

BUNDESKUNSTHALLE

Press kit

FROM MOSUL TO PALMYRA

A Virtual Journey through
the World's Cultural Heritage

30 August 2019 – 3 November 2019

من الموصل إلى تدمر

رحلة افتراضية عبر التراث الثقافي العالمي

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FOREWORDS OF THE PUBLICATION

In recent years, some of the most splendid cities of the ancient world – Mosul, Aleppo, Palmyra, Leptis Magna – have come to be associated with the wanton destruction of their vestiges by fanaticism and war. These ancient sites, some of them completely laid to waste, bear witness to recent and current conflicts that affect us directly. A virtual journey to the sites reveals the disastrous consequences of war on every level, including culture. These consequences reach far beyond the regrettable loss of outstanding artefacts of long-gone civilizations. The intentional destruction of cultural heritage constitutes an attempt to obliterate cultural identity. The historical memory of the multireligious sites stands for those achievements of civilization that are now massively threatened by war and terror.

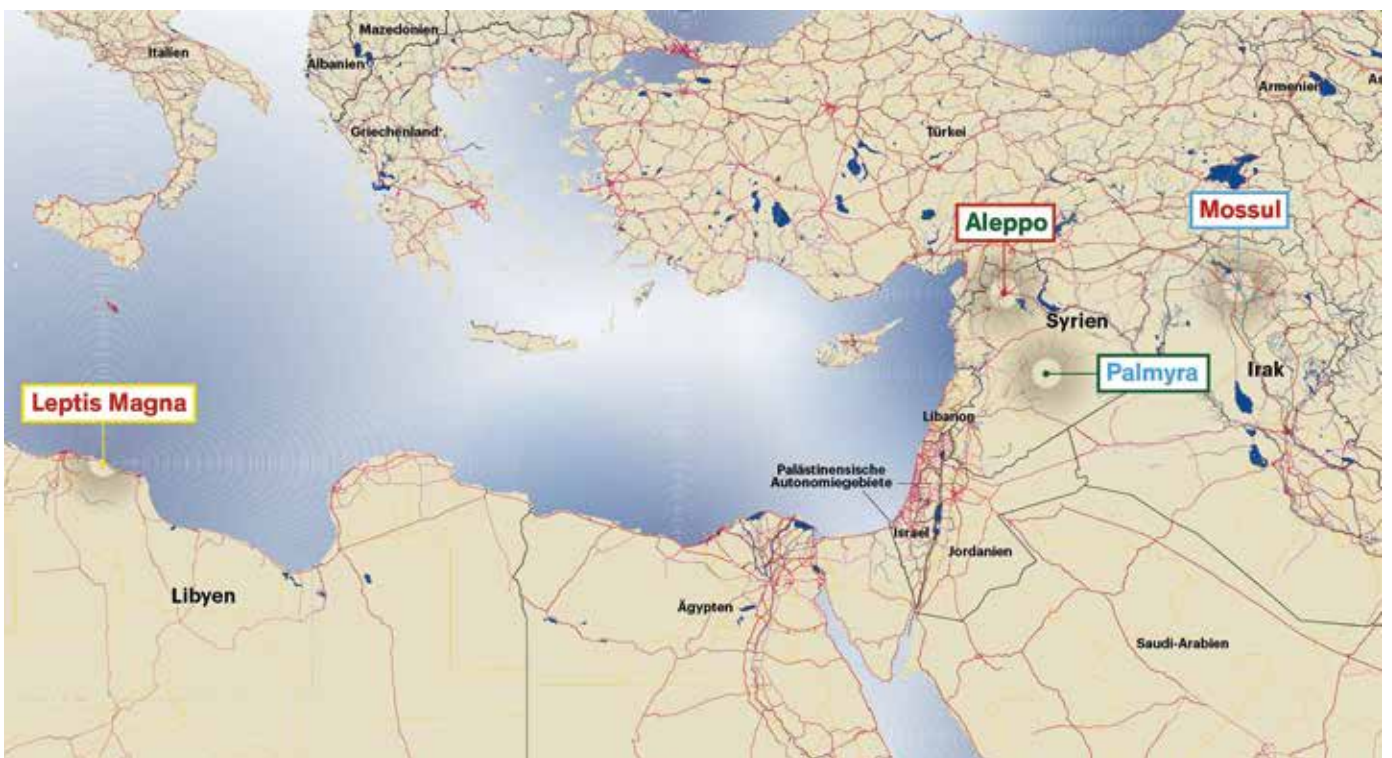
While each of the four emblematic sites, which visitors to the exhibition can explore in virtual models and reconstructions, tells its own story, they have one thing in common: they embody the universality of our concept of culture, which prizes the individuality and diversity of the remains of numerous ancient civilizations without subjecting them to religious or national hierarchies. This principle forms the starting point for endeavors to protect and preserve the precious and fragile antiquities and to utilize modern technology to reconstruct those that have been destroyed.

