

Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum
Busch-Reisinger Museum
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

Press Release

The Harvard Art Museums present *Inventur—Art in Germany, 1943–55*

Showcases artwork largely unknown to American audiences by modern German artists working during the most tumultuous time in that country's history.



Hans Uhlmann, *Male Head | Männlicher Kopf*, 1942. Steel sheet. Lehbruck Museum, Duisburg, FrK 4237/1995. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Jürgen Diemer.

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The Harvard Art Museums' newest special exhibition, *Inventur—Art in Germany, 1943–55*, will be on view from February 9 through June 3, 2018. The first exhibition of its kind, *Inventur* examines a largely unaddressed moment in modern German art—from just before the end of World War II to the decade just after—and features more than 160 works by nearly 50 artists, including women who were integral to exhibitions at the time but whose work has often been ignored. Much of the artwork presented has never been on view outside Germany.

Taking its name from a 1945 poem by Günter Eich, the exhibition focuses on modern art created at a time when Germans were forced to acknowledge and reckon with the atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust, the country's defeat and occupation by the Allies, and the ideological ramifications of the fledgling Cold War. Chosen for the way it helps characterize the art of this period, the German word *Inventur* (inventory) implies not just an artistic stocktaking, but a physical and moral one as well—the reassurance of one's own existence as reflected in the stuff of everyday life. The exhibition, too, “takes stock,” introducing the richness and variety of the modern art of this period to new audiences, while prompting broader questions on the role of the creative individual living under totalitarianism and in its wake. The exhibition examines major themes of the period—humanism, artistic pluralism, commercialization, and technological progress—to demonstrate, for the first time in an exhibition format, how this art is key to understanding German cultural identity in the 20th century.

“*Inventur* is devoted to a group of artists who, despite the shock of war and its harsh aftermath, remained fiercely committed to the act of making. Yet these artists deserve our attention not simply because they kept on working when adversity loomed large, but because the art they produced is essential to the full history of modern German art,” said Martha Tedeschi, the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums. “As a university-based teaching museum—and as the home of the Busch-Reisinger Museum in particular—we feel it's our place to look carefully at this period and the work these artists produced.”

The immediate postwar period has consistently been overlooked in the study of German art, with art historians and critics referring to this era as a “gap” or period of apathy due to the exile or isolation of notable modern artists as a result of Nazi cultural policy. This exhibition focuses on artists who experienced both the war and its impact in Germany—on either side of the Iron Curtain—and who were active participants in the defeated country's burgeoning art scene after war's end. By necessity, these are artists who were racially and politically accepted, or at least tolerated, by the Nazi regime. They worked across Germany in a range of media; they spanned several generations, underscoring myriad experiences of the war and demonstrating varying levels of familiarity with prewar artistic traditions—experienced firsthand by some, learned by others.

“Without a doubt, this is a highly charged period that continues to spark debate and stir emotion. While we don't shy away from these challenging conversations, we also encourage visitors to look closely and approach these works on their own terms, to explore what they can tell us about artistic practice and the stubbornness of the art historical canon,” said Lynette Roth, Daimler Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, head of the Division of Modern and Contemporary Art, and curator of the *Inventur* exhibition. “*Inventur* presents the missing chapter in postwar German art, offering context that can help us not only better understand a variety of works from the Busch-Reisinger's robust collection, but also gain a stronger sense of this period and how it affects our understanding of the 20th century.”

Inventur is based on years of research by Roth and her collaborators, including important contributions from emerging voices in the field. Much of the scholarship has up to now been unavailable to English-speaking audiences.

The Installation

Tracking a series of artist case studies, the exhibition unfolds chronologically, moving from small-scale drawings and photo-based work of the 1940s to the large, colorful canvases and artist/industry collaborations of the following decade, culminating in 1955, the year of the first *documenta* exhibition in Kassel. Taken as a whole, the works on view offer visitors an opportunity to better understand the German postwar period. As *Inventur* reveals, these works were the diverse product of dispersed pockets, unwieldy networks, and a host of self-organized arts organizations. The project overturns the idea that censorship under the Nazis resulted in a prolonged period of creative apathy, instead arguing that art played a vital role in the intense debates over German national and cultural identity in the postwar period.

