

**FEININGER**

A FRIENDSHIP OF ARTISTS

**KUBIN**

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## Exhibition facts

Press conference	3 September 2015   10 am
Opening	3 September 2015   6.30 pm
Duration	4 September 2015 - 10 January 2016
Venue	Tietze Galleries for Prints and Drawings
Curators	Dr. Ulrich Luckhardt (Internationale Tage, Ingelheim) Dr. Eva Michel (Albertina, Vienna)
Exhibits	100
Catalogue	Exhibition catalogue (in German, 29€) available at the Albertina's Shop and at <a href="http://www.albertina.at">www.albertina.at</a>
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## Lyonel Feininger and Alfred Kubin. A Friendship of Artists

4 September 2015 – 10 January 2016

The Albertina commemorates the surprising and fascinating friendship between Lyonel Feininger and Alfred Kubin with a remarkable exhibition that retraces the brief but intense period of contact between these two supposedly disparate artists on the basis of around 100 paintings and graphic works. This is also the first-ever public showing of the works that Feininger and Kubin exchanged, and the accompanying catalogue presents the written correspondence through which the two artists came together as “kindred spirits.”

“Of all of the contemporary draftsmen, I admire you the most,” wrote Alfred Kubin to Lyonel Feininger on 25 November 1912 from the small Upper Austrian community of Wernstein am Inn. Thus began a series of letters that would develop into an intense, ongoing correspondence between the two artists over the years that ensued. It began with the Austrian artist’s suggestion that they exchange drawings. Feininger, originally from the United States, answered two days later from the Berlin suburb of Zehlendorf: “I’m incredibly honoured that you’d like to own a drawing by me; I, for my part, have for years been an admirer of your work, from which I’ve derived quite some enjoyment.”

What began as an exchange of drawings soon grew into a correspondence in which the two otherwise introverted artistic personalities opened up to each other, exchanging thoughts on their art and also devoting in-depth discussion to more general ideas. Furthermore, these letters afford a look at the preparations for and conduct of the legendary exhibition *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon*, hosted by Herward Walden at his gallery *Der Sturm*. It was Kubin who first made one of this exhibition’s organisers, Franz Marc of *Der Blaue Reiter*, aware of Feininger’s work. And Feininger’s participation in this exhibition was to mark the beginning of his career as a fine artist. Feininger and Kubin knew each other’s art from a period during which they had both produced drawings for publication in the periodicals *Der liebe Augustin* and *Licht und Schatten*. Furthermore, Kubin was most likely aware of Feininger’s long years of work as a caricaturist for various periodicals. And at the beginning of their correspondence, Feininger had already read Kubin’s novel *The Other Side*, which had in turn inspired the motif for a gouache of his that was reproduced in an issue of *Licht und Schatten* in early 1911. He called this picture *The City at the End of the World*, whereas Kubin had called his grey-hued city *Pearl*.

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The present exhibition begins with Kubin's early drawings and Feininger's commercial caricatures, thereafter going on to trace both artists' further artistic development. Works that have thematic material in common (such as cities, railroads, war, or music and Carnival festivities) are placed in dialogue with one another and simultaneously demonstrate the ways in which Feininger and Kubin differed.

The intense contact between the two artists largely came to an end in 1914 due to the turmoil of the First World War, with sporadic letters continuing up to 1919. By then, Feininger and Kubin had developed in entirely different directions. While Kubin had increasingly shifted his attention toward the illustration of literary works, Feininger had discovered painting, which is where his further artistic development was to unfold.

This exhibition, conceived together with the exhibition event *Internationale Tage in Ingelheim*, Germany, presents treasures by Kubin from the outstanding holdings of the Albertina as well as numerous rare loan works from private collections.

