



THE MAD SQUARE

MODERNITY IN GERMAN ART 1910-37

*In an era of chaos came an explosion of creativity
- edgy, provocative, yet utterly compelling.*

Over 200 works by key artists – including Max Beckmann, Otto Dix and George Grosz – spanning three decades of German art

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 6 Aug – 6 Nov 2011
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 25 Nov 2011 – 4 Mar 2012

ART
GALLERY
NSW



Rudolf Schlichter *Tingel tangel* 1919–20



August Sander *Secretary at West German Radio in Cologne* 1931

... unbelievably exciting, sophisticated, intellectually and politically explosive

Berlin in the era of the Weimar Republic described by Eric Hobsbawm

THE MAD SQUARE: MODERNITY IN GERMAN ART 1910–37

This is the first exhibition in Australia to look in-depth at the turbulent time of the Weimar Republic when, following the catastrophe of World War I and in a period of intense crisis, Germany entered an extraordinary era of creative and artistic fervour.

The mad square exhibition, organised by the Art Gallery of New South Wales with loans from museums and private collections from around the world, opens in Sydney 6 August 2011, and tours to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in November.

Berlin, 100 years ago, is the starting point for the exhibition. The thriving cosmopolitan metropolis provided new subject matter and new audiences for radically modern art forms. Over two decades, Germany became a centre for international avant-garde artists who were attracted to the culture of Weimar Germany.

Through over 200 works by leading artists of the period – including Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, George Grosz, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, Karl Hubbuch, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Käthe Kollwitz, László Moholy-Nagy, August Sander, Christian Schad, Rudolf Schlichter and Kurt Schwitters – *The mad square* reveals the intensely original art forms born of this time and the fascinating and complex ways in which artists responded to the forces of modernity

During this unprecedented moment in history, avant-garde movements – Expressionism, Dada, Constructivism, Bauhaus and New Objectivity – blossomed and were linked by artists' shared interest in radical experimentation across all areas of the visual arts including painting, sculpture, graphic art, decorative arts and design, photography and film.

The title of the exhibition – *The mad square* – is drawn from Felix Nussbaum's painting depicting Berlin's famous city square Pariser Platz as a crazy and fantastic place. 'The mad square' is both a place – the city represented in so many works in the exhibition – and a state of mind which gives these works their edgy quality.



Christian Schad *Self-portrait* 1927



George Grosz *Suicide* 1916



Otto Dix *Prostitute and war wounded* 1923

The sheer forcefulness and directness of many of the works in this exhibition stem from the tension that is created by representing a view of modernity that was hopeful, dynamic and vibrant on the one hand but dysfunctional and vulnerable on the other.

Jacqueline Strecker, exhibition curator

Beginning with **Expressionists**'s visions of a world on the brink of an apocalypse, the exhibition explores the cathartic effects of the World War I. War is portrayed as a dynamic, modern force but also one which tears society apart, creating fear, anxiety and violence. This mood of social and political turbulence continues in works produced during the revolutionary period 1918–19, when artists addressed political and social issues with a heightened sense of urgency. Major works by Max Beckmann show how political extremism invaded every aspect of life.

The various manifestations of **Dada** in Germany are presented through the work of Christian Schad, Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst. The exhibition highlights the provocative First International Dada Fair held in Berlin in 1920 which included many photo-montages as well as Dada publications.

The legacy of innovation left by the **Bauhaus** on 20th-century art, design and culture is also explored through significant pieces such as Wagenfeld and Jucker's *Table lamp* 1923–24 and Marcel Breuer's *Club chair* c1928–29. Other works show the move from early handcrafted objects to more streamlined, mass-produced furniture and designs for which the Bauhaus is most renowned.

The **metropolis** provided a rich source of imagery for artists. Many views of Berlin in the 1920s focused on leisure, entertainment and the city at night, including Berlin's seedy underbelly. A group of realist portraits demonstrate the mid 1920s movement that known as *Neue Sachlichkeit* or **New Objectivity**.

The exhibition concludes with a section on **art and power** in the 1930s, focusing on the rise of fascism and the disastrous consequences for modern art in Germany. After the seizure of power by Hitler in 1933, modern artists were forbidden to work or exhibit, their works were confiscated from leading museums and then destroyed or sold cheaply at auction.

The 1937 *Degenerate art* exhibition in Munich was the most notorious example of the Nazis' campaign against modernism. A number of works that were exhibited together with documentary photographs are included to highlight the great creativity and stylistic diversity of modernism in opposition to the derogatory ways in which the Nazis sought to ridicule and destroy modern art.



Werner Graul *Metropolis* 1926

Rudolf Schlichter *Tingel tangel* 1919–20 (detail)
Private collection © Rudolf Schlichter Estate,
courtesy Galerie Avensleben, Munich

August Sander *Secretary at West German Radio in Cologne* 1931, printed by August Sander in the 1950s from the project *People of the 20th century. III The woman, 17 The woman in intellectual and practical occupation*, gelatin silver photograph. Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur, August Sander Archiv, Cologne © Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur, August Sander Archiv, Cologne. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

Christian Schad *Self-portrait* 1927, oil on wood
Private collection, courtesy Tate London © Christian Schad Stiftung Aschaffenburg, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

George Grosz *Suicide* 1916, oil on canvas. Tate London, purchased with assistance from The Art Fund 1976. Photo: © Tate, London 2011 © George Grosz / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

Otto Dix *Prostitute and war wounded* 1923, pen, ink
LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster. Photo © LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Münster / Sabine Ahlbrand-Domsaif © Otto Dix / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

Werner Graul *Metropolis* 1926, poster. Austrian National Library, Picture Archives and Graphics Department, Vienna. Photo: courtesy Austrian National Library, Vienna

László Moholy-Nagy *Bauhaus balconies* 1926
gelatin silver photograph. Collection of George Eastman House. Purchased from Mrs Sibyl Moholy-Nagy with funds provided by Eastman Kodak Company. Photo: Courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film © László Moholy-Nagy / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

László Moholy-Nagy *[The law of the series]* 1925,
gelatin silver photograph. J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles © László Moholy-Nagy / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney



László Moholy-Nagy *Bauhaus balconies* 1926



László Moholy-Nagy *[The law of the series]* 1925

PUBLICATION

A beautifully designed and richly illustrated publication, published with the exhibition, includes essays by a range of authors on the exhibition themes related to modern German art, society and politics, and detailed information on key works.

PROGRAM

A symposium and a full program of talks, workshops, events and films will be held at the Gallery in conjunction with the exhibition. Seminal films include Robert Wiene's *The cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), GW Pabst's *Pandora's box* (1929) and Josef von Sternberg's *The blue angel* (1930) as well as the screening of Walter Ruttmann's 1927 cinematic masterpiece *Berlin: symphony of a great city*, with live jazz music composed and performed by Stu Hunter.

BERLIN SYDNEY

In conjunction with the *The mad square* exhibition, a series of programs focussing on Weimar culture and Berlin in the 1920s – covering theatre, music, cabaret, exhibitions and other events – will be held around Sydney. Organisations include Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney Symphony, Sydney College of the Arts and Museum of Sydney.

Full program details: www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

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ON VIEW

The mad square: modernity in German art 1910–37

6 August – 6 November 2011

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Art Gallery Rd, The Domain Sydney

Admission: \$20 adult, \$15 concession