Press release

Berlin, 19.03.2019

German Film Architecture 1918-1933

Tchoban Foundation. Museum of Architectural Drawing, Berlin
Christinenstrasse 18a, 10119 Berlin

Exhibition opening: 12 June 2019 at 7 pm
Press tour: 12 June 2019 at 6 pm
Exhibition duration: 13 June2019 – 29 September 2019
Opening hours: Mon-Fri: 2 pm – 7 pm, Sat-Sun: 1 pm – 5 pm
Admission: € 5; reduced: € 3

The year 2019 will be marked by many important celebrations, including the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus, the first German democratic constitution and women's suffrage in Germany. The historical significance of these events alone makes it clear that during the brief period of the Weimar Republic important foundations of modernism were laid.

The German defeat in the First World War and the subsequent November Revolution of 1918 were a turning point for the country, which provoked louder calls for radical change in the field of culture as well. Walter Gropius, the first director of the Bauhaus, set the experiences of the First World War in relation to the philosophy of architecture: 'A world has ended. We must find a radical solution to our problems.' [1]

This particular historical and social constellation provided fertile ground for new avant-garde styles: Futurism, Dadaism, New Objectivity and Expressionism, which not only

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[1] Cf. Jörg Später, *Siegfried Kracauer. Eine Biografie* (Berlin 2016), 195

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influenced the visual arts but also literature, music, theatre and, not least, film. The new mass medium soon gained an audience for itself, providing welcome distraction from the political crises and worries of everyday life.

In the Weimar Republic, the film industry saw a rapid development: UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft, initially the Bild- und Filmamt or BUFA) and the Deutsche Lichtbild-Gesellschaft (DLG or Deulig) – the first founded in 1917 and second in 1916, both for purposes of war propaganda – became market leaders in the industry. New cinemas sprang up like mushrooms; from 1918 to 1930 their number grew in Germany to 5,000. At first, viewers were shown mainly silent films; then in the late 1920s sound film production increased and, by 1936, finally replaced silent film.

In addition to the star directors of German cinema, many film architects (today often called set designers) such as Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut, Hermann Warm and Robert Herlth gained great prominence. Their work was as important as that of the directors, comprising as it did not only design of film sets but also extensive planning of how to realise the idea of film: sketches often contained already pre-determined camera and actor positions and scenery had painted-on light effects, of great importance in the post-war period because of the erratic power supply. For some scenes with special effects elaborate models were built, some of which would be seen in the film in only a short sequence. In 1965, in a Festschrift for Robert Herlth, Henri Langlois wrote with admiration of German silent film: 'The metaphysics of the sets is a mystery of German cinema. And in the films, where composition means everything, [the] film architect is the alchemist of a world that springs up thanks to his magic skill.'[2]

Like architecture, film too is about the effect of space: the viewer in the cinema experiences space in the film similarly to that of a building, with all the senses and on a cognitive level. By reducing, enlarging or changing the perspective, different effects can be achieved which influence the plot of the film and its emotional impact on the viewer. The exhibited drawings present various possibilities of changing space: curtains, light and shadow, but also stairs and bridges that can connect or disconnect spaces. Line also plays a major role: oblique, broken or zigzagging lines have different

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[2] Henri Langlois, in , *Filmarchitektur Robert Herlth*, (München 1965), unpaginated.

effects on the viewer from straight lines, as Rudolf Kurtz noted in his *Expressionismus und Film* (1926). [3]

Many films of this period are classified as Expressionist, which in the cases of Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) and Paul Wegener's *The Golem: How He Came into the World* (1920) is partly owing to the Expressionist film sets. In contrast to the design work for actual construction projects, film often gave architects greater artistic freedom to develop bold ideas, which were then implemented in the form of the temporary installations at film studios. The masterly realised set designs were first created on paper: the Museum of Architectural Drawing is now showing designs by Emil Hasler, Robert Herlth, Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut, Hans Poelzig, Franz Schroedter and Hermann Warm for *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, The Golem: How He Came into the World, Metropolis, The Nibelungs, The Blue Angel* and other masterpieces of the time.

The exhibition was curated by Nadejda Bartels, Director of the Museum of Architectural Drawing, and is based on loans from the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin, the DFF-German Film Institute & Film Museum in Frankfurt/Main and the Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität Berlin.

A catalogue will be published to accompany the exhibition.

Tchoban Foundation. Museum of Architectural Drawing

Founded in 2009 by Sergei Tchoban, a passionate draftsman and collector of architectural drawings, the Tchoban Foundation and its considerable collection serves as the basis for research on the history and nature of architectural drawing. An extensive reference library with a focus on architectural drawing offers experts and interested visitors the opportunity to conduct research. Above all, the Foundation's stated goal is to introduce in the digital age the fantastic and emotionally charged worlds of architectural drawing to a broad public through exhibitions.

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[3] Cf. Rudolf Kurtz, *Expressionismus und Film* [Berlin 1926], eds. Christian Kiening, Ulrich Johannes Beil (Zürich 2007) 54.

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Illustrations

Hermann Warm (1889–1976)
Roofs
Black chalk, coloured pencil and coloured chalk on yellowish paper
37.8 x 49.9 cm
© Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin – Hermann Warm Archiv

Franz Schroedter (1897–1968)
Industrial landscape
Charcoal on paper
24.6 x 35.3 cm
© Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin – Franz Schroedter Archiv

Robert Herlth (1893–1962)
Mephisto as demon over the town
Black chalk on yellowish paper
50 x 62 cm
© Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin – Robert Herlth Archiv

Erich Kettelhut (1893–1979)
City from above with Tower of Babel
Mixed technique on paper, heightened with white
45.4 x 52.5 cm
Collection: Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin – Erich Kettelhut Archiv
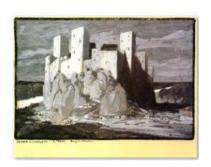© Erich Kettelhut / Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin

Erich Kettelhut (1893–1979)
City of the Sons
Mixed technique on paper, heightened with white
45.3 x 60.4 cm
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Erich Kettelhut (1893–1979)
Siegfried in front of Brünhilde's castle
Coloured chalk on paper
44.8 x 53.4 cm
© Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin – Erich Kettelhut Archiv

Otto Hunte (1881–1960)
Castle at Worms, draft
Ink and opaque white on cardboard
33.5 x 48.6 cm
© DFF – Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum, Frankfurt am Main – Sammlung
Otto Hunte

Otto Hunte (1881–1960)
Main entrance to the 'Blue Angel', draft
Ink, opaque white and pencil on drawing cardboard
36.3 x 46.3 cm
© DFF – Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum, Frankfurt am Main – Sammlung
Otto Hunte