Curators: Dr. Ulrich Luckhardt (Internationale Tage, Ingelheim) and Dr. Eva Michel (Albertina, Vienna)

## Alfred Kubin: Early Demons

Alfred Kubin's early work produced in Munich between 1899 and 1904 represents the early summit of his nearly six decades of artistic activities that are marked by nightmarish visions reflecting traumatic childhood memories, fears, dreams, the irrational and the eccentric. Animals and fantastic chimera often play a principle role in Kubin's works, serving as powerful metaphors for primitive violence, animalistic sexuality and idolatry. Inspired by the fantastic literature of such authors as E. A. Poe and E. T. A. Hoffman, Kubin was particularly inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel and Francisco de Goya as well as the artists of the Symbolist movement. Delusional motifs veering between reality and fiction in Kubin's compositions stand in tension-filled contrast to their technical virtuosity and graceful lines that are typical of Art Nouveau. Feininger once aptly described Kubin's pen and ink drawings "pen paintings".

## Lyonel Feininger as a Caricaturist

Around 1900, Feininger was one of Germany's best known and most highly regarded caricaturists and satirical artists. Some of his works appeared in the same journals that also published Kubin's works. In his 1,800 caricatures, only a mere fraction has survived, Feininger developed a very personal style. Over time, however, his work as a caricaturist left him dissatisfied. He wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, venturing a new start in his mid thirties as a painter and printmaker after a trip to Paris.

## The Town

Feininger's cityscapes feature a vast array of personages, ranging from the working class to the bourgeoisie and the clergy. His works often focus on women, around whom potential suitors stroll. Children appear to be on their own in these scenes, having no contact to their mothers, and only rarely does Feininger show both sexes living harmoniously with each other or in close family bonds. As was often the case in his early works Feininger drew his inspiration from moralising 19th-century French socio-critical novels (Hugo, Balzac, Sue). His work as a caricaturist continued to have an effect on his humoresque details and distorted proportions while the shift of spatial axes and the crystalline fragmented forms demonstrate Cubism's influence on Feininger.

## The City at the Edge of the World

In late 1910, one of Feininger's gouaches – entitled *The City at the Edge of the World* – was reproduced on the cover of the literary journal *Licht und Schatten: Wochenschrift für Schwarzweiss-Kunst und Dichtung*. The depicted city is practically deserted and enveloped in grey. This image was inspired by Alfred Kubin's fantastic novel *The Other Side*, which Feininger had read shortly after its publication in 1909. The novel takes place in an imaginary city named *Pearl*, which is shrouded in permanent twilight and is ultimately destroyed in an apocalypse. Kubin himself alludes to his novel in his drawings that reflect its prevailing sombre, apocalyptic atmosphere.

For Feininger, his *City at the Edge of the World* was synonymous with a society coming apart at the seams on the eve of the First World War. The proportions of the figures to each other as well as to the pictorial space no longer conform to reality. The subject matter of the pictures remains mysterious.

In 1914 Feininger began producing wooden toys that he sawed out and painted himself, turning in this way the houses from his paintings and drawings into tangible objects.

## Railway

The railway is one of Lyonel Feininger's favourite subjects. The *Locomotive with the Big Wheel* from the Batliner Collection reflects his enormous talent as a caricaturist. With an endearing sense of humour he depicts a few railwaymen resting on a greened railway embankment and taking in a mid-morning snack while a man wearing a black hat regulates the boiler pressure in an antiquated locomotive with red wheels behind them. Diametrically opposed to this image is Kubin's discarded wrack of a steam engine that clearly visualised the different artistic approaches taken by these two friends.

## Maritime Idylls before the Great War

Lyonel Feininger was fascinated by the sea and ships ever since his childhood. Starting in 1908 he spent numerous summers on the Baltic Sea and his many depictions of maritime themes show him to be a knowledgeable expert on different types of ships. Promenaders dressed in old-fashioned clothing now stroll down the seafront instead of urban boulevards, hardly taking notice of each other. Ship silhouettes, mirror images and light reflections on the water provided an ideal starting point for crystalline Cubist abstraction and hence for Feininger's further stylistic development.

Alfred Kubin, by contrast, occupied himself with violence, murder and death all his life. At the age of three he witnessed a street brawl in Salzburg in which a participant was killed and he was also confronted with the untimely deaths of his mother and first wife. His remarkable personification of *War*, a figure that tramples everything in its path, was widely distributed in various versions only a few years before the outbreak of the First World War. Neither Kubin nor Feininger fought in the war, but both express their shock about the events and the deaths of many friends in their letters.

## Music and Carnival

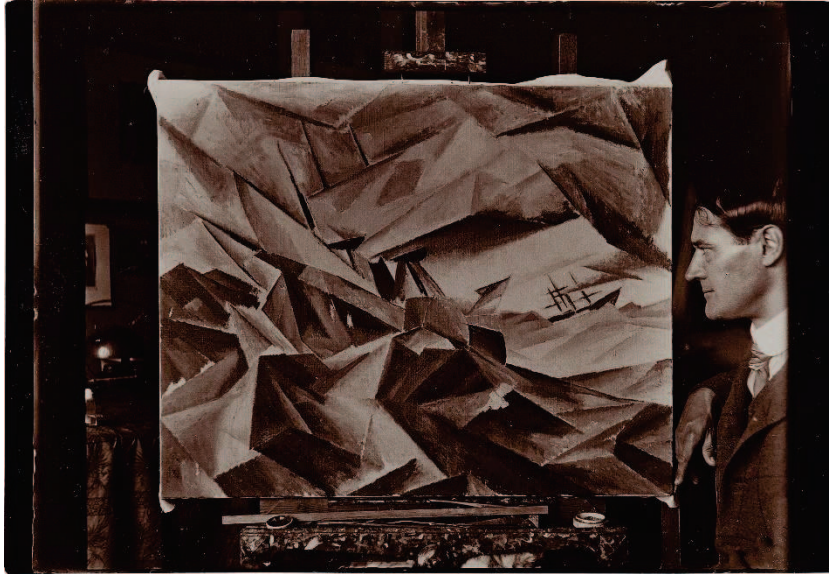
The son of a concert violinist and a singer, Lyonel Feininger began learning the violin at an early age, later discontinuing it in favour of drawing lessons. But music and particularly the figure of the violinist was a constant presence in his work and in the 1920s he even composed a number of fugues in emulation of J. S. Bach.

Lyonel Feininger's carnival scenes mark another important turning point in his transition from caricaturist to painter starting in 1908. Although his grotesquely distorted figures and irrational proportions are still rooted in his earlier work as a caricaturist, the watercolours and paintings he produced around this time reveal his growing artistic independence. The colourfully masked participants in Feininger's carnival procession appear to press on with determination and yet oddly. Here as well they figures all keep to themselves and no one takes any notice of anyone else. Carnivals did not necessarily imply festive occasions for Alfred Kubin, either. Like Feininger, Kubin used distortions and surreal proportions as a stylistic device in his works. Animals and monsters join in on the carnival commotion and the scenes often veer into the macabre.



## Biographies

### Lyonel Feininger: 1871–1956



**1871**

Leonell (from 1906: Lyonel) Feininger is born in New York to parents of German descent.

**1887**

Moves to Germany to study violin; takes first drawing lessons.

**1889–95**

Feininger works as a freelance illustrator and caricaturist for humorous magazines.

**1905**

Initial lithographs and etchings, followed by his first paintings in 1907. Feininger meets Julia Berg and separates from his first wife. He and Julia marry in 1908.

**1906**

Feininger is asked to do comic strips by the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, enabling him to move to Paris for a time. Feininger's son Andreas, later to become a famous photographer, is born. Two further sons follow in 1909 and 1910.

**1911**

Feininger takes part in the *Salon des Artistes Indépendants* in Paris. He takes an intense interest in the colour theory of Fauvism and the formal aspects of Cubism.

**1912–1919**

Written correspondence and artistic friendship with Alfred Kubin.

**1913**

At Kubin's recommendation, Feininger participates in the *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon*, held at the Berlin gallery *Der Sturm*.

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**1917**

From the entry of the USA into the First World War, Feininger—classified as a hostile foreigner due to his US citizenship—is forbidden to leave Zehlendorf, the district of Berlin where he lives.

**1919**

Walter Gropius hires Feininger as a master artist at the newly established *Staatliches Bauhaus* in Weimar (in Dessau from 1926).

**1931**

First retrospective at Berlin's *Nationalgalerie*.

**1937**

Numerous works by Feininger are confiscated from German museums and shown in the exhibition *Degenerate Art*. Feininger and his wife emigrate to New York.

**1944**

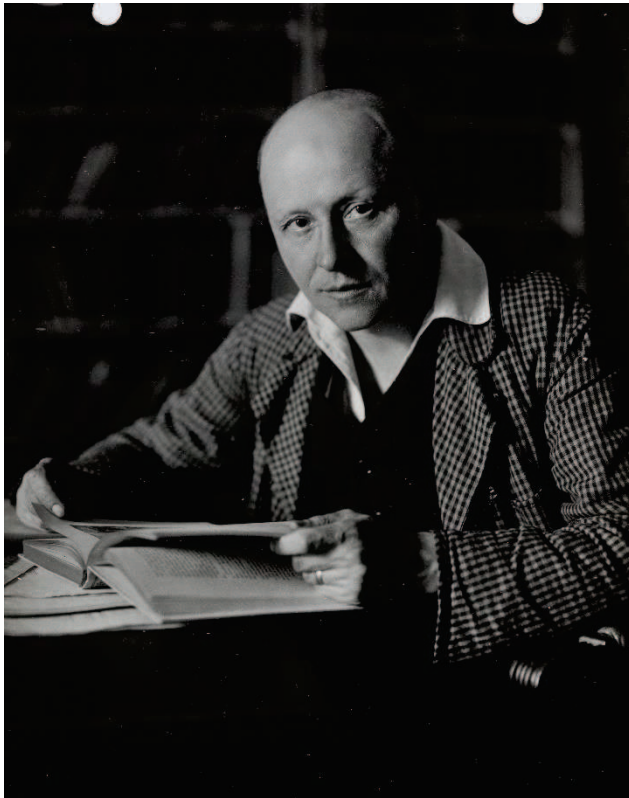
A major retrospective exhibition at the *Museum of Modern Art* in New York lays the cornerstone for Feininger's renown in America.

**1956**

Feininger dies in New York.

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## Alfred Kubin: 1877–1959



### 1877

Alfred Kubin is born in the northern Bohemian town of Leitmeritz. From 1879 to 1882, the family resides in Salzburg, after which they move to Zell am See.

### 1887

Kubin's mother dies. His father marries her sister, who dies a year later in childbirth.

### 1888–1892

Kubin attends an academic secondary school and the arts and crafts school in Salzburg.

### 1892–1896

Apprenticeship with the photographer Alois Beer in Klagenfurt.

### 1897

Kubin volunteers for the army, but is soon admitted to a neurological clinic in Graz following a nervous breakdown. After recovering, he returns to his father in Zell am See, where he increasingly devotes himself to drawing.

### 1898–1901

Studies at a private painting school and at the Munich Academy, dealing intensively with the literature, philosophy, and art of the 19th century. After some initial success in the Munich art scene, Kubin debuts at the Berlin gallery of Paul Cassirer in 1902.

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**1903**

Munich-based collector Hans von Weber publishes a portfolio of facsimile prints of Kubin's drawings, causing the artist's fame to spread beyond Germany's borders.

**1906**

Kubin marries the wealthy widow Hedwig Grundler. The couple moves to the estate Zwickledt near Wernstein in Upper Austria.

**1908**

Following a creative crisis, Kubin authors his fantastic novel *The Other Side*.

**1909**

Kubin joins the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München*; in 1911, he also becomes a member of *Der Blaue Reiter*.

**1912–1919**

Written correspondence and artistic friendship with Lyonel Feininger.

**1921**

First major retrospective at Galerie Goltz in Munich.

**1931**

Kubin meets Paul Klee and possibly also Lyonel Feininger at the Bauhaus in Dessau.

**1939–1945**

Kubin withdraws to Zwickledt during the war years.

**1959**

Kubin dies at Zwickledt.