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**Cat. 1**

*Davos in Winter, 1924*

Oil on canvas

68.5 × 93 cm

Gordon 831

Kirchner Museum Davos,  
on permanent loan from a private collection









# KIRCHNER ON A “FAMILY-IMPOSED PATH”

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's interest in a wide range of artistic possibilities had an impact on his immediate surroundings, which he staged as a total artwork. In his Berlin and Dresden studios, as well as in his later residences in Davos, he created artificial living environments that were meticulously thought out and realized. In addition to sculptures and a self-carved bed for his partner, Erna Schilling (1884–1945), Kirchner produced designs for textiles for his interiors. Decorative wall hangings, seat cushions, tablecloths, and an embroidered tent rounded out the styling of these interiors and attested to the artist's strong affinity to architecture. Yet the literature on Kirchner is primarily concerned with Kirchner's other forms of artistic expression, while his interest in textile handicrafts, for instance, takes a back seat. The same is true for his university education, which had a significant impact on his career as an artist and shows particularly in the way he styled his living spaces as total artworks and in how he created his compositions.

## “HE DIDN'T WANT ME TO BECOME A PAINTER, NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES”

Even as a child, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was quite fascinated with being creative, which manifested itself in the continuous production of numerous sketches. Kirchner's parents lived on the second floor of a modern detached residence in Aschaffenburg, directly across from the train station. From his window, the young Kirchner could gaze out over the lively and varied hustle and bustle of the station from an elevated position. This immediate environment exerted a great pull on the boy: “Let me tell you in plain terms how I ended up becoming a painter. From the age of three I always had the desire ... to depict the wonders my eyes saw in nature ... with a red and blue pencil I tried my hand at the locomotives passing by my window and the very large houses ....”<sup>1</sup>

The urban architectural style of Aschaffenburg at the end of the nineteenth century was highly complex and diverse. During Kirchner's childhood, factory buildings and mansion-like residential buildings sprouted up in the vacant areas between the new train station (built in 1884) and the markedly contrasting historic town center. Reflecting contemporary taste, these buildings conformed to the style of historicism, heralding a golden age of Wilhelminian architecture. The monumental and imposing building complexes that emerged in a wide variety of architectural forms undoubtedly left an indelible impression on the four-year-old boy.

An 1884 drawing of a steam locomotive [fig. 1] underscores the adult artist's statement cited above. Astonishingly, the child's gaze by no means focused solely on the row of railroad cars: the main subject of the image is surrounded by hinted-at station architecture, pointing to the young Kirchner's overall view of the scenery.



Kirchner early on developed a desire to pursue his passion professionally. But despite his family's support, his parents were opposed to him studying painting formally. In retrospect, Kirchner blamed this opposition primarily on his father, describing the situation at the time as follows: "I ... spent time drawing, painting, and modeling. My father ... lovingly collected these children's works, but later when, as a twelfth grader, I worked seriously towards becoming an artist, he turned his back on it. He didn't want me to become a painter, not under any circumstances. ... I became one anyway and have never regretted it."<sup>2</sup> His father's strict rejection of formal training as a painter was presumably motivated by social considerations. Hoping to see their son in a long-established and financially secure profession, Kirchner's parents tried to steer his creative talent into a socially accepted direction.

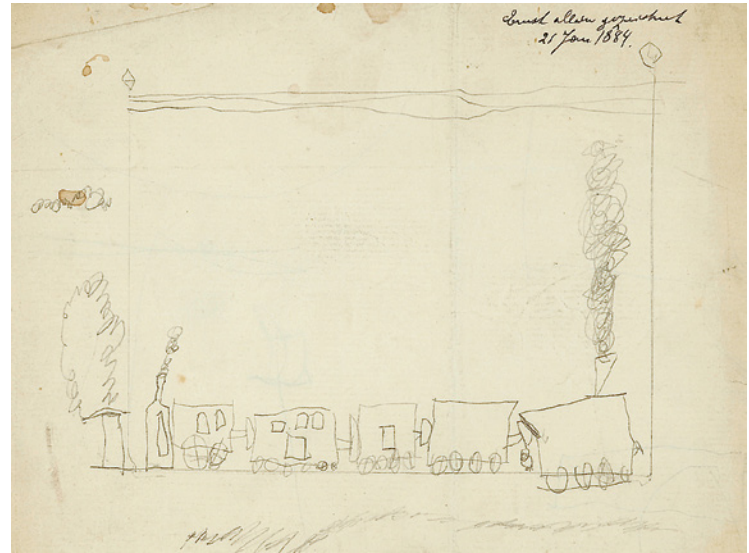


Fig. 1  
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), *Train Station*, childhood drawing, January 21, 1884. Estate of E. W. Kornfeld

## “I PRETENDED TO STUDY ARCHITECTURE THERE”

Seemingly against his will, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner complied with his parents' wishes and enrolled to study architecture in Dresden. Today, this strikes us as a happy compromise, as it both assured Kirchner of the financial support of his parents and allowed him to study a creative subject. Around the turn of the century, architecture emerged from a long slumber, gained artistic status, and experienced a renaissance as the “mother of all arts,”<sup>3</sup> with the result that more and more renowned artists turned to this field. In Dresden, Kirchner had the option of studying architecture either at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts or at the Royal Saxon Technical College. The latter focused on training students to become state-certified engineers. This was what his parents wanted, and so on April 15, 1901, Kirchner embarked on his studies there in the summer semester.

