

Release Date: December 20, 2002

RARE KIRCHNER SCULPTURE ACQUIRED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART; ON VIEW IN MAJOR KIRCHNER RETROSPECTIVE OPENING MARCH 2003



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Head of a Woman (Erna)*, 1913
carved and painted oak
Patrons' Permanent Fund
© Ingeborg and Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

Washington, D.C.-A rare wood bust by German artist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner of Erna Schilling, his lifelong companion and muse, has been acquired by the National Gallery of Art with funds from the Patrons' Permanent Fund. The bust *Erna* (1913), hand-carved and partially painted, will be on view as part of **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1880-1938**, a major retrospective premiering at the National Gallery of Art on March 2, 2003. *Erna* is one of four Kirchner figurative sculptures in American collections and the first on the East Coast.

"Kirchner's sculpture demonstrates his approach to life as a total work of art," says Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to the Patrons' Permanent Fund for our first acquisition of a Kirchner sculpture, an important addition to our collection of Kirchner paintings, prints, and drawings."

A prolific creator of paintings, drawings, and prints, Kirchner produced some 140

sculptural works, primarily figurative sculptures carved in wood, but also some carved furniture, utensils, and silver jewelry. However, only about 80 works remain today; many of his sculptures were destroyed by the Nazis in their campaign against "degenerate art" and others were destroyed by Kirchner himself to save them from falling into Nazi hands. The 14-inch-high *Erna* is the earliest of only three known portrait sculptures of Kirchner's muse and model.

Erna Schilling met Kirchner in 1912 and became the subject of many of his paintings, drawings, and graphic works, as well as his committed partner until his death in 1938. The portrait bust *Erna* was executed in 1913, at the height of Kirchner's productive Berlin years, and reflects Kirchner's admiration for African and Polynesian (Easter Island) art. While vacationing with Erna on the Baltic island of Fehmarn, Kirchner was intrigued by a piece of oak driftwood he found on the beach and proceeded to carve the portrait. Kirchner was proud of the bust; he sent a postcard picture of it to a friend in the summer of 1913 and wrote about it in a subsequent letter. In 1923 Kirchner noted in his diary, "The love which the artist felt for the girl who was his companion and helper, flowed over the carved figure...."

Kirchner wanted to have his art clearly understood. To that end, he wrote about himself under the pseudonym "Louis de Marsalle," a fictional French art critic. In an article entitled, "Concerning the Sculpture of E. L. Kirchner" in 1925, "Marsalle" mentions *Erna* as exemplary of his belief that carving by hand was superior to casting: "How different that sculpture appears when the artist himself has formed it with his hands out of the genuine material, each curvature and cavity formed by the sensitivity of the creator's hand." Kirchner's article also comments on his use of paint: "He (Kirchner) also places color in the service of his sculpture.... The richness of color of Medieval sculptures seems about to rise again...."

About the Kirchner Exhibition

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1880-1938, the first major international exhibition of paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures by the innovative German artist to be seen in the United States in more than 30 years, will premiere at the National Gallery of Art, East Building, March 2 through June 1, 2003. It will contain both well-known

masterpieces and outstanding works that have never been lent or shown publicly before. The Washington exhibition surveys his career but will focus primarily on works created from 1908 to 1920, at the height of his achievement, with particular emphasis on his prewar years in Dresden and Berlin and his early years in Davos, Switzerland. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1880-1938, is being organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

The exhibition is made possible by the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation.

Following the Washington showing, a different version of the exhibition will be on view in London from June 28 through September 21, 2003.

###

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov