

Academy of Fine Arts, Berlin



Origins and History

The Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin has its origins in the Academy of Art founded by the Elector Frederick III on July 1st, 1696 with the object of instructing artists and advising the state on all matters related to the arts. It was the first academy of this kind in the then German states and the third in Europe. It became an object of public attention for the first time in 1786 with an academic art exhibition. Not before 1875 were the representative duties of the Prussian Academy of Art separated from its educational tasks of instruction and teaching. The latter were transferred to the Academy of Fine Arts. A significant factor in the development of the Academy during our century was the concentration of the cream of German artistic talent in Berlin, prior to 1914, whose widespread influence proved to be of greatest importance in the years between 1920 and 1930. It was also in the twenties that the first exponents of modern art joined the Berlin Academy as teachers. In 1924, under the influence of the Bauhaus, the Berlin Academy realized the fusion of the fine and the applied arts. In the few years up to 1933, the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts, under its director, architect Bruno Paul, took a further development until it occupied a leading position among the German art academies. Its staff of teachers included painters such as Karl Hofer, sculptors like Edwin Scharff and architects like Hans Poelzig and Heinrich Tessenow. After 1933 this progressive development was forcibly interrupted; at the Berlin Academy, too, the protagonists of modern art and new building were removed and, in some cases, were denied the right to work.

Development after 1945

It was the work of several years to re-establish and rebuild the Academy after 1945. The old masters of modern art either returned to their old posts or joined the body of teachers as new members; they were the painters Karl Hofer, Max Pechstein, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, the sculptors Richard Scheibe, Renée Sintenis and the architect Max Taut. They were able to base the new start of the Academy on the old pre-1933 tradition. Younger masters joined in as representatives of new tendencies and movements in art and architecture. Under the leadership of Karl Hofer the Academy soon regained its former importance; he and his colleagues laid the foundations for the new beginning and the further development.

Thanks to the quality of its teaching and to the generous promotion of the Land Berlin, permitting the rapid growth, the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin is now the largest of the ten West German art academies and has reached a level higher than any held previously in the course of the century. This is in part due to the Academy's endeavour to foster a spirit of team work and to consider the freedom of ideas in the arts and in teaching more valuable than any narrow-minded dogma which would inevitably lead to academic inertia. This is believed to be the only way for the Academy to meet its obligations towards the students.

Teaching, study and research in an academy of fine arts are possible when professors and students are working together in a genuine relationship of the learned and the learning. In a very high degree, the Berlin Academy accomplished the realization of this ideal: 57 professors who not only teach but also continue their own artistic activities, 33 lecturers and 6 craftsmen are working jointly with a total of some 700 students.

Aims and Organisation

The Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin aims at conveying to the Student a most comprehensive instruction in the field of artistic skills and knowledge, while offering at the same time a broad and fundamental education in subjects of general human interest. The Academy unites within the walls the fine arts and architecture, thereby stimulating contacts between the two and emphasizing the unity of art. This also increases stimulations for the evolution of new ideas and insights, eliminating the one-sidedness on the part of the student. Thereby the Academy is giving each student a chance to recognize the functions and the very meaning of creative work within the framework of cultural, social and political trends of our days.

Gifted young artists of the rising generation are provided here with an education of the highest order. The students of the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts are therefore carefully selected both before and during their courses of study; teachers and professors continuously observe and advise them in their artistic and personal development.

The Academy provides instruction in the following four departments:

- Fine Arts
- Applied Arts
- Architecture
- Art Teachers' Education

The variety and the extensiveness of the fields of study covered by these four departments ensure the co-ordination of all artistic subjects. This approach precludes any tendency towards over-specialisation; according to his talents, each student can be given individual and comprehensive training.

Department of Architecture

The Department of Architecture was established only after 1945. Of all West German Academies of Fine Arts the Berlin Academy alone provides within the Department of Architecture a complete syllabus for a course over five years, with intermediate and final examinations. The training is planned in close contact with the free and the applied arts and aims at renewing the old alliance between art and architecture. One among the annual students' competitions run within the Academy is a joint competition under the heading of "Architecture and the Fine Arts," carried out in close teamwork between students of architecture and those of the arts. This way they understand the importance and the necessity of co-operation and learn to speak a common language.