

21 × 21

**DIE RUHR KUNST MUSEEN
AUF DEM HÜGEL**

EXHIBITION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

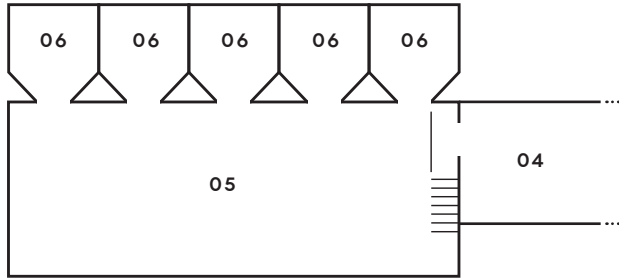
The exhibition 21×21 brings together more than 100 selected works from all 21 RuhrKunstMuseen for the very first time to present a joint, cross-collection show.

It is based on a digital project in which each museum selected an impulse work representative of its own collection, to which the other museums then responded with a work from their own holdings. The result is a collection of over 400 works that together form a digital museum of the Ruhr region. It can be discovered at [21×21.de](http://21x21.de).

Ten themed rooms at Villa Hügel showcase a selection of these 400 works as originals. The respective impulse works are exhibited on mirrored surfaces and are surrounded by works that bear associations with them either in terms of aesthetics, content or art history.

Please note: Some of the titles of the works in the exhibition are not written in full because they use discriminatory terms and foreign names for people.

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THE FEMALE IMAGE

ROOM 01

The image of women is subject to constant change – from stylisation and sexualisation to emancipation and the abolition of patriarchal structures. As a pictorial subject, the female body is omnipresent in the art historical canon; it was considered a classic motif by established artists for centuries. From the 1970s onwards, a critical examination of the gaze directed onto women, which until then had mostly held male connotations, found its way into art – first and foremost through female artists themselves, who addressed gender roles and the female body in their works.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Wilhelm Lehmbruck created sculptural representations of figures such as the *Große Sinnende*, which stood out from prevalent depictions of femininity of his time. His figure is larger than life and by intertwining and extending the limbs, the sculptor succeeded in conveying a feeling of pensiveness and contemplation. With this work, Lehmbruck strove for an artistic emancipation beyond the norms of figurative sculpture.

Eliza Douglas, by contrast, first commissioned other painters with the naturalistic depiction of hands and feet only to estrange and rework them. Similar to Lehmbruck, she lengthens the body parts so that the fragmented feet appear to step into the void, emphasising the absence of the body.

Gerhard Richter's painting of mother and daughter is based on a found photographic image. In his figurative works, Richter refers back to a pictorial atlas that he created throughout his life in order to artistically engage with painting itself. The film icon Brigitte Bardot and her mother can be seen walking arm in arm towards the viewer. In this room, the duo meets another mother and daughter: Paula Modersohn-Becker's *Bäuerin mit Kind (oder Großmutter mit Kind)* shows a differentiated form of femininity and places it in the context of the subject's structural dependence on family, work and survival. In comparison, Rosemarie Trockel takes an abstract, minimalist and at the same time feminist approach to the theme of femininity.

BEING AND DREAM

ROOM 02

While the state of being embodies reality and the conscious, the dream stands for the unconscious, the fantastic and the transcendental. Many artists have repeatedly taken up this duality in order to explore the boundaries between reality and imagination. The Surrealists in particular emphasised the dreamlike and the unconscious in contrast to logic and rationality. As the title suggests, František Kupka's work *Le Rêve* (The Dream) refers to a sequence that the artist himself dreamt, depicting suggestions of his wife and of himself. *Sueño No. 7, Buenos Aires* by Grete Stern also deals with an altered form of perception only innate to the world of dreams. While the two sleeping people in Kupka's painting appear as a single floating figure whose contours are doubled in painterly superimposition, the woman in Stern's photomontage is confronted with her mirror image multiplied, which places the motif in the Surrealist tradition.

Looking at the *Pyrenäen-Torso* by Hans Arp, abstract body forms are recognisable. There is a conscious decision not to depict the human

body in detail. Instead, the sculpture raises fundamental questions about the perception of a work of art that confronts viewers with what they actually see and what constitutes the human body. Friedensreich Hundertwasser's painting *Der Traum [...]*, whose original title refers to the dream of a dead Indigenous person, creates a paradox, since – according to scientific opinion – the dead cannot dream. Instead, Hundertwasser's work itself appears to emerge from the realm of dreams: different shades of colour mix with organic forms to create an overall composition that invites the viewer to immerse themselves in it and interpret the dream that gives the work its title.

