

PRESSEINFORMATION

Beautiful & Strict: The Power of Ornament
From Henri Matisse to the present day

10 October 2026 to 14 February 2027

With the exhibition 'Beautiful & Strict: The Power of Ornament,' the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal explores the function and significance of ornamentation in art from classical modernism to the present day. It thus addresses a topic that is particularly relevant today. Faced with the vast quantities of images rapidly produced by electronic media, many people are searching for formal strategies that promise clarity and stability in geometric and ornamental orders.

The internationally renowned painting collection of the Von der Heydt Museum provides the ideal basis for an exhibition on the 'power of ornament', as it illustrates, through numerous major works, how painters such as Henri Matisse and August Macke have made colour, form and surface the actual subject of their paintings since the beginning of modernism. In contemporary art, too, repetitions, patterns and repeats do not serve a decorative function, but are – as can be seen in works by artists such as Philip Taaffe, Katja Davar and Thomas Bayrle – an expression of the desire to coherently combine the simple and the complex. At the same time, supposedly purely decorative forms are also used to raise questions about the times and society, because every ornament has its own history and, as a result, its own meaning. When artists such as Nevin Aladağ or Susan Hefuna draw on traditional ornaments from certain cultural circles today, for example, patterns can also be read as messages of social criticism.

The exhibition is primarily based on sensual pleasure and the joy of pure contemplation. It focuses on traditional ornaments as well as individually designed image patterns that reflect today's sense of colour and form. On the one hand, the focus is on the formal rigour inherent in ornamentation, on regularity and seriality, as well as on the playful aspect. The selected works thus reflect the artistic approaches that led to abstract or concrete art in the first half of the 20th century, later to Op Art, and are now experiencing a revival. In today's global culture, however, the migration of forms and the representational and communicative functions of patterns and ornaments in the context of intermingling cultures are particularly exciting topics.

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