Stiftung Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein-Westfalen
Grabbeplatz 5
40213 Düsseldorf
+49 (0) 211 83 81 730
presse@kunstsammlung.de

Press Kit: Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950

Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950
K20 – Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf
September 27, 2025 – February 2, 2026

Press Preview: September 25, 2025, 10 am, K20
Press Conference: September 25, 2025, 11 am, K20

Speakers:

- Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf
- Anke Kempkes, Guest curator
- Isabelle Malz, Curator, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
- Annika Schank, Head of Education, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

K21

Content

Download press information and images:

Installation views:
www.kunstsammlung.de/de/press/
Access:
E-mail: presse@kunstsammlung.de
Password: kunstsammlung

#K20QueereModerne
#QueereModerne
#K20

Press Kit: Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950

Queer Modernism
1900 to 1950
K20, September 27, 2025 – February 15, 2026
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Press Preview: September 25, 2025, from 10 am at K20
Press Conference: 11 am

With *Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950*, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen presents the first comprehensive exhibition in Europe dedicated to the significant contributions of queer artists to modernism. Featuring more than 130 works by thirty-four international artists—including paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, films, publications, and archival materials—the exhibition project focuses on the first half of the twentieth century. It tells an alternative history of modernism, one in which queer artists placed themes such as desire, gender, sexuality, and the politics of self-representation at the center of their work. It also traces stories of queer life in times of war and resistance.

K21

Despite their close ties to the avant-garde, queer perspectives have often been marginalized in the art-historical canon. The frequent absence of documentation and accounts of sexual orientations and ways of life continue to hinder efforts to understand queer modernism, in a period also shaped by colonial power relations. The process of reconstructing this often-forgotten chapter of modernism is necessarily marked by fragmented access to knowledge and historical oblivion or erasure. These limitations must be critically and imaginatively incorporated into any perspective on queer modernism. LGBTQ+ communities from less privileged social classes or from the “Global South,” as well as those subjected to intersecting forms of discrimination such as racism, are particularly affected by this fragmentary source base. Furthermore, the term “queer” was only reappropriated as an emancipatory self-designation in the wake of gay and lesbian activism surrounding the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York. This gave the term a positive connotation and played a key role in increasing the visibility of queer lives.

At a time when homosexuality among men, in particular, was widely criminalized and homosexuality among women was taboo, many artists at the beginning of the twentieth century led outwardly socially conformist lives and entered into so-called marriages of convenience—facts predominantly preserved by historiography. What the sources conceal is therefore sometimes even more significant than what they reveal.

Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950 is organized into eight thematic chapters and explores an international network of queer artists that began to emerge in the early twentieth century in various cities across Europe, the United States, and beyond, through global exchange.

The exhibition opens with a prologue representing early modernism and centers on a “double portrait” of the painter Rosa Bonheur (Bordeaux, France, 1822−Thomery, France, 1899) with a bull. Bonheur gained international acclaim for her groundbreaking depictions of animals. Dissatisfied with Édouard Dubufe’s portrait of her, which she found too conventional, she confidently placed the bovine at her side. As early as the second half of the nineteenth century, artists like Bonheur defied traditional gender roles and lived in same-sex partnerships, while some women similarly obtained official permission to wear men’s clothing in public.

Modern artists developed a wide range of alternative visual languages and semiotic codes to represent queer lives and identities. The works gathered under the title “Modern Arcadia” show how artists such as Glyn Warren Philpot (Clapham, UK, 1884–London, UK, 1937), Ethel Walker (Edinburgh, UK, 1861–London, UK, 1951), Lotte Laserstein (Preussisch Holland, now Pasłęk, Poland, 1898−Kalmar, Sweden, 1993), and Ludwig von Hofmann (Darmstadt, Germany, 1861–Pillnitz near Dresden, Germany, 1945) drew on familiar mythological imagery as a form of camouflage to express homoerotic desire. The African American artist Richmond Barthé (Bay St. Louis, US, 1901−Pasadena, US, 1989) created sculptures in the context of the Harlem Renaissance—a literary and artistic movement of African American writers and artists in New York—during which the Black male body became a site for negotiating and representing questions of social emancipation, Black identity, and homosexuality.

