



Press release

Frankfurt am Main, February 29, 2024

Launch of the project "The digital archive of the Städel Schule 1920 to 1950"

[The German Research Foundation](#) (DFG) announces the funding of the important project "The Digital Archive of the Städel Schule 1920 to 1950". The Städel Schule is committed to making this historically significant period more accessible and facilitating research. The cooperation partner is the [Johann Christian Senckenberg University Library](#) (UB JCS), represented by Director Daniela Poth. For the project to digitize the Städel Schule's decentralized holdings and make them accessible virtually and from any location the Städel Museum and the Institute for City History are opening their archives. The funding period is three years, for which a dedicated project position has been created, filled by the art historian Begüm Inal

Background and historical significance

The Frankfurt citizen and banker Johann Friedrich Städel (1728-1816) stipulated in his will that his fortune should be used to establish a foundation for an art institute. In 1817, one year after his death, the Städel Art Institute was founded. This consisted of a gallery and exhibition collection on the one hand, and a teaching institute on the other, where teaching was free of charge regardless of religion or gender.

As a result of the First World War and inflation in the post-war period, the already tense financial situation worsened and the foundation's assets were lost. The Städel'sches Kunstinstitut, the institute with museum and school, developed into two independently operating institutions. In 1919, the Städel Schule was given the status of an independent institution and thus lost its direct connection to the Städel'sches Kunstinstitut - the collection alone now bore this name. During the period of the "New Frankfurt" in the 1920s, the Städel Schule was merged with the Kunstgewerbeschule Frankfurt, founded in 1878, and from then on encompassed the fields of painting, architecture and design.



The war and its consequences

After the National Socialists came to power, Frankfurt's art institutions were "purged": Artistic employees were dismissed in 1933, many lecturers were suspended or dismissed. Jewish students were also expelled from the Städelschule.

Recognition as a School of Fine Arts was granted in 1942 with a contract between the Free State of Prussia and the City of Frankfurt. During the destruction of Frankfurt in the winter of 1943/1944 by Allied attacks, the Städelschule building was also severely damaged. As a result, teaching was relocated to the suburbs of Frankfurt and to rural regions. Teaching continued until March 1945 and was resumed on November 1, 1946 under the sponsorship of the City of Frankfurt am Main.

Establishment of the Städelschule's university archive from 2019

A new chapter in the history of the University of Fine Arts began on January 1, 2019, with the change of sponsorship from the City of Frankfurt am Main to the State of Hesse. This change in sponsorship prompted the establishment of a separate university archive. Its task is to take over all written and audiovisual documents worthy of archiving from all departments of the School, to record them, make them accessible, store them permanently, secure them and make them generally usable. The Städelschule archive contains registers, files, plans, posters, photos, media and art objects. The archive supports teaching and research at the Städelschule in both internal and external research projects and thus serves as a memory and mirror of university history and teaching. The legal basis is the Hessian Archive Act and the currently valid Data Protection Act.

Due to the changing ownership, the existing archive holdings from 1920 to 1950 of the university's predecessor institutions are located at different sites: in the Städel Museum archive (until 1923), in the Institute for City History Frankfurt (from 1923) and in the university archive (from 1924 to 1950). As a result, the collection is distributed across several provenances.

High relevance for the cultural memory of the city of Frankfurt am Main

The decentralized location of the archive material and the small amount of material that has already been digitized make it difficult to gain a complete overview of the holdings between 1920 and 1950 and to use them thematically. In addition, there is a considerable loss of written material from the years before 1945. The aim of the project is to bring the scattered archive holdings together centrally through digitization and the associated virtual preservation. The Städelschule's unique archive material consists of written documents and a manageable number of photographs, drawings, paintings and graphics.

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This opens up the possibility of subjecting the extensive history of the Städelschule with its protagonists and its significance for the regional, but above all international art and cultural scene to academic processing.

The supra-regional significance of the holdings to be digitized is exemplified by the fact that the Städelschule has received an increasing number of national and international inquiries about the contents of the archive material in recent years. These come from interested academics, local historians and relatives of former students. The focus here is usually on researching individuals, particularly those groups of students who were no longer allowed to continue their studies during the Nazi era and had to leave Germany. Another focus of the inquiries is the search for lecturers and the content of teaching during the National Socialist era. It is therefore important to secure and preserve the remaining holdings in order to ensure a much higher level of use and access.

"The project will give researchers, artists and interested parties the opportunity to explore the history of the Städelschule in the context of events and developments, its significance for the national and international artistic scene, especially in the 20th century, and at the same time make it usable for artistic projects," says Prof. Yasmil Raymond, Rector of the Städelschule.

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Facts:

- The funding period is three years
- The aim is to digitally preserve the collection (by recording it using indexing data/metadata, creating digital copies and long-term archiving), to virtually merge the distributed collection via Arcinsys and to make the historical material on the Städelschule from 1920 to 1950 available virtually from any location via platforms such as Arcinsys, Archivportal-D, Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (DDB) and an independent output layer via the JCS University Library's digitization server.
- The scope consists of around 35,000 individual pages of written documents in various formats and on different materials as well as additional art objects in the form of drawings, photographs, paintings and graphics
- Thematically, the content includes the following selection: University history of the Städelschule including changes of status, student lists, teaching staff and teaching content (New Frankfurt, Fritz Wichert, Max Beckmann, architecture class, fashion class/fashion office), Nazi era with letters of leave and dismissal in 1933, war diary of the Städelschule (1939-1945), denazification files and correspondence in this regard
- Expert Council: Dr. Helen Barr (art historian, Art History Institute, Goethe University), Prof. Daniel Birnbaum (Professor of Philosophy and Art Education, Städelschule), Prof. Willem de Rooij (artist and Professor of Fine Arts, Städelschule), Prof. Philippe Pirotte (Professor of Art History and Curatorial Studies, Städelschule), Prof. Yasmil Raymond (Rector and Professor of Curatorial Studies, Städelschule), Prof. Dr. Lynn Rother (Chair of Provenance Studies, Leuphana University), Andreas Schieberle (Research Associate, Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences), Dr. Iris Schmeisser (Head of Provenance Research, Städel Museum), Dr. Stefan Schmunk (Chair of Information Science and Digital Library, Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences), Dr. Sebastian Tripp (Deputy Head of New Department / Digital Long-Term Archive, ISG), Dr. Nicola Wurthmann (Head of Department, Hessian Main State Archive, Wiesbaden), Thorsten Wübbena (Head of Digital Historical Research, Leibniz Institute of European History)

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