

# OSKAR SCHLEMMER

## KUNSTFIGUR

Curated by C. Raman Schlemmer

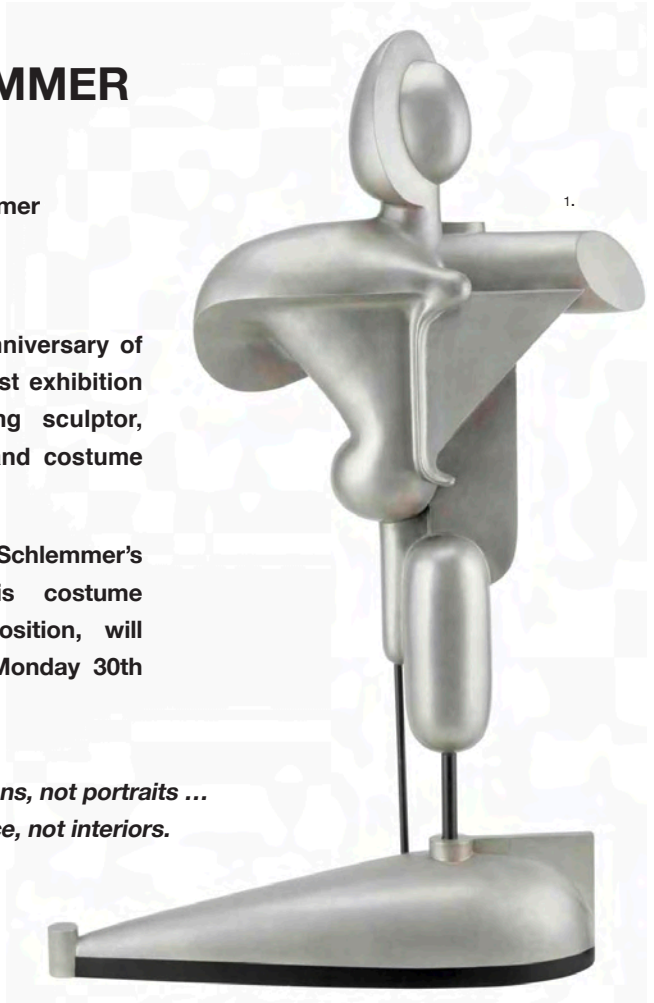
Coinciding with the 100th Anniversary of the Bauhaus, the gallery's first exhibition of works by the pioneering sculptor, painter, performance artist and costume designer

A performance of Oskar Schlemmer's choreography, featuring his costume design and musical composition, will premiere at the gallery on Monday 30th September at 8pm

*I want to create types of humans, not portraits ...*

*I want the essence of the space, not interiors.*

– Oskar Schlemmer, 1929

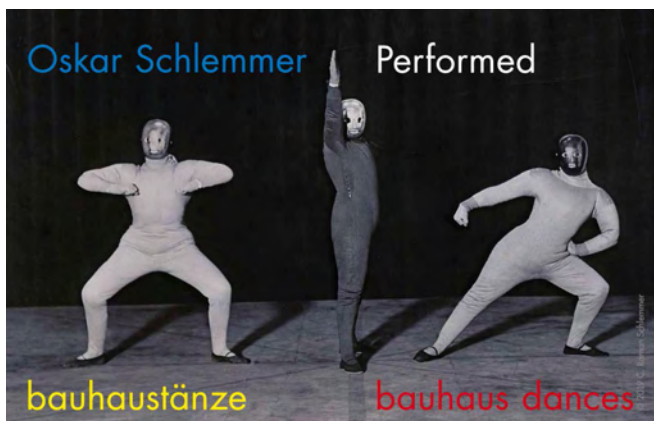


The gallery's first exhibition of the pioneering painter, sculptor, performance artist, stage and costume designer **Oskar Schlemmer** (1888–1943), a key figure of the Bauhaus and one of the most influential artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, will centre on his seminal sculpture, *Abstrakte Figur, Freiplastik G* (1921/23).

*The most important sculptural work produced by the artist over the course of his career, Abstrakte Figur, Freiplastik G exemplifies Oskar Schlemmer's aspiration towards synthesis, harmony and universality: the reconciliation of art and technology, of Man and civilisation, and of body and spirit. Groundbreaking when first conceived and equally significant today, the sculpture pre-empted his trailblazing early 'happenings', which were developed through unique experimentations in theatre and dance. – C. Raman Schlemmer, curator of the exhibition and performance*

Oskar Schlemmer: *Kunstfigur* will include rarely exhibited paintings, lithographs and works on paper from the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, alongside Bauhaus publications and archival materials including his iconic insignia design for the Bauhaus Logo, together demonstrating the artist's rigorous approach to his work. The exhibition highlights Schlemmer's motivations across his diverse practice as well as his revolutionary bridging of pure abstraction and figuration, significantly distinguishing him from his peers, and his lasting influence on the fields of performance art, contemporary dance, theatre and design.

To mark the occasion, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac London will stage an Oskar Schlemmer Bauhaus Performance at 8pm on Monday 30th September. Featuring costumes designed by the artist for his Bauhaus Dances, based on the artist's original choreography and accompanied by his musical composition, three dancers will enact dances first performed at the Bauhaus in 1926.



A key figure of the Bauhaus art, craft and design school (1919–1932), alongside artists Paul Klee (1879–1940) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Schlemmer studied at the Stuttgart Academy in 1906. His internationally acclaimed, dance performance *The Triadic Ballet* was conceived in 1912 and premiered in 1922 in Stuttgart, during which time he was also working on *Abstrakte Figur*. In 1921, Schlemmer was appointed by Walter Gropius as Master to the Bauhaus in Weimar and in 1926 to the Bauhaus in Dessau. From 1923, he directed their stage and theatre workshop. During the legendary Bauhaus festivals, which were orchestrated by Schlemmer and involved the entire school community of masters and students, his utopian and improvisational performances, along with his utopian costume design, presented a new artistic form, which in the 1960s would become known as 'happenings' and later as 'performance art'.

Schlemmer aspired to nothing less than what he termed 'the greatest possible perfection' and was driven by the pervasive, radical conception of the human being as the measure of all things. Evading the limitations of pure abstraction and setting himself apart from the constructivist principles of line, tectonics and economy, Schlemmer's ongoing pursuit of a new order of being – a pursuit that emphasised characteristic forms over and above individual characteristics – resulted in a radical and unprecedented bridging of the figurative and the abstract, which is evident across the artist's sculptural work and the watercolours and paintings on display.

This driving notion in Schlemmer's practice is perhaps most clearly embodied in *Abstrakte Figur*, combining elements of the abstract, the human figure, dance and movement. Comprising a torso with head, set upon a pedestal and rendered as an asymmetric cross-section of its whole, *Abstrakte Figur* shows the figure reduced to its purest organic forms. Systematic in its composition, the sculpture's unified, almost functional elements are governed by an internal logic of the horizontal against the vertical, resulting in a conceivable sense of balance both across the figure's surface and its positioning in space. Essential to both his paintings and his works for the stage was an unwavering focus on people's relationships to their environments and to one another – an empty space would not only be void of meaning, but lifeless.

Through such concerns, Schlemmer not only positions the viewer as an active participant in a work's completion, but further probes interrogations into the relationship between the object, the viewer and their physical environment. Schlemmer's abstracted human figures – the *Kunstfigur* – symbolises the orderly pursuit of a 'supra-individual', whose individuality could be achieved through the rational and mathematical division of their measurements.

The rational and mathematical division of measurements extended across disciplines, and in the artist's *The Triadic Ballet* and his *Bauhaus Dances*, the number three, the triad, formed the base of both choreography and composition, placing his dance practice in constant dialogue with his sculpture and painting. Dancers wore a variety of costumes – mechanical, spiralling skirts; padded leotards; brightly-coloured body-suits; and cubist-inspired masks – to enact theatrical performances that were both innovative and reactionary, celebratory and revolutionary.

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*Oskar Schlemmer: Kunstfigur* holds a spotlight to an artist at the fore of his time and with an indisputable influence on multiple contemporary art forms, paving the way for interdisciplinary practices and inciting a radical reconceptualisation of governing structures across both the individual, society and the function of art.

*“Recollecting: abstraction as a transition to life. A state in which it does not matter what one does, but how. Victory for the aesthetic? I have moved from the geometry of the one-dimensional surface to the half-plastic (relief): to (also a kind of) round plastic of the human figure (the paradox may prove that the more three-dimensional, the flatter it is, the two-dimensional surface image was the most plastic). Yet there is also a geometry of the surface of the dance floor, if only part of the projection of spatial stereometry. On the piano, I practice a similar geometry of the fingers and keys and thus strive for identity (or unity of movement and bodily form) and music.”*

*These lines from a letter to his artist friend, Otto Meyer Amden, in 1920, encompass the entire creative range of Oskar Schlemmer: his central theme *Der Mensch im Raum*, ‘Man in Space’ – the allegory of man and the confined, created, architectural space, not the infinite universe. Painting and drawing, mural, relief, sculpture, architecture, dance and music. *The Gesamtkunstwerk of Oskar Schlemmer.**

– **C. Raman Schlemmer**

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OPENING HOURS  
TUESDAY – SATURDAY 10 AM – 6 PM

The exhibition runs from 30 September - 20 December 2019

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## OSKAR SCHLEMMER, BAUHAUS DANCE PERFORMANCE

Art director: C. Raman Schlemmer | Musician: Vincenzo Pasquariello | Dancers: Olivia Grassot, Oscar Jinghu Li, Kennedy Junior Muntanga | Costume Consultant: Ilaria Martello | Costumers: Robert Allsop and Ingrid Pryer | Milliner: Tony Wood

## IMAGES

1. Left: Oskar Schlemmer *Abstrakte Figur, Freiplastik G. 2.* Oskar Schlemmer, *Bauhaus Dances, Space Dance*, 1926-1929. 3. Oskar Schlemmer with element of a wire sculpture and mask, 1930.

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