K21

“Sapphic Modernism” focuses on salons run by lesbian women and their transcultural networks in Paris. In the modern era, the term “sapphic” became synonymous with lesbian desire—a reference to the ancient poet Sappho from the island of Lesbos. The most influential literary and art salons were hosted by poets Natalie Barney and Gertrude Stein, as well as booksellers Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach. These venues were frequented by key figures of sapphic modernism, including artists Romaine Brooks (Rome, Italy, 1874–Nice, France, 1970) and Marie Laurencin (Paris, France, 1883–Paris, France, 1956), alongside representatives of the avant-garde such as Pablo Picasso and James Joyce. Brooks, an American, painted numerous portraits and nudes of her lovers, such as Barney, as well as companions like Gluck (London, UK, 1895–Steyning, UK, 1978). Like many queer artists, Gluck adopted a gender-neutral name.

Under the title “Surreal Worlds,” the exhibition brings together works that engage with the concepts of androgyny and hermaphroditism (today referred to as intersexuality). At a time when traditional gender roles were increasingly called into question, Surrealism in particular produced numerous depictions of bodies entangled with technology and often violent representations of a modern battle of the sexes, in which women were frequently portrayed as objects of male desire. Several works by Surrealists from the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen attest to this expressive repertoire, such as René Magritte’s menacing painting *Les Jours gigantesques* (*The Titanic Days*) from 1928 and Max Ernst’s *La Carmagnole de l’amour* (*The Carmagnole of Love*) from 1926. In contrast, artists such as Ithell Colquhoun (Shillong, India, 1906–Lamorna, UK, 1988), Jean Cocteau (Maisons-Laffitte, France, 1889–Milly-la-Forêt, France, 1963), Leonor Fini (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1907

Paris, France, 1996), Gerda Wegener (Hammelev, Denmark, 1886−Frederiksberg, Denmark, 1940), and Milena Pavlović-Barili (Požarevac, Serbia, 1909–New York City, US, 1945) used their works to envision queer identities and scenarios in which conventions could be challenged and transcended.

Building on queer theories, such as those of David J. Getsy, the chapter “Queer Readings of Abstraction” seeks to dismantle and rethink the boundaries upheld by the avant-garde between modernist abstraction and figuration. At the beginning of modernism, abstraction was often assigned gendered attributes, as in the work of Piet Mondrian. In his Neo-Plastic works, Mondrian maintained a hierarchical gender binary in which the male principle was deemed superior. In contrast, the Constructivist and biomorphic compositions of artists such as Marlow Moss (Kilburn, UK, 1889–Penzance, UK, 1958), Anton Prinner (Budapest, Hungary, 1902–Paris, France, 1983), Jacoba van Heemskerck (The Hague, Netherlands, 1876–Domburg, Netherlands, 1923), and Louise Janin (Durham, US, 1893–Meudon, France, 1997) reveal the potential of a nonfigurative or genderqueer aesthetic.

“Queer Avant-Gardes and Intimate Networks” focuses on transnational queer networks. On display are works by Pavel Tchelitchew (Dubrovka, Russia, 1898–Grottaferrata, Italy, 1957), George Platt Lynes (East Orange, US, 1907–New York City, US, 1955), Paul Cadmus (New York City, US, 1904–Weston, US, 1999), Duncan Grant (Rothiemurchus, UK, 1885–Aldermaston, UK, 1978), and Beauford Delaney (Knoxville, US, 1901–Paris, France, 1979), who were part of the international avant-garde and transatlantic art scene between Berlin, London, and New York—and, like Nils Dardel (Bettna, Sweden, 1888–New York City, US, 1943), later also in Paris.

The chapter “Queer Resistance since 1933” brings together works by such artists as Toyen (Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1902–Paris, France, 1980), Jeanne Mammen (Berlin, Germany, 1890–Berlin, Germany, 1976), and the lesbian artist couples Claude Cahun (Nantes, France, 1894–St Helier, Jersey, 1954) and Marcel Moore (Nantes, France, 1892–Jersey, 1972), as well as Hannah Höch (Gotha, Germany, 1889–Berlin, Germany, 1978) and Til Brugman (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1888–Gouda, Netherlands, 1958), who developed very different forms of anti-fascist resistance. After three decades of fragile gains in new freedoms and the rise of a flourishing queer artistic culture, many hopes were brutally crushed under the heel of European fascism. By the time Adolf Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, queer people faced concentration camps, cruel medical experiments, and death under Paragraph 175, which the Nazis had made more severe.

The epilogue turns to the conservative 1950s. Against the backdrop of the early Cold War, the United States entered a new phase of political repression against homosexuals during the McCarthy era. In response, artists such as Sonja Sekula (Lucerne, Switzerland, 1918–Zurich, Switzerland, 1963) and John Cage (Los Angeles, US, 1912–New York City, US, 1992) developed a distinctive form of silent, conceptual protest: Sekula dedicated her 1951 painting *Silence* to Cage, and in 1952, Cage staged silence itself with his legendary composition *4'33"*, as an act of cultural and political resistance.

Relevance Today
On many levels, *Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950* demonstrates the ongoing social and political relevance of the themes explored in the works and lives of these artists—both in their own time and today. In light of growing discrimination against queer communities in many parts of the world, making the history of queer culture visible is more urgent than ever. The exhibition thus reflects the vision of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen of being a multifaceted, global museum for all, and marks an important step toward telling the history of modernism in a more nuanced, inclusive, and diverse way.

Queer scholars, artists, and experts from a range of fields contributed their knowledge to the project. A queer advisory board offered critical input on the exhibition, developed formats for educational activities, and proposed ideas for the supporting program.

Idea and Concept: Anke Kempkes, art historian and author.
Curators: Isabelle Malz, curator at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, with Isabelle Tondre, research assistant at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, and Anke Kempkes, guest curator.

Publication
The exhibition is accompanied by a bilingual catalogue (German/English, 304 pages, approx. 200 illustrations) edited by Susanne Gaensheimer, Isabelle Malz, and Anke Kempkes, with essays by Jonathan D. Katz, Anke Kempkes, Tirza True Latimer, Isabelle Malz, Isabelle Tondre, and Diana Souhami. Hirmer Verlag, 39.90 €

The exhibition is sponsored by the Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation.

“*Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950* shines a light on works that have long been in the shadow of art history—works that are not only expressions of individual self-assertion, but also testimonies to a profound expansion of aesthetic and societal horizons. Aspects such as desire, self-representation, individual experience, and social history are not treated as marginal themes here but are made comprehensible as central impulses of artistic creation. In this sense, *Forgotten Avant-Garde* does not see itself as an additive extension of existing art-historical narratives, but rather as a critical counter-narrative that reinterprets modernism from a queer perspective.
The fact that this project is being realized at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen is more than a sign of progress in keeping with the times. It is a conscious questioning of the museum’s own collection history—and thus also a step toward greater openness, plurality, and critical self-reflection in the museum space.”
Dr. Martin Hoernes, Secretary General, Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation

Media partner of the exhibition
Weltkunst

Media partner of Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

Sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia

Supporting Program

Opening
Friday, September 26, 7 – 11 pm / K20 / free entry
We cordially invite you to the opening of the exhibition at K20.

