with all my work [...]. I fight for it in desperation, as an animal for its child."⁴⁸ Encouraged by his nephew and by Sweeney,⁴⁹ Oliver Kaufman wrote to Schwitters that he would help, but that arrangements would have to be made through the Museum. Sweeney wrote to Schwitters in August: "Mr. Barr and I would both be very happy to hear that you were undertaking the restoration of the Merzbau in Hanover. I feel it is an important monument in 20th century expression, and I sincerely hope that you will be able to undertake this work before it is too late." In a surprising turnaround, considering the recent rejection of Schwitters's proposed one-man show, Sweeney continued: "[...] a photographic record of the restoration from its present condition would make an interesting nucleus for a small one man show of your paintings, sculpture, and merzbild. I feel that such an exhibition could possibly be arranged in the Museum and would be glad to advocate it warmly to the Exhibitions Committee."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "Und es lohnt sich wirklich, da es mein Lebenswerk war. Und es galt sehr viel in der Meinung des Auslandes als neues Gebiet in der Kunst. Ich will versuchen, amerikanisches geld für die Bruchstücke zu interessieren, ich würde die Reste oder Bruchstücke ausgraben, wie man es mit antiken Steinen tut, und an Amerika verkaufen. Ich kann davon leben [...]. April 25, 1946 Schwitters letter to Christof and Luise Spengemann. Nündel 1974, p. 194.

⁴⁸ April 30, 1946 Schwitters to Kaufmann. See also, Schwitters July 16, 1946 letter to Edgar Kaufmann about the need for workmen to help him in his effort. Both letters Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁴⁹ See correspondence between Edgar to Oliver Kaufmann (May 27, 1946), Edgar Kaufmann and Sweeney (May 29, 1946 and July 8, 1946). All letters Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁵⁰ August 7, 1946 Sweeney to Schwitters. Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY. This exhibition was not realized.

In the interim, Schwitters had received a photograph the badly damaged Waldhausenstraße 5 from a former neighbor (Frau Prange) and news that digging would not be permitted in the suburbs of Hannover until the following Spring.⁵¹ He wrote to Spengemann, "I don't deceive myself about no. 5 and know that it becomes ever more destroyed through rain, frost, and wind. But my sponsor writes that I should save whatever there is to save [...] Now The Museum of Modern Art wants to exhibit the Merzbau with as much photo material as possible. You can imagine what an exhibition in the biggest and best museum for modern art means for me. [...] It all hangs on the reparability of the Merzbau. If you could just salvage a few ruins, which I could send to America [...]." ⁵²

In January 1947, a check for \$1,000 dollars was delivered to MoMA from the Oliver M. Kaufmann Family Charitable Trust as the initial payment of a potential \$3,000, to be dispersed to Schwitters, allowing him, in Edgar Kaufmann's words, "[to] return to Germany and re-establish his home and workshop."⁵³ Within the Museum, different proposals regarding the terms of the subsidy were discussed. Barr suggested, for example, that Schwitters could contribute some of his works in return for this subsidy, that MoMA might distribute to museums in Germany, as a way to return to these institutions "[...] some of the experimental art which was lost during the Hitler regime."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Reported in Schwitters's July 16, 1946 letters to Edgar Kaufmann (see note 48 above) and his July 17, 1946 to Christof and Luise Spengemann (Nündel 1974, pp. 205-206).

⁵² "Ich lasse mich über die Zertörung von No 5 nicht täuschen und weiss, dass es weiter durch Regen, Frost, Wind zerstört ist. Aber mein Sponsor in New York schreibt, ich soll retten, was zu retten ist. [...] Du kannst Dir denken, was soch eine Ausstellung in dem grössten und besten Museum für moderne Kunst für mich bedeutet. [...] Das alles hängt ab von der Reparaturfähigkeit des Merzbaues. Wenn nur ein paar Ruinenausgraben werden können, die ich nach NY als Fragmente senden kann [...]" September 28, 1946 Schwitters to Christof and Luise Spengemann. Nündel 1974, pp. 229-230.

