



ELEMENTARY PARTS

FROM 13.4.19

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the donation of Bernhard and Margrit Sprengel to the city of Hannover and in celebration the 40th year of its existence, the Sprengel Museum Hannover is staging the exhibition ELEMENTARY PARTS. Ten themed rooms are devoted to both simple and fundamental questions about the museum as an institution and its art: What are the institution's core elements? What is its contractual basis? What collections does it house? What departments are there and what are they each responsible for? What does a sponsoring association do?

What does art actually consist of, and what materials does it use? Which reality (or realities) does it refer to? What is art about, what stories does it tell? By resorting to more than 150 works – all part of the museum's own collection or on permanent loan – ELEMENTARY PARTS is presenting the museum and its collection as a broad spectrum of means of expression in painting, sculpture, graphic art, photography and film from the beginning of the 20th century to the immediate present.

THE SPRENGEL MUSEUM HANNOVER

On his 70th birthday on 17 April 1969, Bernhard Sprengel and his wife Margrit announced their wish to donate their joint collection to Land capital Hannover. 10 years later, the "Kunstmuseum Hannover mit Sammlung Sprengel" (renamed "Sprengel Museum Hannover" in 1984) was opened, with a first extension being added in 1992 and a second in 2015. The Sprengel Museum Hannover houses all the post-1900 holdings from the collections of Land capital Hannover, the Land of Lower Saxony and the Sprengel Collection. On permanent loan in addition are the holdings of the Kurt und Ernst Schwitters Foundation, the Kurt Schwitters Archive, the Niedersächsische Sparkassenstiftung, the Rudolf-Jahn-Stiftung, the Kunststiftung Bernhard Sprengel und Freunde, the Hannover Re Foundation, the Fritz-Behrens-Stiftung and various other foundations.

COLOUR

Colour is the essence of painting and also an elementary part of many other genres such as sculpture, photography, film, drawing and various printing techniques. The debates in art about colour seem inexhaustible. From the Renaissance to the 20th century, painting developed with an increasing focus on colour as a pictorial medium in its own right. When finally, at the beginning of the 20th century, artists turned to colour as an autonomous subject, its intrinsic value came to the fore. At the same time, the idea that had persisted for centuries, that colour's only purpose is for filling areas or for delimiting forms, fundamentally changed. Ever since colour in painting has been freed from the demand for realistic representation, all generations of artists have been probing the relationship between content, form and colour in their pictures.

As a means of abstraction, but also as a radical principle of composition and order, colour played a central role in the work of the Constructivists Josef Albers, Max Bill and Jean Gorin. For the Expressionists Emil Nolde and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, colour itself became the medium of feelings. Artists such as Gerhard Richter and Rupprecht Geiger make use of lively colour gradients and processes of colour differentiation, while Timm Ulrichs addresses the diversity of meaning in the perception of colour.



MATERIAL

Until the 20th century, the primary task of artistic material was to lend form to artists' ideas. Precious materials such as marble or bronze were chosen to enrich art and make it imperishable. This changed radically with the advent of modern art: starting in 1919, Kurt Schwitters created collages from everyday and waste materials, which he called 'Merz art': "I didn't see any reason why you shouldn't use old tickets, driftwood, cloakroom number plates, wires, parts of wheels, buttons and junk from attics and rubbish heaps as material for paintings just as well as factory-produced paint." Materials were no longer used for idealising the work of art and, instead, took centre stage in their diversity and sensuality. Schwitters is regarded as one of the pioneers of this new 'material art'. Particularly from the 1960s onwards, a new generation of artists took up this idea: Dieter Roth created sculptures from organic materials and César compressed a complete car into a sculpture, while Günter Haese used delicate, fragile, microscopically tiny clock parts as material for his sculptures. Textiles were used by Reiner Ruthenbeck, while Niki de Saint Phalle incorporated all kinds of scrap and everyday objects that she had found into her assemblages. In the work of Félix González-Torres, the idea itself is the artistic material that simultaneously materialises into a blank white poster – similar to Bertrand Lavier, who declares an empty white wall to be a projection surface for a picture, illuminated by lamps that seem to shine without a power supply.

