

Press invitation

**100 YEARS WALTER KAESBACH DONATION**  
**Expressionism at Museum Abteiberg**

**Tuesday, 6 December, 11 am**  
**in the Museum Abteiberg collection area**

We cordially invite you to a press event commemorating *100 Years Walter Kaesbach Donation – Expressionism at Museum Abteiberg*.

Dr. Felicia Rappe, Deputy Director and Head of Collections at Museum Abteiberg, joins Research Associate Denise Wegener and art historian and provenance researcher Dr. Vanessa Voigt in presenting the findings of a comprehensive provenance research project at Museum Abteiberg, along with a centennial program commemorating 100 years since Walter Kaesbach's donation, a gift that laid the cornerstone for a contemporary art museum in Mönchengladbach.

It was first presented to the public on 9 December 1922: Walter Kaesbach (1879–1961) donated 97 Expressionist artworks to Mönchengladbach with the intent of raising the profile of modern art in his native city.

The art historian and museum director's collection, gifted to the city shortly before he became director of Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1924, included paintings, drawings and graphic works by Lyonel Feininger, Erich Heckel, and Heinrich Nauen, among others. It put Mönchengladbach on a par with the very centers of the avant-garde. In 1937, it was confiscated by National Socialists as part of a Nazi-era campaign to rid culture of "degenerate art." Much of the collection has never been found.

In an attempt to compensate for the loss of the collection, the museum in Mönchengladbach again purchased Expressionist art in the 1950s and 1960s, this time under the direction of Heinrich Dattenberg with further guidance from Walter Kaesbach. These acquisitions were made at a time when it was fairly uncommon to document the origin of artworks. Museum Abteiberg has spent recent years investigating the possibility that works seized from their owners during the Nazi era entered its collection.

Museum Abteiberg is marking the 100th anniversary of the first public presentation of the Walter Kaesbach donation on 9 December with a multi-part project on a little-known range of topics related to the history of the collection:

- Newly arranged and installed Expressionism area
- Centennial weekend with education and mediation program from 9 to 11 December, starting with a talk by Dr. Meike Hoffmann, Head of the "Degenerate Art" Research Center at the Art History Department at Freie Universität Berlin at 6 pm on 9 December:  
*"Degenerate Art": Condemnation – Confiscation – Exploitation: The Fate of the Kaesbach Donation in the "Third Reich"* (in German)
- Findings from an extensive provenance research project funded by the German Lost Art Center will be published on the museum's website.
- Winter semester 2022/23 cooperation with the Freie Universität Berlin to research the whereabouts of the Kaesbach Collection

- Winter semester 2022/23 cooperation with Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf to communicate provenance research findings at the museum

The centennial program and new collection presentation were sponsored by the Hans Fries Foundation. See below for further information.

## PROGRAM 9 to 11 December 2022

### FRIDAY, 9 DECEMBER

6 pm

Greeting

Christiane Schüßler, Council Officer for Education, Culture and Sport in the City of Mönchengladbach

Introduction

Dr. Felicia Rappe, Deputy Director and Head of Collections at Museum Abteiberg

Talk

*“Degenerate Art”: Condemnation – Confiscation – Exploitation: The Fate of the Kaesbach Donation in the “Third Reich”* (in German)

Dr. Meike Hoffmann

Dr. Hoffmann leads the “Degenerate Art” Research Center at the Art History Department at Freie Universität Berlin. Points of focus for the art historian and provenance researcher include, among other things, German Expressionism and its reception and Nazi art policy. Recent publications include the 2020 conference volume *Unbewältigt? Ästhetische Moderne und Nationalsozialismus. Kunst, Kunsthandel, Ausstellungspraxis* (Unresolved? Aesthetic modernism and National Socialism: Art, art dealing, exhibition practice), co-edited with Dieter Scholz.

Afterwards, until 9 pm

Art Guides provenance research

Heinrich-Heine-Universität students

Free admission to the museum and the event after 5 pm.

### SATURDAY, 10 DECEMBER

11 am – 4 pm

*With Corners and Edges: Build an Expressionist Hand Puppet*

Day 1 of a 2-day workshop for teens and pre-teens ages 10–14

Advance registration at [mail@museum-abteiberg.de](mailto:mail@museum-abteiberg.de)

11 am – 5 pm

Art Guides provenance research

Heinrich-Heine-Universität students

3 pm

*100 Years Walter Kaesbach Donation*

Guided tour with Ulrike Engelke

## **SUNDAY, 11 DECEMBER**

11 – 4 pm

*With Corners and Edges: Build an Expressionist Hand Puppet*  
Day 2 of a 2-day workshop for teens and pre-teens ages 10–14

11 – 5 pm

Art Guides provenance research  
Heinrich-Heine-Universität students

11:30 am

*100 Years Walter Kaesbach Donation*  
Guided tour with Ulrike Engelke

3 pm

*Color, Shapes and Emotions – Pictures from the Walter Kaesbach Donation*  
Guided tour for families with Ulrike Engelke

Attendance at all Saturday and Sunday events is included in the price of museum admission.

## **PROVENANCE RESEARCH AT MUSEUM ABTEIBERG**

Provenance research looks at the origin of artworks and cultural assets. Museum Abteiberg has been researching the provenance of its collection for many years. The German Lost Art Center in Magdeburg funded a systematic investigation of 59 works between 2016 and 2018. Carried out by provenance researcher Dr. Vanessa Voigt, the project sought to identify works in the museum's collection that may have been acquired after having been seized by Nazis between 1933 and 1945, with the aim of publishing information about the pieces and ultimately returning them to their pre-war owners or their heirs.

The investigation findings were compiled in the Lost Art database (German Lost Art Center) and will be available for viewing on the Museum Abteiberg website starting 6 December 2022: [www.museum-abteiberg.de/Forschung](http://www.museum-abteiberg.de/Forschung)

Works from the investigated collection are being shown in three newly-installed collection rooms.

The emphasis on provenance research will continue with two university collaborations in the winter semester of 2022/23:

### **WHEREABOUTS OF THE WALTER KAESBACH DONATION**

#### **Collaboration with Freie Universität Berlin**

In the winter semester of 2022/23, students in the Art History Department at Freie Universität Berlin will work with the department's "Degenerate Art" Research Center to update existing provenance data and locate lost works from the Walter Kaesbach Donation.

Head: Dr. Meike Hoffmann, Freie Universität Berlin

### **COMMUNICATING PROVENANCE RESEARCH**

#### **Collaboration with Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf**

How is provenance research best communicated in a museum context? An open project space becomes the touchstone for a 2022/23 winter semester seminar held as part of the "Art Education and Cultural Management" course at Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. Students will develop education and mediation programs and serve as "Art Guides" in the museum's collection area from 9 to 11 December.

Head: Filomena Lopedoto, Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

## Further information:

### **WALTER KAESBACH (1879–1961) and the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach**

Walter Kaesbach was born on 28 January 1879 in Mönchengladbach. After graduating from high school, he studied national economics for four semesters in Leipzig, Munich, and Berlin before changing his focus to art history. In Heidelberg he became acquainted with Impressionism, the contemporary art of his time. He later transferred to the University of Strasbourg, where he completed his doctorate in 1905 under art historian Georg Dehio.

Kaesbach purchased his first work by Christian Rohlf's for 120 Reichsmark in 1904, while still an art history student. He had met the artist in Hagen that same year through art collector Karl Ernst Osthaus and the two remained friends until Rohlf's death in 1938. The painting (*Straße von Weimar*) laid the basis of what would later be Kaesbach's collection. In 1909 he became an assistant at Nationalgalerie in Berlin. It was there that he forged a lifelong friendship with Heinrich Nauen, a painter from the Lower Rhine area, and befriended Erich Heckel in 1912.