⁵³ February 18, 1947 Edgar Kaufmann memo to Lone Ulrich. Collection files, Schwitters (fellowship), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁵⁴ Barr's idea conveyed by Kaufmann to Lone Ulrich in February 18, 1947 memo (cited in note 53 above).

Dispersing the funds to Schwitters, however, was complicated. The U.S. State Department forbid "remittances of any nature to Germany" and free travel to Germany was forbidden.⁵⁵ The issue was entrusted to the Museum's legal council and was drawn out for many months. Although he tactfully refrained from asking about the status of the money outright, Schwitters noted his concern to Miller and others regarding the additional damage to the Hannover Merzbau with each passing month that it was exposed to the elements.⁵⁶ In April 1947, he wrote to Dreier of the Museum's intention to help him restore the Hannover Merzbau, but lamented that "[...] it has already been a year and nothing has happened."⁵⁷ Perhaps pessimistic that it was now simply too late, he wrote to Dreier of possibly returning instead to Norway in order to document the Haus am Bakkan.

Finally, on June 16, 1947, official news of the \$1,000 fellowship was sent to Schwitters by the Museum's secretary: "It is the understanding of the Trustees that you have two alternatives: to return to Hanover and restore the original Merzbau or to go to Oslo to resume work on the second Merzbau [...] The choice of these projects is left entirely to your discretion."⁵⁸ Schwitters received the Museum's letter on his 60th birthday -- June 20, 1947 -- and it can be seen protruding from his coat pocket in a photograph taken on that day.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ February 27, 1947 Ione Ulrich to James E. Husted. Collection files, Schwitters (fellowship), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY. On September 1, 1946 Schwitters wrote to Sweeney, explaining that travel to Germany was restricted and it was necessary to prove that ones visit would be beneficial to the German people. Collection files, Schwitters (general), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁵⁶ November 11, 1946 Schwitters letter to Miller: "And as I cannot go now to Hannover, it goes on to be destroyed by the weather."

⁵⁷ April 18, 1947 Schwitters to Dreier. Nündel 1974, p. 274.

⁵⁸ June 16, 1947 letter from the Assistant Secretary Schwitters. See also letter of same date from Miller to Schwitters. Both letters, Collection files (Schwitters Fellowship), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁵⁹ Reproduced in Elderfield 1985, fig. 323.

The complexities of postwar international law had delayed the delivery of the fellowship to Schwitters for over a year. By this time it had become clear that the Hannover Merzbau was beyond repair,⁶⁰ and a trip to Norway was inadvisable because, as a German citizen, Schwitters would not be guaranteed a re-entry permit to England.⁶¹ Thwarted in his attempts to restore the existing Merzbaus, Schwitters proposed constructing a third Merzbau in England, and of using part of the scholarship to underwrite a recording of his Ursonate, the second of his "two life works."⁶² These new plans were eagerly supported by Barr, Miller, and Edgar Kaufmann, who approved the increase of the scholarship to \$3,000.⁶³ A barn was offered to the artist by his friend Harry Pierce, and Schwitters began work on this third structure which occupied him during the last six months of his life [O/S 3659]. Sadly, Schwitters only received the first two payments of his fellowship, in increments of \$250, before his death in January 1948. Two more payments in the same amount were used to underwrite his burial, and the additional \$2,000 was never dispersed.⁶⁴

In the last year of his life, Schwitters received no less than twenty-two letters and a number of food packages from the Museum. It is therefore not surprising to find evidence of this correspondence in collages such as Untitled (Via Air Mail) [O/S 3602] and Untitled (Y.M.C.A. Official Flag Thank You) [O/S 3396], both of 1947, which include a pieces of the Museum's letterhead. In 1946, Schwitters dedicated a collage to

⁶⁰ In a letter of June 25, 1947 Schwitters wrote to Spengemann, "On my birthday I received from the Museum of Modern Art a scholarship to repair my Merzbau. But there is nothing more to be done there." Nündel 1974, p. 282.

