

Schwitters

THE REJECTED, THE DISCARDED AND THE USELESS

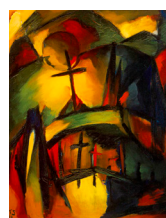
**The booklet is dedicated to all artist who have felt at times their work is not understood.
The rejected, discarded, and the useless.**

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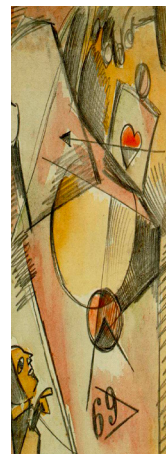
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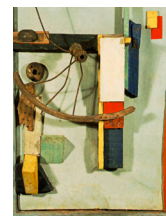
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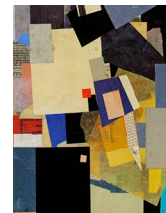
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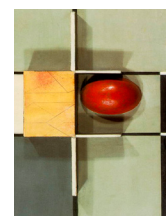
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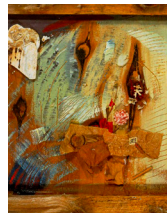
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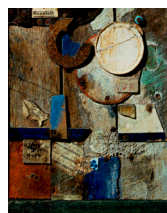
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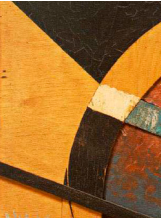
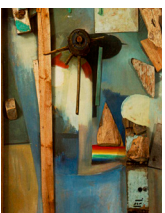
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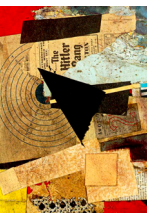
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THE ART MOVEMENT

1880

1890

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

POST IMPRESSIONISM
1885-1905

ART NOUVEAU
1890-1910

FAUVISM
1900-1907

SUPREMATISM
(1915-1916)

ART DECO
(1920-1930)

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM
(1930-1960)

EXPRESSIONISM
(1905-1925)

DADA
(1916-1922)

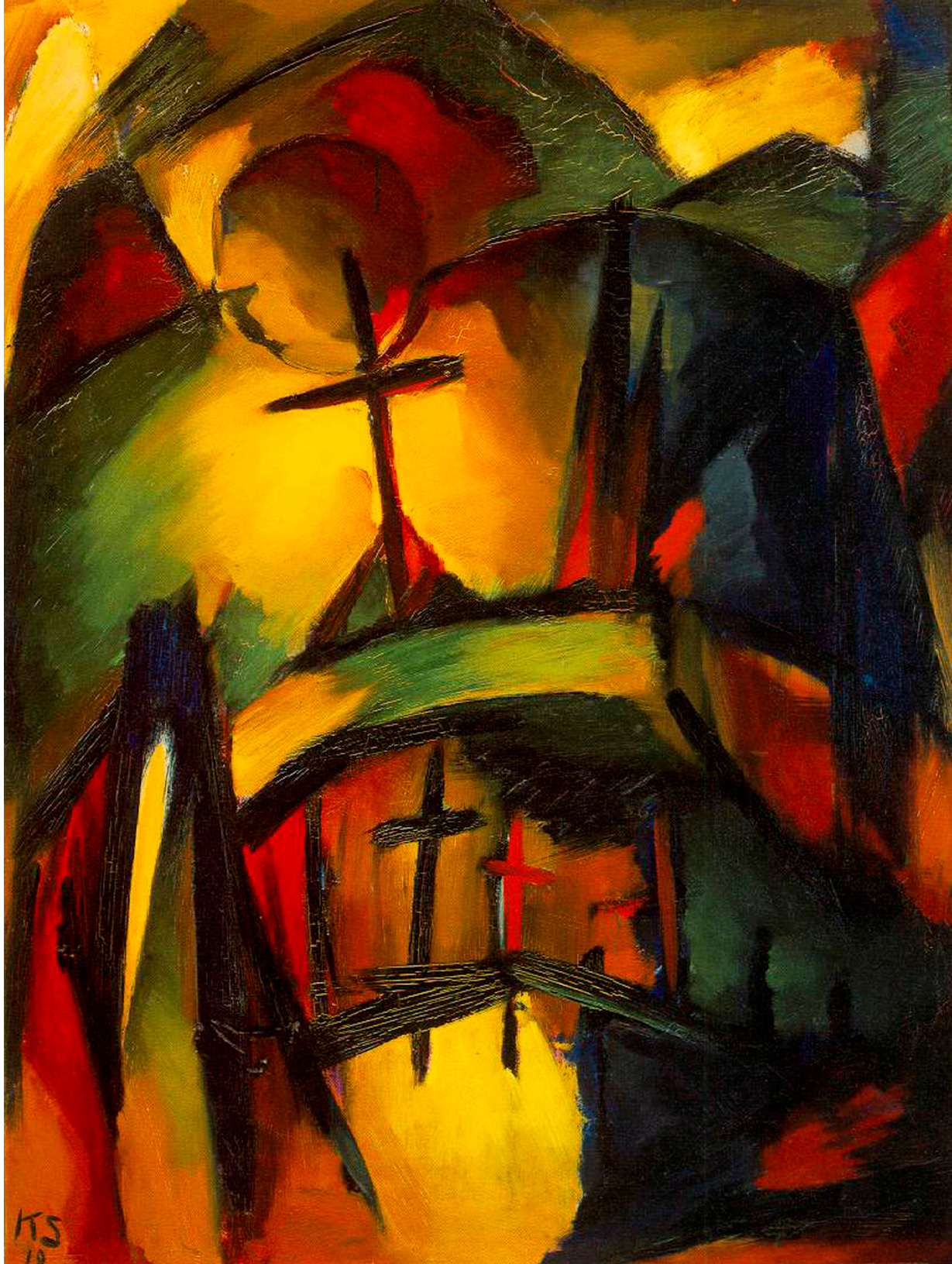
SURREALISM
(1920-1940)

CUBISM
(1908-1914)

DE STIJL
(1917-1931)

CONSTRUCTIVISM
(1919-1934)

BAUHAUS
(1919-1934)



1919 - Mountain Graveyard, oil on board

(1887-1948)

KURT SCHWITTERS

IS GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE TWENTIETH CENTURY'S GREATEST MASTER OF COLLAGE.

BORN IN HANOVER ON JUNE 20, 1887, THE ONLY CHILD OF AFFLUENT PARENTS, HE WAS A LONER IN HIS YOUTH, PLAGUED BY EPILEPTIC ATTACKS, INTROVERTED AND INSECURE, AND AS A STUDENT AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ART IN DRESDEN HE PROVED AS APT AS HE WAS UNIMAGINATIVE. ALTHOUGH HIS CONTACT WITH EXPRESSIONIST ARTISTS IN HANOVER AFTER 1916 GAVE HIM MORE CONFIDENCE TO DEVELOP HIS OWN STYLE, EVEN HIS MOST IMPRESSIVE WORKS (SUCH AS **MOUNTAIN GRAVEYARD**), WERE LITTLE MORE THAN COMPETENT IMITATIONS OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES.



1928 - Kurt Schwitters, photograph

DADA

A MAJOR CHALLENGE CAME IN 1918 WITH THE INVITATION TO EXHIBIT AT HERWARTH WALDEN'S GROUNDBREAKING STURM GALLERY IN BERLIN, FOR WALDEN HAD CONTACTS WITH MOST PROGRESSIVE EUROPEAN ARTISTS, INCLUDING THE ITALIAN FUTURISTS AND THE ZURICH DADAISTS.

