Edited By Emma Chambers and Karin Orchard
With contributions from Adam Chodzko, Alistair Hudson,
Megan Luke, Jennifer Powell, Laure Prouvost, Isabel Schulz,
Katharine Stout and Michael White

Tate Publishing
First published 2013 by order of the
Tate Trustees by Tate Publishing,
a division of Tate Enterprises Ltd,
Millbank, London SW1P 4RG
www.tate.org.uk/publishing

on the occasion of the exhibition
Schwitters in Britain

Tate Britain
30 January – 12 May 2013

Sprengel Museum Hannover
2 June – 25 August 2013

Organised by Tate Britain and Sprengel Museum Hannover, with the cooperation of
Kurt und Ernst Schwitters Stiftung, Hannover

The exhibition at Tate Britain is generously supported by Tate Patrons

© Tate 2013

Text by Isabel Schulz © the author

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any
form or by any electronic, mechanical or other
means, now known or hereafter invented,
including photocopying and recording, or in
any information storage or retrieval system,
without permission in writing from the
publishers or a licence from the Copyright
Licensing Agency Ltd, www.cla.co.uk

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84976 026 3

Distributed in the United States and Canada by
ABRAMS, New York

Library of Congress Control Number applied for

Designed by The Studio of Williamson Curran
Colour reproduction by DL Imaging Ltd, London
Printed by Grafos SA, Barcelona

Front cover: Detail from Kurt Schwitters,
EN MORN 1947 (p.125)

Measurements of artworks are given in
centimetres, height before width

From responsible sources
FSC® C012329
Togetherness in Exile

In August 1944, Kurt Schwitters returned home from a conference organised by the PEN literary club in London and, with some excitement, began to dash off a letter to his old friend László Moholy-Nagy. Both were exiles from Hitler’s Germany: Moholy-Nagy had emigrated to the United States via London in 1937, the same year Schwitters had followed his son to Norway, where they remained until the German invasion in April 1940. When Schwitters eventually landed on British shores himself, he spent just over a year interned as an ‘enemy alien’. Feeling cut off from the world beyond the barbed wire, he received crucial support from Moholy-Nagy as he attempted to secure a visa to travel to America. Though these efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful, the two friends quickly resumed their correspondence a few months after Schwitters was released in November 1941.

Freed from his extended internment, Schwitters found himself marooned in London in the wake of the Blitz. Any acquaintances from the Continent who had made their way there – Piet Mondrian, Walter Gropius, Naum Gabo, to name but a few – had moved on long ago. That late August afternoon at the PEN club, then, he must have felt as if he had seen a ghost when he suddenly encountered Moholy-Nagy’s ex-wife from the Bauhaus days, the photographer Lucia Moholy. In his letter he tells his friend how he had searched for Lucia for over a year once he had learned she was still in town, how he had even pestered a stranger in an art gallery who turned out to be a striking doppelgänger, how he felt too timid, after this episode of misrecognition, to believe that the real Lucia now appeared before him, and how, once they had exchanged pleasantries, both found themselves at an utter loss for something to talk about. ‘Now I have to report to you that I live’, Schwitters continued to Moholy-Nagy, ‘I live, paint, and modellise [i.e., sculpt by modelling]. I do not write very much in the moment, and I believe that at the moment my best things are my small sculptures. They are so small that they may be easily be transported, so that
I could easily have an exhibition of them in [the] USA. With this brief statement — one of the very few he ever made about the sculpture he fabricated in England — the letter ends abruptly, a draft that remained unfinished and unsent.

