

# HANNAH HÖCH ASSEMBLED WORLDS

Lower Belvedere  
21 June to 6 October 2024



Hannah Höch, *Around a Red Mouth*, 1967  
This work is part of the ifa art collection.  
Photo: © Christian Vagt; © Bildrecht, Vienna 2024

## HANNAH HÖCH ASSEMBLED WORLDS

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The exhibition at the Lower Belvedere pays tribute to one of German modernism's key figures from the 1920s, an artist whose influence extended far beyond this period. Hannah Höch (1889–1978) was one of the inventors of collage and photomontage. Armed with scissors and glue, she explored the power and impact of images with an ironic and incisive gaze.

*General Director Stella Rollig: Hannah Höch was the only woman to hold her own in the circle of Berlin Dadaists—an innovative artist, astute observer, and a political mind. A century after she created her groundbreaking works, Höch is now the artist of the hour. We are delighted about our collaboration with the Zentrum Paul Klee, making it possible to present a detailed picture of Höch for the first time in Austria.*

The exhibition focuses on the montages in which, like in film, Hannah Höch optically and mechanically divided up the world into clips and cuttings, which she reassembled into pictorial narratives that engender new visual experiences. Höch was one of the first artists to explore the power of images in daily life and to engage with the media as a subject of art. In this way she was a pioneer of today's contemporary art with its critical approach to the media.

*Curator Martin Waldmeier: Hannah Höch spent her life perfecting the technique of photomontage, which she had developed in the 1920s, creating an oeuvre that is unmistakable in the history of art. Despite her pioneering achievements, she was only recognized much later. Yet there are few artists from the 1920s who still hold such a fascination for the art of the twenty-first century. By choosing modern society's everyday visual culture as her subject and using her images to arrange and comment on the world of the media, Höch remains very current today.*

The exhibition features eighty of Hannah Höch's photomontages in addition to a selection of paintings, drawings, prints, and archival material from the artist's

estate. These works are placed in a dialogue with films that inspired Höch, including works by Hans Richter, László Moholy-Nagy, Viking Eggeling, Jan Cornelis Mol, Alexander Dovzhenko, Dziga Vertov, Fernand Léger, and Paul Painlevé.

An exhibition by Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern in collaboration with the Belvedere, Vienna.



## BIOGRAPHY HANNAH HÖCH

**1889**

Hannah Höch is born into a middle-class family in Gotha (Germany) on November 1. At the age of fifteen she drops out of school to look after her four younger siblings.

**1912**

Attends the class of glass design at the Charlottenburg School of Applied Arts in Berlin. Her studies are interrupted due to the outbreak of World War I.

**1915**

Transfers to the class of graphic arts and book design at the school attached to the Royal Museum of Decorative Arts in Berlin.

**1916**

Joins the Ullstein publishing house, designing textile patterns for their handicrafts department. Relationship with the painter Raoul Hausmann. Establishes first contacts with the Berlin Dada circle.

**From 1918**

First Dadaist photomontages. Höch is the only woman to contribute to the first Dada exhibition in Berlin.

**1920**

Participates in the First International Dada Fair, the Berlin Dada movement's most important exhibition, at the gallery of Dr. Otto Burchard. Close friendship with the artists Kurt and Helma Schwitters, and László and Lucia Moholy-Nagy.

**1924**

Hannah Höch expands her network in Paris. She is in contact with artists such as Theo and Nelly van Doesburg, Tristan Tzara, Man Ray, Constantin Brancusi, Piet Mondrian, Marcel Duchamp, and Fernand Léger. Höch's works become more widely known. Relationship with the Dutch writer Til Brugman and moves to The Hague. Höch joins the film leagues in The Hague and Rotterdam.

**1929**

First solo exhibition featuring paintings, watercolors, and collages takes place at Kunstzaal De Bron in The Hague. Contributes eighteen photomontages to the Werkbund exhibition Film und Foto in Stuttgart. Höch and Brugman move back to Berlin.

**1931**

Höch becomes a member of the Berlin film league and the Reichsverband bildender Künstler Deutschlands (German National Federation of Visual Artists). She is politically active against film censorship and in support of abortion rights.

**1932**

A planned exhibition at the Bauhaus is cancelled after the school is closed by the Nazis.

**1933**

Non-conformist artists from Höch's circle of friends are politically persecuted. Höch's works are also denounced as "cultural Bolshevism." Höch is banned from exhibiting in Germany and withdraws from public life.

**1934**

Architect František Kalivoda invites Höch to show her work in Brno, her last major exhibition before World War II. Höch becomes seriously ill and is forced to reduce her artistic activities.

**1935**

Relationship with the sales representative and pianist Kurt Heinz Matthies.

**1939**

Moves to a small house in the Berlin suburb of Heiligensee. The large garden becomes a refuge for Höch. After the end of her relationship with Matthies, she lives here in seclusion through the war years.

**1945**

After World War II, Höch starts exhibiting again and resumes contact with her friends in exile. She works on new photomontages and creates her Picture Book. The artist increasingly

distances herself from Dada and moves closer to a lyrical Surrealism.

**1948**

Contributes to the exhibition Collage at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

**1956**

Participates in an exhibition at Galerie Klipstein und Kornfeld, Bern.

**1968**

Participates in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Publication of her first monograph.

**1971**

Creates the monumental photomontage Life Portrait.

**1974**

Retrospective at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto.

**1978**

Hannah Höch dies in Berlin at the age of eighty-eight.

## EXHIBITION TEXTS

### **Hannah Höch**

The German Dadaist, painter, and montage artist Hannah Höch (1889–1978) was a key figure of the avant-garde in the 1920s. She was one of the very first artists to engage with the power of images, making her a pioneer of today's art with its critical approach to the media.

As a young woman, Hannah Höch's job with a major German magazine publisher gave her access to an abundant supply of visual material. She used this to create photomontages in which she examined topical issues of her day. Höch practiced and perfected this technique over the course of her artistic career that spanned six decades.

Little known until now is that Höch regarded photomontage as closely related to film: on the screen and on paper, new visual experiences can be conjured up through cutting, composition, and montage. In this exhibition Höch's intensive engagement with avant-garde film can be appreciated through juxtapositions with her work. The show includes films that Höch had seen, made by contemporaries including László Moholy-Nagy, Fernand Léger, Viking Eggeling, and Dziga Vertov. But most of all, the presentation pays tribute to the work of Hannah Höch, who helped define photomontage as a poetic art form in the age of mass media.

### **Dada**

Dada was an artistic and literary movement that formed during World War I in Zurich. Artists from across Europe gathered there and organized provocative soirées in which they criticized imperialism, militarism, and nationalism. Their manifestos and pamphlets took aim at conventional forms of art and bourgeois values. Above all they denounced the indifference of a society that accepted, or even legitimized, the horrific war. After 1918 Dada artists spread the movement to Berlin and Paris, among other cities. They questioned the traditional concept of art and promoted anti-art. This encompassed photomontage with its pieced together fragments of everyday life, a technique that was invented by the Berlin Dadaists, including Hannah Höch. Beauty, harmony, and wholeness were replaced by the contradictory, the incomplete, and the "assembled" artwork.

### **Montage**

Hannah Höch and her colleagues from the Berlin Dada movement called their works "montages" or "photomontages." They described themselves as "Monteure" (mechanics or assembly operators), piecing together their works from images cut out of illustrated magazines and advertisements. Responding to a society that had descended into chaos, photomontage expressed the desire for a radical new beginning in art. It was based on the revolutionary notion of disassembling the world into its component parts and building it into new worlds. After World War I, montage became an important technique employed by the international avant-garde. Soon it was used in graphic design, advertising, and for political propaganda. It also emerged as an essential technique in film, a medium whose artistic possibilities were intensively explored during the 1920s. The use of montage in

film promised an unprecedented visual experience that would unsettle the audience with its unusual cuts, encouraging critical thinking and action.

## **Assembled Bodies**

Technological advances resulted in the emergence of a modern visual popular culture in the 1920s. Daily life was profoundly influenced by mass media: illustrated newspapers and magazines, film and advertising. Images of politicians and film stars, public figures, and anonymous people from other countries and cultures were reproduced thousands of times and circulated like never before. These images in the media soon exerted tremendous power. They guided perception and created new conventions, for example with regard to norms of physical beauty, gender roles and stereotypical behavior, and issues of social belonging. In contrast to some of her colleagues from the Dada movement, Hannah Höch did not pursue political goals or activism. She advocated a "free photomontage." Nevertheless, Höch used the technique of montage to comment on existing images or to combine these into humorous, highly charged, and sometimes subversive new creations.

## **Assembled Bodies II**

The crisis-ridden Weimar Republic was a battleground of different ideologies. Social and economic instability during the 1920s increasingly laid the groundwork for the rise of fascism. The nationalist and racist ideology of the future Nazi regime was developing. At the same time, revolutionary communism aimed to build a "classless" society. Both ideologies used the emerging mass media to spread their own human image. Hannah Höch engaged critically with this totalitarian propaganda. Whereas the media promoted the image of the "new human" based on fascist or socialist ideals, she created pictures of varied and diverse figures that defy clear categorization.

## **The Poetry of Form**

Hannah Höch used both figurative and abstract motifs in her works. These examples demonstrate her enduring fascination with rhythm, composition, and the effects of form, structure, and color, which dates back to her student days. The artist once wrote that she introduced photographs like colors in her photomontages, as if the photos were her paint. After 1933 works by Dadaist artists were branded "degenerate art" in Germany. Unlike many of her colleagues, Höch did not leave the country but her art changed. Höch referred less and less to social themes and avoided politically charged visual material. Nor did she return to these subjects after the war. During her life, Höch developed photomontage from a form of rebellion against conventions in art and society into a universal form of visual poetry.

## **Wonderland**

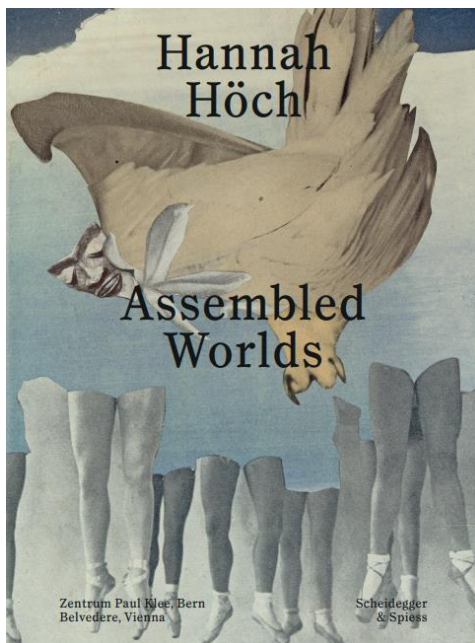
After World War II, Hannah Höch increasingly distanced herself from Dada. She now described her work as "fantastic art" and became interested in Surrealism. Like Dada, Surrealism aimed to create art beyond logic that captured the world's difficult situation by distorting and transcending reality. At the same time, the anarchic and satirical sides of Dada were replaced with a new seriousness. In the spirit of Surrealism, after 1945 Höch worked more with photographs of plants, animals, and organic structures. She was

inspired by experimental nature films that recorded the processes of growth and decay. Höch's pictorial compositions often explored nature itself: a place of fantasy, at once enticing and threatening, familiar and foreign. Abstract and figurative motifs merge into dreamlike landscapes reminiscent of distant worlds that are populated by mysterious beings and plants.

## **Wild Garden**

Fearing persecution, Hannah Höch retreated during World War II to a small house on the outskirts of Berlin where she lived in anonymity and seclusion. Whereas in her early career she had extensive contacts with the German and international avant-garde, her world shrank from the late 1930s onward. Her home became a symbolic barricade shielding her from the unfolding catastrophe. In her garden, Höch buried her archive, which contained her own works and examples by artist friends from the Dada period. The garden was also a source of food during the last years of the war. Höch wrote: "It provides so much beauty, so many nuanced colors and forms, tenderness and intoxicating delights that it satisfies my hunger for the perfect, the magnificent, and the unique." Höch's garden increasingly appeared as a motif in the works of the postwar period. It provided the artist with comfort and inspiration, but also hinted at the isolation from which she could never again truly escape.

## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



**Hannah Höch**  
**Assembled Worlds**

Editors: Stella Rollig, Martin Waldmeier,  
Nina Zimmer

Authors: Martin Waldmeier, Kristin  
Makholm

Graphic design: bonbon

Scheidegger & Spiess Verlag

200 pages, 154 images

Format: 17 x 23 cm

Softcover mit Klappen und  
Heißfolienprägung

German & English edition:  
ISBN 978-3-03942-171-8 (GER)  
ISBN 978-3-03942-172-5 (EN)

Insert Vienna:  
Wire binding with about 16 to 32 pages  
in German and English  
Belvedere list of objects & exhibition  
views  
Will be enclosed with the exhibition  
catalogue

Price: EUR 39,10

## GENERAL INFORMATION

<b>Exhibition</b>	Hannah Höch. Assembled Worlds
<b>Curator</b>	Martin Waldmeier (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern)
<b>Assistant Curators</b>	Johanna Hofer, Ana Petrovic
<b>Duration</b>	21 June 2024 to 6 October 2024
<b>Location</b>	Lower Belvedere, Rennweg 6, 1030 Vienna
<b>Opening Hours</b>	Monday to Sunday, 10 am to 6 pm
<b>Education</b>	Belvedere Education T + 43 1 795 57-134   M <a href="mailto:public@belvedere.at">public@belvedere.at</a>
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For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit [www.belvedere.at/en/press](http://www.belvedere.at/en/press)