Eva Aeppli's works closely link the concept of dreams with the human condition by creating a surreal visual world in which reality and fantasy merge. A striking example of this is the sculpture *Vera*, created in 1970. Seemingly cut off from the outside world, the work directs its gaze into space, focused on an undefined event. This makes the dream tangible as a kind of bridge between conscious experience and deeper, unconscious being.

SHOPPING MANIA

ROOM 03

Two works by August Macke express a growing penchant for consumerism at the beginning of the 20th century. Macke's paintings from 1913 and 1914 depict women standing in front of a shop window admiring hats. In *Helle Frauen vor Hutladen* (1913), the hats on display are barely recognisable. The rounded figures merge with the angular architectural elements to form a composition, showing influences of Cubism and Futurism. A year later, Macke painted *Modes: Frau mit Sonnenschirm* (1914). In contrast to the previous work, this one is more clearly composed, with strong, contrasting colours typical of Expressionism. The cropped figure on the left edge of the picture is a reference to photography.

In the exhibition the two paintings are juxtaposed with photographs that provide insights into the purchasing behaviour of different eras. Gudrun Kemsch photographs people reflected in the glass facades of Apple stores similar to Macke's paintings. Dietmar Riemann and Tata Ronkholz documented views of shop windows and people strolling along shopping streets in

the GDR. Riemann photographed shop windows in both East and West Germany. While the displays in the GDR often appear barren and bleak, a photograph of an exquisite shop in West Germany shows a mannequin that is fashionably decorated down to the last detail. She is standing on a mirror cube, making it appear as if she has three legs. At the same time, the facades of the surrounding buildings are reflected in the glass of the shop window.

Three so-called ceramic *Horten Waben* are also exhibited in the room. These honeycomb-shaped tiles were used to adorn the facades of the Horten department store chain until the end of the 1970s. They symbolise cityscapes of post-war Germany and illustrate the transformation of the city centres.

UPHEAVALS

ROOM 04

Revolutions, wars and social upheavals have always influenced artists. They are triggers or inspiration for the most diverse types of artistic production. Whether documentary, critical or benevolent, the works are commentaries on the very time of their creation.

One example is the steel table by Anatol Herzfeld, a student of Joseph Beuys. It is a relic of the *Drama Tisch* action that took place in Düsseldorf in December 1968. Three speakers chosen by Herzfeld were fixed to the table and Herzfeld gave them light signals: they had to speak when the light was green and remain silent when it was red. The action related to a law passed in the same year that authorised the tapping of telephone calls and interception of letters from private individuals. At the same time, it addresses an issue that is still relevant today: the tension between freedom of expression and censorship. The table as a place for political negotiations also appears in Emil Schumacher's illustration for the Expressionist

ballet *Der Grüne Tisch*, in which the First World War is interpreted as a dance of death.

In his work *Nach der Bombennacht*, Werner Gilles – who was ostracised by the National Socialists as 'degenerate' – reflected on the horrors of war and the destruction of urban environments. The spectrum of his themes is condensed in the 'landscape of ruins' comprising geometric colour surfaces. In the centre of the picture, he shows the severed floating head of the tragic hero Orpheus who is able to overcome death.

Three years after the construction of the Berlin Wall, Wolf Vostell created the work *You are Leaving the American Sector*, which addresses the division of Germany and is named after the information board at Checkpoint Charlie. Vostell combined photos of road signs, tanks, barbed wire, border guards and John F. Kennedy to create a printed collage, which he then literally attacked with brushes and spray paint.

Richard Serra's work expresses a concrete concern: *Stop Bush*. The clear political message directed at the US president in office at the time is emphasised by the image of a prisoner in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. The figure of the 'hooded man' came to symbolise the atrocities committed during the Iraq War in 2003.

WORK AND STRUCTURE

ROOM 05

Structure and its dissolution were of central importance to many artists in the 20th century, both in their works and in the interpretation of their artistic practice. This is expressed in rigorous preoccupation with abstraction as well as with the theme of work itself.

Emil Schumacher continually explored the creation of his artistic works through action and reaction. Louise Nevelson worked for over two decades until she sold her first work – today she is one of the most prominent sculptors of the 20th century and became known above all for her monumental works in public spaces. Denise Ritter's sound installation *mono / industriell* also has an enormous effect in the exhibition space and adds an auditory level to the experience. The artist visited the Prosper-Haniel colliery in Bottrop shortly before the closure of the last coal mine in the Ruhr region and recorded the sounds of the structured work processes underground one last time.

