

Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile

By Megan R. Luke

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German artist Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) is best known for his pioneering work in fusing collage and abstraction, the two most transformative innovations of twentieth-century art. Considered the father of installation art, Schwitters was also a theorist, a Dadaist, and a writer whose influence extends from Robert Rauschenberg and Eva Hesse to Thomas Hirschhorn. But while his early experiments in collage and installation from the interwar period have garnered much critical acclaim, his later work has generally been ignored. In the first book to fill this gap, Megan R. Luke tells the fascinating, even moving story of the work produced by the aging, isolated artist under the Nazi regime and during his years in exile.

Combining new biographical material with archival research, Luke surveys Schwitters's experiments in shaping space and the development of his *Merzbau*, describing his haphazard studios in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom and the smaller, quieter pieces he created there. She makes a case for the enormous relevance of Schwitters's aesthetic concerns to contemporary artists, arguing that his later work provides a guide to new narratives about modernism in the visual arts. These pieces, she shows, were born of artistic exchange and shaped by his rootless life after exile, and they offer a new way of thinking about the history of art that privileges itinerancy over identity and the critical power of humorous inversion over unambiguous communication. Packed with images, *Kurt Schwitters* completes the narrative of an artist who remains a considerable force today.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Luke is particularly adept at operationalizing the artist's writings to support a compelling interpretation of individual artworks and to subvert the idea that study of his late work (and perhaps such work by many artists) is unproductive. . . . Recommended.”
(*Choice*)

“[O]ffers a refreshing critical perspective. . . . Luke achieves a lucid reappraisal of [Schwitters's] work of exile.”
(*Times Higher Education*)

“*Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile* is an excellent study of a deeply fascinating artist, and has important things to say about the history of modernism.”

(*Visual Studies*)

“Luke’s important new study of Kurt Schwitters’s late work provides a much-needed reassessment of an important modernist artist who spent the last eleven years of his life in situations of political dislocation and exile. . . . This publication aptly testifies to her familiarity with heretofore little-known elements of his archive and the considerable light they throw upon the evolution of his work and thought in the last two decades of his life.”
(*Burlington Magazine*)

“Compelling. . . . There may be no way of speaking of Schwitters in exile without pathos. . . . Luke’s study, always restrained, precise, and scholarly, demonstrates that pathos can, under certain circumstances, be put to analytical and critical use.”
(*CAA Reviews*)

“A surprising and penetrating account of ‘Merz,’ this book gives Schwitters his rightful place at the very heart of the theorization of modernism and offers one of the most illuminating accounts I have come across of the implications of his practice for the intersections of art and identity.”
(*Michael White, University of York*)

“This is a powerful and exceptionally articulate treatment of a complex and fascinating artist whose work is diverse and often eccentric, but also important and extraordinarily influential in its time and after. No other scholar has granted Schwitters’s late work the depth of appreciation and importance that Luke accords the output of this period. She brings to this project a keen sensitivity to the formal issues that lie at the heart of Schwitters’s work and ideas across his entire career. Her book makes a significant contribution to the literature on Schwitters and should be read by scholars and students of both modern and postmodern art.”
(*Nancy J. Troy, Stanford University*)

“This book joins rigorous scholarship and rich close readings, providing readers with a compelling and comprehensive new interpretation of Kurt Schwitters’s artistic, literary, and theoretical work. But it does much more than that. Questioning the art-historical preference for beginnings, it looks at Dada, constructivism, and other crucial moments of avant-garde art from the viewpoint of the aging and exiled

artist. This change of perspective offers a lesson of far-reaching significance for our increasingly dis- tant take on twentieth-century art: that modernism itself persevered and thrived thanks to engaging deeply with its own increasingly remote past.”
(Ralph Ubl, University of Basel)

About the Author

Megan R. Luke is assistant professor of art history at the University of Southern California. She lives in Los Angeles.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Richard Williams:

This Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile book is not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you have by reading this book is definitely information inside this publication incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. This Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile without we comprehend teach the one who reading through it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't be worry Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile can bring any time you are and not make your bag space or bookshelves' turn into full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even telephone. This Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile having very good arrangement in word and also layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

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