Speakers:
Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Isabelle Malz, Curator Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Anke Kempkes, Guest curator

From 8 to 11 pm
DJ Set by DJ Ass Tits (hyperlove collective)

SNEAK PEEK – Preview for Young Adults
Even before the official opening, students, trainees, and pupils (from secondary level II) will have the opportunity to experience the exhibition and converse with special guests.
Fri, September 26, 4 - 5.30 pm
With Ronja Jelena Filiz
Admission free with student or pupil ID
Limited number of participants

Workshops

Painting Me and Myself
Workshop on Portrait Painting with Murat Önen
Sunday, November 2, 12 noon–6 pm
In his works, Murat Önen combines classical techniques from drawing, painting, and art history with an open, experimental approach. Colorful pictorial spaces emerge between figuration and abstraction—stages on which social interactions and genre-like scenes are played out that cannot be clearly classified. Önen's works, as well as the diverse portraits in the exhibition *Queer Modernism*, offer inspiration for our own exploration of the representation of the human body. In the workshop, we will experiment with painting techniques and modes of expression.
Registration required. Participation fee: 30 €, including admission to the exhibition.

The Power of the Gaze
Workshop on Portrait Photography with Rebecca Racine Ramershoven
Saturday, January 17, 2026, 12 noon–6 pm
In her work, the photographer Rebecca Racine Ramershoven questions the white gaze on Black people.
Her portraits depict individuals who are self-determined and self-confident. Along with diverse photographs from the *Queer Modernism* exhibition, these portraits form the basis of

the workshop. Together, we will explore questions such as how identity is created in images, what role attributions play, and how photographic representation exercises power. In the practical part of the workshop, we will create personal photographic self-portraits under the guidance of the artist.
Registration required. Participation fee: 30 €, including admission to the exhibition.

A Visit to Gertrude's—Literary Reading on Library Day
Friday, October 24, 4.30 pm
Literature played a key role in the Parisian avant-garde during the interwar period. Artists and intellectuals gathered at Adrienne Monnier's bookstore on the Left Bank. Her partner, the publisher Sylvia Beach, lent English-language books to American expatriates at her shop, Shakespeare and Company, located across the street. Writers experimented with new forms and wrote about their friendships, rivalries, and love affairs. At the salons of Gertrude Stein and Natalie Clifford Barney, they discussed literary and artistic innovations. At the book table in the exhibition, actors bring the diverse literary voices to life.
Readings by Sabine Osthoff and Philipp Noack.
Free admission with ticket to the exhibition. No registration required.

Physical Theatre Company Sticky Fragments
Wednesday, December 3, 8 pm
The artists featured in the exhibition *Queer Modernism* experiment with role models and concepts of identity in their gender-fluid portraits. In an intervention by the physical theater collective Sticky Fragments, the artworks in the exhibition become counterparts and conversation partners, brought to life by the performers through dance and play.
Participation is free of charge. No registration required.

K21

Wall texts

QUEER MODERNISM
1900 TO 1950

The exhibition *Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950* shows the important contribution of queer artists to modernism. It tells a new story about modern art. Many works by queer artists are about love, gender, and sexuality. But the exhibition also shows the art, the lives, and the relationships of queer people in times of persecution and war. (Easy-to-Read Language)
Queer Modernism. 1900 to 1950 is the first comprehensive exhibition in Europe to honor the groundbreaking contributions of queer artists to modern art. It tells an alternative history of the first half of the 20th century, one in which artists placed themes such as desire, gender, sexuality, and the politics of self-representation at the center of their work.
The exhibition is divided into eight chapters and explores an international network of queer artists that began to emerge in various cities across Europe, the United States, and beyond through global exchange. Although closely connected to the artistic avant-garde, queer perspectives have often been marginalized in the art-historical canon.
The scarcity of statements regarding sexual orientations and queer lifestyles pose a challenge for the art historical examination of queer modernism, a period also shaped within the

context of colonial power dynamics. What the sources conceal is therefore sometimes even more revealing than what they openly present. This gap in documentation particularly affects queer communities from less privileged social classes or the “Global South,” as well as individuals who faced multiple forms of discrimination. Many queer artists also led outwardly socially conformist lives and entered into so called marriages of convenience.
The exhibition highlights the ongoing art historical and socio-political relevance of the issues explored in the works and lives of these artists, offering a new perspective on the canonization of modern art history.

I PROLOGUE

Queer art and literature began to grow in the middle of the 19th century. But some artists didn’t sign their works with their own name. They were afraid their art would be banned or they would be arrested. Portraits like those of the painter Rosa Bonheur show selfconfident queer people and their stories. (Easy-to-Read Language)

Already in the second half of the 19th century, some artists rejected traditional gender roles and norms, often living in same-sex partnerships. Women gained access to education for the first time, confidently pursued careers and achieved visibility in public life. Artists such as the French painter Rosa Bonheur obtained permission to wear men’s clothing while working.

K21

Queer themes also began to find expression in visual art and literature, often published under pseudonyms by fear of censorship or of the threat of arrest for indecency. Around the turn of the century, emancipa tory portraits emerged as part of an increasing cultural awareness of the need to represent queer and trans* narratives.
Bonheur became one of the most successful painters of the 19th century with her extraordinary animal depictions. After her death, her partner Anna Klumpke published Bonheur’s “(Auto-)Biography” in 1908, one of the earliest publicly accessible accounts of queer life.

II MODERN ARCADIA

Male homosexuality used to be illegal. Female homosexuality was not talked about. Despite this, Modernist artists found creative ways to express queer themes in their works. They used special imagery and symbols to get their message across. (Easy-to-Read Language)

At a time when homosexuality among men was criminalized and homosexuality among women was socially taboo, modern artists found numerous ways to create alternative visual languages and codes to represent queer lives and identities. Artists like Glyn Warren Philpot, Dame Ethel Walker, Ludwig von Hofmann, and Richmond Barthé used familiar mythological themes as a form of camouflage to express homoerotic desire.
At the beginning of World War I, Philpot created fairy-tale-like queer figures who submerged into fantastic underwater worlds. The artist Richmond Barthé was a member of the Harlem Renaissance, a movement of Black cultural protagonists in New York. He created sculptures in the classical academic tradition, addressing issues of social emancipation, Black identity, and homosexuality.

Both Barthé's *Black Narcissus* (1929) and Lotte Laserstein's intimate double portrait with her lover engage with the myth of Narcissus as interpreted by Sigmund Freud: a modern image of homosexuality, understood as the desire for the same reflected in the mirror of the self.

III SAPPHIC MODERNISM
In Paris at the beginning of the 20th century, there were many meeting places for artists and writers from Europe and the US. Poets, painters, and other people working in arts and culture got together in bookshops and so-called salons, where they would discuss together and make friends. The most important of these meeting places were run by queer women. (Easy-to-Read Language)

In the modern era, the term "sapphic" became synonymous with lesbian desire—a reference to the ancient poet Sappho from the island of Lesbos. Queer subcultures thrived across many metropolises in the 1920s and 1930s. In Paris, a group of intellectual and financially independent American women initiated transcultural networks, characterized by intimate friendships. The most influential literary and art salons were hosted by poets Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, as well as booksellers Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach. Many key figures of the sapphic modernism scene such as Colette, Bryher, Janet Flanner, Djuna Barnes, and Gisèle Freund mingled here, alongside Pablo Picasso and James Joyce.

K21

Romaine Brooks painted numerous portraits and nudes of her lovers such as Natalie Barney, and fellow creators like the British artist Gluck. Like Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, and Marlow Moss, Gluck adopted a genderneutral name and a genderqueer self presentation. The painter Marie Laurencin created landscapes in which women appear in romantic union with nature and with animals, portrayed as queer companions.

IV SURREAL WORLDS
In the Surrealist art movement, artists challenged rules in society and ideas about sexuality and gender. Despite this, they often reflected male fantasies about women's bodies. Queer artists, on the other hand, developed new ideas to show queer lives and feelings of closeness. (Easy-to-Read Language)

Themes such as androgyny and hermaphroditism (today replaced by intersexuality) were widely explored in modernist works.

