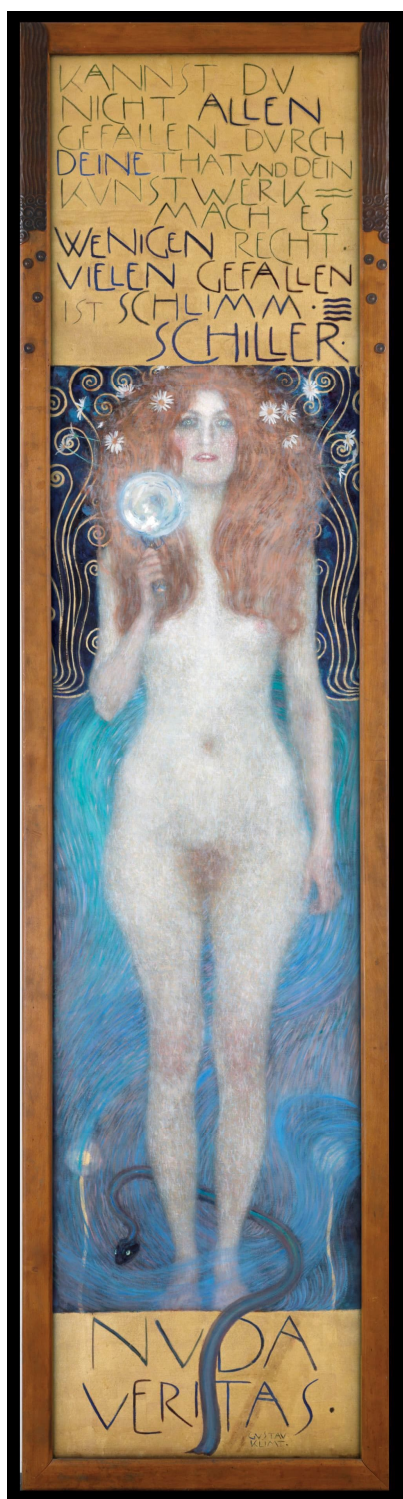


BUNDESKUNSTHALLE

PARA-MODERNISM

Life Reform Movements From 1900 Onwards

11 April – 10 August 2025



Gustav Klimt, *Nuda Veritas*, 1899
Theatermuseum, Vienna
© KHM-Museumsverband, Theatermuseum

Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland GmbH

Helmut-Kohl-Allee 4
53113 Bonn
T +49 228 9171-0
F +49 228 234154
www.bundeskunsthalle.de

Geschäftsführung
Dr. Eva-Christina Kraus
Oliver Hölken

Vorsitzender des Kuratoriums
Ingo Mix

HRB Nr. 5096
Amtsgericht Bonn
Umsatzsteuer ID Nr. DE811386971
Leitweg-ID 992-80160-58

Konto 3 177 177 00
Deutsche Bank Bonn
BLZ 380 700 59
IBAN DE03 3807 0059 0317 7177 00
BIC DEUT DE 380
Deutsche Bank Bonn
BLZ 380 700 59
IBAN DE03 3807 0059 0317 7177 00
BIC DEUT DE 380





Press kit

PARA-MODERNISM
Life Reform Movements From 1900 Onwards
11 April – 10 August 2025


Index

Exhibition Information	page 4
General Information	page 4
Media Information	page 5
Exhibition Texts	page 6
List of Artists	page 18
Publication	page 19
Current and Upcoming Exhibitions	page 20

Press Officer
Sven Bergmann
T +49 228 9171-205
M +49 171 742 6397
sven.bergmann@bundeskunsthalle.de



Exhibition Information

Duration	11 April – 10 August 2025
Press officer	Sven Bergmann
Curators	Robert Eikmeyer, Johanna Adam
Scientific traineeship	Maximilian Reifenröther
Publication / Press copy	43 € / 21,50 €
Cultural partner	



Fidus, *Light Prayer*, 1894, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin
© bpk / Deutsches Historisches Museum / Arne Pšille

General Information

Director	Eva Kraus
Managing Director	Oliver Hölken



Opening Hours	Tuesday 10 am to 6 pm Wednesday 10 am to 9 pm Thursday to Sunday 10 am to 6 pm Public holidays 10 am to 6 pm
Combined ticket for all exhibitions	13 €/reduced 6,50 € All visitors up to and including 18 years of age have free admission 7 € happy hour ticket for all exhibitions (1 hour before closing time, for individual visitors only)
Climate-Ticket	In the Bundeskunsthalle app, visitors receive a 10% discount on the ticket price as an incentive to travel in a climate-friendly way www.bundeskunsthalle.de/en/klima-ticket
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'.
General Information (German / English)	T +49 228 9171-200 www.bundeskunsthalle.de

