Tourguide

Stories of Democracy in Frankfurt

1848 to the Present

Historisches Museum Frankfurt

Welcome to the Historical Museum Frankfurt!

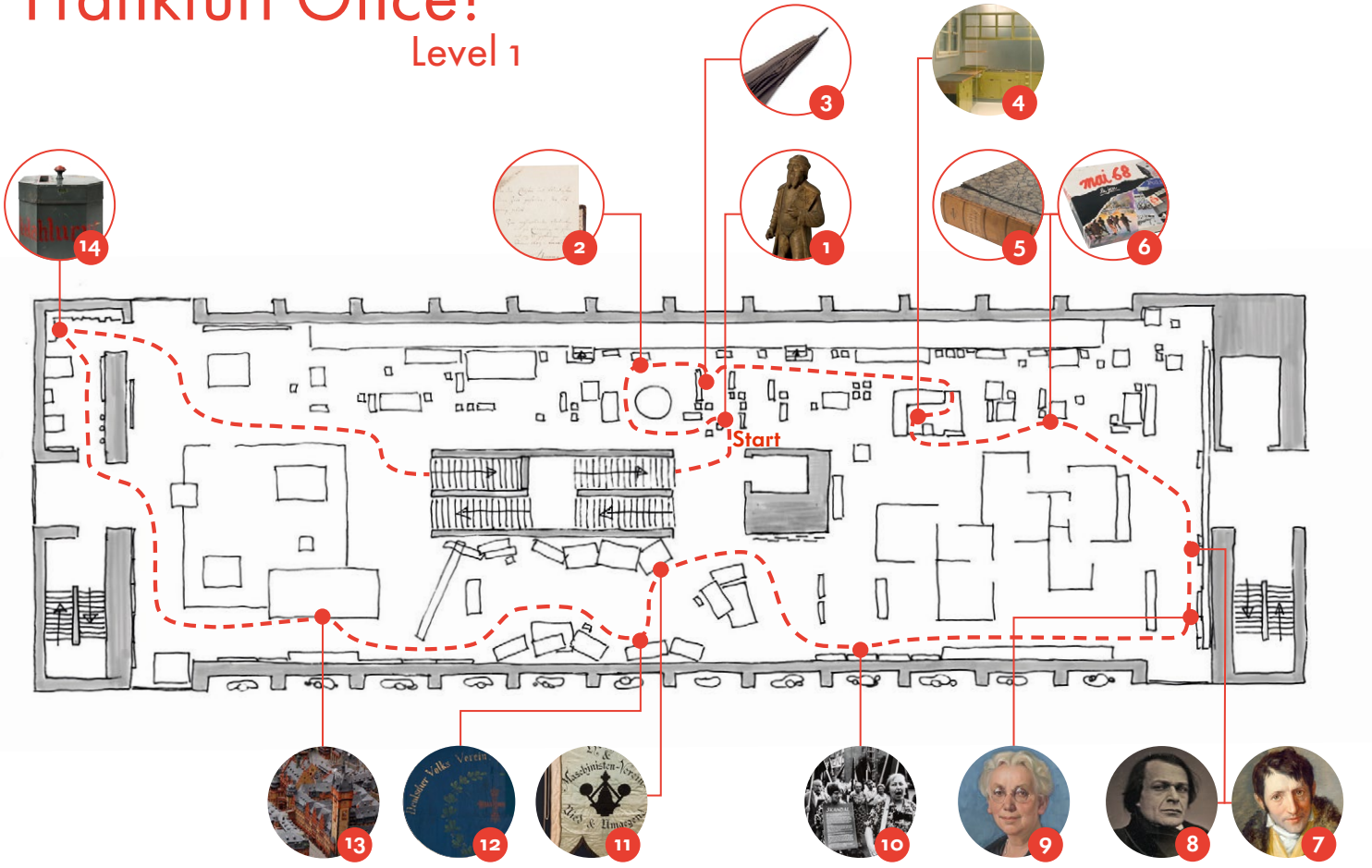
On 18 May 1848, the National Assembly – the first German parliament – gathered in the Church of St Paul. For the first time, some 600 delegates came together as elected representatives of the people. The successful revolution of March 1848 had made this milestone in the history of democracy possible.