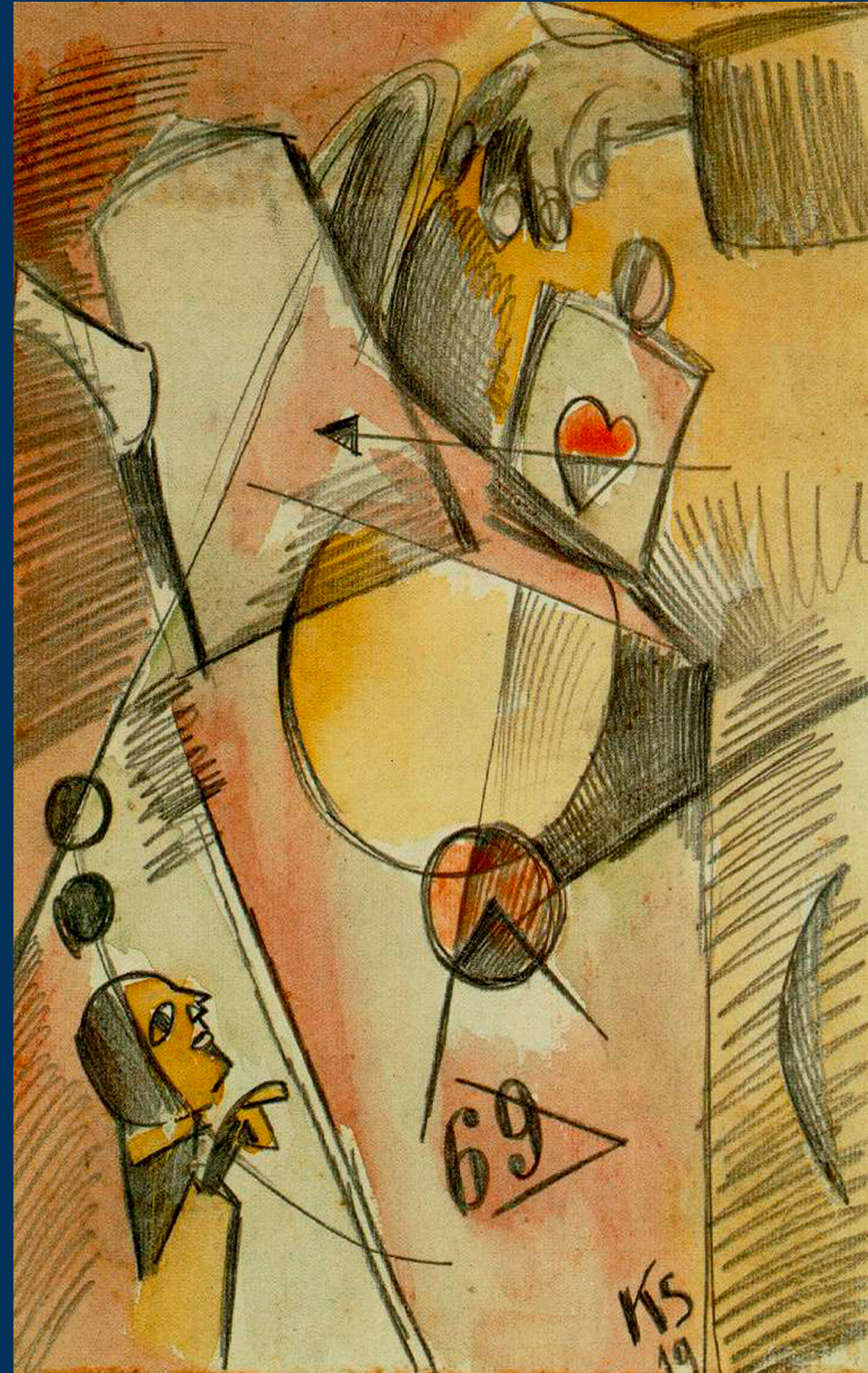
IN THE WINTER OF 1918/19, SCHWITTERS BEGAN TO MAKE COLLAGES, PROBABLY INFLUENCED BY THE WORK OF HANS ARP, WHO WAS IN GERMANY AT THE END OF THE YEAR; ONE OF SCHWITTERS' FIRST COLLAGES, **HANSI**, IS STRONGLY REMINISCENT OF ARP'S WORK.



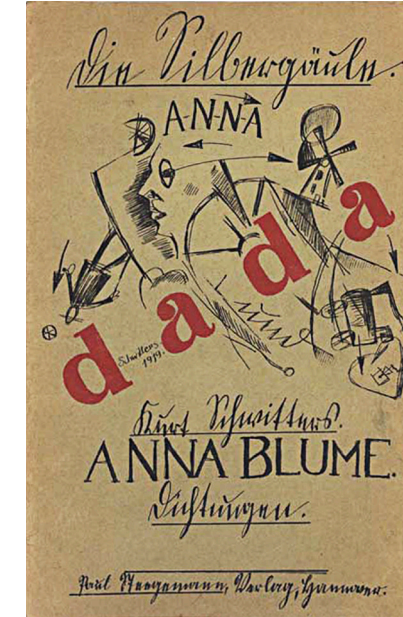
1918 - Hansi, Collage on board

IN THE SPRING OF 1919, SCHWITTERS BEGAN TO MAKE ASSEMBLAGES FROM SCRAPS OF REFUSE, INCLUDING ONE THAT INCLUDED A SNIPPET CONTAINING THE FOUR LETTERS MERZ — CUT FROM AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE KOM-MERZ-UND PRIVATBANK, AS HE REVEALED MANY YEARS LATER. MERZ WAS SOON TO BECOME A KIND OF BRAND NAME FOR ALMOST ALL HIS ACTIVITIES AND INDEED, FROM 1922, HE EVEN BEGAN TO REFER TO HIMSELF AS KURT MERZ SCHWITTERS OR SIMPLY MERZ.

IN 1919, SCHWITTERS APPROACHED TRISTAN TZARA, THE SPOKESMAN OF THE ZURICH DADAISTS, AND THE GROUP GREETED HIS WORK WITH ENTHUSIASM. HE FOUND FURTHER STIMULUS IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BERLIN DADAISTS, WHOSE SCANDALOUS ACTIVITIES WERE MAKING HEADLINES IN THE SAME YEAR. RAOUL HAUSMANN’S ANECDOTE THAT SCHWITTERS WAS REJECTED BY THE BERLIN DADAISTS IS, HOWEVER, DUBIOUS, FOR THEIR SELF-APPOINTED LEADER, RICHARD HUELSENBECK, SUPPORTED SCHWITTERS FROM MAY 1919 ONWARDS AND VISITED HIM IN HANOVER AT THE END OF THE YEAR. THE TWO FINALLY FELL OUT IN 1920, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF AN ARGUMENT ABOUT DADA PUBLICATIONS. CERTAINLY THERE ARE NO GROUNDS FOR THE TALE THAT SCHWITTERS INVENTED MERZ BECAUSE HE WAS REJECTED BY DADA, FOR HE USED HIS MERZ PICTURES TO INTRODUCE HIMSELF BOTH TO TZARA AND HUELSENBECK.