We wish to thank the Institut du monde arabe in Paris.

Rein Wolfs
Director of the Bundeskunsthalle

The partial destruction of the ancient metropolis of Palmyra shocked the whole world. War devastated parts of Mosul and Aleppo and decimated the cities' populations. The ruins of Leptis Magna were not affected by the chaos, but they too are endangered. UNESCO, which is partnering with the Institut du Monde Arabe in this exhibition, has placed several of these cities on the list of world heritage sites. They are more than just stones. They are our shared heritage, and the preservation of that heritage concerns all of us. Citizens of all faiths, archaeologists and curators have worked together, and continue to do so, hand in hand, to protect, preserve and reconstruct these sites. How can one get a sense of the significance and value of this Arab cultural heritage? How can one convey the magnificence and splendour of these ancient sites, the hustle and bustle in its urban centres? To answer these questions, the Institut du Monde Arabe has taken the unprecedented step of mounting an exhibition without objects, a digital, screen-based exhibition that takes visitors on a virtual journey into the very heart of those cities. Reconstructions of the temple of Baalshamin in Palmyra or the Umayyad mosque in Aleppo allow visitors to experience the beauty of these ancient monuments and to contemplate the significance and fragility of this cultural heritage which we hope to preserve and pass on to future generations.

Jack Lang
President of Institut du monde arabe



FROM MOSUL TO PALMYRA

A Virtual Journey through the World's Cultural Heritage

Mosul, Aleppo, Palmyra, Leptis Magna – the names of these cities resonate as symbols of the fabled cultural heritage of ancient civilizations, but also as symbols of the wanton destruction of their vestiges by fanaticism and war. The exhibition employs state-of-the-art virtual reconstructions to bring these legendary ruined cities of the ancient world back to life. Animations allow visitors to experience their past and the history of their destruction and to ponder the possibility of their reconstruction and future.

The presentation sheds light on the deep-rooted cultural and religious diversity of the cultural heritage sites of the Middle East and North Africa and their position at the heart of a close and vibrant network of exchange between three continents. By contrast, the recent years have been a period of profound turmoil for the Arab world. It found itself confronted with new ideologies and subject to far-reaching political changes. Its architectural heritage came to be seen as a symbol of a past that is revered by one faction and abhorrent to the other. Iraq, Libya and Syria are currently embroiled in armed conflict. The population suffers; the architectural heritage is imperiled. The four sites presented in this exhibition are representative of many others that share their long and complex history, their evocativeness and the sheer beauty of their architectural monuments.

Mosul (Iraq), the ancient city of Nineveh with its Neo-Assyrian vestiges, its Old City and the Great Mosque of al-Nuri with its leaning minaret.

Aleppo (Syria), where successive Muslim empires from the Umayyads to the Ottomans left behind an extraordinary architectural treasure.

Leptis Magna (Libya), founded by the Phoenicians and known as the 'African Rome' was a jewel of the Mediterranean in the third century AD.

Palmyra (Syria), the 'pearl of the Orient', was a legendary Graeco-Roman city whose recent destruction at the hands of ISIS shocked the world.

Brief documentary films introduce visitors of the exhibition to people who have been working on the preservation of the architectural heritage for years: archaeologists, conservators and locals who are committed to safeguarding the rich and diverse history of their home. At the end of their visit, in a presentation that was developed especially for this exhibition, visitors can explore six of the destroyed and currently inaccessible iconic sites of the Arab world with the help of virtual reality headsets. With this exhibition, the Bundeskunsthalle wants to underscore the importance of preserving this universal heritage of all humanity.

MOSUL

Projections on giant screens invite visitors to discover the city of Mosul as it is today: recently re-taken from ISIS it is deeply scarred by the war, but its traditional urban architecture remains clearly visible from the bird's eye perspective of the camera's approach. As it draws closer to the monuments, the most emblematic of which is the Great Mosque of al-Nuri with its leaning minaret, the extent of the destruction and current reconstruction efforts becomes apparent. The superimposition of a new 3D virtual image over the ruins, allows visitors to discover the building as it was – and as it could be rebuilt. In order to understand the images better, to locate the structures in the city and to learn about their history, a round central table serves as a support for a dynamic mediation tool that scrolls through information as the big-screen projection progresses.

