

Press release

Museum Folkwang

***I, Gustave Courbet* – Realism, rebellion and cosmopolitan perspectives shape the Museum Folkwang's 2026 annual programme**

Essen, 20 November 2025 – In 2026, Museum Folkwang will present an annual programme that combines historical references, contemporary relevance and cultural diversity. Outstanding retrospectives, internationally significant photography and the continuous development of the collection make the museum a place of reflection, imagination and dialogue between the arts of the present and the past.

The annual programme spans a wide range of topics – from Gustave Courbet's radical imagery to the transcultural perspective of photography exhibitions and the early Islamic collection of museum founder Karl Ernst Osthaus. With its interplay of history, contemporary art and artistic research, it opens up new perspectives on central questions concerning both art and society.

'With the 2026 annual programme, we would like to invite visitors to experience art as a living dialogue between the past and the present. We show how radical artistic positions, historical collections and contemporary practices come together in our museum – a place where experience and perception merge,' **says Peter Gorschlüter, Director of Museum Folkwang.**

Gustave Courbet: pioneer of modernism

With the major retrospective ***I, Gustave Courbet*** (17 July to 8 November 2026), the museum is focusing on one of the most influential artists of the 19th century. Courbet's uncompromising attitude and innovative painting technique made him a pioneer at the intersection of art, society and politics. The exhibition highlights key groups of works – self-portraits, social reality, landscape, eroticism and exile – and shows how Courbet's radical realism paved the way for modernism. The exhibition is organised in cooperation with Leopold Museum Vienna and is under the High Patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic and the Honorary Patronage of Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal President of the Republic of Austria.

***Following Damascus ...* Karl Ernst Osthaus and the Arts of the Islamicate World**

The exhibition ***Following Damascus ...*** (6 November 2026 to 21 February 2027) focuses for the first time on the museum's former 'Department of Islamic Arts'. Around 300 objects – from ceramics and textiles to metal and glass works, including important loans – illustrate how Karl Ernst Osthaus's encounters with art and cultures from North Africa and West Asia shaped the

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development of this collection. Selected works of classical modernism, European arts and crafts, and contemporary positions expand a view of the museum holdings, enabling new perspectives on the collection.

Peter Gorschlüter highlights: 'With *I, Gustave Courbet* and *Following Damascus ...*, we are presenting two exhibitions that tell the story of the power of artistic renewal in different ways. Both showcase how closely art, politics and cultural identity are interwoven. In 2026, we will revisit these questions with an openness that has characterised both the artist Courbet and Museum Folkwang since its very foundation.'

Germaine Krull: chronicler of the 20th century

With the exhibition **Germaine Krull: Chien Fou** (28 November 2025 to 15 March 2026), Museum Folkwang is presenting the cosmopolitan photographer, whose estate has been part of the museum's photographic collection since 1995. In addition to her well-known avant-garde photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, her (auto)biographical texts, photo books, maquettes and political reports will be shown on a larger scale for the first time. The exhibition focuses on Krull's oeuvre as an author and her photographic practice from the beginning of the Second World War, when she left Europe permanently. It opens up a new, transcultural perspective on her work.

Diversity, communication and young perspectives

In addition to the above-mentioned major shows, the museum presents a wide range of other exhibitions: **L is for Look** (27 February to 7 June 2026) highlights a special aspect of photographic applications and shows how photographs found their way into children's literature – from imaginative picture books to literary stories. The exhibition **Herbert W. Franke / Gottfried Jäger** (16 October 2026 to 10 January 2027) deals with the experimental years of non-representational photography, which was characterised by debates and positions of the young generation of that time. **Photography Masters** (16 October 2026 to 10 January 2027), on the other hand, shows the artistic approaches and thematic focuses of young photographic positions today. The exhibition **Saâdane Afif: Affiches / Plakate** (13 March to 4 October 2026) provides the first comprehensive insight into this special group of works by the French conceptual and object artist, and New Zealand artist **Kate Newby** is developing a new site-specific work in the museum's outdoor area. The scholarship programme of the **New Folkwang Residency** and the **6 ½ Weeks** exhibition series continue to support young artists with their first museum exhibitions. The show **100 Best Posters 25** (3 July to 2 August 2026) presents the highlights of the largest annual German-language competition for poster design at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Zollverein.

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Collection and new acquisitions

The presentation of the museum collection – **NEW WORLDS** – focuses on the dialogue between the arts and remains accessible free of charge. A highlight in 2026 will be the new acquisition of the sculpture **Hahn und Podest** (Rooster and Pedestal) by **Katharina Fritsch**, which will enrich the museum as a large-scale installation from March 8, 2026 onwards.

Press image



Gustave Courbet

Le Fou de peur, around 1844, Oil on canvas
Photo: Børre Høstland, Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo

Opening hours 2026

Collection and exhibitions: Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., closed on Mondays.

Lesesaal: Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., library by appointment

Booking guided tours

info@museum-folkwang.essen.de