The Revolution of 1848 would prove to have a lasting impact as an important moment in the demand for freedom and equality and the creation and establishment of the same. Objects in the museum holdings testify to this departure into a new era. Their stories show us that our political and cultural – but also our everyday – coexistence is not simply a matter of course but a product of complex historical causalities.

The tour accompanies you through the permanent exhibition “Frankfurt Once?” with its five theme galleries on the basis of 30 objects. It places a special focus on the section “Representatives of the People”, which delves into the history of the Revolution of 1848 and the St Paul’s Church parliament in detail. It offers insights into the continued efforts to gain freedom in the nineteenth century, and reflects on struggles for democracy in the twentieth and up to the very present. In the process, it illuminates not only continuities and accomplishments, but also discontinuities and setbacks in the history of democracy.

Frankfurt Once?

Level 1



1 Contagious Protest

The 1840 celebration of the anniversary of book-printing was accompanied by demands for freedom of the press. A replica of the Gutenberg monument in Mainz, this small statue was auctioned off on the occasion. The proceeds went to help prisoners and the families of prisoners who had been arrested for participating in the "Wachensturm" (storming of the guard houses) in Frankfurt in 1833. The convicts were said to have created the replica of that monument to their hero from bread. Inspired by the French Revolution of July 1830, they had envisaged freeing journalists and occupying the Frankfurt seat of the German Confederation government. The attempt was forcibly quelled, but sparked solidarity and further protests until the successful Revolution of 1848.

Continue to exhibit no. 34/100 ▷

2 Politics Impacts Everyone!

Numerous deputies of the 1848/49 parliament made entries in the so-called "parliament friendship album" of Clothilde Koch-Gontard of Frankfurt. Her home had become a gathering place for her politician friends after the sessions at St Paul's Church. Political "salons" for parliamentarians and interested persons also formed in the homes of other Frankfurt citizens. Workers' associations, gymnastics clubs and democracy associations were also founded as new venues for political exchange, providing persons previously excluded from the political debate a means of gaining information and getting involved.

Continue to exhibit no. 45/100 ▷

3 Excess and Exemplum

This umbrella served as evidence in court. Henriette Zobel was sentenced to 16 years in prison for participating, with the help of her umbrella, in the murder of two conservative deputies on 18 September 1848. It was not by chance that Zobel, a citizen of Frankfurt, was in the crowd. She had followed the parliamentary debates and, like many of her democratically minded contemporaries, was appalled by the approval of the peace agreement negotiated by the princes to end the war over Silesia. The so-called "September riot" stands for the use of violence in revolutionary situations. Conflicts had escalated elsewhere as well, and the military had prevailed. The revolution threatened to fail.

Continue to exhibit no. 68/100 ▷

4 An Underestimated Venue of Social Participation

Designed by the architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky around 1927, the prototype of the fitted kitchen stands for a revolution that took place in an indispensable area of life: care work. A venue civil society assigned to women, the care work was usually ignored in the revolutionary upheavals, even though women had participated in them, also in 1848. All the more important was the kitchen that – designed to make housework easier – found its way into the residential buildings of New Frankfurt by the thousands. Yet it also symbolizes the ambiguity of democratization, because the standardization gave women time for gainful employment and political involvement, but also sparked resistance. Until today the fair distribution of the burdens of care work did not materialize.

Continue to exhibit no. 84/100 ▷

5 Bitter Fruits of Exile

Max Horkheimer used this box in 1943 to collect letters he received from Jewish expatriates about their persecution in Germany: documents bespeaking the continuity of anti-Semitism and efforts to flee it, but also dedication to democracy. There were already pogroms against Jewish fellow citizens as well as their civil emancipation as far back as 1848. After the revolution was defeated, numerous "48ers" emigrated, primarily to the U.S., where some of them joined the campaign to abolish slavery. Less than a century later, hundreds of thousands again fled, including the staff of the institute directed by Horkheimer. In exile they spoke out against Nazi tyranny, and when they returned to Frankfurt they brought ideas and experiences with them. The letters testify to the break in the history of emancipation as well as the will to resume the struggle.

