

Exhibition: *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*

On View: September 21, 2014–April 26, 2015

Location: Art of the Americas building, Ground Floor

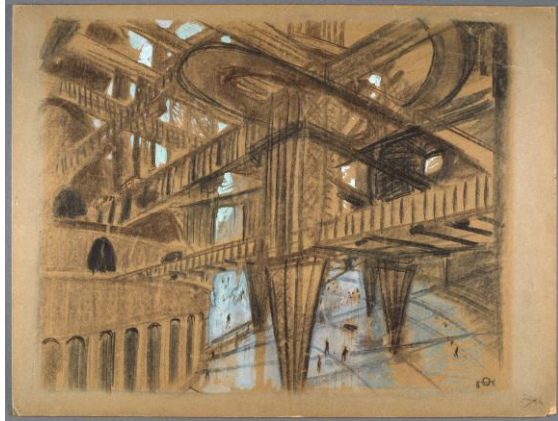


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(Los Angeles—August 25, 2014) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), in collaboration with La Cinémathèque française, presents *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s* (September 21, 2014–April 26, 2015), an exhibition that explores the height of German Expressionist film history through nearly 250 objects. Augmenting a vast collection of set design drawings—on loan from the Cinémathèque—an array of film clips, photographs, posters, documents, and cameras represent 25 films, 20 artists, and 14 directors. In addition to significant loans from the Cinémathèque, objects featured in *Haunted Screens* draw from the rich collections of LACMA’s Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ Margaret Herrick Library, and Los Angeles-based private collectors. The exhibition is designed by Amy Murphy and Michael Maltzan, with Michael Maltzan Architecture, Inc.

Britt Salvesen, Department Head and Curator of both the Prints and Drawings Department and the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department at LACMA, remarked, “*Haunted Screens* underscores the museum's strengths in German modernist art. In addition, this exhibition highlights the relationship between LACMA and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; our complementary collections allow us to explore the international history of cinema.”

“*Haunted Screens* is the tenth exhibition at LACMA in just four years to explore the relationship between art and film,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis

Annenberg Director. "Additionally, it underscores the museum's legacy of engaging with German art, including shows like *Marsden Hartley: The German Paintings 1913-1915* and *Expressionism in Germany and France: From Van Gogh to Kandinsky*."

*Haunted Screens* debuts at LACMA during the centennial anniversary of World War I and is one of three shows at the museum this year to examine work produced in Germany before, during, and soon after the war. *Expressionism in Germany and France* (on view through September 14, 2014) explores the cosmopolitan exchange in Europe that gave rise to the Expressionist movement in painting, and *Marsden Hartley* (on view through November 30, 2014) portrays the profound impact WWI had on the American painter's body of work. Elsewhere in Los Angeles, two exhibitions at the Skirball Cultural Center examine chapters in film history that followed the emergence of German Expressionist cinema. *Light & Noir: Exiles and Émigrés in Hollywood, 1933–1950* traces the development of genres such as film noir by émigré actors, directors, writers, and composers who fled Nazi Europe, while *The Noir Effect* highlights the enduring influence of film noir on American pop culture, art, and media. Both exhibitions at the Skirball Cultural Center run from October 23, 2014–March 1, 2015.

## Exhibition Overview

German cinema produced under the liberal Weimar Republic, between 1919 and 1933, was the first self-conscious art cinema, influencing filmmakers throughout the world in its own time and continuing to inspire artists today. Though German cinema had an international presence both before and after World War I (easily accomplished during the silent era since the intertitles could be replaced with different languages), the war interrupted global production, and in Germany especially, the after effects of defeat changed the industry. Cinema was nationalized in 1917, resulting in the establishment of one major studio, Universum-Film AG (or UFA), which dominated production and distribution, though other smaller studios existed as well. As the post-war economy picked up, directors got more ambitious, audiences grew, many new cinemas opened, and German films were circulated internationally.

