

## Basel's Kunstmuseum – New and Improved

If you have been anywhere near the Wettsteinbrücke in recent months you will have seen it—the new building on the Grossbasel side, across the street from the Kunstmuseum, that is actually part of the Kunstmuseum. After years of construction activities and street closures impeding traffic, the new building will finally be inaugurated this April. At the same time, the main building of the Kunstmuseum, which has been closed for the past 14 months for extensive renovations, will also celebrate its re-opening. Find out here what the new building will have to offer, how it will be integrated with the existing structure of the Kunstmuseum, and how the Grand Opening will be celebrated.

### The New Building

Basel's Kunstmuseum has a centuries-old tradition—all the way back to 1661, when the city bought a collection of drawings and paintings from their private owner to keep them from being sold to a buyer from out of town. The purchase of this so-called "Amerbach-Kabinett" made Basel the first municipality in the world to have an art collection that was open to the public and not just for the upper classes who could afford to collect artworks.

Since then, this public art collection has increased tremendously through both purchases and donations, necessitating ever-increasing exhibition space. This led to the construction of the Kunstmuseum's main building in 1936, which originally was conceived only as a permanent home for the museum's collection. Since the 1980s, and particularly since 2002, however, it has also housed numerous special exhibitions, which has meant less room for the presentation of the museum's own collection. To remedy this, a separate building—the Museum für Gegenwartskunst—was opened in the nearby St. Alban district in 1980. As the first museum in the world it was dedicated exclusively to contemporary art.

But even that addition ultimately could not accommodate the Kunstmuseum's growing collection, particularly of modern and contemporary art, as well as ensure the museum's ability to stage further spectacular special exhibits. The solution? Addition of another building to expand exhibition and storage space. Implementation of this solution was made possible by the generous donation of well-known patron of the arts, Maja Oeri, and her Laurenz Foundation, who donated the funds to purchase the building site just across the street from the old Kunstmuseum and covered half of the construction costs of CHF 100 million. The rest of the construction costs was financed by the canton Basel-Stadt.

Once the canton had approved the construction of a new building, a design competition was used to determine what the new building would look like. The winning draft by Basel architects Emanuel Christ and

Christoph Gantenbein was chosen in March of 2010, and construction began in October 2012. (Emanuel Christ is actually the great-nephew of Rudolf Christ, one of the two architects who designed the main Kunstmuseum building.) Three-and-a-half years later, the finished building was handed over to the Kunstmuseum Basel on February 5 of this year, and its grand opening is scheduled for April 15–18.

Christ and Gantenbein's design seeks to complement the appearance of the main building of the Kunstmuseum across the street, but with a contemporary spin. Thus, both buildings have the same height as well as a classical tripartite façade of base, middle, and capital; and the inverted corner of the new building is a response to the main building's equally distinctive projecting corner. At the same time, the new building distinguishes itself through its surface structure of flat bricks in different shades of gray and the modern interpretation of a frieze in the upper part that is illuminated by LEDs sunk into the hollows between the bricks, providing indirect lighting of the building and the surrounding space.

The interior of the new building consists of four floors—the entrance level, two upper levels, and a basement level that also includes a passage underneath Dufourstrasse to connect the new and the main building. Each floor has two tracts of exhibition space that are connected via a central monumental staircase. The rooms within the exhibition spaces vary from small to large halls and on average are larger, and thus more flexible, than the ones in the main building. They all feature industrial parquet floors; concrete walls that are covered by thick plaster layers to facilitate hanging of paintings, but with the concrete visible along the doorways and tall windows; and concrete ribs spanning the ceilings. In contrast, the public-access areas like the foyer and underground passage have marble floors and galvanized steel wall cladding—an unusual combination that gives the building an utterly contemporary feeling and serves as an impressive backdrop for the monumental stairwell that forms the centerpiece of the new building.





## What is Where?

With the new building, the Kunstmuseum has expanded its exhibition space by nearly 30%, to a total of almost 10,000 m<sup>2</sup>. This has led to a redistribution of the exhibits among the three buildings, which are now referred to as Kunstmuseum Basel | Hauptbau (main building), Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau (new building), and Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart (contemporary).