Continue to exhibit no. 91/100 ▷

6 German-French Dialogue

In 1968, revolutionaries in France and Germany engaged in close exchange, as had their predecessors in 1848. This board game and the story of Daniel Cohn-Bendit recall the circumstances: Cohn-Bendit's father had fled to Paris in 1933 to escape anti-Semitic persecution; his son Daniel organized social protests there until May 1968. It was then that he was expelled by the French government. He came to Frankfurt and became actively involved in the new social movements. The players face off against each other at barricades that remind us of the continuities of the revolutionary uprisings in Paris and elsewhere, while at the same time symbolizing the violent aspects of emancipatory movements and the forces opposing them.

Continue up to the front of the room, into the area "Faces" (blue-grey) ▷

7 One for All – And for Some

When Moritz Daniel Oppenheim completed the portrait of the journalist Ludwig Börne in 1831, the latter was already in exile in Paris. The French Revolution of 1830 had lured him, the censorship of the press driven him away from Frankfurt. By taking a stand for a democratic German nation, Börne helped lay the groundwork for the Revolution of 1848. His fate reflects the varied history of Jewish participation in the formation of a national state. In 1808, under Napoleonic rule, he had earned his doctorate – as one of the first Jews to do so –, in 1811 he was admitted to civil service, in 1815, during the Restoration era, he lost his post and his civil rights alike, and in 1818 he changed his name and religion to avoid anti-Semitic ostracism. Gabriel Riesser countered this discrimination as a Jewish deputy in the Paulskirche in 1848. His commitment was decisive in the adoption of §146 of the Constitution: “Civil and political rights are neither dependent upon nor restricted by the practice of religious denomination.”

Look, right above the photograph ▷

8 New Media

The St Paul's Church parliament of 1848/49 was one of the nineteenth century's major media events. The deputies became an object of widespread public interest. To portray them, publishers and artists made use of cutting-edge technologies such as photography. The Frankfurt studio of Jacob Seib produced the portraits for the extensive compilation entitled *Album der deutschen National-Versammlung*. At the time, however, photography was still incapable of capturing movement. So reports on the revolutionary events continued to be spread in the older mediums of drawing and printmaking, now, however, on a daily basis – today standard practice.

Continue to the painting further to the right ▷

9 The Struggle for Women's Suffrage

This is a portrait of Meta Quarck-Hammerschlag of Frankfurt in her official attire. She was one of the first women to serve as a municipal councillor. It was only after the revolution of 1918/19 that women could finally vote and be elected. Quarck-Hammerschlag had fought for that right in the women's movement, the workers' movement and the German Social Democratic Party SPD. In 1848, the demands had gone unfulfilled: women received neither civil rights guaranteeing them political participation, legally protected social security nor physical integrity. In fact, in 1850 – after the revolution failed – women were explicitly prohibited from participating in politics.

Continue to the display cases "Vereinskästen" on the wall (dark blue) ▷

10 Peace to the Huts – War on ...?

The objects representing the housing conflict in the Westend district of Frankfurt are a reminder that the democratization process goes hand in hand with conflict. It was in 1969, in the struggle against the urban policy plan to tear down residential buildings in favour of office high-rises, that one of Germany's first citizens' initiatives was founded. Squatting was an element of the "participatory revolution" from 1970 onwards. It gave rise to street battles with the police – and to the forerunners of today's preservation statutes for distressed residential areas. The housing conflict stands for ambiguous continuities from the pre-March era to the present: for the struggle over participation and living space on the one hand, and for ostracism and ignorance on the other. The public's focus on jewish people among the investors involved, sparked a discussion about anti-Semitic currents within the protest movement and their use of anti-Semitic motives.

Continue to the "Flag Gallery" (dark blue) ▷

11 Solidarity Is (Not) a Weapon

Made in 1898, this banner of an IG Metall (metalworkers' union) predecessor symbolizes the contributions of the trade union movement to democratization. The adoption of the freedom of association in the constitution of 1848/49 represents one of the movement's decisive early moments. Now the "sub-bourgeois" classes had gained this right. Their demands met with rejection in the National Assembly. During the revolutionary uprisings in Berlin and Vienna, journeymen and labourers made up the majority of the victims. Workers' education associations and solidarity funds were founded as far back as the pre-March era. Despite recurring prohibitions and compromises, the unions achieved decisive victories for social participation and economic democracy.

