

Rudolf Mosse's Art Collection

Building Up the Collection

Rudolf Mosse primarily collected the art of his generation, that is, works of German realism from the second half of the 19th century, focusing in particular on painting from Berlin and Munich, the two main places where he did business. But the lines were not sharply drawn; with exemplary works by artists from neighboring countries, he also placed German art in an international frame of reference. In addition to portraits and landscapes, popular genre scenes also formed an emphasis of his collection. The depictions focus in a contemplative way on everyday life and the richly faceted society of the period beyond classical and academic norms of the beautiful and the ideal. Mosse's collection included artworks by recognized masters and by less well-known local artists. The current state of research indicates that the collection consisted primarily of paintings, watercolors, and drawings. But it is also striking that the collection included several contemporary sculptures, something that was quite rare for a private collection.¹ Ancient sculpture, craftsmanship, and antiques rounded out Mosse's collection, along with a comprehensive library of German literature.²

Strategies of Acquisition and Documentation

Rudolf Mosse rarely acquired the works in his collection from art dealers. According to findings up until now, they mostly came from the annual exhibitions at the art academies in Berlin and Munich, sometimes also from Dresden or Düsseldorf.³ In making his selections, beginning in the late 1890s Mosse took advice from Fritz Stahl, an art critic from the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*, founded by Mosse. Many of the catalogues for institutional exhibitions were published by his own company. This meant that Mosse and Stahl were already informed of what was on offer well in advance of the exhibitions themselves. Mosse and his wife also purchased directly from artists in their studios or commissioned individual works often in order to support the livelihood of struggling artists.⁴ The exact extent of the collection is unknown, a total inventory has not yet been found. But there are three catalogues indexing all the works exhibited at Mosse-Palais from the years 1908, 1915, and 1921, and a publication of selected works from the collection of 1929/1932 with comments and photographic illustrations. The key acquisitions were made by the start of the First World War. A total of 206 works are mentioned in the catalogues. Together with the works in Schenkendorf and at Mosse's other places of residence and the prints, craft objects, miniatures, antiques, and East Asian art

¹ See Dorrman 2002, 145ff.

² Rudolf Mosse had acquired the library of literary scholar Erich Schmidt, who held a professorship for German since 1887 at Berlin's Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (today's Humboldt-Universität). See Library Inventory

³ Hans Rosenhagen, Vorwort, in: Lepke 1934.

⁴ Some of Rudolf Mosse's correspondence is available at Landesarchiv Berlin, LAB NL Mosse 1965–1925, E Rep. 061-16.

not included in the catalogues, the collection was much larger, as shown by the auction catalogues from 1934 and various documents.⁵

Representation

The Mosse Palais was already planned as a “museum” very early on,⁶ not least because Rudolf Mosse’s interest in art was also reflected in the design of the façade. For the façade facing Leipziger Platz, he commissioned the sculptor Max Klein to create a two-meter-high frieze showing important historical figures in 1883.⁷ The monumental relief bore the title *Die Erhebung des deutschen Genius* (The Elevation of German Genius) and was made in the spirit of the patriotic euphoria over the founding of the German Empire in 1870 and 1871 and the unification of the German nation, meeting a demand that had become increasingly urgent ever since the March Revolution in 1848. From left to right, the frieze depicted the history of the development of the German Empire. In the final scene, the German eagle mauls the Gallic rooster⁸ to symbolize the triumph over France and the pride over the newly achieved national sovereignty. The frieze is interrupted by a figurative pediment over the balcony niche on the top floor with a scrollwork bearing Rudolf Mosse’s initials. In so doing, the master of the house inserted himself symbolically as a representative of the liberal bourgeoisie into the course of this history. Mosse’s views were reflected in the art collection inside the residence. Realism corresponded at its core to a democratic art form. The negation of a binding ideal opened art for individual values. The intention was to create an art that was generally understood, dealt with actual everyday reality, and was not only accessible to educated elites.

Berlin Philanthropy during the Wilhelmine Period

Rudolf and Emilie Mosse planned from the very beginning to open their art collection to a larger audience. As of 1909, the “Mosseum” at Mosse-Palais on Leipziger Platz could be viewed upon appointment or in the framework of charity events for a fee between two and five marks.⁹ Proceeds went to charitable associations.¹⁰ In contrast, the library was freely accessible to academics.¹¹ Besides making acquisitions for this own collection, Rudolf Mosse was also a generous donor to the Berlin museums. To expand the Egyptian Collection, he financed the excavations of Berlin Egyptologist Heinrich Brugsch. The Mosse family were thus some of the most important promoters of culture and science of their day; their art collecting in combination with their charity work and their generous donations were typical for Berlin philanthropists of the

⁵ See Hans Lachmann-Mosse, Testament, March 11, 1944, Leo Baeck Institute New York/Berlin, George L. Mosse Collection, AR 25137, Box 4, Folder 21

⁶ Donath 1909, 9.

⁷ *Deutsche Bauzeitung* 1889 (1), 29.

⁸ Letter, Max Klein to Rudolf Mosse, Nov. 8, 1894, LAB NL R. Mosse, E Rep. 061–016, 1515

⁹ Correspondence between Paul Meyerheim and Rudolf Mosse, 1889–1913, LAB NL Mosse, E Rep. 061–016, 2027–2046.

¹⁰ Willi Oswald Dressler, *Dresslers Kunstjahrbuch: Ein Nachschlagebuch für deutsche bildende und angewandte Kunst* 4 (Rostock, 1909), 452. The money raised at these public viewings and tours was donated to the Berlin association Mädchenhort, founded in 1884: see *Berliner Volkszeitung* (April 9, 1915), 2 (April 23, 1915), 2 (December 10, 1927), 2; *Berliner Börsenzeitung* (April 10, 1915), 4; (April 16, 1915), 5; *Berliner Tageblatt* (April 27, 1917), 10; (April 28, 1917), 7. On the “free” charity of Berlin philanthropists see Dorrman 2002, 100f.

¹¹ *Berliner Tageblatt* (March 22, 1914), 3.

(<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/tel4/newspapers/issue/3000096342041?hp=3&page=3&query=mosse+%22leipziger+platz+15%22>, last accessed: October 19, 2017)

period. At the same time, the Mosse collection differed from those of the other “kings of industry” in the German Empire. It did not follow the advice given by the two prominent leaders of the art world at the time: Wilhelm von Bode (general director of the Berlin museums), who encouraged his followers to collect works from the Italian Renaissance and Dutch painting of the 17th century, or Hugo von Tschudi (director of the Nationalgalerie), who praised the international avant-garde. Mosse’s predilection for German realism, in contrast, and the lack of any works by French masters shows that his political commitments also played an important role in building up his collection.

Illustrations



Max Liebermann, Lesendes Mädchen (A Young Woman Reading, 1896) (L34_057)

Max Liebermann, Der Schweinestall (The Pigpen, undated) (L34_058)

Rudolf Mosse, as we know, was no friend of avant-garde painting. He was interested in art primarily as a documentary perspective on the living reality of his age, not in the aesthetic efforts of revolutionary painters. And yet, he also acquired early works by several representatives of the Berliner Secession, such as Walter Leistikow, Lesser Ury, and Max Liebermann. He maintained personal contact with all three, and Liebermann tried cleverly to awaken Mosse’s interest in the new efforts: “I hope that you won’t be displeased if I send you several reviews of the Munich exhibition. If I could thus encourage you and your art advisor to take a more favorable view of the ‘new’ in painting I will have achieved my goal” (LAB NL R. Mosse, E Rep. 061–016, 1727). Hans Rosenhagen, an art critic and key proponent of the Berlin Secession, regarded Liebermann’s Pigpen as one of the artist’s central works. Since the Lepke Auction in 1934, there has been no trace of either painting.



Hanns Fechner, Theodor Fontane, 1893 (L34_025)

Hanns Fechner, Rudolf Virchow, undated (L34_026)

The first phase of Rudolf Mosse’s acquisitions until 1908 also included several works by Berlin painter Hanns Fechner. Besides portraits of family members, the portraits of Theodor Fontane and Rudolf Virchow are also worth mention, with which the painter, who began working at Berlin’s Kupferstichkabinett as a conservator in 1892, had become famous in the region. Fechner depicted the two figures, the most important novelist of German realism and the famous

physician and liberal politician—unspectacularly in their bourgeois pose to underscore that their importance was not achieved due to their familiar background, but by way of their own personal achievements. In this way, Fechner's works can be seen as representative of Rudolf Mosse's self-understanding. Both paintings were on offer at the Lepke auction at Mosse-Palais in 1934. The purchaser of the Virchow portrait is known to the MARI team, the Fontane portrait has been considered lost since then.



Katalog der Rudolf Mosse'schen Kunstsammlung, Berlin 1908

To mark his 65th birthday, Rudolf Mosse presented the first catalogue of his collection in 1908. The catalogue included 195 works that were exhibited at Mosse-Palais, Leipziger Platz 15. But the catalogue is only of little help when it comes to identifying the actual works involved. Only the last names of the artists are mentioned, occasionally with a first name or initial. The work titles frequently seem arbitrarily chosen. Information on techniques is rarely provided, dimensions and dates are lacking entirely. The publication, 16 pages long, also has no illustrations. The catalogue was probably used as orientation while viewing the collection. The catalogue of works exhibited is organized according to room and with brief indications of how the visitors could view them on their tour. The topographic principle that dominates all catalogues of the Mosse collection with the scarcity of information provided is similar to the inventories of the famous royal collections of the 17th and 18th centuries in Vienna and Dresden. The booklet concludes with an alphabetic index of artist names with numbers indicating the rooms in which their works were exhibited.

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