



W E S E R B U R G

PRESS INFORMATION

Museum für
moderne Kunst

The Museum in the River

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The Weserburg, Bremen's museum of modern art—one of the largest museums in Germany with an international reputation—is located in the middle of the Weser River in the heart of the Hanseatic city. The institution does not only consider itself in the middle of the river geographically: constantly alternating presentations of works from famous private collections as well as special exhibitions show the dynamic development of modern art from the sixties to the present. A supporting program consisting of weekly guided tours, concerts, lectures, performances, discussions with artists and film screenings make the Weserburg one of the liveliest places in town.

The First Collector's Museum in Europe

The idea for a collector's museum, an institution in which the collector is not only the lender but a committed mediator of modern art, was implemented for the first time in Europe in Bremen, a concept that clearly sets the Weserburg apart from traditional art museums. Various focuses have been selected from several German collections that provide insight into the world of art that is as personal as it is diverse. The private collector's individual passion for art is combined with the scholarly eye of the museum in the special atmosphere of this historic building. In an impressive tour, visitors do not follow a path alongside art-historical developments, rather they follow dialogues between the individual works of art. The appeal lies in the interaction between the individual private collections. When strolling through the exhibition spaces, the juxtaposition and coexistence of different collection concepts under one roof enables experiencing contemporary art from ever new, in part surprising angles of vision.



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History

The old warehouses of the Weserburg can look back at an eventful history. Before art took up residence in the building, it housed a tobacco factory and later the Schilling coffee roasting facility. In 1893, the cigarette factory Ad. Hagens & Co. purchased the packing houses nos. 20a–d, which were built on the Teerhof by the C. Poppe company, and in 1897 built the so-called Hagensburg. The architect Johann Rippe was in charge of construction, and the building constituted the spectacular completion of the development of the Teerhof before World War II. The two neo-Gothic gate towers in particular loosened the monotony of the rows of packing houses and were an eye-catcher when viewed from the Kaiserbrücke (now the Bürgermeister-Smidt-Brücke).

In 1923, the coffee roasting facility Gebrüder Schilling (Schilling Brothers) bought the building complex, where they henceforth imported, roasted, and shipped coffee. The name Hagensburg was changed to Weserburg. The buildings on the Teerhof were badly damaged in World War II. In 1944, following the 159th air raid, most of them lay in ruin—the Weserburg was almost completely destroyed. The building was reconstructed in 1949, and Schilling recommenced operations. In 1973, the company with a fifty-year tradition in the coffee business closed its doors and sold the Weserburg to the Municipality of Bremen.

In the ensuing years, the cultural scene seized the building. Artists set up studios, and the Moks-Theater and the Städtische Galerie found new space. The building accommodated a total of more than twenty cultural and social facilities. The GAK—Gesellschaft für aktuelle Kunst (Society for Contemporary Art), founded in 1980, was also housed here. During one of their exhibitions—the presentation of works by Edward Kienholz from the Onnasch Collection—the idea was born to establish a collector's museum for Bremen. It was a number of years, however, before it could be implemented.

The bridge to the present: On 14 November 1988, the foundation “Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen” was established by a decision of the municipal parliament of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen. The founding members were the city of Bremen, the Kunstverein in Bremen as well as the collectors Hans Grothe, Anna and Gerhard Lenz, Reinhard Onnasch, and Hartmut Ackermeier. The alterations to the building complex were undertaken according to plans by the Bremen architect Wolfram Dahms.

On 6 September 1991, the Neue Museum Weserburg Bremen was opened in the old warehouses under the direction of Thomas Deecke. The museum was an absolute novelty in Europe.

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Realized for the first time was the concept of a collectors' museum in which the permanent exhibition would consist solely of works from private loaners. Through the untiring efforts of Thomas Deecke, it was possible to create a long-term association between the museum and several outstanding collections from Germany and abroad. Since then, works of contemporary art have been displayed in numerous exhibitions and collection presentations on 6,000 square meters of floor space. In a short time, the institution attained widespread national and international recognition. Mention should be made of successful exhibitions such as "Art and the Beautiful Object" (1995), "Picasso, Guston, Miró, de Kooning" (1997) and "Fondation Maeght. Southern Art Beneath a Northern Sky" (2003). Many exhibitions developed by the curators of the Weserburg were subsequently taken over by well-known museums. For example, the exhibition "Minimal Maximal" (1999) toured from Spain all the way to Japan (2001) and South Korea (2002).

On 1 November 2005, Carsten Ahrens took over the directorship of the museum. At his suggestion, the museum was renamed "Weserburg | Museum für moderne Kunst" on 1 January 2007. Under his direction, the Weserburg opened itself to a wider audience with solo exhibitions on the works of Jörg Immendorff (2007) and Helmut Newton (2008). Carsten Ahrens left the museum in June 2013.

His provisional successor was Peter Friese, who again concentrated on the institutional obligations formulated in the charter of the foundation: to exhibit art of the 20th and 21st centuries in private ownership. And on the core tasks formulated in the sense of the ICOM statute: to collect, preserve, research, exhibit, and educate. In its current work with collectors, the Weserburg does not display any "private collections" but, in carefully curated presentations of selected works from these collections, conveys a differentiated overall picture of the present.

On 11 June, 2015 Peter Friese was named director and continued the course initiated in 2013. In the current practice of the Weserburg, there are clearly defined functional areas: large, special exhibitions on themes of contemporary relevance, e.g. "Kaboom – Comics in Art," "Flowing Color," "Land in View," and in 2016 "I Prefer Life. The Collection Reydan Weiss." Among the entirely new exhibition formats are the "Young Collections," a series of exhibitions that as a rule present works from a young collection that have not yet been displayed in public. There is "Master Pupils of the HfK Bremen," a series which – together with the Karin Hollweg Award – makes an important contribution to supporting artists. And last but not least, "Artist's Spaces" establishes one time each year a fascinating dialogue between current, space-encompassing works from the Weserburg's own collections, cooperating collections and invited artists.



The contact to collectors has been intensified as well. The close connection to the “Foundation Situation Art” in Bochum led in 2015 to the very successful exhibition “Land in View,” and the collaboration with the Act Art Collection of Siggi Loch gave rise to the exhibition “Art in Music” – together with wonderful jazz concerts. Newly cooperating “young collections” were brought on board: the Dominic und Cordula Sohst-Brennenstuhl Collection (Hamburg), the von Kelterborn Collection (Frankfurt) and the Ivo Wessel Collection (Berlin). In the future as well, the museum will pursue the goal of realizing high-quality presentations of collections, thematic exhibitions, and retrospectives in order to reveal insights into a contemporary art that is expressing itself in increasingly complex ways. The Weserburg welcomes visitors of all ages and backgrounds. It addresses an interested audience in Bremen and further afield.

The Collections

Since it opened in 1991, the Weserburg has presented art from a number of private European collections, which enables viewers to perceive the spirited variety of contemporary art in a special way. Unlike public institutions, as art lovers, private collectors are only committed to their own preferences. By pursuing their personal ideas and passions, collections are created with an unmistakable character of their own.

While one collector systematically follows the work of an artist over decades or is particular enthusiastic about a single art movement, another is constantly on a quest for certain themes and motifs or aims at a dialogue between different artistic stances. In this way, the Weserburg creates a space in which divergent perspectives can encounter each other and be discussed publicly. The museum has been working closely with most of the collectors for many years. This has resulted in a mutual trust that allows presenting the various aspects of the collections to an interested audience in large-scale special exhibitions and smaller presentations.