Although his studies in Dresden and in Munich, where he spent a semester “pretend[ing] to study architecture like in Dresden,”<sup>4</sup> are well documented, his architectural training, to date, has received scant attention in the scholarly literature and in exhibitions. Why is that? Partly, surely, because of the deliberate artistic persona Kirchner constructed for himself throughout his life, thereby creating an artistic ideal favorable to him. He redacted his biographical data and artistic successes in publications according to his own ideas. Formal training hardly conformed to the ideal Kirchner pursued of the freedom-loving, self-taught artist, and so after completing his studies, he would hardly ever mention this period of his life. It is therefore all the more astonishing that Kirchner's surviving drawings from his student days and their high-quality execution tell a very different story. Kirchner was, in fact, a diligent and thriving student who successfully finished his architecture degree within the standard period of study.

Kirchner's final year project and 95 student assignments, which he presumably submitted in bundled form for his exams, are extant to this day.



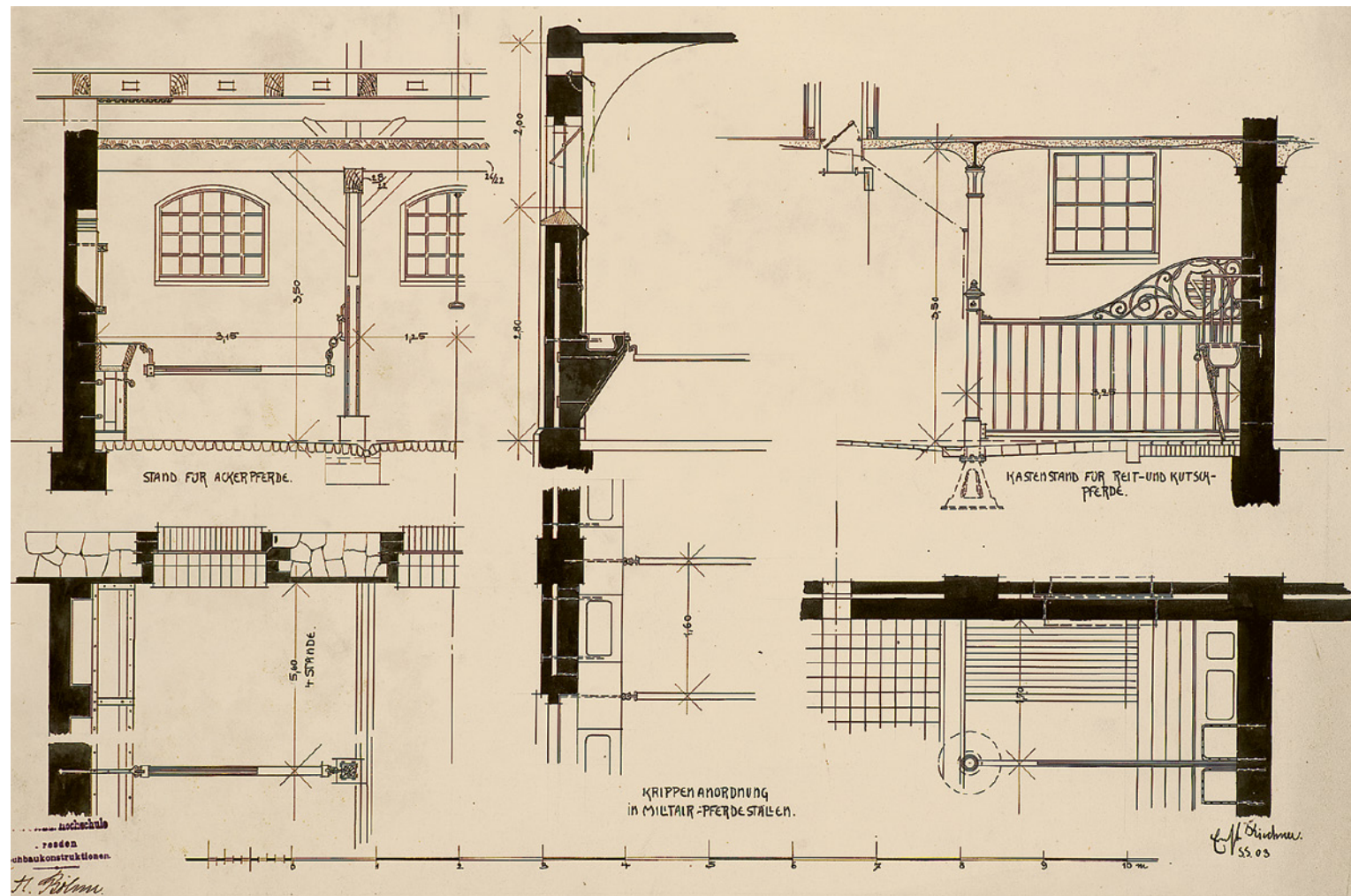
# Cats. 13-14

Configuration of horse mangers in military stables and design for a residential and farm building, 1903