- **Hauptbau:** On the ground floor of the main building you will find primarily Swiss and Basel artists. The first floor is dedicated to old masters up to the 19th century, whereas the second floor will house the European modern art, up to and including such artists as Picasso, Richter, and Giacometti.
- **Neubau:** The ground floor and basement level of the new building are not so much exhibition spaces, even though they will feature impressive pieces of art, but primarily serve as event areas that can accommodate up to 1,000 people for vernissages, performances, symposia, concerts, and the like. The basement also includes the underground passage to the main building. The first floor of the new building provides exhibition space for the museum's modern art collection from around 1950 up to about 1990, including U.S. artists such as Rothko, Newman, Johns, Warhol, and Judd. The second floor will be used mainly for the Kunstmuseum's special exhibitions, regardless of which artists or era they will focus on.
- **Gegenwart:** This building will now display the museum's collection of contemporary art from 1990 onwards. Thus, many of the pieces previously shown here will now be moved to the new building.

## The Grand Opening

The official inauguration celebrations for the new building will last from April 15–18. For the public, the main event will be the "open house" on Sunday, April 17, and Monday, April 18, when all three buildings will be open to the public free of charge from 10:00–18:00. So this is your chance to visit the new building and admire its architecture and presentation of art works, but also to explore the main building and its newly renovated exhibition spaces with their updated displays. In addition, numerous food stalls of vendors from the Markthalle will be set up outside the museum to allow visitors to fortify themselves for taking in all the art.

Please note that large numbers of visitors are expected on those two days. To accommodate the crowds and allow them safe and easy access to and from both the main and the new building, the surrounding streets will be closed to traffic on those two days, except for public transport. This includes the Wettsteinbrücke, St. Alban-Graben between Kunstmuseum and Bankverein, and Dufourstrasse between Kunstmuseum and Picassoplatz.

## Upcoming Exhibits

The inauguration of the main and new buildings coincides with the opening of two special exhibits, "Sculpture on the Move 1946–2016," which runs through September 18, and "Barnett Newman—Drawings and Prints," which runs through August 7.

"Sculpture on the Move 1946–2016," which is set up both in the new building and in the Kunstmuseum | Gegenwart, focuses on sculptural art between the end of World War II and the present. It illustrates how the classical idea and form of sculpture grew more flexible and abstract as artists began to integrate everyday objects into their art or blurred its spatial and conceptual boundaries. The exhibit draws both on pieces from the Kunstmuseum's own collections and on loans from other leading museums and private collections. It begins on the second floor of the new building with late works by Brancusi and Giacometti as well as a loosely chronological arrangement of sculptures created between the 1940s and 1970s by artists such as Picasso, Calder, Arp, Serra, and more. The ground floor will feature pieces from the 1980s by Ray, Koons, Fischli and Weiss, and others. The exhibit concludes in the Kunstmuseum | Gegenwart, where pieces created between the 1990s and the present will be shown.

The exhibit "Barnett Newman—Drawings and Prints" will be set up in the Kupferstichkabinett in the main building of the Kunstmuseum. The American artist Barnett Newman is a prominent representative of abstract expressionism. The Kunstmuseum owns a complete set of his prints as well as 10 outstanding drawings that were donated to the museum in 2014 by the Barnett Newman Foundation. This exhibition offers a survey of the artist's entire graphic oeuvre, including colorful and playful drawings from the mid-1940s, black-brush drawings featuring vertical bands that anticipate a period of graphical work in the late 1950s, and prints dating after 1961 that can be considered an extension of his drawings and paintings.

## Practical Information

Starting April 19, all three buildings will have the same opening hours and ticket prices. Thus, all three buildings will be open 10:00–18:00 Tuesday to Sunday, Thursday until 20:00, closed Monday.

Ticket prices to view the regular collection and exhibits will be CHF 16 for adults; CHF 8 for teens ages 13–19, students ages 20–30, disabled visitors, and groups; and free for kids up to age 13 and holders of the Swiss Museumspass, Museums-Pass-Musée, or Colourkey card. Tickets for special exhibits (as well as the regular collection and exhibits) are CHF 23 for adults and CHF 8 for teens, students, disabled visitors, and groups. Tickets are valid for all three buildings on the same day. Also, entrance to the regular collection and exhibits is free on the first Sunday of each month (this does not apply to special exhibits).

[www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch](http://www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch)