

PRESS PREVIEW

Arnold Böcklin Fantastic Worlds

5 March to 13 June 2027

Darmstadt, 13 August 2026

Darmstadt is kicking off the Böcklin anniversary year in 2027. To mark the 200th anniversary of Arnold Böcklin's (1827–1901) birth, the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt is dedicating the exhibition »Arnold Böcklin. Fantastic Worlds« to this important Symbolist artist. It marks the start of an international series of exhibitions, which will subsequently continue in Berlin, Leipzig and Basel.

Thanks to the generous donation made by the industrialist Baron Maximilian von Heyl and his wife Doris to the city of Darmstadt in 1924, the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt holds twelve paintings by Arnold Böcklin on permanent loan from the Darmstadt Municipal Art Collection (now the Institut Mathildenhöhe) – including several of his spring scenes and the second version of »Prometheus Landscape« (1885). As early as 1907, the von Heyls had donated a »Self-Portrait« (1877–1879) and 74 rare drawings by the artist to the museum; 67 of these works have been preserved in the Museum's Graphic Collection.

As a trained landscape painter at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art, Böcklin discovered his love for Italy at an early age. It was a country that became his second home, enabling him to study the Old Masters, immersing him in the world of ancient mythology and providing him with a wealth of artistic inspiration for his fantastical visual worlds.

Gradually, Böcklin broke new, not uncontroversial ground in his painting, venturing far beyond the mere depiction of emotional moods and states of mind, and touching upon the subconscious whilst exploring the fantastical. It is above all in his mythological subjects that the fantastical breaks new ground: Böcklin reinterprets the tales of ancient heroines and heroes and creates bizarre hybrid creatures whose inventiveness is virtually unrivalled.

Böcklin's era was shaped by the profound effects of industrialisation and the associated social and political upheavals. Against this backdrop, his art conjures up a fantastical counter-world to reality. With its manifold references to the past, it reflects, on the one hand, the tastes of the bourgeoisie during the »Gründerzeit«. On the other hand,

Böcklin's paintings reveal an emotional depth which, from today's perspective, reveals surprising connections to modern conceptions of the fantastical.

The Surrealists, in particular, discovered this potential at the beginning of the 20th century. For the very first time, works by Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst and Salvador Dalí are on display in Darmstadt. They exemplify the shifts that the reception of Böcklin's art has undergone.

The outstanding Böcklin collection at the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt forms the starting point for an exhibition that is significantly expanded by more than 30 high-calibre loans from major museums in Germany and abroad. Works from, amongst others, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, the Museum Folkwang in Essen and the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal enter into a dialogue with the Darmstadt collection.

Spanning nine sections, the exhibition is one of high aesthetic quality and thematic depth, highlighting Darmstadt as a special place for the reception of Böcklin's work. Almost five decades after the last major Böcklin exhibition in Darmstadt, his work can once again be experienced here in a comprehensive show. The exhibition thus builds on a long tradition of Böcklin's reception in Darmstadt whilst simultaneously highlighting its significance for the present day.

Curator: Dr Lutz Fichtner

[This text was translated with the help of AI.]

The exhibition is held under the patronage of Her Excellency Livia Leu, Swiss Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany.



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The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by HIRMER Verlag.

Image material is available **for free download** exclusively for reporting on the exhibition „Arnold Böcklin. Fantastic Worlds“ in our press section:

<https://www.hlmd.de/de/presse/aktuell/aktuell/pressebilder-zur-ausstellung-arnold-boecklin>

Press event: Thursday, 4 March 2027, 11.00 am
Main Hall

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