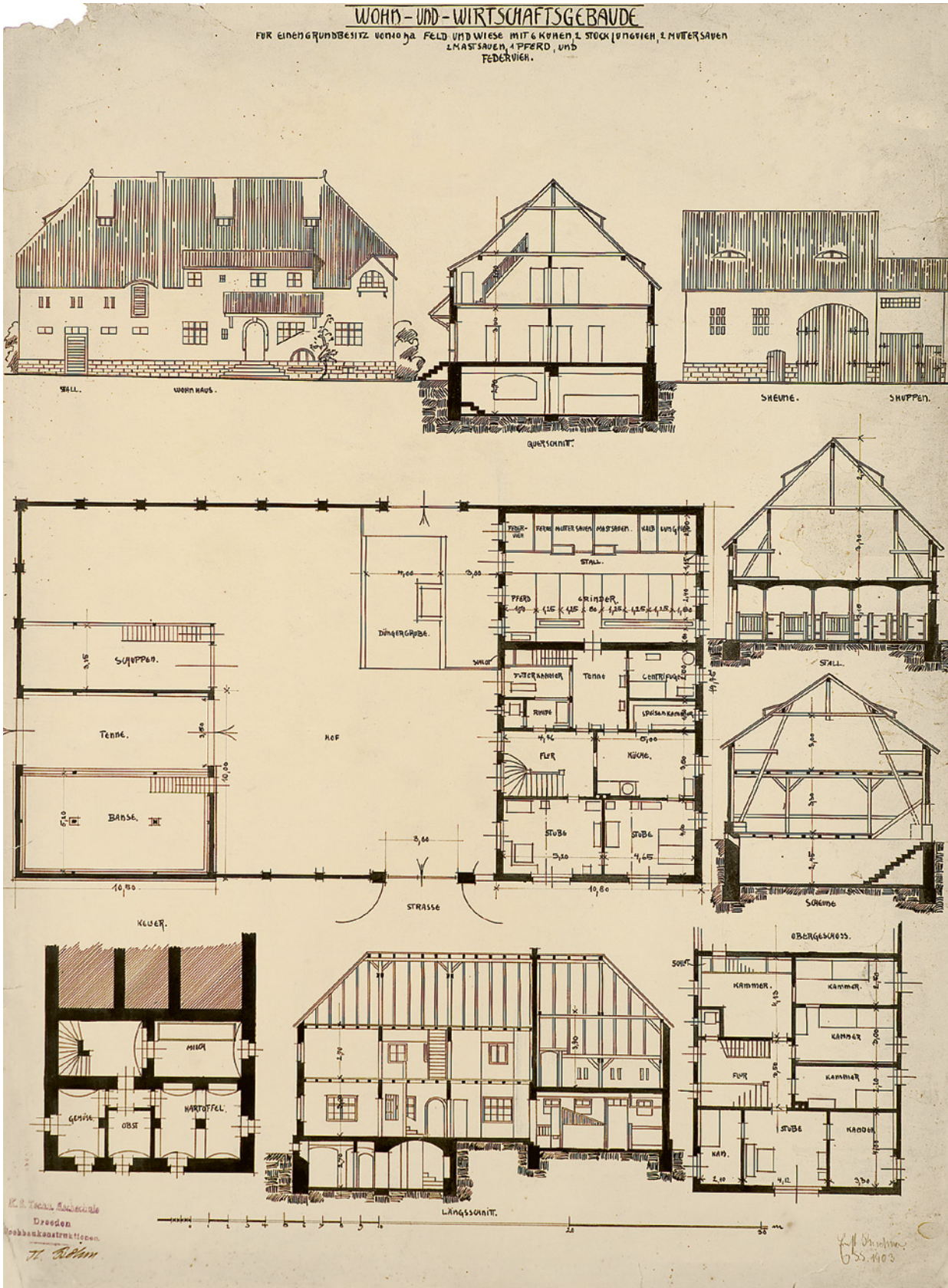
Course Prof. Theodor Böhm: Structural Design Theory, SS 1903

Pen and ink drawing over pencil on vellum

Courtesy Galerie Henze & Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern









# Cat. 23

Student works – design for a museum, 1904/05

Course Prof. Karl Weißbach: Architectural Studio, SS 1904 or WS 1904/05

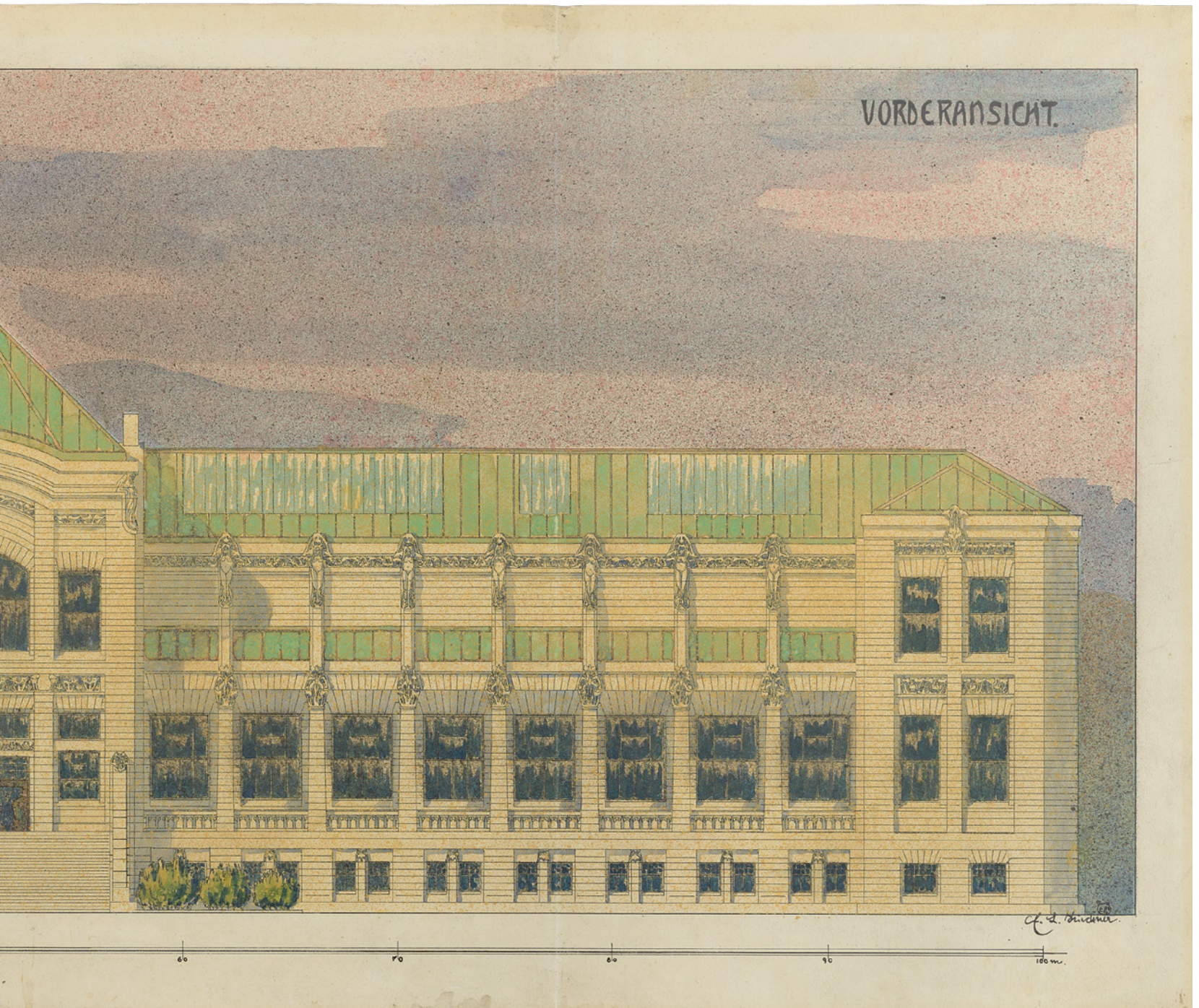
Sheet 1

Pen and ink drawing over pencil, watercolor and spray paint technique on strong vellum