The Surrealist movement, beginning in the 1920s, questioned societal norms and established worldviews through art and literature. Despite its liberating approach to sexuality, it also reproduced subconscious projections of male desire onto female bodies. Works by Surrealists from the collection of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen testify to this expressive repertoire, as for example the violent scene in René Magritte's *Les jours gigantesques* from 1928. Androgyny was often depicted through an idealized and desexualized representation of the human body.

Artists like Toyen, Leonor Fini, Ithell Colquhoun, Gerda Wegener, and Milena Pavlovic´-Barili, on the other hand, created visions of queer identities beyond prevailing conventions. Their works portray modern gender utopias and alternative models of intimacy and familiarity within fantastic scenarios.

V QUEER READINGS OF ABSTRACTION
Many pictures in the exhibition show people who don't look clearly masculine or feminine. Queer artists not only painted figures like these. Some were also interested in abstract forms and in finding out if these could be used to show bodies and relationships differently. (Easy-to-Read Language)
A queer perspective on abstraction seeks to dismantle and rethink the traditional distinctions between abstraction and figuration. Can abstract forms symbolize social relationships and less fixed, definable forms of embodiment?

The constructivist and biomorphic comp ositions of artists like Marlow Moss, Anton Prinner, Jacoba van Heemskerck, and Louise Janin reveal the potential of a nonfigurative queer form of expression. At the beginning of modernism, abstract elements such as lines, shapes, and colors were ascribed gender attributes of "masculine" and "feminine." Piet Mondrian maintained in his work a gender hierarchy in which the male principle was deemed superior. Moss, on the other hand, subverted Mondrian's binary order with the introduction of the dynamic "double line," symbolizing sameness and equality.

K21

The Hungarian sculptor Anton Prinner also opposed clear gender distinctions in his postcubist work. In pieces like the undated sculpture *Double Personnage*, two bodies merge into an ambiguous unity.

VI QUEER AVANT-GARDES AND INTIMATE NETWORKS
Queer artists from Europe and the US often worked together. They developed new ideas inspired by theater, ballet, literature, and photography. They created their own artistic styles that were different from many approaches in modern art. But they also experienced a lot of discrimination and despair, which they expressed in their art. (Easy-to-Read Language)

At the beginning of the 20th century, transnational and transatlantic networks emerged between Berlin, London, New York, and Paris. Independent artistic movements formed, combining neo romantic and hybrid styles with queer themes, while distancing themselves from the dominant aesthetics of Modernism. Theater and ballet provided artists like Pavel Tchelitchew, Nils Dardel, and Robin Ironside with a space for artistic freedom.

The exiled Russian artist Tchelitchew and the American photographer George Platt Lynes—both of whom also frequented Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas' salon in Paris—were part of an intimate queer circle in New York, which also included Paul Cadmus.
In 1953, the Black American painter Beauford Delaney followed his friend, writer James Baldwin, and moved from New York to Paris. In times of racial segregation in the USA, Europe offered a comparatively more tolerant environment for Black artists. Homosexuals and People of Color often experienced deep despair and depression due to societal stigma. Dardel and Ironside expressed such experiences in their works.

VII QUEER RESISTANCE SINCE 1933
Queer people were persecuted all over the world. When the Nazis were in power, they threatened queer people with concentration camps and death. Some queer artists showed resistance. Others worked with fascist regimes to protect themselves. (Easy-to-Read Language)

Queer people worldwide were subject to exclusion and persecution under fascist and authoritarian regimes. In Germany, repression dramatically intensified with Adolf Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor: under Paragraph 175, they faced concentration camps, cruel medical experiments, and death. Queer meeting places, networks, and magazines were dismantled.

Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, Hannah Höch, Til Brugman, and Toyen developed various forms of anti-fascist resistance as early as the 1930s. Others emigrated, went underground, or, like Jeanne Mammen, withdrew into internal exile. Cahun and Moore distributed several thousand anti-regime leaflets on the Nazi-German-occupied island of Jersey—where the couple lived disguised as sisters—before being arrested by the Gestapo on July 25, 1944. Both were sentenced to death but were freed in 1945.

However, queer artists such as Romaine Brooks and Jean Cocteau sometimes collaborated with fascist regimes, often as a means of self-protection and survival.

K21

VIII EPILOGUE
Queer artists could live and work more freely at the beginning of the 20th century. But fascism in Germany and other European countries destroyed this freedom. After the Second World War, it was especially difficult to be homosexual in the US. The American government actively discriminated against queer people. (Easy-to-Read Language)

After years of newly gained freedoms and a rich queer art production in the 1920s and 1930s, many hopes were brutally crushed under the heel of European fascism. In the conservative 1950s and against the backdrop of the emerging Cold War, the McCarthy era in the United States entered a new phase of political repression. As part of the so-called *Lavender Scare*, the US government specifically targeted homosexuals.

The openly lesbian Swiss-Jewish painter and poet Sonja Sekula emigrated to New York with her parents in 1936. From 1947 onward, she lived in close creative exchange with composer John Cage and his partner, dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham. In 1951, she dedicated her painting *Silence* to Cage, followed by *Speak Silence* in 1958, inspired by his famous statement: "I have nothing to say, and I am saying it."

With his legendary performance *4'33"*, Cage brought silence itself to the stage. However, this silence took on a polyphonic form through the sounds of the audience and became a symbol of cultural and political resistance.

QUEER MODERNISM
1910 TO 1950

GLOSSARY
The glossary explains terms relating to sexual and gender diversity that play a role in the exhibition and educational program

ANDROGYNOUS
A person who has male and female characteristics

BISEXUAL, BI
A person who is attracted to people of the same gender and of other genders

CISGENDER, CIS
A person whose gender matches the one assigned at birth

COMING OUT
When a person tells others they are queer

COMMUNITY
A supportive group of people who share characteristics and features, along with their allies

DEADNAME

A name a trans* person used before their transition but now no longer uses

DISCRIMINATION
The unfair treatment of a person or a group of people because of their characteristics or features

DRAG
An art form where people play with gender roles using clothes, makeup, and performance

EMPOWERMENT
When people acquire power through strategies and measures

FLINTA*
A German abbreviation that stands for women, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans, and agender people. The asterisk includes other gender identities and sexual orientations

GAY
When a man is attracted to other men (In English, gay is also used for same-gender love in general.)

GENDER
A person's social or lived gender or their gender identity

GENDERFLUID
When a person's gender identity can change

GENDERQUEER
A gender identity that is not clearly categorized as male or female

GENDER ASTERISK (*)
In German, the asterisk can be used to include other genders besides the masculine and feminine in words like “Student*innen”, which means “students of all genders.” This is called “gendering.”

GENDER IDENTITY
A person’s internal sense of their gender

HERMAPHRODITE
An outdated and discriminatory term for intersex people

HETERONORMATIVITY
The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and cisgender

HETEROSEXUAL
A person who is attracted to people of the opposite gender

HOMOSEXUAL
A person who is attracted to people of the same gender

K21

INTERSEXUAL
A person who is physically not clearly male or female

LESBIAN
A woman who is attracted to other women

LGBTQIA+
An abbreviation that stands for lesbian, gay, bi, trans*, queer, intersex, agender, and more

NON-BINARY
A person who doesn’t clearly identify as male or female

QUEER
An umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual and / or not cisgender

QUEERPHOBIA
The rejection or hatred of queer people

SEX
Sex assigned at birth based on physical features

TRANSFEMININE
A person with a female gender identity who was assigned male at birth

TRANSGENDER, TRANS*
A person whose gender is different from the one assigned at birth

TRANSITION
The process a trans* person goes through to live as their true gender

TRANSMASCULINE
A person with a male gender identity who was assigned female at birth

A more comprehensive glossary on this topic can be found here:
Abbreviation lsbtiq*— anders & gleich nrw

Exhibition Preview

K21 Global Art Award
The Winner is Tadáskía
Award Ceremony: October 9, 2025, from 7 pm with Artist Talk
K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Press Conference and Preview: October 9, 2025, 11 am at K21
The artist will participate in the press conference.

