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## EXHIBITION PRESS RELEASES

# German Expressionism collection viewed through art conservation lens in new exhibition

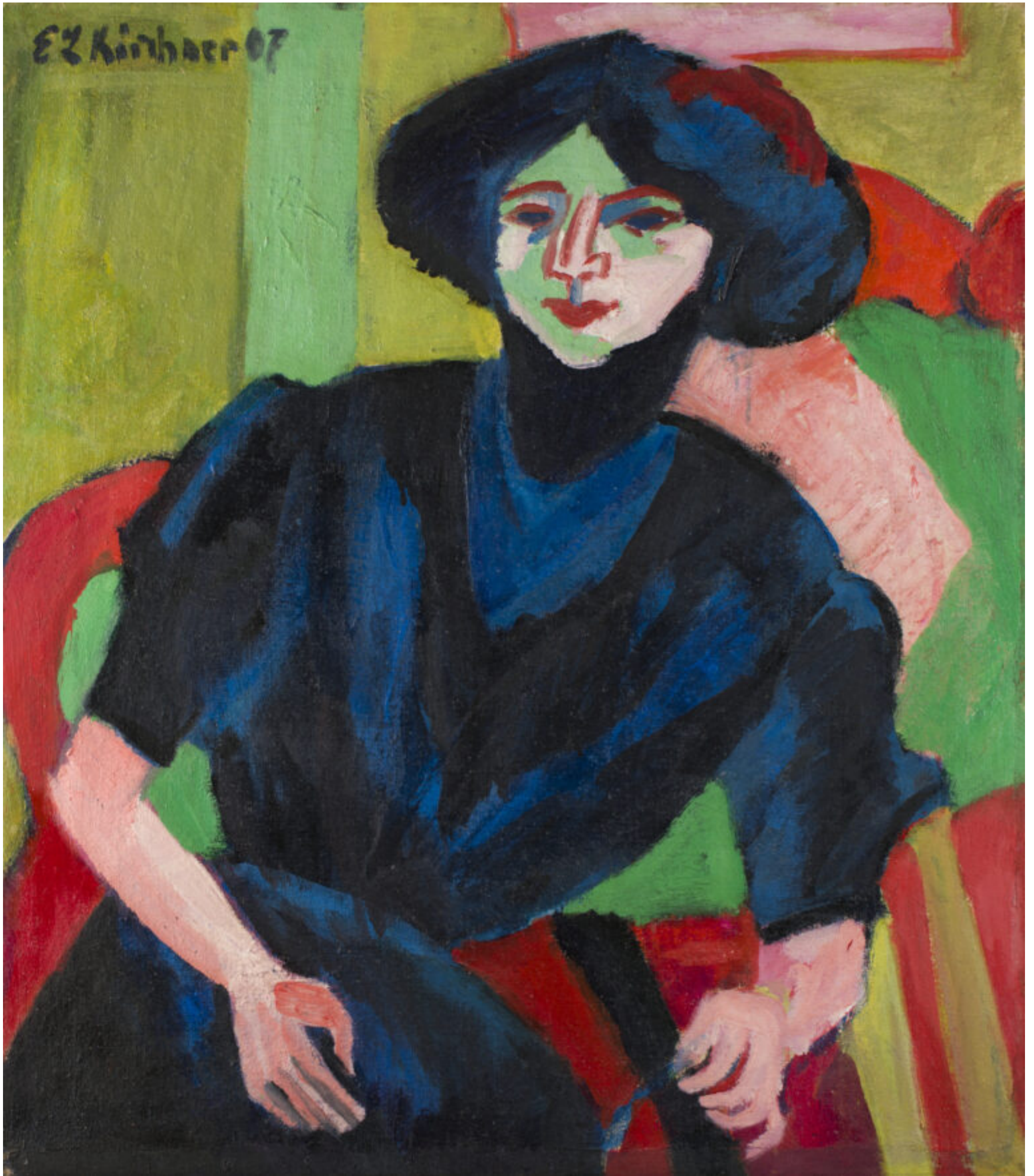
January 29, 2024

**ST. LOUIS, Jan. 29, 2024**—A new free exhibition at the Saint Louis Art Museum takes visitors behind the scenes and below the surface for an inside look at art from the museum’s permanent collection.

“Concealed Layers: Uncovering Expressionist Paintings” opens with a public celebration at 4 pm March 15. It is on view through Aug. 4 in the Caro Nichols Holmes Gallery 214 and Sherry and Gary Wolff Gallery 215.

“Concealed Layers” presents recent discoveries from a three-year, comprehensive technical analysis of SLAM’s world-class collection of German Expressionist paintings. Of the 48 paintings studied, 11 will be featured in the exhibition along with conservation images and examples of tools and materials used during research. Highlights include stick-figure studio graffiti in Oskar Kokoschka’s “The Painter II,” revealed by infrared reflectography. A previously undiscovered lake scene appeared in the X-radiograph of August Macke’s “Landscape with Cows, Sailboat, and Painted-in Figures,” and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s important early painting “Portrait of a Woman” regained its original title—“Portrait of Gerti”—from an inscription on the back.





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Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, German (active Switzerland), 1880–1938; "Portrait of Gerti", dated 1907 [1910-11]; oil on canvas; 31 3/4 x 27 3/4 in. (80.6 x 70.5 cm); Saint Louis Art Museum, Given by Sam J. Levin and Audrey L. Levin 26:1992

"This new research has transformed our knowledge about the collection and underscores the essential role of art conservation at the museum," said Melissa Venator, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Modern Art and co-curator of the exhibition. "As art historians, we can study a work for years without really knowing it. Conservation gives us some objective data about how an artwork



was made. And sometimes, like with the paintings in this exhibition, those discoveries form the basis of entirely new interpretations.”

The museum’s conservation department houses specialized labs for paintings, three-dimensional objects, works on paper, textiles and frames staffed by experts who care for the more than 36,000 artworks in SLAM’s global collection. Technical analysis is a bedrock of conservation. It includes activities ranging from physical examination to diagnostic imaging with X-ray, infrared and ultraviolet light, all designed to identify an artwork’s materials and applied techniques.



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“Conservation is about so much more than cleaning art and repairing damage,” said [Courtney Books](#), associate painting conservator and exhibition co-curator. “Since its origin, the field has evolved to use modern methods and advanced technologies that can unlock mysteries surrounding an object’s material history — essential research for providing ongoing care and optimizing future treatments.”