



Exhibition

Tattoo Legends. Christian Warlich in St. Pauli

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the practice of tattooing underwent a veritable renaissance in the Western world. A central figure of that era was the Hamburg tattoo artist Christian Warlich, who is considered to be one of the most significant tattoo artists of the twentieth century and gained an international reputation as 'The Tattoo King'. Since December 2015, Dr Ole Wittmann has been researching this German tattoo icon as part of the project 'The Estate of the Hamburg Tattoo Artist Christian Warlich (1891–1964)', or simply 'Nachlass Warlich'. In November 2019, the findings of this research project will be incorporated into the special exhibition *Tattoo Legends. Christian Warlich in St. Pauli* at the Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte (Museum of Hamburg History), curated by Wittmann.

Exhibits

The museum's holdings contain the most important Warlich-related collection in existence, and this has formed the basis for the research. Until now, this corpus of objects has been neither extensively researched nor made available to the public or the professional world. Furthermore, in the context of the research carried out up to this point, it has been possible to obtain further outstanding objects from private and institutional collections for the project. Thus, not only the latest academic findings can be included in the exhibition but also items that have never previously been exhibited. The holdings of the Museum of Hamburg History and the research conducted into them form the basis for the world's first comprehensive exhibition on one of the leading figures of global tattoo history.

Questions addressed in the exhibition

Until now, research into the complex history of tattooing in Germany, in which Warlich is a central figure, has been fragmentary. For the first time, the Warlich Estate research project offers the opportunity to incorporate the latest and unpublished research findings into the exhibition. Here, fundamental questions will be addressed: in which global context should Warlich's work be situated? How did Warlich become a figurehead for tattoo art? What form did the global exchange of ideas take, and what consequences did it have for the visual language of the tattoo?

How can Warlich, who worked in St. Pauli for around half a century, be contextualised within Hamburg's urban and tattooing history? And how about the interdisciplinary topics in which, besides micro-, local- and regional-historical questions, medical, cultural-anthropological and art-historical questions also play a role? Is there a shift in terms of the meaning and reception of the artistic medium and the cultural practice of tattooing? As early as during his own lifetime, Warlich was the catalyst for a transatlantic exchange of ideas. In recent decades, can one even speak of a globalisation of the Warlich phenomenon?

Objective

The world's first major exhibition on one of the most significant tattoo artists of the twentieth century will present various interlinked thematic areas. The aim is to shed light on this extremely important chapter of tattoo history and, for the first time, to elaborate on its local and, later, global dimension. This will also be the first tattoo exhibition to have its main focus on Hamburg, and it will make the city's importance to the general history of tattooing clear.

Exhibition location



Duration

27.11.2019 until spring 2020
Exhibition opening: 26.11.2019

Funder of the exhibition



Funder of the research project

Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von
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Curator

Dr Ole Wittmann