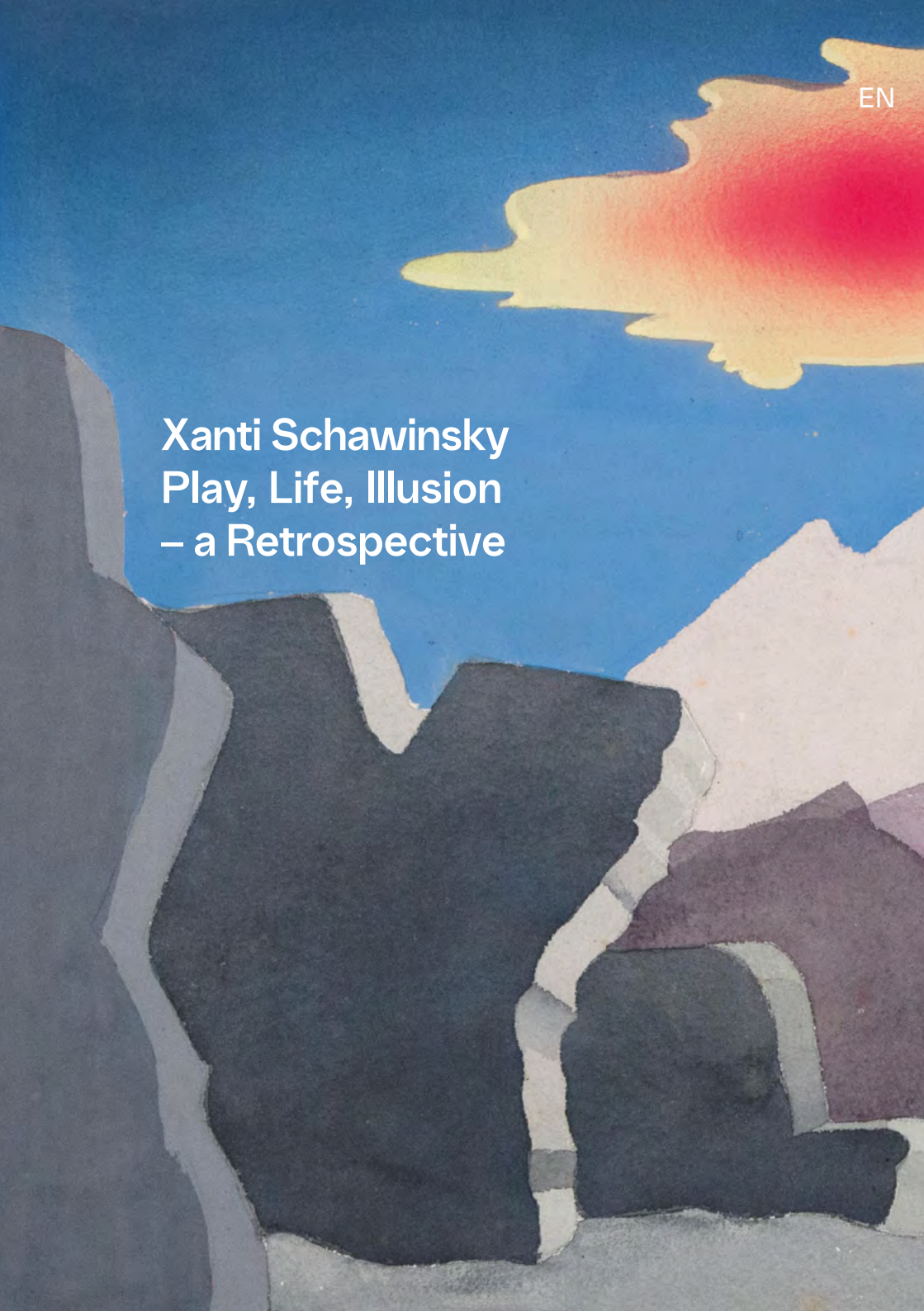
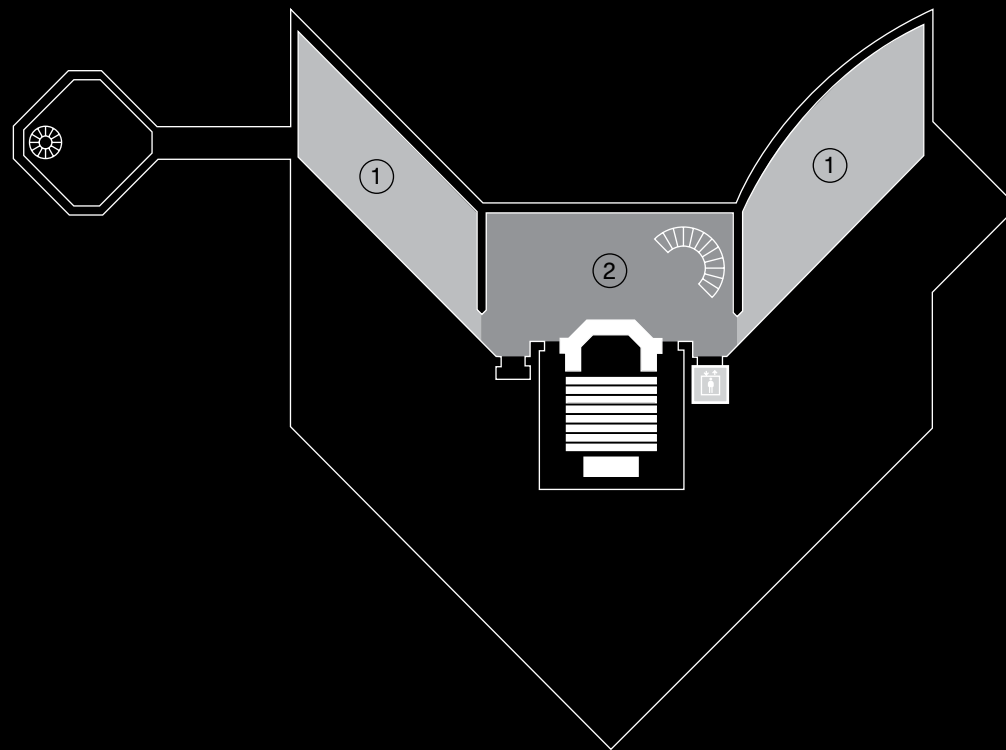