The Bundeskunsthalle is supported by



Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für Kultur und Medien

facebook.com/bundeskunsthalle
twitter.com/bundeskunsthalle
instagram.com/bundeskunsthalle
#Bundeskunsthalle
#Paramodernism



Media Information

PARA-MODERNISM

Life Reform Movements From 1900 Onwards

11 April – 10 August 2025

Be free! From the restrictions of bourgeois life, from capitalism and industrial society. This was the dream of many young people around 1900 - and they made plans to get out. Some of them began an alternative life in reform colonies away from the cities. A return to nature and a life in peace were at the centre of this, as well as health, physical culture and spirituality: a new attitude to life that was to find a suitable aesthetic. It was an attempt to give life a more natural and healthier twist in a world based on selfishness and luxury, on illusions and lies. This is how Ida Hofmann, the co-founder of the vegetarian settlement Monte Verità on Lake Maggiore, put it - a refuge for revolutionaries and outsiders who wanted to try out a different form of art and society. Käthe Kruse, Hermann Hesse, Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman and many more came to the 'Mountain of Truth'.

The ideas of the Lebensreform were visibly reflected in art and design, for example in Art Nouveau and Expressionism, emancipatory reform clothing and socially motivated approaches to production. From 1919, women tested a new way of living and working together in the Loheland housing estate project. For the residents, the model offered the opportunity to create an independent existence for themselves as women. The life reform movement found expression in many areas of everyday culture: vegetarian nutrition, naturopathy, rejection of bourgeois marriage and traditional gender roles, free body culture, fitness and, last but not least, in the new image and communication media with which all of this could be propagated.

PARA-MODERNISM. Life Reform Movements From 1900 Onwards traces the ideals of the early life reform movement through the 20th century. Evidence of the various reform movements in the fields of design, lifestyle and art is presented in eight chapters. A look at the pioneers illustrates early thought models that are reflected in current considerations on sustainability, health and the common good. The exhibition also sheds light on tendencies whose esoteric worldview led to theories of the superiority of certain 'human races'. Together with the idealisation of the healthy body, this led to folkish doctrines of salvation, which must be seen as paving the way for eugenics, anti-Semitism and racism. Like no other, the name of the architect and cultural theorist Paul Schultze-Naumburg stands for an aesthetic and political radicalisation of life-reform approaches that led to culturally based racism.

In addition to the developments in Germany and Europe, it is above all the links to American counter culture and the flower power movement that the exhibition presents comprehensively for the first time. With a cultural revolution that rebelled against conservative values, the Vietnam War and the consumer society, the rebels of the 1960s are closely linked to the ideas of life reform around 1900.



Exhibition Texts

PARA-MODERNISM. LIFE REFORM MOVEMENTS FROM 1900 ONWARDS

Freedom! Shaking off the constraints of bourgeois life, capitalism and industrial society. This was the dream of a great many people around 1900 – and they set about making it come true. Some of them embarked on a new life in reform colonies far away from urban areas. The desire for a peaceful existence in harmony with nature was at the heart of these ambitions, as were health, physical culture and spirituality.

Para-Modernism. Life Reform Movements From 1900 Onwards follows the ideals of the early life reform movement through the 20th century. Examples of the various reform movements from the fields of art, design and everyday culture are presented in eight chapters. The exhibition illustrates early approaches that paved the way for present-day thinking on sustainability and the common good. It also illustrates the connection to American counter-culture, which, originating in the Californian hippie movement, later became a worldwide phenomenon. Furthermore, trends propagating the idealization of the healthy body and nationalist doctrines of salvation are highlighted.

Eight chapters show examples of the various reform movements in the fields of art, design and everyday culture.

1 FREEDOM!


"In a world built on selfishness and luxury, on appearances and lies, where physical and mental illness prevail, life should be given a more natural and healthier turn", Ida Hofmann, the co-founder of the dropout colony on Monte Verità, the "mountain of truth", in Ticino, Switzerland, stated.

Everything was in motion around 1900. Emancipation and social change were in the air: women fought for self-determination and co-determination, questioning the old distribution of roles. Young people rebelled against the adults and ventured into nature, making music along the way. Reform settlements were springing up everywhere. They all had one thing in common: a desire to be free from bourgeois constraints, to escape the cramped conditions of the big cities and to live in harmony with nature.

"Through hardship to the stars" – *Per aspera ad astra*, the title of the shadow frieze by Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach proclaims the redemption of humankind in a paradise on earth. On the first panel, Diefenbach and his children can be seen striding up a cliff. From the top right, they are greeted by a bird of paradise.

With its thirty-four individual panels, the frieze anticipates the moment of arrival, following the rough ascent to the stars. On the succeeding panels, the small group is met by a triumphal procession of children and animals playing music and dancing happily, peacefully united and heralding a life in harmony with nature. At the end of this series of images, a sphinx guards the gates of paradise from which the exultant stream originated.

