

Kurt Schwitters, singular plural (Paris, 12–13 Nov 26)

Paris, France, Nov 12–13, 2026

Deadline: Jun 21, 2026

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In conjunction with the exhibition “Total Schwitters” presented at the Musée national Picasso-Paris from 5 October 2026 to 7 February 2027, the Musée national Picasso-Paris and Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, in collaboration with the Sprengel Museum Hannover, are organizing an international and interdisciplinary conference devoted to the work and legacy of Kurt Schwitters in Paris on 12 and 13 November 2026.

The work of Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) charts a singular path within the art of the first half of the twentieth century. Painter, assemblage artist, poet, musician, sculptor, typographer, magazine editor, and organizer of artistic events, this total artist – whose work merged seamlessly with life itself – defies categories and resists all attempts at classification. Continuously painting from observation, Schwitters was one of the key figures of abstraction, participating in several landmark exhibitions in Paris during the interwar years and initiating unprecedented collaborations with Dada artists and Constructivists. Through his polymorphic Merz practice – which encompassed collage, assemblage, sound poetry, theatre, and architecture over nearly thirty years, from 1919 until his death in 1948 – Schwitters stands among those creators who, like Pablo Picasso and the figures of the Dada constellation, radically redefined the boundaries of art. Forced to flee Hanover, his birthplace, Schwitters nevertheless continued to pursue this major artistic project despite the destruction of his works and precarious living conditions. Paradoxically, this art was characterized by the modesty of its materials: found objects, natural or man-made items, string, wire, newspaper clippings, and other traces of reality.

Since the last retrospective devoted to Schwitters in France, held at the Centre Pompidou in 1994–1995 (curated by Serge Lemoine and Didier Semin, with the collaboration of Isabelle Ewig and Jacqueline Chevalier), new monographs have significantly expanded our understanding of the artist’s life and work (notably Isabelle Ewig, 2004; Isabel Schulz, 2010 and 2020; Megan R. Luke, 2013). These studies have been complemented by a catalogue raisonné of Schwitters’s visual works (eds. Karin Orchard and Isabel Schulz, 2000), as well as publications of the artist’s writings in German, English, and French, notably through the work of Marc Dachy. Publications devoted to his Norwegian and Anglo-Saxon periods have also deepened our understanding of the artist’s later works, which long remained less studied than those of his Hanover years (Emma Chambers and Karin Orchard, 2013; Isabelle Ewig, 1996 and 2004).

The conference aims both to further explore themes addressed in the exhibition – such as the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) and artistic and intellectual networks – and to foreground other aspects, particularly those relating to the legacy and reception of Schwitters’s

work. Special consideration will be given to papers examining Schwitters's relationship with France, as well as his connections to the histories of photography and poetry.

The conference will address the following themes in particular:

- The question of the Gesamtkunstwerk, the history of this term, and its relevance in the case of Schwitters;
- Schwitters's networks and the circulation of his works, particularly in France;
- Material studies and issues related to the conservation and restoration of hybrid and fragile works;
- Critical and artistic receptions of his work from his lifetime to the present day.

Submission Guidelines:

Proposals may come from the fields of art history, the humanities, or artistic practice. Papers may be delivered in either French or English. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the Musée national Picasso-Paris within the limits of current reimbursement policies.

Applications should consist of a single PDF file titled in the format:

SURNAME_FirstName_COLLOQUE SCHWITTERS

The file should include:

- a short biography (maximum one page);
- an abstract of the proposed paper (maximum 3,000 characters including spaces).

Applications may be written in French or English.

Submission deadline: 21 June 2026

Email submissions to: colloqueschwitters@gmail.com

Contact:

For any questions, please write to colloqueschwitters@gmail.com

Reference:

CFP: Kurt Schwitters, singular plural (Paris, 12-13 Nov 26). In: ArtHist.net, May 7, 2026 (accessed May 31, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52405>>.