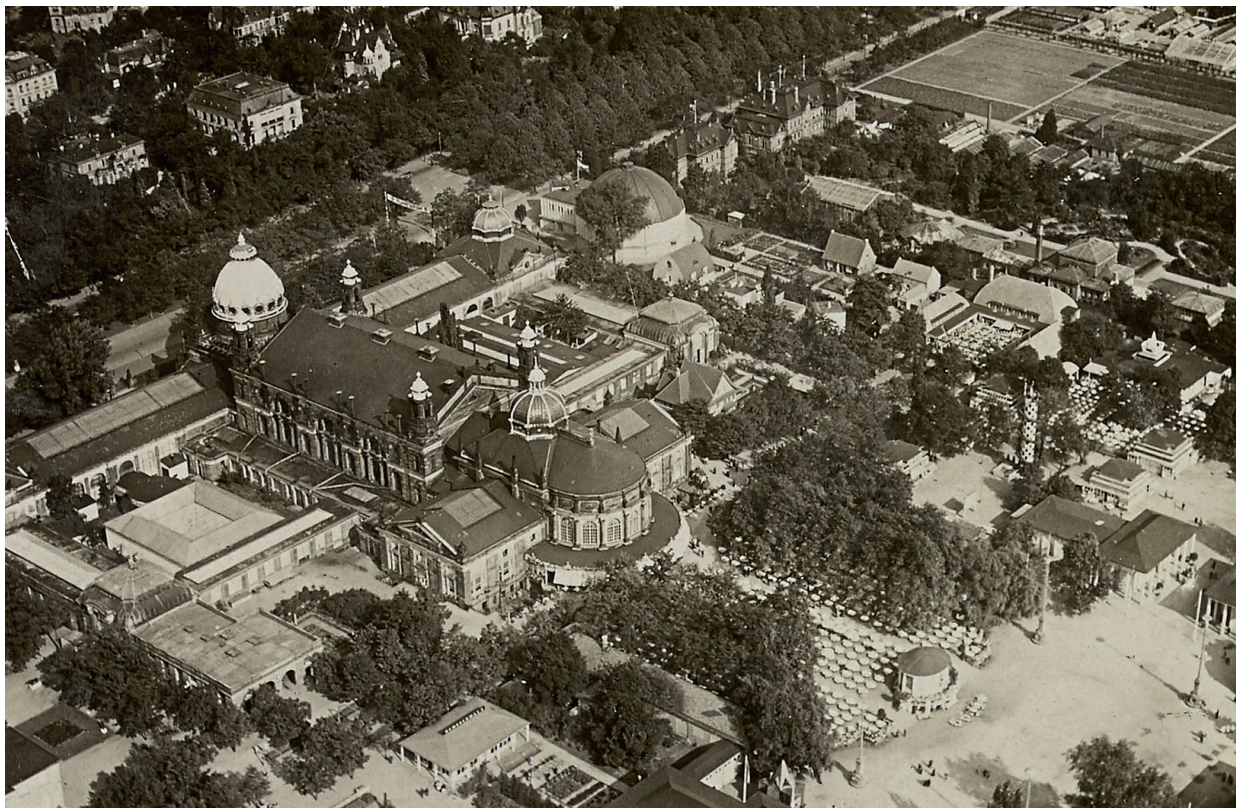


The Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926: A (Forgotten) Milestone between the Sonderbund and Documenta

Birgit Dalbajewa / Andreas Dehmer



The *Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926* (International Dresden Art Exhibition 1926, here IKA for short) was the first and only art exhibition after the First World War in the Weimar Republic that aimed — with a curated programme — to provide a survey of the latest state of the arts throughout Europe and the USA. More than 800 paintings and almost 190 sculptures by some 460 artists⁰¹ (eleven of them women) from twenty countries were on show in 56 rooms of the Städtischer Ausstellungspalast (Municipal Exhibition Palace) on Stübellee, today the site of the Gläserne Manufaktur. The *Mannheimer Tageblatt* reported that “The Internationale Kunstausstellung [...] in its coherent unity and its overall artistic standard may be described as positively sensational. For the first time since the war, an exhibition is being held here in Dresden that gives a full opportunity to become acquainted with the best and the latest artistic production in this country and abroad.”⁰²

During and immediately after its run from June to September 1926, the exhibition was greeted by a veritable flood of press publications and reviews, most of them favourable. However, reporters from conservative milieus of a strongly German nationalist bent and from the *völkisch* National Socialist spectrum, who — at least judging by the surviving collection of press articles — only accounted for a small proportion of the critics, scoffed at the modern works on show: “The managers of the exhibition should take note that daubings of this and a similar kind on no account have a place in an exhibition. Because they represent an insult to healthy taste.”⁰³ Following the electoral victory of the National Socialists and the cultural purge in 1933, the exhibition was seen as promotion, in retrospect no longer to be tolerated, of “Jewish-Bolshevik unculture,” for which its director had to justify himself in fear of dismissal.⁰⁴

The Status of Research

The exhibition scarcely featured in art historical research after 1945. One reason may be that the archives were kept almost entirely in Dresden, and thus in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic until 1989–90. A further reason may be the fact that Hans Posse (1879–1942), the artistic director, was one of Hitler’s special representatives from 1939 onwards and that after 1945 his role as the former organiser of a modern exhibition could therefore neither be mentioned in memoirs nor in research — let alone become a subject of study. Another contributing factor is certainly the fact that the exhibition’s extremely broad profile, which will be described below, did not represent a clear break between artistic eras and therefore did not represent a decisive point for newly established tendencies or artistic innovations that were not yet, or had scarcely been, received — which was the case with the Sonderbund exhibition of 1912 in Cologne.

The canonical shortlist of important German art exhibitions during the Weimar Republic includes shows that concentrated on individual artistic movements: the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair) in Berlin in 1920, *Neue Sachlichkeit: Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus* (New Objectivity: German Painting since Expressionism) in the Städtische Kunsthalle in Mannheim in 1925, and the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (Abstract Cabinet) held in 1927–28 subsequent to the Dresden show in the permanent exhibition of the Provinzialmuseum in Hanover.⁰⁵ Outstanding international exhibitions that were less well known and less discussed than the examples above included the 1. *Russische Kunstausstellung* (First Russian Art Exhibition) at Galerie van Diemen in Berlin⁰⁶ and the 1. *Internationale Kunstausstellung Düsseldorf* (First Düsseldorf International Art Exhibition) in 1922, which was initiated by a group of artists called “Das junge Rheinland” (Young Rhineland) and held at the Kaufhaus Tietz department store in Düsseldorf as a counter-event to the *Grosse Kunstausstellung Düsseldorf* (Grand Düsseldorf Art Exhibition).

Until recently, art-historical publications on the IKA primarily focused on the *Room for Constructive Art* installed there by El Lissitzky (1890–1941). In 1967 a monograph by Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers (1891–1978), with material that remains fundamental to the subject to this day, was published in Dresden, followed by further texts on Lissitzky’s room by Kai-Uwe Hemken, Beatrix Nobis, Ulrich Krempel, Maria Gough and others.⁰⁷ It was not until the year 2000 that a first overall survey appeared, “Grosse Ausstellungen um 1900 und in den zwanziger Jahren (Major Exhibitions around 1900 and in the Twenties)” in a thematic issue of the *Dresdner Hefte* by Erhard Frommhold. The same issue featured a contribution by Henrik Karge on the exhibition architecture of Heinrich Tessenow (1876–1950).⁰⁸ Individual publications

⁰¹ The exhibition catalogue demonstrably does not include all of the works displayed there; this results in a little uncertainty in these figures.

⁰² Heinrich Zerkulen: ‘Dresden 1926,’ in: *Mannheimer Tageblatt*, 26.6.1926. Collected contemporary press reports on the IKA in: Archiv der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden (hereinafter: SKD, archive), 01/GG 16, vol. 16 b.

⁰³ O. Th. Stein: ‘Internationale Kunstausstellung zu Dresden, II. Das Inland,’ in: *Schlesische Tagespost* (Breslau), 8.7.1926.

⁰⁴ Hans Posse: ‘I. Die Vorwürfe, die gegen mich erhoben werden ...’, type-written report, probably 1934, SKD, archive, estate of Posse 41, vol. 2, pp. 1–21.

⁰⁵ Cf. Eberhard Roters (ed.): *Stationen der Moderne. Kataloge epochaler Kunstausstellungen in Deutschland 1910–1962 und Kommentarband zu den Nachdrucken der zehn Ausstellungskataloge*, Cologne 1988; Bernd Klüser, Katharina Hegewisch (eds.): *Die Kunst der Ausstellung: Eine Dokumentation dreißig exemplarischer Ausstellungen dieses Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig 1995.

⁰⁶ Roters 1988 (see note 5).

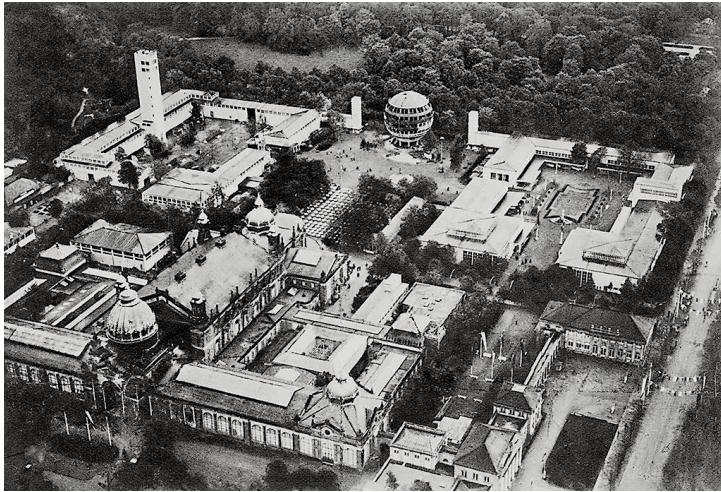


Abb. 1, 2 Exhibition grounds on Stübelallee, Dresden, 1926–27 and 1929. Aerial views. SLUB / Deutsche Fotothek

Abb. 3 Visitors at the Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit, postcard, 1928, privately owned

21. *Jahrhunderts* (From Item to Exhibit: The Relationship of Object and Presentation in Exhibitions of the 20th and 21st Century), with the collaboration of the Exhibition Design Institute of the Hochschule Düsseldorf. An important foundation for the necessary basic research are twenty photographs by Alexander Paul Walther (cf. pp. 15, 21–59), which with two



discussed the question of the acquisitions that the Staatliche Gemäldegalerie (State Gallery of Paintings) in Dresden made from the exhibition.⁰⁹ Finally, in 2009, work on the exhibition and the form of its organisation based on systematic examination of the archives, by Annegret Karge, appeared for the first time, and the same author later presented an essay on Will Grohmann's (1887–1968) role in organising the exhibition.¹⁰ The catalogue of the special exhibition *Visionary Spaces: Kandinsky, Mondrian, Lissitzky, and the Abstract-Constructivist Avant-Garde in Dresden, 1919–1932* contained the first full statements on the hanging in the *Room for Constructive Art* and the (unsuccessful) invitation to Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) to come to Dresden in 1926.¹¹

The Kunsthochschule of the University of Kassel and the Albertinum of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (Dresden State Art Collections) are currently carrying out a virtual reconstruction of the exhibition within the context of a joint project, *Vom Gegenstand zum Exponat: Das Verhältnis von Objekt und Inszenierung in Ausstellungen des 20. und*

07 Norbert Nobis (ed.): *El Lissitzky 1890–1941. Retrospektive*, exh. cat. of Sprengel Museum Hanover/Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle, Hanover 1988; Kai-Uwe Hemken: *El Lissitzky. Revolution und Avantgarde*, Cologne 1990; Maria Gough: 'Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hanover Demonstrationsräume,' in: Nancy Perloff, Brian Reed (eds.): *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, Los Angeles 2003, pp. 77–125; Ulrich Krempel: 'Kurt Schwitters' "Merzbau" und El Lissitzkys "Kabinett der Abstrakten": Zwei Rekonstruktionen von zerstörten Räumen der Moderne im Sprengel Museum Hannover' in: Annette Tietenberg (ed.): *Die Ausstellungskopie. Mediales Konstrukt, materielle Rekonstruktion, historische Dekonstruktion*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2015, pp. 115–128

08 Erhard Frommhold: 'Die Internationale Kunstausstellung 1926,' in: *Dresdener Hefte 18* (2000), issue 63, pp. 72–78; Henrik Karge: 'Die Ästhetik der Sachlichkeit. Heinrich Tessenows architektonische Fassung der Internationalen Kunstausstellung 1926,' in: *ibid.*, pp. 62–71.

09 Birgit Dalbajewa: "... selbst auf die Gefahr einzelner Irrtümer hin ...". Die "Sammlung modernster Malerei" in der Gemäldegalerie unter Hans Posse 1918 bis 1933,' in: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gilbert Lupfer, Thomas Rudert (eds.): *Kenntnis zwischen Macht und Moral, Annäherungen an Hans Posse (1879–1942)*, Cologne/Weimar/Berlin 2015, pp. 239–270.

10 Annegret Karge: 'Die Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Besprechungen von Nikolaus Pevsner und Will Grohmann,' unpublished manuscript of Master's dissertation, Technische Universität Dresden 2009 (thanks to the author for making this manuscript available); eadem: 'Mitstreiter or Mitarbeiter? Will Grohmann und die "Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,"' in: Konstanze Rudert (ed.): *Zwischen Intuition und Gewissheit. Will Grohmann und die Rezeption der Moderne in Deutschland und Europa 1918–1968*, Dresden 2013, pp. 94–100.

11 Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Birgit Dalbajewa, Heike Biedermann, Hilke Wagner, Andreas Dehmer, Mathias Wagner (eds.): *Visionary Spaces. Kandinsky, Mondrian, Lissitzky and the Abstract-Constructivist Avant-Garde in Dresden 1919 to 1932*, Dresden 2019; including: Andreas Dehmer, Birgit Dalbajewa: 'Lissitzky, Mondrian, Kandinsky at the Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926: "Features" in the "Interpretation of a Contemporary Present,"' pp. 194–207; Andreas Dehmer, Mathias Wagner, Birgit Dalbajewa: 'Reconstruction of the Presentation of Works in the "Room for Constructive Art,"' pp. 208–217; on Mondrian see Andreas Dehmer: "'une chose très bien Neo-Plasticienne" – zwei unveröffentlichte Briefe von Piet Mondrian zur Internationalen Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,' in: *Dresdener Kunstblätter* 63, 1 (2019), pp. 22–31.

exceptions are held by the archive of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden and have not yet been published as a whole. These photographs contain valuable information, for example, on the hanging of the paintings, the atmosphere of the room, spatial sequences and perspectives, while illuminating and explaining much of what is merely described, if mentioned at all, in catalogues and reviews.

Fundamentals

The idea of holding an international art exhibition in Dresden was linked to the tradition of the Internationale Kunstausstellungen (1897, 1901) and Grosse Kunstausstellungen (Grand Art Exhibitions; 1904, 1908 and 1912) that had been held in the Städtischer Ausstellungspalast, which opened in 1896 on Stübelallee, and had been initiated by the painter and academy professor Gotthardt Kuehl (1850–1915). Alongside Munich, Berlin and Düsseldorf, Dresden was one of the competing German centres of major art exhibitions. In Munich, International Art Exhibitions had taken place in the Glaspalast between 1869 and 1913, held by the Münchner Künstlergenossenschaft (Munich Artists' Cooperative). The catalogues often included more than 2,000 items. After the First World War, in the generally precarious situation of the Weimar Republic, the Bavarian capital was only able to regain its international status to a limited extent. The Grosse Kunstausstellung events in Düsseldorf sometimes presented as many as 1,500 works in the Kunstpalast (Palace of Art), which was replaced in 1926 by a newly rebuilt forum for exhibitions, the Ehrenhof (architect: Wilhelm Kreis), and in this way became comparable with Dresden in its architectural dimensions and as a large-scale show. Contemporary observers also made comparisons with previous international exhibitions in Vienna, Zurich, London and New York, and also of course with the *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte di Venezia*, the Biennale.

In Dresden, a regular Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit (Annual Show of German Labour, ill. 1–3) was held on a large scale from 1922 to 1929 to promote industry, science and trades, for example the show *Deutsche Erde – Porzellan, Keramik, Glas* (German Soil – Porcelain, Ceramics, Glass) in 1922, *Sport und Spiel* (Sport and Games) in 1923 and the *Deutsche Textilausstellung* (German Textile Exhibition) in 1924. Several of these big events attracted more than one million visitors each. The ambitious undertaking of the IKA was made possible by the astute cultural and financial policy of combining it with the 1926 annual show, at which the long-planned and comprehensive Jubiläumsgartenbau-Ausstellung (Jubilee Gardening Exhibition) was presented at the same time. Through this connection, following lengthy negotiations and setbacks, the exhibition attained funding by

the government of the German Reich, the state of Saxony and the city government of Dresden. However, the initiative to hold the IKA derived from “extensive circles of Dresden’s citizens, especially artists, teachers, collectors and those interested in art.”¹²

The continually expanded exhibition grounds of the Jahresschau events (ill. 2) were much larger than the above-mentioned Ausstellungspalast. Many more buildings, often ephemeral, were erected for the Jahresschau themes and later dismantled again. Today almost nothing remains, even of the permanent buildings, as the area was bombed in 1945.

The area devoted to the IKA was limited to part of the Ausstellungspalast and its annexes, while the rest was reserved for the Jubiläumsgartenbau-Ausstellung. Nevertheless, almost 1,000 works were displayed in the allocated space, exclusively painting and sculpture. About half of them were by invited international artists, mainly European and from the USA, while the other half were produced by German artists. It was in the interest of the exhibition management to keep to these proportions; it was also part of the exhibition concept, not least because of lack of space, that works by 90 living and only seven deceased artists were shown in the German section.¹³ Art by Germans who were not from Dresden was represented by a total of 98 painters and 29 sculptors (224 paintings and 72 sculptures).¹⁴

Approximately 150 paintings and 50 sculptures by 100 artists from Dresden or Saxony (81 painters and nineteen sculptors) were exhibited. From Dresden only works by living artists were represented, with the exception of paintings by Gotthardt Kuehl, the Nestor of the art exhibitions, and the academy professor Oskar Zwintscher (1870–1916), who died young and was honoured in this way.¹⁵

Among the 212 lenders listed in the catalogue were the artists themselves and 45 art dealerships, of which eleven were from Paris, nine from Berlin, six from New York, three from Vienna, etc.¹⁶ Additionally, a large number of private collectors loaned their works to Dresden, including nineteen collectors from Berlin, ten from Dresden, seven from London, six each from Munich and Stockholm, five each from Frankfurt am Main, Brussels, Copenhagen and Prague, etc.

¹² Karge 2009 (see note 10), p. 29.

¹³ Deceased artists: Lovis Corinth, Franz Marc, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Hans Thoma, Wilhelm Trübner, Fritz von Uhde, Albert Weisgerber.

¹⁴ ys: 'Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926. 2.', in: *Sächsische Staatszeitung*, no. 167, 21.7.1926. Parallel to the IKA, the Grosse Aquarell-Ausstellung Dresden 1926 (Great Watercolour Exhibition) took place; the catalogue contains 1,074 items.

¹⁵ 15 ys: 'Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926. 1.', *Sächsische Staatszeitung*, no. 166, 20.7.1926. Otto Gussmann died on 27.7.1926.

¹⁶ Paul Sorgenfrei: 'Die Internationale Kunstausstellung zu Dresden,' in: *Der Kunstwanderer* 8 (1926), p. 468.

Furthermore, loans had been negotiated in advance from 28 public museums and collections, in Munich, Prague, Basel, Amsterdam, Barmen, Berlin, Berne, Brussels, Budapest, The Hague, Stettin, Vienna, Zurich and other cities. The IKA was distinguished from similar events by this large number of lenders. Typically, most of the works at art exhibitions were submitted by artists or artists' groups and associations and were then selected by a jury or were assembled by the representatives of artists' associations in various countries.

Some of the artists who loaned their works in Dresden laid down conditions: for example, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) insisted on not being shown in the same room as other members of the group Die Brücke, which had been disbanded in 1913, and specified a circle of pupils and colleagues associated with him in Switzerland with whom he wished to be exhibited jointly (cf. ill. 10–14).¹⁷

The fact that 100 works from the exhibition were sold was considered by contemporaries as a particular success. About half of the purchases were made by the state of Saxony, the city government of Dresden and the Staatliche Gemäldegalerie, financed from a variety of private, state and municipal funds.

The Artistic Direction

The initiative for the content of the IKA largely derived from Robert Sterl (1867–1932), a painter and professor at the Kunstakademie (Academy of Art) in Dresden, who was well connected in artists' circles throughout Germany and was very active in Dresden's cultural policy. Sterl was considered impartial and possessed great artistic and personal authority.¹⁸ His intention was to go "back approximately to Daumier" with French artists, and to Vasily Surikov (1848–1916) with the Russians. "Everything else will be work by living artists." Sterl attached particular importance to groups of works by Corinth and Liebermann, as well as by Kokoschka, Kirchner and Beckmann, as he wrote on 7 December 1924 to Hans Posse, who had been director of the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden since 1910, proposing at the same time that they travel together to select certain works.¹⁹ However, as the state of Sterl's health deteriorated, the artistic directorship of the IKA was transferred to Hans Posse in early April 1925.²⁰

Posse's research specialized in Italian Baroque painting, and his focus in acquisitions for the Gemäldegalerie at this time was on artists such as Max Liebermann (1847–1935) and Lovis Corinth (1858–1925), as well as on younger painters such as Emil Nolde (1867–1956) and Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980).²¹ He had a doctorate in art history and in 1922 had already taken on the artistic direction of the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Here, Posse had gained experience wielding the effect of contemporary art exhibitions and of setting a balance between established artists

like Liebermann and younger ones. Among other reactions, he had been confronted in Venice with the reproach that he had "given centre stage too much to the most modern (Kokoschka, Heckel, Pechstein, Hofer, Kirchner, etc.), who are controversial at home, thus provoking verdicts of rejection by the Italians."²²

In the mid-1920s the idea of entrusting the direction of an exhibition to an art historian, rather than to an artist or a representative of an artists' association, was still relatively new. Pluralistic forms of organisation, based on parity in the representation of nations, regions and members were customary — which resulted in a lack of choices or large juries having to make compromises.

The artistic director's authority to take decisions was a prerequisite for a programme with a more coherent content. A recurring theme of contemporary reviews was that "the selection was not made by the invited governments but by the exhibition director."²³ The journal *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* reported: "It was only possible to attain this high general level by breaking with that bad old habit at exhibitions, the large jury, and in its place giving extraordinary powers of selection and organisation to one person, so that a unified work — not to say a work of art once again — could arise from this concentrated energy."²⁴ According to another report, Posse "did not confine himself, as Gotthardt Kuehl did, to leaving the choice of the artistic material from abroad to persons of his trust, but was present on the spot himself and personally made contact with artists in the participating countries, with the sole exception of America."²⁵

The conception of the role of the artistic director can not only be traced through contemporary reviews, which should be seen critically with regard to the writers' differing points of view, but is also confirmed by archival material

¹⁷ Cf. here Birgit Dalbajewa: "Dresden ist mir etwas schuldig." Aus Briefen von Ernst Ludwig Kirchner an Hans Posse zum Erwerb eines Gemäldes für die Dresdner Galerie,' in: *Dresdener Kunstblätter* 51, 2 (2008), pp. 101–111.

¹⁸ Letter of 2.1.1925 from Otto Gussmann to Robert Sterl, Archiv Robert-Sterl-Haus, Naundorf (Sächsische Schweiz).

¹⁹ Robert Sterl to Hans Posse, 7.12.1924; SKD, archive, estate of Hans Posse 1913–1932, sheet 99 f.

²⁰ Cf. Karge 2009 (see note 10), p. 32 f.; cf. letter from Posse to the Reichsministerium des Innern, 6.4.1925; Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, file 14923, sheet 14, and letter of 8.5.1925 from Robert Sterl to Hans Posse; SKD, archive, estate of Hans Posse 1913–1932, sheets 107 f.

²¹ Cf. here Dalbajewa 2015 (see note 9).

²² Hans Posse to Johannes Sievers, undated; Posse to Sievers, 29.5.1922; SKD, archive, 01/GG 16, vol. 12 a, sheets 77–82.

²³ 'Kleine Mitteilungen,' in: *Kunst und Handwerk* 76 (1926), issue no. 4, p. 116.

²⁴ Oskar Schürer: 'Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,' in: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 59 (November 1926), pp. 87–98, here p. 87.

²⁵ ys 1926 (see note 15).

from the IKA like the correspondence that Posse maintained or sought with hundreds of artists, gallerists and collectors, ranging from Liebermann, Corinth and Kirchner through to many artists living in Paris and to Naum Gabo or El Lissitzky in Moscow.

The conjecture that Will Grohmann or Nikolaus Pevsner (1902–1983)²⁶ rather than Posse was the driving force for the most modern sections of the IKA is understandable, particularly considering Posse's later career as Hitler's special representative for setting up the Führermuseum in Linz, but this is not confirmed by examination of the files. In 2013, Annegret Karge demonstrated that Grohmann's later reference in his autobiography to "1926, principal work on the Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden" does not correspond to the facts, but that he was claiming the position, now forgotten in the passage of time, that another person had occupied.²⁷ The reviews in the *Dresdner Anzeiger* newspaper by the late architectural historian Pevsner, who supported the work of the IKA as a specialist intern, and an assessment of the Pevsner Papers in the Getty Research Institute refute the assumption that Pevsner might have shown greater commitment to recent art such as Constructivism than Posse can be presumed to have shown in 1926.²⁸

The Programme of the Exhibition

According to a contemporary review describing the innovation of the curatorial concept, "This entire selection was not made arbitrarily, and it was not done by commissars of foreign countries, but was established according to Posse's own broad perspectives."²⁹ The following sections set out which "broad perspectives" of the exhibition programme can be ascertained according to the present state of research.

It was clear to the organisers from an early stage that the exhibition could only gain the desired profile through strict reduction. Sterl wrote to Posse that the selection "[must] be carried out very meticulously, because our space is limited, and we will probably have filled it too quickly." Regarding the inclusion of late nineteenth-century German artists, he continued: "Increasing the foundation of historical German art within our rooms is entirely out of the question."³⁰ By following Sterl's plan of showing French artists of the late nineteenth century such as Degas, Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Manet, Renoir and Rousseau, Posse therefore clearly directed emphasis towards artistic qualities and the desire for renewal. The effect of this prologue before entry to the rooms with contemporary art was described as follows: "It is certainly bold to start an exhibition of today's art with such a great chord from a past era. But it is generous: from the very moment of entrance it fills the visitor with that lofty breath of air that cannot fail to animate a creative reception."³¹

In the foreword, Hans Posse set out his approach or programmatic attitude: he had "made his best endeavours to avoid the tiring impression of a mass offering, of the great art market."³² These efforts were rewarded by recognition in the observations of critics. "A massed assembly of paintings has been avoided, and yet 1,000 works of painting and sculpture are present in total." The exhibition made "the impression of a modern gallery,"³³ or "Through its whole planned nature instead of the usual crude collection of material, an overview is supplied that is as beautiful as it is instructive, and, it must be repeated, an extremely high degree of exhibitory accomplishment has been achieved."³⁴

Posse himself described the size of the exhibition by the standards of his age as "modest"³⁵ and justified this in the foreword to the catalogue by pointing out that "certain limits [...] to the available accommodation"³⁶ had been set. He thereby concluded that "The decision was therefore taken for small, select collections by country." Precisely this curatorial ambition to influence the choice of artists represented in the country collections may be highlighted as a first and the most important distinguishing feature of the Dresden exhibition.

The yardstick for this selection was artistic quality and originality or, as Posse expressed it, the "personality" of the artist.³⁷ The acquisition of works from private collections and

²⁶ Cf. Karge 2013 (see note 10).

²⁷ Ibid., here pp. 96 and 100.

²⁸ Pevsner rejected the "assessment of this Constructivism as autonomous painting" because the starting point of the works did not lie in "autonomous individuality," which meant "great impoverishment;" Nikolaus Pevsner, in: *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 30.7.1926, p. 2 f.

²⁹ Zerkaulen 1926 (see note 2).

³⁰ Robert Sterl to Hans Posse, 7.12.1924; SKD, archive, estate of Hans Posse 1913–1932, sheets 99 f.

³¹ Oskar Schürer: 'Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,' in: *Augsburger Postzeitung*, 25.7.1926.

³² The exhibition director [Hans Posse]: Foreword to *Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926. June/September. Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit. Amtlicher Führer und Katalog durch die Ausstellung*, Dresden 1926, p. 5 f., here p. 5.

³³ Alfred Mello: 'Die Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,' in: *Schwäbischer Kurier*, Stuttgart, 6.7.1926.

³⁴ Ludwig Coellen: 'Die Dresdener Internationale 1926,' in: *Wormser Zeitung*, 15.8.1926.

³⁵ See note 32.

³⁶ Ibid. and Hans Posse: 'Ansprache zur Eröffnungsfeier der "Internationalen Kunstausstellung" am 12. Juni 1926,' typewritten manuscript; SKD, archive, 01/GG 16, vol. 16 c, sheets 107–111, here sheet 110.

³⁷ Cf. here Hans Posse: Foreword, in: Künstlervereinigung Dresden. *Sommerausstellung 1919*, Dresden 1919, and quotes by Posse in Birgit Dalbajewa: 'Dresdens "Moderne Galerie" unter Hans Posse. Forschungsansätze,' in: *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden* 36 (2010), pp. 184–191.

museums — a matter of course for exhibitions today — in order to achieve the desired selection and quality was in itself a novelty by this criterion, and was also perceived as such.³⁸

Curatorial Decisions and Strategies

In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue Posse wrote in condensed form that “On the other hand, a fashionable programme has not been followed, and the attempt has not been made to demonstrate slogans or historical developments, but rather, often reaching further back to strong artistic personalities that are still of significance today, to the best and liveliest examples and works that were accessible, the intent was to provide a survey of modern creative work.”³⁹

The choice of groups of works comprising more than five paintings or sculptures may be seen as a programmatic focus, whereas in the case of most artists only one or two works were selected. In a contemporary description, “The individual artists are represented according to their importance and of course in the nature of things according to the opportunities to acquire them. Groups of ten or more especially important paintings are shown only for the German masters Corinth and Liebermann, for Edward [sic !] Munch and for Matisse and Picasso.”⁴⁰

The biggest “collections,” as they were then called, were dedicated to Liebermann with fifteen paintings, and Corinth with fourteen. The spontaneous, gestural, free, late Impressionist painting of these artists always received an extremely high degree of attention from both Sterl and Posse in all of their activities. In the German section, with seven works each, Barlach, Macke, Kandinsky, Kokoschka and Slevogt occupied important positions, as did Beckmann, Hofer, Klee and Nolde with six each, and Marc, Rohlf, Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff with five each: thus, alongside early abstract works, mainly positions that reviews and art history at that time subsumed under the heading of Expressionism.

Among the sections for countries, prominent items in the French department were twelve paintings by Matisse (six of them from a collection in Stockholm), eleven by Rousseau, seven by Vlaminck, six by Derain etc.⁴¹ For the Scandinavian room, Posse made particular efforts to gain loans directly from Munch, who was represented by eleven works; there were ten by Picasso in the Spanish section. Ten paintings by van Gogh were allocated to the Netherlands, seven by Ensor to Belgium and six by Chagall, who lived in Paris, to Russia. However, other, smaller groups of works — for example those by Léger, de Chirico, Carrà and Oppi (three each) — sometimes made an even stronger impression, especially among the artists who visited the IKA.

In its totality, however, the exhibition must have been largely characterised both in the foreign and the German

rooms by late Impressionist and other variants of Realism with academic connotations, or the standpoints of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity): in Germany *Neue Sachlichkeit*, in Spain and Italy *Nuovo Realismo*, *Realismo mágico*, *Pittura metafisica* and the *Novecento* group, in Russia the Society of Panel Painters (OST). Further newly established styles and terms expressed great interest in all of Europe and in America in variations on Realism and Neoclassicism, in classical formal values and subjects that were *en vogue* in the mid-1920s. Calls for a “return to order” in art were clearly evident in the exhibition: Jean Cocteau’s *Le Rappel à l’ordre* appeared in 1926.

Of course the greatly varying circumstances for acquiring the works, i.e. the possibilities of gaining loans from individual artists, largely determined their presence or absence in the exhibition. Gallerists and artists often gave priority to other exhibitions, some of which offered better opportunities for sales or were more prestigious. Sometimes there was simply no recent “production” on hand in the studios, as correspondence with the artists reveals. Equally, political obstacles in making exchanges with former “enemy countries” were enormous.

Nevertheless, these quantitative decisions by the directors clearly had a decisive effect on the exhibition: “very wisely, whole walls or special spaces have been devoted to individual artists in cases where especial interest suggested this. Precisely this constitutes the substance of the show,”⁴² wrote the *Wormser Zeitung*, for example. A fundamental prerequisite for adhering consistently to the still novel approach of individual curation was the condition that no associations or groups of artists were to be approached, in order to avoid levelling by the members. On this point, Posse stated that “Equally, as we wanted to gain only certain artists and certain works for the purpose of having a high average level, we approached artists’ associations neither in Germany nor abroad.”⁴³ Prominent examples of how strictly the artistic director applied this principle are found in replies to certain artists, for example to Edmund Kesting, who wrote to Posse on behalf of the “International Association of Expressionists, Futurists and Cubists, German section,” asking for participation on a larger scale.⁴⁴ Posse replied in the

³⁸ Zerkaulen 1926 (see note 2).

³⁹ See note 32. On the concepts of quality and “strong artistic personalities” as a criterion also in Posse’s museum work, cf. Dalbajewa 2010 (see note 37).

⁴⁰ Zerkaulen 1926 (see note 2).

⁴¹ Five works each were by Braque, Manet, Gauguin and Utrillo, four by Cézanne, etc

⁴² Coellen 1926 (see note 34).

⁴³ Hans Posse to Ministerium des Innern, 24.7.1926; Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Min. f. Volksbildung 14923, file IKA Dresden 1926, no. 54 / no. 37, vol. 1, sheets 1 and 84.

same way to Wassily Kandinsky, who had “applied” in writing from Dessau for a commission to design a room for the Bauhaus.⁴⁵

Contrasts

The premise of aiming to provide a survey of contemporary art according to the motto of artistic quality was tied to the directors’ intention of maintaining openness towards different trends: “If however this is an exhibition of living art, it must not start from the point of view of a museum but, as was explicitly demanded at the time in both cases, must display an up-to-date cross-section of contemporary work. Such exhibitions would be meaningless or would only take account of a small circle if for one reason or another the wish were to adopt a preconceived position on what was presented.”⁴⁶ One reviewer’s verdict of the attempt to provide an overview of contemporary European painting was that “one has the impression of a successful objective survey.”⁴⁷

Openness of this kind was also the precondition for the ability to manifest the contrast between more conservative and longer-established positions, and positions that were new and provocative to a wide audience. Thus the *Magdeburger General-Anzeiger* newspaper wrote that “The exhibition of works of art, too, goes its own way. The important items are presented in a loose arrangement, placed not according to movements and schools but entirely according to the artistic effect. A principle that brings disadvantages as well as benefits has been implemented: the law of opposites. Here it speaks with great forcefulness, but on the other hand approaches unartistic marginal realms. A whole cabin is occupied by Kirchner’s artificial simplicity, next to Corinth’s gripping revelations. A further pointed contrast is El Lissitzky’s Constructivist room, followed in violent contradiction by Liebermann’s mature art in a dedicated room, while next to this the artistic absolutism of the Bauhaus artists Kandinsky, Feininger and Klee shouts like a blaring fanfare.”⁴⁸

Greater clarity concerning the artistic director’s intention is shown in a description by Pevsner, an assistant during the preparations, who testifies: “The wish was to avoid at all costs the boredom of endless exhibition rooms, and therefore the exhibition was designed with as much contrast as possible. Adjacent rooms in the new building always contain tendencies that diverge as much as possible, to give continually new impulses to the viewer.”⁴⁹ This kind of thinking was undoubtedly known in the 1920s, as expressed around 1925 in the words of Lothar Schreyer (1886–1966), a dramatist and author from Dresden who was close to the Bauhaus and familiar with Jakob Böhme’s mysticism: “Harmony cannot reveal itself without consciousness of contradiction.”⁵⁰

Whereas the overall impression of the exhibition was very often praised, statements in reviews on the different countries varied considerably (depending on their focus, for example in Austrian and Czech daily newspapers). In order to characterise contributions from individual countries, consideration should be given in future research to evidence about various supporters and mediators from Prague, London, Helsinki, Paris, Stockholm, etc. on the “country collections,” as they were called in the catalogue’s foreword and elsewhere. In two of the twenty country sections, “co-curators” were involved: Wilhelm Valentiner (1880–1958), director of the Detroit Art Institute, whom Posse knew from the time when they were both assistants at the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin, took care of the contribution from the USA. The selection of paintings from the USSR (not those by Russians living abroad, to whom Posse himself attended) was made by Boris Ternovez (1884–1941), director of the Academy of Arts and the Museum of Modern Art in Moscow, who in turn was officially represented by Piotr Kogan (1872–1932), president of the Academy of Arts.

Widely differing opinions were published about the section on German art, but here too a spirit of praise was predominant: “German department pleasing.”⁵¹ From today’s point of view, the diversity of positions at the IKA is remarkable, but this may also be the reason why the exhibition has not been associated with a specific profile to this day and has not received greater attention. The canon in appreciation of Expressionism described as “moderate Modernism” is still in accordance with present-day assessments. Much less well represented, numerically at least, than these tendencies, which later and up to the present day have been greeted with interest and approval, were critical political Realism, Verismo and Dadaism, as well as the Constructivists. However, two unconventionally designed rooms received great

⁴⁴ Letter from Edmund Kesting [letterhead: “Der Weg,” Neue Schule für Malerei, Bau-Kunst, Grafik], to Hans Posse, 27.5.1925; SKD, archive, 01/GG 16, vol. 13 a, sheet 19.

⁴⁵ For a detailed discussion: Dehmer 2019 (see note 11).

⁴⁶ See note 32.

⁴⁷ Schürer 1926 (see note 31).

⁴⁸ Johannes Reichelt: ‘Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden,’ in: *Magdeburger General-Anzeiger*, 22.6.1926.

⁴⁹ Nikolaus Pevsner: ‘Rundgang durch die Internationale Kunstausstellung,’ in: *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 13.6.1926.

⁵⁰ Quoted from Iris Yvonne Wagner: ‘Die Harmonie der Gegensätze. Die Kunst von Itten, Kandinsky und Arp im Spiegel der Schriften Böhmes,’ in: Claudia Brink, Lucinda Martin (eds.): *Jakob Böhme. Alles in Allem. Die Gedankenwelt des mystischen Philosophen. Denken, Kontext, Wirkung*, Dresden 2017, pp. 167–185, here p. 168.

⁵¹ Coellen 1926 (see note 34).

recognition from art experts. Evidence for this is, on the one hand, the transfer of El Lissitzky's conception of a *Room for Constructive Art* (also known as the Room for Abstract Art) to Hanover between the autumn of 1926 and 1928, in the form of the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (Abstract Artists' Room) by Alexander Dorner (1893–1957), and on the other hand the clear influence of the Bauhaus room at the IKA on the joint presentation with works by Rudolf Belling and Lyonel Feininger curated by Ludwig Justi (1876–1951) in 1932/33 at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin in the Kronprinzenpalais.

On the question of whether the exhibition had an avant-garde character or corresponded to prevailing expectations and conventions, the answer must be ambivalent. On the one hand, the artistic directors were confronted from the very start by attacks and proposals to give centre stage to German art.⁵² Posse was guided by an idea of quality in painting that could not be considered an avant-garde outsider's view at this time and did not wish to be seen as such. Moreover, both in general and in his museum work, he acted with fundamental caution and consideration in order not to ignite conflicts, as expressed in the exhibition catalogue when he wrote of "circumstances that are not yet completely settled."⁵³ On the other hand, it can be demonstrated that it was the artistic director himself who argued for "a punch-line of the exhibition [...] that has so far not been known from similar events"⁵⁴ – the invitation to El Lissitzky in Moscow to design the avant-garde *Room for Constructive Art*. Equally, he made personal efforts to gain works by Moholy-Nagy, Gabo, Schlemmer, Baumeister, Muche and other not yet "settled" positions.⁵⁵

The Section for Art from Dresden

The extensive presentation of art from Dresden was sometimes met with approval and sometimes with disapproval, but its presence was understood: "That preferential consideration was given among the German art to works from Saxony and in particular from Dresden seems understandable and by all means justified; in his international art exhibitions, Gotthardt Kuehl too kept to the principle of ensuring the right of art from the home region to be coherently represented."⁵⁶

The exhibition committee that was responsible for this selection from Dresden consisted of painters and professors from the Kunstakademie in Dresden and the Kunstgewerbeakademie (Academy of Applied Arts), as well as from the Staatliche Kunstschule für Textilindustrie (State School of Art for the Textile Industry) in Plauen – Karl Albiker, Max Feldbauer, Otto Gussmann, Richard Müller, Paul Rössler and Otto Lange – and the independent artists Conrad Felixmüller, Bernhard Kretschmar and Wilhelm Rudolph. For years these last three had vigorously publicly campaigned for support

for young artists from Dresden in times of need. "The selection of works for the Dresden department was made, in contrast to the selection in the departments for countries, by a jury following free submissions by the artists. By dispensing with pre-selection by the exhibition director, the intention was to achieve a wide spectrum and to preclude the criticism that preference was always given only to artists who were already established."⁵⁷ The files allow only limited inferences on exactly how the collaboration between the artistic director Posse and the exhibition committee should be conceived. According to the minutes of a meeting of this committee on 9 March 1926, for example, Conrad Felixmüller (1897–1977) and Otto Lange (1879–1944), even though they were ultimately in a losing minority, voted against rooms dedicated exclusively to abstract and Constructivist art and against inviting Lissitzky to come from Moscow and Mondrian from Paris to design them.⁵⁸ The documents also show that differences of opinion were common in relation to the choice of artists from Dresden.⁵⁹ Posse had negotiated for himself a free hand in making the choice of countries and took the final decisions. In the case of the section with artists from Dresden, however, pluralistic compromise solutions and jury decisions, as described above, were more typical – here there is a need for research that includes correspondence or statements by the members of the committee. As an outsider, Oskar Schürer gave the verdict, "The only compromise at the exhibition is that the summer exhibition of Dresden artists was mixed with it; it has smuggled in many things that contrast with the overall standard. With Dresden's top-class standard, this was not necessary."⁶⁰ Another reviewer expressed himself even more clearly on the "Dresden

52 Before becoming director of the IKA, Posse had considered exhibiting the "German line" from Dürer to the nineteenth century in a special exhibition as a "piquant counterpoint" to the major exhibition; letter from Posse to Sterl, 9.12.1924; Archive of the Akademie der Künste Berlin, estate of Robert Sterl.

53 See note 32.

54 Minutes of the 6th session of the exhibition committee for the Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926 [...]; SKD, archive, 01/GG 16, vol. 13, sheets 45 f., here sheet 45. Cf. by contrast Hemken 1990 (note 7), p. 105, asserting that Posse had espoused "cultural nationalism." On the opening day of the exhibition, the minister president of Saxony stressed that it should also contribute to "making the relations of Germany to foreign countries friendlier and closer;" SKD Archive, 01/GG 16, vol. 16 c, sheets 4–6, here sheet 5.

55 Cf. correspondence in: SKD, archive, 01/GG 16, vol. 16.

56 ys 1926 (see note 15).

57 Karge 2009 (see note 10), p. 58.

58 Minutes of the 6th session of the exhibition committee for the Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926 [...]; SKD, archive, 01/GG 16 vol. 13, sheet 45 f.

59 Cf. Karge 2013 (see note 10) and others, p. 97.

60 Schürer 1926 (see note 31).

department": "Personal considerations and local circumstances restrict the cutting edge of the selection, and kitsch has even found a spot here and there."⁶¹

International Character

Almost all of the numerous nationwide reviews of the IKA emphasised that the exhibition was "the first German undertaking of this kind since the First World War."⁶² Contemporaries were conscious that the "world war [was] a time of a reputation diminished to practically nothing, also in relation to cultural work," and what an achievement it was "to succeed at all in assembling an international art exhibition of this scale and comprehensiveness."⁶³

After losing the war, Germany was dependent on food supplies from international charitable organisations, isolated in foreign policy, and torn apart by internal conflicts about war reparations and war guilt. The country was not permitted to join the League of Nations, founded in 1919, until 1926. Against massive internal opposition, German diplomacy under Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929), Reich foreign minister from 1923 onwards, pursued a policy of reconciliation with its former opponents in the West. Cultural achievements such as the IKA contributed to the recognition of Germany again on the international stage. Far-reaching significance was attributed to the exhibition: "the cultural impediment of closure in the war and post-war periods has been removed."⁶⁴

Posse's main theme in his opening speech related to the international nature of the enterprise and increased interest in Europe. He stressed the international character of the Dresden tradition and the relationships that Dresden artists maintained "from natural necessity," "because all artistic life, if it wishes to be worthy of the name, needs constant external stimulus in order to save itself from provincial stagnation and extinction."⁶⁵ In preparation for the exhibition, for example, Alfred Schulze (1878–1929), ministerial secretary of Saxony, directly approached Stresemann in 1924 with the request "to give as much support as possible with the help of the diplomatic service to the wishes of Professor Sterl, and thus to the artistically interested public in Dresden."⁶⁶ In France, as Posse reported to the Interior Ministry for the message to be passed to the Foreign Ministry, there was strong resistance to cooperation with German exhibition organisers after the First World War; many artists, museums, collectors and galleries refused.⁶⁷

Bearing this background in mind, it can be understood why it was so important to the artistic directors, first Sterl, then Posse, to borrow French modern art and works held by museums in the Soviet Union. Posse abandoned the idea only when a clear refusal was received from Moscow and it became evident that this issue also threatened loans of

works by Russian artists. In the end, a large number of the works by French Impressionists came from the collection of Oskar Schmitz in Dresden.⁶⁸ In Paris, and even more successfully in Brussels, personal contacts, including contacts to gallerists, helped the artistic director to acquire loans. This was also the case in other countries, where negotiations were easier because they were not former "enemy countries."

To summarise, the exhibition's significance derived from the following factors: firstly, from its international character or its international range, which was achieved only once during the Weimar Republic in this form; secondly, from the standard of the artistic programme; and thirdly, from the design and the architectural installation of the exhibition, which will be discussed below. An essential criterion for the success of the exhibition was the clarity and generous scale of the arrangement. Contemporaries acknowledged this with such remarks as "What is presented? Modern, not modish art from all countries of culture. How is it presented? In an unusually tasteful arrangement: [...] discreet colours, no strident 'adornment,' the paintings and the sculptures, some of them marvellous, produce an effect. That oppressive, confusing feeling that so easily assails the viewer at large exhibitions — how can I find my way through? — is avoided."⁶⁹

⁶¹ Coellen 1926 (see note 34).

⁶² Cf. Richard Horn: 'Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,' in: *Merseburger Korrespondent*, 16.9.1926, among other reviews.

⁶³ ys 1926 (see note 15).

⁶⁴ Schürer 1926 (see note 31).

⁶⁵ 'Ansprache des Herrn Direktor Dr. Posse zur Eröffnungsfeier der "Internationalen Kunstausstellung" am 12. Juni 1926,' typewritten manuscript; SKD, archive, 01/GG 16 vol. 16 c, sheets 107–111, here sheet 108 (page 2 of the manuscript).

⁶⁶ Letter from Ministerialdirektor [Alfred] Schulze, Dresden, to Reichsminister [des Auswärtigen Gustav Stresemann], Berlin, 28.11.1924; Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Min. f. Volksbildung 14923, file IKA Dresden 1926, file 54/ no. 37, vol. 1, sheet 1. Here it was argued "that the section on Russian art is, however, of very great importance for the overall standard of the exhibition and will certainly exert great attractive power."

⁶⁷ Ministerium des Innern, Berlin, to the Sächsisches Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 9.7.1926; *ibid.*, sheet 82; Hans Posse to the Ministerium des Innern, 24.7.1926; *ibid.*, sheet 84. The Auswärtiges Amt had asked for a report on experiences of the behaviour of "the non-German organisations and artists' associations, especially those that belonged to the former enemy states."

⁶⁸ Further loans came from the Moderne Galerie in Prague and private collections, including in Copenhagen.

⁶⁹ o. A.: 'Internationale Kunstausstellung 1926 in Dresden', in: *Wesermünder Neuste Nachrichten*, 7.8.1926.

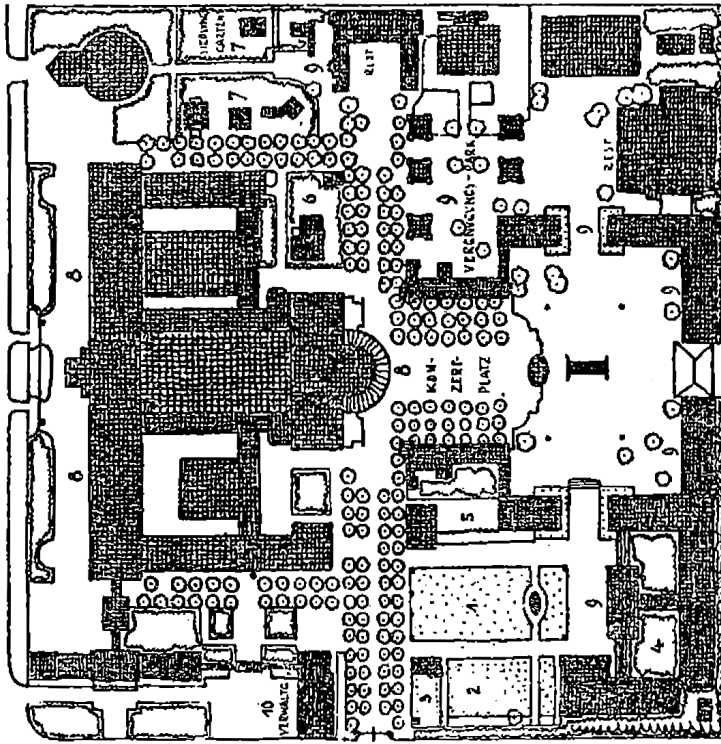


Abb. 4 Plan of the exhibition grounds on Stübelallee (excerpt), 1926, in: *Dresden 1926. Internationale Kunstausstellung. Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung*, special edition of *Cicerone*, Dresden 1926, p. 54

The Site and Architecture of the Exhibition

The circuit of the IKA began in the new Städtisches Kunstausstellungsgebäude (Municipal Art Exhibition Building), which was built parallel to Lennéstrasse by Hans Erlwein and Carl Hirschmann in the style of a Neoclassical pavilion and opened in 1914, and continued in the western part of the older (1896) Ausstellungspalast. The latter (ill. 4), a structure in several parts, had been extended for the purpose of the exhibition in 1926 by adding rooms 29 to 35, which enclosed a square courtyard (ill. 5). This part was constructed without a power supply for temporary use in summer (ill. pp. 37–49). The architectural circumstances of the different wings were therefore highly diverse.

In the newspaper *Welt am Abend* (6 January 1928), the architectural publicist Adolf Behne described the IKA as the best exhibition venue ever created in Germany.⁷⁰ The architectural outfitting of the rooms was praised by many other contemporaries. It was the work of Heinrich Tessenow, professor of architecture and head of the architecture department at the Kunstakademie of Dresden from 1920 to 1926. He belonged to the generation of reformers who hoped for renewal, on the one hand, and the maintenance of humanist traditions, on the other hand, from artisans. His declared aim was the unity of function, material and constructional consistency, and his means of expression was elegance combined with simplicity. He was mainly engaged in residential construction in rural areas, and in Dresden his manner of

working was principally known through the Festspielhaus in Hellerau, built in 1911. Through his acquaintance with Robert Sterl he also had personal contacts to the professorial body of the Kunstakademie.⁷¹

For the IKA, Tessenow succeeded in combining the various older and newer parts of the building into a design with a unified appearance, both through clear, unadorned and bright rooms and through slender lateral walls with a finely rhythmic composition. All elements such as dividing walls, cladding, etc. were taken with consistent logic up to the edges of the ceilings and the corners, without irritating details and interruptions. He thereby created clear walls as a background for viewing paintings and sculptures without any distraction. The calm, bright effect of the rooms was also achieved by covering the ceilings, where skylights were present, and also by covering the floor – in most of the rooms with natural fibre, likely coconut fibre. Alexis Joachimides described the practice, new from 1921 onwards, of designing exhibition rooms as neutral spaces like studios, as the “ideal of the artist’s atelier” in contrast to the older practice in museums of simulating a living room.⁷² Even before the First World War, Hans Posse himself had created a consistent and exemplary presentation in the remodelling of the Gemäldegalerie at the Zwinger and had eschewed an “impression of excessive pomp,” using simple wall coverings of dyed linen instead of template patterns, and had gained experience of the effect of skylights, etc.⁷³

In its reduction and clarity, several aspects of Tessenow’s design for the IKA approached the principle of the white cube, which did not become the norm until a much later date. The austere emphasis of symmetry, the classical character and the room heights in Tessenow’s work possess a quiet aestheticising pathos that is clearly distinct from a Bauhaus-related aesthetic. Moreover, the rooms were characterised by natural materials and proportions that did not engender any distanced, technical spatial impression. The consistently reduced, elegant, delicate solutions for the sequences of rooms and the inserted partition walls on which the paintings hung were described in compelling terms by

⁷⁰ Marco De Michelis: *Heinrich Tessenow, 1876–1950. Das architektonische Gesamtwerk*, Stuttgart 1991, p. 279.

⁷¹ Cf. letter from Heinrich Tessenow to Robert Sterl, undated (between 1925 and 1930); Robert-Sterl-Haus Archive, Naundorf (Sächsische Schweiz).

⁷² Alexis Joachimides: *Die Museumsreformbewegung in Deutschland und die Entstehung des modernen Museums 1880–1940*, Dresden 2001, pp. 187–224.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, e.g. pp. 185 and 187.

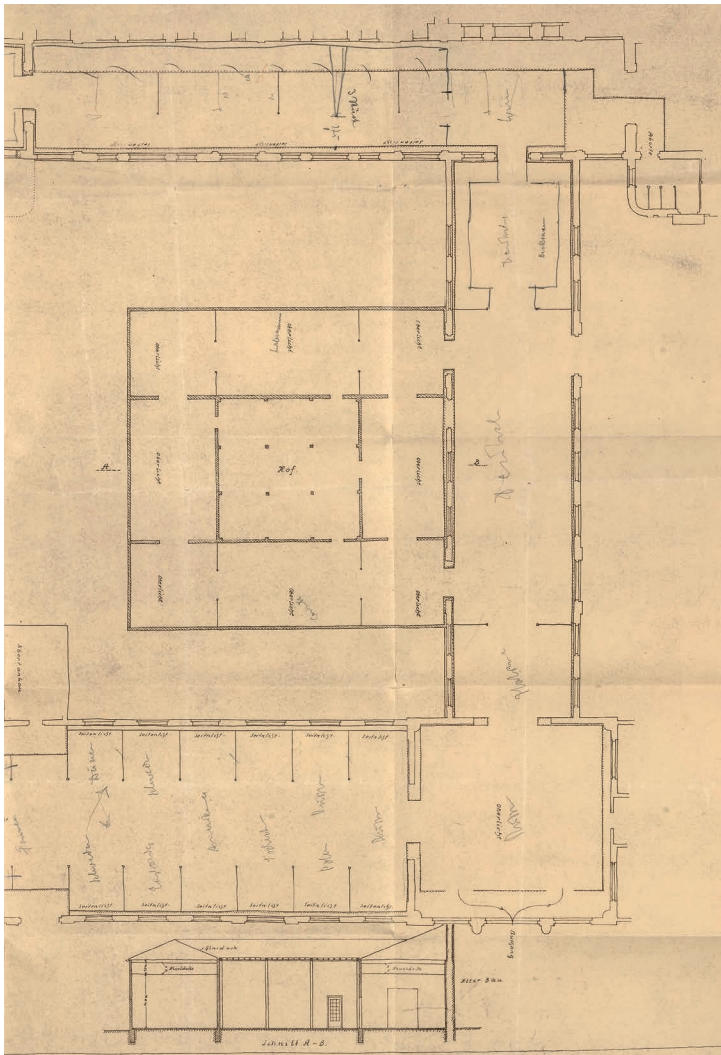


Abb. 5 Plan of the Städtischer Ausstellungspalast (excerpt), 1925–26, with depictions of the annexe by Heinrich Tessenow; below: rooms 29 to 31, cross-section
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, archive, file 01/GG 16 vol. 16c, Ausstellungspalast, plan 1

Nikolaus Pevsner in 1926. Annotated excerpts from this review are assigned below to the photographs by Alexander Paul Walther, which in their totality reflect the most important attributes of the exhibition circuit.⁷⁴

The interaction of Tessenow's and Posse's work was congenial. In the layout of sequences of rooms and booths, the architect aimed to achieve stringent sight lines – and the exhibition's artistic director also employed symmetry and visual axes. For example, he planned to place Munch's painting *Life*, which was already acquired from the exhibition in 1926, in a central position in the Gemäldegalerie, an aim that was not, however, carried out until after 1930, in the eastern hall of the Semperbau.⁷⁵

A characteristic of the exhibition director's presentation of the paintings in the IKA was the decision to hang them with the lower edge at a uniform height, forming an almost continuous band. This, judging by surviving photographs, was already one of the most common methods of hanging in exhibitions around 1900. In this way, in Dresden in 1926, a high degree of attention and tranquillity was achieved for

the paintings against bright, unadorned walls. The horizontal line of the lower edge produced calmness not only in an architectural sense but equally in relation to the diversity of styles and appearances of the paintings and the great diversity of their frames. Verdicts on the result were mainly favourable, but some were negative: "The rooms that Tessenow has designed with genteel restraint make it a pleasure to take in the paintings. Here the exhibition has been composed in an exemplary manner that most effectively supports Posse's style of hanging, taking its cue from the demands of the paintings and taking account of their decorative harmonies."⁷⁶ Sophie Küppers from Hanover, who represented avant-garde artists such as Lissitzky and Mondrian, made the following criticism in the *Hannoverscher Kurier*, not least in defence of Lissitzky's ideas about renewing the practice of exhibitions by covering some paintings: "With a minimum of effort, Professor Tessenow has fitted clear, bright rooms of great nobility into the ugly old exhibition halls for the exhibited works of art. The rhythm of the smooth walls, the music of the architectural overlapping and the absoluteness of the space are, however, brutally destroyed by a forest of paintings crammed closely together and by sculpture that cuts into all lines of sight." Her review also illuminates the difficulty of the task: "After the chaos of the thicket of paintings, the visitor whose eye and brain have been abused by the thousand different expressions of ego and individual statements will perceive Tessenow's delightful courtyard as a salvation."⁷⁷ (ill. 8; cf. ill. p. 47)

The impression gained by Gustav Pauli (1866–1938), a museum director from Hamburg, strikes a completely different tone. In a letter from the IKA dated 17 June 1926, he reported that "Its content has sensibly been assembled by a single responsible person, the Dresden museum director Hans Posse; the arrangement and decoration of the rooms is the masterly work of the architect Tessenow. In fact this is not decoration. Tessenow has confined himself to reducing the height of the rooms to a pleasant degree by fixing sailcloth and giving the walls a uniform covering of bright, whiteish fabric. Only a single row of paintings has been hung

⁷⁴ Pevsner 1926 (see note 49). Henrik Karge first drew attention to the brilliance of these descriptions, cf. Karge 2000 (see note 8).

⁷⁵ Cf. Dalbajewa 2015 (see note 9), ill. p. 267.

⁷⁶ Schürer 1926 (see note 31)..

⁷⁷ Sophie Küppers: 'Internationale Kunstausstellung in Dresden,' in: *Hannoverscher Kurier*, 17.8.1926.

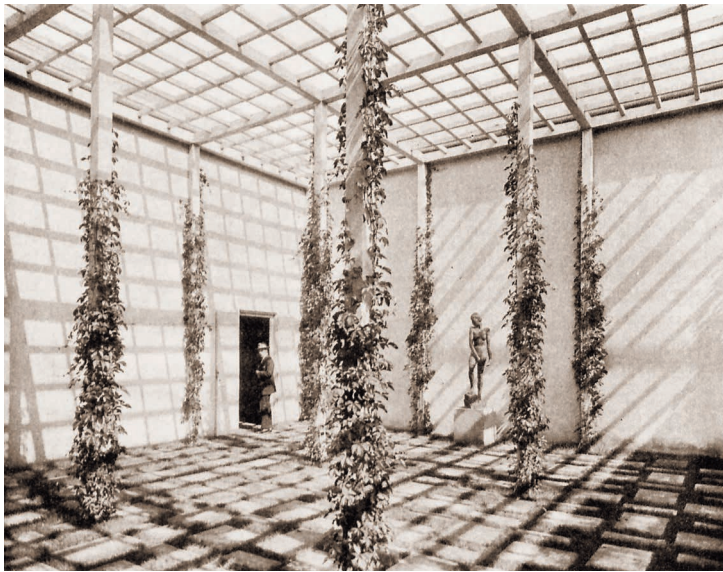
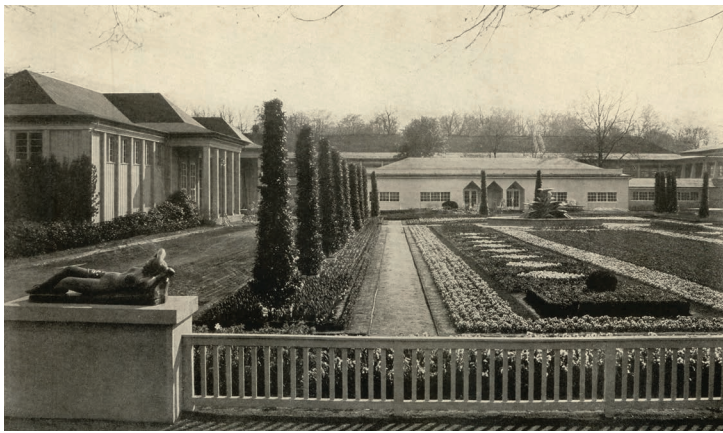


Abb. 7 Title illustration for the article by Otto Wilhelm Wulle: 'Die architektonische Gestaltung der Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung Dresden 1926,' in: *Der Neubau. Halbmonatsschrift für Baukunst*, 8th year, issue 18 (24.9.1926), p. 205

Abb. 6 Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung 1926, Dresden: large show garden at the main entrance. Photograph by Alexander Paul Walther, in: Dresden 1926. *Internationale Kunstausstellung. Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung*, special edition of *Cicerone*, Dresden 1926, p. 2

Abb. 8 Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926 (IKA): view of the courtyard. Photograph by Alexander Paul Walther. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, archive, file 01/GG 16 vol. 16 c



The Visual Sources – the Photographer

The IKA's catalogue names Alexander Paul Walther as the official architectural photographer under the heading "management," alongside the commercial management, accounts, film department and other functions. Walther, born in 1893, most likely in Dresden, joined the Sächsischer Photographen-Bund (Saxon Association of Photographers) in 1918. In 1919, the trade journal *Nachrichtenblatt für das Photographenhandwerk* reported that he had "set up as a photographer at Reckestrassse no. 2."⁸² This studio in Dresden-Plauen is known to have existed until 1928.⁸³ By 1920 Walther had established a reputation for aerial photography; since 1922 he had worked as an exhibition photographer for the *Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit* (ill. 6). In 1926 he also published postcards and a folded leaflet for the *Jubiläums-Gartenschau*.⁸⁴

In the Dresden Technical Collections there is an album of 122 photographs of the Jubiläumsgartenbau exhibition, including seventeen prints of Walther's photographs of the IKA. The Stadtmuseum Dresden (Dresden City Museum) also

throughout, so that each individual work ideally comes into its own."⁷⁸

Cooperation between Tessenow and Posse laid the groundwork for a modernity that the exhibition was able to radiate beyond Dresden. In July 1928, Ludwig Justi, director of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, described Tessenow's work at the IKA, which he must therefore have visited personally, as "the best that has been done in this field so far."⁷⁹ At this time Tessenow had already been commissioned to remodel the Kronprinzenpalais, which suggests a reception of the IKA in Berlin in the person of the architect alone. Posse, too, further pursued the "'idea of concentration' on the exhibited paintings" in design,⁸⁰ both as maker of the exhibition in Venice in 1930 and in the gallery in Dresden: "The Neue Staatliche Gemäldegalerie, fitted out in 1931, was the first major art museum in Germany with a presentation entirely directed to simulating a studio space."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Quoted from Christian Ring: *Gustav Pauli und die Hamburger Kunsthalle. Reisebriefe*, Berlin/Munich 2010, p. 625. At the same time, Pauli criticised the "room of abstract modern art;" *ibid.*, pp. 625–627.

⁷⁹ Quoted from De Michelis 1991 (see note 70), p. 279. On Tessenow's oeuvre, see also Gerda Wangerin et al.: *Heinrich Tessenow. Ein Baumeister (1876–1950). Leben – Lehre – Werk*, Essen 1976.

⁸⁰ Joachimides 2001 (see note 72), p. 223.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁸² *Nachrichtenblatt für das Photographenhandwerk* 26 (1919), p. 281. Warm thanks are due to Regine Richter and Stephan Dahme for biographical research.

⁸³ His company later operated under the name "Dresdner Farbenfotografische Werkstätte (DFW) A. P. Walther Dresden," from 1929 based at Stübelallee 14, later in Radebeul.

⁸⁴ Cf. also the article by Katja Leiskau: 'Moderne im Bild. Architekturfotografie in Dresden 1919 bis 1933', in: Claudia Quiring, Hans-Georg Lippert (eds.), *Dresdner Moderne 1919–1933. Neue Ideen für Stadt, Architektur und Menschen*, exh. cat. Stadtmuseum Dresden, Dresden 2019, pp. 210–221, especially pp. 211–213.





Abb. 9 Five views of the IKA (from left to right: rooms no. 6, 10, 12, including 4 and 34), in: *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, no. 27, 4.7.1926, p. 6. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, archive

Abb. 10–14 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: photographs of room 29 at the IKA. Kirchner Museum Davos

architect's clear-cut sight lines, his strictly geometrical divisions of space and his emphatically sober but also engaging rhythmic presentation.⁸⁶

All of Walther's interior views were taken without visitors while the exhibition was closed. That the photographer had been given instructions to this effect or that individuals responsible for the exhibition accompanied him is shown by the fact that exhibits were demonstrably moved for the photographs, such as Lissitzky's diagonally crossed stand for the sculpture by Naum Gabo. The reason for this can be appreciated: whereas Tessenow aimed for balanced symmetry, Lissitzky countered this in "his" *Room for Constructive Art* – through a shift of axis in the placing of the sculpture, an irregular arrangement of the wall panels, and an effect of rotational movement in the space.

Elsewhere, too, works may have been moved in the room or differently placed. In two views of room 26, the same sculpture of a nude woman appears in two different positions (cf. ill. P. 31 and 33), and in the courtyard that was praised as an "architectural gem" (Pevsner 1926) none of the works by Georg Kolbe, which were placed there according to the catalogue, are visible in Walther's photographs – in contrast to another view, published in the journal *Der Neubau* towards the end of the IKA, which shows the *Emporsteigende* (Woman Ascending) in the background (ill. 7, 8).⁸⁷

That Alexander Paul Walther focused more on spatial impressions and the exhibition architecture than on the programme of paintings is evident when a comparison is made with the small number of images, presumably by a different photographer, that record individual groups of paintings and walls.

How many photographs exist that record the exhibited works is a question that to date remains open. The present evidence consists of five photographs published in the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* (ill. 9) and five by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner of the German-Swiss room (ill. 10–14) in the Kirchner Museum in Davos.

possesses an album in several parts with Walther's photographs of the Jahresschau in 1926, serving to record his work for this event, which by that time went back five years. A further album of his photographs is held in the Stadtarchiv Dresden (City Archive), but it only relates to the Jahresschau in 1925.

The Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden's archive has the largest holdings of Walther's photographs of the IKA in 1926, a total of twenty; a further view of El Lissitzky's *Room for Constructive Art* is in the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, and there is a second in the Kupferstich-Kabinett (Collection of Prints, Drawings and Photographs) in Dresden. The following photographs of the rooms, published in their entirety and in context for the first time, are characterised by a sober visual language: Walther's photographs have a brilliant perspective effect and dispense with dramatic effects, as is particularly evident in his neutral handling of light. In their austerity of composition and consistency of structure, they match the effective simplicity of the architect's spaces.

Original negatives have not been found or are lost. Walther clearly used a plate camera; large-format negatives were a prerequisite for high-resolution, low-grain prints. To produce an adequate representation of the quality of Tessenow's architectural forms, distorted lines were avoided in the photographs.⁸⁵ Walther's camera often captures large areas of the ceiling, crops paintings (which thus structure the composition) and therefore puts itself primarily at the service of the architectural order. Particular attention was paid to the extensive sequences of rooms leading into deep perspectives, illustrating the professionalism with which Walther was able to perceive Tessenow's ideas. His views are a congenial representation of the intentions of the

⁸⁵ Konstanze Krüger, SKD, kindly drew attention to this.

⁸⁶ In 1930, photographs by Walther on interior designs by Tessenow appeared in a widely circulated publication; see Walter Müller-Wulckow: *Die deutsche Wohnung der Gegenwart*, Königstein im Taunus 1930, pp. 15 and 34. This was published in the series *Die Blauen Bücher* by Langewiesche-Verlag.

⁸⁷ Warm thanks to Claudia Quiring, Stadtmuseum Dresden, for the information and source.



Each of the former group of photographs brings sculptures, almost dramatically large, into the foreground and thus puts the focus on attractive ensembles of works (all of them combinations of painting and sculpture), without depicting the ceiling or floor. Rooms as a whole and details such as the design of walls and ceiling are either not recorded or are merely background. In the newspaper reproductions, the photographs are also framed by arches and cropped, and thus manifest an aesthetic that fundamentally departs from the austerity of Tessenow's designs and the visual language of Alexander Paul Walther.

Five other photographs from the rooms of the IKA derive from Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, previously an artist of the group *Die Brücke*, who was staying in Germany at that time and visited the IKA in Dresden in June. The original negatives are photographic plates in 8 × 11.8 cm format, kept at the

Kirchner Museum in Davos (inv. no. 1/101–104 and, so far unpublished, 104_2: a photograph taken with a long exposure showing the outlines of visitors in room 28 in front of three paintings by Alexander Kanoldt; ill. 14). In these photographs the artist made a record of room no. 29, which he had arranged.⁸⁸ He, too, photographed the works much closer and scarcely included architecture in the view. Nevertheless, knowledge of the exact sequence of hanging and of the framing is significant evidence for reconstructions of the exhibition.

⁸⁸ Gabriele Lohberg (ed.): *Kirchner Museum Davos. Katalog der Sammlung*, vol. 2. *Fotografie. Porträt, Landschaft, Interieur, Ausstellung*, Davos 1994, pp. 152–154, here p. 154. Albert Müller, whose work was also exhibited in room 29, reported that "We Swiss artists with Kirchner have an excellent hanging and this room, along with that of the abstract artists, is conspicuously new, the only thing of its kind that exists."