Continue further left ▷

12 Revolution Fails – Ideals Endure

The 1848 Revolution banner of the Sossenheim district of Frankfurt illustrates the liberal aspirations and ideals of that age. The front is inscribed with the words "Deutscher Volks Verein für Freiheit und Recht" (German People's Association for Liberty and Justice). The Sossenheim Association was banned in 1849 after the failure of the revolution. The banner was hidden and used again only decades later – in 1898 by the "Vorwärts" workers' choral society, having meanwhile been brought up to date: as a symbol of Prussian militarism, the iron cross was now unsuitable for the international workers' movement and had been replaced by a red heart.

Continue to the big city model in the Gallery "Portraits of the City" (dark red) ▷

13 A Church as a Parliamentary Venue

In the model portraying the old town of Frankfurt before 1940, it is clear why the Church of St Paul was suited to serve as a meeting place for the first German parliament. Built to completion in 1833, it was located at the centre of the city, which in turn was easy to reach from all regions of the German Confederation. The large church building stood out against the compartmentalized half-timber architecture. It offered space for more than 2,500 persons, enabling a large public to follow the parliamentary debates. After the failure of the revolution it once again served as a parish church but remained an important venue for commemoration.

Continue up to the front of the room, into the "Study Room" ▷

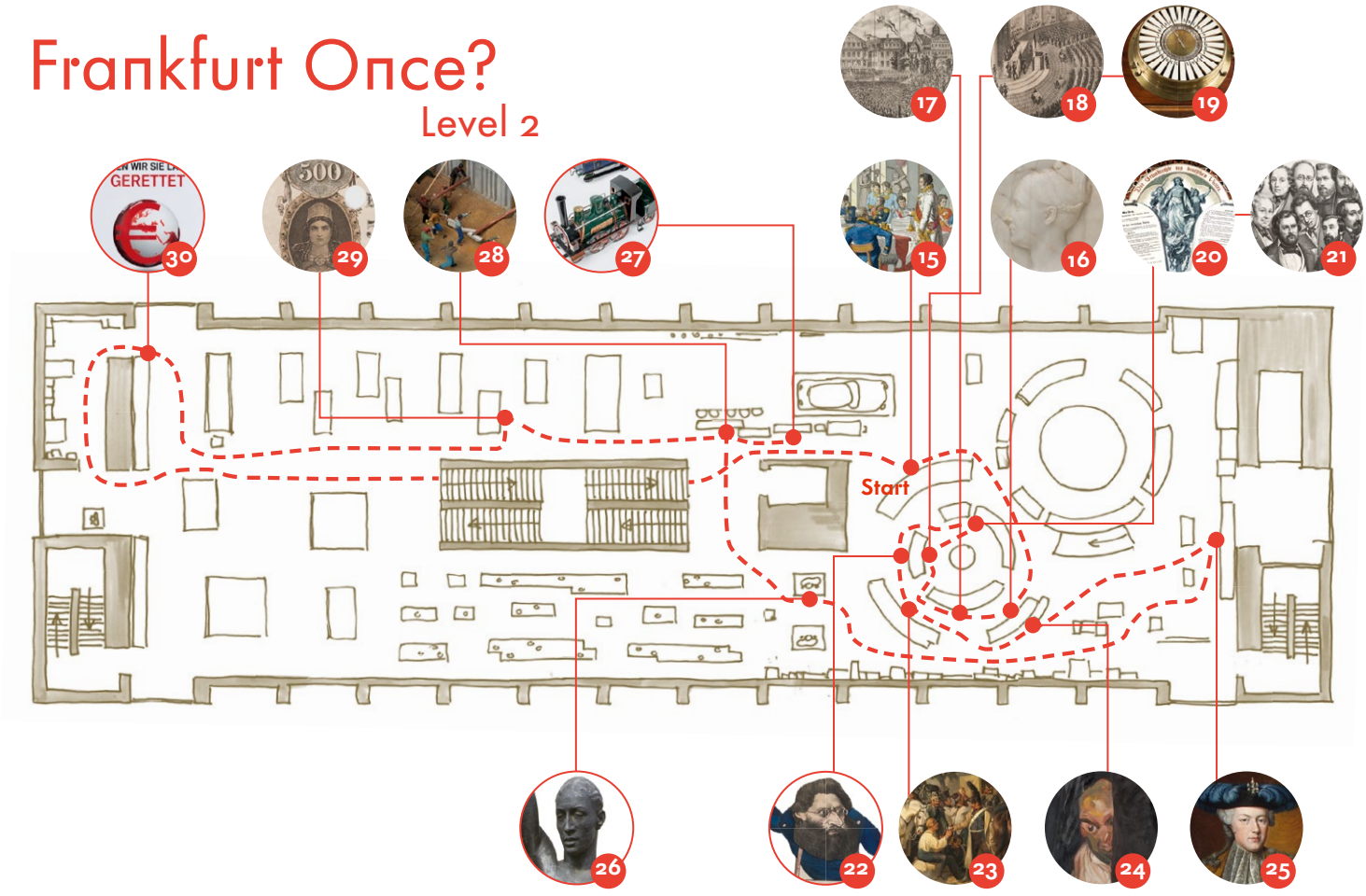
14 If elections really brought about change, they would long have been ...

