

PRESS RELEASE

August 2025

WOMEN ARTISTS!

From Monjé to Münter

September 25, 2025 - February 1, 2026

Overlooked, forgotten, suppressed—numerous female artists of the 19th and early 20th centuries are not represented in the canon of art history. The major special exhibition *Women Artists! From Monjé to Münter* is now the first comprehensive exhibition to focus on the lives, works, and challenges of those women who were artistically active in Düsseldorf during this period. A multi-year research project uncovered around 500 names, many of which are virtually unknown today. With over 100 exhibits, the show tells the story of female art production in a place that stood for generations of artistic education and networking, shedding new light on a chapter of art history that has been largely overlooked until now.

In the 19th century, Düsseldorf was a magnet for artists from all over Europe. Numerous women also came to the city – even though they were not allowed to study at the art academy until the 1920s. They organized private lessons, built networks, and developed individual strategies to be able to work artistically and exhibit publicly. Some prevailed against great resistance, others disappeared from public view – or were never noticed.

In addition to names that are well known today, such as Gabriele Münter, who is represented in many museums, the Kunstpalast exhibition focuses primarily on forgotten protagonists such as Amalie Bensinger, Minna Heeren and Magda Kröner.

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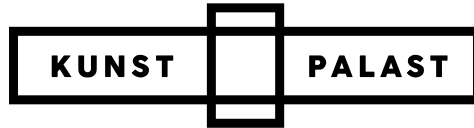
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Numerous works by the 31 artists presented here are being shown publicly for the first time since the 19th century.

The exhibition is also a self-critical examination of the museum's own collection history: to this day, female artists are underrepresented in almost all historical collections, including those at the Kunstpalast. The museum is working specifically to close these gaps. Although its own resources and the offerings on the art market are limited, in recent years alone 15 paintings by 19th-century female artists have been acquired for the City of Düsseldorf's collection.

Künstlerinnen! (Women Artists!) enables a long-overdue "second look" at female artistic creation and fundamentally broadens our understanding of 19th- and early 20th-century art. Using the example of the academy city of Düsseldorf, which developed from an attractive place of longing for female artists to a transit station to better educational opportunities, 100 years of female artists' history are presented in eleven chronologically arranged rooms.

The exhibition outlines the living conditions of women in the early 19th century. In the 1830s and 40s, there were only a few female artists working in Düsseldorf. They were in close contact with their male colleagues and generally dealt with similar motifs to them. Since art, alongside social activities, was one of the few pursuits considered appropriate for middle-class women, the number of female artists grew with the increase in professional activity in the 19th century.

From the 1850s onwards, more and more female artists came to the city, private tuition became more professional, and there were already some role models for the next generation. With the economic boom of the 1870s and the desire for lavishly decorated living spaces, the art market also grew. At the same time, there were more and more artists, and the struggle for recognition and visibility intensified. From the 1890s onwards, several female artists who were later classified as "classical modernists" lived in Düsseldorf.

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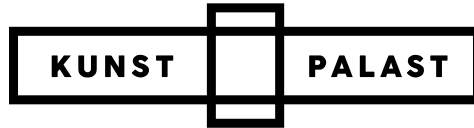
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For many, however, Düsseldorf was merely a stopover around 1900, as they found better places to study in Berlin, Munich, or Paris. The arts and crafts schools accepted women earlier than most art academies, as they were considered more suited to applied arts than fine arts. In Düsseldorf, the arts and crafts school for women was opened in 1904 under the new director Peter Behrens. With the Weimar Constitution in 1919, women were granted the same civil rights and duties as men, and almost all academies became accessible to aspiring female artists.

The exhibition tells the story of their forgotten biographies and the long road to recognition. The public is invited to take a new look at art history: more diverse and more complete.

Curator: Kathrin DuBois, Head of the Painting Collection up to 1900, Kunstpalast

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