Courtesy Galerie Henze & Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern









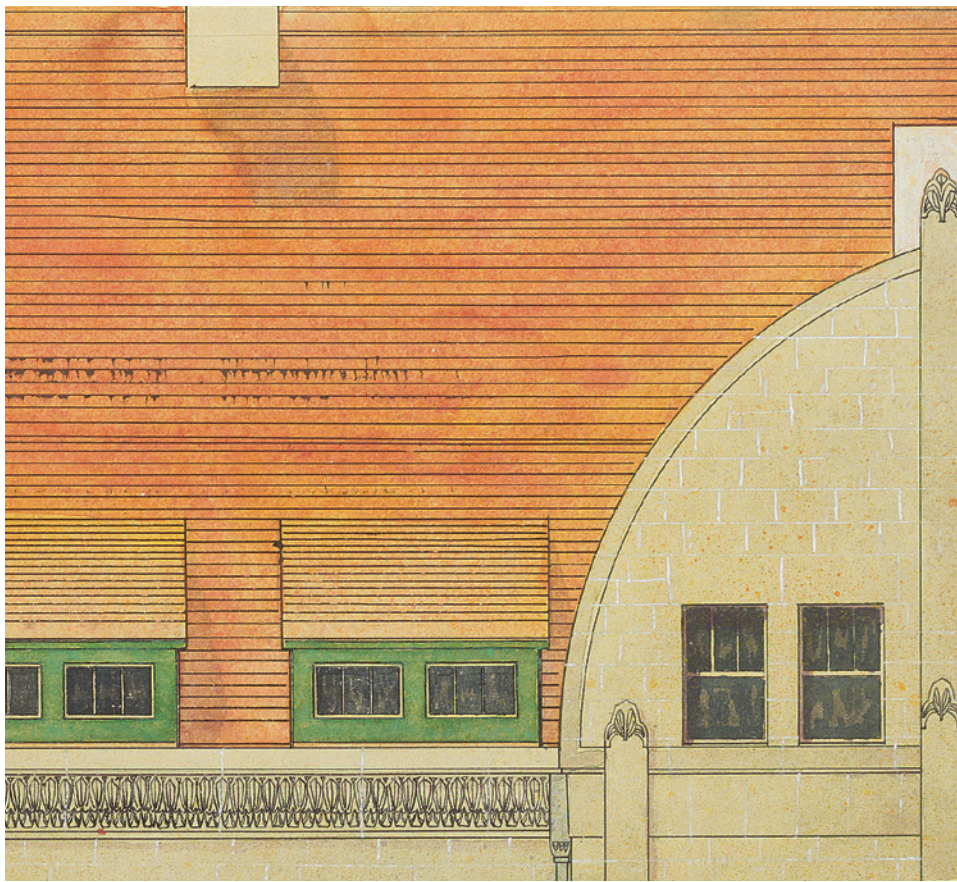


Fig. 3  
Detail of cat. 51



Fig. 4  
Detail of cat. 39

small castle [cat. 75], or be part of the decoration, as in *Entwurf eines Herrenzimmers. Erkerwand des Herrenzimmers* (Design for a Study. Bay Window Wall of the Study) [cat. 41]. An even more subtle reference to human presence is made in *Innenräume. Innenraum mit Liege* (Interiors. Interior with Daybed) [cat. 61], where a steaming pot and cup suggest the direct action of a human being. Repetitions and serial arrangements, especially in wall paneling and wall cabinets, create a certain dynamic in *Perspektivische Ansicht eines Innenraums mit Wandschränken* (Perspective View of an Interior with Wall Cabinets) [cats. 17, 19–20], in *Entwurf für ein Wohnhaus am Berghang* [cat. 70], and in the Hetzer library [cat. 79]. In Kirchner's final year project we also find serial arrangements of architectural elements such as round arches, bays, vaults, or trees [cats. 84–92]. Particularly in the early drawings of his first semesters Kirchner would combine two or more perspectives of a design on one sheet

of paper, as in the designs for *Wohnhaus am Berghang* [cat. 68], *Malerateliers* (Painters' Studios) [cat. 42], and in *Skizze für ein Berghäusel* [cat. 60]; each of these feature multiple views or floor plans for a project on a single sheet. In general, Kirchner learned during his studies to capture, and commit to paper, the same subject from different viewing angles.

Wherever possible, drawings were done in color with strong contrasts, examples being the colored accents in *Entwurf für ein Wohnhaus am Berghang* (Design for a Slope House) [cat. 68], *Entwurf für ein Hotel, Vorderfassade eines Hotels in Sandstein* (Design for a Hotel, Front Façade of a Hotel in Sandstone) [cat. 51], *Entwurf für eine Jugendstilvilla, Seitenansicht* (Design for a Jugendstil Villa, Side View) [cat. 45], where the roof is red; in *Skizze für ein Berghäusel* [cat. 60] where the trees are brownish; in the designs for chandeliers and a grandfather clock [cats. 18, 35–37]; and all over in *Entwurf eines Rauchzimmers* [cat. 32], in *Innenraum mit Liege* [cat. 61], in *Entwurf für ein Herrenzimmer* featuring furniture and wall paneling [cats. 38–41], as well as in the view of *Umbau Hetzer, Bibliothek* [cat. 80] and, finally, in the context of his final year project in *Gesamtplan der Friedhofsanlage* [Cemetery Master Plan] [cat. 85], where Kirchner already used what would become his signature colors.<sup>11</sup>