These sculptures are indeed remarkable for the small scale that Schwitters stresses in this letter, as well as for their brazenly polychrome surfaces that show little regard for tasteful or systematic harmonies of colour. He regularly used paint to coat a casing of rough plaster that, in turn, did not so much trace the internal armature of a given work as thoroughly obscure it. This structure was often supplied by a found object like a twig, a rock or a bone. The surfaces of these works — a mixture of the viscous and tacky materials of oil paint and plaster — do their utmost to distract us from fixing a clear mental image of their underlying form as conceptually separate and distinct. Schwitters intended that these objects would thereby collapse conventional distinctions that had long separated the artistic media of painting and sculpture, together with their attendant claims on our perceptual faculties. As he subsequently put it in a letter to Alfred H. Barr, Jr, then the chair of modern painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York: ‘I modelled the colour and form of the surface with paint, so that modelling and painting become only one art.’ These objects confound habitual approaches to the pictorial and spatial arts, which might assume that painting is something that is primarily seen, something that conjures a space or an illusion independent from our own environment, whereas sculpture is something corporeal that shares a space with our bodies and other things. We cannot rely upon these assumptions when approaching his English sculptures, and instead we are asked to reflect consciously on the specific overtures these objects make to us as we attempt to establish some kind of rapport. Does their small size encourage us to pick them up and hold them even as we are impelled to look at their colours from a distance? Do their unpredictable colour combinations invite us to dwell on their changeable appearance, dependent upon lighting conditions and our own physical movement from one vantage to another?

As our options for how to approach these objects appear to multiply, not only do we question their status within the traditional parameters of the arts of painting or sculpture, but we are made to feel equally unsure of what it is, exactly, that we ultimately behold. Here Schwitters’s description of his reunion with Lucia Moholy makes vivid the particular context in which he developed his sculptural technique following his release from internment. In his letter to Moholy-Nagy, he poignantly narrated his situation in exile in London as a series of missed encounters, unfulfilled searching, and uncanny apparitions of his past life. Recounting how he finally recognised Lucia at the PEN club, he writes that ‘she looked still like Lucia, but less than the wrong [woman] from before. Anyhow we sat together and did not know what about to speak.’ Resemblance was too uncertain and mutual recognition too little guaranteed to regain the community that had once existed between them. Exile had made the familiar strange, and vision proved to be an unreliable guide as he navigated both a foreign land and his memories of home. In this state of perceptual uncertainty and alienation from his past self and present surroundings, Schwitters completely redefined his sculptural practice, which had long
been dominated by his Merzbau, the monumental transformation of the entire interior of his studio and its adjacent rooms in his home in Hanover that, in these last years, he declared to be his ‘life’s work’.² He had been forced to leave this all-consuming environment behind with his relocation to Norway, where he attempted to reconstruct it from scratch in a little structure he built himself on his landlord’s property in the Oslo suburb of Lysaker – only to have to abandon this space too with yet another border crossing in advance of the approach of war. Now, as we consider the small, transportable sculptures he made in England, we ought to realise that the intimacy that their scale and modelled surfaces appear to solicit is far from untroubled by this history. What could it possibly mean to behold sculpture when the conditions that once seemed so necessary for this encounter had been so thoroughly undone?

When Schwitters sought to merge painting and modelling into a single process, his aim was not to coordinate individual arts into a Gesamtkunstwerk, like so many parts making up an overpowering and totalising whole; rather, he preferred to find what it was that they might share, to destabilise the boundaries that purported to define the identity of a given medium or genre. For two decades prior to his exile, abstract composition and the found object had served as the common denominators for an art he termed Merz. Painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, theatre and poetry could all be formed through collage rather than with the traditional materials that had distinguished these arts from each other. And the artist’s individual expression of a rhythmic equilibrium, rather than the task of representation, would be the force that organised these heterogeneous fragments of everyday debris into works of art.³ As Schwitters travelled to Norway for increasingly longer stays to take up landscape painting in the years leading up to his eventual exile, the word ‘Merz’ began to fade from his vocabulary, and by the time he wrote to Moholy-Nagy and Barr, the shared terrain he envisioned between the arts of painting and sculpture had clearly shifted. For one thing, the found material incorporated into many of his small sculptures was organic matter rather than the detritus of mass culture. What is more, these works no longer obtained their colour through the garish printed matter of advertising and consumer packaging. Instead, he employed oil paint, which he had long ago claimed ‘reeks of rancid fat’ in a provocative response to critics who felt his early Merz collages were nothing more than abject accumulations of trash. Manipulating paint as if it were clay or paste, he appeared capable, at last, to acknowledge, even relish, its base materiality.⁴