EN

Xanti Schawinsky
Play, Life, Illusion
– a Retrospective



① **Xanti Schawinsky**
Play, Life, Illusion – a Retrospective
 Galleries Level -1

② **Monster Chetwynd**
Xanti Shenanigans
 Foyer

MUDAM

Xanti Schawinsky **Play, Life, Illusion – a Retrospective**

12.07.2024 — 05.01.2025

Invited curator
 Raphael Gygax

Coordination
 Christophe Gallois

Production
 Boris Reiland, David Celli, Richard Goedert, Lourindo Soares

The exhibition is organised by Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean and the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, in collaboration with the Estate Xanti Schawinsky.

The exhibition is supported by

ART FOUNDATION
MENTOR LUCERNE

MUDAM



T. Lux Feininger, *Bauhaus Balconies* (Alexander (Xanti) Schawinsky on a Bauhaus Balcony), 1928–9
Courtesy The Estate of T. Lux Feininger

Introduction

This is the first retrospective dedicated to the Swiss American artist Alexander 'Xanti' Schawinsky (1904, Basel – 1979, Locarno) outside his native country, Switzerland.

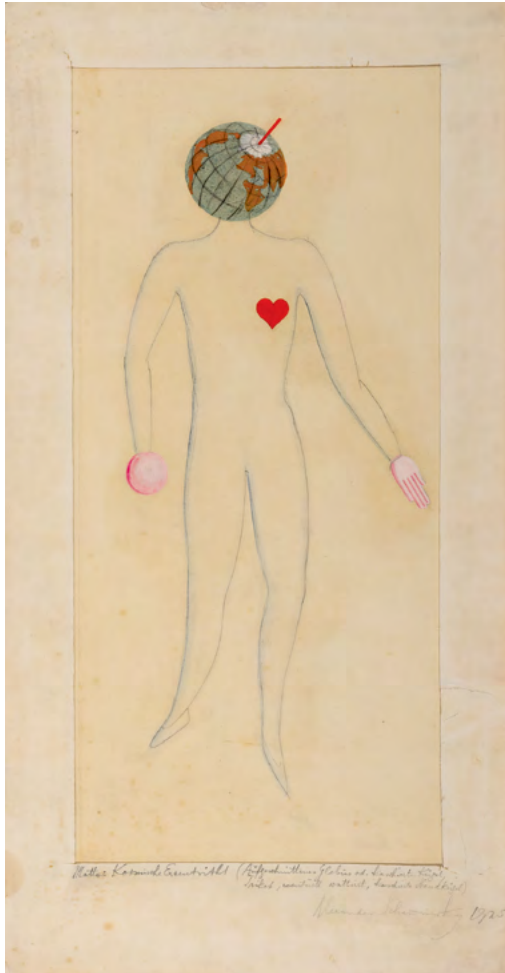
Marked by the spirit of the Bauhaus, where the artist studied in the 1920s, and of the Black Mountain College (USA), where he taught in the latter half of the 1930s, Schawinsky's work is characterised by its multidisciplinary nature: theatre, scenography, photography, graphic design, painting and typography are among the fields the artist explored during a career spanning six decades.

Formally diverse and guided by constant experimentation, Schawinsky's work bears close and varied connections with main movements of pre- and post-war modernism in the United States and Europe – the continent the artist left to escape Nazism and fascism in 1936, and where he returned to in the 1960s. His practice is emblematic of the transatlantic artistic exchanges sparked by the Second World War that left a lasting impression on art history, of which Schawinsky was a key player.

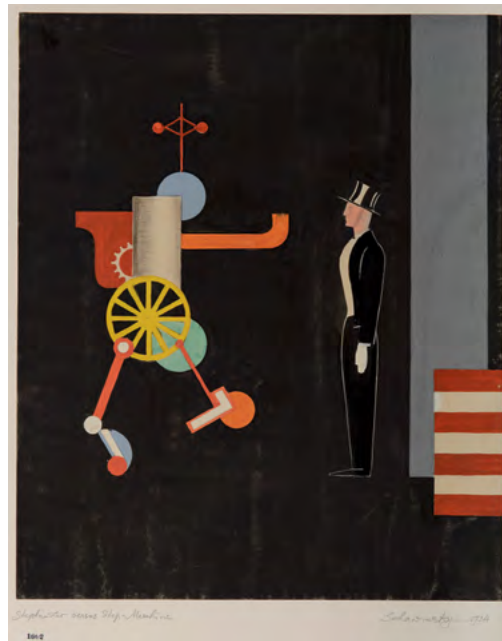
Xanti Schawinsky: Play, Life, Illusion – a Retrospective covers Schawinsky's artistic trajectory from his early pieces, driven by concerns around scenic space and the relationship between man and machine, to the pictorial work he developed from the 1940s onwards, gradually integrating a processual and performative approach to the medium of painting.

