

**A SOCIETY MIRRORED IN ITS TIMES: THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT PRESENTS A MAJOR THEMATIC EXHIBITION ON ART IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC**

## **SPLENDOR AND MISERY IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC FROM OTTO DIX TO JEANNE MAMMEN**

**OCTOBER 27, 2017–FEBRUARY 25, 2018**

**PRESS PREVIEW: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2017, 11 A.M.**

Social tensions, political struggles, social upheavals, as well as artistic revolutions and innovations characterize the Weimar Republic. Beginning October 27, 2017, the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting German art from 1918 to 1933 in a major thematic exhibition. Direct, ironic, angry, accusatory, and often even prophetic works demonstrate the struggle for democracy and paint a picture of a society in the midst of crisis and transition. Many artists were moved by the problems of the age to mirror reality and everyday life in their search for a new realism or “naturalism.” They captured the stories of their contemporaries with an individual signature: the processing of World War I with depictions of maimed soldiers and “war profiteers,” public figures, the big city with its entertainment industry and increasing prostitution, political unrest and economic chasms, as well as the role model of the New Woman, the debates about paragraphs 175 and 218 (regarding punishability of homosexuality and abortion), the social changes resulting from industrialization, and the growing enthusiasm for sports. The exhibition provides an impressive panorama of a period that even today, 100 years after its advent, has lost nothing of its relevance and potential for discussion.

The focus of the exhibition lies on the unease of the era, which was reflected not only in the motifs and content, but also in a broad spectrum of styles. Arranged in thematic groups, it assembles portrayals and scenes from Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Rostock, Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Munich, and Hannover that have hitherto frequently been regarded separately and can be assigned more to the “verist” wing of New Objectivity. The exhibition assembles 190 paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures by 62 famous artists and others who have been largely neglected to date, including Max Beckmann, Kate Diehn-Bitt, Otto Dix, Dodo, Conrad Felixmüller, George Grosz, Carl Grossberg, Hans and Lea Grundig, Karl Hubbuch, Lotte Laserstein, Alice Lex-Nerlinger, Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, Jeanne Mammen, Oskar Nerlinger, Franz Radziwill, Christian Schad, Rudolf Schlichter, Georg Scholz, and Richard Ziegler. Historical films, magazines, posters, and photographs provide additional background information. The Schirn was able to arrange important loans from numerous museums as well as public and private collections in Germany and abroad for this presentation, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Neue Galerie in New York, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Madrid, the Museum Moderne Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, the Nationalgalerie of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Albertinum of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus Munich, the Sprengel Museum Hannover, the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, the Folkwang Museum Essen, and the Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf.

The exhibition “Splendor and Misery in the Weimar Republic” is supported by the Gemeinnützige Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain GmbH.

On Friday, October 27, 2017 at 6 p.m., experts will discuss the arguments and subjects of the exhibition – also from a contemporary perspective – under the title “Weimarer Verhältnisse / Weimar Conditions?”

Dr. Philipp Demandt, Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, remarks about the exhibition: “With ‘Splendor and Misery in the Weimar Republic’ the Schirn is presenting a counterbalance to the exhibitions that have already been shown on many occasions on the Roaring Twenties. It takes a look at the unvarnished facts of life during the Weimar Republic. 190 works by 62 artists mercilessly hold a

mirror to the society of the time. We see an era that clung to democracy by the skin of its teeth and in some respects is closer to us than we would like to believe.”

The curator of the exhibition, Dr. Ingrid Pfeiffer, explains: “We often read the history of the Weimar Republic from the end backwards—from its transition to National Socialism and World War II. In spite of the negative sociopolitical developments that the artists so succinctly describe in their works, it was during the Weimar Republic that ‘modernism,’ which continues to shape our lives to this day, developed. The Weimar Republic was a progressive era in which many pioneering ideas were formed—not only in art, architecture, and design. The direction in which the Republic should develop was energetically discussed on all levels, the role of women, the length of the working week, and the paragraphs relating to abortion and homosexuality. Besides the manifest misery, it is these tendencies that for me distinguish the splendor of the Weimar Republic.”