One of the room views taken by Kirchner (ill. 10) looks through into the adjacent room, no. 36. A hat and coat and other items are lying on the floor in the corner, as if they are a spontaneous signature testifying to presence and participation, presumably on the part of the artist and photographer.⁸⁹

Through the preservation, assessment and publication of visual documents such as these, an illustrative – if rudimentary – impression can be reconstructed of an exhibition that may be described as epoch-making in a number of ways. The IKA in 1926 was not only “the most interesting exhibition by far of contemporary art since the Sonderbund show in Cologne” (during the Weimar Republic),⁹⁰ but is also regarded to this day as a milestone for later international art exhibitions, particularly for the first Documenta in 1955. The work committee at the latter date went so far as to emphasise the parallels between the programmes of the exhibitions in Dresden and Kassel, whose intention was “in a clear, succinct selection and on a European scale to trace the lines of development of the visual arts of our century [...] in a documentary manner and to identify with the greatest possible focus the positions that have been attained today.”⁹¹ In

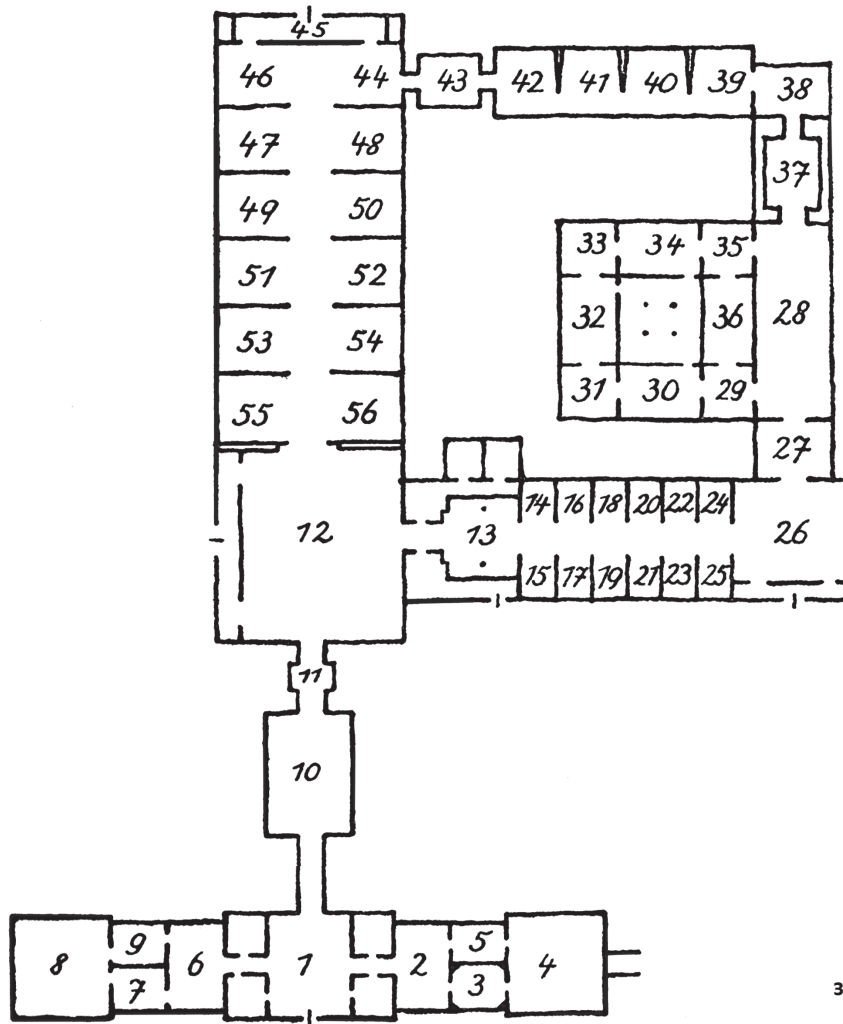
the future, the virtual reconstruction of the IKA, which is currently being undertaken at the Kunsthochschule Kassel in collaboration with the Albertinum of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, will be an instrument that allows even more precise appraisals to be made.⁹²

⁸⁹ “Kirchner demonstrates the youthfulness and expansiveness of his artistic aim by occupying the room devoted to him with only two of his own paintings, and has joined with like-minded younger artists, Scherer, Albert Müller and Camenisch from Basel and the German Bauknecht, to make a fine room.” Georg Schmidt, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 5.8.1926; quoted *ibid.*, p. 152. Cf. also Dalbajewa 2008 (see note 17).

⁹⁰ Mello 1926 (see note 33).

⁹¹ Quoted from Manfred Schneckenburger (ed.): *documenta. Idee und Institution. Tendenzen – Konzepte – Materialien*, Munich 1983, p. 32. Cf. Also Harald Kimpel, Karin Stengel: *documenta 1955. Erste Internationale Kunstausstellung – eine fotografische Rekonstruktion*, Bremen 1995.

⁹² Kai-Uwe Hemken took up this idea in 2018 and related it to the manner of design of the two exhibitions; see *idem*: ‘Kuratorische Steuerung kultureller Diskurse: documenta 1955,’ in: Simon Grosspietsch, Kai-Uwe Hemken (eds.), *documenta 1955. Ein wissenschaftliches Lesebuch*, Kassel 2018, pp. 127–167, especially pp. 135 and 139–142.

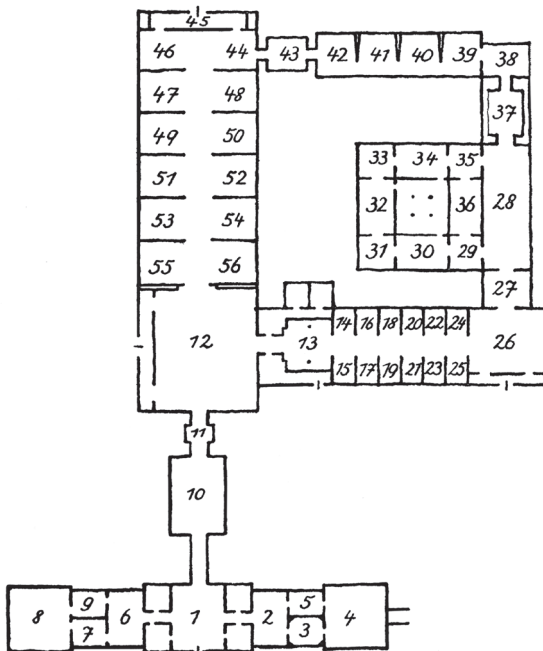


- 1 Entrance lobby
- 2 O. Schmitz Collection
- 3-5 France
- 6 France, Spain
- 7 Belgium
- 8 Belgium, France
- 9 France
- 10 Switzerland
- 11 Barlach
- 12 Norway, Sweden, Denmark
- 13 Finland
- 14-16 Norway, Sweden, Denmark
- 17-20 Great Britain, America
- 21-23 Czechoslovakia, Poland
- 24-26 Russia
- 27 Italy
- 28 Germany
- 29 German Swiss
- 30 Germany
- 31 Abstract art
- 32-36 Germany
- 37 Netherlands
- 38 Vienna
- 39 Hungary
- 40-46 Germany
- 47-56 Dresden

Main entrance to the Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926. Two bronze sculptures by Selmar Werner, *Bogenschütze* (Archer) and *Diana*, stand on the lawn in front of the portico (above a sculpture by Georg Wrba). The Städtisches Kunstausstellungsgebäude, slightly set back parallel to Lennéstrasse, was built in Neoclassical style between 1914 and 1916 to designs by Hans Erlwein and Carl Hirschmann, and serves as the entrance in 1926. Through this structure, connected with the old exhibition building of 1896, "one reaches the well-known large lobby [not shown], which some will admittedly not recognise. It has been given a cladding by the architect of the art exhibition, Heinrich Tessenow, and now, devoid of all decoration, achieved its effect only through well-judged proportions."

Nikolaus Pevsner, 'A Circuit of the Internationale Kunstausstellung,' in: *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 13.6.1926

The exhibition buildings existent at that time were destroyed by bombing of the area shortly before the end of the Second World War.





From the exhibition room for Norway, Sweden, Denmark (no. 12), dark in this photograph, the camera looks straight ahead into the room sequence of the Dresden department; on the left at the front in room 55 are, among other works, the figure *Stehender Mann* (Standing Man) by Paul Berger and the broad-format painting *Roter Diwan* (Red Divan) by Pol Cassel. Behind are the adjacent rooms nos. 53, 51, 49, 47 and 46. In the line of sight at the end of the room sequence stands the monumental plaster figure *Pallas Athene* (1924–25) by Karl Albiker.

According to Nikolaus Pevsner in the *Dresdner Anzeiger* on 13.6.1926, the architect Heinrich Tessenow had used light-weight construction to divide the large room “most beautifully by means of lateral walls into twelve, large, bright sections with a wide passage through the middle [...]. Note how the white supporting beams on the ceiling of the room in Dresden, undoubtedly a structural necessity, are used to divide the rooms and to lend clarity to the whole.”

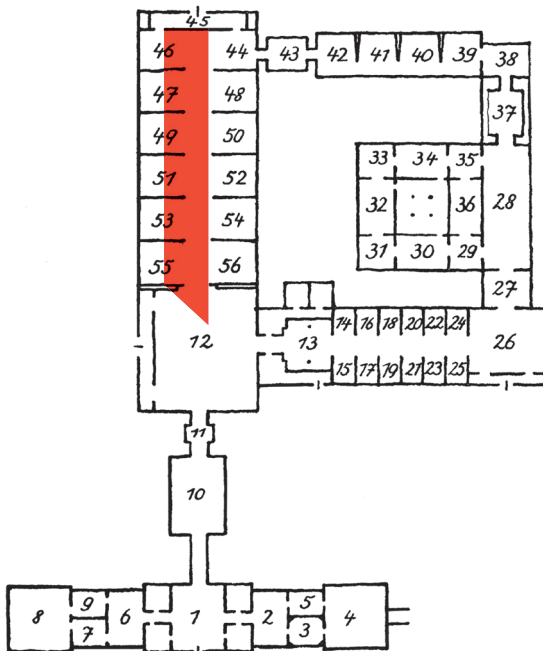


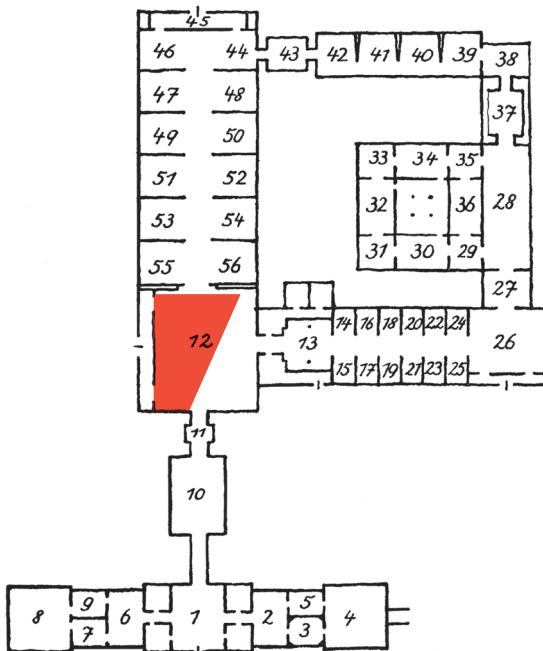


PHOTO WALTHER
DUITZ/JEROMEKESRZ

View of room 12: Norway, Sweden, Denmark. Balanced lighting dominates the effect of the room. The entire ceiling is covered with linen-weave fabric in a natural colour, ensuring even diffuse light. The design of the floor and ceiling and the uniform colour of the smooth, undivided wall surfaces are elements that lend unity to all of the rooms with their diversity of construction.

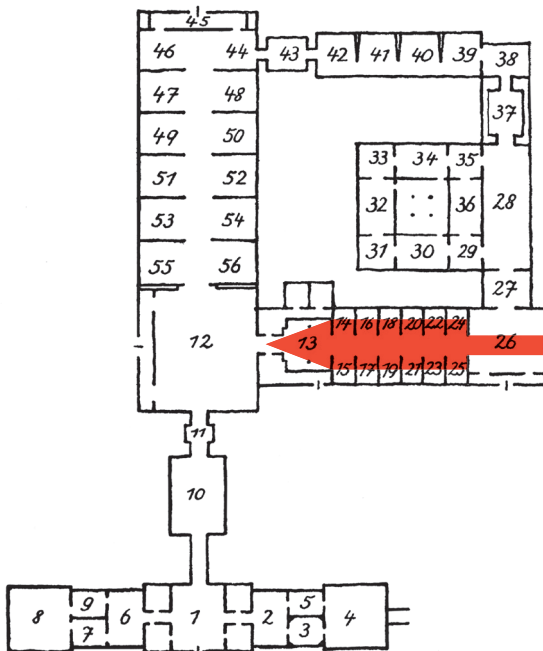
The central, inserted wall – on the viewer’s left when entering the room – lies in the sight line of the wing that adjoins to the right (rooms 13 to 26). The two openings for illumination are staged as symmetrical surfaces and rise with logical consistency to just below the ceiling. In an axial position in the centre of this wall is Edvard Munch’s painting *Life* (1908) which the city of Dresden purchased in 1927–28 and was later hung as a loan in the Gemäldegalerie in the Semperbau, also as a “central painting” (Posse). In 1937 it was classified as “degenerate” and confiscated. Today it is displayed in the city hall of Oslo.

The sculptures in front of the windows are by Hermann Haller and Johannes C. Bjerg (left) and by Kai Nielsen (right). The figure in the foreground is Einar Utzon-Frank’s *Athena*.



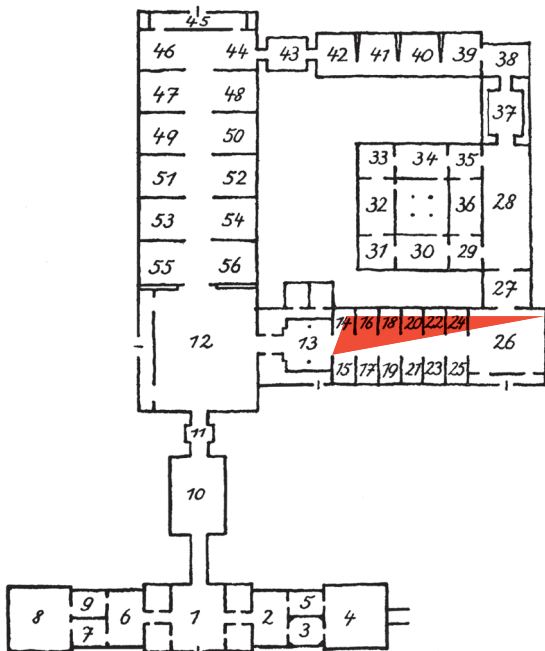


A view from the passage leading from room 12 into room 13 (Finland), which is illuminated from above, and to the sequence of rooms leading as far as room 26. Walther's photograph emphasises the strict central perspective and austere symmetry. The enfilade consists of six booths or rooms each on the left and the right. They open from the dark middle passage and are laterally illuminated by windows. The line of sight ends at a work on several panels in room 26 (Russia), *The Spanish Women* (1925) by Natalia Goncharova. The frames on both sides of the passage in the foreground each contain three reliefs by Hannes Autere.





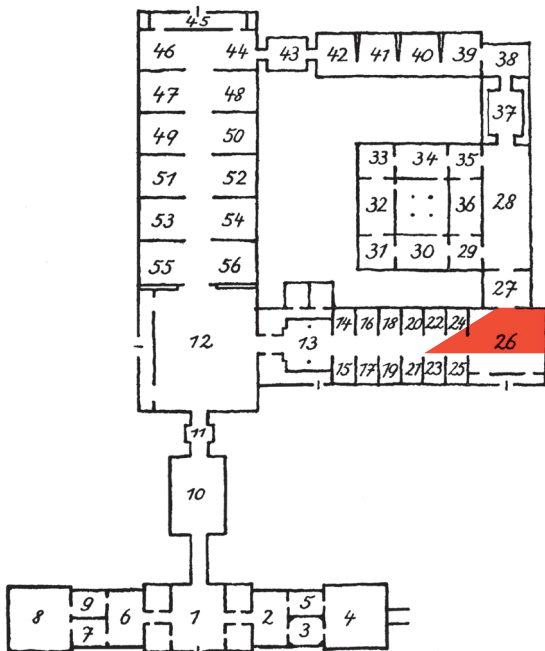
View of rooms 14, 16, 18, 20, 22 and 24, where works from Scandinavia, America, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Russia are exhibited. The photographer is standing in room 15. On the left in room 14 hangs Isaac Grünewald's *Portrait of Tollie Zellmann* (1919). In the other section of the Scandinavian department (room 16) at the centre is Edvard Weie's vertical-format painting *Nude Girl* (1923). The picture rails on the slender partition walls, a functional element, are discreetly placed slightly below the ceiling.





The rooms shown here, cropped, are no. 24 and the large corner room no. 26, brighter thanks to its skylight. Works by Russian and Soviet painters and sculptors were exhibited here. At the front left a self-portrait and a double portrait (both 1924) by Robert Falk are recognisable; in the room beyond, in addition to the *Spanish Women* (1925) by Natalia Goncharova, are paintings by Marc Chagall, sculptures by Kogan Moissej and other works.

This photograph demonstrates how the paintings, closely placed in a row almost without a gap, are aligned by their lower edge. The structure of the floor covering, obviously made from woven coconut fibre, is also clearly discernible.

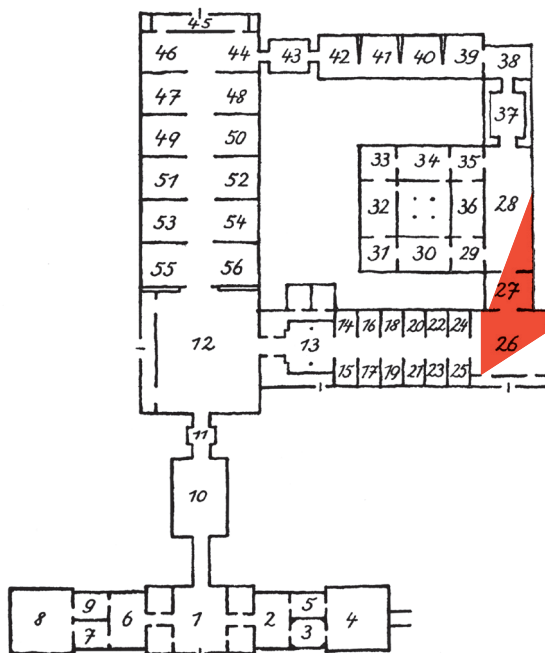




The viewer's position in this photograph is in room 26 (Russia). Adjoining in the background are rooms 27 (Italy) and 28 (Germany). Among the paintings seen on the right are works by Alexander Deyneka (*Football*), Yuri Pimenov (*Skiers*) and Marc Chagall (*The Jew, Sabbath*), and to the left of the doorway David Shterenberg's *Still-life with Cabbage* and above it *Autumn: Armenian Landscape* by Martiros Saryan.

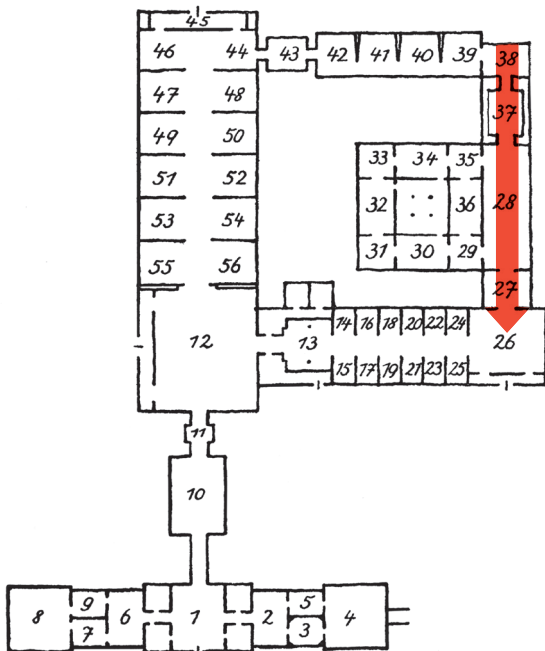
The plinths for the sculptures, like the walls, were clearly covered, but with a darker fabric.

Among the paintings visible through the doorway to room 27 (Italy) is *Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bal Tabarin* (1912) by Gino Severini (today in the Museum of Modern Art, New York).





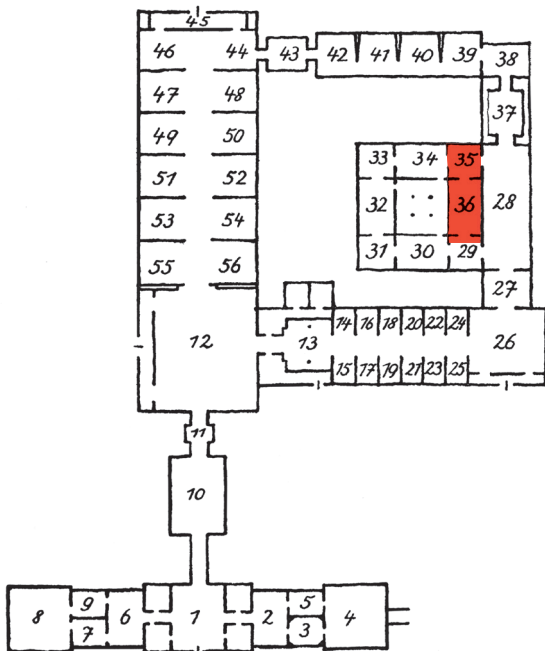
View from room 26 (Russia) through rooms 27, 28 and 37 (Italy, Germany and Netherlands). At the end of the main view axe is room 38 (Vienna) with the centrally positioned painting *Die Jungfrau* (The Virgin, 1913) by Gustav Klimt (National Gallery, Prague). In front of it, on the left in room 28, stand two monumental sculptures by Wilhelm Lehmbruck, *Grosse Kniende* (Large Kneeling Figure) and *Emporsteigender Jüngling* (Young Man Ascending). On the right of the opening leading to room 37 hangs the painting [*Mädchen mit Pfingstrosen*] ([Girl with] Peonies) by Alexej von Jawlensky (1909, today in the Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal).





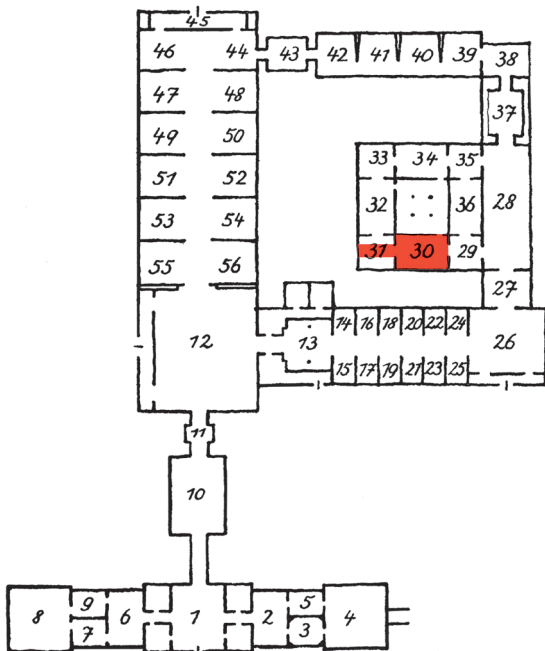
View from room 29 (German-Swiss artists) to room 36 (Germany). At the front on the right, cropped, is *Bahnhof Davos* (Davos Station, 1925) by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. The marble sculpture in the middle of the next room is *Parze* (1922–1926) by Edwin Scharff, and on the right-hand wall hang paintings by Christian Landenberger, Wilhelm Trübner, Hans Thoma and others.

In the background is room 35, where the exhibits include *Sommergäste* (Summer Guests, 1925) by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and the sculpture *Christ Dead* (1913) by Wilhelm Gerstel. Light-coloured curtains are attached at both doorways – as is obviously done between the rooms in Tessenow's entire new building. There is no power supply in this annexe.





View of room 30, with paintings by Lovis Corinth and sculptures by Ernesto de Fiori, looking towards room 31. In the line of sight is El Lissitzky's *Room for Constructive Art* with a *Proun* by the same artist as a point de vue. The fountain sculpture by Naum Gabo, which had in fact been placed almost at the centre of room 31 (cf. pp. 41, 43, 45), was obviously moved aside to take this photograph. The two rooms can be separated by drawing the light-coloured curtains. To the sides of the doorway hang Corinth's painting *Christus am Kreuz* (Christ on the Cross; left) and *Geschlachteter Ochse* (Slaughtered Ox; right).

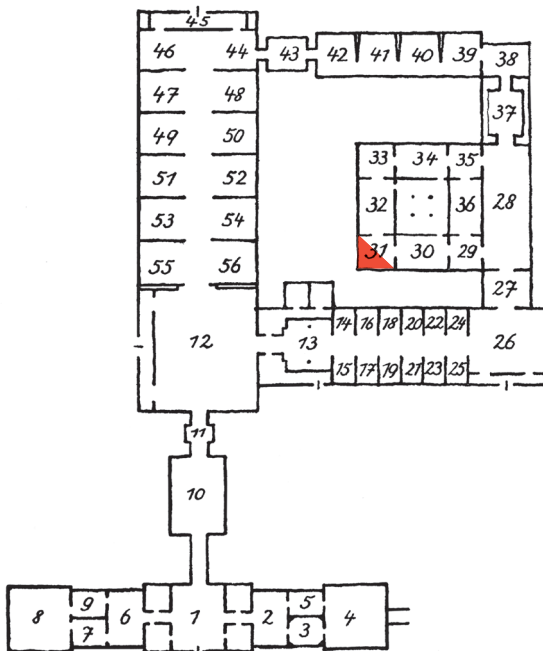




El Lissitzky had been commissioned to design the *Room for Constructive Art* (also known as Room for Abstract Art, no. 31). Lissitzky stated that "The room [...] is intended to set a standard for rooms in which new art is shown to the public." He addressed the task of creating conditions for better perception of the works.

The wooden battens on the walls, seven centimetres thick, are white on one side, black on the other, and painted at the front in the same grey as the wall. Thus the background to the work changes as the beholder moves. In this way Lissitzky, who worked as an artist and architect in Moscow, attempted to "dissolve" the wall surfaces. The viewer was therefore to regard them as an optical background rather than as "supporting or protecting walls."

The exhibited paintings are by Piet Mondrian, Francis Picabia and László Moholy-Nagy (on the left-hand wall) and by El Lissitzky (right). At the centre of the room is a model for a fountain by Naum Gabo (now in the collection of Tate, London).

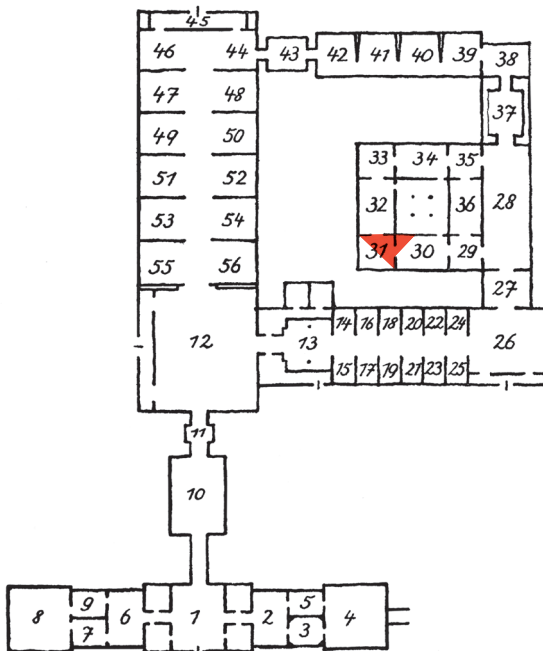




In order to avoid an “impression of being crammed full,” El Lissitzky designed wall panels with movable perforated metal sheets for the *Room for Constructive Art* (no. 31) that could be pushed up and down to cover up one picture at a time. In this way, visitors could decide which selection of works they wanted to concentrate on. Lissitzky’s aim was thus to “activate” the viewer, who was “lulled into a certain passivity by walking past walls of paintings.”

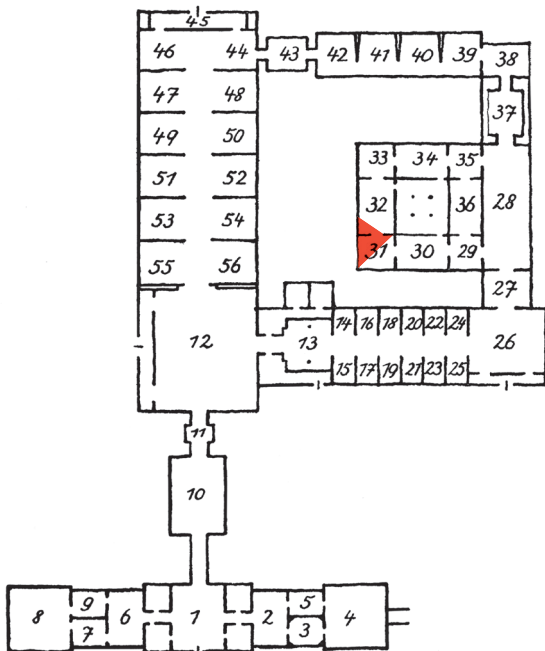
In the photograph (the archive of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden holds two slightly different prints), a painting by Alexej von Jawlensky can be seen in the upper panel, and one by Paul Klee below. To the right, on the wall with wooden battens, is a painting by László Moholy-Nagy. All exhibits in room no. 31 are identified in the catalogue book for the exhibition *Visionary Spaces. Kandinsky, Mondrian, Lissitzky and the Abstract-Constructivist Avant-Garde in Dresden 1919 to 1932, Dresden 2019*.

In the background on the right, paintings by Lovis Corinth hang in the previous room, no. 30.





Room for Constructive Art by El Lissitzky (no. 31), with paintings by El Lissitzky (*Round Proun*), Oskar Schlemmer, László Moholy-Nagy and Georg Muche. The stand that Lissitzky designed for the sculpture by Naum Gabo relates to a rotational movement in the room created by the varying widths of the wall panels. On the top-lit ceiling we see stripes, whose purpose is likely to generate cold blue and warm yellow light in order to attain various lighting effects for the perception of the paintings. On the right in the background hang paintings by Max Liebermann in the adjacent room 32.





40



View of the courtyard, which was not covered. The sculptures by Georg Kolbe placed here were of no interest to the architectural photographer as a subject. The courtyard, like an atrium, was surrounded by rooms 29 to 36 and served as a place to linger. On the right, the glass dome of a corner room of the Ausstellungsgebäude is visible through the lattice.

In his review of 13.6.1926, Nikolaus Pevsner turned his attention to the function of this space in the exhibition circuit: "In one place, however, Tessenow, entirely free and without concern for existing rooms whose interior he merely had to furnish, was able to shape: in the small new building for the German department. And he created enchanting rooms, grouped around that architectural gem, the small decorative courtyard. Here he ensured that an audience tired from viewing works of art can recuperate in the fresh air and rest their eyes on the most delightful sight. Tessenow most finely expressed the idea that this is not truly 'outdoors' but a part of the building, half interior and half exterior. Simple white supports of extremely slender dimensions bear a white lattice that covers the courtyard. The supports are covered with greenery, larger plants stand round about, and — a particularly ingenious idea — even the floor is halfway between nature and architecture. Stone flags form a symmetrical pattern, but between them are large gaps in which carefully tended, lush grass grows. One has to experience this lovely impression of happy recuperation for oneself — words cannot express it."

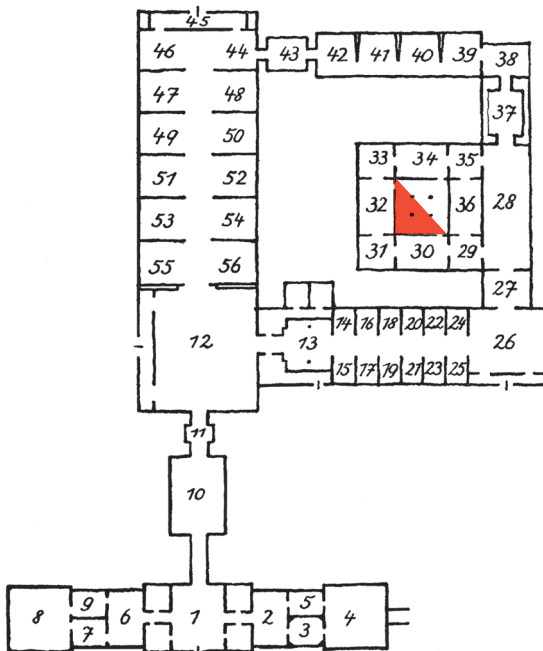
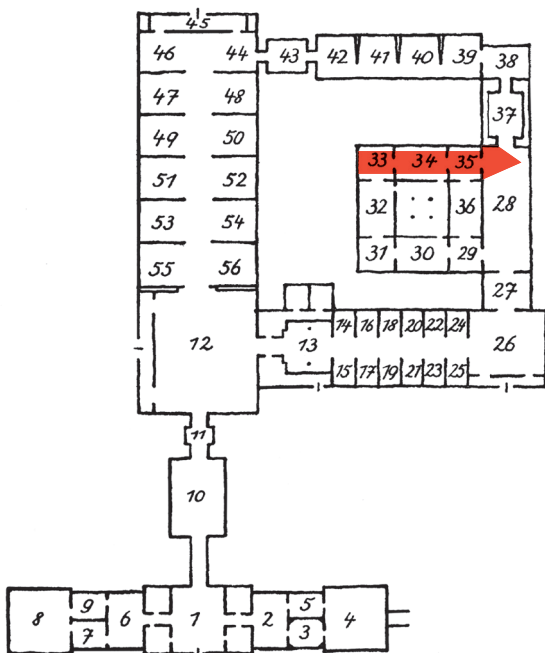




PHOTO WALTER
DE ZUCCEROTTI

The German department: view from room 28 to Tessenow's four-part new building, through rooms 35 and 34 to room 33. The ceiling height, lower here at four metres, and the construction of the skylights are shown on a cross-section drawing (cf. p. 13).

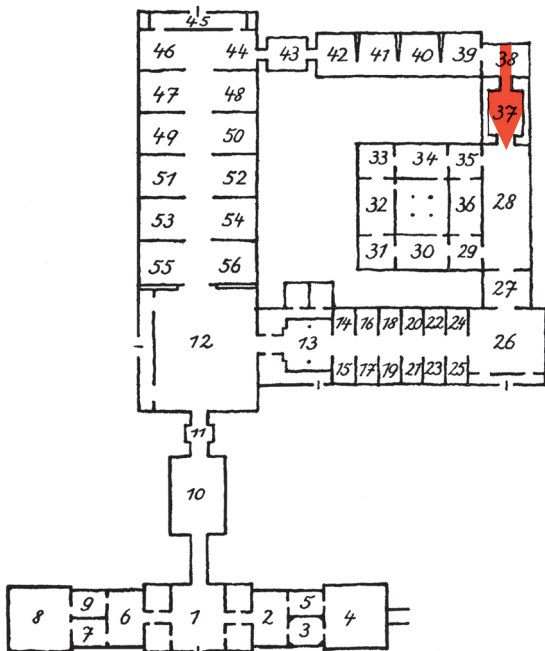
In the line of sight, in the Bauhaus room (no. 33), hangs Wassily Kandinsky's painting *Einige Kreise* (Several Circles, 1926). It was later purchased for Dresden and displayed in the Gemäldegalerie, then confiscated in 1937 as "degenerate," and is in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York today. In the foreground is the sculpture *Emporsteigender Jüngling* (Young Man Ascending, 1913) by Wilhelm Lehmbruck (room 28). A wooden figure by Gerhard Marcks, *Stehende Frau mit Tuch* (Standing Woman with Cloth) can be seen in room 35, and in room 34 two sculptures by Wilhelm Gerstel, *Schreitende* (Woman Walking, c. 1922/1924) and *Sitzendes Mädchen* (Seated Girl, c. 1925).





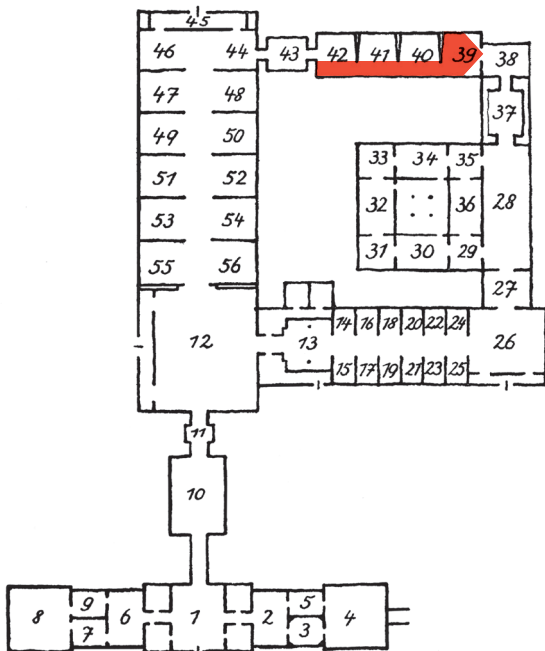
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
DUFFELMAN & CO. 1932

View of room 37 (Netherlands), with paintings by Jan Sluijters and Kees van Dongen on the left-hand wall and on either side of the doorway. On the right-hand wall is a row of works by Vincent van Gogh. In the line of sight—flanked by the two paintings *Badezimmer* (Bathroom, c. 1923) by Sluijters (left) and *Das silberne Hemd* (The Silver Shirt, 1917) by van Dongen (right)—is room 38 (Vienna) in the background with the painting *Die Jungfrau* (The Virgin, 1913) by Gustav Klimt, placed in the central axis (cf. p. 35).





View of room 39 (Hungary), with Stefan Szönyi's painting *Bathing* (1925) in the middle of the wall facing the camera. Next to it on the left, the eye sweeps along the bright row of windows, with sculptures in rooms 40 to 42 (Germany) by Arno Breker, Bernhard Frydag and August Kraus. These four rooms, or open booths, are illuminated only from the courtyard side of the large four-sided exhibition building.





View from room 44/45 to the German and Dresden department. In a cropped view from behind stands Karl Albiker's *Pallas Athene* (1924–25). Next to it on the right, works by Max Beckmann in room 46 can be seen. Visible in the background is a large plaster figure by Fritz Maskos, *Eva* (room 49).

The dimensions and height of the various spaces are again evident in this photograph, as is the calm hanging achieved through consistent alignment of the paintings by their lower edge.

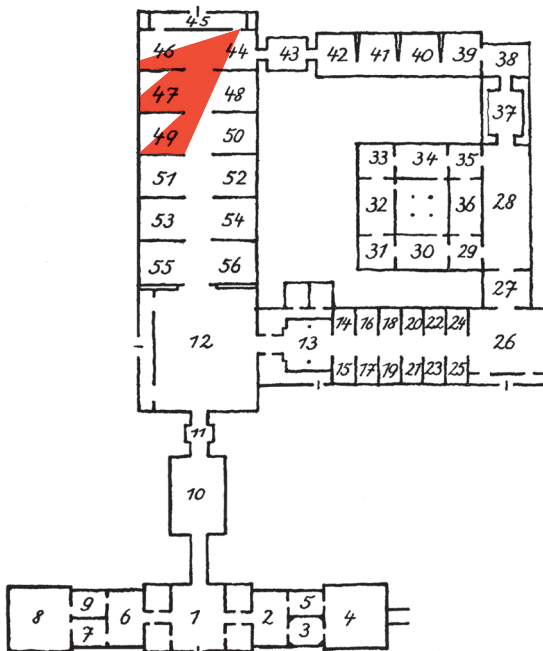
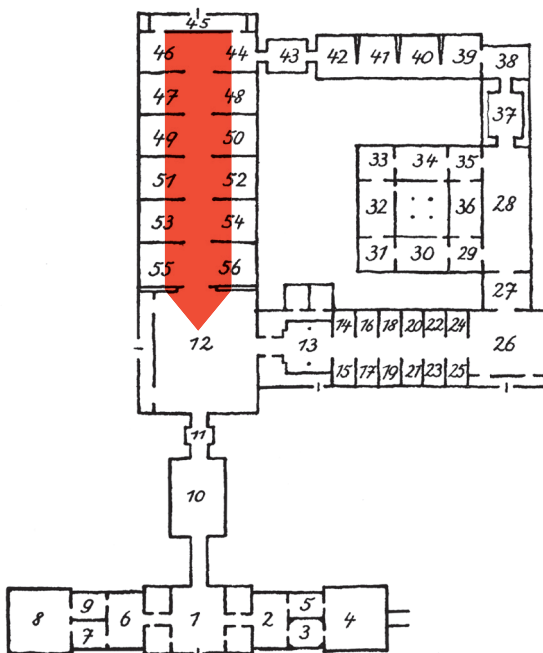




PHOTO WALTER
DR. FLUENTIN & CO.

This is one of the previously known published views from room 12 (Scandinavia) to the German and Dresden department (nos. 44 to 56). In the main view axis Karl Albiker's *Pallas Athene* (cf. pp. 23, 55, 59) is visible.

In 1926 Nikolaus Pevsner drew attention to "the finely judged taste with which the sequence of rooms has been designed in a lively and varied manner. Here—Tessenow's style is familiar—all decoration has consciously been eschewed, and instead the pure, warm effect is achieved simply by the proportions and the colour, through the white of the walls and the pearl grey of the floor covering."





View of the passage from the entrance lobby to the higher, top-lit room 10 (Switzerland), on the right Carl Burckhardt's sculpture *Amazone* (1921–1923), "free-standing in the room yet skilfully shifted a little to the side so as not to detract from the depth of the long axis." (Pevsner, 13.6.1926)

Beyond it another passage leads to room 12 and further back to the wing dedicated to art from Dresden. In the background at its brightly lit end, Albiker's *Pallas Athene* can once again be seen. This plaster model, over four metres high, for the *Denkmal für die Gefallenen der Technischen Hochschule Karlsruhe* (Monument to the Fallen of the Karlsruhe Technical University), as well as the man in a suit placed in front of it, makes it possible to appreciate the generous proportions of the architecture.

"Architecture and interior design in Dresden are brilliantly represented by Tessenow, who has remodelled the familiar old rooms purely by means of good proportions and effective division and arrangement in various forms, to create without any decoration a magnificent setting for the paintings and sculptures, which Posse has then installed with an extremely fine decorative sense, so that the functionality of the rooms is unobtrusively revealed."

Paul Schumann, 'Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926', in: *Die Kunst für Alle* 42 (1926), pp. 1–16, here pp. 1 and 4.