The exhibition also highlights the graphic artwork that Schawinsky created during the time he spent in Milan (1933–6), as well as his experimental pieces in the field of theatre around his concept of 'Spectodrama', through which he wanted to gather 'colour and shape, movement and lights, sound and words, pantomime and music, graphic art and improvisation'. The pioneering role that Schawinsky played in the development of performance art still echoes in the artistic practice of today.

Situated in Mudam's Foyer, the space that connects the two galleries of Schawinsky's retrospective, British artist Monster Chetwynd (1973, London) was invited to create a new installation in response to Schawinsky's oeuvre. With a similar transdisciplinary approach, *Xanti Shenanigans* borrows from Schawinsky's motifs and artistic principles, while adapting them to Chetwynd's own visual and performative universe.



Motto: Kosmische Exzentrizität, 1925



Steptänzer versus Steppmaschine, 1924

The exhibition

1. The Bauhaus years (1924–9)

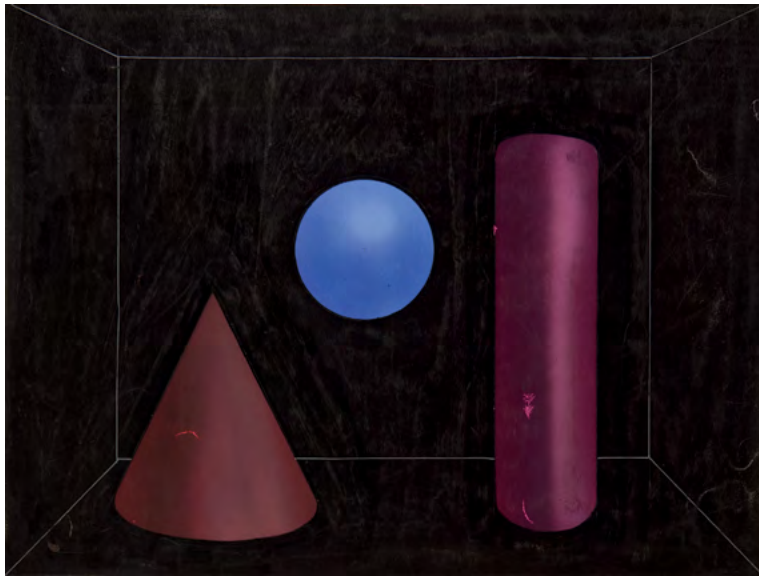
In 1924, at the age of twenty, Xanti Schawinsky began his studies at the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany. Founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus was a multidisciplinary school that is now considered one of the main hubs of architecture, visual arts, theatre and design in the twentieth century and one of the birthplaces of modern art and the avant-garde movements. Among Schawinsky's teachers were painter Paul Klee (1879–1940), architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969) and painter and photographer László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946).

At the Bauhaus, which moved from Weimar to Dessau in 1925, Schawinsky was mainly involved in the theatre workshop led by Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943). It was at this time that Schawinsky began to work on his concept of 'Spectodrama' – a forerunner of total theatre –, and it was not long before he also brought his experiments to the stage. The broad themes that would be present in his future work could already be seen here in an embryonic form, namely the elaboration of dramatic spaces and a concern with the relationship between man and machine. Parallel to his studies, his stage experimentations and his paintings, Schawinsky devoted part of his time to his passion for music, playing the saxophone in the Bauhaus orchestra. In 1926, he worked for one season as a set designer at the municipal theatre in Zwickau (Germany). Upon his return to the Bauhaus in 1927, he gave courses based on the practical experience he had gained there.

Focus 1.1: *Steptänzer versus Steppmaschine* (1924)

These two preparatory drawings for the painting *Steptänzer versus Steppmaschine* [Tap Dancer versus Tap Machine] (1924) juxtapose the figure of a tap dancer, symbolising the 'creative man', with that of an automaton, the 'tap machine'. This machine first appeared in Schawinsky's play *Feminine Repetition*, performed on 20 March 1926 and described on the invitation as 'poignant, typochal and normative, as tap-eccentricity, animal drama, ballet deux, salon play, stereotypism, as weaving in the forest, Uncle Lala in the schoolyard, abstraction, poetry and crime symphony'.

In this ballet-like pantomime, Schawinsky himself plays the role of a tap dancer, wearing tails and a top hat, in dialogue with a tap machine of his own design. The Bauhaus encouraged the use of new technologies in artistic production, and the notion of the machine was one that would remain with Schawinsky right throughout his life, appearing in many of his works, including the processual paintings he began creating in the 1940s.



Spectodrama – Illusion des Körperlichen 1 (perspektivisch) und 2 (unperspektivisch), 1926 (detail)

Focus 1.2: the theatrical works of the Bauhaus years

The theatrical works Schawinsky created during his years at the Bauhaus were typically short, vaudevillian, one-act plays, 'somewhere between spectacle, spatial play and anti-Faustian farce'. In these pieces, the actors interact with, or hide behind, geometric and colourful set components, moving them around in grotesque ways. The stage is populated by figurative constructions which, though recognisable as schematic representations of the human body, are constantly bringing this interpretation into question through their incomplete and ambiguous nature. These attempts – sometimes playful, sometimes ironic – to represent the human form using precise, simplified geometries reflect of a rational vision of the world that was characteristic of the Bauhaus from 1923 onwards, in keeping with their motto 'Art and technology: a new unity'. The plays, staged with nearly no rehearsals, were set to minimalist music. They left plenty of room for improvisation and dealt with whatever themes were 'causing a stir' at the Bauhaus at the time, such as 'mocking discussions of new or old materials, seen in a new light: the building blocks of an emerging philosophy of the functional, the mechanical and the mechanised – of an existence driven by electricity...'. (Xanti Schawinsky)