After many eventful years, accompanied by financial and artistic failures, Diefenbach founded a commune near Vienna in 1897. The "Himmelhof" was regarded one of the first communes and was often frequented by Viennese intellectuals and artists.



Around 1900, six young people moved from Munich to Ticino in Switzerland and founded the dropout colony Monte Verità on Lake Maggiore. Largely inspired by K. W. Diefenbach, they were joined by Gustav Arthur Gräser, his brother Karl, sisters Ida and Jenny Hofmann, Henri Oedenkoven and Lotte Hattemer. Their maxims: freedom of the individual, pacifism, a vegetarian diet, the abolition of patriarchy, liberation from conventional dress and open relationships among the sexes.

Soon, however, the small community became divided. The Monte Verità Natural Healing Institute, run by Ida Hofmann and Henri Oedenkoven, was intended to sustain itself financially. It became a place of pilgrimage for people in search for meaning, people weary of civilization and *bon vivants*. The Gräser brothers and Jenny Hofmann, on the other hand, continued to pursue the idea of an anarchist commune

From a potato for a head and a towel stuffed with sandbags for a body, Käthe Kruse created her first reform doll in 1905 on Monte Verità.

The reformer described the toy for her daughters as heavy, warm, soft and unbreakable. "Feeling comes from touching", her later husband, sculptor Max Kruse, stated. At his request, she had moved to the reform settlement on Lake Maggiore and initially lived in one of the light-and-air huts on Monte Verità with her two children. With her hand-written chronicle from 1905, a Christmas present for Max, Käthe Kruse left behind a valuable document from the early days on Monte Verità.

For better models of the doll, Käthe Kruse sewed up the body and searched for a suitable filling. In 1910, the result of years of work was presented at the Berlin department store Tietz with the "Doll I" and later patented under the name "Käthe Kruse Doll".

The phenomenon of artist-prophets emerged in the late 19th century with Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach, who tied his visions to a certain "look". With his long hair and beard, barefoot or in sandals, sporting a frock and a shoulder bag, he inspired many young people, including Gustav Nagel and Gusto Gräser.


Gustav Nagel was the most famous of the so-called "turnip cabbage apostles". From 1901 onwards, he commissioned masses of photographs and postcards of himself and styled himself as the new messiah.

Gusto Gräser had made the wandering missionary lifestyle and living out of his pocket his trademark, embodying the wise possessionless philanthropist who carried everything he owned with him.

The legacy of Diefenbach and his early successors extends from the hippies and the green movement to contemporary environmental activism and socially committed artists such as Joseph Beuys.

In 1907 Hermann Hesse spent several weeks at the Monte Verità sanatorium. The great success of his books and nuclear family life had triggered an existential crisis. At first, he lived and fasted in one of the light-and-air huts, exposing his naked body to the glaring sun and night-time cold in order to heal. Whether he also lived in a cave with Gusto Gräser for a while, and found inspiration there, can only be speculated.

Between 1916 and 1918, Hesse returned to Ticino for longer stays before finally settling in the village of Montagnola. It was during this time that Hesse took up painting. On the recommendation of his therapist, he began a series of "dream paintings". Initially, his landscape renderings were also created in a therapeutic context, eventually becoming an



expression of Hesse's love for nature. Hermann Hesse was a passionate gardener throughout his life and also tried his hand at self-sufficiency.

"Youth" became the keyword for the spirit of optimism in the early 20th century. On self-organised hiking trips into nature, groups of teenagers and young adults experimented with new ways of life away from the usual drill and education in duty and obedience. The name "Wandervogel" emerged around 1900. Shortly after, these very different groups were commonly referred to as the "youth movement". Music and a distinct style of clothing in particular have remained central elements of rebellion against the rules of the "adult world" to this day. In October 1913, thousands of young people gathered on the Hoher Meißner near Kassel for the first "Free-German Youth Day". Above all, the participants had in common that they were young and wanted to set an example against the German Empire's disciplinary society.

2 NUDA VERITAS

No other field allowed for the questions of freedom and individuality to be answered as excitingly and radically as art. Gustav Klimt's *Nuda Veritas*, a key painting of Art Nouveau, unites these ideas. Klimt perceived the art academies' rigorous rules as restrictive and hostile to art. Drawing from a quote by Friedrich Schiller, he advised:


"If you cannot please everyone with your deeds and your art, please a few. To please many is bad."

Art Nouveau or "Jugendstil" as it was called in German, expressed an attitude to life that was reflected not only in painting, but also in dance, design and everyday culture as a whole. Art Nouveau and the ideas of life reform were closely linked in many ways. Incidentally, the term "youth" referred less to age than to the desire for renewal.

