

ART IS PUBLIC

FROM KUNSTVEREIN TO KUNSTHALLE

Founded 200 years ago as a civic initiative, the non-profit institution Kunstverein (art association) in Hamburg holds a firm place in the cultural life of the city ever since. It acts as an important intermediary between contemporary art, artists and the public. As a free city, early 19th century Hamburg is devoid of any courtly collecting or art academy. Therefore, the bourgeois Kunstverein plays a central role in the promotion and dissemination of art. This commitment culminates in the opening of the Kunsthalle with its public collection in 1869. Time and again, the Kunstverein and the museum remain in close contact, linked both by organisational structures and their programmatic emphases. It is only since the final spatial separation in 1963 that the two institutions have been operating completely independently.

In nine theme rooms, this exhibition highlights selected events from the history of the Kunstverein. They are closely related to the history and the collection of the Hamburger Kunsthalle, thus connecting both institutions to this day. A timeline along the walls of the first room locates the events in the following rooms in their historical context. The persisting mutual appreciation of both institutions is reflected in the sound installation by the artist Hanne Lippard in room 8. It was commissioned by the Kunstverein for this exhibition.

ROOM 1

1826 — THE FIRST PUBLIC EXHIBITION

April 13, 1826 is a significant day for artistic life in Hamburg: The first exhibition of the Kunstverein opens in a house built after designs by Alexis de Chateauneuf on the corner of ABC-Straße and Fuhrentwiete. In the following weeks until mid-May, interested citizens are invited to explore the current art scene in a presentation of almost 250 works of art. From now on, the Kunstverein organises exhibitions every two or three years which emphasizes its social relevance.

The exhibition catalogue of 1826 demonstrates clearly that most of the exhibits are by Hamburg artists. Well-known representatives of the Dresden Romantic School are similarly represented – an exclusive concen-

tration on local artists is deliberately not intended. The Dresden-based Norwegian landscape painter Johan Christian Dahl figures in the exhibition with six paintings, his artist friend Caspar David Friedrich, likewise a resident of Dresden, is represented with three paintings. Remarkably, in 1826, Hamburg is able to present one of Friedrich's most important works, ›The Polar Sea‹ – (which you will find displayed in the centre of this room). However, it is only in 1905, almost eighty years later, that the Kunsthalle acquires this painting.

ROOM 2

1842 — FIRST EXHIBITION OF OLD MASTERS

Ever since the Kunstverein's first gathering in 1817, the Old Masters are one of its main interests. The members regularly show each other prints and drawings by Old Masters and discuss them. The establishment of the public exhibitions in 1826 marks a shift towards contemporary art. Some members consider this tendency as too partial and initiate an exhibition of older art in the Kunstverein. On May 2, 1842, the association opens its ninth art exhibition in the former theatre at »Dammthorstraße« (roughly the current location of the State Opera). It features 257 paintings of »Old Masters«, loaned by 44 collectors from Hamburg and Altona. The choice of the location turns out to be a stroke of luck: Only a few days after the exhibition opens, the Great Fire of Hamburg breaks out. Some of the lenders lose their entire possessions. The theatre, however, is unscathed.

Old Master loan exhibitions are not continued. It is only with the foundation of the »Städtische Gemäldegalerie« (City Art Gallery) in 1850 and the opening of the Hamburger Kunsthalle in 1869 that the Old Masters become firmly established in the Hamburg art scene. Over the years, the Kunsthalle receives 76 of the paintings exhibited in 1842, of which 48 are still in the collection. The Kunsthalle's collection goes beyond individual paintings, recording the collecting activities of Hamburg citizens in the 19th century as well as former collections and taste preferences.

ROOM 3

19TH CENTURY — THE ASSOCIATION'S EDITION (VEREINSBLÄTTER)

One of the Kunstverein's special achievements in the nineteenth century is the free distribution of editions. They consist of graphical reproductions given to the association's members since 1830, at first in longer intervals, then almost every year. On rare occasions, the offer even includes booklets or books. Many prints even come in a representative format suitable for wall decoration. Reproductions of paintings or frescoes by outstanding masters such as Holbein or Rubens are frequently selected. Still more numerous are prints after contemporary artworks, often those purchased by the »Städtische Gemälde-Galerie« (Municipal Art Gallery). It is not until the 1890s that original prints get distributed, e.g. prints which are not reproduced after a specific model. In many cases they get specifically commissioned by the Kunstverein. Sometimes, however, they are existing prints from other art associations.

