

## P r e s s e i n f o r m a t i o n

Frankfurt am Main, 18.01.2019

**Modernism in Frankfurt 1919–1933**  
**19 January to 14 April 2019**

Opening: Friday, 18 January 2019, 7 pm

In honour of the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus, the Museum Angewandte Kunst is taking an in-depth look at the history of Frankfurt in the years 1919 to 1933. During that period, the city implemented an unparalleled programme of renewal in the areas of building construction, design and culture that went down in cultural history as *Neues Frankfurt* (New Frankfurt). After World War I, Frankfurt developed into an archetype of the modern metropolis that attracted interest far beyond city limits. Many regard the Bauhaus as the cradle of modernity in the twentieth century. Yet that famous art and design school was not the sole hotspot of innovative design in Germany and Europe. By the end of the 1920s, Frankfurt am Main had established itself as a world-famous centre of the avant-garde on a par with the Bauhaus.

The aim of the exhibition *Modernism in Frankfurt 1919–1933* is to show that *Neues Frankfurt* amounted to far more than just the housing programme initiated by Ernst May and the popular *Frankfurt Kitchen* by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. From the second half of the twenties onward, Frankfurt's metropolitan utopia also encompassed the universal aspiration to embrace all areas of human life with new design forms and, in conjunction with forced industrialization, to launch a new urban society. This ambition was reflected as much in the (then) new media of photography, film and radio as in product, interior, industrial and communication design and the applied and free arts.

As the specific characteristics of Frankfurt-brand modernism evolved, the protagonists drew more on the present than on the past: they adhered to the principle of the unity of design and social dedication. The concern was not to create prestige objects charged with meaning, but things with the recognizable character of technical production and social function in keeping with the vision of a new, better society. From the present-day point of view, it can thus be said that, in the 1920s, there was hardly a city as replete with the spirit of the new as the metropolis along the Main River.

A range of factors prove to have been decisive for this development: the revival of the trade fair, the municipal building department and the Frankfurt art school, which underwent significant reorientation under Fritz Wichert and brought teachers from the Weimar Bauhaus to Frankfurt. Yet there were also other entities quite actively involved in the city's widely noted aesthetic and societal reshaping in the spirit of *Neues Frankfurt*, among them a considerable number of private enterprises such as the lamp manufacturer Bünthe & Remmler, the Bauersche Giesserei type foundry or the Fuld telecommunications company. And the institutional structures were moreover enhanced by a dense network of informal connections uniting associations, interest groups and the social frameworks of the innovators.

With more than 500 objects and designs, photographs and reproductions, drawings, paintings, films and sound recordings from more than forty private lenders, public archives and museum collections, the Museum Angewandte Kunst here tells the story of *Neues Frankfurt* in unprecedented breadth and depth. On 1,200 square metres of exhibition space, eight thematically-oriented sections paint a multifaceted picture of a new departure into

# Presseinformation

Frankfurt am Main, 18.01.2019

modern design distinguished by an optimistic outlook and a cosmopolitan mindset. It introduces better and lesser known protagonists of modernism in Frankfurt, acquaints visitors with the creative networks of the metropolis on the Main and reveals the connections to and differences from the Bauhaus. And it brings home the realization that, if the Bauhaus was modernism's academy, *Neues Frankfurt* was its workshop. It was Frankfurt's urban society that offered the new ideas a forum for discourse and a laboratory for practical experimentation.

## The Foundations of *Neues Frankfurt*

In the first section of the exhibition, visitors can acquaint themselves with the situation that prevailed in Frankfurt after World War I. Ludwig Landmann (1868–1945), head of the department of economic development from 1916 and city mayor from 1924, can be considered the single most important protagonist in the radical changes taking place here during that period in society and politics alike. Already during the war, Landmann had worked on the idea of a new international trade fair centre, and it was he who would later coin the term *Neues Frankfurt*. His chief aim was to encourage the export of German products and a new internationalization by putting Frankfurt on the map as a trade fair location and an infrastructural hub. The reopening of the Messe Frankfurt in 1919 was thus a decisive factor on the city's way to the modern age. Other important historical determinants were the founding of the Werkbund Haus and the activities of the exhibition producer Lilly Reich. Her trade fair exhibition "Von der Faser zum Gewebe" (From Fiber to Textile, 1926) was the first ever to focus not on finished products, but on raw materials, semi-finished products and manufacturing processes.

## Experimentation and Research

*Neues Frankfurt* was also associated with far-reaching changes in art and the establishment of various new media, first and foremost film and sound. The section entitled "Experimentation and Research" introduces all the various players who spent important years in Frankfurt and, with their cross-genre experiments, advanced to become pioneers in the areas of the new media and music.

