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## PRESS RELEASE

### Kulturforum, Gemäldegalerie

Matthäikirchplatz, 10785 Berlin

Tue, Wed + Fri 10am – 6pm, Sat + Sun 11am – 6pm, Thur 10am – 8pm  
(from 2 September 2021)

### Late Gothic. The Birth of Modernity

21 May – 3 October 2021

A special exhibition by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

**Berlin's Gemäldegalerie is holding the first ever comprehensive exhibition on late Gothic art in the German-speaking world. Inspired by developments in the Netherlands, from the 1430s onwards, artistic means of expression began to change: light and shadow, body and space came to be depicted with increasing realism. With the invention of the printing press, these innovations achieved mass circulation. Despite their religious function, images increasingly came to be seen as art, with their creators gaining wide-reaching fame. Featuring some 130 objects – including impressive loans and key works from the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – the show will juxtapose various artistic genres and media, revealing the full breadth of the media innovations of the 15th century and the art of the late Gothic era.**

“The artistic developments of the 15th century continue to shape our understanding of images – making the art of the late Gothic era --as a phenomenon that traversed genres and media-- a fascinating and highly relevant exhibition theme,” says **Michael Eissenhauer**, Director-General of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. “In dialogue with key works from the fields of painting, sculpture, printmaking and decorative arts, we are bringing this supposedly remote epoch into the present day. Only very few museums in the world have the holdings necessary to illuminate the art of the late Gothic era in all its diversity. I am therefore very pleased that this exhibition, with central works from our own collections as well as some spectacular loans, can be presented by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin as the first comprehensive exhibition on this topic.”

### Innovations and Developments

The innovations of the late Gothic era – which began around 1430 – are illustrated by way of juxtapositions with selected major works from the preceding decades. With the depiction of Christ Carrying the Cross from Lorch and the altar from St. Gereon's Church in Cologne, the exhibition begins with two works from the end phase of the International Style, together with early images from the nascent discipline of printmaking. By way of contrast, the Wurzach Altar by Hans Multscher, the panel paintings of Konrad Witz and Stefan Lochner, as well as the engravings of the Master of the Playing Cards highlight the radical artistic changes that began to take hold in the early 1430s.

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Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF PRESS, COMMUNICATION,  
SPONSORSHIP

**MARKUS FARR**  
PRESS OFFICER

Tel.: +49 30 266 42 3402  
Mobile: +49 151 527 53 886

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse



The fascination with the new realism conveyed by these artforms led to individual artists going on to become famous figures, with their styles remaining recognisable decades after their death – as was the case, for example, with the Master of the Karlsruhe Passion, who is believed to have been the Strasbourg artist Hans Hirtz, and whose work is represented in the exhibition. The art of the 15th century as a whole would go on to significantly shape our understanding of human beings as individuals, which is illustrated in the exhibition through the first standalone portraits in the history of German art. The rekindled interest in the depiction of the human body influenced all artistic media, as can be seen, for example, in a comparison of Dürer's Man of Sorrows panel from Karlsruhe with Nicolaus Gerhaert's bust from Strasbourg – with religious and profane art adopting the same representational motifs.

### **The Multiplication of Images**

The invention of printmaking techniques and the printing press represents one of the most important German contributions to European culture, and continues to shape our communication to this day. The mass production of artworks led to a democratisation of images and brought about radical changes in our interaction with them. Visual representations became more affordable and found new markets, with the increased demand having a reciprocal effect on the output of this fledgling industry. The increased focus on marketing followed a clear economic objective, as can be seen in the engravings of the Madonna of Einsiedeln by the Master E.S., for example. At the same time, these works reveal high levels of artistic ambition, which illustrates the creative stimulus provided by these new media.

Beyond the circulation of figurative images, books emerged as a truly ground-breaking mass medium. Early examples show the tentative attempts to apply the design principles of illuminated manuscripts to the products of the printing press, with this process of adaptation to the new technical possibilities leading to a completely new form of book art. A central object in this field is the Gutenberg Bible, which was produced in 1454.

### **Regional Styles and Hubs of Innovation**

In the 15th century, evolving artistic centres developed their own distinct regional styles, which were already recognisable to contemporaries. The exhibition makes this strikingly clear through major works from various regions, such as those of Stefan Lochner in Cologne, the Master of the Darmstadt Passion in the Middle Rhine, or the rich collections of metalwork from Lüneburg.

As a region with a particularly strong tradition of artistic production which is impressively represented in the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – with an array of works taken from all genres and media – the Upper Rhine region is a focus of the exhibition, which showcases works by the Master E.S., Peter Hemmel von Andlau, Niclaus Gerhaert von Leyden and Martin Schongauer.

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## The Interplay of Different Media

The exhibition sheds light on the interplay between works in various media, which responded to, copied, and influenced each other. The arrival of mass-produced printed images also had knock-on effects on other art forms, and when we look at a number of the sculptures and paintings on display, it is easy to see that they are based on graphic works. At the same time, engravers were also taking inspiration from famous paintings and sculptures, disseminating the inventions of these works far beyond the locales where they were on view. Sculpture and metalwork also entered into a dialogue: the Bode-Museum, for example, possesses a wooden Madonna by the Ulm sculptor Michel Erhart which served as the model for a silver Madonna by the Augsburg goldsmith Heinrich Hufnagel.

Martin Schongauer represents the phenomenon of intermedia dialogue in a particularly striking way. As the first “world star” of printmaking, he emerged from the traditions of the Upper Rhine region, but his work found audiences as far away as the Netherlands and Spain, with his prints providing the inspiration for hundreds of paintings, graphic works and sculptures. A perfect example of this is provided by Tilman Riemenschneider’s *Noli me tangere* of 1490–92, which uses a composition by the artist from Colmar, transforming it into a relief.

## Impressive Loans and Central Works from the SMB’s Holdings

*Late Gothic. The Birth of Modernity* brings together key works from the holdings of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – from the Gemäldegalerie, the Skulpturensammlung, the Kupferstichkabinett, the Kunstgewerbemuseum and the Nationalgalerie, and the Manuscripts Department of the Staatsbibliothek – with impressive loans from the National Gallery in London, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. Overseen by Michael Eissenhauer, the exhibition is co-curated by Julien Chapuis (Skulpturensammlung and Museum für Byzantinische Kunst), Stephan Kemperdick (Gemäldegalerie), Lothar Lambacher (Kunstgewerbemuseum) and Michael Roth (Kupferstichkabinett).

## Publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue published by Hatje Cantz in separate German and English editions, 360 pages, 215 reproductions, ISBN (German): 978-3-7757-4754-7, ISBN (English): ISBN 978-3-7757-4755-4, Price: ca. 40 €.

## Health and Safety Measures

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition dates are subject of change. The visit is only possible with a time slot ticket which you can book online: [www.smb.museum/tickets](http://www.smb.museum/tickets)

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