As Schwitters adjusted his choice of materials for his late sculpture, his focus shifted to the surface of the art work as the site where the world of an object meshes with our own. Colour and form were not opposed terms in his remarks to Barr, but equally subject to the process of modelling. This technique was additive, building up a form with wet, clinging materials that conformed to the given shape of a found object or interior construction, rather than by carving one away in stone or assembling it by nailing disparate parts together. The irregular contours of a work like Untitled (Ochre) 1945–7 might suggest that some piece of matter shaped by forces of nature rather than artistry lay at its core, yet it is impossible to deduce from the surface of the sculpture the shape of that generative form with any certainty (fig.17). Even when we can

---

17

Untitled (Ochre)
1945–7
Plaster and stone, painted
9.5 x 22.8 x 15
Tate. Purchased 1990
CR:3249
clearly see the form that serves as the basic structure for a given work, as in *Untitled (Painted Stone)* 1945–7, Schwitters deliberately works to estrange us from it through his application of paint, here deployed in rings of gold, pink, aquamarine, white, ochre, orange and silver around its entire surface (fig. 18). This combination of colours in bands of varying thickness implies no order or consonance, nor does it orient the object in space, as it can just as legitimately rest on one face as the other. It is impossible to screen out the gaudy interference of painted colour to see the stone that gives the work its form.

Here Schwitters’s artistic intervention works against the conceit of ‘truth to materials’, which had dominated discussions about modern sculpture in England prior to the war. Closely tied to a revival in the technique of direct carving, this concept held that sculpture ought to make visible and explicit the properties particular to stone or wood – such as their hardness, resistance or heft – as if the sculptor had released something latent in his or her materials that would heighten their visibility. Schwitters’s little objects do not accord with these terms, and they stand in uneasy relation to the work of contemporaries such as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth (fig. 19).7 Moore, for example, felt the task of the sculptor was ‘to think of, and use, form in its full spatial completeness. He gets the solid shape as it were, inside his head – he thinks of it, whatever its size, as if he were holding it completely enclosed in the hollow of his hand.’ Like Schwitters, Moore turned to small pieces of driftwood, pebbles, and bones as a starting point for many of his sculptures after the war, yet he prized these found treasures less for their material properties than for their weathered forms, which he felt he could translate into bronze or stone and enlarge at will. For Moore, the small object would always affirm the mastery of the sculptor, whose ability to recognise a compelling form and control its monumentality was ‘a mental thing rather than a physical thing. It’s in the mind rather than in the material.’ According to the critic Adrian Stokes, the hand-held shape thereby became a metaphor for a sculptural idiom that was essentially dependent on ‘modelling’, one that asserted the mastery of a mental conception of form over material specificity. He contrasted this entirely subjective approach to ‘carving’, exemplified by Hepworth’s sensitivity to the surface, which aimed to make manifest how her materials always retain a measure of independence from cognition.8 Schwitters’s late sculptures, however, stand quite apart from either Moore or Hepworth’s paradigm: their small scale stresses the contingency of form on the beholder’s unfixed, shifting vantage, whereas their coloured and textured surfaces attract our attention only to frustrate our expectations that they ought to reveal all those qualities that we imagine exceed our grasp, whether because they are hidden within an inner core or are embedded in the materials of a given work. Indeed, a miniature work like *Untitled (‘Melting’ Sculpture)* 1945–7 gently mocks these ambitions for a supreme clarity of form and an expressive surface, as its very body appears to slide off its meagre base and into a formless mass of plaster and paint masquerading as something softening under its own weight (fig. 20).

These objects simultaneously court and deflect our impulse to seek recognition, which relies on the promise that identity is stable, that resemblance is possible, and that representation can be decoded. Schwitters’s anecdote about
his estrangement from Lucia Moholy becomes an allegory for how any faith in this promise is radically foreclosed to the exiled subject. The sculptures he fabricated in this context provide us the opportunity to feel what it might be like to experience the world from such a destabilised perspective. In this sense they come closest to the miniature plaster figures Alberto Giacometti produced in the 1940s after he fled Paris for Geneva on the eve of the German occupation (fig. 21). With these works, Giacometti had tried to give form to a memory of catching sight of his beloved at a distance, standing across a street as he approached with ‘the immense blackness of the houses above her’.¹⁰ The possibility for recognition is held in tight suspense, under threat from both the process of making the sculpture and the act of beholding it. Had Giacometti attempted to render this woman at any further remove, the work itself might crumble into dust beneath his touch; and, when apprehending this sculpture, were we to draw too close, all we would see are formless lumps of plaster. Yet even this narrow margin for recognition does not appear available to us through Schwitters’s late sculptures. Though we might attempt to relate his small objects to those he made in Germany or to search for affinities with the work of his contemporaries, they nevertheless eschew the historian’s inclination to link them with a coherent narrative of the artist’s past or working milieu.

Perhaps this is why, despite his resolute commitment to abstract sculpture throughout his life, Schwitters began to toy with varying degrees of figurai
tive depiction in his studio in Barnes on the outskirts of London. Works that appear to resemble other, already familiar objects, seem all the more strange as their hold on representation remains ambiguous, falters and fails to cohere. Several sculptures, such as the phallic Fant/Good-for-Nothing 1944, make explicit allusions to parts of the human body only to confound them through a skin of colour that defies any naturalism (p.52). Dancer 1943 is singular for its attempt to represent a figure in its entirety, which Schwitters built up from a branch or, possibly, an animal bone (p.23). The limbs of this creature seem to reproduce like a cluster of polyps, its red-tipped extremities appear raw, almost bloodied, and its disjointed, twisting leg and unsteady posture underscore this corporeal vulnerability. In short, while we cannot help but see this leaning, anti-statuesque object as a ‘body’, anything more specific we cannot say. With the sculptures that Schwitters made after he quit London for the town of Ambleside in the Lake District in June 1945, he attenuated their ties to representation still further, diminishing his reliance on the base and testing the limits of their very capacity to be recognised as sculpture, let alone as stand-ins for other objects in the world. For instance, as much as we might regard Untitled (Stone) 1945–7 as an analogue for a fist, one that would fit perfectly into the cup of the hand if we reached out to touch, its hastily painted colour pre-empts such metaphoric projection and keeps our probing fingers in check (p.53). Scale and contour lures us in, while colour requires that we step back and look. This object may be both painting and sculpture, but our senses of sight and touch fail to work in concert when we attempt to analyse its form. At the same time, colour thwarts even our capacity to see this object literally, as a simple stone and nothing else besides. With the utmost economy of means, this incomplete coat of paint is all it takes to foil our search for likeness and, simultaneously, to transform an unformed thing into a sculpture.
But what did Schwitters take sculpture to be? When he attempted to reproduce the Merzbau in Norway, he closely followed the form the Hanover space had assumed over six years of work prior to his exile. The new structure was to perform a memorialising, even reviving function – one that would bridge the rupture of separation and embody the continuity of his practice and aesthetic concerns. Schwitters’s studio in Hanover had once been a space strewn with the found materials he had amassed for his collages and assemblages, permeated by the smells of glue as it warmed and the refuse he had collected from the street. When he first turned his attention to sculpture, he consolidated these materials into free-standing dada objects, increasingly ambitious columns, and evocative ‘grottoes’ (fig.22). He eventually encased these objects, sculptures, and cavities within a crystalline wooden construction, leaving just a small selection visible behind glass (fig.23). In sharp contrast to the textural and coloristic diversity of the grottoes and, indeed, the entirety of his work in collage, the sculptural construction of the Merzbauten in Hanover and Lysaker consisted of intersecting beams and planes, painted white and sanded smooth with only very rare accents of primary colours (fig.24). Here the material that Schwitters sought to form was not so much wood or plaster, but space. His constructions would divide and bend this space, conceived less as a predetermined enclosure and more as a field riven by the confrontation of various forces, of the dance between the movement of the beholder and that of light. When Schwitters did occasionally create free-standing sculpture independent of this environment in the 1930s, he stayed close to its model. Completely white and uniform in texture, these works recall the monolithic columns of the Merzbau's origins as they extend its attempts to constitute space through a dynamic intersection of planes serving as blank screens for the mutable play of light and shadow. In his first year in Norway, he continued to make sculpture in this vein; indeed, Small Twisted Sculpture 1937 is a direct reprise of a sculpture (now lost) he completed in France in the months just before he emigrated (fig.25, overleaf).11

