

The Whole World Under One Roof – The Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt

The Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt [Hessian State Museum] is one of Germany's largest museums, uniting a large number of diverse collections from the fields of art, culture and natural history. This wide range of exhibits lends the HLMD a character that makes it special among Europe's important museums.

The Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt is not only distinguished by the variety, but also by the quality of its collections: Paintings ranging from Pieter Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens to Arnold Böcklin, August Macke and Gerhard Richter are only a few highlights of the over 440 exhibited works from the painting collection. The comprehensive collection of prints and drawings features works by Albrecht Dürer, Michelangelo and Rembrandt van Rijn. The collection of medieval treasury art and ivories is one of the most valuable of its kind. The Art Nouveau department with its jewellery collection and suite of rooms by Henry van de Velde is renowned around the world. The largest complex of works by Joseph Beuys, the "Beuys Block" comprising seven rooms and 290 pieces, is among the museum's internationally most important holdings.

Numerous objects from the natural history collections are of great scientific significance. The zoological dioramas from 1906, which are architecturally integrated into the building, are world-famous, as are the skeletal herd of over 100 animals and the sensational reconstructions of ten hominid busts. Striking exhibits from the geological-paleontological department include many fossils from the nearby Messel pit UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tertiary fossils from the Upper Rhine and the mineralogical collection.

The origins of the Landesmuseum go back to the late 18th century. At the end of the 19th century Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig commissioned the architect Alfred Messel (1853-1909) to erect a new museum building. Completed in 1906, he succeeded in providing a specific architectonic facade to each of the collections with details stylistically suited to the respective objects as well as optimal exhibition possibilities. The museum was celebrated as a total work of art. An extension designed by the architect Reinhold Kargel was added to Messel's structure in 1984. The modern building is home to the painting gallery.

The buildings were completely renovated from 2007 to 2013 so that Alfred Messel's architecture shines again in its former splendour. The presentation of the collections has been revised both in terms of structure and context. A number of objects are on display for the first time in many decades.

The museum now has a rejuvenated and future-orientated appearance: Natural and cultural history is presented here using modern technology and exhibition design and the history of the museum and its building is made tangible.

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