Klimt painted *Nuda Veritas* in 1899, immediately after having caused a scandal: He had been asked to paint allegories of science on Vienna University's auditorium ceiling. Klimt seized the opportunity and rendered them in his new, ornamental style, allowing the motifs to completely merge with the design of the surrounding space. He also dispensed with the usual idealization and depicted nudity bluntly. The result led to an outrage. Klimt eventually bought back the paintings and had them removed.

His *Nuda Veritas* can be read as a reaction to this experience. The "Naked Truth" stands before us larger than life, with the mirror of self-awareness in her hand and the serpent at her feet. Without the serpent, we would never have gained the ability to understand, according to the Bible. For Klimt, the most important insight is likely contained in the painting's inscription: "To please many is bad."

Rudolf von Laban played an eminent role in the development of expressive dance. Turning away from classical ballet in order to free dance from its rigid form, he wanted to achieve individual expression instead. One of his goals was to liberate dance from its ties to music. Between 1913 and 1919, Rudolf von Laban held summer courses on Monte Verità. It was here that he developed his theories on movement analysis and created his first dance dramas, in which he propagated the "new man".



Johann Adam Meisenbach, a dancer, documented the rehearsals on Monte Verità with his camera and thus left his mark on dance and media history. His great-uncle had developed a process for the printed reproduction of colour photographs, which Meisenbach certainly learned from him. The autochromes impressively convey the outdoor dances, the importance of nudity and the costumes' intense hues, which helped shape the aesthetics of the new dance.

Mary Wigman was one of the pioneers of modern dance; to her, the summer courses on Monte Verità were groundbreaking. Dance became a means of self-awareness and spirituality for Wigman. She combined dance and pantomime to express existential themes and experimented with masks to achieve universal expression. Her most famous works, *Hexentanz (Witch Dance)* and *Totentanz (Dance of Death)*, deal with death and the fragility of life. In 1920, Wigman opened a dance school in Dresden, which became a centre of the avant-garde dance scene.

The 1920s were characterised by a liberal world view. At the same time, however, reactionary and nationalist currents were gaining momentum. After the transfer of power to the National Socialists in 1933, Mary Wigman tried to adapt her dance philosophy. Ultimately, however, her liberal concept of art could not be reconciled with National Socialist ideology. Wigman ended her career as a dancer in 1942. Her school was continued, and to this day the Villa Wigman in Dresden is a place of experimental dance.

Anna Muthesius' concept of "women's own dress" embodied the Art Nouveau idea that clothing should not only be functional, but also an expression of personality. She focused on handmade couture that stood out from the uniform character of industrially produced clothes and took individual needs into account. Colour design in particular played a central role for her. Her approach can be seen as an important step towards the emancipation of women, as it promoted autonomy over one's appearance. With her "own dress", Muthesius focused on the creative individuality of every woman and encouraged them to design their own fashion. This fell into line with the reform movement, which was also striving for "individual attire", free body culture and the departure from corsets.

3 BODY IMAGES

Tuberculosis was a widespread disease in the early 20th century. Catastrophic hygienic conditions, malnutrition and cramped housing provided ideal breeding grounds for "consumption" and other infectious diseases such as typhoid and cholera.

Sunlight, fresh air, clean water and a healthy diet promised the prospect of recovery. Those who could not afford an expensive stay in a sanatorium or spa sought out public light and air baths or relied on the healing powers of nature.

Wealthy people recuperated at the *Weißer Hirsch* sanatorium just outside Dresden or at the *Jungborn* spa in the Harz Mountains. Franz Kafka took a cure there in the summer of 1912. He followed a strict health programme, including a vegetarian diet, persistent chewing (so-called "fletching") and daily physical and breathing exercises following Jørgen Peter Müller's system.



Modern architecture with its bright interiors, large glass surfaces, balconies and terraces was, among other things, a response to the cramped, dark and damp flats at the turn of the century. The notion of old “sick” European cities can be encountered in almost every founding document of modern architecture.

The new way of construction aimed to realise the utopian dream of a perfect, “beautiful” and “healthy” society. Architecture in the 1920s produced residential buildings and sanatoriums with sterile rooms and sunny balconies. The tuberculosis sanatorium by Alvar and Aino Aalto in Finland is a famous example. The architects were also commissioned with the interior design. Their *Paimio* armchair with its curved plywood seat, its shape was originally intended to make it easier for patients to breathe, is now a design classic.

Physician and gymnastics teacher Bess Mensendieck developed a training programme specifically for the female body that focused on posture, movement and breathing. “Functional gymnastics for women” was so popular in the 1920s that Mensendieck’s name entered the German language as a verb. Cabaret artist Willy Rosen even composed a hit song about it in 1926. The second verse of *Frau Levy mensendiekt* contains Mr. Levy’s admonishment to his wife: “Dear child, oh let it be. For after what I’ve seen today of the way to strength and beauty, you seem to be on the wrong path.”

