HAMBURGER KUNSTHALLE

Press release | May 2026

Hamburger Kunsthalle presents the major exhibition *SCULPTURAL: The New Galleries* in modernised premises, based on a research project made possible by generous funding from the Dorit & Alexander Otto Foundation



Athens, tetradrachm
(440–420 BC)
Reverse of the coin: owl
Silver, Ø 24 mm, 17.09 g
© Hamburger Kunsthalle
Photo: Christoph Irrgang



Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
The Owl, 1952, 12.12.
Fired clay, painted,
34 x 25 x 34.5 cm
Hamburger Kunsthalle, acquired in 1956
© Succession Picasso / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026
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Photo: Elke Walford

- 1,000 exhibits spanning diverse media and periods will be on view until 30 April 2028 [extended]
- The research project has uncovered 6,000 miniature sculptures: coins, medals and plaques – the historical foundation of the sculpture collection.

With *SCULPTURAL: The New Galleries*, the Hamburger Kunsthalle is presenting the first show covering the entire spectrum of its sculpture collection. The exhibits, supplemented by selected key works on loan, span all genres as well as multiple media and periods, altogether comprising nearly 1,000 large and small sculptures, reliefs, paintings, graphic art, photos, and room and video installations from 2,500 years of visual history. Surprising comparisons unfold as visitors traverse an exciting circuit leading from antiquity to the present day, from the second to the third dimension, from miniature to monumental. A special focus is the museum's newly rediscovered trove of coins, medals and sculptural reliefs in gold, silver and bronze. The research project is dedicated to comprehensively examining, identifying, restoring and digitising these approximately 6,000 miniature sculptures and studying their context on an ongoing basis. A selection of around 650 of these works form part of the show.

The exhibition areas extending across 1,500 square metres on the ground floor of the founding building (opened in 1869) and extension (opened in 1919) have been extensively modernised and equipped with display elements developed specially for *SCULPTURAL*. The comprehensive research project on the miniature sculptures, along with the modernisation of the premises and forms of presentation, as well as the exhibition itself, have been made possible by funding totalling 4 million euros from the ***Dorit & Alexander Otto Foundation***. The foundation is thus once again acting as a leading sponsor for the Hamburger Kunsthalle. The foundation most recently demonstrated its extraordinary commitment to the museum in 2014–16, when its funding enabled extensive structural modernisation. The Kunsthalle drew here on the expertise of Alexander Otto's company ECE, as it has once again for the design of the new exhibition spaces.

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Other cooperation partners for the research and exhibition project include the University of Hamburg, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and, to an exceptional degree, the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Dr. Carsten Brosda, Hamburg Senator for Culture and Media: *»With the generous support of the Dorit & Alexander Otto Foundation, the Hamburger Kunsthalle has unearthed a very special treasure: ›sculptures en miniature‹, as Kunsthalle founder Alfred Lichtwark called coins and medals. The new presentation of this extraordinary collection not only spans an arc from miniature artworks to room-filling installations, from antiquity to the present, from the second to the third dimension. The clever exhibition concept simultaneously offers viewers a completely new experience of the collection and building ensemble, enabling them to retrace the history of the museum in a unique way*.«

Alexander Otto, entrepreneur and sponsor: »*I have been fascinated by numismatics since I was a child. So I am all the more pleased that our foundation is helping to bring to light again with these coins and medals a long-hidden Kunsthalle treasure and enabling their restoration and academic study. Another matter close to my heart was to give these special objects new and modern exhibition spaces in the context of the sculpture collection, where they can be shown to best effect and inspire viewers. The SCULPTURAL exhibition has impressively achieved this aim*.«

Prof. Dr. Alexander Klar, Director of the Hamburger Kunsthalle: *»The exhibition SCULPTURAL presents an entire collection area of the Hamburger Kunsthalle in a new way, drawing attention to the spatial dimension of art and to a wide variety of media and materials. Based on the museum's history, the presentation develops themes that connect present and past across large leaps in time, conveying them in a contemporary fashion as visitors traverse completely redesigned halls. Cataloguing, digitising and researching the coins, medals and plaques in the collection of the Hamburger Kunsthalle is a once-in-a-lifetime project that provides renewed access to a long-invisible component of the Kunsthalle's holdings. Following Dorit and Alexander Otto's outstanding commitment to the modernisation and renovation of the Kunsthalle in 2016, this is yet another example of the couple's support and promotion of genuine museum work at the highest level through their foundation.*«

Dr. Annabelle Görgen-Lammers, Curator, Head of the Collection and Research Project: *»Rarely does one still have the chance to rediscover forgotten collection treasures and research them in depth. In this case, these 6,000 objects collected from the Kunsthalle's inception according to purely artistic criteria formed the basis and an integral part of the sculpture department! As head of the collection and exhibition curator, it was my heartfelt wish to make these finds and initial insights into their historical and contemporary contexts accessible in the most exciting way possible. I am grateful to be able to draw on a growing international network of institutional and (private) collections to supplement our own holdings with long-term loans of key works in multiple media, for example from the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. Above all, however, I would like to thank the Ottos for their faith in us and their enthusiasm for the concepts developed for such a large, multi-layered museum project.*«

Further information:

The exhibition *SCULPTURAL: The New Galleries*

The exhibition presents sculptures from 2,500 years of visual history in surprising contexts, together with paintings, video installations, photographs and graphic art. A special focus is the museum's newly rediscovered trove of coins, medals and plaques – »sculptures en miniature« that the Kunsthalle has collected ever since our first director, Alfred Lichtwark (1852–1914), introduced this unusual initiative for an art museum. Many of these objects attest to Lichtwark's in-depth knowledge of contemporary developments in French sculpture at the end of the nineteenth century – he collected both art medals and the designs on which they were based, some directly from Paris studios. But they also illustrate the reception of antiquity at the time, already evident in the Kunsthalle's neoclassical architecture and a large collection of plaster casts that was established upon its founding. The exhibition explores the historical ideal of antiquity, for example with reminiscences on the changing presentation over a period of 60 years of the nineteenth-century plaster casts after ancient masterpieces, among them larger-than-life statues of Greek deities. These works from the Kunsthalle's original holdings were handed over to the University of Hamburg for research and teaching in 1980. Now selected examples are returning on a ten-year loan. *SCULPTURAL* at the same time delves deeper to examine how the antique ideal was, and is still, called into question by artists – through pointed juxtapositions with works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In the exhibition, the miniature sculptures and outstanding (large) sculptural works are shown alongside other masterpieces from the collection spanning multiple media and periods. It was also possible to obtain selected exceptional large and small sculptures on loan, including over 25 from the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. This extraordinary collaboration with a major French museum takes up historical threads and carries them forward into the future, because Alfred Lichtwark had already established close contacts with the predecessor museum in Paris. In themed galleries, high-calibre masterpieces from selected European private collections shine an additional light on the special, multifaceted profile of the Kunsthalle's sculpture collection. Antique portraits, for example, enter into a dialogue with contemporary photography, and large sculptures by Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol meet up with body casts from the 1960s and video works by artists including Marina Abramović. The sculptural forms suggest associations between dimensions and times, evoking themes such as the settings for art as well as the face, emotions and expressions in portraits and masks. Here, the collection of the Hamburger Kunsthalle, which has to date focused on a period of 800 years, is supplemented by works from other decisive centuries and thematic areas.

In addition to new spatial experiences, visitors will discover novel forms of presentation, such as table showcases developed curatorially after models conceived by the first director, which offer an intimate and communicative way to view art. Integrated interactive digital stations convey information on the miniature objects through 3D scans, animations and texts. Special juxtapositions highlight the themes presented: for example, ancient and modern meet up in the Hall of Columns – originally dedicated to the goddess Athena and now the museum café – when Athena's attribute, the owl from an ancient Greek tetradrachm, encounters Pablo Picasso's clay sculpture *The Owl* (1952).

The new sculpture galleries extend over the entire ground floor – from the neoclassical Hall of Columns to the rotunda of the first extension building, where a new, site-specific work has been commissioned to complete the circuit. »*Wishing You Well*« (2026), an imaginative »wishing well« by French artist Laure Prouvost (b. 1978) that responds in singular fashion to the site and the exhibition concept, was made possible by the Dr. Heinz H. O. Schröder Foundation. Although an artistic fountain was planned for the imposing central hall at the time it was built, the project was never realised – and now this setting can be experienced in a fresh way.

Featured artists: Marina Abramović, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Eleanor Antin, Hans Arp, Arnold Böcklin, Constantin Brancusi, François-Rupert Carabin, Jean Baptiste Carpeaux, Giovanni Cavino, Jules-Clément Chaplain, Alexandre Charpentier, Pierre Jean David d'Angers, Sebastian Dadler, Edgar Degas, Jean-Baptiste-Daniel Dupuis, Julius von Ehren, James Ensor, August Gaul, Alberto Giacometti, Julio González, Henri Charles Guérard, Mona Hatoum, Armand Francois-Joseph Henrion, Johann Georg Hinz, Max Klinger, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Daniel Friedrich Loos and Friedrich Wilhelm Loos, Fernand Khnopff, Käthe Kollwitz, Henri Laurens, Alphonse Eugène Lechevrel, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, Aristide Maillol, Ewald Mataré, Henri Matisse, Adolph Menzel, Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, Olaf Metzel, Bruce Nauman, Anne-Marie Carl-Nielsen, Laure Prouvost, Victor Peter, Antonio Pisano (gen. Pisanello), Pablo Picasso, Hubert Ponscarme, Hans Reinhart d. Ä., Jean Désiré Ringel d'Illzach, Auguste Rodin, Oscar Roty, Thomas Ruff, Johann Gottfried Schadow, Anton Scharff, George Segal, Adriaen Valck and others.

The »new galleries«, complete with an historically authentic terrazzo floor

The modernisation measures now completed close a gap in the project of 2014–16, bringing the exhibition galleries on the ground floor of the extension and the hall adjacent to the museum café in the foundation building up to the latest standard. The light-flooded hall was equipped with improved light protection and an acoustic ceiling, making it suitable for dual use by the café and, based on its history, to exhibit art. Among other improvements, a high-quality terrazzo floor was installed in reference to historical plans. In the neoclassical Hall of Columns housing the museum café, the Parthenon frieze encircling the room at ceiling height has been restored and is now illuminated for the first time, enabling it to enter into a dialogue with exhibits presented here. External wall temperature control was installed in 10 galleries. Also new is the modernised lighting system using LEDs. In addition, an artistically designed staircase was reopened to provide direct access to the first floor, where an additional, daylit sculpture gallery can be found as well as a direct connection to the painting galleries. All measures were carried out in consultation with Hamburg's Monument Protection Office.

The research project

SCULPTURAL builds on the research project *From the second to the third dimension*, which was launched in 2022 to study the coins, medals and plaques from over 2,500 years of pictorial history in the Kunsthalle's collection. Alfred Lichtwark laid the cornerstone for the historical sculpture department with these »sculptures en miniature«. The exhibition presents selected key pieces as a cross-section of the collection, focusing on ancient Roman and Greek miniature works of art as well as the medal art collected by Lichtwark. In parallel with the exhibition opening, selected coins, medals and plaques will be made publicly accessible for the first time via the Kunsthalle's *Online Collection* and in the ikmk portal (Interactive Catalogues of the Coin Cabinets). Exhibition visitors can also use QR codes to access further information and high-quality images of all the small objects.

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HAMBURGER KUNSTHALLE

Made possible by:

Dorit & Alexander Otto STIFTUNG

Sponsored by:

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With the exceptional support of the Musée d'Orsay

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