Across from that giant screen, a second projection goes back through time: the same structures, the same streets, are shown at different moments throughout the twentieth century. The city comes alive through animated archival photographs. The contrast between the current images of the damaged city and the street photographs plunges visitors into history and arouses emotions. Witnesses (archaeologists, curators, and ordinary residents) talk about their efforts to protect Mosul's most valuable possessions. Visitors are then invited to enter the adjacent rooms to learn more about the city of Mosul, to discover its multiculturalism and to explore the mausoleum of Nabi Yunus with its recent archeological discoveries of a palace of Nineveh.

SPECIAL FOCUS SPACE 1

Mosul, a multi-denominational and multi-ethnic city

Mosul was conquered by the Arabs in the seventh century AD. From that time onwards, Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Yazidis lived there together. Ethnic and linguistic diversity were markers of the city's plurality.

According to the electoral census of 2009, the city's 1.5 million inhabitants were classified as follows: Arabs (65.7%, of whom 5.5% were Shiite Muslims), Kurds (27.4%), Turkmen (3.3%), Christians (2.1%), Shabaks (0.9%), and Yazidis (0.6%).

The Christian population had already declined by half since the early 2000s. The Jewish community, one of the most ancient of the region, gradually disappeared from Mosul throughout the twentieth century.

SPECIAL FOCUS SPACE 2

Mosul: the mausoleum of Nabi Yunus

On the site of ancient Nineveh, on the east bank of the Tigris, stood the mausoleum of Nabi Yunus, the prophet Jonah, recognized equally by Muslims, Jews, and Christians as one of the twelve prophets. The tenth surah of the Koran is dedicated to him.

Built over an ancient church, the mausoleum of Nabi Yunus was integrated into a mosque erected in the fourteenth century. That structure was considered heretical by the constitution of ISIS, promulgated in Mosul on June 13, 2014. On July 24, 2014, the mosque and mausoleum of Nabi Yunus were dynamited.

The multi-denominational identity of the city, already at risk, came under severe attack when the jihadists arrived in 2014. Members of minorities went into exile or were massacred. Buildings deemed heretical under the rigid doctrine of ISIS were looted, damaged and sometimes razed to the ground.

The future of Mosul's heritage is intricately linked to the return of the minorities to their city. The desire to see them return is shared by Mosul residents, aware that they have lost a central element of their identity.

An irony of history would have it that vestiges of an Assyrian palace were discovered beneath the rubble. The gigantic bulls carved in stone, fragments of ornamental tiling and various objects can be dated to the seventh century BC and linked to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon. These discoveries, which shed new light on the history of Nineveh, are currently studied by Heidelberg University.



Interior view of Al-Hadba Mosque in Mosul, Iraq. February 2018 © UNESCO



Children in front of the Al-Hadba Mosque in Mosul, Iraq. July 1985, Mosul, Iraq © Tasser Tabbara. Archive, courtesy of Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT

Quotations

“Arab Mosul lies on the borders of other glorious lands belonging to Muslim history, to other allied cultures, the Turkish, Iranian and Kurdish. Setting aside other forms of dialogue, one may say that it is situated between the civilization of the city and that of the desert close by.”

René Guitton, 2016

*“Oh, son of Nineveh
Vow to destroy these occupiers
Such is vengeance for the martyrs and the orphans
For the churches, the mosques, the sanctuaries of prophets
Mosul-Hadba will again don its gorgeous vestments
The daisies will bloom anew
And the people will once more live in peace and security.”*
Abou Chaker known as “Ibn al-Mosil” (“Son of Mosul”),
Mosul resident, October 2017

“Some miles to the north of Mosul lay Nineveh, the largest and most magnificent city in Assyria, surrounded by a thousand towers. The walls were a hundred feet high; three chariots would pass them abreast. Nineveh is now no bigger than a village.”
P.A.L. de Gardane, 1809

ALEPPO

As in the section devoted to Mosul, visitors approach Aleppo from a bird's eye perspective with a view of the only slightly damaged rooftops of the citadel and the relief of the city. Wandering the streets of the old city, visitors arrive at Aleppo's most emblematic religious edifice, the Umayyad Mosque. Its completely destroyed minaret rises again thanks to 3D digitization. In a separate room, the video "Greetings from Aleppo" by the Aleppo-based artist Issa Touma presents the city from the inside and allows visitors to follow the everyday life of the population. The film acts as a reminder that the heritage of a city like Aleppo is alive and cannot be dissociated from the people who live there. This section ends with a look at the recently damaged famous souq of Aleppo in the heart of the city.