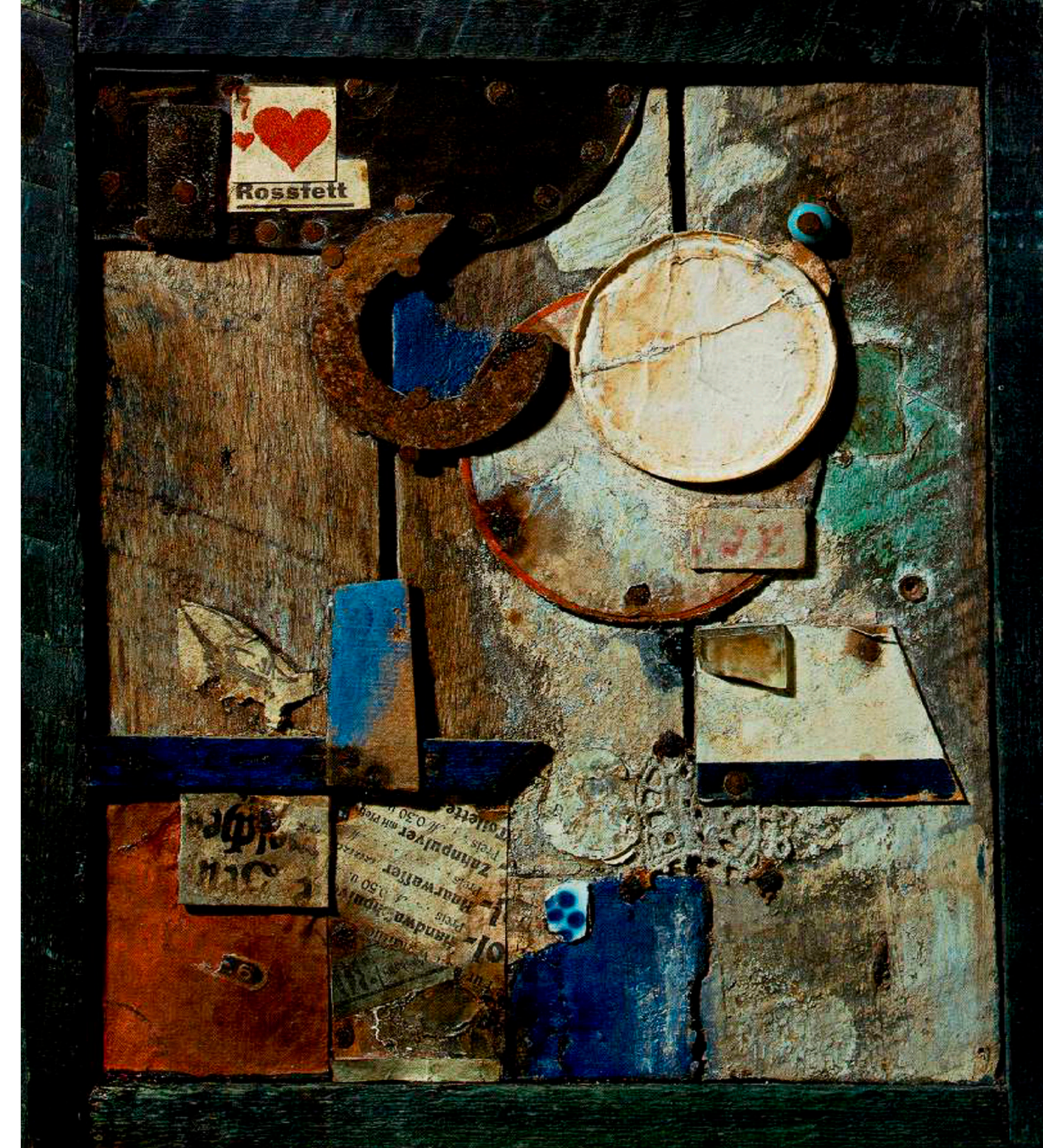


1919 - The Heart Goes from Sugar to Coffee, watercolor

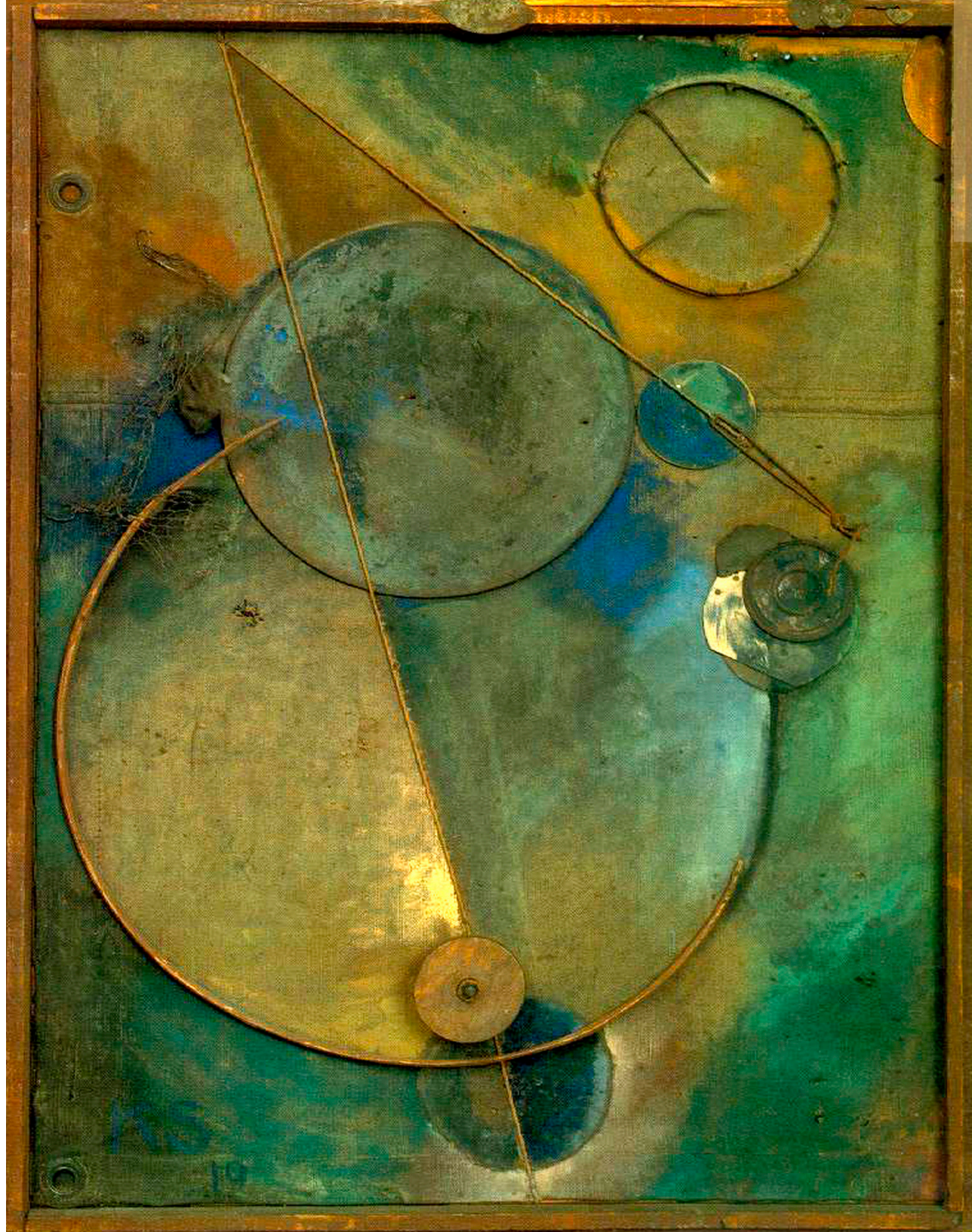


IN A STURM EXHIBITION IN MID-1919, SCHWITTERS SHOWED HIS NEW MERZ WORKS AND SOME WHIMSICAL WATERCOLORS (SUCH AS **THE HEART GOES FROM SUGAR TO COFFEE**). MERZ CAUSED A FUROR AMONG THE CRITICS, AND A SUCCESSFUL PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE HIS PROVOCATIVE POEM **AN ANNA BLUME** BROUGHT HIM NATIONAL NOTORIETY. THOUGH HE WAS NOT CONNECTED WITH ANY POLITICA L PARTY, HIS ART WAS REGULARLY VILIFIED AS A THREAT TO TRADITIONAL GERMAN VALUES, WHILE HE HIMSELF WAS DENOUNCED AS ‘UNPATRIOTIC’ OR, JUST AS OFTEN, INSANE.

YET SCHWITTERS THRIVED ON PUBLIC OPPOSITION, AND FROM 1919 TO 1923 HE CREATED A SUCCESSION OF MERZ PICTURES, WHICH ARE NOW SEEN AS HIS GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO TWENTIETH CENTURY ART. THESE PICTURES CARRY AN INNER TENSION THAT DERIVES FROM THE SENSITIVE JUXTAPOSITION OF ABSTRACTION AND REALISM, AESTHETICS AND RUBBISH, ART AND LIFE, AND THEIR INNATE DYNAMISM IS ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MERZ.



1919 - Merzbild Rosstett, assemblage



1919 - Revolving, assemblage

SCHWITTERS STANDS ALONE IN THE CONSUMMATE MASTERY OF COLOR, THE DELICATE BALANCE OF CONTENT AND FORM AND THE INTRICATE INTERPLAY OF COARSE AND FILIGREE DISPLAYED IN **MERZBILD ROSFETT...**

... THE ALMOST MINIMALIST **REVOLVING**, USING THE BAREST OF MATERIALS, CONVEYS A MYSTERIOUS SHADOWY ROTATING COSMOS EXTENDING FAR BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF THE FRAME.



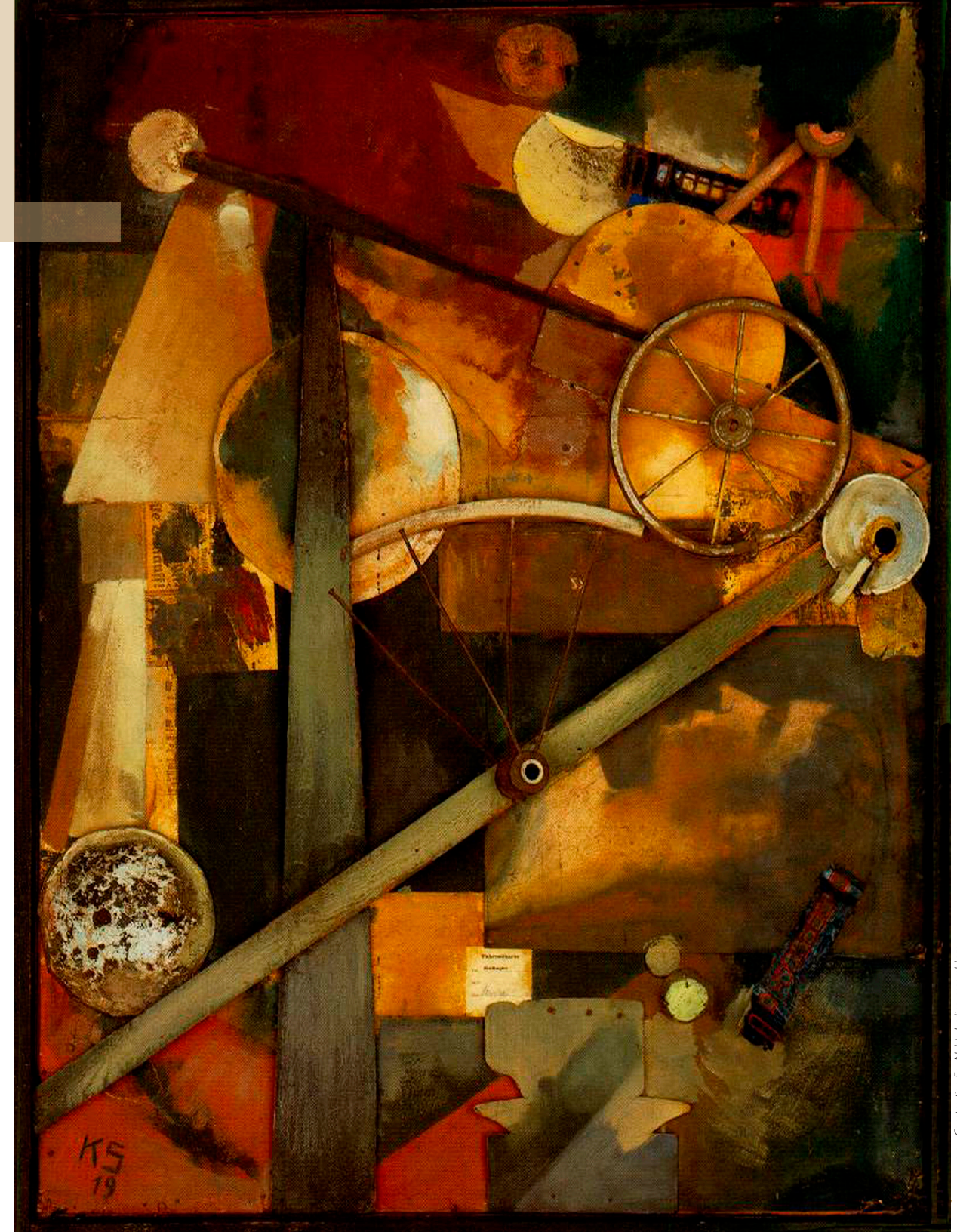
1924 - Merz Werbe, trading card, litho printed card

IN **CONSTRUCTION FOR NOBLE LADIES**, 1919, THE PRECARIOUS EQUILIBRIUM OF THE DISPARATE ELEMENTS IS STABILIZED ONLY BY THE SIDE-ON PORTRAIT OF SCHWITTERS' ANGELIC AND LONG-SUFFERING WIFE HELMA. SCHWITTERS CLAIMED THAT THE COMPOSITION INCLUDES SEVEN FACES OF WOMEN, WHICH MAY BE A CLUE TO THE TITLE OF THIS WORK, THOUGH NO ONE HAS FOUND ALL OF THE FACES YET.

SCHWITTERS' REVOLUTION CAME LATE - HE WAS THIRTY-TWO AT THE TIME OF THE FIRST MERZ EXHIBITION - BUT MERZ CHANGED HIS LIFE RADICALLY. HE SUDDENLY FOUND HIMSELF AT THE FOREFRONT OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND QUICKLY ALLIED HIMSELF WITH THE AVANT-GARDE, INCLUDING VARIOUS EUROPEAN DADA GROUPS, THE BAUHAUS (SCHLEMMER, KLEE, KANDINSKY, FEININGER, GROPIUS, MOHOLY-NAGY) AND THE NEW GENERATION OF CONSTRUCTIVISTS FROM EASTERN EUROPE AND THE DE STIJL GROUP FROM THE NETHERLANDS (LISSITZKY, THEO VAN DOESBURG).

BY NOW HIS FANTASY KNEW NO BOUNDS AND OVER THE NEXT DECADE HE UNDERTOOK GROUNDBREAKING EXPERIMENTS IN SUCH FIELDS AS ABSTRACT DRAMA AND POETRY, CABARET, MULTIMEDIA ART, BODY PAINTING, MUSIC, PHOTOGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURE.

HE WAS A SUPERB PERFORMER AND A PROLIFIC WRITER; HIS LITERARY WORKS NOW FILL FIVE VOLUMES, AND HE ALSO PUBLISHED AN INNOVATIVE MERZ JOURNAL THAT APPEARED IRREGULARLY FROM 1923-32. HE ALSO BECAME A LEADING TYPOGRAPHER OF HIS TIME, FOUNDING WHAT WAS TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL ADVERTISING AGENCY, **MERZ WERBE**, IN 1924.



1919 - Construction For Noble Ladies, assemblage

CONSTRUCTIVISM

SCHWITTERS' ACTIVITIES FROM 1922 ONWARDS WERE LARGELY INFORMED BY THE MOVEMENT KNOWN AS INTERNATIONAL CONSTRUCTIVISM, WHICH AIMED FOR NO LESS THAN A COMPLETE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY IN WHICH ARTISTS WERE ENVISAGED AS PLAYING A KEY ROLE. AS A MASTER OF SUBTLE COLOR AND PRECARIOUS BALANCE, HOWEVER, HIS ADOPTION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVIST ART, WITH ITS RELIANCE ON PRIMARY COLOR AND GEOMETRICAL FORMS, WAS NOT ALWAYS ADVANTAGEOUS TO HIS WORK, ALTHOUGH A QUASI-MINIMALIST APPROACH CAME NATURALLY TO HIM (HE EXPERIMENTED WITH IT EARLY, IN PICTURES LIKE **COLORED SQUARES**).

FROM 1924 THE COMPOSITION OF THE MERZ PICTURES BECOMES MORE CLEAR-CUT, THE TEXTURES MORE UNIFORM, THE INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS LARGER AND SIMPLER. BUT LUCKILY HE NEVER ABANDONED THE IDEA OF MERZ — THE SUPREME ART OF THE FRAGMENT - AS CAN BE SEEN FROM THE SPLENDID RELIEF WITH **CROSS AND SPEAR** AND **CICERO**, WHERE THE EFFECTS OF STARK CONSTRUCTIVIST COLORS AND TIGHT COMPOSITION ARE BRILLIANTLY OFFSET BY SHARP CURVES AND SHADOWS AND SCHWITTERS' BELOVED SCRAPS OF BATTERED MERZ REFUSE. AN EQUALLY STARTLING EXAMPLE IS **SMALL SEAMAN'S HOME** (MADE IN HOLLAND, WHERE SCHWITTERS WOULD COMB THE BEACHES FOR MERZ MATERIAL DURING HIS SUMMER HOLIDAYS).

FOR THIRTEEN YEARS (1923-36) HE ALSO WORKED ON AN EXTRAORDINARY CONSTRUCTION THAT CAME TO BE KNOWN AS THE **MERZBAU**. ITS BEGINNINGS CAN BE TRACED TO A NUMBER OF COLUMNS IN HIS STUDIO AT THE REAR OF HIS PARENTS' APARTMENT IN HANOVER, TWO OF WHOSE NAMES ARE KNOWN: THE CATHEDRAL OF EROTIC MISERY AND THE COLUMN OF LIFE. HE MADE NO SECRET OF THE COLUMNS, BUT NEITHER PUBLICIZED THEM NOR REFERRED TO THEM IN HIS CORRESPONDENCE IN THE 1920S.

APART FROM A FEW LARGELY UNENLIGHTENING PHOTOS, WE THEREFORE HAVE ONLY THE (GENERALLY CONTRADICTIONARY) REMINISCENCES OF HIS STUDIO RECORDED MANY DECADES LATER BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND HIS SON ERNST, WHICH MEANS THAT MOST THEORIES ABOUT THE APPEARANCE, NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLUMNS ARE BASED ON GUESSWORK.

IN THE EARLY 1930S, SCHWITTERS INTEGRATED THE COLUMNS INTO A SCULPTURAL INTERIOR THAT HE COMPLETED IN EARLY 1933 AND NAMED THE MERZBAU. THIS WAS A WORK HE TRIED HARD TO PUBLICIZE, AND IN 1936, SEVERAL PHOTOS OF THE MERZBAU WERE EXHIBITED IN MoMA IN NEW YORK. BETWEEN 1934 AND 1937, WHEN HE LEFT GERMANY, HE CREATED NEW ELEMENTS IN OTHER AREAS OF THE HOUSE, INCLUDING THE BALCONY AND THE ATTIC; THE FINAL EXTENT OF THE MERZBAU IS NOT CLEAR, BUT AT LEAST SIX ROOMS WERE INVOLVED.

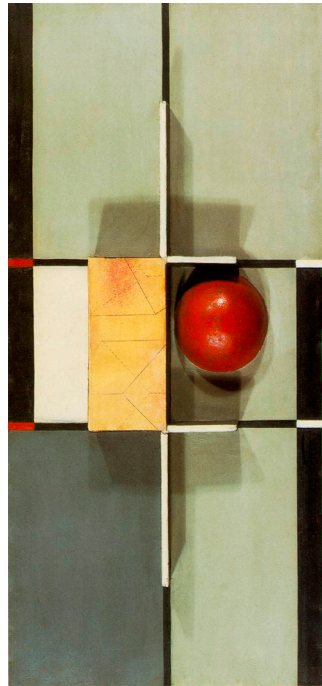
WITH THE RISE OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM IN GERMANY AFTER 1929, SCHWITTERS FOUND HIMSELF IN SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES. THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF THE AVANT-GARDE COMMUNITY DISINTEGRATED AND SCHWITTERS GRADUALLY CEASED HIS PUBLIC ACTIVITIES. THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER AND OF THE LEADER OF DE STIJL, THEO VAN DOESBURG IN 1931 MARK THE START OF A NEW PHASE OF HIS WORK, AS SCHWITTERS HIMSELF MAKES CLEAR IN 'NEW MERZ PICTURE', WITH ITS CONTEMPLATIVE MOOD AND COARSE DABS OF COLOR. THE SOMBER RESTRAINT OF PINO ANTONI IS LIKEWISE IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE WORKS OF THE EXUBERANT EARLY MERZ PERIOD.

SCHWITTERS' WORK WAS RUTHLESSLY DEFAMED BY THE NAZIS, AND HE KEPT A LOW PROFILE DURING THE THIRD REICH. HIS WORKS WERE EXHIBITED IN A SERIES OF 'DEGENERATE ART' EXHIBITIONS THAT BEGAN EARLY IN 1933 AND CULMINATED IN THE INFAMOUS 'ENTARTETE KUNST' EXHIBITION IN MUNICH IN MID-1937.

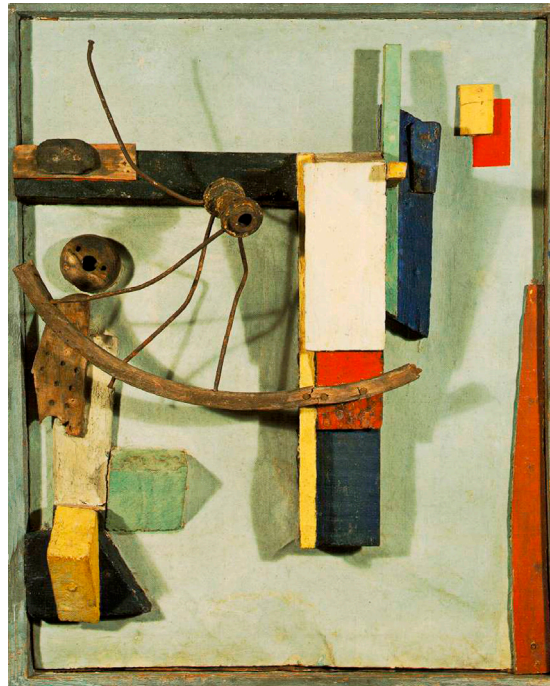
THE PRINTED EDITION OF HIS LITERARY MASTERPIECE, A SOUND POEM NAMED THE **URSONATE**, WAS SEIZED BY THE SS IN THE SAME YEAR, AND PUBLICIZING THE MERZBAU BECAME IMPOSSIBLE IN GERMANY.



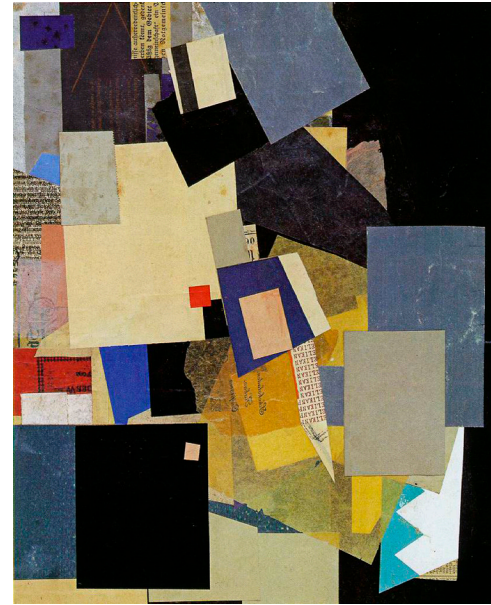
1921 - Merz 352 Colored Squares



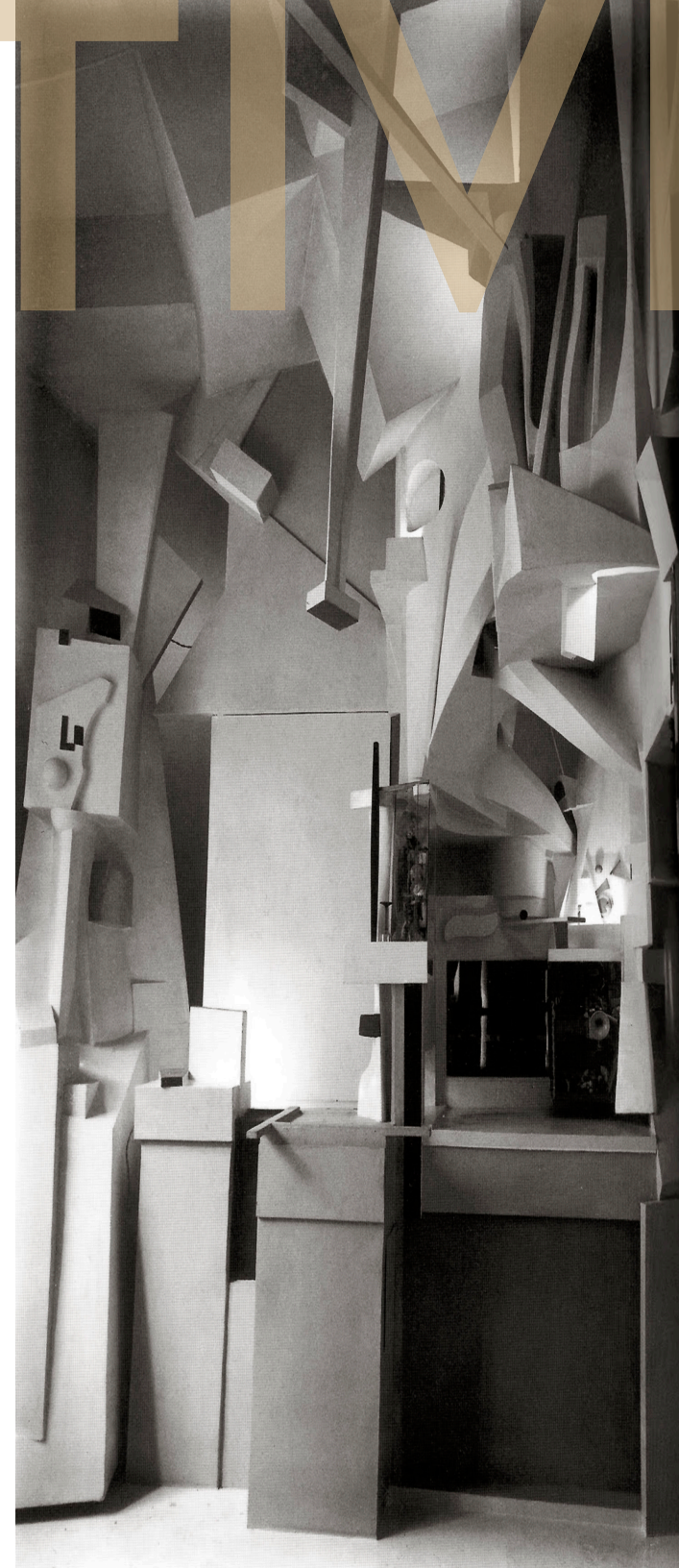
1924 - Relief With Cross and Spear, painted wood relief



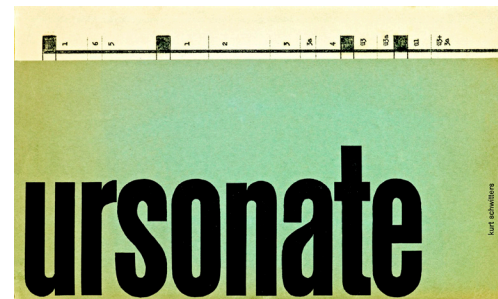
1926 - Small Sailor's Home, assemblage



1928 - Elkan, collage



1932 - Merzbau Hanover, interior room construction



1932 - Ursonate (dada sound poetry, litho printed book cover)

Inhalt: DADA IN HOLLAND. KOK: GEDICHT. BONSET: GEDICHT; AAN ANNA BLOEME. PICABIA: ZEICHNUNG. HANNAH HÖCH: ZEICHNUNG; WEISSLACKIERTE TÜTE

1921 Merz 21 Erstes Veilchen, litho printed cover

1027 De Stijl Mercano litho printed cover

1923 Meiz 1 Holland Dada, litho printed cover.

1924 Pelikan Tinte Ad. litho print

03, Palikan PanPante Ad printed ad

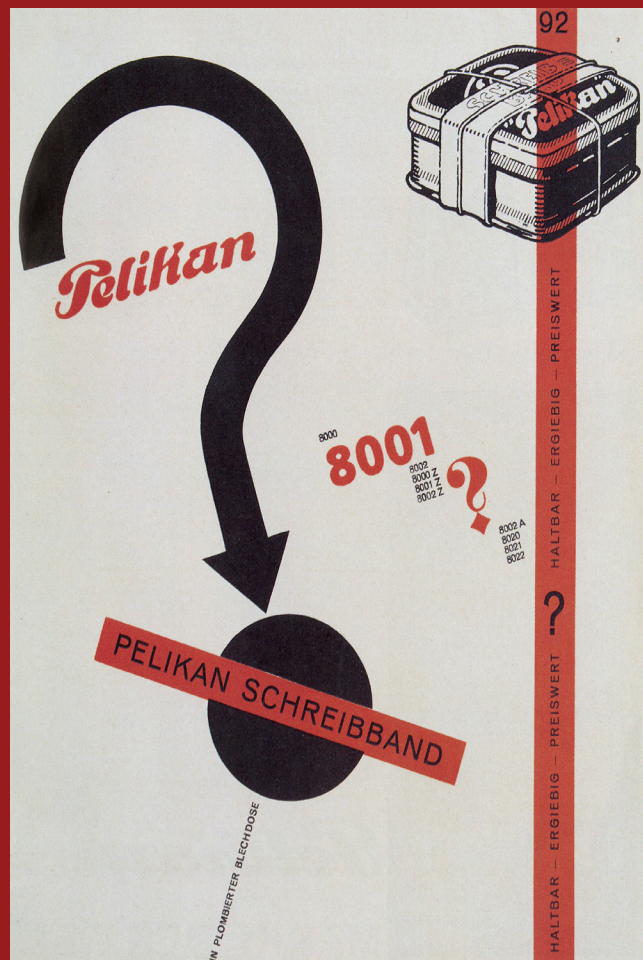
AS HIS PROFESSIONAL SOURCES OF INCOME DRIED UP, HE SPENT MORE AND MORE TIME IN NORWAY PAINTING PORTRAITS AND LANDSCAPES AND SELLING THEM TO TOURISTS.

HE MOVED TO NORWAY IN JANUARY 1937, FOR REASONS THAT HAVE NEVER BEEN FULLY EXPLAINED, THOUGH THE GESTAPO WAS CERTAINLY ON HIS TRAIL, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF HIS CONNECTIONS WITH THE HANOVER RESISTANCE, WHICH HAD BEEN UNCOVERED IN AUTUMN 1936.

FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS, SCHWITTERS EKED OUT AN UN-

CERTAIN EXISTENCE AS A REFUGEE IN NORWAY. DEPRESSED AT ABANDONING THE **HANOVER MERZBAU** TO AN UNCERTAIN FATE, HE TRIED TO GAIN A COMMISSION TO CREATE A NEW ONE IN THE US OR SWITZERLAND, BUT COULD RAISE NO INTEREST.

ALL HOPES OF FINISHING HIS SECOND MERZBAU, PAINSTAKINGLY CONSTRUCTED IN HIS GARDEN AT LYSAKER, NEAR OSLO, WERE DASHED WHEN NAZI TROOPS INVADED NORWAY IN 1940 AND HE FLED NORTH WITH HIS SON ERNST.



1924 Pelikan Pen Points, printed ad



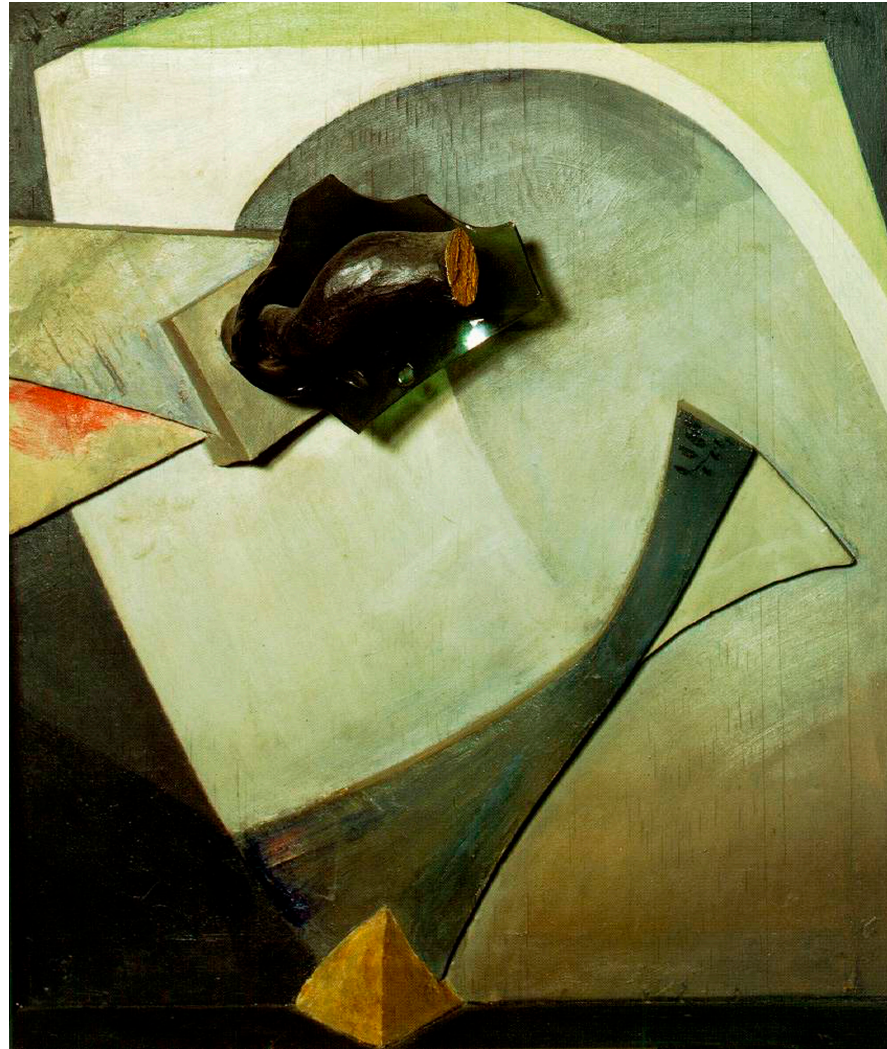
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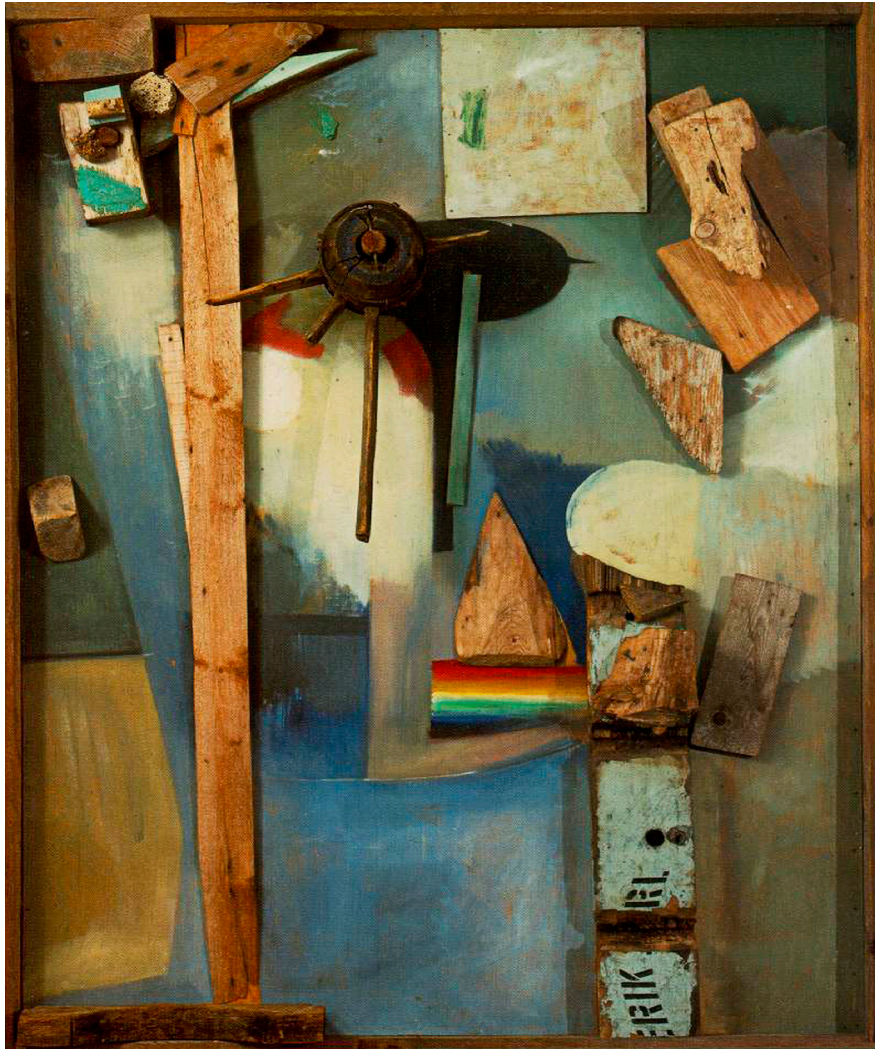
1939 Merzbild Alf, assemblage



1938 Spring Door, assemblage



1940 - The Glass Flower, assemblage



1939 - Merzbild With Rainbow, assemblage

He finally landed in England, where he was interned until November 1941. Yet the Merz pictures of this turbulent period give little indication of the fact that Schwitters suffered from poor health and time and again found himself in life-threatening situations. **Merzbild Alf** is often cited as an example of his brief interest in Surrealism: it is difficult to imagine that **Spring Door**, the superb **Glass Flower** and **Merzbild With Rainbow**, with their sparks of light and swinging rhythms, were created at a time of increasing isolation and despair for the artist.