## THE THEMES AND ARTISTS OF THE EXHIBITION

One of the first works in the presentation is the painting *Weimarer Fasching (Weimar Carnival, ca. 1928/29)* by **Horst Naumann** (1908–1990)—a panorama of society, a concentrated overview of those phenomena that defined the Weimar Republic: the entertainment industry, money, sports, the church, the army, weapons, right-wing nationalist symbolism, and industrial progress. The economic consequences of the war and the moral burden resulting from the Treaty of Versailles and its article relating to the blame for the war weighed heavily on the Weimar Republic and posed a massive threat to the young democracy. In the years following World War I, in their works artists **Otto Dix** (1891–1969), **George Grosz** (1893–1959), and **Georg Scholz** (1890–1945) in particular reacted to the political and economic conditions within the Republic with scathing criticism. War invalids, day laborers, and the unemployed were a frequent sight and also appeared as subjects in art. The Schirn shows works like Otto Dix’s *Kriegskrüppel (War Cripples, 1920)* and George Grosz’s *Invalide (Invalid, 1921/22)*, which depict the situation in the streets directly and with mordant humor. With their highly political art, George Grosz and Georg Scholz also took a stance against National Socialist tendencies and in retrospect demonstrate an almost prophetic foresight with regard to future events. Georg Scholz, for example, painted his so-called *Hakenkreuzritter (Swastika Knight)* in a café as early as 1921.

Since the founding of the Weimar Republic, opponents on the right and left fought against it, since they both wanted a very different kind of social and political order in Germany. Communist revolts and extreme right-wing attempts at a coup d’état were both real and hypothetical dangers. As early as 1922, **Otto Griebel** (1895–1972) was one of the first artists to portray the political and social contrasts that the young republic had to face. Along with **Lea Grundig** (1906–1977) and **Hans Grundig** (1901–1958), **Conrad Felixmüller** (1897–1977), **Alice Lex-Nerlinger** (1893–1975), **Curt Querner** (1904–1976), and **Otto Nagel** (1894–1967), Otto Griebel was also a member of the *Assoziation Revolutionärer Bildender Künstler Deutschlands (Association of Revolutionary Artists of Germany, ASSO or ARBKD)*, which was founded first in Berlin and then in 1930 in Dresden and through which the artists took an active part in political events.

Georg Scholz made the growing social injustice in the Weimar Republic a subject of his work, for example in his painting *Von kommenden Dingen (Of Things to Come, 1922)*, in which he illustrated a questionable deal between the most important string-pullers of the early Weimar Republic: the industrialist Hugo Stinnes, the politician Walther Rathenau, and the trade-union leader Carl Legien. The petit-bourgeois and the well-fed citizen, the industrialist who profited from inflation, and the nouveau-riche individual all cropped up in pictures of the time, as in *Der Schieber (The Trafficker, 1921/22)* by **Heinrich Maria Davringhausen** (1894–1970). These are contrasted by portraits such as *Arbeitslose (Unemployed Workers, 1929)* or *Stoffhändler (Fabric Merchant, 1932)* by **Grethe Jürgens** (1899–1981), in which the artist depicted the harsh and immediate present.

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In the Weimar Republic cultural events were no longer merely the privilege of an élite but became mass entertainment: variétés, revue theater, nightclubs, cafés, and bars were features of social life in the big cities and offered opportunities to escape from everyday life. The Schirn has assembled images such as *Tiller Girls* (before 1927) by **Karl Hofer** (1878–1955), *Variété* (1925) by **Paul Grunwaldt** (1891–1962), and *Lissy im Café* (*Lissy in the Café*, ca. 1930/32) by **Karl Hubbuch** (1891–1979). The illustrations and drawings for the satirical magazines *Ulz*, *Simplicissimus*, and *Jugend*, including *Logenlogik* (*Box Logic*, 1929) by **Dodo** (1907–1998) or *Aschermittwoch* (*Ash Wednesday*, ca. 1926) by **Jeanne Mammen** (1890–1976), bear witness to a dissolute, heedless drive and show the abysses and dark sides of the world of entertainment. Increasing prostitution was portrayed not only in a sociocritical manner by **Heinrich Ilgenfritz** (1899–1969), for example in *Die Ernährerin* (*The Breadwinner*, 1928–1932), or grotesquely by George Grosz or Otto Dix in *Dame mit Schleier und Nerz* (*Woman with Mink and Veil*, 1920), but also more subtly and with more empathy, for example in *Margot* (1924) by **Rudolf Schlichter** (1890–1955) or in the works of **Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler** (1899–1940). The latter lived for a time in Sankt Pauli in Hamburg: her pictures are drastic, as in *Über der Leib* (*About the Body*, 1930), but often also almost humorous and full of sympathy.

The role model of women changed fundamentally during the Weimar Republic. Correspondingly, artists such as **Lotte Laserstein** (1898–1993) and **Kate Diehn-Bitt** (1898–1993) portrayed themselves corresponding to the image of the New Woman as urban and self-confident, with a bob and at times androgynous. Large numbers of women now took up new professions and became telephone operators, saleswomen, doctors, or academics. Almost one-third of the artists whose works are being presented in the Schirn exhibition are female—artists who were hitherto often missing from overview publications on New Objectivity. Their works also reflect the social developments in the direction of more liberality and pluralism. The “Women’s Question” also influenced political debates on abortion (Paragraph 218) and contraception, marital rights, prostitution, women’s wages, and even cultural-critical debates on fashion and sexual orientation. Women artists developed their own versions and forms of social realism not only in Berlin, with Jeanne Mammen, Lotte Laserstein, and Alice Lex-Nerlinger, but also in many other places—**Gerta Overbeck** (1898–1977) and Grethe Jürgens in Hannover, Lea Grundig and **Hilde Rakebrand** (1901–1991) in Dresden, Kate Diehn-Bitt in Rostock, Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler in Hamburg, and **Hanna Nagel** (1907–1975) in Karlsruhe.

The exhibition presents important personalities of public life during the Weimar Republic, including gallerists, journalists, writers, and composers, as well as industrialists, doctors, and scientists. The portraits by New Objectivity artists such as **Erich Büttner** (1889–1936), **Kurt Lohse** (1892–1958), and **Christian Schad** (1894–1982) are not only depictions of character, but powerful commentaries as well. In addition to these real personalities, who can also be seen as representatives of professions and functions, typological portraits were also produced, such as *Der Radionist* (*Kleinbürger am Radio*) (*The Radionist [Citizen on the Radio]*, 1927) by **Kurt Günther** (1893–1955). As a new medium, the radio was both a leisure pursuit and a source of information.

The show also takes up another topic of the time: sports. For workers, the middle classes, and intellectuals, sporting contests embodied a new attitude toward life. The Schirn presents, for instance, *Rugbyspieler* (*Rugby Players*, 1929) by **Max Beckmann** (1884–1950), *Der Schaubudenboxer* (*The Booth Boxer*, 1921) by **Conrad Felixmüller**, sculptures by **Renée Sintenis** (1888–1965) depicting sports such as running, soccer, and boxing, and excerpts from the documentary film *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (*Ways to Health and Beauty*, 1925).