The exhibits here include experimental films by Oskar Fischinger, a native of Gelnhausen who provided notable impulses for film and its expansion into "visual music". Important developments in the areas of music and sound are also featured in this section. Visitors will hear, for example, compositions by Paul Hindemith which the native of Hanau wrote for an early electronic instrument, the trautionium. The role of the radio is introduced along with two figures of importance for that medium: Hans Flesch and Ernst Schoen's radio programme contributed decisively to shaping the character of the new Frankfurt radio station (Südwestdeutscher Rundfunk), which was considered the most innovative in Germany between 1924 and 1929. This section of the exhibition will present the very first radio play, which was broadcast in October 1924: *Zauberei auf dem Sender* (Magic on the radio).

Apart from access to this historical film and sound material, visitors here also have the opportunity to discover and experiment with a Theremin synthesizer remake donated by the US-American company Moog Music.

### Networks and Societies

The modernism movement in the Rhine-Main region was borne by a network made up of a wide range of different persons, all of whom worked more or less closely together to realize various design ideas. One representative example of this network principle is the life and work of the artist couple Ella Bergmann-Michel (1895–1971) and Robert Michel (1897–1983), selected works of whose are on display in this section. Their home and studio in the Taunus Mountains – the Schmelzmühle (a melting mill) – became a linchpin for designers, artists and architects of their time and later came to be known fondly as the “Heimatmuseum of Modern Art”. Among the guests who went in and out of the Schmelzmühle were László Moholy-Nagy, Willi Baumeister, Jan Tschichold and, not least significantly, Kurt Schwitters.

The couple moreover belonged to important associations that likewise provided important impulses to design in Frankfurt. Robert Michel belonged to the Werkbund and the association of German architects, was involved in the Frankfurt October Group's task force on social building, and himself realized several small building projects starting in 1928. Ella Bergmann-Michel worked as a photographer and, between 1931 and 1933, made altogether five documentaries on everyday life in Frankfurt and its surroundings, a selection of which are on display in the show. Along with Paul Seligmann (1903–1985), the couple founded an independent film league which organized numerous artistic film events in Frankfurt, for example screenings of the experimental films of Oskar Fischinger (who was already living in Berlin at the time) in 1932.

### Teaching and Learning

Another participant in the endeavours to reshape society aesthetically and socially was the Frankfurt art school – an amalgamation of the arts and crafts school and the Städelschule –, which Fritz Wichert developed from 1924 onward as a teaching institution modelled on the Weimar Bauhaus. This Kunstschule comprised a two-semester introductory course, ten specialized classes and the respective workshops. It differed from the Bauhaus in that it had architecture on its curriculum from the start. The free and applied arts were to rank equally. Adolf Meyer, Josef Hartwig, Karl Peter Röhl and Christian Dell came to Frankfurt from the Weimar Bauhaus and worked for the modern teaching concept. Other teachers included Margarethe Klimt (fashion class), Richard Lisker (textile class), Paul Renner and Willi Baumeister (typography and advertising graphics), Franz Schuster (interior architecture), Richard Scheibe (sculpture) and Max Beckmann (painting). Among the professionals to come out of the school were the photographers Marta Hoepffner and Elisabeth Hase, the graphic designer Werner Hugo Epstein, the painter Helmut Tamm and the typographer and graphic designer Liselotte Müller.

The art school also cultivated close contacts to industry and business as well as the municipal administration. Hans Leistikow, for example, the head of the Frankfurt graphic design office, carried out commissions from the city with students during his term as a teacher at the Kunstschule between 1926 and 1927. Similarly, Adolf Meyer passed on small construction projects to his students, and Josef Hartwig realized commissions in keeping with the newly issued cemetery guidelines with his class.

### Designing the City

The protagonists of modernism in Frankfurt not only initiated innovations in housing construction, but also in the planning of green areas and the design of the public space. The city was to be structured and unified with a system of carefully designed recurring elements. The solutions developed in this context – from Ernst May's large-scale spatial planning and Max Bromme's green spaces to Leberecht Migge's recoverable substance cycles, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's allotment garden huts and Adolf Meyer's drinking fountains – clearly reflect the democratic and solidary ideas behind the designs.

To this day, nearly one hundred years after the project *Neues Frankfurt*, the urban landscape still exhibits elements of this modern design movement in several locations. These testimonies inspire us to think about the ideals their designers were pursuing, and to pose a question that is still as relevant as ever: how does the built environment impact the coexistence of people in a city?

Ferdinand Kramer – who was entrusted with the interior design and furnishing of the Frankfurt housing estates and brought forth the furniture designs characteristic for *Neues Frankfurt* – also created a series of park benches and furnishings for the public space. The benches have unfortunately meanwhile disappeared from the urban landscape. For the show, one of them was reproduced in cooperation with tatcraft GmbH (a Frankfurt makerspace start-up) according to Kramer's plans and offers visitors a place to sit and rest. Over the course of the exhibition, two further park bench reproductions will be installed permanently in the Metzlerpark and on the riverbank.

### Going into Production

It was above all close cooperation between municipal departments that made modernism in Frankfurt possible. In the 1920s, the Frankfurt building department had some 12,000 flats built in housing estates located on the town periphery. This office thus bore an unprecedented influence on the character of the urban landscape. The architecture of the buildings, the landscaping of the green areas and cemeteries and the advertising, but also the interior furnishings of the flats were now to be more rational, standardized, and thus more modern in design.

In the summer of 1925, the city council elected Ernst May (1886–1979) to serve as municipal architect. Martin Elsaesser (1884–1957) assumed the newly created office of buildings director. With these two appointments, the effective restructuring of the municipal building department got underway. It was now subdivided into “Department E: Large-Scale Buildings”, “Department B: Construction Consulting” and “Department T: Standardization”. May also took charge of the municipal building inspection and the housing department with the offices of “Urban and Regional Planning” and “Gardens and Cemeteries”.

In the section entitled “Going into Production”, visitors will discover numerous design objects that emerged from *Neues Frankfurt*, for the most part within the framework of cooperation between the members of the municipal administration and the flourishing regional private enterprises. Along with furniture by Ferdinand Kramer, Franz Schuster and others, the exhibits also include several lamps by Christian Dell and Adolf Meyer, the Fulda company's Frankfurt telephone and the car radiator of the Adler Standard 8 after designs by Walter Gropius and his Berlin office.

# Presseinformation

Frankfurt am Main, 18.01.2019

## Publicizing Modernism

This section of the exhibition features photographs, objects, posters and facsimiles as a way of acquainting visitors with a selection of major events that served to bring politics and the public together in the democratically governed metropolis. They provide information about which public themes and interests were under negotiation and how Frankfurt's unprecedented modernization effort was expedited and managed. Another focus here is photography, with introductions to the most important players active in this medium in Frankfurt and responsible for communicating modernism to the public as an interdisciplinary project.

## Prologue and Epilogue

Before visitors enter the exhibition proper, they can immerse themselves in the world of *Neues Frankfurt* by virtual means. The VR installation by Nadine Auth (a graduate of the HfG Offenbach), developed in collaboration with Caspar Schirdewahn (a game design student at the HTW Berlin), offers a detailed introduction to nearly all of the many people who contributed to modernism in Frankfurt. The network of persons of widely differing professions who communicated and worked with one another to that end – an aspect impossible to represent two-dimensionally – can be palpably experienced here.

The exhibition comes to a close with an epilogue presenting selected objects and a further multimedia installation. A library of 360° panoramas of extant *Frankfurt Kitchens* by the photographer Laura J Gerlach shows what is presumably the most famous invention of *Neues Frankfurt* in the context of its present-day settings: private flats, offices and museums. Made possible with kind support from *Lauterbach Schaap Interiors* in Frankfurt, this installation and two artworks by Olaf Metzel together form a link to the original *Frankfurt Kitchen* from the Frankfurt housing estate programme, on display in the same room. As a counterpart to the Frankfurt park bench by Ferdinand Kramer, a new variation on the bench is also on view in this last section of the exhibition, developed by *tatcraft* GmbH taking present-day technical and material aspects into account.

If the exhibition succeeds in painting an informative picture of the spirit of new departure, the model function and the critical investigations of design possibilities that characterized Frankfurt in the period between 1919 and 1933, three fundamental questions can be derived from the "allusions" in the epilogue: Do societal changes have to be reflected in a changed aesthetic free of imitation, and if so how? How do new things come into the world? And: How much modernism – that is, how much newness – and thus how much change can the human being tolerate?

## Curatorial Statement

National Socialism and World War II brought *Neues Frankfurt* to an abrupt halt. Ernst May and his "brigade" went to the USSR, where, under Stalin, modern design was soon discredited. In the U.S., on the other hand, the group around Walter Gropius was met with keen interest and had a far-reaching impact after 1945 with what came to be known as the International Style. Apart from the *Frankfurt Kitchen* and the *Futura* typeface, no iconic – or later iconized – products had come out of Frankfurt. On the contrary, the city had produced buildings, furniture, household objects, communication mediums, etc. – that is, utilitarian objects for daily use, or, as Mart Stam referred to them, "things for human proportions".

## Presseinformation

Frankfurt am Main, 18.01.2019

Yet there was also a far more tragic reason for the end of this modernist movement. Hardly any city was shaped as decisively by the dedication of its Jewish citizens as Frankfurt. Many of the city's businesspeople, politicians and intellectuals came from this age-old tradition. In 1933, Frankfurt's Jewish community counted some 30,000 members. By 1945, this former urban, knowledge and action elite had disappeared almost entirely. More than 10,000 of them had been murdered in concentration and extermination camps; the others emigrated.

To us, the curators, to rediscover *Neues Frankfurt* in its entirety with this exhibition not only means to carry out an act of historical rehabilitation but also to think about the end of modernism in Frankfurt – and moreover to provide an impulse for the development of prospects for the future from the political, social, societal and, not least importantly, the design point of view.

We at the Museum Angewandte Kunst would therefore like to recall the words of Ludwig Landmann, who, elected mayor of Frankfurt in 1924, not only coined the programmatic term *Neues Frankfurt* but also clearly defined what it should stand for and to whom it should appeal: “the cosmopolitan, down-to-earth, optimistic spirit in Frankfurt”.

### Curators

Grit Weber, Annika Sellmann, Prof. Dr. Klaus Klemp, Prof. Matthias Wagner K

## Presseinformation

Frankfurt am Main, 18.01.2019

### **The exhibition features works by the following architects, graphic designers, designers and artists:**

Philipp Albinus (1884–1957), Nadine Auth (b. 1988), Willi Baumeister (1889–1955), Ella Bergmann-Michel (1895–1971), Ilse Bing (1899–1990), Max Bittrof (1890–1972), Anton Brenner (1896–1957), Max Bromme (1878–1974), Johannes Cissarz (1873–1942), Hermann Collischonn (1865–1945), Franz Delavilla (1884–1967), Christan Dell (1893–1974), Walter Dexel (1890–1973), Martin Elsaesser (1884–1957), Werner Epstein (1903–1987), Hans Flesch (1896–1945), Oskar Fischinger (1900–1967), Gisèle Freund (1908–2000), Laura J Gerlach (b. 1980), Albert Fuß (1889–1969), Walter Gropius (1883–1969), Erika Habermann (1903–1993), Josef Hartwig (1880–1955), Elisabeth Hase (1905–1991), Ninni Hess (1882–1942), Carry Hess (1889–1957), Lucy Hillebrand (1906–1997), Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), Marta Hoepffner (1912–2000), Margarethe Klimt (1892–1987), Rudolf Koch (1876–1934), Ferdinand Kramer (1898–1985), Grete Leistikow (1893–1989), Hans Leistikow (1892–1962), Richard Lisker (1884–1955), Ernst May (1886–1970), Olav Metzel (b. 1952), Adolf Meyer (1881–1929), Robert Michel (1897–1983), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), Leberecht Migge (1881–1935), Liselotte Müller (1906–1990), László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), Peter Rasmussen (1897–1935), Lilly Reich (1885–1947), Paul Renner (1878–1956), Karl Röhl (1890–1975), Richard Schadwell (dates unknown), Caspar Schirdewahn (1988), Ernst Schoen (1894–1960), Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000), Franz Schuster (1892–1972), Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), tatcraft (Tim Fleischer and Fabian Winopal), Joachim Warnecke (1900–1988), Fritz Wichert (1878–1951), Albert Windisch (1878–1967), Paul Wolff (1887–1951)

### **Catalogue**

An extensive exhibition catalogue has been published by av edition.

German, 304 pages, paperback with flaps, 350 illustrations, 16.5 x 24 cm, 39 EUR (available in the museum for 29 EUR during the exhibition, to registered representatives of the press for 20 EUR)

The catalogue was realized with support from the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung.

**The exhibition is part of a joint initiative of three Frankfurt museums – the Museum Angewandte Kunst, the Deutsches Architekturmuseum and the Historisches Museum Frankfurt – as well as the ernst may gesellschaft e.V. and the newly founded Forum Neues Frankfurt in honour of the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus in 2019.**

The exhibition is being carried out with support from the Federal Cultural Foundation within the framework of Bauhaus 100, the Hessian Ministry of Science and Art and the Department of Culture of the City of Frankfurt.

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Prof. Matthias Wagner K

**Curators**

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Forum Neues Frankfurt

**Media partners**

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Journal Frankfurt, hrINFO

**Hotel partner**

Fleming's

**Location**

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**Opening hours**

Tue, Thu–Sun 10am – 6pm, Wed 10am – 8pm

**Admission**

12 EUR, reduced 6 EUR  
Free for children and teens under 18 and students of the Goethe University Frankfurt, the Städelschule and the HfG Offenbach

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