SHAPE

There are barely any limits to the form and shape of works of art. They are as diverse as the forms of nature and reality, but even beyond this anything is possible that the human imagination can construe. The spectrum ranges from organic forms that seem to have an affinity with or can be derived from nature, as in the case of Hans Arp, Alexander Calder, Henry Moore or Niki de Saint Phalle, to technically constructed forms that do not occur in nature and stand for a mathematically constructed formal language (Wassily Kandinsky) or a technical/industrial one, as in the case of Donald Judd and Shinkichi Tajiri. Since the Italian Renaissance, as embodied by the rivalry between the schools of Florence and Venice, line and colour, strictly constructed and gesturally expressive forms, have been competing for predominance, and this can be traced through to modern art.

REALITIES

After many centuries in which art had consistently subordinated itself to the visible world, it severed this bond in the first two decades of the 20th century and focused increasingly on its own laws of composition, form, colour and material. From different sides, art opened up a world beyond visible reality: a path, exemplarily represented by Franz Marc and the Blue Rider and by Max Ernst, Hans Arp and Pablo Picasso, leading from nature, from organic abstract forms to autonomy of artistic form. The Constructivist movement constructed its own world without any reference to nature and visible reality. In the second half of the 20th century, this found its continuation in conceptual art – with Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth and Ben Vautier, for example.

Throughout the 20th century, however, even (hyper)realistic depiction remained an artistic option – for example in Pop Art or, as here, impressively demonstrated by Duane Hanson. Finally, there are also intermediate worlds such as Surrealism, which often presents itself in the guise of the physical world, but opens windows to dream worlds beyond visible realities. The "Capri Battery" by Joseph Beuys combines fantasy and the real world, nature and technical civilisation. The lemon and the light bulb are similar in shape, and nature appears as a source of form and energy for technical civilisation (theoretically, citric acid actually functions as an electrical energy source). And at the same time, the light bulb provides light and warmth, just as the lemon does as a southern fruit and also as a symbol of the artist's quest for longed-for places.



(HI)STORY TELLING

One of the most important characteristics and functions of art is the telling of history and stories. The range of topics is huge and stretches from Christian iconography and themes of world and contemporary history to very personal experiences.

Marc Chagall and Adolf Hölzel depict religious themes such as the *Adoration of the Magi* and the *Nativity of Christ* to appeal to the morality of the viewer, while Max Beckmann clothes his personal destiny of American exile in the biblical parable of the "Prodigal Son". In a wide variety of ways, artists tell stories of life and death: in the midst of flowers in rampant bloom, James Ensor provides a 'memento mori' with a skull. Alfred Hrdlicka's sculpture tells the legendary story of the mass murderer Fritz Haarmann (1879-1925) from Hannover. Wilhelm Sasnal approaches traumatic Nazi history by visiting the Majdanek concentration camp on his bicycle. Marlene Dumas' pictures of lost, wiped-out family members refer to the first Iraq War under George Bush. Alice Musiol shows a game board on which there are apparently too many figures – and suggests how play can become a serious social matter. Finally, Daniel Spoerri conserves the remains of a meal that tells of an evening together, of artist friendships and of night-long discussions about art.

NATURAL SPACES

At the beginning of the 20th century, as a reaction to industrialisation and the resultant poorer living conditions in towns, a large number of reform projects evolved, with the aim of achieving a new conception of humanity in its relations with nature. Pictures showed not only plants, gardens and landscapes, but also nude bathers at the seaside. For the Expressionists nature became a means of freely expressing the emotions. With their pictures of nature they wanted to no longer merely convey moods, but to express the sensual experience of the landscape in defiance of rigid and restricting social conventions.

Nature also provides content and ideas for numerous artists who concern themselves with the dialogue between humanity and nature in the Anthropocene era, the age of extreme human intervention in the Earth's ecosystem. Julia Schmid combines her meticulously painted pictures of plants with precise topographical records. Julian Charrière's and Julius von Bismarck's video recordings were made in the radioactively contaminated environment of Chernobyl. They show the world from the supposedly innocent, pre-human perspective of an animal and at the same time bear witness to the apocalypse of civilisation.