SPECIAL FOCUS SPACE 3

Greetings from Aleppo

Photographer and gallery owner Issa Touma was born in Aleppo and still lives and works there. In "Greetings from Aleppo", shot in 2017, he shows the city from the inside: from its streets, the balconies of its houses, and its storefronts, but above all through its inhabitants. Every day they watch over their belongings, get news of their loved ones and try to maintain a semblance of routine. Their daily lives attest to their resilience in the face of the Syrian conflict.

This documentary reminds us that the heritage of a metropolis such as Aleppo is a living one. The architecture and urban fabric cannot be dissociated from the people who imprint them with a way of life and shape them through their activity. They are the first victims of the destruction of their heritage.

SPECIAL FOCUS SPACE 4

The souqs of Aleppo

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Aleppo was the city of souqs. The entire organization of the city was based on the differentiation between commercial souq spaces and residential areas. The souqs dictated the flow of traffic in the city, and merchants occupied a prominent place in society.

This souq was burned down; others have completely collapsed. This destruction clearly speaks to the notion of intangible cultural heritage: the relationship between merchants and customers was an essential component of the identity of this ravaged heritage.

In the twentieth century, the situation changed: the vast majority of urban commercial activity moved elsewhere. Before 2012 and the beginning of the war in Aleppo, several shops had specialized in trade with foreign tourists; a case in point is the Souq al-Zarb presented here.



Quotations

“With its beautiful, high walls, its gates with gigantic ogival arches, its many elegant minarets, its baths, its thousand cupolas, its aqueducts, its great bazaars, its magnificent khans, it has every appearance of a capital city. (...) There are few cities in the Orient as well-built or featuring such beautiful monuments as this one. Everything there is tall, vast and richly ornamented.”

Eugène Flandrin, 19th century

“The solidity of its fortress is famed; it towers above all else. No-one would dare attack it, on account of its strength, or, if one were to do so, one would not carry it off. Its elevations are made of dressed stone, and it is built to a highly symmetrical design.”

Ibn Battûta, 14th century

“For him who reaches it, Aleppo is a garden of Eden, and for those who distance themselves, it is a blazing torch.”

Abû l-‘Alâ‘ al-Ma‘arrî, 10th-11th century

*“The church is a sign,
The mosque is a voice.
Between these two, life runs through Aleppo like in a garden on
the island of time.”*

Adonis (Ali Ahmad Saïd Esber), 2003

EXHIBITION SECTIONS

PALMYRA

The despoliation and destruction of Palmyra at the hands of ISIS dealt a terrible blow to the world's cultural heritage. Palmyra's most emblematic buildings, among them the Temple of Bel and the Temple of Baalshamin, were brought crashing down. Images of the latter in ruins are complemented by its virtual reconstruction by a team at the University of Lausanne.

SPECIAL FOCUS SPACE 5

The necropolis of Palmyra

Like most ancient cities, Palmyra is surrounded by tombs. There were numerous tall funerary towers, many of which had several floors of burial chambers with intricately carved stone sarcophagi. Unfortunately, they were dynamited by ISIS.

Beginning in the second century AD, collective underground tombs, known as hypogea, were dug. One of them, the Tomb of the Three Brothers, was adorned with magnificent wall paintings and contained several carved stone sarcophagi. When ISIS jihadists decided to use this tomb as a base, turning it into a shelter, canteen, and office space, they painted over the murals and covered the sarcophagi with blankets so as not to see the figurative decorations.



Temple of Baalshamin, interior view of the Cella (Main Room of the temple)
2010, Palmyra, Syria © Louise Rabeih, IASA – UNIL

Quotations

“Everything was given to me at once; and there was nothing more to search for than that which was before my eyes, offered in the evidence provided by an ageless dream, come true in every respect.”

Dominique Fernandez, 2016

“Here, I tell myself, here an opulent city once flourished, here was the seat of a powerful empire. [...] These heaped-up marbles went to form orderly palaces; these fallen columns adorned the majesty of its temples; [...] and now, behold what remains of this mighty city: a lugubrious skeleton!”

Volney, 1787

“One slept, so to speak, amongst the ruins, one's head in the stars and full of ancient dreams, lulled by the discourse of Baalshamin, god of the sun and the dew, with Ishtar, the goddess with her lion.”
Mathias Énard, 2015

“I do not want to enlarge upon the question of art; but, having visited Athens, the Peloponnese, Rome and the temples at Paestum, I believe I can set Palmyra above all of them. Wherever the traveler places himself, he will turn around, and the sights will delight his eyes.”

Mme Le Ray, 1885

LEPTIS MAGNA

Of the four sites presented in this exhibition, Leptis Magna is the only one that has not suffered serious destructions, despite the conflict in Libya. However, the immense complex is threatened by looting, neglect and the corrosive effects of the climate, which pose a different but equally serious kind of danger that the public needs to become aware of. The images taken by Iconem in April 2018 allow visitors to take a virtual stroll through the ancient city. Little known to the general public, Leptis Magna is among the best preserved Roman cities in the world and features all the architectural elements one would expect to find in a splendid imperial metropolis: temples, basilicas, forum, theater, amphitheater, baths... On site, the French Archaeological Mission in Libya, is working to rediscover it and enhance its prestige. Visitors can explore the site, following the movement of the drones to wander the streets, enter the buildings and marvel at their sculptural details.

Quotations

“These are the most beautiful ruins and the most complete in all of Africa.”

Claude Lemaire, 17th century

“At any event, this place must have been immensely splendid, because one observes three things there: the magnificence of the port, which is now entirely filled in; an amphitheater of prodigious size, which one can easily distinguish; and an earthen area almost two miles in length and one mile wide, running alongside the sea, fully bordered by walls, surrounded by the city, full of buildings and monuments.”

Durand, 1694

“The beautiful scarred city went through so much suffering and so many dangers over the centuries, and even very recently, it saw so much bloodshed that I often feared for it.”

Frédérique Hébrard, 2012



VIRTUAL REALITY

For the first time, Ubisoft, a leading producer of video games and renowned creator of virtual worlds, has put its knowhow at the service of the preservation of cultural heritage. Sound, lighting, and animation come together in an immersive virtual reality experience that allows visitors to explore six emblematic sites of the Arab world that have been destroyed or are difficult to access. Entering a space of 9 sqm, visitors can move about freely and enjoy a moving and astonishingly “real” experience. The virtual reality space is highly intuitive and suitable for visitors of all age groups.

The Souq of Aleppo (Syria): built in the nineteenth century in the medieval old city of Aleppo, this souq was intended for the Bedouins. It was destroyed by combat-related fires in 2012.
Images recorded: April 2017.

Excavations beneath the Mausoleum of Nabi Yunus (Mosul, Iraq): the buried vestiges of a 2,600-year-old Assyrian palace were discovered in 2014 following the destruction of the mausoleum of the Prophet Jonah in Mosul.
Images recorded: February 2018.

The Temple of Baalshamin (Palmyra, Syria): erected north of Palmyra 2,000 years ago, this sanctuary of the god Baalshamin was blown up by ISIS in 2015.
Images recorded: July 2016.

Church of Our Lady of the Hour (Mosul, Iraq): built by the Dominican Fathers in the 1870s and destroyed by ISIS in 2016.

Images recorded: February 2018.

Severan Basilica of Leptis Magna (Libya): completed in 216 AD, the Basilica of Septimius Severus is a monumental complex measuring 92 x 42 meters. Inspired by Roman models, it was home to the city’s court of law.
Images recorded: April 2018.

Great Mosque of al-Nuri (Mosul, Iraq): the emblem of Mosul, it was built in 1170 and destroyed by ISIS in 2017, three years after it had formed the backdrop for the proclamation of the caliphate.
Images recorded: February 2018.

The three experiences of the cultural heritage of Mosul were developed using data generously provided by UNESCO. © UNESCO / IMA

EPILOGUE

Since the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001, the world has become more aware of the fragility of its cultural heritage. In the Arab world, deliberate damage to architecture has been more frequent in the last decade than it has been in the preceding centuries. The shocking images of the recent acts of destruction, for example the demolition of the temples of Palmyra, caused worldwide outrage. The violence of those acts must not, however, detract from the danger of other threats to our shared heritage.

The temples of Angkor in Cambodia, the pyramids of Meroë in Sudan, the minarets of Jam in Afghanistan and Samara in Iraq, the island of Delos in Greece... all are in peril for different reasons. Threats range from vandalism to indifference as well as climate change and ecological disasters. The cultural heritage sites of the world must be preserved for all humanity. We must recognize their value so we can protect and maintain them. These sites are more than just agglomerations of crumbling stones, they are tangible manifestations of our very origins and history that are at risk of being lost.



VIRTUAL RECONSTRUCTION

Heritage preservation poses many technical challenges. The IMA has joined forces with the start-up Iconem, a pioneer in the digitization of at-risk sites, to develop this exhibition. Filming with drones and processing data with novel algorithms, in combination with archaeological research, make it possible to create extremely accurate 3D models. These digital models are used for research as well as for actions that promote the safeguarding of cultural heritage. They allow for the study and preservation of these unique sites.

PUBLICATION

From Mosul to Palmyra
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30 August to 3 November 2019

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GOETHE

Transformation of the World
until 15 September 2019

Goethe, illustration by Maria Gottweiss after the painting by Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *Goethe in the Roman Campagna* (detail), 1787 © Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland GmbH



GOETHE'S GARDENS

Green Worlds
on the Roof of the Bundeskunsthalle
until 22 September 2019

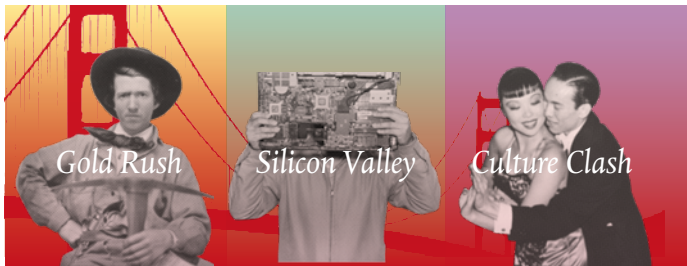
Photo: Sibylle Pietrek © Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland GmbH



POWER PLAY

Anna Uddenberg
until 22 September 2019

Anna Uddenberg, FOCUS (Keep Calm) (detail), 2018, Johann König, Berlin © Photo: Gunter Lepkowski



CALIFORNIA DREAMS

San Francisco – A Portrait
12 September 2019 – 12 January 2020

Joseph Sharp, with a pick axe, pan and gun, ca. 1855 © Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Alec Soth, Quick Fix Computer Sales & Services, Mountain View, 2013, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art © Alec Soth, Photo: Don Ross
The Dancers Wilbur and Mae Tai Sing at the nightclub "Forbidden City", c. 1940 © Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco



FEDERAL PRIZE FOR ART STUDENTS

24th Federal Competition of the Federal
Ministry of Education and Research
18 October 2019 – 5 January 2020

© Janusz Lorenz



MARTIN KIPPENBERGER
BITTESCHÖN DANKESCHÖN

A Retrospective
1 November 2019 – 16 February 2020

Martin Kippenberger in front of a wall piece by Günther Forg (detail), Gallery Max Hetzler, Cologne 1985
© Photo: Estate Günther Forg, Suisse/ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019, courtesy the Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne



BEETHOVEN

World.Citizen.Music
17 December 2019 – 26 April 2020

Josef Karl Stieler, Beethoven with the manuscript of the *Missa solemnis* (detail), 1820, Beethoven-House Bonn © Beethoven-House Bonn

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition

30 August to 3 November 2019

Director

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Managing Director

Patrick Schmeing

Curator

Aurélie Clemente-Ruiz

Exhibition Manager

Susanne Annen

Press Officer

Sven Bergmann

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Thursday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Public Holidays: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Closed on Mondays

Admission

standard / reduced € 10 / € 6.50

Free admission for all under 19s and for refugees

Happy Hour-Ticket € 7

Tuesday and Wednesday: 7 to 9 p.m.

Thursday to Sunday: 5 to 7 p.m.

(for individuals only)

Guided Group Tours Information and Registration

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Public Transport

Underground lines 16, 63, 66 and bus lines 610, 611 and 630 to Heussallee / Museumsmeile

Deutsche Bahn / UN-Campus:

Lines RE 5 (Rhein-Express), RB 26

(MittelrheinBahn), RB 30 (Rhein-Ahr-Bahn)

and RB 48 (Rhein-Wupper-Bahn)

Parking

There is a car and coach park on Emil-Nolde-Straße behind the Bundeskunsthalle.
Navigation: Emil-Nolde-Straße 11, 53113 Bonn

Press Information (German / English)

www.bundeskunsthalle.de

For press files follow 'press'.

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