

PRESS RELEASE

KING OF THE ANIMALS
WILHELM KUHNERT AND THE IMAGE OF AFRICA
OCTOBER 25, 2018–JANUARY 27, 2019

Wilhelm Kuhnert (1865–1926) shaped the concept of Africa in both Europe and the United States more than any other artist of his time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he was one of the first European artists to travel through the German colonies of East Africa, which were still largely unexplored at the time. During these journeys, his sketches of the animal and plant world were often created under difficult conditions; they later served as a basis for the monumental paintings he produced in his Berlin studio after his return. The works were exhibited and sold internationally with enormous success. Kuhnert adopted an almost scientific approach while painting and recorded the characteristics of the animals and the landscape in which they lived with great precision. It is not surprising that his animal pictures were published in zoological books like *Brehms Tierleben* (Brehm's Life of Animals) as well as in publications by Wilhelm Haacke, the director of Frankfurt Zoo, and in wall charts for school classrooms. His works even appeared on the wrappers of Stollwerck chocolate. Although Wilhelm Kuhnert remains one of the most frequently collected academic painters to this day, his work is largely unknown by the broader public. The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting the first comprehensive retrospective on the artist's life and work. The exhibition combines studies and paintings from European and American museums, private collections, and Kuhnert's estate with numerous prints and commercial graphics and publications by the artist. It represents a wide-ranging rediscovery an unusual artist personality of the early twentieth century. Kuhnert's work is seen not only as a mirror of the history of art and natural science, but also against the background of the history of colonialism.

CURATORS Dr. Philipp Demandt and Dr. Ilka Voermann, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

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