

HELMUT KOLLE

Helmut Kollé (24 February 1899 – 17 November 1931) was a German figurative painter. The second son of the bacteriologist Wilhelm Kollé, he was born in Berlin. He studied painting in Frankfurt and later worked in Wiesbaden and Berlin. In 1924 he moved to Paris and died in Chantilly in 1931.

Joie de Vivre and Bitterness - Paintings from the Hartwig Garnerus Collection

The film *Joie de Vivre and Bitterness* focusses on thirty important paintings by Helmut Kollé. It was shot at the home of art collector Hartwig Garnerus and produced by Seeblick.Film, Munich.

Other highlights of the Garnerus Collection – works by Hofer, Girieud, Scharl, Levy, Lohse and Ophey – are hung side by side with Kollé's work. Because of the character of the collection as an ensemble and the hanging arrangements, they also feature in the film. In this context Kollé's paintings demonstrate the extraordinarily expressive impact of his artistic achievement.

The film accompanies Garnerus on a tour of his collection. Kollé's paintings are unmatched in 20th-century German art. They are images of unfulfilled longing in a unique portrayal of physical strength and beauty. His artistic career spanned just seven years. In this brief period he was to consolidate the stylistic and formal elements of his art. His images of the human figure reflect a breadth of experience and activity that meld unfulfilled longing and beauty with self-assertiveness, rebellion, anger, melancholy and an acute awareness of mortality - French *peinture* intermixed with German sentiment.

The existentiality of the linkage between Kollé's own life and his oeuvre, the freedom of his approach in formal artistic terms and his disciplined resolution of artistic problems catalyze classical traditions without overlooking cubist and expressionist influences.

Hartwig Garnerus writes: "Kollé's images of the human figure, for the most part shown in isolation, provide the viewer with a possible alter ego – conferring on it something of an invulnerable persona. We are shown idealized figures charged with emotion and jarring beauty counterposed to Kollé's own physical fragility. Kollé conjures up the tradition of classical ideals with an affecting *noblesse* in both conception and style, and – relevant today – a clearly perceived '*joie de vivre*, combined with an inrush of bitterness.' (Baudelaire) – images of the human figure in poetry."

Kolle enjoyed the patronage of many prominent figures in the arts, among them Jean Cocteau, Waldemar George, Klaus Mann, Pablo Picasso and Wilhelm Uhde. Between the wars Kolle was the only German artist in Paris to be exhibited regularly and to be the subject of critical analysis. Leading collectors in Paris, Brussels, Berlin and New York actively promoted his work. His corpus of oil paintings, although not large, is of exceptional art-historical importance.

"Rediscovery of Kolle's work is long overdue – rediscovery of his moving *noblesse* of approach, his assured touch both in stylistic and formal terms, his dandyish elegance, his playfulness, his waxing lyricism combined with aggressive machismo, rebelliousness and abandon – and, in his best work, his stark and shocking humanity. He was cut down in his prime." (H. Garnerus)

The film provides a perceptive and quietly poetic documentation of the oeuvre of a German artist working in 1920s Paris.

Work in public collections

Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz; Städelsches Kunstinstitut Frankfurt; Musée de Grenoble; Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum, Hagen; Hamburger Kunsthalle; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Musée de l'Hôtel Sandelin, Saint Omer; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Cologne, Museum Ludwig.

Retrospectives have been held at museums and public collections in: Chemnitz, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hanover and Munich. Kolle's work has also been shown at leading galleries in Paris, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Munich and Milan.

The paintings featured in the film have been shown in Berlin, Chemnitz, Frankfurt, Hagen, Hamburg, Hanover, London, Marbach, Milan, Munich, New York, Paris and Zurich.

Recent publications

Hartwig Garnerus, *Der Maler Helmut Kolle 1899-1931*, Munich 1994

Helmut Kolle, Ein Deutscher in Paris, exhibition catalogue, Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, Museum Gunzenhauser, 2010

Catalogue raisonné par Philippe Chabert, Paris, Sorbonne, 1981, not published.

Text: H. Garnerus