

# Look at the People!

## The New Objectivity “Type” Portrait in the Weimar Period

12/02/2023 – 04/14/2024

- This exhibition focuses on portraits of types of people by New Objectivity painters during the Weimar period (1918–1933). In many of these portraits, artists emphasized what was “typical” about the person they were painting. The debates on human constitutions and types that were omnipresent at the time had a determining influence on these depictions.
- With more than 100 works of New Objectivity—including paintings, prints and works on paper, as well as photographs—the exhibition enables visitors to explore this art movement and its significance for us today from a new perspective. The artworks are complemented by historical documents and materials, such as books, magazines, advertisements, and films.
- A key goal of the exhibition is to encourage visitors to thoroughly engage with social stereotypes and their effectiveness.
- The installation by the artist Cemile Sahin, created especially for this exhibition, establishes a link to the present day.
- For this exhibition, the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart is collaborating with the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz – Museum Gunzenhauser.

Ernst Gombrich remarked already in 1966 that the book “Physique and Character” by the psychologist from Tübingen Ernst Kretschmer was “the talk of the day” back in the 1920s. The same was true for the medical guide “Sieh dir die Menschen an!” (Look at the People) (1930), written by the physician Gerhard Venzmer. The theories regarding the typology of people based on their outer appearance presented in these publications were read and discussed equally in almost all social classes all over Germany. The enthusiasm for “types” and the accompanying desire for a systematic order triggered an omnipresent discussion about human constitutions and types in the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) that can be seen in the most diverse contexts.

This is also the starting point for the exhibition “Look at the People! The New Objectivity ‘Type’ Portrait in the Weimar Period” in which the artworks presented are explored within a discourse in society that goes beyond their art historical significance. This makes it possible to consider the painted, printed, and photographed portraits of New Objectivity as visual documents of processes of social classification. The main goal of this exhibition is to inspire visitors to reflect

on social stereotypes, how they are seemingly legitimized by science, how they are spread through art and mass media, how they are often reproduced without thinking, and, last but not least, how they persist because, in hindsight, it becomes clear that many stereotypes and clichés that were established in the 1920s still have an effect on us today and influence how we view other people.

New Objectivity continues to be an important theme for the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart because this art movement represents an important focus of our collection. The museum is always striving to revisit the collection from new perspectives and examine it in light of questions that are relevant for society today. By complementing our own works of New Objectivity—with Otto Dix's portraits leading the way—in this exhibition with international loans from more than 40 museums and private collections, we are able to represent the typology of the individual as a key leitmotif of the art of New Objectivity in a comprehensive manner. A special highlight is on works by women artists, for they had a decisive influence on New Objectivity in the Weimar Republic but were often marginalized. Artists like Jeanne Mammen, Grethe Jürgens, and Kate Diehn-Bitt had a major impact on social, political, and cultural life and were active in the construction of and reflection on gender roles and different types of women.

The portrait was one of the most important means of expression in New Objectivity and was characterized by a unprecedented connection between portraits of individuals and portraits of types. The artists captured people's individual physiognomies, but they also highlighted what was typical about them, presenting them in their social environment and as representatives of a certain social group. The artists took very different approaches to this theme: Sometimes they simply adopted stereotypical figures like the "worker" or "intellectual," thereby taking them for granted; other times their representations addressed how questionable or legitimate these ascribed typologies were. Some portraits undoubtedly confirmed the prejudices that were prevalent at the time and bolstered racist, misogynist, or homophobic animosity. On the other hand, artists also used their pictures to depict people from social groups that had been underrepresented in the past, and they portrayed positive connotations of sexual identities in a nonjudgmental way. New Objectivity portraits of types of people are thus also expressions of an emancipatory movement that was critical of society.

Because the categorization of our fellow humans is, per se, a contradictory process that is both deeply human and always necessarily connected to mechanisms of exclusion, this lends the exhibition a fundamental dichotomy in which making types visible necessarily leads to the reproduction of clichés as well. For this reason, the works are always contextualized by historical documents and materials—like books, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and films—so that viewers can establish a differentiated and critical reflection of this subject from today's perspective. Through this contextualization, it also becomes clear that the ambivalence between a classification that provides orientation and discriminatory judgments was already being discussed at the time. In the exhibition galleries, educational texts in plain

language (also available in an audio version) make the content and contexts of the exhibition more accessible for everyone. We also address the main themes in workshops and lectures accompanying the exhibition.

How difficult it is for humans to avoid the dilemma of wanting to categorize other people according to their appearance is also shown in the installation “Alpha Dog” (2023) by Cemile Sahin (born in 1990), which was developed especially for this exhibition and which creates a link from the exhibition project to the present time. Sahin, who is an artist living in Berlin, deals with tendencies to create typologies and classifications that are used in computer-based facial recognition tools. In this way, she points at the dangers of a programmed racism, while revealing parallels to the debate about human constitutions and types in the Weimar period.

**Artists** Hans Baluschek, Rudolf Bergander, Albert Birkle, Richard Birnstengel, Friedrich Bochmann, Steffi Brandl, Gottfried Brockmann, Friedrich Busack, Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, Erich Drechsler, Kate Diehn-Bitt, Rudolf Dischinger, Otto Dix, Hermann Fechenbach, Conrad Felixmüller, Fred Goldberg, Otto Griebel, George Grosz, Lea Grundig, Hans Grundig, Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn, Hainz Hamisch, Olga Hayduk, Nini Hess, Karl Hubbuch, Heinrich Hoerle, Lotte Jacobi, Grethe Jürgens, Alexander Kanoldt, Annelise Kretschmer, Paula Lauenstein, Lotte Lesehr-Schneider, Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, Jeanne Mammen, Hanna Nagel, Gerta Overbeck-Schenk, Lotte B. Prechner, Anton Räderscheidt, Curt Querner, Christian Schad, August Sander, Josef Scharl, Rudolf Schlichter, Wilhelm Schnarrenberger, Georg Scholz, Alice Sommer, Cami Stone, Erika Streit, Ernst Thoms, Kurt Weinhold, Erik Winnertz, Dörte Clara Wolff [DODO], Richard Ziegler – and Cemile Sahin

**Concept** Anne Vieth

**Curator** Dierk Höhne

**Assistant curators** Alina Grehl, Arne Schmidt

## **Kunstmuseum Stuttgart opening hours**

Tuesday to Sunday 10 am – 5 pm

Friday 10 am – 8 pm

## **Admission**

11 € / 8 € / kids under 18 years free of charge

## **Catalog**

Hatje Cantz Verlag, German / English, 304 pages

ISBN 978-3-7757-5600-6

Museum price 40 € / Retail price 54 €

## **Mediaguide**

The digital tour presents individual type portraits of the Weimar Period (1918–1933) and the main themes of the exhibition. It connects historical sources with current debates from society, social science, and the humanities.

## Diversity Room

In "Studio 11. Raum für Kunstvermittlung," terms and basic principles from the subject areas of diversity, discrimination critique and equality are explained. A glossary provides terms on different levels.

## Arts of the Working Class – Issue 29

In several articles, the current issue of the street newspaper "Arts of the Working Class" looks at the changing image of cultural workers—and in particular at organizations in which they organize themselves collectively. The articles are based on the "Art Worker's Summit," which took place with international and Stuttgart art and cultural workers as part of the preparations for the exhibition. The newspaper is available free of charge at the museum.

## An exhibition organized by the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart in cooperation with the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz – Museum Gunzenhauser

**KUNST  
SAMMLUNGEN  
CHEMNITZ**

Museum Gunzenhauser

The exhibition is on display at Museum  
Gunzenhauser from 05/11 – 09/01/2024

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**Press images available at:** [www.kunstmuseum-stuttgart.de/presse/menschen](http://www.kunstmuseum-stuttgart.de/presse/menschen)

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