

Press Release

Frankfurt am Main, 6.5.2022

Artists' Books – A Success Story Der Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König 7 May – 28 August 2022

Press preview: Friday, 6 May 2022, 11 am

Opening: Friday, 6 May 2022, 7 pm

"That's what is great about certain concept books, when they fall out of their concept and suddenly it becomes sensuous. And then the gut feeling sets in, and only then does it get really interesting: It all depends on the artistic potency of those who make the book. It communicates directly. Books like that need a special stage, even if they're small and quite modest." – Walther König, 2022

In the 54 years of their existence, numerous bookstores have opened beyond the original store in Cologne at Ehrenstraße 4. Over 4,000 titles - including more than 1,000 artists' books - have been published. The approach of the publisher and bookseller Walther König is characterized by the fact that many meanwhile famous artists were provided with a forum to present the book as art for the first time and later received ongoing support in their development.

The Museum Angewandte Kunst and its Department of Book Art and Graphics are now dedicating an exhibition to this special alliance of art, the book, and creative publishing for the first time: a publisher's portrait along the lines of artists' books. The question of Walther König's publishing strategies, which since the 1960s have contributed decisively to the establishment of important art movements and have sensitized the public to the phenomenon of artists' books, form an essential aspect of the exhibition.

The exhibition and the accompanying catalog allow two perspectives: One is the alphabetical listing of the more than 300 artists. Here it becomes clear that the publisher recognized the potential of many of today's well-known artistic positions in advance and promoted them in book form. The other perspective focuses on the publishing chronology of the more than 1,000 exhibited artists' books including their special editions, also taking into account the variations in names. Visitors encounter the art objects on the shelves and in glass cabinets of PHILIPP MAINZER OFFICE FOR ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN. A reading table by Michael Riedel also invites visitors to browse through various publications.

The bookstore was founded in Cologne in 1969 by Walther König (born 1939) and developed into one of the world's leading establishments for art-related literature and a place where artists can exchange ideas. In addition to its original location, the bookstore now has branches all over Germany, in Vienna, London, and Milan, most of which are located in museums or near cultural venues. Thus, places have been created where those who want to learn about art and those who produce art can meet.

In 1968 König and his brother Kasper also founded a publishing company: Verlag Gebrüder König Köln-New York. Over a long period, the publishing house was under the management of Walther

Presseinformation

Frankfurt am Main, 6.5.2022

König and Jutta Linthe as "Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König" or as "Oktagon", extended by "Alberta Press" or "Koenig Books", to the personal union "Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König" from 2019. Since its foundation, the publishing house has published a large number of artists, including Thomas Bayrle, Hanne Darboven, Hans Peter Feldmann, Isa Genzken, Gilbert and George, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter or Michael Riedel. *OBJEKTE, benutzen* by Franz Erhard Walther and *House of Dust* by Alison Knowles are the first two artists' books published by the publishing company. *OBJEKTE, benutzen* is also the first book in the exhibition and reflects the transatlantic operation of the publishing house and its international dimension during its origins: Franz Erhard Walther, for example, transmitted written instructions from New York to Cologne, where they were elaborately implemented. The artist's book *Findet mich das Glück* by Peter Fischli and David Weiss from 2003, which became the best-selling artist's book ever with a print run of more than 300,000 copies, is one of the publisher's greatest successes. It is available for purchase at the museum's box office in German, English, Italian, and Japanese.

The emergence of artists' books in the 1960s is a consequence of modernism and its replacement of art genres in favor of an expansion of art forms in the sense of an open concept of art. The U.S. art theorist and curator Lucy R. Lippard formulated the following definition of the artist's book: „It's an artist book, if an artist made it, or if an artist says it is". For her, the artist's book is a new, autonomous contribution to art history. The publishing company of the Walther König bookstore follows this understanding. It should be mentioned here that in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s there were no publishing houses and publishing personalities, such as in France Tériade or Albert Skira. For this reason, Walther König had the desire to publish artists in series thus establishing lasting concepts of reception of their artistic work in the form of artists' books. The foundation and location of his bookstores, which succeeded the publishing company, offered the artists' books a combination of production, publication, trade and reception in the circle of well-stocked specialist literature on art and thus a corresponding positioning and establishment in the art world. And so it can be said that Walther König's publishing strategy contributed significantly to promoting the medium of the book as an autonomous and mobile art space and to promoting the possibility of the book as an art object in all its facets of descriptive material, pictoriality or binding.

Respect for artistic positions and their individual approaches is expressed not least – or perhaps above all and irrespective of the name under which the publisher operates – in the fact that the publishing house has always refrained from creating any logograms. Giving precedence to art in the form of books and, in return, renouncing the common practice of appropriating and imposing one's own, ever-present hallmark on what is being published, must be regarded as the essential motivation for the economic anti-strategy of this publishing philosophy and its central figure, Walther König.

The exhibition catalog, conceived by the curator of the exhibition, Dr. Eva Linhart, and designed by the graphic designer Sandra Doeller, lists the artists' books of the publishing house alphabetically and chronologically in the style of a bibliography. As a catalog, this publication thus provides a qualitative overview of the artists, the sequence of titles over the 54 years, and the names of the publishing house under which it published which was never done before. As an artist's book, the catalog also takes on the character of a portrait of the publishing house. The publications listed are artist's books that Walther König made available for the exhibition, including literature on artist's books from the publisher's archives. Thus, the compilation here (status April 1, 2022)

Presseinformation

Frankfurt am Main, 6.5.2022

represents the publisher Walther König's view of the subject of "artists' books." Furthermore, this publication sheds light on the titles with which the publishing company managed to shape the development of art. In its conceptual, structural and typographical reminiscence of the theme of artists' books, it is published in a numbered edition of 200 copies. The catalog can be purchased for 19 euros at the museum ticket office. It can also be downloaded from the museum's website. The enclosed ISBN numbers enable each individual title, including preferred editions, to be identified. Accordingly, the listed artists' books can be accessed in a library or museum even after the exhibition has ended.

The exhibition at the Museum Angewandte Kunst provides an initial assessment of the publisher's achievements and its development. Detailed in-depth studies and interpretative differentiations must follow in order to classify the far-reaching cultural impact of the publishing house specializing in art. The production of a corresponding publication along selected artists' books on the occasion of the exhibition is intended.

Accompanying programs with talks by artists and those involved, as well as guided tours with more detailed looks at individual publications in the context of the exhibition, are planned for the summer of 2022.

The exhibition is sponsored by Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP.

Curator: Dr. Eva Linhart, Head of the Department of Book Art and Graphics

Direktor

Prof. Matthias Wagner K

OrtMuseum Angewandte Kunst
Schaumainkai 17
60594 Frankfurt am Main**Information**

T +49 69 212 31286

F +49 69 212 30703

info.angewandte-kunst@stadt-frankfurt.de

www.museumangewandtekunst.de

Presseinformation

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Öffnungszeiten

Mo geschlossen, Di, Do-Fr 12-18 Uhr, Mi 12-20 Uhr, Sa-So 10-18 Uhr

Eintritt

12 Euro, ermäßigt 6 Euro

Kinder und Jugendliche unter 18 Jahren sowie Studierende der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, der Städelschule und der HfG Offenbach frei

Pressekontakt

Natali-Lina Pitzer, Lucy Rose Nixon und Anna Richter

T +49 69 212 32828 / 75339

F +49 69 212 30703

presse.angewandte-kunst@stadt-frankfurt.de

Pressedownloads

www.museumangewandtekunst.de

Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit

T +49 69 212 32828

F +49 69 212 30703

presse.angewandte-kunst@stadt-frankfurt.de