⁶¹ August 5, 1947 Miller memo to lone Ulrich. Collection files (Schwitters Fellowship), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁶² Apparently proposed in a now-missing letter of July 1947 from Schwitters to Miller, reported on in August 5, 1947 Miller memo to lone Ulrich (see note 61).

⁶³ Increase confirmed in October 16, 1947 Miller letter to Oliver Kaufmann. Collection files, Schwitters (fellowship), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁶⁴ Elderfield 1985, p. 220. The payments of \$250 were sent on: July 31, 1947; November 30, 1947; January 8, 1948 (the day of his death); and January 12, 1948. The last two installments were sent to Schwitters's companion Edith Thomas.

Margaret Miller [O/S 3374], a testament to their sympathetic relationship developed by mail. In 1947, he wrote to Otto Gleichmann in 1947 "It would be a wonderful thing to exhibit at MoMA. It means a great deal in the whole world."⁶⁵ For Schwitters, who neither visited the United States nor ever met a single representative of the Museum in person, MoMA existed exclusively through the mail. Airmail collapsed the insurmountable physical distance between Ambleside and New York, offering, until the end, the possibilities of travel, financial support, and recognition, as well as a means to overcome the isolation of his final years.

In his very last letter to Miller of November 11, 1947, Schwitters wrote: "In a few days or weeks I shall be English. Then I may travel. For example when you would like to be at the opening of the [Collage] exhibition and recite my Ursonata."⁶⁶ This exhibition, which had originally been scheduled to open in March 1947 was delayed, and only opened in September 1948, nine months after the artist's death.⁶⁷ Miller's "Collage" exhibition included fifteen works by Schwitters, more works than by any other single artist, except Picasso who was represented by nineteen works.⁶⁸ This constituted what was, in effect, a mini-retrospective of Schwitters's work, spanning the years 1918-1947. The selection, however, clearly favored the earlier period, with ten works dating from the teens and early twenties, and five from the 1940s. These five late works were selected from some thirty-five examples the artist had sent to the Museum for this exhibition.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ February 2, 1947 Schwitters letter to Gleichmann: "Aber es wäre eine wundervolle Sache, im MoMA auszustellen. Es bedeutet viel in der ganzen Welt." Nündel 1974, p. 262.

⁶⁶ November 11, 1947 Schwitters letter to Miller. Original letter misfiled in "Kurt Schwitters" MoMA Exh. #1400, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

⁶⁷ The "Collage" exhibition was scheduled to take place from March 25-May 18, 1947, but due to, in Miller's words, the "dislocations of war," it was postponed until September 21-December 5, 1948. Schwitters died on January 8, 1948. See Miller's letters to Schwitters of October 1, 1946 and January 17, 1947, respectively, MoMA Exh. #385 and MoMA Exh. #1400, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

⁶⁸ MoMA Exh. #385 (September 21-December 5, 1948). MAID no. IN3851, 4, 5, 6, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

⁶⁹ In these years, it was common practice for the Museum to sell works on behalf of the artist. Among the works by Schwitters sold from the "Collage" exhibition was Paper Clouds of 1946 [O/S 3322], which Schwitters had referred to as one of his "very best" (November 7, 1946 Schwitters

For reasons that remain unclear, the planned catalogue for this exhibition never appeared, resulting in the exhibition's relative historical obscurity and lack of impact.

Miller was particularly interested in including examples of Schwitters's large works -- in Schwitters's terminology Merzbilder as opposed to Merzzeichnungen. Prior to the opening of the show, she wrote to Katherine Dreier: "[...] many people associate a certain kind of mastery with large works, and a number of people asked me [...] if Schwitters had ever attempted collage on a larger scale."⁷⁰ Having repeatedly borrowed Dreier's Radiating World, it was hardly surprising that, when a large-scale early Merzbild -- Picture with Light Center of 1919 [O/S 445] became available in 1950, the Museum purchased it from the Carlebach Gallery. This was the fourth Schwitters to enter the Museum's collection, following the three small works acquired by Barr in Paris and Berlin some fourteen years earlier.

