

Press release

Isa Genzken Meets Liebieghaus

6 March to 31 August 2025

Press Preview: Wednesday, 5 March 2025, 11.00 am

Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung

Frankfurt am Main, 10 February 2025 – The Liebieghaus is forging a unique link between the present and the past by juxtaposing powerful works by Isa Genzken (b. 1948) with its sculpture collection spanning 5,000 years. From 6 March to 31 August 2025, 17 works by the renowned artist will be on display alongside ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman, as well as medieval and modern-era works from the museum's outstanding collection.

Isa Genzken is one of the most important contemporary artists and has been a major influence on the international art scene since the 1980s. Her diverse oeuvre encompasses sculpture, collage, painting, film and photography and is characterized by the combination of personal experience with extensive references to art history, architecture and modernism. Often dealing with the remnants of material culture and the decay of architectural structures, she uses her own biography to explore central themes such as identity, beauty and the role of the individual in society. She combines an impressive variety of materials—from textiles, cement and glass to stuffed animals and aeroplane windows—to create enigmatic sculptures that reflect the fragility of the modern world. Her works challenge social and cultural ideals, including those associated with the notion of marble-white ancient sculpture. In this way, her work also provides a contemporary commentary on the polychromy of ancient sculpture.

The exhibition takes as its point of departure the polychromy of statues, a subject for which the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung is internationally renowned for its research and educational work. Isa Genzken has taken up these scientific findings in various works and translated them into her own formal language. Among the works on display at the Liebieghaus are her reinterpretations of the casts of Nefertiti, as well as works from 2016 for which she created a collage from numerous pages of a catalogue for the exhibition “BUNTE GÖTTER” (2010). Key sculptures from Genzken's oeuvre, such as *Fenster* (1990) and *Weltempfänger 'Berlin'* (1991), as well as the film *Die kleine Bushaltestelle (Gerüstbau)* (2012), are included in the presentation at the Liebieghaus, providing a broad insight into her work. The exhibition extends into almost all areas of the permanent exhibition: from the Liebieghaus garden and the antiquities collection to the medieval and modern-era rooms.

After “Jeff Koons. The Sculptor” (2012) and “William Kentridge. O Sentimental Machine” (2018), “Isa Genzken Meets Liebieghaus” is the third contemporary art intervention at the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Gemeinnützige Kulturfonds Rhein-Main GmbH and the Städtischer Museums-Verein e. V.

“Isa Genzken’s works represent a tireless artistic engagement with our cultural history and its relevance to the contemporary world. It is a great pleasure and enrichment for us to be able to present her works in the midst of the Liebieghaus collection, which spans 5,000 years. For our visitors, such encounters with contemporary art in an international historical collection are always particularly stimulating, because they allow the history of sculpture up to the present day to be told and, above all, impressively experienced”, explains Philipp Demandt, Director of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung.

Sylvia von Metzler, Chair of the Städtelscher Museums-Verein e.V.: “As an association of friends and patrons, we support the Städel Museum and the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung in all their endeavours, including this exhibition of works by the great German artist Isa Genzken. Since our founding more than 125 years ago, we have felt a special affinity with contemporary art. The extraordinary private commitment of our members is reflected not only in their support for this exhibition, but also in the expansion of the Städel’s contemporary art collection, for which we have already been able to purchase two important works by Isa Genzken.”

Vinzenz Brinkmann, curator of the exhibition and Head of the Liebieghaus Department of Antiquities and Asia, explains: “Isa Genzken approaches the concept of sculpture with unmistakable humour and an extraordinary joy in experimentation. Her work, characterized by an impressive range and radicalism, demonstrates a remarkable ability to constantly reinvent herself. Rather than adhering to a clearly defined artistic signature, she creates works that subtly and directly reflect social issues and evoke a wide range of associations—without ever becoming clearly tangible. Particularly in her works on the polychromy of statues, which provoke and challenge our viewing habits, her joy in questioning truths we thought were certain is evident.”

Tour of the Exhibition

In the Liebieghaus sculpture garden, visitors encounter the *Pink Rose* (2016/2023), a colourful steel and aluminium sculpture over eight metres high that Isa Genzken first created in the 1990s as a site-specific commission and other versions of which are on permanent display in New York and Tokyo, among other places. While the rose is often associated with positive, emotional value as a symbol of beauty and as a gift, Genzken’s monumental work exudes an almost menacing presence. Its imposing size shrinks the surrounding area and the sculptures permanently exhibited in the garden, shifting proportions—a key aspect for the medium of sculpture.

In the first room of the collection presentation, works of art from ancient Egypt meet two sculptures (both 2018) from an extensive series by Genzken, in which she adapts the famous bust of the Egyptian queen **Nefertiti** from the 14th century BC. The juxtaposition of the two plaster casts—one left white, the other painted in colour—and their placement among the ancient sculptures takes up the theme of the polychromy of statues. A sculpture without colour was considered unfinished and unsightly in both ancient Egypt and ancient Europe. Both busts wear sunglasses—a high-contrast combination of sculpture and everyday object that has characterized Genzken’s work since the 2000s.

The variation of the Xanten Boy (*Untitled*, 2015) exhibited in the following room, the original of which, like the bust of Nefertiti, is in the Neues Museum Berlin, has also been fitted with a modern accessory by Isa Genzken and transformed, with only minimal changes, into an everyday figure. She has placed headphones connected to a portable CD player on the plaster cast, coloured and partially covered in copper paint, of the ancient Roman bronze figure, which originally held a tray in its outstretched arms. Genzken deliberately dispenses with a pedestal in order to place the figure at eye level with the visitor and thus make it tangible as a direct counterpart. The colourfully painted bronzes of the Greeks and Romans also create an astonishing illusion of liveliness: the reconstructions of the Riace Warriors, for example, which are exhibited in the same room and were created as part of the “Liebieghaus Polychromy Research

Project”, give the impression of sun-tanned skin achieved through numerous layers of asphalt paint diluted with red pigment. Detailed stone inlays in the eyes, nipples inlaid in copper, and lips and teeth covered with silver sheeting make them appear extremely lifelike. Scientific research has shown that *Warrior A* represents Erechtheus, son of the goddess Athena, and *Warrior B* represents the Thracian king Eumolpus, son of Poseidon. Similar research on the *Quirinal bronzes* has identified these figures in turn as Amycus and Polydeuces, heroes of the Argonaut saga, who encounter one another in a boxing match. These can also be seen in the second room of the museum alongside other colour reconstructions such as the *Phrasikleia* and the so-called *Small Herculaneum Woman*.

The nine mannequins standing in a circle at the centre of the Liebieghaus’s large Hall of Antiquities with its Roman and Greek statues are part of another central series of works in Genzken’s oeuvre, in which, since 2012, she has staged mannequins in frozen moments of human interaction. Her *Schauspieler* (2016) represent both the artist’s alter ego and urban types, whose clothes and accessories allude to the excesses of capitalism. The mannequins wear clothes, some of which the artist has taken from her own wardrobe, and are accessorized with everyday objects that are unusual for the context. Genzken’s unique assemblage technique, developed in the 2000s, uses dolls, plastic toys, cheap consumer goods, decorative objects and spray paint to create colourful, psychedelic-looking sculptures and wall works. In a series of four **assemblages on the polychromy of statues**, three of which from 2016 can also be seen in the Hall of Antiquities, Genzken focuses on overcoming the old dogma of the sublimity of white sculpture. She uses different types of adhesive tape to join together various documents: pages from publications, including one on ancient Greek sculpture with illustrations of numerous colourless figures, pages from the catalogue for the exhibition “Colourful Gods”, at the time at the Pergamonmuseum in Berlin, a report on her 2016 exhibition “Make Yourself Pretty!” at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, among others, as well as a text on the cultural activities of the city of Bremen in 2006 entitled “Verantwortung übernehmen heißt auch Farbe bekennen” (Taking responsibility also means showing your colours).

Isa Genzken has created other assemblages using elements from the interior cladding of passenger planes. At the Liebieghaus, the work *Flugzeugfenster (Medusa)* (2011) is juxtaposed with the colourful reconstruction of a large relief of Medusa’s head. In 2024, scientists at the Liebieghaus were given the opportunity to examine the well-preserved colouration of a Greek, late classical hypogea, the “Ipogeo dei Cristallini” in Naples. This resulted in the project presentation “Medusa’s Colours”, which focused on the reconstruction of a Gorgon. Isa Genzken applied the motif of Caravaggio’s painting of Medusa to the aeroplane windows: in the left of the two windows, she superimposed Medusa’s head with the face of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, and in the window next to it with her own photographic self-portrait.

The elegance of the work *Kai* (2000), on view in the rotunda, contrasts formally with the assemblages and recalls the austere graphic precision of Almir Mavignier, with whom Isa Genzken studied at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts (HFBK) from 1969 to 1971, as well as the artist’s interest in the high-rise architecture of Chicago and New York. The slender stele of wood and metal is over three metres high and is part of a series of portraits of artist friends, in which she also explores the aura of superstardom, and is dedicated to the Cologne painter, video artist and musician Kai Althoff (b. 1966). They co-produced the film *Die kleine Bushaltestelle (Gerüstbau)* (2012, 71:19 min.), which can be seen at the end of the exhibition in the Baroque room of the Liebieghaus. In this episodic film, shot with a simple digital camera and oscillating between slapstick and improvisational theatre, the two play different roles and couple constellations and in their dialogues address themes such as love and sex, weather, illness, money and art.

