

PRESS RELEASE

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Reopening. The Whole World Under One Roof. The Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt sets off into the 21st Century

The Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt is open again. A major architectural landmark in Hesse and one of Germany's largest museums is thus open to the public again. The building was closed for seven years – five of those years for a complete renovation of the building and its technical facilities; two years for the transfer of the inventory.

The museum was constructed from 1897 to 1902 according to the plans of the Berlin architect Alfred Messel (1853–1909) and opened in 1906. With its period rooms and galleries grouped around a large central hall, the open courtyards, suggestive sight lines and richly detailed finishings, the museum building was regarded at that time as one of the most beautiful and most modern in Europe.

The Darmstadt museum building was severely damaged exactly 70 years ago during the Second World War. It was rebuilt in its original form, but with deficient materials. The growing demands made on the building's technical facilities impaired the already weakened and transformed structure even further; changing tastes caused alterations to the historical substance, distorting the visual connections, so that original structure as planned by the architect was no longer recognisable. The need to renovate the building structure and modernise the technical facilities resulted in the chance to restore Alfred Messel's building to its former beauty and to make the enfilades, site lines, colour schemes and decorations tangible again.

Alfred Messel was not only the building's architect but also responsible for the interior design down to the smallest detail. He intensely studied the museum's collections, enabling him to achieve a harmonious arrangement between the exhibits, their presentation and the surrounding architecture. In the decades following the Second World War, this was replaced by a conglomerate of remnants from various showcase systems, makeshift exhibition fittings and stopgap solutions resulting from a lack of funds. None of this corresponded to even the most elementary of conservational requirements and was missing in substance. The museum renovation provided the opportunity to rearrange the collections in accordance with the original architectonic specifications and to again introduce a uniform exhibition character corresponding to both the premises as well as the respective nature of each collection.

The unique character of the Landesmuseum consists in the diversity and scope of its collections and the consistent high quality of the holdings. This becomes particularly

evident in the new presentation. Nearly all of the museum's collections are represented, even if only with a few examples, and integrated into the parcours. In the process, each collection is presented in a specifically diverse manner, with the result that the visitor is presented with constantly changing experience spaces, just as Alfred Messel intended.

The character of these experience spaces is particularly evident on the main floor with its period rooms. The suite of the archaeological galleries extends off to the right with the reception of classical antiquity, the colonnade courtyard for the Roman Bad Vilbel mosaic, the Roman passageway with large-scale ancient sculpture and the Great Hall, which is air-conditioned for future exhibitions. On the left side, the Romanesque passageway with medieval art leads to the chapel featuring the ecclesiastical treasury and the adjacent secular treasury, the highlights of which are ceiling from the Palazzo Medici-Pandolfini and an original room from the Palazzo Pestalozzi in Chiavenna. The arms and armour gallery is off to the side with its holdings from various arsenals, and above it is the collection of bourgeois arts and crafts from the Baroque period with the famous Darmstadt waistcoats. What all of these rooms have in common is that by combining different genres: applied arts, stained glass, painting and sculpture, the thematic starting point determines the room's impression. The completely redesigned zoological collection with a monumental biodiversity wall, a skeleton herd and the freshly restored dioramas are located to the north of the Great Hall. Above it is the earth and life history collection with the finds from the Messel pit, then the section for modern art with the restored "Block Beuys" rooms, the Simon Spierer Collection and finally the print collection with the new study hall. Two modern staircases that have been symmetrically integrated into the historical architecture lead from the foyer to the new sub foyer level. Functional spaces that did not exist before or which were inadequate can be found here: wardrobes, sanitary facilities, a new lecture hall, reading rooms for the education department as well as the coffee shop with its own entrance and exit to the outside and the museum shop, similarly and also as a barrier-free access to the museum with its own entrance from the outside. The museum's three open courtyards, the Rodensteiner Courtyard as the outdoor area for the café, the Gothic Courtyard that is now open for the first time since the Second World War and the never before accessible Roman Courtyard with an open-air theatre can be reached from here. Shown for the first time are the collections of Egyptian, Greek and Japanese art with numerous objects from the former Wella Museum, the prehistory and early history department as well as the world famous collection of international Art Nouveau, all of which in fresh presentation, are on show in the basement. From here the visitor can access the newly renovated expansion from 1984 designed by Reinhold Kargel, which houses the painting gallery. The once famous Darmstadt Painting Gallery, which was only shown in parts and at various places throughout the museum in recent decades, now has a nearly 2.000 square metre large area and coloured spaces, providing it with the framework it deserves in accordance with its rank in the German museum landscape.

The museum now emerges as an invigorated, forward-looking institution where modern technology and exhibition design are just as effectual as the history of the museum and its architecture is tangible.

Press contact:
Yvonne Mielatz
Head of the Public Relations Office
Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt
Friedensplatz 1
64283 Darmstadt
Tel: +49 (6151) 16-57 100
Email: yvonne.mielatz@hlmd.de