With his series *Homage to the Square*, comprising over 2,000 works, Josef Albers created

an important oeuvre of artistic-theoretical investigation. The first beginnings of these precise colour studies can already be seen in *Oscillating (A)*. After emigrating to the United States in 1933, Albers found a new source of inspiration in Mexican culture, which influenced his later preoccupation with colour and its perception.

Carlos Cruz-Diez, by contrast, explored the interplay of colour, light and movement in his work. *Physichromie No. 418* consists of colour fields arranged next to each other and separated by plastic slats. The work only unfolds through the movement of the viewer: differently coloured circles become visible and appear to interlock, creating a visual mixture of colours.

Jessica Stockholder uses ordinary everyday objects from consumer society in her installations. These objects are given a new appearance through dominant colours or a uniform coat of paint. They are thus detached from their original function and placed in a different context. The work invites the viewer to rethink the structures of the everyday and the mechanisms of mass production.

SIGNS OF LIFE

ROOM 06

Signs of life can be understood as signs of a life form. They give rise to the assumption that someone or something is alive. In relation to the works of art, they bear witness to the life and work of the artists and, depending on the subject, also to the existence of the person depicted. In *Magnify BWS 1224 (Woman with a Spyglass)*, Morgaine Schäfer uses material from the context of her family and preserves it in her artwork. The artist's mother is shown with binoculars, observing something and captured in this intimate voyeuristic moment by the artist's father.

Timm Ulrich's 50-part photo series *Die Welt im Wohnzimmer* takes us into the living room as a domestic space for retreat and relaxation – where the television is the central object of life expression. News, films and series visualise the macrocosm in the microcosm of our own lives, as do the objects and images draped around the television. The photographs were taken in a retirement home, which opens up a further level of reflection on life, age and transience. Günther Uecker's *TV* takes a critical look

at entertainment and mass media and relieves the television as an object of its actual function.

László Moholy-Nagy used photography and experimental art to symbolically capture the dynamics of modern life. He depicted light and technology as living and constantly changing elements. This is also the case in *Komposition A 17*, which is defined by a tension between transparency and the intensity of colours.

For a long time, the Ruhr region was the centre of the German coal and steel industry, characterised by mining, steelworks and power plants. Even after the end of mining, this past has left its mark. The work *Konstruktive Struktur Schwarz mit Rot 2196* by Helmut Bettenhausen combines minimalism with the materiality of heavy industry and shows a special examination of space, surface and structure. In her work *18 C – Erinnerung an eine verflüchtigte Landschaft (Visualisierung)*, Helga Griffiths also deals with the element that shaped the region for so long. The perfume *18 C* contains the 'essence' of coal – an experimental fragrance that conveys not just an odour, but an entire narrative. Smell for yourself.

WINDOW TO THE WORLD

ROOM 07

The term 'window to the world' has completely different connotations today than it did prior to the media age. Today, all it takes is a glance at a smartphone and social media to be confronted with content from all over the world. The rapid development of photography, film and their distribution channels via the internet brings with it an increasing fleetingness that fits seamlessly into our restless world. The landscapes of Alexej von Jawlensky, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Gabriele Münter and Kurt Schwitters date back to times that were unfamiliar with this fast pace. Only individual elements such as a signpost, a small hut or a farm bear witness to the presence of people, without integrating them visually. These landscapes invite the viewer to forget everyday life completely. As for Molitor & Kuzmin, the collaborative duo of visual artists literally opens the window. The view here does not lead into the external surroundings, but reveals a technologised world in the form of fluorescent tubes.

Using long-exposure photography, Miles Coolidge has captured the Prosper-Haniel mine

shaft. At first, the image is difficult to grasp – the dark, sooty surface appears velvety and is speckled with white spots. Gradually, the jagged layers of the coal seam emerge, consisting of charred plant material that has been turned into fuel under enormous pressure. The image shows the interior of the Earth, but at the same time is reminiscent of a distant galaxy of stars such as the Milky Way.

As in Coolidge's shot, in which darkness and light merge, the perception of light also plays a central role in Alexander Basile's black-and-white film. While Coolidge uses contrasts to transform the coal seam into an almost cosmic scenery, Basile deals with the interplay of visibility and disappearance – between spotlight and shadow. In both works, light is not only used as a design element, but also as a meaningful motif that shapes spaces, structures and emotions.