Many consider this ballot box of the 1920s symbol of democracy. On closer inspection, however, the case is not quite as clear-cut. Elections were introduced not only in response to demands for political participation, but also as an outcome of power-political deliberations on the part of the ruling class. Princes had already set up initial parliaments even before 1848, in part to prevent revolution. The issue of who was entitled to vote led to the exclusion of women, persons without property and minorities. To this day, many persons without passports are denied the right to vote. Old methods such as lot-drawing and citizens' councils are now being rediscovered as ways of coping with these contradictions of democracy.

Continue via central stairwell to Level 3, entering the area "Representatives of the people" (grey) ▷

Frankfurt Once?

Level 2



15 Princes Disappoint Hopes

The 1814-15 Congress of Vienna brought about the reorganization of Europe. Among the 34 princely states and four cities making up the German Confederation, Frankfurt was an important political venue. The so called "Bundestag" – the confederation's diplomatic mission, which enacted laws for all of the member states, was based in Frankfurt. The allegorical image reflects the many hopes pinned on the existing monarchies. However, they disappointed those hopes, suppressing demands for civil rights, state unity and free elections in the member states. The victory of the 1848 March Revolution put a temporary end to the "Bundestag".

Continue, outside past the grey wall to the component "Storming of the guard houses 1833" ▷

16 Uprisings and Exile in the Pre-March Era

This medallion displays a portrait of Eva Margharete Bunsen. A citizen of Frankfurt, Bunsen is one example of the many who took to the streets in 1830s Europe to speak out against poverty, censorship and bondage and campaign for a better life in freedom. However, the attempt to storm the main police guardhouse, the armoury at the constables' guardhouse and the Thurn und Taxis Palais (government building of the German Confederation) on 3 April 1833 failed. Rebels were put in prison or went into exile – like parts of the family of Eva Margharete Bunsen and her husband, who fled to the U.S. The expatriates took their liberal ideas with them and united with like-minded persons internationally.

Directly opposite ▷

17 Early Mass Demonstrations

As political gatherings were prohibited in the German Confederation before and after the 1848 Revolution, festivals were celebrated on occasions of a seemingly non-political nature. On 24 June 1840, 30,000 people congregated at Rossmarkt Square to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the invention of book-printing. Celebrations of this kind took place in many cities: they were an expression of how important education and the spread of knowledge are for liberation from inequality and oppression. In essence, they were a form of early political mass demonstration for freedom of speech and the press and other democratic demands.

Continue into the inner circle, left ▷

18 The St Paul's Church Parliament Convenes

The National Assembly – Germany's first parliament – convened at the Church of St Paul on 18 May 1848. Following the victory of the March Revolution, a "pre-parliament" had formed, consisting of representatives of the individual states appointed by revolutionary and private initiatives. Its purpose was to carry out the preparations for the election taking place on 1 May. Women were excluded. For the first time, almost universal and equal suffrage applied to men of full age. There was to be one deputy to represent every 50,000 inhabitants. Dedicated individuals ran for office; political parties did not yet exist.