For the first time, the Kunstverein's editions are here comprehensively displayed in an exhibition. Previously neglected by art historical scholars they give a fascinating insight into the culture of bourgeois taste in Hamburg in the nineteenth century. The thematic spectrum is surprisingly wide: Depictions of majestic Christian and historical events come alongside genre scenes. There are also portraits, city views and landscapes. The association's high standards are also reflected in the technical quality of many of the editions. Louis Jacoby's copy of the »School of Athens«, for example, counts amongst the best reproductions after Raphael ever made.

ROOM 4

1927 — EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY ART

A century after its first exhibition in 1826, in the summer of 1927 the Kunstverein organises a comprehensive exhibition of »European Contemporary Art«. Around 500 paintings and sculptures by artists from 16 European countries are exhibited in the upper-floor galleries in the oldest part of the museum building. After the crisis that marked the first years of the Weimar Republic, the exhibition attempts to kindle a spirit of optimism in the local art scene and to position Hamburg as a vibrant artistic centre. The exhibition receives great support and promotion both from the city administration and the local press. It can boast a prominent honorary committee of politicians, lenders and art historians.

A commission selects the works of art for the exhibition. Its members include the director of the Kunsthalle, Gustav Pauli, who uses his international network for the procurement of loans. While the exhibition catalogue lists all works strictly by country the hanging of the works follows aesthetic and stylistic considerations which, in some cases, reveal connections beyond national boundaries. Only the works by artists from Hamburg are displayed separately.

Seven works from the 1927 exhibition on display in this gallery are today owned by the Hamburger Kunsthalle. From today's point of view, the contrast between Kandinsky's expressive »Arabian Cemetery« and the more dignified subjects depicted by the Hamburg artists is striking. It demonstrates the ambition to bring the Hamburg art scene to a more international level.

ROOM 5

1936 — PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN GERMANY

In 1936, the Kunstverein organises this exhibition in cooperation with the Deutscher Künstlerbund (German Artists' Association). The aim is to give »an insight into the contemporary artistic creation in Germany«. Under the direction of the Hamburg painter Heinrich Stegemann, 249 works by 175 artists are exhibited. Alongside artists conforming to the artistic ideals of the Nazis, there are also numerous representatives of the avant-garde and of German Expressionism, such as Max Beckmann, Emil Nolde or Otto Dix.

The broad selection of works is an attempt to induce the Nazi authorities to accept a certain artistic freedom during the Olympic year. The first draft of the exhibition poster is accordingly headed »German Art in the Olympic Year«. However, the poster is rejected and the name is duly changed to »Painting and Sculpture in Germany«. The initial approval of the exhibition is of short duration: After only eleven days, the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (the Reich's Authority for the Fine Arts) bans the presentation. The exhibition of works by progressive modern artists shows, according to the Nazi ideology, a total lack of »responsibility towards the [German] people and the Reich«. As a result, Stegemann, as the organiser of the exhibition, faces trial before a court of honour. The German Artists' Association is dissolved and the Kunstverein in Hamburg is placed under a new, ideologically conformist management.

ROOM 6

1940 — CONTEMPORARY GERMAN SCULPTORS

A few months after the outbreak of World War II, the Kunstverein organises the large exhibition »Contemporary German Sculptors« in the Hamburger Kunsthalle. In the catalogue, the Kunstverein depicts a bust of Adolf Hitler to signal its ideological allegiance.

A committee of four representatives of Hamburg's cultural policy department and the Kunstverein as well as three sculptors are responsible for the selection of the works. The exhibition focuses on works showing human and animal figures, predominantly sculptures in a classical traditional style. They correspond with the aesthetic conceptions of Nazi Germany. The expressive and experimental tendencies of modern art are rejected.

The bronze sculptures displayed here highlight the different aspects of the 1940 exhibition and reflect contemporary artistic notions that are, even in this period, somewhat ambivalent. Richard Scheibe's athletic »Thinker«, with its expression of determined action, fits in with the Nazi propaganda of racial superiority. Rudolf Agricola's »Standing Woman« is showing no opposition to such perception. The »Large Walking Man« by Hermann Blumenthal, on the other hand, follows the tradition of a modern style relating back to antiquity. The crossed fists could be interpreted as an expression of protest. By choosing Blumenthal and other sculptors, some of which were classified as »degenerate«, the Kunstverein takes a stand for these artists.

ROOM 7

1955 — NEW ACQUISITIONS OF THE HAMBURGER KUNSTHALLE 1945–1955

On the occasion of the retirement of the director of the Kunsthalle, Carl Georg Heise, the Kunstverein organises this exhibition in the oldest part of the museum building. It presents an overview of the works acquired during Heise's ten-year tenure and conveys an appreciation for the achievement of the new beginning since 1945.