One year prior, the film *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (*Ways to Strength and Beauty*) had premiered, the culmination of a series of health and nutrition guides and films on physical training that had been produced as part of the life reform movement. *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* revolutionised the depiction of the human body with a radical visual language. However, the film also prompted the “healthy national body” as a goal and is considered an ideological precursor of the National Socialist body cult.

4 THE CALL OF THE WILD


In 1845, US writer Henry David Thoreau moved to the forest for two years. He documented his findings in the book *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. With his self-built log cabin on Lake Walden he inspired generations to come. A life in harmony with the environment formed the core of this natural philosophy. Thoreau also coined the term “civil disobedience”, which activists still refer to today.

Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger developed their most important philosophical writings in secluded huts. In 1914, Wittgenstein had a wooden house constructed according to his designs in Skjolden, Norway, intending to solve the problems of logic once and for all in the calm of nature.

From 1922, Heidegger presented himself as a lonely thinker and mountain farmer in his hut in Todtnauberg, willingly offering his support to the National Socialists.

The replica of Heidegger’s hut is smaller than the original. In this scaled-down space, both the existential density and dangerous narrowness of Heidegger’s “thinking in the provinces” become tangible.

August Engelhardt, a native of Nuremberg, emigrated to the South Seas in 1902. On the small island of Kabakon he intended to live exclusively on sun and coconuts, preaching “cocovorism”, the gospel of the coconut, as the path to a state of nature.



In his search for like-minded people for his “equatorial settlement community”, Engelhardt worked himself into a downright writing frenzy, producing masses of postcards and letters, which he sent to friends and acquaintances, as well as to the most important magazines on vegetarianism and naturism. The experiment failed tragically: Engelhardt and his small community suffered increasingly from the consequences of malnutrition. The “coconut apostle” himself died of complete exhaustion combined with malaria.

In 1971 mathematician Ted Kaczynski retreated to the wilderness of Montana where he lived self-sufficiently in a cabin he had built. From there, the hermit sent letter bombs to universities and airlines for seventeen years. The “Unabomber”, as the FBI called him, wanted to warn of the consequences of industrial and technological progress. Three people died in the attacks and twenty-three more victims were injured, some of them seriously. The attacks ended when Kaczynski’s manifesto “The Industrial Society and its Future” was printed in the *Washington Post*. A short time later, Kaczynski was identified as the author and arrested.

5 LOOKING INTO THE ABYSS


The reform movement also encompassed terms such as homeland protection, cultural landscape, body cult and healthy national body. These were often accompanied by a fear of “foreign infiltration” and “degeneration”, which led to racism and anti-Semitism. A hatred of big cities developed, on modern art and architecture and liberal lifestyles in general.

Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who initially gained fame as a dress reformer and homeland conservationist, became one of the most important Nazi cultural politicians with books such as *Art and Race*. His example shows how the glorification of a supposed “naturalness” was transformed into a dangerous ideology.

Ludwig Christian Haeusser is another example of radicalised life-reform ideas. Based on Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch*, Haeusser staged himself as a spiritual leader and modern Christ during the inflationary period.

Following Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, Ludwig Christian Haeusser began to present himself as an “*Übermensch*”, spiritual leader and the new Christ. Like Gustav Nagel, he disseminated postcards and leaflets often portraying him as a messianic saviour. Haeusser gave numerous well-attended lectures and chose unusual activities to promote himself. His performances were characterised by tirades of hate and excessive insults directed at the audience.

Haeusser’s costumes, his absurd rhetoric and the bold advertisement designs for his lectures were to a certain extent related to Dadaism and political propaganda. While some aspects of his aesthetics referred to the artistic avant-garde of the 1920s, the presentation of a person as leader and saviour can also be found in NSDAP media productions.



In 1922 assistant doctor Hans Prinzhorn published the book *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* (*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*), in which he presented various works that he had collected at the psychiatric clinic in Heidelberg. As an art historian, Prinzhorn was not only interested in the medical or therapeutic aspects of these paintings. For him, the patients' works were a key to understanding the human essence.

Prinzhorn's approach was informed by a psychology of design, as in his eyes, antonyms such as "sick – healthy" or "art – non-art" did not suffice to fully grasp the creative drive and the human need for expression. Large parts of the art world were enthusiastic about Prinzhorn's research. However, the conservative medical world in particular regarded it a provocation.

Marcel Odenbach's video installation *In Abgründe blicken* (*Looking into the Abyss*) is an artistic approach to the person and work of Paul Schultze-Naumburg. The film was mainly shot in the former Saalecker workshops. The site, acquired around 1900, served as Schultze-Naumburg's home and housed his workshops. From the mid-1920s on, high-ranking Nazi officials and party members gathered in Saaleck. Adolf Hitler is also known to have stayed there several times. In the central room of the main house, films were shown and lectures held for propaganda purposes and to entertain guests in the evenings.

