

## Press Release

# Clifford HOLMEAD Phillips (1889–1975) A Unique American Expressionist between the Old and the New World

With the **Joseph Hierling collection** on permanent loan, the **Kunsthalle Schweinfurt** provides the artists of the 'lost generation' with an impressive platform. With this exhibition they are presenting a remarkable rediscovery: the distinctive works of HOLMEAD, who was on the verge of an international breakthrough between the 1920s and 1940s. American and European museums exhibited his paintings as well as major art galleries such as **Bernheim-Jeune**, Paris, **Durand-Ruel** or the **Montross Gallery** in New York. Two of his paintings were included in the **Société Anonyme: Museum of Modern Art**, founded in 1920 by Katherine S. Dreier, Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. Yet in April 1940, his exhibition 'The Human Drama' had to be closed down instantly in Oslo following the German occupation.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, expressionism had created an entirely new view of the world. That was changed once again in 1925 by the important artists of the generation born around 1900: they made use of the Classic Modernists' vocabulary of forms and found a pictorial approach that can be summarised by the term 'Expressive Realism'. While after World War II abstract, informal expressions were fostered in the West and socialist realism in the East, the general public took hardly any notice of the achievements of the representatives of Expressive Realism, of whom HOLMEAD was one. Hence they became the 'lost generation' but beginning in the 1980s, there has been a renewed interest in their art.

HOLMEAD, as he called himself after his return to the USA in 1941, was born in 1889 in Shippensburg/Pennsylvania and decided to become a painter after his first visit to Europe in 1912. His frequent travels between the Old World and the New World at a time when art on both continents broke completely new ground were a contributing factor to his entire oeuvre, showing features of American tradition as well as European modernism. Initially, the Old Masters of previous centuries had left their mark on him, then his paintings showed influences of the American 'Hudson River School' and later he was affected by his frequent stays at the East Coast and with the Provincetown 'Art Colony', Cape Cod. After his second stay in Europe in 1924, HOLMEAD's art underwent a major change, however. Rather than by idyllic wide-open spaces, he was now fascinated by the disconcerting reality of European cities as well as the alarming political developments.

Although his paintings are influenced by expressive realism, he himself described his style as 'crude expressionism', a raw version of expressionism without frills. His style is idiosyncratic, seemingly untamed, rough, rich in emotions and the sum of an eventful life, characterized by contrasts. Five years before his death, he embarked on a new start. His brilliant late works show that he had found his very own form of abstract expressionism, 'short-hand painting'. Character heads, swiftly created by a few spatula strokes, form the essence of his painting life. In his paintings he dramatically unfolded a sarcastic clarity, his eye on what peoples' faces and gestures reveal and he didn't paint the beautiful portraits of his early years but characters in a grotesque human comedy: intellectuals with egg-shaped heads, ghostly old people, pompous people, vain women or fat gourmands. In some faces greed, an obsession with power, smugness, heartlessness and slyness can be recognized, in others friendliness, kindness, sadness or bitterness about having missed out, being disregarded or hurt. These aren't caricatures of anonymous people he met on his walks, they are generalising and disturbing abbreviations of what he had seen in those people with his observant, disillusioned eyes. HOLMEAD's sarcastic distance to mankind is conspicuous but this distance is not marked by bitter contempt, instead it shows cheerful irony and sometimes also humour. These paintings join spontaneity, tremendous artistic experience and maturity.

The **Kunsthalle Schweinfurt** curates the exhibition in cooperation with Joseph Hierling and the administrators of HOLMEAD's estate. It shows around 100 works from the areas 'Landscapes', 'Views of Cities' and 'Religious Themes'. A special focus is on 'Heads'.

**29 July to 18 September 2016**

**Kunsthalle Schweinfurt**

Rüfferstraße 4 | 97421 Schweinfurt | Germany

**For further information and photographs please contact:**

Birgid Groscurth

Ars Vivendi – Kunst, Kultur, Kommunikation

Phone **+49 (0)69 / 74 30 84 44**

E-Mail [b.groscurth@arsvivendi-salonkultur.de](mailto:b.groscurth@arsvivendi-salonkultur.de)

[www.kunsthalle-schweinfurt.de](http://www.kunsthalle-schweinfurt.de)

[www.holmead.de](http://www.holmead.de)