After release from internment, Schwitters lived until 1945 in bombed-out London, where the unfamiliar surroundings gave him fresh inspiration for Merz pictures. He made light of his

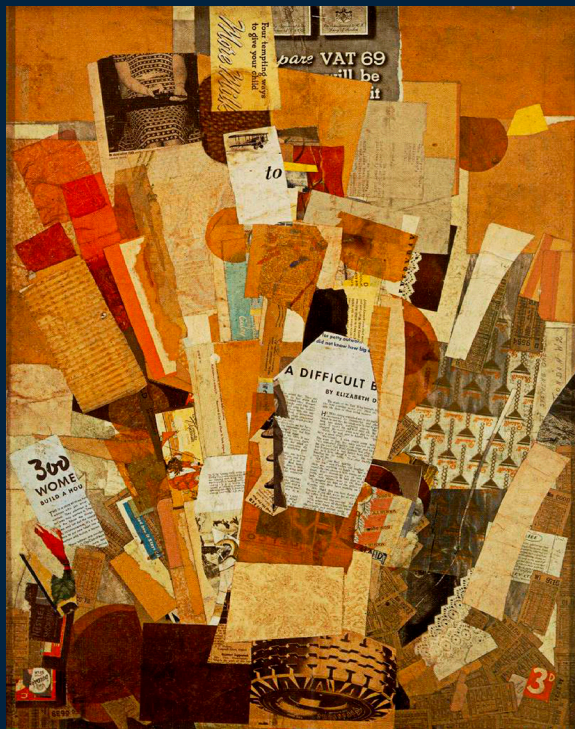
SURREALISM



1931 New Merzplure assemblage

HEAP OF PROBLEMS IN DIFFICULT, reworked the great masters in inimitable tongue-in-cheek MERZ fashion in THE HOLY NIGHT AND recalled the dark days of the Nazi regime in the sinister black shapes and blood-red background of HITLER GANG (named after a film). He was fascinated by the comics sent in letters from compatriots in the USA and used them in his famous FOR KATE, a collage now regarded as a forerunner of Pop Art.

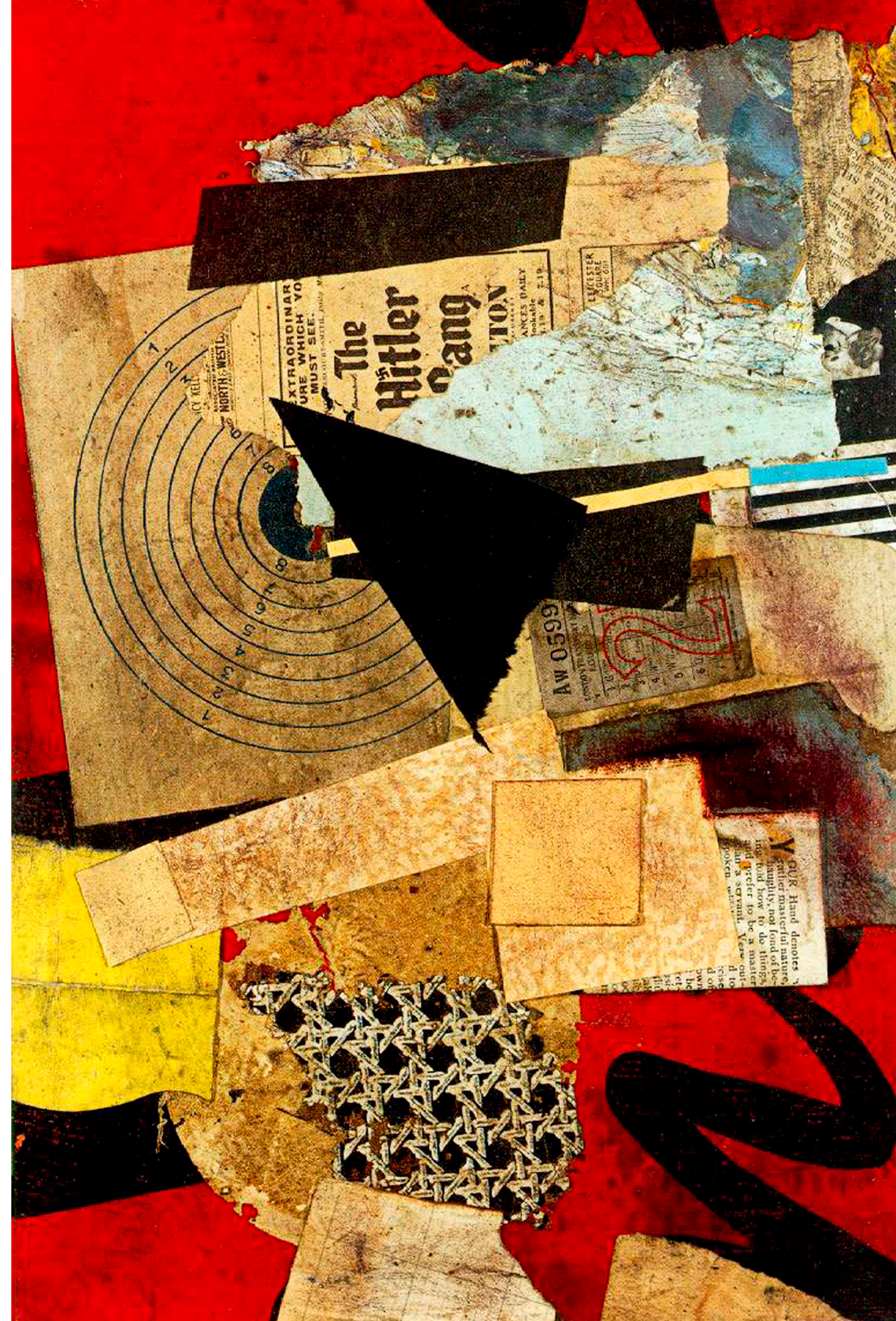
In 1945 he moved with his companion, Edith Thomas (nicknamed Wantee), to Ambleside in the English Lake District, and in August 1947, with a grant from a Pittsburgh businessman transferred to him via the



1942 - Difficult collage



1947 - The Holy Night, 1947 collage



1944 - The Hitler Gang collage

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK, HE STARTED ON A NEW MERZBAU IN A BARN IN THE HAMLET OF ELTERWATER. HE NEVER FINISHED THE MERZ BARN, HOWEVER, AND AFTER HIS DEATH IN KENDAL ON JANUARY 8, 1948, PART OF THE INTERIOR WAS DESTROYED AND PART WAS MOVED TO OTHER LOCATIONS. THE LARGEST SECTION, AN END WALL WITH AN ABSTRACT RELIEF, IS NOW TO BE FOUND IN THE HATTON GALLERY OF NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY. NOTHING REMAINS OF SCHWITTERS' OTHER MERZBAUTEN, FOR THE HANOVER MERZBAU WAS ANNIHILATED IN AN ALLIED BOMBING RAID ON HANOVER IN 1943, AND THE LYSAKER MERZBAU BURNED DOWN IN 1951.

SCHWITTERS DIED IN 1948 AT THE AGE OF SIXTY, POVERTY-STRICKEN AND NEGLECTED, BUT UNDERSTANDING THAT HIS WORK WOULD ONE DAY BE RECOGNIZED AS THAT



OF A GENIUS. THROUGH ALL THE TRIBULATIONS OF HIS LIFE, HE STOOD HIS GROUND WITH HIS UN-DOGMATIC, NON-ELITIST AND DEMOCRATIC CREATION OF MERZ, WHICH CONJURED UP ITS OWN MAGIC FROM THE REJECTED, THE DISCARDED AND THE USELESS: SMALL WONDER THAT THE NAZIS FOUND HIS ART SUBVERSIVE AND TRIED TO ERADICATE IT. SCHWITTERS' WORK INSPIRED SUCH POST-WAR PIONEERS AS JASPER JOHNS, ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG AND JOSEPH BEUYS, AND HE IS NOW SEEN AS THE GRANDFATHER OF POST-1945 ART MOVEMENTS, FROM POP ART TO FLUXUS, CONCEPTUAL ART TO SITE-SPECIFIC ART, AND THE FORERUNNER OF PRESENT DAY ARTISTS SUCH AS THOMAS HIRSCHHORN, GREGOR SCHNEIDER AND RACHEL WHITEREAD.