After Dreier's death in 1952, Marcel Duchamp, who had been entrusted with dispersing Dreier's personal collection, invited Barr -- who remained at the Museum in the capacity of Director of Research in Painting and Sculpture -- to visit Connecticut to make selections for the Museum from those works which had not already been allocated to other institutions.⁷¹ Together with Margaret Miller, Barr chose twenty works by

letter to Miller; MoMA Exh. #385). It was purchased by a Museum trustee and presented as a gift to the Museum in 1964 (577.1964). Margaret Miller bought one work from the exhibition, C 76 Like Marmor of 1946 [O/S 3348] as did another MoMA curator, Dorothy Miller, C 25 Mirage 1946 [O/S 2214].

⁷⁰ May 18, 1948 Miller letter to Dreier, quoted in Luyken 2000, p. 52 (n. 74).

⁷¹ Duchamp initially offered Dreier's entire private collection to the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C. but, due to inadequate exhibition and storage space, Duncan Phillips declined the full gift in favor of a selection of objects, including Radiating World (see May 19, 1952 Phillips letter to Duchamp, Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.). Dreier's private collection was ultimately split between The Phillips Collection, American University, Guggenheim, and MoMA.

Schwitters.⁷² They marked their selection with red-bordered white labels, still visible on the work's versos.

The care with which Barr and Miller made their selection is evident in the plea Barr made for Mz 448 Moskau of 1922 [O/S 999] when he learned that it had been promised to the Guggenheim. He wrote to Duchamp:

As you know our list was very carefully selected in a couple of hours' study by Margaret Miller and myself in an effort to assemble a really well-rounded and representative group. [...] "Moskau" is quite important to us because it's in a different medium than anything else we have selected and because the wooden appliqué is related to the "factura composition" which the Russians showed in Berlin in 1922.⁷³

Duchamp restored Moscow to MoMA⁷⁴ and, in June 1953, the Dreier bequest was exhibited, including nineteen collages by Schwitters.⁷⁵ The addition of these works increased the Museum's holdings from four to twenty-three: comprising two works from the teens, twenty from the 1920s, and one from the 1940s.

Despite the recent influx of small Merzzeichnungen into the collection, in 1954 when Merz Picture 32 A. The Cherry Picture [O/S 778] was offered for sale by Brita (Gretzer) Holmquist, the granddaughter of Hjalmar Gabrielson, Miller no doubt recounted Schwitters description of it in one of his letters to her as "a great old picture of mine."⁷⁶

⁷² Duchamp had suggested limiting their Schwitters selection to twenty works. Barr made an initial visit to Milford on September 25, 1952 and a second visit with Miller and William Lieberman in early November, reported on respectively in Barr's letters to Duchamp of September 30, 1952 and November 12, 1952. Both letters, Collection files, Donors (Dreier), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁷³ November 24, 1952 Barr letter to Duchamp. Collection files, Donors (Dreier), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁷⁴ December 29, 1952 Barr letter to Duchamp. Collection files, Donors (Dreier), Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, NY.

⁷⁵ "Katherine S. Dreier Bequest," MoMA Exh. #538 (June 23-October 4, 1953). MAID no. IN538, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

⁷⁶ November 11, 1946 Schwitters letter to Miller. Original misfiled in "Kurt Schwitters" Exh. #1400, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

She recommended its purchase on the basis that it was “one of the three works Schwitters himself felt best represented him.”⁷⁷

In 1960, an exhibition of Schwitters’s works, organized by Werner Schmalenbach, was shown at the Venice Biennale. MoMA’s Department of Circulating Exhibitions was interested in bringing this show to the Museum but -- as though history were repeating itself -- just as the “Collage” retrospective had preempted a Schwitters show in 1948, an exhibition on the “Art of Assemblage” preempted this Schwitters show from coming to the Museum in 1961.⁷⁸ When it was decided that the Schwitters exhibition would not come to MoMA, Schmalenbach withdrew his support, and in its place, the curator of the Assemblage show, William Seitz organized a different circulating Schwitters exhibition of some eighty works drawn from American collections, that traveled to five American cities, excluding New York, in 1963-64.⁷⁹