HUMAN SHAPED SPACES

Since industrialisation in the 19th century and especially thereafter in the 20th century, art has increasingly focused on civilised space as a world contrasting with nature. Hans Purrmann stages the conflict between civilisation and nature as a view through the window. In Umberto Boccioni's landmark picture of modern art, "The Street Enters the House", an old woman on her balcony looks out of her familiar old world onto the new, modern city that crashes over her like a tsunami of speed and dynamism; August Macke's "Shop Window" shows the modern world of commodities. The range of living spaces designed and inhabited by humans and reflected in art is broad: among them are geometric structures based on abstract schemata from such modernist movements as Cubism, Bauhaus or De Stijl (Fernand Léger), as well as organic structures reminiscent of nature, such as those by Paul Klee, Max Ernst and Niki de Saint Phalle. The spaces shaped by humanity also touch on religion (Niki de Saint Phalle, Karl Schaper) and social issues (Otto Gleichmann, Lyonel Feininger). Bogomir Ecker even designs a "Housing for an Unknown Bird".

PRESS RELEASE

4/4



POWERFUL EMOTIONS

Art is a platform of expression, a mirror, seismograph and thermometer for all human feelings, for powerful emotions, both positive and negative: joy, love, passion and desire are dealt with just as fear, aggression, violence and hatred.

The ambivalent facets of love and desire are the central themes of Edvard Munch's *Beast* and Emil Nolde's "Schwärmer". Picasso presents himself as a victim in the shape of a cock being eaten by an aggressive cat – the background is his personal situation in the year the picture was painted, when he was left by his then partner Françoise Gilot and their children Claude and Paloma. Niki de Saint Phalle presents the "Bride" on the threshold between childlike innocence and the threat from male instruments of violence. In "Portrait of my Lover" she turns the tables and presents her lover as a target. Male aggression is as much a theme in Max Beckmann's "Wrestlers" as it is in Bruce Nauman's "Double Slap in the Face"; in another of his works, a conversation between a married couple escalates into a sudden outburst of violence. In "Swiss Tantrum", Arman gives free rein to his hatred of the Swiss control and security mentality in the explosion of a still life.

FACES

The personal portrait is one of the oldest genres in art and has been an important motif for almost all times and cultures through to the present day. In the depiction of the face, the peculiarities and character traits of an individual can be depicted just as much as facets of the society in which the sitter lives. Styles of the time, such as Cubism, Expressionism, New Objectivity or Pop Art, are reflected in the portraits, as are the circumstances of the period and social conditions. The depictions range from strong reduction and stylisation to abstraction – in Alexej von Jawlensky for example – and extremely realistic depictions on the other hand, such as those by Christian Schad and Franz Gertsch. Hans-Peter Feldmann shows people of all ages from one to a hundred; Niki de Saint Phalle shoots at heads of state as representatives and perpetrators of patriarchal injustice and violence; Otto Dix shows his parents as tough, emaciated workers; during the same period, Christian Schad presents "Lotte" as a glamour girl of the Roaring Twenties. The human face appears as a mask (Julio González), as a role image (Julian Rosefeldt), as a blurred and indistinct memory from the past (Gerhard Richter) and as a sober, austere and unembellished image of the present (Thomas Ruff).

The presentation will be accompanied by an exhibition catalogue.

Curators: Reinhard Spieler and Stella Jäger

PRESS CONFERENCE

Thursday, 11.4.19, 11 a.m.

OPENING

Tuesday, 12.4.19, 7 p.m.

PRESSE CONTACT

presse.smh@hannover-stadt.de

T +49-(0)511 168 4 39 24

F +49-(0)511 168 4 50 93

SPRENGEL
MUSEUM HANNOVER
KURT-SCHWITTERS-PLATZ
30169 HANNOVER
+49 511 168 43875
SPRENGEL-MUSEUM@
HANNOVER-STADT.DE
WWW.SPRENGEL-MUSEUM.DE

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