The exhibition includes key artists from across Germany and presents a wide variety of works in an array of media: photography, collage, photomontage, drawing, painting, sculpture, and commercial design. Artists include Willi Baumeister, Hermann Glöckner, Jeanne Mammen, Hans Uhlmann, Karl Hofer, Hannah Höch, Gerhard Altenbourg, Otto Steinert, and Emil Schumacher, among many others. As creative individuals who lived under totalitarianism and in the uncertainty of its consequences, each artist had a unique experience, and their art represents a range of perspectives, varying levels of ingenuity, and differing critical approaches. The exhibition draws from the Harvard Art Museums' Busch-Reisinger and Fogg collections and is complemented by works from more than 50 public and private collections across Germany, as well as a smaller number of U.S. lenders.

Artist case studies in the exhibition include:

Willi Baumeister (1889–1955): One of the best-known artists of the period and thus well represented in *Inventur*, Willi Baumeister played a prominent role as an artist, teacher, and theorist. Dismissed from his teaching position at the Städelschule in Frankfurt in 1933, he had continued to earn a living even as Nazi cultural agencies stripped his work from galleries and forbade him to create or exhibit art. In 1943, his Stuttgart house and studio were badly damaged during an aerial attack, forcing him to move to Bad Urach, near the Swabian Alps. In these cramped conditions, his artistic practice was limited to drawing on small sheets of paper. Between April and October 1943, he made over 480 drawings—a fifth of his lifetime drawing oeuvre. While there he also wrote his influential defense of modern art, *The Unknown in Art*, published in 1947.

After years of artistic isolation at the hands of the Nazi regime, Baumeister greeted the war's end as a liberation. Part of a series called *Metaphysical Landscapes*, his *Growth of the Crystals II* (1947/52) reflects this optimistic attitude. The painting's cheerful colors and vibrant surface refer to a bright future, but the work also combines technique and forms deeply rooted in Baumeister's past practice, thus serving as a visual inventory of his oeuvre.

Wilhelm Rudolph (1889–1982): The experience of war on the home front forced some artists, like Dresden-based Wilhelm Rudolph, to grapple with their self-identification. A former Communist Party member, Rudolph had joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) in 1931, only to resign a year later. Between February 13 and 15, 1945, the Allied Forces relentlessly bombed Dresden, destroying most of the city within mere hours of the first strike. Although it was not the most fatal aerial attack during World War II, the event sparked heated debate about the moral and strategic considerations behind the bombing, and the destruction was used by the National Socialists and later the East German Socialist Unity Party of Germany for anti-Ally and anti-American propaganda.

On the morning of February 14—just one day after the Dresden air raids began—Rudolph, who had lost his home and almost his entire body of work in the bombings, started drawing the city street by street. Within a year, he had made more than 200 pen and ink drawings, later titled *Dresden Destroyed* (1945–46). "I drew, I drew obsessively," he recalled of his fixation on the ruins. Rudolph's drawings have often been referred to as "documents," but his depictions are far from neutral records. As in *Zöllnerstr.*, Rudolph chose perspectives that highlight the fullest extent of the destruction. Translated later into woodcuts, these images remained the focus of Rudolph's career in the German Democratic Republic, which promoted the notion that working-class civilians in the anti-fascist state were victims.

Jeanne Mammen (1890–1976): Known for her depictions of the "New Woman" in popular German journals of the 1920s, Mammen began to paint in a cubo-expressionist manner during the Nazi period—a surprising turn for an artist-illustrator typically associated with the critical realism of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). Mammen stayed in Berlin throughout the war, and her newer, abstracted style, which she mostly used to paint portraits of soldiers and civilians, stood in direct opposition to Nazi censures. She was not a member of the Reichskammer der bildende Künste (Reich Chamber of Fine

Arts), the Nazi-controlled arts organization that enabled its members to continue to purchase art materials and exhibit publicly. Registered instead as a commercial graphic artist, she painted in her small studio apartment with poster tempera on cardboard intended for air-raid protection.