The Expressionist movement, which began in the early 1900s and proliferated through painting, photography, theater, literature, and architecture, resurfaced in silent film during the 1920s. In a rejection of realist traditions, Expressionism sought to communicate a subjective, emotional reality through stylized abstraction. Within the cinematic realm, filmmakers employed geometrically distorted set designs, chiaroscuro lighting, innovative camera angles, and melodramatic acting techniques (drawn from Expressionist theater) to express complex psychological states. Storylines most

commonly fixate on the inner workings of the mind; whether the action takes place in the past, present, or future, the protagonists struggle with issues of identity, and the oscillation between control and repression, freedom and expression. To suggest the complexity and contingency of identity, plots often include doppelgängers, multiple personalities, ghosts, and dream sequences in contrast to mainstream cinema of the time in which identities were more fixed, with standard characters playing out familiar plots.

The influence of Expressionist cinema served as a catalyst for subsequent genres, most notably horror, science fiction, and noir. The movement's emphasis on modern psychology set a precedent later followed in almost all science fiction, for example, with the fictional future containing anxieties about the present day. Conflicting attitudes about technology appear prominently in Expressionist film, which is also a cornerstone of science fiction. Horror also has its roots in Expressionist films, which frequently featured monsters and villains with supernatural powers. The influence of Expressionism on noir is most evident in the so-called street films, a genre that arose in Germany in the 1920s. Characters include criminals, prostitutes, street urchins, and other specifically urban types, often contrasted with rubes from the country and smug bourgeois citizens, but the main connection is aesthetic as the émigré directors, cinematographers, and production designers brought their vision from Germany to Hollywood. Fritz Lang, director of seminal films such as *M* and *Metropolis*, is the key director in this context.

The multitude of set design drawings featured in *Haunted Screens*, which have never before been exhibited in the United States, come from the collection of La Cinémathèque française and are part of the legacy of Lotte Eisner, a German émigrée film historian and author of the pioneering text *The Haunted Screen* (1952). Over many years, Eisner sought out individuals involved in making Expressionist films and persuaded them (or their estates) to donate their archives to the Cinémathèque. More than 140 drawings from the Cinémathèque are complemented by some 60 photographs, one dozen books, seven projected film clip sequences, numerous film posters, and a resin-coated, life-size reproduction of the Maria robot from *Metropolis*.

### Exhibition Organization

*Haunted Screens* features roughly 25 films that are grouped by theme within one of five sections. The sections, which are arranged in loose chronological order, include: Madness and Magic; Myths and Legends; Cities and Streets; Machines and Murderers; and a sub-section contained within Machines and Murderers called Stairs, which gathers drawings from a wide variety of films using the stairway as a visual and psychological

motif. There are two darkened tunnel areas within the exhibition in which excerpts from the featured films will be projected to complement the content of the galleries.

Amy Murphy and Michael Maltzan, with Michael Maltzan Architecture, Inc., have designed the installation for *Haunted Screens* with a plan that distinctly highlights each of the five sections and offers fluidity of access between these areas.

“One of the most compelling aspects of Germany Expressionist Cinema is the works’ use of dramatic spatial sequences as an inherent part of storytelling. Without trying to mimic the iconic aesthetic of this movement, we looked instead to provide visitors with a way to engage the spirit of the works through a contemporary series of forms and spaces,” said Amy Murphy and Michael Maltzan. “The exhibition’s architectural elements intentionally create an undulating dialogue between dark and light, inside and outside, space and form, rupture and unity—highlighting the simultaneous and often overlapping worlds of art, film, and design so often represented within each film’s production.”

#### Credit

The exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in collaboration with La Cinémathèque française. In Los Angeles, *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s* is presented by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in association with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and is generously supported by the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation and Riza Aziz.



#### Image Captions:

(Left): Otto Hunte, *Metropolis*, 1927, director: Fritz Lang, gouache and charcoal, sheet: 18 11/16 x 24 5/8 in. (47.4 x 62.5 cm), La Cinémathèque française, Paris. Photo courtesy La Cinémathèque française, Paris

(Right): Unknown photographer, set photograph from *The Nibelungen: The Death of Siegfried (Die Nibelungen: Siegfrieds Tod)*, 1923, director: Fritz Lang, gelatin silver print, La Cinémathèque française, Paris. Photo courtesy La Cinémathèque française, Paris

#### About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 120,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art, Latin American art, ranging from pre-Columbian masterpieces to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over a million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives, such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement

at [lacma.org](http://lacma.org). Situated in Hancock Park on over 20 acres in the heart of Los Angeles, LACMA is located between the ocean and downtown.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

Press Contact: [press@lacma.org](mailto:press@lacma.org), 323-857-6522

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