

Press Information, October 13, 2016

LUTHER AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Contemporary Art in Wittenberg, Berlin, and Kassel

May 19 to September 17, 2017

Altes Gefängnis, Berliner Straße, 06886 Lutherstadt Wittenberg

St. Matthäus-Kirche, Matthäikirchplatz, 10785 Berlin

Karlskirche, Karlsplatz, 34117 Kassel

International contemporary art meets the spiritual figure of Luther— this is the starting point for the exhibition *Luther and the Avant-garde*, presented from May 19 to September 17, 2017 by the Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur (Foundation for Art and Culture), Bonn, in cooperation with Reformationsjubiläum 2017 e.V. The historic prison in Wittenberg will serve as a central exhibition venue and is being renovated and opened to the public on the occasion of the exhibition. Some 60 international artists have been invited to address the inspiring ideas of the Reformation, which have not lost their currency today. The exhibition will include works by i.a. Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Ólafur Elíasson, Ayşe Erkmen, Isa Genzken, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Günther Uecker, Ai Weiwei, Erwin Wurm, and Zhang Peili. Additional exhibition sites are Berlin and Kassel, where art takes up residence in church buildings.

"The exhibition takes stock of contemporary artistic production. It brings together positions on issues of concern throughout the world today. The historic prison in Wittenberg is a challenging and exciting exhibition location. We are also very pleased to have two additional venues that will supplement the program in Wittenberg. We will present Gilbert and George in the St. Matthäus-Kirche in Berlin, and in the Karlskirche in Kassel works by the Indian artist Shilpa Gupta will be combined with those of the Stuttgart artist Thomas Kilpper," explains Walter Smerling, Chairman of the Board of the Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur e.V. and Spokesman for the curatorial team. The exhibition is being made possible thanks to the support of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

The exhibition *Luther and the Avant-garde* is an encounter between the figure of the reformer, a visionary and avant-gardist of his era, and contemporary art that engages with the questions facing society today. Martin Luther spurred religious and social processes of reform, which radically changed society above and beyond the sphere of Christian values. *"The reformer can be considered an avant-gardist not merely in socio-cultural terms. Luther changed the world. What is changing it today? What is the significance of art today? What stance do contemporary artists take, and what roles do they play?"* These and other questions are explored by the exhibition curators.

The views of artists on subjects such as freedom, individuality, or resistance play a central role. The exhibition also critically explores new media and the power of language and images in the context of governmentally or religiously motivated claims to power or moral imperatives.



LUTHER UND DIE AVANT GARDE

"As autonomous, individual works of art, the selected works have intellectual, visual, and poetic force, working together in dialogue within the framework of the exhibition's narrative. The interplay between the works forms a kaleidoscope of contemporary art serving as a mirror reflecting observations on society," explain the curators. Bazon Brock will host his Visitors' School in Wittenberg for 40 days.

Luther strengthened the role of the viewer and freed art from the dictates of religion. He wrote: "Images are neither here nor there, neither good nor evil. One may have them or not have them." His contribution to the question of images paved the way for the art of the modern era and still poses a challenge to both artists and viewers. This "carte blanche" has inspired artists of all periods to reconsider the mandate and content of art anew—and does so especially now, in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

The exhibition is being prepared by an international team, which consists of Kay Heymer, Head of Moderne Kunst, Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf; Susanne Kleine, Curator, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; Dimitri Ozerkov, Head of Modern Art, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; Walter Smerling, Chairman of the Board, Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur e.V. Bonn and Spokesman for the curatorial team; Peter Weibel, Director Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe; Dan Xu, Art Historian, Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur e.V.

Luther and the Avant-garde is taking place in conjunction with the multi-part *Weltausstellung Reformation – Tore der Freiheit* (World Reformation Exhibition – Gates of Freedom) that is being presented by Reformationsjubiläum 2017 e.V. in the fortifications of the old city of Wittenberg from May 20 to September 10, 2017. Additional cooperation partners are the Kulturstiftung St. Matthäus Berlin and the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck.

For more information, please see: www.luther-avantgarde.de.

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