Mammen's innovative use of found materials continued when faced with material scarcity after war's end. "Simply everything has to be used," she wrote. Works in a range of media will be on view in *Inventur*, including *Untitled (Profiles)* (c. 1945–46), comprised of three pieces of discarded wire (said to be from a Soviet bivouac near her home) held in place with tiny bent nails against a thickly painted, whitened background. Two strands form distinct yet interlocking human profiles: one outlined by a red cable at left, heightened around its perimeter with green paint, the other demarcated in blue inside the first visage. Her sculpture *Hermaphrodite* (c. 1945–49) also describes a dual profile, calling attention to the issue of gender fluidity, but also perhaps to Mammen's own double life as a covert modern artist in Nazi Germany.

Anneliese Hager (1904–1997): Artist and poet Anneliese Hager trained in photography in the early 1920s and worked as a technical assistant for microphotography at Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (today the Max Planck Institute). Inspired by Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy, whose work she came to know through illustrations, Hager began making photograms in the mid-1930s. Hager moved to Dresden in 1940. During the bombing of the city on February 13, 1945, all of Hager's possessions—including her earliest photograms—were destroyed, along with works by her eventual partner and fellow artist K. O. Götz. Displaced, Hager relocated with three of her children to rural Königsförde, near Hanover.

The scarcity of materials during and after the war fostered Hager's creativity. Her photographic works frequently combined natural forms with abstract forms, as well as an array of technical approaches to the medium. With *Untitled (Portrait A. H.)* from 1947, Hager employs multiple exposures to combine the techniques of straight photography—using a photograph of herself in profile—with cameraless photography. In the 1950s, her photograms increased in size, employing everything from fabric to liquid glue. She continued to make photograms until 1972, amid what she perceived as a downturn in interest in the medium. Like the careers of female contemporaries such as Louise Rösler and Jeanne Mammen, Hager's artistic contributions to the immediate postwar period have largely been forgotten.

Konrad Klapheck (b. 1935): The youngest artist in *Inventur* and the only one born after 1930, Konrad Klapheck grew up amid a bounty of artistic references as the child of two prominent Düsseldorf art historians. Due to the intense bombing of that city, his mother left with him for Leipzig in 1942. The next year, Leipzig, too, was heavily bombed; Klapheck later recalled observing the burning red sky not with fear but as if viewing a "wonderful spectacle." At the end of 1945, Klapheck and his mother returned to the largely destroyed Düsseldorf. One of only a few extant ink drawings, *Landscape with Ruins* (1950) depicts the expansive, bleak environs in which the artist played as a young boy. "I loved the ruins," he has said of his blissful ignorance.

In 1955, before pop art had gained a firm foothold in Britain and the United States, Klapheck painted his first "machine picture," *Typewriter*, while he was a student of Bruno Goller (another artist represented in *Inventur*) at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. Tasked with painting a still life, the 20-year-old Klapheck chose as his subject a rented Continental brand typewriter. He later described the result as a less-than-flattering self-portrait and, elsewhere, as "the discovery of my Self." Klapheck's dedication to bureaucratic and household objects—typewriters and, later, sewing machines, faucets, telephones, irons, shoetrees, and more—ran counter to the increasingly dominant abstract position of the period. Klapheck has insisted that his machine pictures were and are, in fact, always about people. "Man is mirrored in the objects that he created," he said. Over time, the artist has painted more than 40 typewriters.

Institutional Relevance

One of three constituent museums that make up the Harvard Art Museums, the Busch-Reisinger Museum is unique among North American institutions in its dedication to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries. Among the handful of museums in the United States to have world-class collections from this region, it is the only such collection in a university setting. *Inventur* coincides with the Busch-Reisinger's 115-year anniversary; since its founding in 1903, the museum has been a leader in the study of German art. This exhibition also recalls the brief American reception of German art in the 1950s—namely postwar positions from the Federal Republic—including at the Busch-Reisinger Museum.