One of the most frequent artistic subjects of the time is industrialization, with representations of machines, factories, train stations, and bridges. The industrial sites are for the most part not shown as being filled with bustling activity, but rather as cool and uninhabited. The increasing skepticism toward the optimism about progress and enthusiasm for technology manifests in these melancholy, seemingly apocalyptic landscapes or, for example, in the large-format and full-canvas machines by **Carl Grossberg** (1894–1940). The Weimar Republic can be regarded as a period of transition from the German Empire to the dictatorship of National Socialism: tension, an ominous feeling, the premonition

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of an imminent catastrophe is visible in many images of the time. The disquiet of the age is subliminally clear, as in the painting *Todessturz Karl Buchstätters* (*Karl Buchstätter Falls to his Death*, 1928) by **Franz Radziwill** (1895–1983). His biography, like that of Rudolf Schlichter, mirrors the vacillation between political convictions and the ambiguous relationship to National Socialism that was characteristic of the time.

## PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE FIRST DAY OF PUBLIC VIEWING

On Friday, October 27, 2017, at 6 p.m., experts will be discussing the subjects and topics of the exhibition under the title “Weimarer Verhältnisse? / Weimar Conditions?”—including a contemporary perspective. Participating in the discussion will be historian Dr. Andreas Braune (Research Center for the Weimar Republic at Friedrich Schiller University, Jena), art historian Dr. Birgit Dalbajewa (Galerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden), Prof. Olaf Peters (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg) and Dr. Ingrid Pfeiffer, curator of the exhibition.

Moderation: Alf Mentzer (hr2 Kultur).

In German language. Admission with a valid ticket to the exhibition; register by calling +49 (0) 69.29 98 82-112 or by sending an E-mail to [fuehrungen@schirn.de](mailto:fuehrungen@schirn.de).

**CATALOG** *Glanz und Elend in der Weimarer Republik / Splendor and Misery in the Weimar Republic*, edited by Ingrid Pfeiffer, with a foreword by Philipp Demandt, essays by Andreas Braune, Karoline Hille, Annelie Lütgens, Stéphanie Moeller, Olaf Peters, Dorothy Price, as well as Martina Weinland and Ingrid Pfeiffer, and including artists' biographies and a chronology of the Weimar Republic. German and English editions, each ca. 300 pages, ca. 260 illustrations, 29 x 24 cm, hardcover; graphic design: Sabine Frohmader; Hirmer Verlag, Munich, ISBN 978-3-7774-2932-8 (German), ISBN 978-3-7774-2933-5 (English), €35 (Schirn edition), €49,90 (trade edition).

**DIGITORIAL**® The Schirn will be providing a Digitalorial® to accompany the exhibition. The free digital educational program is responsive and will be available in German and English. The Digitalorial® is funded by the Aventis Foundation and is available online at [www.schirn.de/digitalorial](http://www.schirn.de/digitalorial).

**BOOKLET** *Glanz und Elend in der Weimarer Republik*; introduction to the exhibition, edited by the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. It is about 40 pages in length and presents the most important works in the exhibition as well as the historical and sociopolitical context. German edition, suitable for children 12 and older; €7.50 per copy, school class set €1.00 per booklet (15 or more copies).

**VENUE** SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt **DURATION** October 27, 2017–February 25, 2018 **INFORMATION** [www.schirn.de](http://www.schirn.de) **E-MAIL** [welcome@schirn.de](mailto:welcome@schirn.de) **TELEPHONE** +49.69.29 98 82-0 **FAX** +49.69.29 98 82-240 **ADMISSION** €12, reduced €9; free for children under the age of eight **ADVANCED BOOKING** Tickets are available online at [www.schirn.de/tickets](http://www.schirn.de/tickets) **GUIDED TOURS** Wed 7 p.m., Thu 8 p.m., Fri 11 a.m., Sat 5 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. **TOUR BOOKING** Individual or group tours can be booked by calling +49.69.29 98 82-0 or by sending an e-mail to [fuehrungen@schirn.de](mailto:fuehrungen@schirn.de) **AUDIO TOUR** An audio tour is available to accompany the exhibition, spoken by Volker Bruch **CURATOR** Dr. Ingrid Pfeiffer **CURATORIAL ASSISTANT** Maria Sitte **MEDIA PARTNER** Acht Frankfurt, VGF **CULTURAL PARTNER** HR2

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