Look into the show case on the right ▷

19 Politics Becomes Transparent

The church interior had been converted to serve as a parliamentary chamber with a visitors' gallery for 2,000, a speaker's platform, and furniture for 600 deputies, stenographers and the persons chairing the sessions. The parliamentary sessions and decisions were to be transparent and public. Long-distance telegraphs were used for the first time to ensure the rapid transmission of messages between Frankfurt and Berlin. Frankfurt became a centre of long-distance telegraphy as a result. A stenography office with a staff of 12 stenographers and 13 scribes recorded every word spoken during the parliamentary sessions. The nonpartisan reports were sent to the press within hours. This news coverage is still considered a standard for parliamentary work today.

Continue in the inner circle, right ▷

20 Basic Rights: Not for Everyone

Following more than half a year of discussion, the St. Paul's Church parliament passed the basic rights on 20 December 1848. The human and civil rights established during the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 were now also in effect in Germany. Freedom of the press, of assembly and of faith as well as the abolition of the death penalty were guaranteed. The right of the people to participate in the decision-making process was explicitly confirmed; the equality of all before the law and the removal of all class privileges were now enshrined. As before, however, women were excluded from political rights and citizenship remained linked to national affiliation.

Look into the show case on the right ▷

21 Political Parties met in Pubs

The deputies banded together according to their political interests and formed factions, the precursor of political parties. For lack of space in the church, they gathered in pubs and adopted the establishments' names as their own. The left-wing liberals, among them the "Württemberger Hof" group, made up 13 per cent, the radical-democratic left wing "Donnersberg" 15 per cent of the parliament. They were in favour of a republic. The "Casino-Club", was the largest faction by far, and wanted a constitutional monarchy. The conservative right-wingers who wanted to retain a monarchy congregated in "Café Milani". These disparate interests made it difficult for the parliament to agree on a form of government and were one of the reasons for its failure.

Continue, out of the inner circle back to the left ▷

22 Politician Bashing – As Old as Parliamentarianism Itself

To this day, freedom of opinion and protection of personality rights are two basic rights that must be weighed one against the other in cases of the public criticism of individuals. In 1848, a large number of deputies became career politicians – and objects of criticism and caricature in contemporary media such as newspapers, leaflets and cartoons. Already the 1848 public was familiar with criticism voiced not as a constructive contribution to debate, but for the sole purpose of vilifying one's political opponent. The print portfolio put out by the publisher Eduard Gustav May, for example, reduces the parliamentarians to gutless jumping jacks subject to domination by others.

Continue to the painting obliquely opposite ▷

23 The Revolution Is Quashed

By July 1849, the first attempt to create a unified and democratically constituted German national state had been quelled once and for all by a military force consisting primarily of Prussian and Austrian troops. The parliament had already dissolved in May of that year. The suppression of the revolution and the parliament meant the suspension of a large majority of the basic rights that had gone into effect. With the aid of various media, the princes tried to capitalize on their victory. The painting on view here was commissioned especially for that purpose.

Continue to the outside of the grey rotunda ▷

24 A Critical Look at the Past

In 1987, the artist Johannes Grützke won first prize for the redesign of the rotunda mural in Frankfurt's Church of St Paul. The church was to commemorate the first German parliament, the pre-March era and the failed revolution. And just as the National Assembly did not accomplish the breakthrough to democracy and unity, Grützke's "Procession of the Representatives" never arrives at its destination. The painting depicts a parade of some two-hundred men in dark suits carrying symbols of sovereignty, revolution and failure: the imperial crown and the body of the executed deputy Robert Blum. While the people along the edges are busy with their everyday pursuits, the procession passes them by. As seen here in the draft, Grützke immortalized himself in the mural.

Continue up to the front of the room, into the area "The Emperor-Makers" (red) ▷

25 Monarchy instead of Republic?

These four paintings are all rejected first versions of works for the new Emperors' Gallery in the Town Hall. The hall had been renovated between 1839 and 1853 to serve as a setting for 52 imperial portraits. All of the paintings were donated. With the Emperors' Hall in the Römer, the City of Frankfurt had and has a means of displaying its significance as a venue of elections and coronations as well as its claim to the status of German capital in connection with a reform-oriented monarchy. The portrait of Joseph II was repainted for the hall. Rather than depicting him in Baroque costume as before, the second version portrays him as an enlightened ruler with a code of law and a "patent of tolerance" (a decree granting toleration to religious minorities).