ATMOSPHERE

ROOM 08

The term 'atmosphere' can describe a subjective feeling or mood that varies from person to person depending on their associative capacity, their experience or their mood. At the same time, it describes the gaseous envelope of the earth, in whose lower layer, the troposphere, cloud formation takes place.

The cloud is the central motif linking the works on display in this room. Gerhard Richter's offset print based on a photomontage shows a cloud-covered sky, which – in reference to George Minne's bust *Melancholie* – is able to convey this feeling precisely. Wilhelm Morgner also takes up the motif in his painting *Der Mann auf dem Hügel*. The cloudy sky reinforces the pensive, forlorn mood of the painting. The man appears introverted and is reminiscent of the motif of the melancholic figure alone in landscape, which has long been widespread in art and is combined here with the topos of the reflective artist. Morgner's brooding natural scenery, which tends towards isolation and loneliness, supports this interpretation of the painting.

Ulrich Möckel's *Konturenwolke*, by contrast, makes the essentially intangible weather phenomenon tangible as a mobile composition in space. Although a large cloud is visible at first glance, on closer inspection it consists of multiple layers of individual contours of trees. Formed from the outlines of various native tree species, these contours are characteristic of Möckel's work. The tree trunk acts as a connecting element between heaven and earth, which is particularly emphasised in the floating cloud of contours. The clouds, which the artist forms from hard foam using copious contours, are particularly reminiscent of those in Wilhelm Morgner's Expressionist landscape.

DYNAMICS

ROOM 09

Movement, tension and expressiveness – these are the first associations that the term ‘dynamics’ evokes. In this room, Michael Sailstorfer’s work *Zeit ist keine Autobahn*, in which a constantly rotating car tyre leaves a growing pile of rubber abrasion on the floor, meets Christian Schink’s photograph of a large motorway bridge. Both works address the theme of traffic and transportation in the urban context. The bottom view of the elevated carriageway in Schink’s *A9/A38 Autobahnkreuz Rippachtal (1)* makes the motorway bridge appear monumental and threatening at the same time. The barren, deserted surroundings reinforce this impression and lend the scenery an atmosphere that is more sombre than romantic. Anton Stankowski’s *Schnee-Graphik, Garmisch-Partenkirchen* captures a fleeting moment: the street is empty except for a single person taking a walk. The sharply contrasting tracks left by tyres in the snow, however, tell of previous movement and presence. The imprints become graphic elements – an idea that is also reflected in the work’s very title.

The monumental *Junction II* by Karl Otto Götz shows superimposed, gestural applications of colour. Characterised by rapid brushstrokes and spontaneous gestures, the artist’s expressive painting technique creates a powerful, almost stormy pictorial effect. The interplay of the works in this room evokes associations with the fast pace of life and mobility, but also with transience and change.

The large-format lithograph *Fo’ Faux Rocks 4* by Katharina Grosse is the counterpart to Karl Otto Götz’s squeegee painting. Here, too, bright traces of colour and dynamic gradients are boldly applied to the sheet.

TRADITION IN TRANSITION

ROOM 10

Traditions are passed on from generation to generation and convey a consistency of ideas, cultural practices and behaviour. It is not uncommon to find them as subjects in art, where they are scrutinised, rethought or even consolidated. In his work, Christian Rohlf shows the interior of Museum Folkwang in Hagen in 1903. Folkwang founder Karl Ernst Osthaus was convinced of the transformative power of culture and propagated 'change through culture – culture through change'. Today, more than 120 years later, Museum Folkwang has changed spatially – but the guiding principle of a dialogue between the arts and cultures and the unity of art and life has not.

After the end of the Second World War, however, Josef Albers clearly broke with the norms that had been handed down until then. Colour moved to the forefront of his work and displaced the figurative motif that had predominated until then. His series entitled *Variants*, which he began in 1947 and continued for decades, is the first illustration of Albers's continuous exploration of perception through colour. Traditional

Mexican adobe houses, which inspired him on his travels, served as a model for the series.

Alicja Kwade appropriates the tradition of the self-portrait yet removes all its characteristics. Neither the physiognomy nor the figure of the artist are recognisable. The sculpture raises the question about the sculptor's self, which is apparently to be found under the sheet, just as the title *Selbstporträt als Geist* suggests. Nevertheless, the viewer's scepticism remains: who or what is really hiding under the sheet?

Zofia Kulik's work *Wer erobert die Welt* deals primarily with the patriarchal world order. This has always conveyed an intrinsic inferiority of women compared to men. Kulik's work attempts to undermine the traditional normative symbols of masculinity through a juxtaposition of signs with female connotations and to negotiate a reorganisation of the world.

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