

DETAILED BIOGRAPHY OF EMIL ZBINDEN (1908 – 1991)

- 1908 On the 26th of June Emil Zbinden was born into poverty near Bern as the fifth of eight children of Samuel Zbinden (1869 – 1943, Postillon) and Bertha Zbinden-Kohler (1874 – 1962). Only five children reach adulthood.
- 1924 Apprenticeship as typesetter with K. J. Wyss Erben in Bern. He was supported in writing, drawing and watercolour painting by his teacher Albert Ruppli (1887 – 1963). Evening classes at the adult education centre with sculptor and woodcutter Karl Hänny (1879 – 1972). Member of Büchergilde Gutenberg, Berlin and the youth group „Nie wieder Krieg!“. First linoleum and woodcuts („Selbstbildnis“ 1926).
- 1927 Design and production of the novella „Die drei gerechten Kammacher“ by Gottfried Keller. First prize from the Pro Juventute Foundation.
- 1928 Completion of apprenticeship. At the suggestion of Albert Ruppli, sketching and drawing in the Emmental with the aim of illustrating the story „Elsi die seltsame Magd“ by Jeremias Gotthelf. Thanks to the mediation of the Bern Cantonal Department of the Interior, he arrived in Berlin on 18 August to work as a typesetter. Admission to the large company Braun & Co. Change to the Graphic Art Institute Liebheit & Thiesen. Evening courses at the School of Applied Arts in Neukölln near Hildebrand and further training in woodblock printing and typography at the German Printing Association by Curt Reibetantz († 1929). Attends lectures at the Humboldt University Berlin. Friendship with Bruno Skibbe, graphic artist and first typesetter at Büchergilde Gutenberg and the typesetter Karl Lüdtke. Zbinden reads the magazines „Weltbühne“, „Querschnitt“ and „Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung“ and comes into contact with works by Heinrich Zille, John Heartfield, George Grosz and Käthe Kollwitz and modern typography by Jan Tschichold (1902 – 1974).
- 1929 On October 14, entry into the master class of Georg Belwe (1878 - 1954) at the State Academy for Graphic Arts and Book Trade in Leipzig, together with Bruno Skibbe.

- 1930 Meets the artist Alfred Frank (1884 – 1945). Member of the „Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künste Deutschlands“ (ASSO). Frank becomes Emil Zbinden’s mentor. Fable „Der kluge Bauer und der Teufel“ („The clever farmer and the devil“), type and pictures cut in linoleum. Wood engraving for the title page of the 1930 Annual Report for the Cantonal Labour Office in Bern.
- 1931 Acquaintance with Bruno Dressler (1879 – 1952), book designer and trade unionist, founder and director of Büchergilde Gutenberg in Berlin. First orders to design books published by Büchergilde Gutenberg, beginning with Ellen Wilkinson’s „Die Kluft“. Collaboration in the design of the exhibition IfA (Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur) under Alfred Frank’s direction, which was to take place from 14 to 28 March in the Austrian Messehaus, but was closed by the police on the opening day. In Leipzig until 11 June student at the academy. Travel to Prague, then five weeks by bicycle through Northern Germany, Rhineland and Southern Germany. Return to Switzerland at the beginning of August. Worked as a freelance artist and graphic artist under difficult economic conditions in Bern and briefly as a typesetter for Albert Ruppli in Zurich. Founding of the association „Werkstätige Kunstfreunde“ (Working Art Friends) in Bern. Acquaintance with the wood engraver Emil Burki (1894 – 1952) in Zurich.
- 1933 After the National Socialists took power in Germany, he travelled to Berlin and Leipzig to prepare Bruno Dressler’s escape to Switzerland on behalf of the Zurich publisher and politician Hans Oprecht (1894 – 1978). Bruno Dressler emigrated to Switzerland on 30 November and became head of Büchergilde Gutenberg office which had opened in Zurich in 1927. During this time, his independent works dealt with social and political issues, including the Dimitrov trial.
- 1934 At the beginning of the year he was employed as a graphic artist in Nice. Acquaintance with Fleurie Bertrand. Until Bruno Dressler wished to return to Bern in December, half a year of free drawing and painting. Beginning of cooperation with the German exiled Büchergilde Gutenberg Zurich, Vienna, Prague. Decoration and illustration of the advertising gift copies of Büchergildes „Wie Christen eine Frau gewinnt“ by Jeremias Gotthelf.

- 1936 – 1953 Sketching and drawing in Emmental and Oberaargau. Illustration of the sixteen-volume Gotthelf edition of Büchergilde Gutenberg Zürich (book series „Gilden Bibliothek der Weltliteratur“) with a total of 910 wood engravings. Design of numerous other books for the Büchergilde Zürich and Lausanne, the Francke- and the Feuz-Verlag.
- 1937 Journey to Paris, one year later to Auvergne.
- 1939 Friendship with the Zurich Socialist city councillor and later Federal Government Minister Ernst Nobs (1886 - 1957). A commission within the framework of the Swiss National Exhibition is not awarded. Stays in Dijon, Lyon and Savoy.
- 1941 Wood engraving illustrations of Carl Albert Loosli (1877 – 1959) „Der Gäng-hü-Schlosser“. Beginning of the friendship with the writer and journalist Carl Albert Loosli (1877 – 1959).
- 1941 – 1944 Drafted in to the staff of the air-raid organisation in Bern together with other artists, namely Lindi (1904 – 1991), Fred Stauffer (1892 – 1980) and Victor Surbek (1885 – 1975). Hand-written and illustrated army diary in Bern. Work on the wood engraving "Gürbetal" in the back room of the fire brigade barracks. Membership of the Swiss Werkbund, Bern section.
- 1944 Louise-Aeschlimann scholarship from the Bernese Art Society. Drawing and painting in Grisons and Ticino with Rudolf Mumprecht. Founding of the Association of Swiss Woodcutters "Xylon" together with Emil Burki (1894 – 1952) and other colleagues. Co-organiser of the exhibition " Der schweizerische Holzschnitt" at the Kunsthalle Bern. Move into the studio at Kirchgasse 24 (today Münstergasse) in the old town of Bern.
- 1946 First international exhibition of the Xylon in Paris, in the Salon des Indépendants.
- 1947 Journey to Italy, drawings and watercolours. Journey to Prague.

- 1948 Travels to Germany and Scandinavia.
- 1949 Wall paintings in the Wylerschulhaus in Bern, together with Eugen Jordi (1894 – 1983) and Rudolf Mumprecht (*1918).
- 1950 – 1953 Painting and drawing with Eugen Jordi and Rudolf Mumprecht during the construction of hydroelectric dam in the high alps. Arnold Kübler publishes works by the three artists in the May issue of 1954 of the cultural magazine "Du".
- 1952 President of Xylon Switzerland (until 1970). Marriage to Martha Emma Bichsel, called Gritli (1919 – 1959); birth of their son Karl.
- 1953 Foundation of "Xylon International", together with Frans Masereel (1889 – 1972, Belgian), and first international woodcut exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich. Active exchanges and friendly contacts with woodcutters of the national and international Xylon and with various writers (including Traugott Vogel, Alfred A. Häsler, André Gide and Hans Ulrich Schwaar). From 1953 regular participation in exhibitions of the international Xylon in Zurich, Berlin, Ljubljana, Schaffhausen, Geneva, Nuremberg, at the Triennale in Carpi and at international woodcut exhibitions in London and Brighton.
- 1954 – 1957 Decoration and illustration of works by Carl Albert Loosli for Bücher-gilde Gutenberg Zurich.
- 1955 Trip to Leipzig. Beginning of collaboration with Walter Roos, Verein für Originalgraphik in Zurich.
- 1955 – 1970 Trip to Leipzig. Beginning of collaboration with Walter Roos, Verein für Originalgraphik in Zurich.
- 1958 – 1960 Renewed painting and drawing with Eugen Jordi during the dam building in the high Alps.
- 1959 Sudden death of his wife Martha Emma by stroke. Termination of the

studio apartment at Kirchgasse 24 by the Canton of Berne. After unsuccessful objections move to Brunngasse 60 in 1962.

- 1960 New construction of the Bern railway station, drawn reportage.
- 1965 Gleyre scholarship and trip to Crete.
- 1965 – 1989 Study trips to Greece, Corsica, Italy, Belgium and France. Travels to Germany (Hamburg, Leipzig, Berlin, and Frankfurt a. M.) and London.
- 1969 – 1991 An verschiedenen Orten Werktagungen der Xylon, Sektion Schweiz, angeregt durch Emil Zbinden. Gemeinsame Holzschnitte.
- 1977 – 1991 Reports from industrial companies (e.g. Brown Boveri in Baden). Numerous sketching hikes through Switzerland and abroad.
- 1979 Emil Zbinden is honoured in the context of the exhibition "50 Years ASSO" in Leipzig.
- 1982 The first volume of the catalogue of Emil Zbinden's graphic works is published by the publishing house Xylon.
- 1987 On 8 May, Emil Zbinden and friend Clément Moreau (Carl Meffert, 1903 – 1989) are awarded the first cultural prize of the Swiss Confederation of Trade Unions.
- 1991 Biography by Tobias Kästli "Emil Zbinden. Draughtsman, wood engraver and typographer".
- 1991 Death on 13 December due to heart failure.