Continue back through the area "Representatives of the people" ▷

26 Politics Shapes Remembrance

The sculpture "The Youth" was cast in 1926 by the sculptor Richard Scheibe. The City of Frankfurt had commissioned him to create a monument to Friedrich Ebert – the first Reich president of the first German democracy – , who had died in 1925. The figure of a nude male youth stretching towards the sky was intended to symbolize the optimistic spirit of the young Weimar Republic. The monument was unveiled in 1926 before the outer wall of St Paul's Church, where it commemorates the origins of parliamentarianism in the Revolution of 1848. No wonder the National Socialists took it down again shortly after their accession to power in 1933.

Continue to the area "Crossings" (yellow) ▷

27 High Time!

At first sight, the toy train dating from the 1880s looks harmless. On closer inspection, however, it reveals the complex interrelationships that shaped the course of the 1848/49 Revolution. On the one hand, without the railway, communication carried out by the revolutionaries and parliamentarians would have been much slower, and it moreover enabled the transport of soldiers and protesters. On the other hand, this mode of transportation stands for the industrial revolution, the emergence of big business and the proletariat, a new sense of space and time – in a nutshell, for the modern age. And common to both the railway and modernity was their ambiguous character: vehicle for both democratization and repression, condition for prosperity and poverty alike, and not least of all a symbol of the hunger for coal and steel. The fossil energy era had begun.

Continue to the exhibit further to the left ▷

28 Of Tree-Sitting and Mourning

The diorama shows us that traffic projects are also about democracy, that protest is also part of the picture, and that movements can fail over the issue of violence. Runway 18 West was designed to strengthen Frankfurt's key role in the European traffic network, but the 1966 decision to build it sparked resistance. A citizens' initiative was founded in 1978; a tree-sitting campaign followed. When the conflict escalated in 1987, two policemen lost their lives, bringing the protests to a halt. The disagreements over the burden on the environment and economic growth continue. In 1848 it was the social question that people were asking; today it is the ecological one – and with it the question as to what means of protest are legitimate.

Continue into the area "Up and Down" in the Gallery "Money Town" (petrol) ▷

29 A Debt for Democracy

A celebration on the 75th anniversary of the 1848 Revolution was intended to embed the new democratic political order of the Weimar Republic in tradition. Yet the year 1923 was also one of crisis. Inflation had followed on the heels of World War I. Money was printed in excess and its value decreased from one day to the next. The liabilities of war – national debt, reparation payments, poverty and unemployment – dampened enthusiasm for the republican project. Then and now, ongoing inflation is a political challenge because it can lead to massive social conflicts about ressources associated with lack of prospects for the future, fears of loss, political radicalization and anti-democratic populism.

Continue up to the front of the room, into the area "The new Financial Center" ▷

30 Try Again, Fail Again, Fail Better

The years following 2008 saw a global series of protests resembling the cascades of revolutions around 1848. The financial crisis exacerbated poverty all over the world; governments implemented massive austerity measures and rescued banks. Protesters occupied public spaces from New York to Madrid to Cairo. "Occupy" also took place in front of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt. The public realm became a venue for democratic negotiation. Demands were voiced for participation, for the democratization of the economy and of government action; objections were raised against the return of nationalist sentiment. The summer of migration, the corona pandemic and the Russian war of aggression again triggered conflict between emancipatory and authoritarian forces.

Finished! Please visit the Museum Café, enjoy food and drinks and take a look around in the Museum Shop. ▷

Stadtlabor-Exhibition

„Democracy: From the promise of equality“
13.5.2023 – 14.7.2024
3. level in the exhibition building

www.paulskirche.de/en

Digital platform about the topic
„1848 – The Paulskirche and the Revolution“

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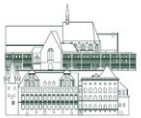

Historisch-Archäologische Gesellschaft Frankfurt am Main e.V.

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translation: Judith Rosenthal; design: Gardeners

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Parking Dom/Römer

▷ **Opening hours**
Tue – Sun 11 am – 6 pm and Thu 11 am - 9 pm

▷ **Tickets**
Permanent exhibition € 8 / € 4
Free admission for children and youths under 18
28 € / 18 € / 10 € Museumsufer-Ticket Two-day ticket valid on two consecutive days (34 museums)

▷ **Visitor service and guided tours**
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Blog