Marcel Odenbach applies the means of projection and montage and thus takes up Schultze-Naumburg's central method, the "contrast montage". In the film, a uniformed actor brings a projector into the former residential building in Saaleck and installs it in front of the original projection shafts. Footage of the grounds and interior of the main house is contrasted with sequences from the Nazi propaganda film *The Eternal Jew* and footage from the *Degenerate Art* exhibition. The donor figures of the Naumburg Cathedral, which were instrumentalised for the Nazi cultural discourse, are also addressed. A section of the room is decorated with a Schultze-Naumburg designed wallpaper from the "Weimar" series.

6 LOHELAND

In 1919, Hedwig von Rohden and Louise Langgaard founded the Loheland settlement project, a school for physical education, agriculture and crafts, near Fulda. As a living and learning community for women, the school aimed at a holistic education, with gymnastics playing an important role.

With their futuristic-looking costumes and expressive body language, the Loheland dancers were among the stars of expressive dance. Fabrics, ceramics, leather goods, baskets and small pieces of furniture were manufactured in the workshops — handicraft products, which the Loheland women were represented with at the major trade fairs, and funded their community.

The photographic workshop produced photos in the New Objectivity style that documented everyday life and work. The workshop's artists were among the pioneers of cameraless photography.

7 THE SPIRITUAL EYE

Radioactive rays, electromagnetic waves, wireless telegraphy: around 1900, exploring the supernatural was literally in the air. Suddenly it had become possible to render visible the previously invisible: In 1895, Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen succeeded in using rays to look inside the body. Shortly afterwards, Marie and Pierre Curie discovered radioactivity. The world suddenly seemed full of strange, previously concealed phenomena.

The discovery of the invisible as a new field of research allowed a new view of humanity and the cosmos. Theosophy became one of the major movements. Its followers were convinced of the existence of a hidden universe.

For artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, the theosophical theory of colour and form became an important source. He used it to develop his pictorial compositions. In his essay *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, he emphasised the spiritual dimension of painting and its potential to express the inner being of humans rather than purely depicting external impressions.


The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, regarded itself a counter-movement to modernity's materialism. Its goal was to achieve humankind's advancement and higher development via spiritual paths. Wassily Kandinsky also intensely engaged with these ideas.

In his work *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), Kandinsky emphasised the spiritual dimension of painting. Kandinsky was very familiar with esoteric literature. Books such as *Thought Forms* and *Man, Visible and Invisible*, as well as Louis Darget's photographic experiments, reinforced his assumption that colours and geometric shapes can induce immediate spiritual effects.

Dream painter Wilhelmine Assmann represents a special case in the history of abstract art. Her large colour drawings were created in trance. Kandinsky was familiar with Assmann's works and František Kupka was also likely to have heard of the famous dream painter. Unlike the "founders" of abstract art, however, it was quickly agreed that this painter's works were merely decorative handicrafts. Assmann's oeuvre was only rediscovered decades later.

The theory of evolution not only revolutionised science. Darwin's theory also shook and inspired philosophy and art. František Kupka was very interested in these ideas. Initially influenced by Art Nouveau and Symbolism, Kupka soon realised that he had to break new artistic ground: "It seems superfluous to me to paint trees when people can see much more beautiful ones on the way to the exhibition. I just paint concepts, syntheses, (...) chords and things like that". In Paris, he attended science lectures and worked in a biological laboratory. His art developed in the direction of abstraction, which he saw as the next stage in the "evolution" of art.

In 1912, he caused a sensation with *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colours*. Kupka believed in a future art form that could transmit thoughts directly – similar to telepathy or hypnosis. In *Creation in the Plastic Arts* (1923), he speculated about a technique that would make it possible to transmit works of art mentally rather than physically.



Fidus' *Lichtgebet* (*Light Prayer*) is considered the life reform and youth movements' key painting. Its stages of creation provide an excellent means to outline both the history of the life reform movement and the artist's biography.

The featured boy on a cliff top was inspired by Diefenbach's shadow frieze and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. The different versions of the work illustrate the artist's development from a youthful reformer to a "Germanic fanatic". The praying boy is transformed into a naked youth with his back to the sun, his open arms forming a rune. The motif could be linked to Christian ideas, the ideas of theosophy or the awakening of youth as well as to neo-pagan, nationalist and anti-Semitic, racist concepts.

Fidus had recognised the importance of technical reproducibility for the dissemination of his pictorial worlds and founded his own publishing house, which sold at times elaborate reproductions of his works en masse.

The pioneers of new dance, above all Loïe Fuller with her *Serpentine Dance*, also experimented in the field of tension between occultism, science and media. When asked to perform a hypnosis scene in a theatre, Fuller proposed dancing an apparition. Rather than seeing the dancer's body on stage, the dark space was filled with glowing waves and swirls that Fuller created with long rods attached to huge silk robes. The likeness to spirit photographs created during spiritistic sessions is obvious. Fuller perfected these performances with coloured light projections and corresponded with researchers and inventors of her time to create ever more effects.


Dream dancer Magdeleine G. triggered a media hype comparable to that surrounding dream painter Wilhelmine Assmann. In 1904 she came to Munich and performed at the theatre, among other venues. Under hypnosis, she began to express her hidden feelings. As it turned out later, the dream dancer had received rhythmic-gymnastic training in her early years, which she more or less consciously drew on in her performances.

8 KALIFORNIFICATION

Due to its mild climate, California offered ideal conditions for a life in nature. People suffering from tuberculosis came here, but also all kinds of Europeans in pursuit of healing. Among them: Friedrich Wilhelm Pester, who lived in seclusion in a cabin near Palm Springs from 1916 to 1922. As the "Hermit of Palm Canyon" he became a tourist attraction.

Pester was the most prominent example of a number of European immigrants with backgrounds in the life reform movement. At the end of the 1930s, a group of young men were inspired by them. The *Nature Boys*, including Eden Ahbez and Gypsy Boots, slept in the caves of the canyons at night. During the day, they frequented the vegetarian cafés and health food stores of Los Angeles.

Ahbez composed the song *Nature Boy* in one of the caves. Featured by Nat King Cole, it became a number one hit in 1948. There are countless cover versions of the song about the "Nature Boy", who today seems like the proto-type of the later hippies.



Robert Bootzin, born in San Francisco in 1915, was the most important link between life reform and US counter-culture. Thanks to his character Gypsy Boots, as he later called himself, and his slogan "Don't panic. Go organic!", wellness and health food became popular in the US. Together with his wife Lois, Boots opened the *Back to Nature Health Hut* on Beverly Boulevard in Los Angeles in 1958, which became a meeting place for many Hollywood stars.

Boots and his wife performed in front of the *Health Hut's* legendary façade, surrounded by acrobats and bodybuilders. Inside, soybeans, alfalfa sprouts and seaweed were served, which the landlord advertised in front of the camera on TV. Boots mimed a health clown on TV shows, played himself in Hollywood films and served his healthy food at the Monterey and Newport pop festivals.

In the mid-1960s, the US experienced a downright Hermann Hesse boom. Hesse was revered by the younger generation as a pacifist, spiritual leader and writer for the youth. Paperback editions of *Siddhartha*, *Demian*, *Steppenwolf* and other titles sold millions of copies over the next few decades, making Hesse one of the most successful European writers in the US to this day.

In the realm of rock music, the band Steppenwolf named itself after Hesse's famous novel; Latin rock group Santana chose the name of the deity Abraxas for an album title with a quote from Hesse's *Demian* on the back cover. The road movie *Easy Rider* (1969) made "Born to Be Wild" and Steppenwolf world-famous. In the visual arts, it was above all Andy Warhol's screen print of Hesse smoking and the accompanying poster that ultimately turned Hermann Hesse into an icon of pop culture.

In the mid-1960s, San Francisco was the centre of counter-culture. Psychedelic rock bands such as Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and Quicksilver Messenger Service performed in music venues such as the Fillmore Auditorium and Avalon Ballroom and were advertised with flashy posters. Posters and flyers also invited people to a "Gathering of the Tribes" at Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967. The "Human Be-In" brought together the various groups from the alternative and political scene and was the prelude to the *Summer of Love*.

The dissemination and commercialisation of the hitherto rather small subculture set in with the pop festivals of Monterey (1967) and Newport (1968) and culminated in the Woodstock Festival (1969). After the kick-off in Monterey, the number of visitors at the Woodstock Festival rose from an estimated 50,000 to half a million. The *Summer of Love* was an unprecedented cultural revolution, the effects and achievements of which still shape the way we live together today. At the end of the exhibition, Robert Indiana's sculpture *HOPE* releases us into a future that bears a striking resemblance to the world around 1900.

Hippie culture was a counter-movement: against consumerism, everything conservative, racism and political authoritarianism. Its style was shrill and radical. In many instances, it consciously invoked artistic traditions.

Wes Wilson and Victor Moscoso are among the most widely known poster artists of the 1960s. Moscoso had studied under Bauhaus teacher Josef Albers. Wilson was inspired by typefaces created by Art Nouveau artist Alfred Roller, transforming the static letters into



a lively, flowing form. In doing so, he reversed the rules of poster design: The contained information was not immediately legible. Instead, people had to immerse themselves in the image to decipher the lettering.