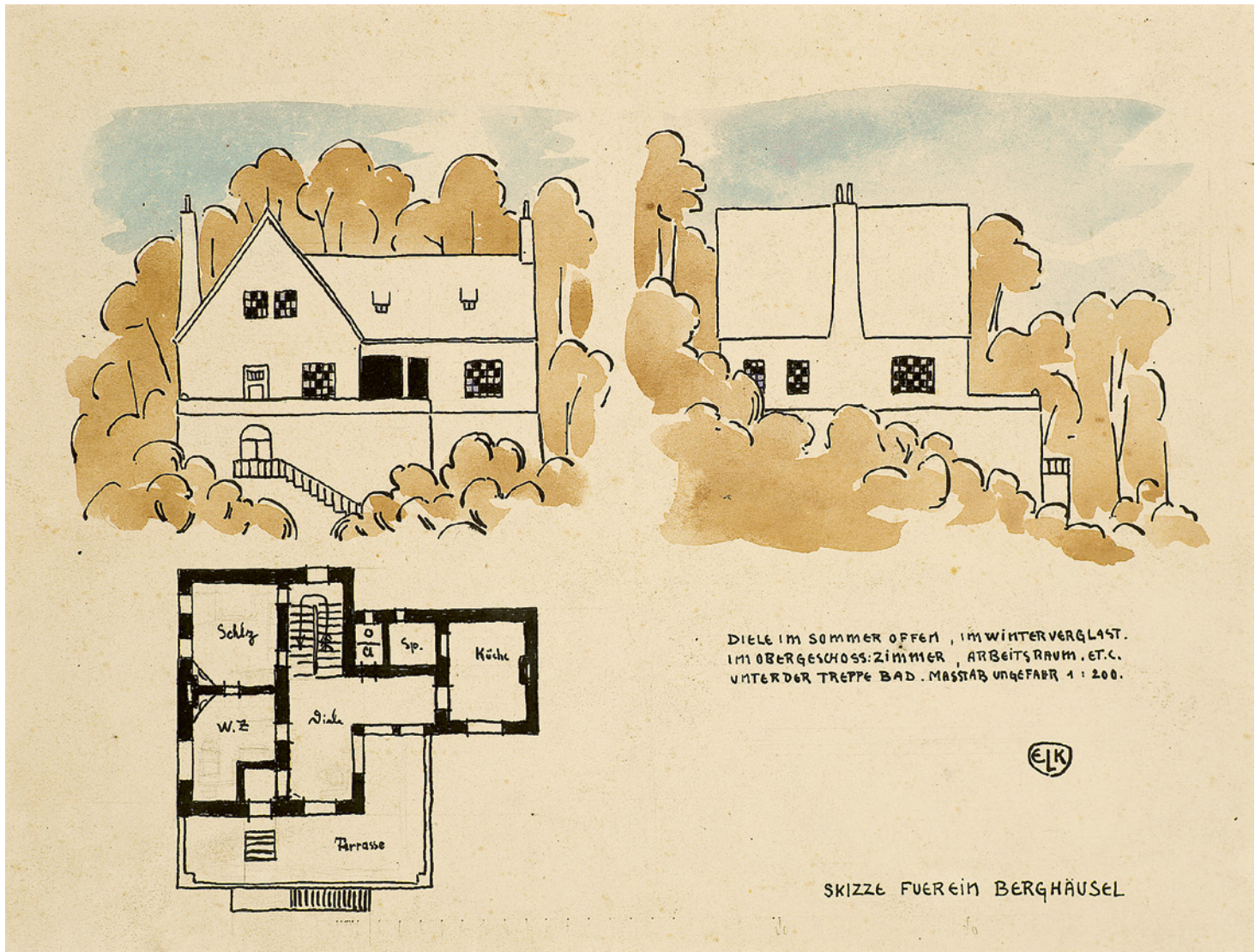
Kirchner particularly liked to render the sky in color. He did so already in *Entwurf für ein Wohnhaus am Berghang* (Design for a Slope House) [cat. 68], *Entwurf für ein Museum* (Design for a Museum) [cat. 23], *Skizze für ein Berghäusel* (Sketch for a Mountain Cottage) [cat. 60], *Schlösschen für einen Kunstliebhaber* (Small Castle for an Art Lover) [cats. 72, 75] and in his designs for a cemetery as part of his final year project [cats. 84–92].

The attention to detail is most impressive in *Schlösschen für einen Kunstliebhaber* (Small Castle for an Art Lover) with the colorful miniature images of the wall coverings, decorations, reliefs, and sculptures in



longitudinal section [cat. 76] and the drawings showing the metope frieze, the pediment reliefs, and the cartouche as well as the roof and the sky in the front view [cat. 75]. This is where Kirchner was best able to express himself and develop his skills.

In all these areas Kirchner freed himself from the strict mannerisms, guidelines, and practices of architectural studies—as also observed retrospectively by his teacher, Professor Fritz Schumacher<sup>12</sup>—and developed his creative streak. In this sense, we can already discern the later artist in his early designs.



### Cat. 60

Drawing for a mountain cottage, ca. 1904

Designs for houses

Pen and ink drawing over pencil, watercolored, on vellum

Courtesy Galerie Henze & Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern



**Cat. 107**

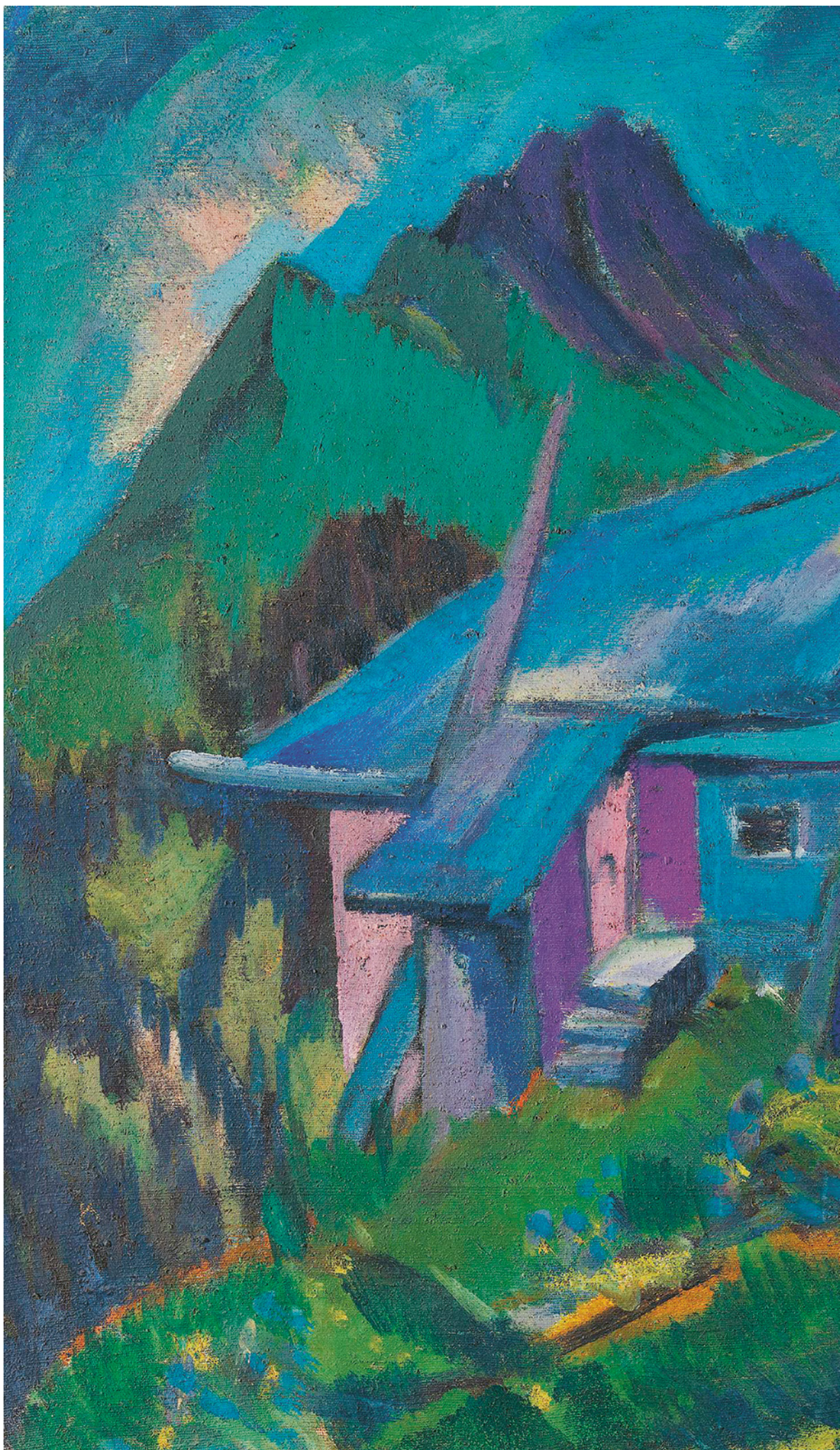
*Mountain Huts and Tinzenhorn, 1919–1920*

