



National Treasures from Germany - From Luther to the Bauhaus
30 September 2005 to 8 January 2006

An exhibition initiated by the Konferenz Nationaler Kultureinrichtungen (KNK, Conference of National Cultural Organisations) in cooperation with the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn.

“I would much love to see the treasures there, gathered over time”. The treasures that so intrigued the great Johann Wolfgang von Goethe two hundred years ago were the extraordinarily rich collections and matchless landscaped parks built by the ruling houses, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie at the very heart of Europe, in Germany’s east.

Fifteen years after the German reunification, twenty-five leading cultural institution from the former East Germany and Berlin have come together to present their most precious treasures in a unique display. Six hundred key objects are showcased in an exhibition that covers 2000 square metres of the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

This exploration of the history of collecting illustrates the origins and evolution of the many kinds of museums and private collections, examining them in their larger European setting over five centuries as well as highlighting the particular character of the museums of eastern Germany. The history of collecting was decisively influenced by developments emanating from eastern Germany, and it is there that major sites of the German shared cultural heritage can be found. In recognition of the pivotal nature of Martin Luther’s Reformation, which spread from Wittenberg in Saxony at the beginning of the 16th century, the exhibition begins its survey with the Reformation.

The display of paintings, sculptures, drawings, literary and musical compositions, valuables and curios as well as specimens of natural history illustrates the emergence of the German national heritage that is rooted in the framework of a wider European context. Visitors will come face to face with the princely collectors of the past and share their passions, captivated by the outstanding quality of the objects.

The exhibition spans more than 500 years of collecting history, ending with pieces of the Bauhaus era. A brief computer animated portrait of the twenty-five participating institutions at the beginning of the 21st century brings the impressive survey to a close.

Sections of the Exhibition:

Martin Luther and the Reformation

German history, and with it the history of collecting, was profoundly influenced by Luther’s Reformation at the dawn of the 16th century. The emergence of Protestantism

created new genres and a new audience for art by allowing art to transcend the confines of religion and the Church.

The Renaissance and Baroque *Kunstammer*

Originally intended as a microcosm of universal knowledge, the fascinating *kunstammer* collections at Dresden, Gotha, Leipzig and Halle permit a unique glimpse into the interests and preferences of their owners. They collected not only works of art and scientific instruments, but also strange and wondrous objects found in nature. These early collections and their purpose-built galleries were a glittering manifestation of prestige, wealth and intellectual diversity.

Baroque Splendour and Baroque Music

The Elector of Saxony, Friedrich August I (August the Strong), significantly expanded and reorganised the Dresden collections. In Schwerin and Potsdam as well, collections of fine art and porcelain emphasised the majesty and splendour of the monarch. Music by Bach and Händel transports the visitor to the court of the “Saxon Sun King”.

Towards Enlightenment

The Weimar court under Duchess Anna Amalia fostered literature and music. The Duchess’s son Karl August and his Minister of State Johann Wolfgang von Goethe opened the fine art collection for the education of young artists. The court encouraged travel to Italy in order to promote a deeper understanding of antiquity, which period was widely seen as the very foundation of the Age of Enlightenment.

Parks and Gardens

While Baroque garden design subjected nature to man, the landscape gardens in the English style of the late 18th century embody the ideal of unfettered nature. In 1770, Prince Franz of Anhalt-Dessau created the first landscape park on the European continent in Wörlitz. Prince Pückler-Muskau spent his entire inheritance and his wife’s dowry creating his parks at Branitz and Muskau, while the Hohenzollern of Brandenburg-Prussia had parts of their parks redesigned in the modern style.

Romanticism

Romantic painting gave visual shape to the idea of nationhood as defined by a shared cultural heritage, long before a unified Germany became a political reality. Napoleon’s defeat led to a surge of monuments and memorials dedicated to German writers, thinkers and composers. The Wartburg became the central shrine of the German national movement.

Specialist Museums

In the 19th century, an increased interest in non-European cultures and the natural sciences led to the establishment of new and specialised collections and to the foundation of numerous new museums to house them. New museums were dedicated to mineralogy, zoology, anthropology and ethnography, and a museum of musical instruments was founded in Leipzig.

Museums and Modern Art

Towards the end of the 19th century, the rift deepened between art deemed worthy of museums and contemporary art. In Leipzig, Chemnitz and Halle, enlightened directors of new museums that were founded by the bourgeoisie rather than the aristocracy took it upon themselves to establish collections of modern art. The applied arts, too, rose to particular importance in the early 20th century. The Bauhaus, founded in 1919 in Weimar and relocated to Dessau in 1925, was the most important art school of the modern era.

The 23 Institutions of the KNK (Conference of National Cultural Organisations)

Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Stiftung Weimarer Klassik und Kunstsammlungen
Staatliches Museum Schwerin
Kulturstiftung DessauWörlitz
Franckesche Stiftungen zu Halle
Deutsches Meeresmuseum Stralsund
Stiftung Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden
Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau
Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen Anhalt
Stiftung Fürst-Pückler-Museum Park und Schloss Branitz
Stiftung Fürst-Pückler-Park Bad Muskau
Museum für Kunsthandwerk Leipzig - Grassimuseum
Staatliche Ethnographische Sammlungen Sachsen
Musikinstrumenten-Museum der Universität Leipzig - Grassimuseum
Staatliche Naturhistorische Sammlungen Dresden
Wartburg-Stiftung
Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig
Stiftung Moritzburg Halle
Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz
Lindenau-Museum Altenburg
Stiftung Bach-Archiv Leipzig
Händel-Haus Halle

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Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz

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