

PRESS RELEASE

# **BACK TO THE PRESENT NEW PERSPECTIVES, NEW WORKS – THE COLLECTION FROM 1945 TO TODAY**

**New Presentation of the Collection of Contemporary Art  
from 19 May 2020 in the Garden Halls**

**Frankfurt am Main, 4 May 2020.** Starting on 19 May 2020 – nearly a decade after the opening of the Garden Halls – the Städel Museum’s Collection of Contemporary Art will be presented anew for the first time. A history of art after 1945 fans out proceeding from the central square of the Garden Halls, which cover an area of some 3,000 square metres, beginning with major works of art dating from the recent past to the present. A total of approximately 230 works by 170 artists of various schools, styles and groups will reveal surprising comparisons, viewpoints and visual axes between the immediate present and its roots in past decades. In honour of the occasion, a large number of the museum’s most recent acquisitions and gifts will be on exhibit for the first time, for example works by Miriam Cahn (\*1949), René Daniëls (\*1950), Carlos Cruz-Diez (1923–2019), Jimmie Durham (\*1940), Asta Gröting (\*1961) and Victor Vasarely (1906–1997). With a wide array of narrative threads, the new presentation will allow experiencing post-1945 art from a thematic rather than a chronological point of view. The dissolution of the depicted object in formless, abstract painting, as seen in works of different decades, will be one thematic focus; another will be the advent of gestural painting and its impact on the generations that followed. The presentation will also address itself to the aesthetic of geometry and objects of everyday life – an aspect that turns up time and again in the period in question, charged with ever new meanings and references – in all its various forms and thematic premises. As visitors make their way through the rooms and squares of the Garden Halls, they will moreover gain insights into how the figure found its way back into the picture, how painting conquered – real – space, how the alleged competitors painting and photography entered into a mutual exchange, and much more.

“We’ve been collecting contemporary art since the founding of the Städel Museum. In 2012, the collection of art of the present received a superb new domicile in the Garden Halls. A lot has happened since then. Over the past years, thanks to the

**Städelsches Kunstinstitut  
und Städtische Galerie**

Dürerstraße 2  
60596 Frankfurt am Main  
Telefon +49(0)69-605098-268  
Fax +49(0)69-605098-111  
presse@staedelmuseum.de  
www.staedelmuseum.de

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PRESS- AND  
PUBLIC REACTIONS  
Pamela Rohde  
Phone +49(0)69-605098-170  
rohde@staedelmuseum.de

Franziska von Plocki  
Phone +49(0)69-605098-268  
plocki@staedelmuseum.de

Jannikhe Möller  
Phone +49(0)69-605098-195  
moeller@staedelmuseum.de

Susanne Hafner  
Phone +49(0)69-605098-212  
hafner@staedelmuseum.de

strong dedication of our patrons as well as numerous substantial gifts and a resolute purchasing policy, we have significantly expanded our contemporary art holdings. Our visitors can now discover these recent acquisitions – and rediscover important older works – in a changed presentation featuring works by 170 artists. It is an invitation to see a special collection and seven decades of contemporary art with new eyes”, Städel Museum director Philipp Demandt comments.

“The open structure of the Städel’s Garden Halls permits an independent look at the art of our time, going back from each respective present to the immediate post-war period. The squares, spaces and paths of the exhibition architecture offer unaccustomed visual axes and proximities that create links and make them visible, effortlessly bringing together art of several decades. We become flâneurs, discovering the most recent chapter in art history on routes of our own choosing”, adds Martin Engler, the head the Städel’s Collection of Contemporary Art.

Wolfgang Tillmans’s (\*1968) abstract photograph *Freischwimmer 54* (2004), for example, strikes up a dialogue with the assemblage *Zimbal* (1966) by Gerhard Hoehme (1920–1989) and Raymond Hains’s (1926–2005) collage *Coup de Pied* (1960). The presentation segues from the sculptures by Jessica Stockholder (\*1959) *#358* (2001) and Isa Genzken (\*1948) *Wind I (David)* (2009) to works such as Blinky Palermo’s (1943–1977) *Cloth Picture* (1970) and Yves Klein’s (1928–1962) sponge relief *Relief éponge bleu* (1960). Daniel Richter’s (\*1962) abstract-figurative painting entertains a link to Francis Bacon’s (1909–1992) *Study for the Nurse in the Film “Battleship Potemkin”*. Dirk Skreber’s (\*1961) photo-realistic-like painting forms a transition to the spaces built and captured on film by Thomas Demand (\*1964). In realms off the beaten paths of post-1945 art, various presents become visible: widely differing interpretations and accesses to the art of this period that run parallel to, intersect or complement, contradict or comment on one another. The result is an expedition through seven decades of contemporary art that enables visitors to grasp art history individually and according to personal interest.

### **Insights into the new presentation**

The central square of the Garden Halls forms the point of departure for exploring the new presentation of the contemporary art collection. The space overarched by an eight-metre-high dome unites works by artists of the most recent present. Examples by Isa Genzken, Jessica Stockholder, Michel Majerus (1967–2002), Wilhelm Sasnal (\*1972), Daniel Richter and Dirk Skreber bring the collection’s multifaceted narrative threads together. They testify to the heterogeneity of contemporary art production while at the same time defining the aesthetic echo chamber of our time. The main

narratives of the collection presentation branch out from this central hub. With the aid of major works and discoveries outside the usual canon, the exhibition emphasizes a reading of art history that invalidates a linear development and seeks the unifying rather than the segregating aspects of art.

One chief concern of the new permanent exhibition is the development of a unifying narrative between modern art and that of the post-1945 period – the so-called first and second avant-gardes. In the **geometric abstraction** of the post-war era, artists quoted, revised or deconstructed the formal language of the Bauhaus, Russian Suprematism etc. In a concentrated assemblage, works by Victor Vasarely, Mary Heilmann (\*1940), Carlos Cruz-Diez, Josef Albers (1888–1976) and others demonstrate how the renunciation of representation and a personal style sharpen the visual perception of colour and form. In the work of Robert Breer (1926–2011) or Rupprecht Geiger (1908–2009), on the other hand, geometric abstraction is the road to colour-field painting.

In the Städel Collection of Contemporary Art, the **European Informel** is understood as the concept of an entire era. After 1945, it served as a vehicle for expressing not only the aspect of freedom, but also the inability of representational pictorial language to depict the magnitude of the destruction. Abstract, gestural painting dissolves every form, every human figure. The human being is no longer present in the picture as anything but a trace of the painterly act. Yet this multifaceted international phenomenon had already come into play back in the 1920s and '30s in the works of such artists as Jean Fautrier (1898–1964) or Fritz Winter (1905–1976). Works by Wolfgang Tillmans, Michel Majerus and others, for their part, introduce formlessness as an aesthetic category that has persisted in art to the very present. And finally, this universal pictorial language transcends the boundaries of painting: works by Raymond Hains and Dieter Roth (1930–1998) unite in a surprising manner in the dissolution of self-contained form and even in cross-media pictorial concepts.

Parallel to this development, several of the artists represented in the collection – among them Georg Baselitz (\*1938), Eugen Schönebeck (\*1936) and Leon Golub (1922–2004), but also Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) with their images of deformed bodies (1901–1966), saw to it that the **figure** by no means ever entirely disappeared. On the contrary, they were among those artists who set out in search of new forms of figural expression. Between figuration and abstraction, a new representationalism emerged, a new way of perceiving and depicting the human image. Works by artists like Miriam Cahn and Daniel Richter testify to the fact that this search is still in progress today.

Painting after 1945 increasingly leaves the canvas – but does not stop being painting. The Garden Halls vividly illustrate this **expansion of the panel painting into space** from the Nouveaux Réalistes, Zero, and American Minimalism to the present. Yves Klein's sponge reliefs, Günther Uecker's (\*1930) nail paintings, and Dieter Roth's assemblages, for instance, revert to modernist concepts while at the same time pointing to the future. The works by John M. Armleder (\*1948), Isa Genzken, Jessica Stockholder and others show how art increasingly conquers the surrounding space and makes its way into everyday life.

The presentation also mirrors the reciprocal relationship between **painting and photography** across the decades. From Bernd (1931–2007) and Hilla (1934–2015) Becher and their students, for example Jörg Sasse (\*1962) and Andreas Gursky (\*1955), to artists such as Wolfgang Tillmans and Angela Grauerholz (\*1952), it spreads out a variegated spectrum of new pictorial strategies – between the claim to documentation and photographs entirely removed from any reality. In the process, it does not emphasize the differentness of the two seemingly competing mediums, but rather their mutual influence. Photography, with its supposed claim to the reproduction of reality, becomes a medium in its own right that exploits its potentials to the fullest. This discourse continues to take on ever greater relevance, in particular in the context of the digital age. In a reciprocal exchange, photography adopts pictorial strategies of painting and vice versa.

### **The Städel Museum's Collection of Contemporary Art**

Since its founding more than two hundred years ago, the Städel Museum has continually expanded its collection, always with an eye to the respective artistic present – whether the art of the Nazarenes in the early years of the nineteenth century or, later on, works of Impressionism and Expressionism under director Georg Swarzenski (1876–1957). The founding of the Städtische Galerie (municipal gallery) in the Städel by the City of Frankfurt in 1907 firmly established the art of the present in the museum. The acquisitions made under director Klaus Gallwitz (\*1930) between 1974 and 1994 laid the foundation for the present-day collection of post-1945 art, which has meanwhile grown substantially. Major works by artists such as Yves Klein, Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985), Anselm Kiefer (\*1945), Georg Baselitz and Gerhard Richter (\*1932) thus made their way into the Städel's holdings at a relatively early point in time.

It was not until 2012 that – thanks to the Garden Halls initiated by former director Max Hollein (\*1969) – the Collection of Contemporary Art could finally be presented in comprehensive form. The structural extension of the Städel facilities was made

possible by support from the citizenry as well as contributions from the Städtischer Museums-Verein, the cities of Frankfurt and Eschborn, the Land of Hesse, the Gemeinnützige Hertie-Stiftung, and other foundations as well as numerous business enterprises. The dedication of these organizations finds expression in the form of room sponsorships. Generous gifts from private patrons continue to expand the Städel Museum's contemporary art collection, and important works have also entered the holdings in the form of loans from the collections of the Deutsche Bank and the DZ Bank. Not least of all the acquisitions of the Städelkomitees 21. Jahrhundert account for the quality and magnitude of the current collection of contemporary art to a substantial degree.

Through the ongoing acquisitions and a consistent purchasing policy, it has been possible to sharpen the collection's profile not only with regard to German painting, but also as concerns important interconnections within post-war art and beyond. In the process, there have been new discoveries and rediscoveries, and international links have been forged and expanded. The permanent exhibition offers a look at a history of post-1945 art that does not stand isolated from but entirely within the context of the Städel Museum's narrative of seven hundred years of European art. Wholly in the spirit of a global zeitgeist, contemporary art at the Städel is accordingly presented not as a straightforward linear process but as a richly faceted and thematically interwoven one.

### **CLOSE UP: Understanding the Present – Delving Deeper into the Present**

In conjunction with the new presentation, the Städel's Department of Museum Education and Department of Contemporary Art have developed an innovative art and museum education space. It offers visitors means of gaining individual access to key themes of contemporary art and of delving deeper into the subject. CLOSE UP addresses a diverse public with its manifold expectations and levels of prior knowledge. The works of contemporary art are those closest to the life reality of present-day museum visitors. Nonetheless, experience gained in the active museum education work of the past years has shown that the reception of contemporary art is often associated with a certain level of inhibition. That is where the Städel Museum's new art and art education space comes in – it offers visitors not only individual, low-threshold, and in part playful access, but also more in-depth engagement through the independent study of artists, themes and discourses. CLOSE UP combines the presentation of individual works with various mediums, particularly digital museum education formats – starting from mid June 2020. It places the works on display in the space in their respective sociocultural and historical contexts, making the lines connecting art and society visible. When the new presentation opens, the CLOSE UP

activities will get underway with a focus on the interplay between photography and painting. In addition, a diverse museum education programme for groups will supplement the offer of more in-depth involvement with the themes of the contemporary art collection. CLOSE UP will also be an integral part of the regular museum education programme and the offers for day-care groups and school classes.

**BACK TO THE PRESENT: NEW PERSPECTIVES, NEW WORKS – THE COLLECTION FROM 1945 TO TODAY**

**New presentation of the Collection of Contemporary Art:** from 19 May 2020

**Curator:** Dr Martin Engler (Head of the Collection of Contemporary Art, Städel Museum)

**Project director:** Svenja Grosser (research intern, Städel Museum)

**Location:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

**Information:** [www.staedelmuseum.de](http://www.staedelmuseum.de)

**Visitor services:** +49(0)69-605098-200, [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

**Opening hours:** Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun & holidays 10.00 am – 6.00 pm, Thu & Fri 10.00 am – 9.00 pm

**Holiday opening hours (10.00 am – 6.00 pm):** 21 & 31 May, 1, 2 & 11 Jun 2020

**Admission:** 16 EUR, reduced 14 EUR; families 24 EUR; admission free for children under 12

**Advance ticket sales online at:** [shop.staedelmuseum.de](http://shop.staedelmuseum.de)

**Inventory catalogue:** Overview of the collection: *Gegenwartskunst (1945–heute) im Städel Museum*, ed. Martin Engler and Max Hollein. With a foreword by Max Hollein, an introduction by Martin Engler, texts by Martin Engler, Anna Fricke, Carolin Köchling and Charlotte Klonk and interviews with Klaus Gallwitz, Friedhelm Hütte, Sylvia von Metzler and Luminita Sabau.

368 pages, 379 illustrations, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern 2016, ISBN 978-3-941399-65-5 (in German), 35 EUR

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