Oil on burlap and canvas

88.5 × 120.5 cm

Gordon 601

UlMBERG collection









# ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER'S VISIT TO GERMANY IN 1925–26

The year 1925 began with a bang for Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, even if he was initially unaware of it. On New Year's Eve the Rot-Blau artists' group was founded partly in his honor [fig. 1]—an association of three young Basel artists, Paul Camenisch, Albert Müller, and Hermann Scherer, whom Kirchner had met two years earlier when he had his exhibition at the Kunsthalle there. In a letter to Müller, he wished the group every success in his typical twisted manner: "All the best for your association, which Scherer vaguely told me about. I hope you have more luck with it than I did with the 'Brücke' back then."<sup>1</sup> The founding of the new group marked a turning point for the 44-year-old Kirchner. He had long since ceased to be part of the young generation positioning itself against the "long-established older powers," as the Brücke program had put it almost two decades earlier. Despite his reclusive life in Switzerland, Kirchner was one of the most prominent German artists. His works entered important collections thanks to patrons such as Ludwig and Rosy Fischer, Carl Hagemann, and Karl Ernst Osthaus. He was in contact with the directors and curators of major museums and planned exhibitions in Zurich, Dresden, and Berlin. He also kept in touch with Max Liebermann, the then President of the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin, and five of his works were included in the spring exhibition there in 1925.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile in Davos, Kirchner was working on several landscape paintings, including the large-scale panoramic *Davos mit Kirche; Davos im Sommer* (Davos with Church; Davos in Summer) [cat. 109] and the no less impressive canvas *Sertigtal im Herbst* (Sertig Valley in Autumn) [cat. 110], which he started in October and completed in 1926, after his trip to Germany.

While the landscapes and the rural way of life in the Alps were dominant subjects in the artist's early Swiss years [cats. 107, 108], he became increasingly interested in depicting modern Davos in the mid-1920s. By no means a sleepy enclave, the highest city in Europe was a vibrant health resort boasting numerous sanatoriums and attracted illustrious visitors from all over the world, among them some of the great thinkers of the time, such as Ernst Cassirer, Albert Einstein, and Martin Heidegger. Davos presented itself as a modern town in architectural terms as well. The Davos flat roof, a type of construction promoted by Swiss architect Rudolf Gabarell, already appears in Kirchner paintings such as *Bahnhof Davos* (Davos Station) [cat. 114] and *Davos mit Kirche; Davos im Sommer* [cat. 109]. In the latter, Kirchner places the twisted church tower of St. Johann in the golden section, its lengthy spire reaching to the top edge of the image and banishing Tinzenhorn mountain with its characteristic drop to the background. In a stunning play of colors, mostly vibrant late summer hues, Kirchner shows a deserted cityscape nestled in the vast Alpine landscape, with densely packed rows of houses bounded by the mountainsides. The vertical and horizontal lines of the buildings reveal Kirchner's interest in creating paintings that are more organized and less moment-like, as well as in compositions based on geometric shapes and their lines. By manipulating proportions, Kirchner manages to transform a summery Davos into an urban landscape and merge it with the otherwise dominant mountain



ranges of Landwasser Valley. Kirchner skillfully captures both the spectacular panorama of the Alpine town and its modernity. Strikingly, the colors are more vivid, and the painting style is flatter, compared to his late Expressionist work. Similarly experimental in character, *Sertigtal im Herbst* [cat. 110] offers an artificially constructed bird's eye view of the titular side valley of Landwasser Valley, at whose entrance Kirchner's "Wildboden" house is located. Kirchner presents a fold-out-like, panoramic view from the Wildboden plateau over the sculpture-adorned fence of his house. This view not only shows the nearby Sertigbach stream below Kirchner's house (in reality not visible from this angle) and the point where it flows into the Landwasser river, but also extends far into the valley down to the church in the village of Frauenkirch and even high up to the Stafelalp, where Kirchner had his first Davos residence. In this way, the painter masterfully combines the valley landscape's lines of sight that are normally bounded by mountain ridges and forests into a monumental panorama.



Fig. 1  
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938),  
*Three Artists: Hermann Scherer, Kirchner,  
Paul Camenisch*, 1926 (Gordon 804).  
Kirchner Museum Davos

These are the works Kirchner left behind in Davos in December 1925 to reflect on, further develop, and rethink the already evident changes in his painting on a grand tour through his German past.

## FRANKFURT AM MAIN, CHEMNITZ, DRESDEN, AND BERLIN

It was Kirchner's first trip to Germany since he had left his home country damaged by war seven years earlier to find peace and recovery in the Swiss Alps and get back to creating art again. Kirchner had left behind a country severely wrecked by the First World War that was now being torn apart by radical political forces and undermined by an ailing economy. He kept postponing this journey and became absorbed by the catalogue raisonné, published as *Das Werk Ernst Ludwig Kirchners*, that he was preparing with German art historian Will Grohmann, meticulously going over all the details and having proofs sent to him for correction. In his letters of these months, he repeatedly asked how Germany and his former artist friends would treat him: "I certainly have nothing against the German painters of my former circle, and especially [Otto] Müller [sic!] was very dear to me—he was also the one that was most decent and companionable, except that during the war he spoke out so harshly against me as a traitor to the fatherland, etc., that I thought he would probably be forever hostile to me, which would have been unfortunate, but I couldn't help it. I'm not a soldier and I didn't fit in. I said that honestly and whoever holds that against me, well, let them."<sup>3</sup> He was also worried by the political situation, writing to collector and patron Gustav Schiefler: "The Fehmarn trip is still uncertain. I first want to wait and see whether the election of Hindenburg, insane from a political point of view, doesn't give rise to



Cat. 111

*Königstein Station, 1916*

Oil on canvas

90 × 80 cm

Gordon 469

Ulmborg collection

