L’Europe des esprits – the magic of the intangible from the romantic to the modern
31st March until 15th July 2012

The Zentrum Paul Klee is opening an ambitious exhibition on a theme, whereby there is scarcely an artist of note who has not attempted to prove himself in giving a visual form to the intangible. The exhibition “L’Europe des esprits – the magic of the intangible from the romantic to the modern” is dedicated to the history of the intangible, which today attains a new relevance in a time when meaning is sought after outside the traditional religions.

It is scarcely possible to imagine our society without the intangible and the irrational. Social or financial crises or catastrophes, whether caused by people or nature, always throw us back onto fundamental questions. Over centuries creative artists have taken up these questions and made them comprehensible in pictures.

In a countermove to the rationalistic tendencies of the Enlightenment the artists of the romantic in the 18th century sought to depict the supernatural. Painters such as Johann Heinrich Füssli or Caspar David Friedrich were preoccupied with legends, witches and spirits or viewed nature as the reflection of moods. Resulting from the collaboration with the Musée d’art moderne et contemporain in Strasbourg, the exhibition “L’Europe des esprits – the magic of the intangible from the romantic to the modern” shows the changing influence of mystic attitudes of mind and spiritistic practices upon the visual arts in Europe from 1780 into the 1930’s. Besides the appearance of European spirits in painting, photography and sculpture, the development of the history of art during this period of time can be traced from the romantic through Symbolism to Surrealism and the abstract trends of the modernists. Works of well-known artists like Caspar David Friedrich and Francisco de Goya as well as Ferdinand Hodler, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky up to Max Ernst alternate with the fascinating pictures, rarely seen here, by exceptional artists from Eastern and Northern Europe.

The exhibition was curated by Dr. Michael Baumgartner and Serge Fauchereau and comprises around 250 works from international owners.

The opening takes place on Friday, 30th March 2012, at 6 p.m. in the Zentrum Paul Klee. The opening will be accompanied by the world famous glass harmonica virtuoso Bruno Kliegl.
The exhibition

**Fairies and table-moving**

The magic of the intangible and supernatural has been an important subject in art for centuries. Witches, fairies and demons from popular belief and literature but also spiritistic practices such as table-moving and mysticism fascinated artists and audience in always new ways. The exhibition “L’Europe des esprits – the magic of the intangible from the Romantic to the Modern” sheds light on the significance of the spiritual, the esoteric and the occult on European art stretching over an extensive period.

**From the Romantic to science**

It begins at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century, at a time when the world of myths, spirits and demons, having been banned into darkness by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, were enjoying a revival. As the 19th century progressed, interest in the occult and paranormal phenomena increased. With the help of new scientific methods such as the use of electromagnetic rays, some attempted to make these phenomena visible, while others were occupied with the religions of the world and in particular eastern religious beliefs. So the movement of the Theosophical Society, brought into existence in 1875, or Anthroposophy founded at the beginning of the 20th century by Rudolf Steiner, were both dedicated to finding a universal spiritual basis of being.

**Symbols and abstraction**

Towards the end of the 19th century the symbolist artists were searching for a deeper spiritual truth behind the material appearance of objects and the means of depicting them artistically. At the start of the 20th century the artistic modernists attempted with their abstract tendencies to make an authoritative step in this development. And this also took place alongside a decisive rejection of the material world. Artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg or Johannes Itten were engrossed in the theosophical and esoteric theories of their time.