Posters were reinterpreted as an art form, defying the separation of high culture and everyday design. In doing so, they drew on the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century. Art Nouveau in particular, itself a revolt against historicism, served as a model.



List of Artists

Alvar Aalto	Ingeborg Lüscher
Eden Ahbez	Goshka Macuga
Wilhelmine Assmann	Digne Meller Markovicz
Johannes Baader	Bonnie McLean
Richard Barnes	Johann Adam Meisenbach
John Beattie	Bess M. Mensendieck
Annie Besant	László Moholy-Nagy
Joseph Beuys	Victor Moscoso
Michael Bowen	Stanley Mouse
Franz Karl Bühler	Alphonse Mucha
Marie Therese Commichau	Edvard Munch
Robert Crumb	Anna Muthesius
Louis Darget	Gustav Nagel
Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach	Olaf Nicolai
August Engelhardt	Sophie Nys
Hugo Erfurth	Marcel Odenbach
Fidus (Hugo Höppener)	Gilbert Pattison
Loie Fuller	D. A. Pennebaker
Johann Karl Genzel	William Pester
Gusto Gräser	Raymond Pettibon
Julius Groß	Wilhelm Prager
Bertha Günther	Hans Prinzhorn
Gypsy Boots	Rainer Maria Rilke
Ludwig Christian Haeusser	Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen
Hermann Hesse	Alfred Roller
Martin Hesse	Paul Schultze-Naumburg
Ida Hofmann-Oedenkoven	Julius Shulman
Robert Indiana	Peter Stackpole
Franz Kafka	Rudolf Steiner
Wassily Kandinsky	Henry David Thoreau
Alton Kelley	Hedwig von Rhoden
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner	Sasha Waltz & Guests
Gustav Klimt	Andy Warhol
Käthe Kruse	Joshua White
Max Kruse	Mary Wigman
Franstšek Kupka	Tom Wilkes
Louise Langgaard	Wes Wilson
Charles Webster Leadbeater	

Publication



The exhibition is accompanied by a publication

PARA-MODERNE
Lebensreformen ab 1900

Published by
the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany

With contributions by
Johanna Adam, Robert Eikmeyer, Lyra Kilston, Anett Matl, Susanne Rappe-Weber,
Rainer Schmitz, Johanna Söhningen

Scope and format
Hardcover, 24 x 30 cm
304 pages, 200 illustrations
In German language
Hatje Cantz Verlag, Berlin
Price museum edition: 43 €
Price bookstore edition: 48 €



Current and Upcoming Exhibitions

SAVE LAND
United for Land
until 1 June 2025

Our soils take up to hundreds of years to form. But one extreme event is enough to deplete soil in a matter of minutes. We are degrading 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land each year; an area roughly three times the size of Germany. Land restoration is of the utmost urgency not only for ourselves, but also for biodiversity and the world's climate. Land is of existential importance for our lives, and it is a treasure of immeasurable value that must be preserved.

The immersive exhibition *Save Land* was developed in partnership with the UNCCD-G20 Global Land Initiative. It brings together insightful contemporary art positions with exhibits from the natural sciences and uses the latest media technologies to understand the global situation of land. What is the state of our soils in cities and on agriculture and industrial land? And is there any untouched nature left on Earth? What can we do to protect our soils? The exhibition aims to inspire action for the common good.

An exhibition organized by the Bundeskunsthalle and the UNCCD-G20 Global Land Initiative to mark the 30th anniversary of the UNCCD

SUSAN SONTAG
Seeing and Being Seen
until 28 September 2025

Susan Sontag studied the nature and impact of visual media throughout her career. As early as 1977, having recognised the decisive influence of photography in our media-driven society, she published *On Photography*, her most widely read book, in which she argued that the act of taking a photograph is more than just passive observation. In view of the dramatic proliferation of photographs of war and atrocities in the wake of globalisation, she reiterated her warning against the dangers of apathy and visual numbness in her 2003 book *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

The exhibition *Susan Sontag. Seeing and Being Seen* focuses on her observations on photography and traces Sontag's theories and thoughts on the subject. It also explores her involvement with queer culture, her stance on the discrimination against people infected with HIV and her own struggle with cancer. Moreover, it shines a light on Sontag as a film enthusiast and director and portrays her as an independent woman who rebelled against society throughout her life.



Save the dates

INTERACTIONS X WEtransFORM

1 May – 26 October 2025

Media conference: Tuesday, 29 April 2025, 11 a.m.

SUMMER OF CHANGE

Summer festival of transformation

31 May – 27 September 2025

Media conference: Thursday, 22 May 2025, 11 a.m.

WEtransFORM

New European Bauhaus and Beyond

6 June 2025 – 26 January 2026

Media conference: Wednesday, 4 June 2025, 11 a.m.

Subject to change

Status: March 2025