With his acquisitions, Heise complements the array of works from earlier periods. His main goal, however, is to reconstruct a collection of modernism which has suffered great losses during the 1937 campaign against »degenerate art«. In addition, the Hamburger Kunsthalle collects contemporary art. This includes abstract paintings by Georg Meistermann and Ernst Wilhelm Nay as well as figurative works by Hamburg artists.

The acquisition policy focuses on paintings by German artists. This is partly due to the collection's tradition, partly to the scarce resources after 1945 which offer little scope for international purchases. However, Heise is able to add European accents to the sculpture collection by acquiring a range of works from Auguste Rodin to Constantin Brancusi.

The paintings and sculptures on display are a small selection of the new acquisitions presented in 1955. Many of the major works purchased between 1945 and 1955 can be found in the permanent collection of the Kunsthalle.

ROOM 8

HANNE LIPPARD »FRAMES«, 2017 — SOUND INSTALLATION

Hanne Lippard's text-based sound installation »Frames« takes the shared history of the Kunstverein and the Kunsthalle as its starting point. In a transitional space, i.e. the passage between the historical and the contemporary collections, the artist uses her voice to visualise time. While discussing the status quo of contemporary art production, she is thus transforming time into shape. Through variations in emphasis, strength and rhythm, language is being forged into a melodious and aesthetic ensemble. On the other hand, the body and the voice are used to challenge the traditional modes of artistic representation. The immaterial perception of time is defined by speaking about the materiality of the body. »Frames« explores the different shapes and notions that the body can signify: as a building (institution), as an artwork (art), as a living body (man), as well as the body as a mere measurement of time. This means the body as a soundboard and metaphor for the passing of time, as a fragile structure under history's spell. What determines historical or contemporary values? When is time shown, when is it concealed? What do we learn from the past and what is important today? The present is always a place of passage, a space that becomes a place of reflection and a place of possibilities, where definitions are not categorically fixed, but put up for discussion.

Hanne Lippard (*1984 in Milton Keynes, England, living and working in Berlin) graduated from the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in 2010. She was awarded the ars viva-Prize 2016 for her text- and time-based works, performances, short films and sound works. In 2017, she reopened the Kunst-Werke Berlin – KW Institute for Contemporary Art with her first institutional solo exhibition.

ROOM 9

1973 — BLINKY PALERMO'S MURAL PAINTING

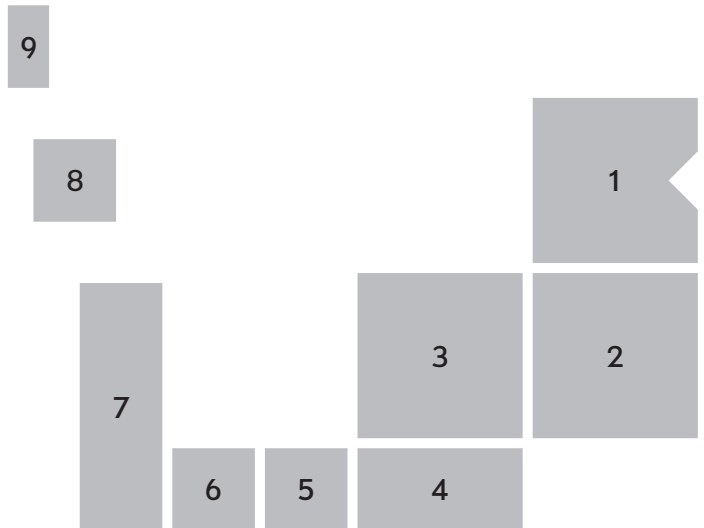
This room installation dates from 1997. It is devoted to Blinky Palermo's exhibition »Wall Painting« of 1973. In that year, the exhibition is on show for eight days in the former Kunstverein, next to the Kunsthalle. In 1991, the building is torn down to make room for a new building devoted to contemporary art. It is during the demolition works that Palermo's mural is rediscovered under a thick layer of paint. It is uncovered and transferred to a new surface. This relict is a reminder of the unusual exhibition experience of 1973.

At the time, Palermo paints the mobile exhibition walls of the Kunstverein in oxblood red. The load-bearing outer walls remain white, as does the front wall, on which he traces the layout of the red walls. Thus, the artist reduces the concept of wall painting to its abstract, ideal essence. He creates a three-dimensional, intricate colour space with monochrome image spaces in which it is easy to get lost.

However, many visitors of the 1973 exhibition are outraged by the »empty« walls causing fierce protests. Numerous members resign their Kunstverein membership, and visitors demand back the entrance fee.

After the exhibition has ended, the work is covered by paint. Nothing remains but the sketch of the wall layout (which is later uncovered), and the documentation of the exhibition in several photographs.

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