T. Lux Feininger, *Untitled (Scene from Olga Olga)*, 1928
Courtesy of The Estate of T. Lux Feininger

Focus 1.3: *Olga Olga* (1928)

The play *Olga Olga*, which premiered on 21 February 1928, was one of the high points of Schawinsky's theatrical work at the Bauhaus. The play revolves around the actions of the dancer and ballet mistress Manda von Kreibitz (1901–89). Three masked male performers – Oskar Schlemmer, Hermann Rösler (1906–34) and T. Lux Feininger (1910–2011) – act in the style of commedia dell'arte, but in a somewhat surreal, Dadaist fashion, with no recognisable plot emerging from the wordplay and often nonsensical sound poetry. Schawinsky also appeared in the play, dressed in white, wearing a sort of Tyrolean hat, a pointed beard and a bathing suit. The work did not offer definitive interpretations: Schawinsky wanted to create a space for association where it was up to the audience to project meaning. The piece can be seen as a precursor to performance art, which would not become an art form until several decades later. In contrast with Oskar Schlemmer's 'sculptural' theatre, *Olga Olga* is marked by dynamism, chance and a form of queerness.



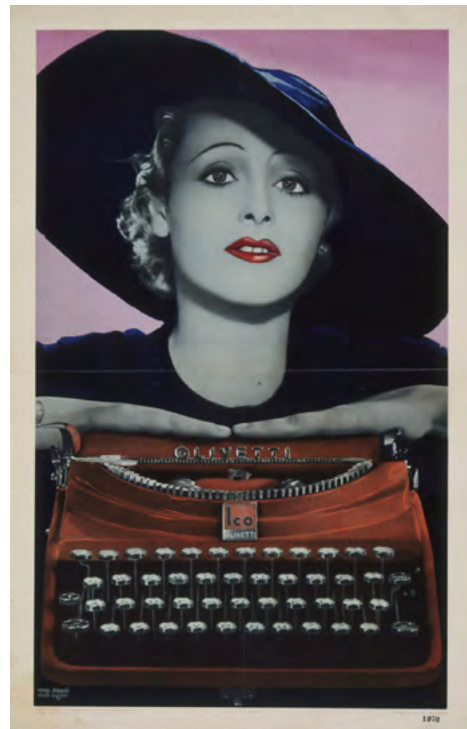
Untitled, c. 1930

Focus 1.4: The Album

Many of the leading figures of the Bauhaus retrospectively compiled what are known as 'albums', made up of photographs and other ephemera. Schawinsky created his Bauhaus album after leaving the institution in 1929. It is likely that he did not produce the first sheets until the early 1930s, perhaps even after 1936, when he emigrated to the United States. It is not a bound book, but a folder containing collages that are all in the same format. The photographs and other documents used are not simply juxtaposed with one another: each sheet is an autonomous graphic composition. The images selected are from different periods and it is often difficult to determine the context of specific motifs, perhaps because they are both personal memories and artistic and graphic compositions. Images of friends and colleagues from the Bauhaus or Schawinsky's family life intermingle with references to his artistic work and photos taken during trips or festivities. Only six of the album's seventy sheets are shown here, but they offer a unique insight into Schawinsky's Bauhaus years, during which he strove to dissolve the boundary between art and life.



Advertising for "Illy Caffè", 1934



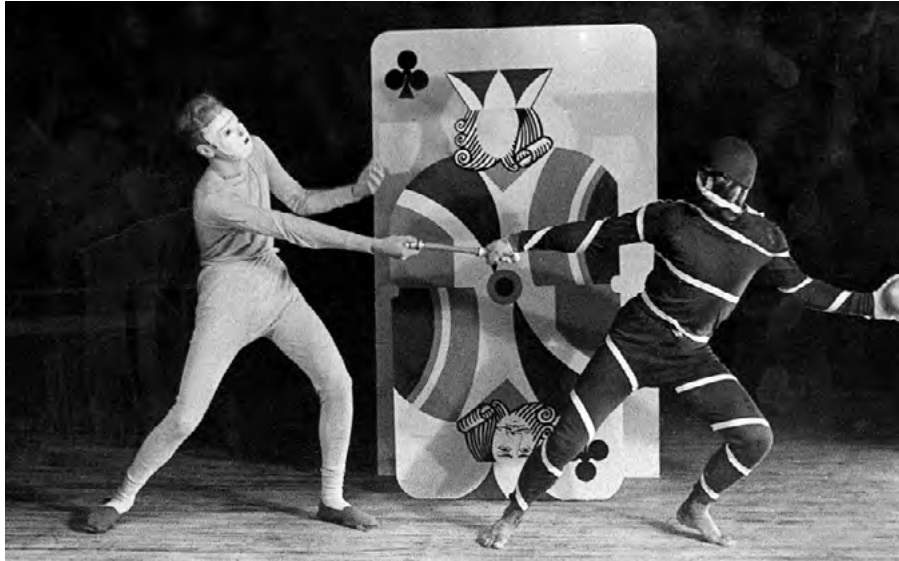
Advertising for "Olivetti", 1933

2. Graphic arts: Milan (1933–6) and New York (early 1940s)

After attacks by the National Socialist press began in 1931 and a wave of political arrests ensued, Schawinsky fled Germany in 1933. He went first to Switzerland, where he worked in Zurich and Ascona, before continuing to Milan later that year. There, he made a living mainly as a graphic designer. With his innovative, Bauhaus-influenced approach to typography and photography, Schawinsky contributed to the renewal of visual advertising in Italy. During this period, he also created several typefaces, some of which have since been digitised (for example, under the name Xanti32). Numerous commissions for Studio Boggeri – for brands such as Cinzano, Motta, Sanpellegrino and Olivetti – brought him recognition and commercial success.

It was also around this time that a small group around Walter Gropius, including Schawinsky, came up with the idea of reopening the Bauhaus in Italy in a new form. To bring this project to fruition, they were willing to work together with the government of Benito Mussolini (1883–1945). In their attempts to get the regime on side, the members of the Bauhaus became blind to the political consequences of colluding with Mussolini. However, with the mounting political repression in the country, the project ultimately fell apart. Given the historical and political context, it is difficult to know how to interpret Schawinsky's cover design for a 1934 issue of the fascist magazine *La rivista illustrata del Popolo d'Italia* and the poster bearing Mussolini's likeness that it originally contained. Was this a concession made by the artist to the fascist regime to be able to continue working freely? Or was it an assignment carried out under duress and against his political convictions either due to his professional relationship with Studio Boggeri or out of material need?

A few years later, when Schawinsky was living in New York during the war, he worked as a graphic designer again, mainly on ad campaigns – for Bourjois perfumes, for example – but also for the U.S. Army. He was also involved in the 'Artists for Victory' organisation, which issued a series of postage stamps designed by artists, the proceeds of which went to the American war effort during the Second World War.



Danse Macabre, 1938 (detail)



Spectodrama – 8 (building tensional), 1925–37

3. Black Mountain College (1936–8)

In 1936, as fascist Italy was drawing closer to Nazi Germany, Schawinsky fled Milan. He went first to London and then, that same year, to the United States, following an invitation from Josef Albers to teach at Black Mountain College, an experimental, transdisciplinary college founded in 1933 in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Highly receptive to modernist ideas and home to many European artists in exile, this small art school gave pride of place to the ideas of the Bauhaus and to the forms of expression that would later give rise to 'happenings' and performance art. Among its best-known teachers and students were composer John Cage (1912–92), choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) and sculptor Ruth Asawa (1926–2013).

Heading a programme called 'Stage Studies', Schawinsky used and refined his ideas from his Bauhaus years around scenic space and the notion of the theatre as a laboratory for experimentation. Under the generic title 'Spectodrama', he staged several plays in collaboration with students, including *Spectodrama: Play, Life, Illusion* (1936) and *Danse Macabre: A Sociological Study* (1938). These stage creations explored fundamental elements of the performing arts, such as movement, light, sound, colour and space. In addition to pantomime and dance, these pieces used multimedia components (projections, sound, etc.) and ideas from various scientific and scholarly disciplines.

Focus 3.1: *Spectodrama: Play, Life, Illusion* (1936)

At the Black Mountain College, Schawinsky staged his first non-narrative theatre production, which he described as a 'total experience' and titled *Spectodrama: Play, Life, Illusion* (1936). He chose the 'Ursonate' (1923–32) by Kurt Schwitters (1888–1948) – a Dadaist sound poem – as the musical accompaniment. Schawinsky's play consisted of a succession of episodes, of which only a few preparatory sketches remain and whose staging was based on the fundamental means of theatrical expression: 'optics, form and colour, acoustics, sound, language, music, time, space, architecture, technology and illusion' (Xanti Schawinsky). In these preparatory drawings, the performers' bodies, when visible, appear within one of a number of tableaux that Schawinsky described as 'archetypal' geometric, spatial or social situations, such as 'play', 'communication', 'form' and 'space'. The costumes, typically made of white paper, were created in collaboration with his first wife, Irene von Debschitz (1903–90).



Camouflaged Outpost, 1942

4. New York (1938–49)

In 1938, Schawinsky left North Carolina for New York to work as a graphic designer and painting teacher at New York University and City College. A year later, he became an American citizen. In early 1940s New York, Schawinsky was confronted with the war, both directly and indirectly. As a designer, he created camouflage patterns for the U.S. Air Force, but the war also influenced his artistic production. His best-known series of works from this period, exhibited in the United States and abroad in the 1940s and 1950s, is likely *Faces of War* (1942). Combining watercolour and drawing, these works on paper bear titles evoking various military ranks and functions (*The Admiral*, *The Enemy*, *The General*, *The Soldier*, *The Aviator*, *The Warrior*, etc.). They depict faces composed of weapons and military equipment, set against backgrounds with colour gradients reminiscent of Schawinsky's advertising designs and abstract, camouflage-like patterns. These brightly coloured and unsettling machine-men convey a deeply ambivalent vision of war and are a direct response to contemporaneous political events, which is rare in Schawinsky's work.



Marvin P. Lazarus, *Dance Painting*, 1957–8

5. Processual pictorial works (1949–79)

From the late 1940s onwards, Schawinsky devoted most of his time to painting. From 1949 to 1979, Schawinsky produced several series of works that emphasised the performative nature of painting. His aim was to involve the body in the production of the work in as many ways as possible, moving beyond the traditional tools of the practice, such as brush, easel, paint and canvas. In this way, the production process became as important as the finished work. During the same period, Schawinsky experimented with ways of creating paintings without paint. For instance, his *Smoke Paintings* (1964) were made by fixing smoke to fibreboard. Another example is his photographic series *Light Paintings* (1950), where Schawinsky played with photosensitive surfaces and treated them like paintings – resulting in painterly compositions where traces of light in the photographic print call to mind expressive brushstrokes. But his most spectacular work began in the 1950s: for the *Track Paintings* series, he drove his car over oil paint and then across canvases spread out on the ground. Here it was the car itself, and more specifically its tyres, that were the 'brushes'. Using this unusual technique, he created works up to five metres wide and attracted widespread public interest.

Focus 5.1: the essay 'About the Physical in Painting'

In his essay 'About the Physical in Painting', published in 1969, Schawinsky, whose creative work had always been accompanied by theoretical texts, sets out his ideas on experimental painting, for which the brush ceases to be the main tool. Looking back on his experimentations, Schawinsky situates his work within the history of contemporary art, alongside Yves Klein (1928–62) and Jackson Pollock (1912–56). As with his call for a 'total theatre', what interested him in the realm of painting was the use of hitherto unexplored techniques and materials. Schawinsky writes: "totality" can be approached through the greater mobilisation of the body's resources and the choice or invention of new tools'. He then goes on to list ten ways of experimenting with this 'totality'.

This enumeration is reminiscent of an 'instruction piece' – instructions or a protocol that can be carried out by someone other than the artist –, a type of work that was characteristic of the conceptual art movement of the time. The possibility of delegating painterly actions not only represented a deconstruction of the romantic figure of the artist, but also activated the reader's imagination. Schawinsky highlights the performative nature of this form of painting, in which the act of making is at least as important as the final work itself. Here are Schawinsky's ten examples.

- 1 Simultaneous ambidextrous brush manipulation.
- 2 Transfer of paint by blocks and stencils (wood, cork, leather, etc.) with simultaneous ambidextrous manipulation; resulting in stereotype forms and their derivatives through repetition, shifting and overlapping, slanting, pulling and other modifications in rhythmic and counter-rhythmic sequence of 'theme and variation' [...].
- 3 Attachment of blocks to both feet and the transfer of paint to a canvas by walking or dancing – permitting, through body locomotion to paint a large-size format.
- 4 Method 3 plus the use of spray-guns in both hands.
- 5 Transfer of paint by means of a roller.
- 6 Transfer of paint with the four wheels of an automobile by driving over a canvas.
- 7 Beating of tools such as sticks, leaves, branches of trees, grass, flowers, rags, etc. dipped into paint and manipulated with both hands.
- 8 Adaption of the photo-mechanical process to painting on light-sensitised materials and the application and photographic enlargement of half-tone values into a series of black-and-white components. [...]
- 9 Employment of soot-producing fire and smoke on a horizontally moving canvas and the violent burning, resulting in transformation or destructions of its fibers.
- 10 Sculptural transformation of a flat canvas with subsequent spray-gun painting and re-stretching.



Untitled, 1961-2

Focus 5.2: the *Eclipses* and *Sphere Paintings* series

Schawinsky returned to Europe for the first time in 1961. Besides Germany and Italy, he also spent time in Switzerland. In Ticino, he began a new series of works, *Eclipses*, which he produced using an airbrush, building on experiments he had begun in the 1940s. Schawinsky crumpled up sheets of paper and airbrushed them to create dramatic abstract landscapes – a process that blended chance and control.

In 1966, he built a house in Oggebbio, Italy, on the shores of Lake Maggiore, from where he organised a series of exhibitions. His paintings were shown in numerous exhibitions at the time in Europe, North America and South America.

From 1967 onwards, Schawinsky produced his last major series: the *Sphere Paintings*. In these works, the pictorial space became three-dimensional, with Schawinsky using the canvas as a support and inserting one or two additional layers of painted gauze into the frame. These abstract paintings use basic geometric forms such as circles or simple polygons. The transparency of the partially painted layers of gauze creates spaces within the work that are characterised by the interplay of overlapping or additive elements, or different colours mingling together, creating striking optical effects. They invite a fluctuating form of 'expanded vision', in which the viewer plays an active role. The *Sphere Paintings* can be seen as an extension of Bauhaus teachings on geometry, optics and colour theory, but they can also be seen as manifestations of the spirit of the 1960s, or as evidence of an emerging interest in quantum physics – the study of matter and energy at the most fundamental level. Schawinsky always drew a connection between existentialism and science and the effects of industrialisation, which was reflected in his lifelong preoccupation with the relationship between man and machine.



Helen M. Post, *Xanti Schawinsky teaches an art class at the Black Mountain College*, c. 1937
Courtesy State Archives of North Carolina,
Western Regional Archives

The artist

1904

Alexander Victor Schawinsky is born in Basel, as the second of four children of a Jewish merchant family of Polish descent.

1921

After completing school, he initially decides to study architecture. He does a traineeship in the architecture office of Theodor Merrill in Cologne.

1924

He enrolls at the Bauhaus in Weimar, where he studies with Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, László Moholy-Nagy and Walter Gropius. He joins Oskar Schlemmer's theatre workshop.

1925

His first theatrical piece, *Circus*, is performed in Weimar. The Bauhaus is transferred to Dessau.

1926

He is appointed set designer for a season at the Stadttheater in Zwickau.

1927

He returns to Bauhaus in Dessau and is appointed instructor in set design.

1929

He is appointed as head of the graphics department in the Municipal Works Services in Magdeburg, where he creates designs for exhibitions, theatres and museums.

1931

Due to attacks against him as a Jew and foreigner in the public service, he leaves Magdeburg at the end of 1931. He moves to Berlin and works as a graphic designer, notably for the Berlin branch of the Dorland advertising agency, whose artistic director is Herbert Bayer.

1933

The political climate in Berlin worsens. After being arrested by the Gestapo, Schawinsky flees via Switzerland to Italy.

1933–6

He works for the advertising agency Studio Boggeri in Milan

1936

He flees Italy because of the rise of Nazism and Fascism, and emigrates to the United States, following an invitation from Josef Albers to teach at the Black Mountain College, in North Carolina. He gives classes in drawing and colour theory and develops a 'Stage Studies' workshop.

1938

He moves to New York and works as an exhibition and advertising designer. He participates in the exhibition *Bauhaus 1919–1928* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1939

He becomes an American citizen. He designs the North Carolina Pavilion for the 1939 New York World's Fair, as well as the Pennsylvania Pavilion, in collaboration with Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer.

1941–2

In the early 1940s, Schawinsky works for the United States Army Air Corps, designing camouflage patterns. In 1942, he produces his famous series *The Faces of War*.

1943–61

While continuing his work as a painter, graphic designer and scenographer, he teaches at various institutions, including the New York City College (1943–6), the Brooklyn College (1944–5) and the New York University (1950–4). At the end of the 1950s, he produces his *Track Paintings* series and holds numerous exhibitions of his work in North and South America.

1961

He returns for the first time to Europe. He visits Germany, Switzerland and Italy and begins to divide his time between the United States and Europe.

1966

He starts to live partly in Oggebbio, on the shores of the Lake Maggiore, in a house he has designed.

1968

He participates to the touring exhibition *50 Years Bauhaus*, which travels to Stuttgart, London, Amsterdam, Paris, Chicago, Toronto and Pasadena.

1975

An important exhibition of Schawinsky is organised at the Galleria d'arte moderna, Bologna.

1979

He dies in Locarno, Switzerland.

After the artist's death, Schawinsky's work remained largely inaccessible for several decades. Since 2013, several exhibitions have contributed to its rediscovery: at the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation (2013); Drawing Center, New York (2014); Migros Museum, Zürich (2015); Kunstmuseum Kloster, Magdeburg (2016); Bergen Kunsthall (2016); Museo Casa Rusca, Locarno (2023).

Schawinsky's works can be found in the collections of numerous institutions, including the Drawing Center, New York; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Migros Museum, Zürich; Museum of Modern Art, New York; MASILugano and Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Public programme

Curator tour 28.08.2024 18:00 – 19:00 FR With Christophe Gallois	Picnic Season: Xanti Schawinsky/Monster Chetwynd 07.08.2024 10:30 – 14:30 In collaboration with Singa Luxembourg
Lunchtime at Mudam 26.07.2024 12:30 – 13:30 06.09.2024 12:30 – 13:30	10.08.2024 11:00 – 15:00 In collaboration with Hörgeschädigten Beratung SmH
Drop in! Bauhaus Badges 13.07 – 15.09.2024 10:00 – 18:00 (every working day during the summer school holidays)	14.08.2024 17:00 – 20:00 Open to all

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Cover: Xanti Schawinsky: Play, Life, Illusion – a Retrospective: Xanti Schawinsky, *Stage Design for Goethe's 'Faust II', 4th Scene: High Mountains, Rigged Raked Rock Summit, a Cloud Floats Pass*, 1928/29. Pictet Collection | Xanti Schawinsky, *Danse Macabre*, 1938

Cover: Monster Chetwynd: Xanti Shenanigans: Monster Chetwynd and Esther Teichmann, *Phantasie Fotostudio II* (mirrored), 2018 © Monster Chetwynd and Esther Teichmann. Photo: Esther Teichmann. Courtesy of the artists | Production of the installation *Xanti Shenanigans*, 07.06.2024, Zurich. Photo: Joseph Campbell © Mudam Luxembourg

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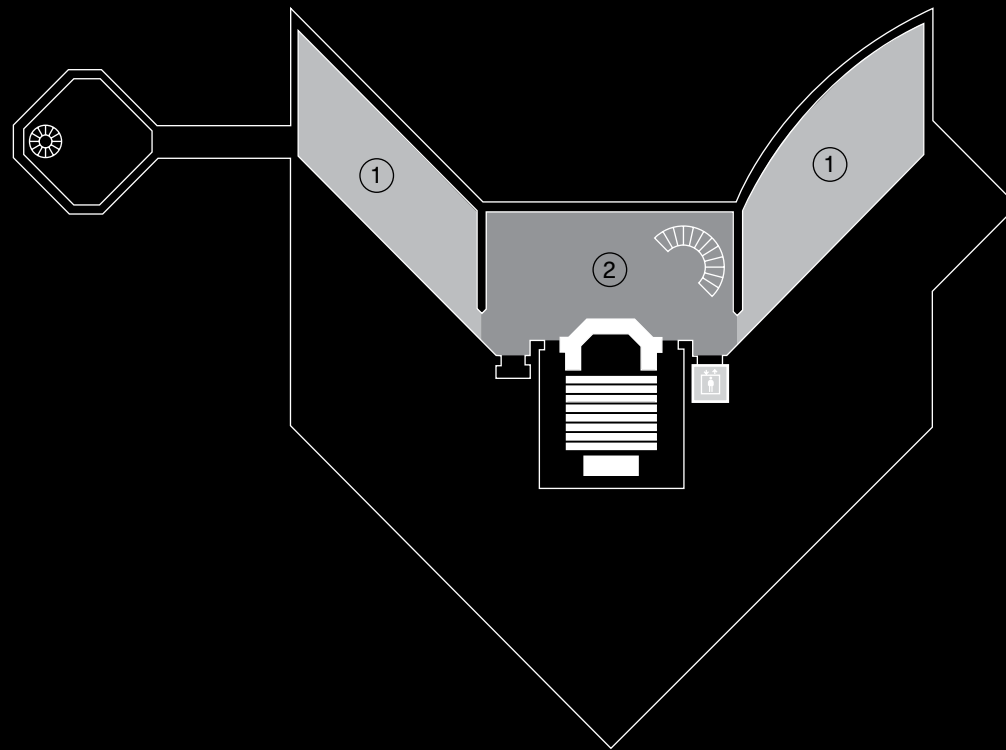
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A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a red beaded bikini top and a matching skirt with fringe, is standing barefoot on a dark, textured surface. She is looking up and reaching out towards a large, yellow, textured sculpture of a monster's head with multiple eyes. The background is a painted backdrop of a forest scene with trees and foliage. The text "Monster Chetwynd Xanti Shenanigans" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Monster Chetwynd Xanti Shenanigans



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The exhibition

In response to Xanti Schawinsky's retrospective exhibition (1904, Basel – 1979, Locarno) in the two galleries on Level -1, British artist Monster Chetwynd (1973, London) has been invited to create new work for the Foyer space. Her ambitious installation draws inspiration from the idea of 'mobile theatre', a concept developed by Schawinsky in the 1920s during his time studying at the Bauhaus.

Since the early 2000s, Chetwynd has been engaging in a multidisciplinary artistic practice situated at the intersections of performance, painting, collage, sculpture, installation and video. Guided by a decidedly DIY ethic, using inexpensive materials like paper, cardboard, papier-mâché and fabric, her works often serve as sets, costumes or props for exuberant and grotesque performances, created in collaboration with a group of performers with whom she regularly collaborates.

Chetwynd, in her work, draws on a host of references from classical and popular culture – two worlds often kept apart, but which the artist blend with a carnivalesque spirit. 'I really love the analysis of carnival culture, and the idea of not having any rules when it comes to high and low culture – whether you're going to roll around on the floor, farting, or hit people with some terrifying, clever, intense concept. I think it's very exciting, the inside out, upside-down time of carnival.'

In her performances and installations, elements from film and TV shows, vaudeville, street theatre and folk practices intersect with references to writers as varied as the medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), French humanist François Rabelais (c. 1494–1553) and English novelist Charles Dickens (1812–70), artists like pre-Renaissance painter Giotto (1267–1337), Flemish Primitive Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) and Pre-Romantic painter William Blake (1757–1827), or to modern avant-garde movements like Dada and Surrealism. Chetwynd approaches these references, and the production of her works, from the perspective of a '*bricoleur*', a notion the artist gleaned from anthropology.

'I am very excited and impatient in my need to communicate, so I will hurriedly grab things around me to make something happen. It links to a concept I learned about when I studied anthropology, the *bricoleur*, from Lévi-Strauss's book *The Savage Mind*. Rather than being a professional, where you wait to gather your appropriate tools for the job and then make a skilled, measured product, the *bricoleur* literally grabs anything to hand and botches it together. But within that, there's an excitement and a different quality, and I relate to that.'

Monster Chetwynd's installation was created in response to Schawinsky's retrospective exhibition and possesses the same spirit of bricolage. While the installation Chetwynd has created, titled *Xanti Shenanigans*, is inspired by the late artist, she approaches his practice with a great degree of liberty, as the 'shenanigans' in the title might suggest. In *Xanti Shenanigans*, Chetwynd borrows some of Schawinsky's artistic principles and motifs, such as certain shapes from his costumes and stage sets. Additional elements of her installation were produced by driving a car over large strips of fabric, replicating a process used by Schawinsky in the 1960s for his *Track Paintings*. Meanwhile, the rail carts that run through the installation, moving costumes around, were inspired by one of Schawinsky's earliest works, the painting *Entwurf zu einem fahrbaren Theater (Arena)* (1925–6), which is emblematic of his research around the idea of 'mobile theatre'.

On the opening day of the exhibition, Monster Chetwynd's installation functions as the backdrop and starting point for a performance involving a dozen performers inspired by TV dating shows.



Exhibition view of Monster Chetwynd – *Toxic Pillows*, 2019–20, De Pont Museum, Tilburg, The Netherlands
Photo: Maarten Nauw

The artist

Monster Chetwynd (1973, London) has held solo exhibitions at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2023); Konsthall C, Stockholm (2021); De Pont Museum, Tilburg (2019); Villa Arson, Nice (2019); Tate Britain, London (2018); CCA Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow (2016); Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham (2014), Le Consortium, Dijon (2008) and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst (2007). Her work was also presented at the 16th Istanbul Biennial (2019); Liverpool Biennial (2016) and the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2011).

Monster Chetwynd has presented performances at Konsthall C, Stockholm (2021); the National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2019); Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2018); Bozar, Brussels (2017); Le Plateau – Frac Île-de-France, Paris (2017); Bergen Kunsthall (2016); ICA Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2015); Perfoma, New York (2011); Hayward Gallery, London (2011); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2010) and Tate Britain, London (2006). Monster Chetwynd lives and works in Zurich.



Monster Chetwynd, *Clic-Clac*, Frac Île-de-France, Le Plateau, Paris, 01.06.2017
Photo: Martin Argyroglo