The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, in cooperation with the Friends of the Kunstsammlung and with generous financial support from the Reydan + Roger Weiss Foundation**,** is presenting the K21 Global Art Award for the third time. This award is unique in its global approach and is one of the most highly endowed art prizes in Germany. The nominated artists were proposed by an international jury consisting of Doryun Chong, Koyo Kouoh, Omar Kholeif, and Jochen Volz. The 2025 nominees are Sin Wai Kin, Simon Fujiwara, Hashel Al Lamki, Celia Hempton, Sallisa Rosa, and Tadáskía. The museum is delighted to announce that the winner of the 2025 K21 Global Art Award is the Brazilian artist Tadáskía. The award ceremony will take place on October 9 at K21.

K21

As part of the K21 Global Art Award, the Friends of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen have acquired her site-specific installation “brincando animada: travesti mariposa centopeia / animated play: travesti moth centipede” (2025). The work unfolds across the wall in a freely painted semi-abstract composition, accompanied by newly created sculptures made from taboa. “It is a mysterious gift to see my work – born around my mother Elenice, speaking to the plants and the stars, and my father Aguinaldo, who taught me to work with constancy – reaching places beyond my familiarity. I am deeply grateful and honored to receive the recognition of the 3rd K21 Global Art Award. I am so excited to see my drawings playing and coming to life in this other part of the world,” says Tadáskía.

Land and Soil. How We Live Together
Nov 29, 2025 — Apr 19, 2026

Press preview: Nov 27, 2025 from 10am, K21
Press conference: 11 am

Featuring: AA Bronson, Havîn Al-Sîndy, Maria Thereza Alves, Asche Lützerathi (other-hosted by Sybling – JP Raether & Sarah Friend), Johannes Büttner, Joseph Beuys, Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (Congolese Plantation Workers Art League, CAPTC), Liu Chuang, Simon Denny, Jan Dibbets, Nir Evron, Simone Fattal, Ximena Garrido-Lecca, Jef Geys, Robert Gober, Dor Guez, Andreas Gursky, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Richard Long, Gordon Matta-Clark, Boris Mikhailov, Lutz Mommartz, Grace Ndiritu, Simone Nieweg, Chris Reinecke, Ugo Rondinone, Thomas Ruff, Lin May Saeed, Shimabuku, terra0, Ron Tran, Franz West, Alex Wissel

In a time of multiple crises, the exhibition Land and Soil. How We Live Together leads us back to the foundations of human coexistence. It invites visitors to gather around questions of living, owning, and sharing, and to envision a just and sustainable future. For the first time, an exhibition will span the entire former parliament building of K21 and extend to the adjacent Ständehauspark, addressing the ground the museum stands on—both geographically and historically. Thirty international artists and collectives will present various models of administrating resources —from indigenous ways of planning to co-ownership and utopian blockchain projects.

Coal, earth, lotus silk, pine needles, chocolate: the exhibition touches on elementals in both material and form. It takes us to Brazil, Korea, the Congo, Japan, the USA, China, Peru, Vietnam, Iraq, Sri Lanka, the Middle East and back to Germany. It explores the newest fantasies of libertarian thinkers who seek to build their own states or occupy Mars. And it looks at the foundations of the industrial wealth of Düsseldorf: On its last day, a performance by Sybling (JP Raether & Sarah Friend) will lead to the nearby open-pit coal mine Garzweiler, a place of tensions between industry and preservation, capital gain and activism, that underpin this exhibition.

The Players of the German Postcode Lottery enable free entry every Friday from 3 pm to 6 pm.

K21

Funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation. Supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

Supported by Players of the German Postcode Lottery.

Media partner of the exhibition
Monopol

Media partner of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen:
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

Supported by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia