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THE UNEXPECTED NEW: LATE PAINTINGS OF ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER
18 APRIL to 3 JULY 2008

Michael Werner Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of the late paintings of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. This exhibition highlights Kirchner's paintings made in Davos, Switzerland beginning in the 1920s, a period rarely examined in-depth in exhibitions devoted to Kirchner's work. The exhibition takes its title from the artist's own words, "Das ungewohnte Neue", a phrase he used in a 1924 letter to his brother explaining the shock with which the public received these new and unusual paintings.

Born in Aschaffenburg, Germany in 1880 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was one of the most inventive artists associated with German Expressionism. He studied architecture in Dresden and Munich before founding, together with his colleagues Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Erich Heckel, Die Brücke (The Bridge) in 1905. The group was formed in opposition to prevalent artistic tastes of the time, in particular Impressionism, and called upon artists to work against the established cultural order. The spirit of fierce independence that characterized the activities of Die Brücke artists would remain a hallmark of Kirchner's life and work until his death by suicide in 1938.

Kirchner is most widely known for paintings he created at the height of Die Brücke and for the series of street scenes begun in 1913 after the disbanding of the group. The precise timing and characteristics of the so-called late work of Kirchner have been hotly debated by art historians. *The Unexpected New*, by focusing on paintings made during 1921 to 1935, aims to deepen this discussion and allow the public to grasp the qualities of a little-known body of work by one of the most important artists of the twentieth century.

A number of events in Kirchner's personal and creative life are thought to be the catalysts for the change in his painting style that came about during the 1920s: his brief military service in 1914; a nervous breakdown the following year; a lengthy convalescence and eventual move to Davos. In Davos, deeply moved by the natural beauty of his new environment yet isolated from the vibrant cultural life he enjoyed in Germany, Kirchner strove to invent a new style of painting.

The search for a new aesthetic language was a common goal of many artists of the inter-war period and Kirchner approached this endeavor within a vocabulary of motifs already familiar to him. Kirchner's Davos paintings include portraits, landscapes and nudes primarily, depicted in an entirely new way. Line and movement continue to be of paramount importance and are increasingly mined for their inherent formal, rather than descriptive, qualities. His rhythmic, architectonic compositions suggest a Cubist influence, and Kirchner's renewed interest in geometric construction and an odd, almost hallucinatory palette signify a move toward abstraction and 'pure' painting. The formal inventiveness of Kirchner's late paintings is thus related to the efforts of his contemporaries Klee, Picasso, Braque and Matisse, and Kirchner's work demands consideration on par with these great artists.

The Unexpected New: Late Paintings of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner is on view from 18 April to 3 July 2008. The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color catalogue with an essay by Dr. Pamela Kort. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday from 10 am to 6 pm. Please contact Jason Duval at jason@michaelwerner.com for more information