Genzken’s sculptures in the medieval rooms of the Liebieghaus’s permanent exhibition take up the theme of architecture, among other things. She understands architecture as sculpture and experiments with its forms to address changes in cities and their social and political structures. For example, *Untitled* (2015), a wooden stele covered with mosaic mirror foil, gives the impression of a high-rise building façade.

Genzken has wrapped it like a doll in a Japanese silk kimono, thus countering the monumental, awe-inspiring appearance of high-rise buildings. The ship's propeller lying on the stele is the trophy of the Yanghyun Award, which the artist received in 2009. In the sculptural assemblage *Untitled (4 Türme, 3 Stelen)* (2015), Genzken combines, among other things, a vase made of blown and coloured glass, an ibuprofen package leaflet and various photographs—including one showing her with the painter Gerhard Richter, to whom she was married from 1982 to 1993—with a replica of a seated Madonna and Child. The original, created around 1515 by Hans Leinberger (1480–1531), is part of the collection of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, as are the busts of Nefertiti and the Xanten Boy. Genzken's grouping of the towers and columns is reminiscent of streets and urban canyons. Various images on one of the columns depict high-rise buildings, and the towers are also covered with Genzken's typical mosaic mirror foil reminiscent of building façades. The work illustrates her passion for architecture and big cities, especially New York, which she once described as her "studio".

In the second half of the 1980s, Genzken began making sculptures in concrete, steel and, later, epoxy resin, including the *Fenster* series. The *Fenster* (1990) on view at the Liebieghaus is part of the collection of the Städel Museum. In its simplicity, the combination of concrete and steel, two of the most important building materials in modern architecture, recalls the bare carcasses of buildings. Isa Genzken is fascinated by them because she finds the rationality of engineers more truthful than façades disguised in supposedly noble materials. The artist spent over a decade working on the *Fenster* and other concrete objects in her Berlin studio, such as the *Weltempfänger*, of which the *Weltempfänger 'Berlin'* (1991) can be seen in the Renaissance Hall of the Skulpturensammlung, seemingly communicating silently with the other examples of the series around the globe.

Isa Genzken was born in Bad Oldesloe in 1948 and has lived in Berlin since 1996. She studied Painting, Art History, Philosophy, Photography and Graphic Design, among others at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art from 1973 to 1977. Genzken has received numerous international awards, including the Wolfgang Hahn Prize (2002), the Goslar Kaiserring (2017) and the Nasher Prize (2019), and represented Germany at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Major retrospectives of her work have been held at The Museum of Modern Art in New York (2013) and most recently at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (2023). Her work is included in numerous international collections, such as the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Opening

The opening of the exhibition "Isa Genzken Meets Liebieghaus" will take place on Wednesday, 5 March 2025, from 7.30 pm. Admission is free.

Isa Genzken Meets Liebieghaus

Exhibition Dates: 6 March to 31 August 2025

Curator: Prof. Dr. Vinzenz Brinkmann (Head of the Departments of Antiquities and Asia, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung)

Project Manager: Jakob Salzmann (Curatorial Assistant, Departments of Antiquities and Asia, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung)

Location: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Schaumainkai 71, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Liebieghaus

SKULPTUREN
SAMMLUNG

Opening Hours: Tue, Wed 12.00 noon–6.00 pm, Thu 10.00 am–9.00 pm, Fri–Sun 10.00 am–6.00 pm, closed on Mondays

Information: [liebieghaus.de/en](https://www.liebieghaus.de/en)

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Tickets: Tue–Fri €10, reduced €8; Sat–Sun €12, reduced €10, admission free for children under 12. Tickets are available online at shop.liebieghaus.de.

Overview Tours: Contemporary art meets a world-class sculpture collection: the guided tour of the exhibition on Wednesdays at 2 pm and Saturdays at 4 pm invites you to immerse yourself in Isa Genzken's powerful and multi-layered work and discover the unique connection between the internationally renowned artist's personal experiences and her extensive references to art history, architecture and modernism. Price (admission and guided tour): Wednesdays €15, concessions €13; Saturdays €17, concessions €15. Tickets are available online at shop.liebieghaus.de.

Audio Guide App: The audio tour allows visitors to experience Isa Genzken's art in the context of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung and conveys the complexity of her works. The app in German and English contains audio tracks and illustrations for ten stations and lasts around thirty minutes. The tour is available as a free app for iOS and Android operating systems and can be downloaded to your smartphone from the comfort of your own home or via the Liebieghaus WiFi.

Sponsored by: Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain gGmbH, Städelscher Museums-Verein e. V.

Social Media: The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung communicates the exhibition on social media with the hashtag #Liebieghaus.

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