

PRESS RELEASE

Masks Metamorphoses of the Face from Rodin to Picasso

An international themed exhibition staged in cooperation with Musée d'Orsay, Paris and NY Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen

**Mathildenhöhe Institute Darmstadt
March 8 through June 7, 2009**

Preview and masked ball: Saturday March 7, 2009 from 6.30 p.m.

In collaboration with Musée d'Orsay, Paris and NY Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen from March 8 through June 7, 2009 Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt is showcasing the exhibition "Masks. Metamorphoses of the Face from Rodin to Picasso". For the first time ever this comprehensive themed exhibition places the focus squarely on masks as the subject and motif of art. In the historical exhibition building on the Mathildenhöhe significant loans from throughout Europe – first and foremost masterpieces by Arnold Böcklin, Jean Carriès, Jean Cocteau, Paul Gauguin, Emil Nolde and Auguste Rodin – together with numerous new discoveries will document the heyday of mask art between 1860 and 1930, while also looking back as far as antiquity.

"Not only has the mask been a fascinating object in cult and theater since living memory. It is simultaneously the founding element of modern sculpture in Rodin and helped to give birth to modern painting in Picasso. For the first time this exhibition examines an exciting chapter of art and cultural history," explains Dr. Ralf Beil, Director of the Mathildenhöhe Institute.

As an object that veils and transforms the face, the mask plays a key role in almost every culture: in rites, customs and theater. To date, however, there has been only scant research on the mask as a subject matter of art. Two hundred exhibits from all categories of art not only create a gallery of real portrait pictures but also imaginary faces, which reveal the radical nature of the subject as well as formal and material experiments in the late 19th and early 20th century. Major film presentation of these years completes the fascinating panorama of mask art.

"A mask tells us more than a face." Oscar Wilde

The exhibition "Masks. Metamorphoses of the Face from Rodin to Picasso" stands under the patronage of Bernard de Montferrand, French ambassador to Germany.

The topics of the exhibition

Because it discloses through disguise and disguises by disclosing, the mask touches the very roots of mankind and life itself. While in the cultures of antiquity it was of major importance as a cult object and a theater requisite since the mid-19th century the mask experienced a remarkable renaissance in Europe: Its »disconcerting strangeness« is experienced as extraordinary enrichment and aesthetic revival.

Conceived by Édouard Papet for Paris and enlarged by Ralf Beil for the Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, the exhibition examines the previously little explored enthusiasm many artists around 1900 had for the metamorphosis of the human face. The masks on show and their interactions in sculpture, painting, graphic art, film and photography demonstrate the special features of a visual grammar, which can push both illusionist obsession and hypnotic symbolism to the limit.

Around 1900 the suggestive power of masks, their capacity to reflect the whole individual or even create him anew inspired numerous artists, sculptors and photographers. Though the memory of their classical role remains vivid increasingly ancient archetypes such as the gorgon's head of Medusa or Christian topoi such as the severed head of John the Baptist are ousted by contemporary influences, say from Japanese art. And the mask is inseparably linked with the principle of fragmentation, which gave sculpture fundamental new impulses around the turn of the century. Art nouveau embellishment breathes new life into the old decorative element, the gargoyle. In the early 20th century when the so-called primitive masks from Africa and Oceania acquired incredible popularity, the artistic exploration of the mask took a highly individual and eminently modern turn

Accompanying program and masked ball

To celebrate the official opening of the exhibition, following the preview the Mathildenhöhe Institute is organizing a large masked ball in Haus Bäumle (March 7, 2009). We are now accepting reservations for the masked ball (€ 55 for ball and buffet). These can be made to the Mathildenhöhe Institute by phone on 06151 – 13 2778.

A comprehensive accompanying program extends and deepens the topics of the exhibition. In readings, lectures, workshops and discussions the topic mask will be explored both as an anthropological constant but also in its special significance around 1900. Film presentations address the cinematic treatment of disguise and masquerades. For families and children there will be guided tours for children and mask workshops. From early February the complete and detailed accompanying program can be viewed at www.mathildenhoehe.eu. The accompanying program was made possible thanks to the generous funding of MERCK.

Catalog and audio book on the exhibition

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated book, edited by Ralf Beil and featuring essays by Geneviève Lacambre, Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, Édouard Papet, Jean-Luc Nancy, Teresa Nielsen, Philippe Thiébaud, Renate Ulmer and others. The publisher is Hatje Cantz Verlag. Hard cover, 256 p., ca. 280 colored illustrations, 22 x 28 cm, € 35 in the exhibition, €39.80 in bookstores.

Hatje Cantz Verlag has also produced an audio book on the Masks exhibition in German and English in the series "Art to Hear". Hard cover with CD, 48 p., ca. 40 colored illustrations, 22 x 22 cm, € 16.80.

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Information

Curator: Dr. Ralf Beil, Director Mathildenhöhe Institute, Darmstadt

Works in the exhibition: 200

Stations of the exhibition:

Musée d'Orsay Paris: October 21st 2008 through February 1st 2009

Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt: March 8 through June 7, 2009

Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Copenhagen: August 6 through October 25 2009

Admission: 8 € | 6 € reduced; family-card: 16 € (two adults with children)

Opening hours: Thursday to Sunday 10 – 18 o'clock; Thursday 10 – 21 o'clock

Public guided tours: Thursday 18.30 o'clock; Sunday 11 and 15 o'clock

Individual guided tours in German, English, French or Russian: T +49 (0) 6151 13 27 78

Address:

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This press release and printable **press images** on the exhibition can be found in the Press Section of our homepage at www.mathildenhoehe.info/www/presse.html. We would be pleased to help you with briefings and interviews in connection with the exhibition. Should you require further information on this or other topics please contact us on +49 (0) 6151 13 37 38 or at presse.mathildenhoehe@darmstadt.de.