In 1968, MoMA curator William Rubin presented the exhibition “Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage.”⁸⁰ Among the Schwitters works included was Revolving (Das Kreisen), the major large-scale assemblage of 1919 [O/S 444]. Reproduced frequently in Dada-period journals, and selected by the artist as one of eleven images reproduced on postcards in the early 1920s,⁸¹ it was clearly an important work in the artist’s eyes and,

⁷⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee on the Museum Collections held on Tuesday, April 6, 1954. Department of Painting and Sculpture.

⁷⁸ “Art of Assemblage,” MoMA Exh. #695 (October 4-November 12, 1961).

⁷⁹ Pasadena Art Museum (June 19-July 20, 1962; The Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire (September 27-October 18, 1962); The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (November 4-25, 1962); University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (January 7-February 4, 1963); and the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, MA (April 22-May 20, 1963). See exhibition catalogue by Walter Hopps, Kurt Schwitters (Pasadena Art Museum, 1962). For correspondence pertaining to this exhibition, see “Schwitters” Circulating Exhibition #CE 61-9, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY and Collection files, Schwitters (general), Department of Drawings, MoMA, NY.

⁸⁰ MoMA Exh. #855 (March 27 - June 9, 1968).

⁸¹ At least eight examples of the Revolving postcard are known to survive, sent to the following recipients without collage additions: Grete Dixel (20 July 1920 and 8 Sept 1921); Tristan Tzara (20 June 1923 and 24 Sept 1925). With Schwitters's collage additions: Walter Dixel (15 April 1922 [O/S 1055] and 27 Feb 1924 [O/S 1241]), Hans Arp (c. 1922 [O/S 1057]); Ernst Schwitters (1930 [O/S 1713]).

as an assemblage, its acquisition from Ernst Schwitters through the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery filled a major gap in the Museum's holdings.⁸²

In 1972, the Museum organized its first on-site Schwitters exhibition.⁸³ Drawn exclusively from the Museum's own collection, the show presented seventy-eight objects, including a large selection of graphic work from Jan Tschichold's collection, donated by Philip Johnson. This exhibition prompted a critical evaluation of the Museum's Schwitters holdings by the show's curator, Jennifer Licht:

[...] the collection now has a rather unsystematic group of small collages, with works from the mid-twenties [...] predominating. It lacks any drawings -- the child-like and repetitive rubber stamp drawings are of great interest; there are no machine image collages or photomontages featuring products and goods; there are no constructions or sculpture, and no late works except for one small collage.⁸⁴

The possibility of deaccessioning some of the works from the Dreier bequest in order to fill these gaps was discussed, but not acted upon.⁸⁵

It was not until 1985 that the Museum finally presented a full-scale Schwitters exhibition.⁸⁶ Organized by John Elderfield, this show brought together over two-hundred collages, assemblages, drawings, sculpture, graphic works, documentary photographs, and poetry from each period of the artist's production. The book which served as the

⁸² As an extra incentive, Marlborough offered as a gift Schwitters's small collage Untitled (Fec) of 1920 [O/S 728] which had also been included in Rubin's exhibition.

⁸³ "Kurt Schwitters," MoMA Exh. #1009 (July 31-September 10, 1972).

⁸⁴ Licht memo of September 1970, quoted in May 2, 1972 Licht memo to William Rubin. "Kurt Schwitters" MoMA Exh. #1009, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY.

⁸⁵ The idea of deaccessioning some of Dreier's Schwitters works met with resistance among the Museum staff who felt that it would violate the integrity of bequest. See memos to William Rubin from Betsy Jones (May 9, 1972) and Kynaston McShine (May 11, 1972), both in MoMA Exh. #1009, Museum Archives, MoMA, NY. This idea of deaccessioning Schwitters works from Dreier's bequest was raised again, in 1984, when Schwitters's son presented the Museum with the rare opportunity to purchase one of the artist's best known early drawings, The Heart Goes from Sugar to Coffee of 1919 (53.1985; O/S 525), but alternate means were found to make this purchase.

⁸⁶ MoMA #1400 (June 10 - October 1, 1985).

exhibition catalogue was, in fact, an important scholarly study based on years of research from the 1960s onward.⁸⁷

Among the enduring legacies of this exhibition was the incentive it provided for close study of Merz Picture 32 A. The Cherry Picture [O/S 778]. A routine examination of the work undertaken by the Museum's paper conservator Antoinette King, led to an extensive consideration of the work and its history, revealing significant changes to its material composition between its earliest documented state and its current appearance.

King's essay appeared in the second issue of Studies in Modern Art,⁸⁸ a journal published by MoMA dedicated to "reinvigorat[ing] scholarly interest in the permanent collections of museums."⁸⁹ Edited by John Elderfield, each issue focuses on a different theme related to the Museum's holdings, or to its history and activities.

The Museum is currently preparing a book on Dada works in the Museum's collection. Co-edited by Anne Umland and myself, it is planned as the first in a series of books, published under the auspices of Studies in Modern Art, to focus on areas of the Museum's holdings that are significant in both scope and importance. This project was catalyzed by the recent Dada exhibition, and has again focused the Museum's attention on Schwitters -- if not a Dadaist per se, certainly an artist deeply engaged with Dada. Each entry from Dada in the Collection will include provenance, exhibition and

⁸⁷ In 1975, John Elderfield joined the staff of the Museum as a Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture. Elderfield, who first encountered Schwitters's work on a visit to the Lake District in the mid-60s, studied the artist as an undergraduate at the University of Leeds, published a series of important articles on him in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and completed a doctoral dissertation on the artist at the Courtauld in 1975. Already under contract with Thames and Hudson to publish a major monograph on the artist, Elderfield submitted a proposal for a major Schwitters retrospective in 1980.

⁸⁸ Antoinette King, "Kurt Schwitters's *Cherry Picture*: Material Change and an Ethical Problem," Studies in Modern Art, no. 2 (1992), Essays on Assemblage, pp. 31-41.

⁸⁹ Richard E. Olderburg, "Foreward," Studies in Modern Art, no. 1 (1992), p. 6.

conservation histories, references, etc. along with a one thousand word essay, based on extensive archival and object-based research.

During the course of this talk, I have mentioned some of our archival findings concerning Schwitters and will conclude with an example of our object-based research.

Atypically, the original mat of Untitled (Mz ELIKAN ELIKAN ELIKAN) of ca. 1925 [O/S 1314] is hinged on only one side, allowing it to be lifted from the work. When lifted, it is possible to see dramatic color shifts in certain papers which have been protected from the light. While color shifts in works on paper from this period are par for the course, the degree of these shifts came as a surprise to us.

Using the original colors under the mat as a guide, Scott Gerson, Assistant Paper Conservator, created a facsimile reconstruction approximating how Elikan would have looked before these color shifts took place. The Museum would never actually consider restoring these colors, but the exercise raises interesting questions.

In the case of Elikan, we might ask if these color shifts cause us to interpret the work differently. In its current condition, one might be inclined to interpret the dull brownish elements as nostalgic and melancholic remains -- pieces of abandoned waste, salvaged for presentation in this collage. In their original state, however, these now-brown papers may have functioned as clear signs of modernity and contemporaneity in keeping with, rather than in contrast to, the decidedly modern pieces of carbon paper, Pelikan packaging, film wrappers, and metallic papers also found in this collage.

Because the qualities of materials were Schwitters very means, his vocabulary, even subtle changes may have significant impact on close formal readings of his works. Were a systematic study of color shifts in Schwitters's work to be undertaken, it would ideally be done in collaboration with the Sprengel Museum, an institution unequalled in Schwitters holdings and resources, and would present a unique opportunity for international collaboration, continuing a New York-Hannover exchange begun seventy-three years ago between Alfred Barr and the artist himself.