

Ewald Gnijka, Hans Uhlmann in seinem Atelier, um 1954
© Rechtsnachfolger*innen Ewald Gnijka,
für die Werke von Hans Uhlmann: © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024



Hans Uhlmann

Experimental Forming

16.2. – 13.5.24

Hans Uhlmann is one of the most important sculptors and draftsmen of the post-war period in western Germany. His works are represented in numerous national and international collections and his sculptures for 'per cent for art' projects continue to shape public spaces in Germany and abroad today. Despite this propagation of his works, Uhlmann is now no longer known to a broad public.

With a selection of roughly eighty sculptures and graphic works as well as documents from the artist's estate, the exhibition **Hans Uhlmann: Experimental Forming** provides an overview of Uhlmann's artistic work from the 1930s to the 1970s. The four chapters 'Spaces Shaped with Wire', 'Dance and Movement', 'Transcending the Material', and 'A New Astronomy of Space' guide viewers chronologically through the various phases of Uhlmann's oeuvre. The three chapters 'Curator and Networker', 'International Success', and 'Monumental Sculptures' present Hans Uhlmann as a curator, internationally celebrated artist, and author of important 'per cent for art' projects.

Spaces Shaped with Wire

Hans Uhlmann came to art by a circuitous route. He first studied mechanical engineering at the Technische Hochschule and, after his studies, worked as an engineer. In his leisure time, he tried his hand at sculpture and occasionally participated in exhibitions. In October 1933, Uhlmann, then a member of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), was detained by the Gestapo. Due to 'preparing for high treason', he was sentenced to one and a half year in prison. During his time there, Uhlmann produced drawings and developed the idea of a 'wire sculpture', which he executed sculpturally following his release. His early oeuvre remained very important to Uhlmann throughout his life: 'As the basis for all my subsequent work, it is the most important period in my artistic development.'

Dance and Movement

After the Second World War came to an end, Uhlmann intentionally decided to abandon his engineering career in order to work solely as an artist. In post-war Berlin, he was also active as an organizer of exhibitions: initially for the district administration of Berlin-Steglitz and subsequently for the Galerie Gerd Rosen. Uhlmann thus influenced the art scene in West Berlin not only as an artist, but also as a mediator. His works from the years after 1945 are characterized by a great pleasure in experimentation, particularly with the handling of various materials.

BG

Besides solid plaster figures and bronzes, Uhlmann developed his wire sculptures further as well. The fine wire was, however, replaced with thicker iron rods, which the artist warped in such a way that they give rise to figures as if drawn in space. In these works, Uhlmann dedicated himself primarily to the topics of 'dance' and 'movement'.

Transcending the Material

In 1950, Uhlmann began teaching at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste (today: Universität der Künste) in Berlin-Charlottenburg. He first took over the preliminary course as an associate professor. The position at the college offered Uhlmann financial security and opened up new possibilities for him. Within the framework of his teaching activities, he had a large studio at his disposal, which gave him very new technical design options. His sculptures consequently became considerably larger. Artistically, Uhlmann's works in the 1950s became more and more detached from representational references. The question of material also seems to have clarified itself for him. For his sculptures, he now used exclusively metal. Thematically, however, he continued to devote himself to the question of representing movement and transcending his material.

International Success

In the 1950s, West Germany strove to present itself abroad as a free and democratic nation. Visual art played a central role in communicating this image. Attempts were thus made to underscore the image of a modern state particularly by promoting modern and non-representational art, which had been defamed by the National Socialist regime as 'degenerate'. Hans Uhlmann also achieved international success in this context. With his abstract works in metal, he was staged internationally as a representative of a young German art. His works were presented at international exhibitions such as the Biennale di Venezia, Biennale de São Paulo, and documenta, as well as at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

A New Astronomy of Space

In the 1960s, Uhlmann worked intensively on the realization of 'per cent for art' projects. These commissions influenced his small-format sculptures as well, which now became significantly more compact. They are also less playful than the wire compositions of the 1950s. Formally, Uhlmann occupied himself in his late oeuvre with the topics of 'tower' and 'column'. But unlike what the titles suggest, these sculptures

are not massive blocks, but instead spaces constructed round an inner life. As in his early oeuvre, Uhlmann was also interested in permeability in his late sculptures. While his early drawings were closely connected with his sculptural works, his late chalk drawings become more and more detached from his sculptures. The drawings of the 1960s thus form their own complex of works. For Uhlmann, the drawings were an important artistic means for expressing himself spontaneously—a spontaneity that was barely possible when working on his rigorously conceived sculptures.

Monumental Sculptures in Berlin

In the 1950s and 1960s, Uhlmann was very much in demand as an artist for 'per cent for art' projects. Between 1954 and 1972, he thus produced a total of seventeen publicly commissioned works, which can still be seen today in cities in western Germany as well as in Rome, Italy. In the western part of Berlin, altogether four large-format sculptures adorn striking urban public spaces: Concerto (1954) in the foyer of the concert hall of the Universität der Künste and the sculptures on Hansaplatz (1958), in front of the Deutsche Oper (1960–61), and on the roof of the Berlin Philharmonie (1963). In the 1950s and 1960s, these works were an expression of the general striving for modernity that characterized West Berlin.

The exhibition is supported by the Förderverein Berlinische Galerie e. V.



Exhibition catalogue

Kerber Verlag, 272 pages, 120 illustrations,
German/English

Museum edition: 29,80 €

ISBN: 978-3-940208-83-5

Book trade edition: 38,00 €

ISBN: 978-3-7356-0956-4

Podcast

An episode (in German) of the Berlinische Galerie's 'Art in Berlin' podcast will be released in March to accompany the exhibition. Director Thomas Köhler talks to Ilka Voermann about her first exhibition on 'Hans Uhlmann' as head of the Departments Prints and Drawings at the Berlinische Galerie. The episode deals with Uhlmann's artistic work from the 1930s to the 1970s. The podcast will be available on all the usual podcast platforms and online:
berlinischegalerie.de/podcast/kunst-in-berlin

Programme

berlinischegalerie.de/en/programme/calendar

Press images

berlinischegalerie.de/en/press-release/hans-uhlmann

Online tickets

bg.berlin/en/tickets

Social Media

#HansUhlmannBG

#berlinischegalerie

Contact Berlinische Galerie

Sascha Perkins

Head of Communication and Education

Tel +49 (0)30 78 902 829

perkins@berlinischegalerie.de

Paula Rosenboom

Communication

Tel +49 (0)30 78 902 831

rosenboom@berlinischegalerie.de

Berlinische Galerie

Berlin's Museum of Modern Art,

Photography and Architecture

Alte Jakobstraße 124–128

10969 Berlin

Tel +49 (0)30 78 902 600

berlinischegalerie.de

Admission 10€, concessions 6€

Wed–Mon 10 am–6 pm

Tue closed

Contact Press

Bureau N

Friederike Wode

Tel +49 (0)30 62736102

friederike.wode@bureau-n.de