Schwitters's situation in England was very different from what it had been in Norway, where his family had travelled annually since their first visit as tourists in 1929. He had chosen to remain in Norway to avoid Gestapo interrogation concerning the resistance activities of his son and friends, whereas he was forced to flee to Britain, arriving in an utterly alien country following a harrowing escape from certain imprisonment.12 When we see Schwitters take up the formal idiom of the Hanover Merzbau for the only time in England with Untitled (Little Dog) 1942–5, the work no longer confronts us with a belief that continuity with his past work could be maintained (fig.26, overleaf). The smooth white surfaces and angular protrusions are still there, as are the planes set obliquely to each other to give a sense of a form twisting in space, but now they have been reduced to a formal echo, a kitschy knick-knack. Schwitters had long attacked kitsch as the hollow imitation of authentic artistic expression, rendering what was challenging or shocking more palatable to the public: “The absolute imitator, the Kitscher, has the most friends among the public; with his works, a large public feels so settled, so at home, so much among friends, that it feels content.”13 Irrevocably severed from any concept of home and his own artistic past, Schwitters now engages in a self-pastiche as if the Merzbau had been made by another artist entirely, cannibalising
the form but draining it of the ‘elementary force’ of its creativity. Within the Merzbau, he had once envisioned that ‘imaginary planes emanate from the directions and movement of the constructed surfaces as directions and movement in space’, and that ‘the suggestive effect of the sculpture is based on the fact that you intersect these imaginary planes yourself as you enter the sculpture’. Now this dynamic relationship between beholder and sculpture is cemented by a dog begging for food or mugging for a handshake – a performance for approval not unlike that staged by the Kitscher himself.

As Schwitters emphasised to Moholy-Nagy, the sculptures he made in England were eminently portable and deliberately rootless. Unlike the site-specific structures of the Merzbauten in Hanover and Lysaker, they were capable of emigrating ever westward, across the Atlantic if necessary. Indeed, it soon became clear to him that their mobility would be their salvation, a lesson for the exile himself. As disorientating as homelessness was, in times of war an excessive attachment to place could well be one’s undoing. When Schwitters wrote to Moholy-Nagy, he did not yet know that the Hanover Merzbau had been hit and destroyed by a bomb during an Allied raid the night of 8 October 1943. He learned of this catastrophe only when he received word that his wife Helma, who had remained behind in Germany to care for their elderly parents and protect their property, had died of cancer almost exactly one year later. To compensate for these twin tragedies, which had obliterated the deepest ties he still had to home, Schwitters wrote: ‘I worked on and developed my abstract sculptures. It was good that I did these small sculptures because the Merzbau had been bombed.’ And he repeatedly insisted that they marked a turning point in his approach to sculpture: ‘I am developing a new kind of sculpture from found forms. Very small. Not ornamental like the Merzbau. Similar to the MZ [Merzzeichnungen – i.e., collages].’ This statement challenges the common assumption that the Merzbau was a logical extension of collage into ‘empty’ space, a conceptual matrix that is merely given, existing independently from and prior to our bodily experience in time. He stressed that his sculptures in England should thereby assume a key role in our very ability to distinguish his pictorial compositions fabricated with the useless debris of mass consumption from his site-specific experimentation with the phenomenology of spatial perception.

I believe that when Schwitters claimed his latest sculptures were ‘not ornamental like the Merzbau’, he wanted to emphasise their detachment from any place or purpose, much like the very rubbish he had culled from the streets for his collages. Such refuse was free to drift, to acquire a patina, to shed a connection to a functional past, and to assume a new identity within another context. In April 1946 Schwitters received word from friends in Hanover that perhaps some parts of the Merzbau could yet be salvaged. He wrote back with the idea that he could ‘excavate the remains of the fragments, just as one does with ancient stones, and sell them in America’, elaborating that perhaps these remnants ‘could be fitted together to yield a sculpture again’. Although nothing of the Merzbau could, in the end, be recovered, here he considers how ruined fragments could be reconfigured endlessly into new wholes, whose status as ‘finished’ was, in fact, merely provisional – no longer bound to a particular place and time but rather perennially destined for ‘elsewhere’. At the same
time he began to build up new sculptures from found animal bones, thereby collapsing different processes and temporalities: 'I buy a bone, let a dog gnaw away what he thinks is worth gnawing, and rebuild the gnawed remains with plaster according to the rules of movement in art. That produces no bones but rather sculptures.' The role of found objects in his earliest Merz pictures from 1918 to 1922 had been to affirm the power of his composition to discipline their wanderings, to fix their meaning within an integrated and discrete whole, and to shed any vestiges of their prior use value. Over time, Schwitters came to question the priority of composition, allowing for the beholder's contribution to his art in his development of the immersive environment of the Merzbau. With his sculptures in England he extended this critique, dismantling the presumed hierarchy between material and form by insisting on their radical discontinuity. When curators at MoMA decided against exhibiting these new sculptures because they planned to include a large number of his Merz pictures in their ambitious survey of collage, he argued: 'In reality my sculptures are worked through, they are the best of my work and quite new for Amerika [sic]. It would take a long time of explaining. They are not compositions like the pictures and collages, they are constructions. Anyhow they are a new development, while my collages are 28 years old, when I made them.'

A work like *Untitled (Togetherness)* 1945–7 is, then, neither collage nor Merzbau (p.55). Both painting and sculpture, it is part of a ‘new development’ that is nevertheless built on ruins, fragments and bones. This was a development born of dislocation, which brought with it both a longing for recognition and a lack of confidence in its recuperation. Though the verticality of this sculpture might summon to mind a monumental column lifted proudly on a pedestal, what we actually see is a form that is not united in itself. Split in two, together and apart, its coloured shafts are lodged in a bed of lumpy plaster filling the lid of a cast-off cardboard box. In fact, where the sculpture ends and the frame of the base begins is by no means clear: one of these forms, made of a sliver of rock painted red and topped with a white cap, already sits on a cylindrical base wrapped in a ring of hard green plastic. Its neighbour too appears internally divided, as the colour on one side makes a red base for a yellow crest, while from another angle, the monochrome white coating affirms that this same body is all of a piece. Is this sculpture an image of union or isolation? Is the space in-between an agent of division or does it become a body in its own right, rendered visible, almost palpable? Schwitters’s late sculptures are not easily reconciled into anything like a logical series, but they all raise these questions, which point to the ambiguity of identity, place and community. As we make an uneasy peace with the fact that definite answers will inevitably evade us, we can think back once more to the same PEN club conference dedicated to the ‘freedom of expression’ where Schwitters had his failed reunion with Lucia Moholy. For it was there that he also encountered a new friend, another émigré, the Polish filmmaker Stefan Themerson, whose remarkable account of his impressions of the Merz master confirms that these sculptures, of all his works, aimed to contend with the paradoxes of exile and the violent upheaval of war:

There were writers from all over the world there, in the hall – and there were sounds of aeroplanes above the roof. Two hours earlier a bomb had
fallen on a nearby house. You don’t need to think about it too dramatically. This was a customary occurrence in those days; two hours had been enough to move away those who needed to be moved away, whole or in pieces, and the place looked peaceful, and the sky, now made visible by the removal of the higher part of the building looked bright … The same morning, while passing the bombed site on his way to the French Institute, [Schwitters] had picked up from among the ruins a piece of convulsed iron wire, a foot or two long. ‘I always take everything I find interesting’, he told me later. And now, sitting in the hall beside me, he was bending it into a space-sculpture while Mr E.M. Forster was delivering his speech. There were some distinguished writers there who, seeing him so occupied, thought he was an electrician or a plumber who had got lost and strayed into their Pen by mistake. Nevertheless, there, at that meeting, it was he, Schwitters, who was practicing what the speakers were preaching.
1 Contact was reestablished with a letter from Moholy-Nagy, 11 March 1942, Kurt and Ernst Schwitters Stiftung at the Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum Hannover (hereafter KESS). For information on Moholy-Nagy’s efforts with the US government on Schwitters’ behalf, see letter from Kate Stieritz, 12 December 1940, KESS. For more details on his internment in Britain, see Jennifer Powell’s essay in this volume.