Publication

An illustrated catalogue is available in conjunction with the exhibition. This publication, the first of its kind in English, contributes a wealth of new knowledge to scholarly understanding of 20th-century German art. Two essays and sixty entries on individual artists or groups of objects address a variety of topics, including German guilt and victimhood, the postwar ruinscape, humanist debates, gender disparities, and widespread technical experimentation. The book is a rich resource for any reader interested in German art of the 20th century. Exhibition curator Lynette Roth wrote the lead essay, which offers an in-depth introduction to the cultural, political, and social conditions of the time. Ilka Voermann, the former Renke B. and Pamela M. Thye Fellow in the Busch-Reisinger Museum, contributed an essay on the U.S. reception of the art of the period, including the key role played by the Busch-Reisinger Museum. Doctoral candidates serving as research assistants for the project drafted the object entries. The catalogue, published by the Harvard Art Museums and distributed by Yale University Press, is now available through the museums shop.

Programming

A rich assortment of programming, including lectures, workshops, student performances, and film, will delve more deeply into artistic production and the political landscape in postwar Germany. An opening celebration on the evening of Thursday, February 8, 2018, will feature an artist talk with Konrad Klapheck, the only living artist with works featured in the exhibition. Monthly gallery talks and Materials Lab Workshops will look closely at the work of individual artists, with particular attention to the ways in which war-driven technologies and the lack of access to traditional artists' materials affected artistic production in the country in the late 1940s and beyond. A series of performances, ranging from classical works and theater to avant-garde music from the Studio for Electronic Music of the West German Radio (WDR) in Cologne, will explore the human experience and sonic landscape of postwar Germany. Inspired by the *Inventur* exhibition, the Harvard Film Archive will present a series focused on German cinema from the postwar era, curated by Haden Guest, director of the Harvard Film Archive and senior lecturer on Visual and Environmental Studies, and Eric Rentschler, Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Harvard. Detailed information about programs is forthcoming at harvardartmuseums.org/visit/calendar.

Press Preview

A preview of *Inventur* will be held for members of the press on Monday, February 5, 2018, at 3:00pm. RSVP required by Wednesday, January 31, to jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu or 617-496-5331. Parking may be available, by permit, at the nearby Broadway Garage, 7 Felton Street. To reserve a permit, please indicate the need for parking in your email.

Credits

Inventur—Art in Germany, 1943–55 is organized by the Harvard Art Museums. Curated by Lynette Roth, the Daimler Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum and Head of the Division of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Harvard Art Museums.

Support for this project was provided by the German Friends of the Busch-Reisinger Museum (Verein der Freunde des Busch-Reisinger Museums) and by endowed funds, including the Daimler Curatorship

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About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, and are comprised of three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes Western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on Asian art, Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern art, and Islamic and later Indian art. Together, the collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States. The Harvard Art Museums have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies.

The Harvard Art Museums' 2014 renovation and expansion carried on the legacies of the three museums and united their remarkable collections under one roof for the first time. Renzo Piano Building Workshop preserved the Fogg Museum's landmark 1927 facility, while transforming the space to accommodate 21st-century needs. The museums now feature 40 percent more gallery space, an expanded Art Study Center, conservation labs, and classrooms, and a striking glass roof that bridges the facility's historic and contemporary architecture. The three constituent museums retain their distinct identities in the facility, yet their close proximity provides exciting opportunities to experience works of art in a broader context. harvardartmuseums.org

Hours and Admission

Daily, 10am–5pm. Closed major holidays. Admission: \$15 adults, \$13 seniors (65+), \$10 non-Harvard students (18+). Free for members; youth under 18; Cambridge residents (proof of residency required); and Harvard students, faculty, and staff (plus one guest). On Saturdays, from 10am–noon, Massachusetts residents receive free admission (proof of residency required). For further information about visiting, see harvardartmuseums.org/plan-your-visit

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For more information, please contact:

Lauren Marshall
Associate Director of Communications
Harvard Art Museums
617-495-4750
lauren_marshall@harvard.edu

Jennifer Aubin
Public Relations Manager
Harvard Art Museums
617-496-5331
jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu