



Press Release / Pressemitteilung

October 2023

The Grand Seduction. Karl Ernst Osthaus and the Beginnings of Consumer Culture Nov. 24, 2023–Apr. 28, 2024 Kaiser Wilhelm Museum

Invitation to the press conference on November 22 at 11 a.m., KWM
Exhibition opening: November 23 at 7 p.m., KWM

Beginning November 24, 2023, the Kunstmuseen Krefeld are presenting the exhibition *The Grand Seduction: Karl Ernst Osthaus and the Beginnings of Consumer Culture* at the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum (KWM). The year 2023 marks not only the 650th anniversary of the city of Krefeld but also the centenary of the museum in a museum. Exactly a century ago, one of the world's first design collections entered our institution: the *Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe* (DM; German Museum for Art in Trade and Industry), founded by Karl Ernst Osthaus. The exhibition at the KWM honors the legacy and visionary work of this patron of the arts and collector from Hagen, who from 1909 to 1919, in collaboration with the Deutscher Werkbund, assembled impressive holdings of exemplary advertising art and everyday objects. They included posters and advertisements, typography and photography, as well as wallpaper and fabric, everyday items made of glass, metal, and ceramics, and luxury goods of silver. Osthaus worked closely with leading artists of the time, including Henry van de Velde, Walter Gropius, Peter Behrens, Richard Riemerschmid, Clara und Fritz Hellmuth Ehmcke, artists from the Wiener Werkstätte such as Mela Köhler, Josef Hoffmann, and Koloman Moser, as well as influential advertising artists such as Lucian Bernhard and Julius Klinger. With support from these renowned figures from art, the crafts, and architecture, Osthaus lay the foundations on which the Bauhaus could be built in the 1920s.

“The unique collection of the *Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe* is a fascinating record of the innovative collaboration between designers and trade and industry more than 100 years ago,” explains museum director Katia Baudin. “Osthaus’s holdings still form the core of the museum’s collection of applied arts. The Werkbund idea they reflect is the basis for the Kunstmuseen Krefeld’s current program in which art, design, and architecture meet on equal footing.”

The exhibition *The Grand Seduction: Karl Ernst Osthaus and the Beginnings of Consumer Culture* highlights the fascinating history of everyday culture prior to World War I, when aesthetic ideals and economic goals were becoming increasingly intertwined. At the outset of the twentieth century, cultural life was changing along with industrial mass production. Where everyday urban life took center stage, commodities appeared in aesthetically designed shop windows and magnificent department stores.

Kunstmuseen Krefeld

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Window shopping and shopping as a leisure activity became part of an evolving form of consumerism. In pulsating metropolises, the culture of display was increasingly evident in public spaces in diverse forms including advertising. Corporate identity and modern advertising strategies emerged.

Artists became commercial artists and product designers, developing a new formal language that became exemplary of modern everyday life. Osthaus's goals were to enforce these developments and to disseminate the unity of art and life they advocated. He thus devised an innovative concept: the *Deutsches Museum* was mobile and designed to reach as wide an audience as possible through traveling exhibitions and a comprehensive educational program. "Educating taste" and the aesthetic permeation of everyday life were intended to provide answers to the upheavals in politics and society. The curators Magdalena Holzhey (Head of Collections, Kunstmuseen Krefeld) and Ina Ewers-Schultz (art historian, Cologne) underscore the importance of the *Deutsches Museum* and its diverse impulses: "With its extraordinary concept, the *Deutsches Museum* was already asking questions of great relevance that continue to have an impact today: "What role do art and design play in everyday life? What do 'good taste' and 'proper consumption' mean? And, last but not least, how can a museum have a lasting influence on society?"

The exciting presentation takes viewers on a journey back in time to around 1900. On view are a variety of objects of everyday use as well as fascinatingly innovative commercial and advertising graphics: from artfully minimal labels for food to stationery, newspaper ads, and the then new advertising posters. Historical photographs, taken specifically for the DM, document the interiors and exteriors of modern reform architecture around 1900. The exhibition examines the past while also providing impulses for the present and the future. It takes a fresh look at the museum's own collection and links it to current issues.

Public Program

Our education program invites visitors to become acquainted with the design ideas of emerging modernism from different perspectives and to seek points of connection for today's exploration of the world of advertising and commodities as well as the design ideas evolving from them. In a kind of advertising test center, visitors can judge for themselves. The *Studio2/KreativLabor* at the KWM is becoming a *DesignLab*. In this digital-hybrid workshop, the audience is invited to design their own digital advertising graphics and take a new look at everyday objects. The historical posters and graphics in the exhibition provide inspiration. A program for schools and kindergartens addresses such questions as how individualized advertising influences our buying behavior and what "good" design actually means against the backdrop of dwindling resources. Cooperations with the Hochschule Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences and the Goethe University Frankfurt, among others, take a look at scholarly fields.

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue published by the Wienand-Verlag in a German and an English edition.

Curators: Dr. Magdalena Holzhey and Dr. Ina Ewers-Schultz

We thank the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Landschaftsverband Rheinland for their generous support.

Selected press images:



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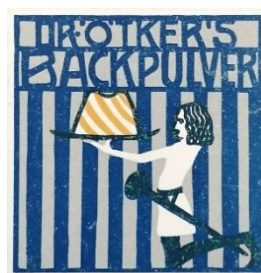
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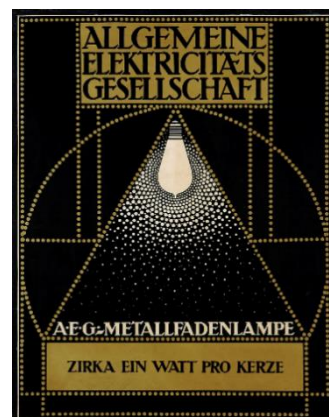
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Visit
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The Kunstmuseen are a cultural institution of the City of Krefeld.
Free admission for children and teenagers to age 17.

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