2 Letter to László Moholy-Nagy, 21 August 1944, KESS (English in the original).

3 Letter to Alfred H. Barr, Jr, 1 November 1945, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Archives, New York, Exhibition #1400, File 11 (English in the original).


7 Schwitters met Hepworth and Ben Nicholson in May 1942, exchanging collages with Nicholson at that time. Over the course of his years in England, however, he remained disappointed in their art: ‘Hepworth can’t measure up to Arp’; ‘I think personally, there is only one artist worthwhile in England: Gabo. In a big distance there is Ben Nicholson or Henry Moore. The average English artist is nothing.’ See letters to Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, 5 January [sic] 1948, reprinted in Volker Rattemeyer and Dietrich Helms (eds.), Vordemberge-Gildewart: Briefwechsel, vol.2, Nurmburg 1997, p.236 and to Katherine Dreier (c. January 1947), Katherine S. Dreier Papers/Société Anonyme Archive, Beinecke Library, Yale University, Box 31, Folder 926.


11 See photographs in Kurt Schwitters: Catalogue Raisonné, vol.2, Ostfildern-Ruit 2003, cat. nos. 1767 and 1768. In March 1936, he travelled to Meudon and Paris to visit Nelly van Doesburg and Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp, where he completed as many as five sculptures. These were kept by Nelly van Doesburg for safekeeping but are all lost today.

12 For details, see Gwendolen Webster, Kurt Merz Schwitters, Cardiff 1997, especially p.290ff.

13 ‘Merz’ (1924), in Lach 1981, p.187. For more on the inauthenticity of kitsch, its mass appeal, and as a marker of class difference, see also Schwitters’s critique of architectural neo-classicism (and a veiled retort to Le Corbusier), ‘Über griechische Tempel’ (On Greek Temples’), written 6 April 1928, in Lach 1981, pp.204–8.

14 Letter to Alfred H. Barr, Jr, 23 November 1936, MoMA Archives, Exhibition #1400, File 42.

15 Edith Tachichold telegraphed word of Helma’s death in late December 1944; Marguerite Hagenbach confirmed the destruction of the Herbstbau in February 1945. See Webster 1997, pp.344–9.

16 See letters to Hans Richter, 29 March 1946, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Yves Poupard-Lieuissou Papers, Box 5, Folder 2 (English in the original) and to Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, 5 January [sic] 1946, Rattemeyer and Helms 1997, p.236.


18 Letter to Edgar Kaufmann, 15 July 1946, KESS. After several delays, Collage opened after Schwitters’s death on September 1948.

19 Stefan Themerson, Kurt Schwitters in England, London 1958, p.10. (See Chambers, p.18, note 27 for Themerson and Schwitters’s first meeting.) This story resembles Klaus Hinrichsen’s first recollection of Schwitters’s arrival at Hutchinson camp as he ‘sat down the next day on a bench on the grass field and continued to carve with a pocket knife an abstract sculpture form the branch that had accompanied him from Norway together with a white mouse’ (Kurt Schwitters Almanach, vol.8, 1989, p.100).
Fant/Good-for-Nothing  
1944  
Wood and plaster, painted  
CR:3190

Untitled (Stone)  
1945–7  
Stone, painted  
CR:3259
Untitled (Construction on a Sheep Bone)
1945–7
Wood, bone, nails and plaster, painted
CR:3247

Untitled (Togetherness)
1945–7
Stone, cardboard and plaster, painted
CR:3244