Kaesbach volunteered as a medic in the First World War. As commanding officer of a medical company in Flanders, he placed a number of artists including Heinrich Nauen, Erich Heckel, and Max Beckmann in his unit, effectively saving them from active service at the front. He also secured Belgian painter James Ensor's release from an internment camp.

His tenure as director of the municipal Angermuseum in Erfurt, started in 1920, saw exhibitions of artists Heckel, Mueller, Pechstein, Schmidt-Rottluff, Feininger, Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky—shows that gave Expressionism a forum. The Erfurt museum flourished under Kaesbach's directorship.

### **1922 and 1928 donations**

The Kunstverein der Dr.-Walter-Kaesbach-Stiftung (the Dr. Walter Kaesbach Donation Art Association) was established in early 1922. Kaesbach donated 97 paintings, watercolors and drawings, including 41 Heinrich Nauens, 35 Christian Rohlf's and 14 Erich Heckel's, as well as others by Emil Nolde and Lyonel Feininger, most of which were less than ten years old. His donation aimed to boost efforts to establish an art museum in his native city.

Kaesbach hoped to help the city—which was very modern at the time and dominated by the textile industry—shift from what had been a more generic, regional and encyclopedic collecting style to an internationally-renowned, leading-edge museum of modern art. The gift was meant to lay the cornerstone for a public collection of contemporary art and help motivate its ongoing expansion. On 9 December 1922, parts of the collection were presented to the public in an exhibition held at what was then still the (provisional) museum building on Fliescherberg. As the *Kölner Zeitung* newspaper noted of in 1923: "This little museum deserves a special place among German collections of modern art."

The donation configuration changed in 1928: Despite a reduced holding of 76 works as compared to the 1922 donation, the number of Expressionist artists represented was expanded to a total of 12. Works by Heinrich Campendonk, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Wilhelm Lehmbruck,

August Macke, Otto Mueller, Max Pechstein, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff were added. Works from the donation were exhibited in a new building: Karl-Brandts-Haus at Kaiserstraße 47.

In 1924, Kaesbach was appointed director of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he appointed instructors including Heinrich Campendonk, Ewald Mataré, and Paul Klee. The academy enjoyed a heyday under Kaesbach—one that came to an abrupt end when Nazis purged Kaesbach from the directorship in 1933. A smear campaign ensured that Kaesbach was one of the first to be removed from office. He retired to Hemmenhofen on Lake Constance, near the Swiss border.

### **1937 confiscation as “degenerate art”**

In December 1937, Nazis confiscated Kaesbach’s collection in Mönchengladbach as “degenerate art.” Only seven works remained in the museum for as yet unknown reasons. Three of the seized works were reacquired in the 1960s and 70s after several changes of ownership: Erich Heckel’s *Flandrische Ebene* (Flanders plain), 1916 (1st donation 1922), was purchased in 1979; the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach re-acquired Christian Rohlf’s *Gottvater, den ersten Menschen modellierend [Die Schöpfung]* (God the Father sculpting the first man [The Creation]), 1916 (1st donation 1922), in 1966; Heinrich Campendonk’s *Roter Hirte mit Tieren* (Red shepherd with animals), 1928 (2nd donation 1928), re-entered the Mönchengladbach collection in 1965 as a permanent loan from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia. Museum Abteiberg is marking the centennial anniversary of the original donation with an exhibition of these ten works from the original 1922/28 donation holdings. The whereabouts of the remaining works are being documented and researched in cooperation with the “Degenerate Art” Research Center at Freie Universität Berlin.

In 1954, after receiving the Golden Ring of Honor from the City of Mönchengladbach, Kaesbach donated a further 53 works by Heinrich Nauen to the museum on the occasion of his 75th birthday. Walter Kaesbach died in Constance on 1 June 1961.

The project team is available for questions and discussions. Please contact Henrike Robert, Dept. of Education, Press and Public Relations  
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