





____ Family Museum

Young Museum Frankfurt Susanne Gesser





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The Young Museum (Junges Museum) is a place in Frankfurt where children and young people can engage with culture in all its many facets. It was founded in 1972 as the Kindermuseum Frankfurt, a branch of the Historisches Museum, and from 2008 to 2018 it was housed in the Hauptwache. Now spread over three levels at the Saalhof, it turns a visit to the new Historisches Museum Frankfurt (HMF) into an exciting adventure for the whole family. Its changing programme of interactive exhibitions is aimed explicitly at children and young people and explores themes of relevance to their interests and their world. Besides welcoming youngsters to the museum, the HMF also has a Young Museum on Tour which takes the museum to them. The Young Museum also designed special family tours of parts of the new Historisches Museum, specifically the sections Frankfurt Collectors and Donors and Frankfurt Once?. Included in these tours are more than thirty hands-on, interactive stations as well as study rooms with additional learning opportunities.

The Idea of the Kindermuseum Frankfurt, 1972-1997

Although quite a young museum, it is still the oldest of its kind in all of Germany. The idea of a museum specially for children arose during the planning of the new HMF in 1969-1972. After all, the declared goal of the museum's founders had been to reach all sections of the population and not just middle-aged, middle-class visitors. For the first time, children were identified as a target group in their own right. As the museum's director, Hans Stubenvoll, was aware: "Such a definition of the pedagogical work of the museum is bound to change the museum itself, which will become an educational institution for all social classes" (Stubenvoll 1972).

At its opening in 1972, the Kindermuseum was unparalleled – and not just in Germany, but throughout Europe. America's great children's museums were certainly known, though rarely from first-hand experience, and while other museums in Germany had begun introducing special tours and events for children, the HMF was the only one to consider such an option. Once two small galleries had been set aside as a Children's Gallery, the Kindermuseum team got down to work on developing and installing an exhibition specially for children. The concept broke new ground by taking as its



— Original historical objects from the HMF-collections are used and are often a focus of the activities

starting point the experiential world of the museum's young visitors. The aim was to "confront the present in which the visitor is now with a past situation" (Detlef Hoffmann and Almut Junker, 1973), represented by historical artefacts drawn from the museum's own collection. This approach has proved its worth to this day and has become a standard method for the development of educational events and exhibitions specially for children.

Even in its early days, Frankfurt's Kindermuseum was an experimental venture that had to be invented more or less from scratch. Thanks to the energy and initiative of each of those who have taken charge of it, moreover, it has continued to grow ever since. Under

Heike Kraft, who ran the Kindermuseum from 1975 to 1982, its exhibitions developed a distinctive format that set them apart from the HMF's other exhibitions in both form and content. The shows "Robinson im Main" (1978) and "Anno Kindermal" (1979/80), for example, were semi-staged presentations that called on visitors to become actively involved. The learning effect in fact hinged on their active participation and readiness to follow the thread – and so the interactive exhibition was born! After a four-year interruption from 1982 to 1986, Ursula Kern overhauled the Kindermuseum's programme of exhibitions and educational events, not only attaching more importance to historical themes, but also broadening their scope so as to include more of the HMF's objects



— The HMF's tours for schoolchildren use role-play to bring Frankfurt's history to life

relating to Frankfurt's own history and culture (up to 1997).

1998–2018

Susanne Gesser took over as head of the Kindermuseum in 1998, and since then has worked steadily with her assistants Martina Dehlinger and Marie-Luise Schultz on developing and professionalizing it. The interactive exhibitions are still produced in-house by the Kindermuseum's own team of educationists, who are at the same time curators. The team experiments with new formats, applies a wide range of methods, and refines its own exhibition concepts. All our exhibitions, without exception, are created specially for a young but otherwise

heterogeneous audience, in some cases with the active participation of young people. The combination of original artefacts from the collection of the HMF, objects from the didactic collection of the Young Museum, and hands-on, interactive displays is among the distinctive features of these shows, which since 1972 have motivated young visitors to join in the learning experience by becoming actively involved themselves.

The past twenty years have seen not just exhibitions, but also the launch of other activities and formats by the Kindermuseum, among them the Young Museum on Tour, which is a free programme of activities that tours from one part of town to the next, Frankfurt



— Original objects can be used and stand in the focus of activities

Live!, which is a biographical archive for young refugees, and the Minimuseum created specially for children aged under six. A wide range of hands-on workshops is also provided.

At the Hauptwache

From 2008 to 2018 the Young Museum was housed separately inside the Hauptwache, a subway and suburban train station at the end of Frankfurt's principal shopping street, the Zeil. The location was unusual, but that only made it seem all the more appropriate for a children's museum! The Hauptwache's central location made the Young Museum a visible presence in the city, and because it was so easy to get to, visitor numbers rose steadily. The museum was also able to expand within the premises allotted to it: Having initially occupied just 100 m² of exhibition space, it eventually spread to 800 m².

Back in the Saalhof – Young Museum Frankfurt

Today, the Kindermuseum, now called the Young Museum, is back at the place where it was first founded, the Saalhof. There, spread over three floors of the Bernuspalais in the historical part of the new museum quarter, it can once again influence other parts of the HMF, just as it did at its founding. The modernized premises also provide plenty of space and scope for exhibitions and workshops. The Young

Museum is accessed via its very own stairwell, which has been painted red to make it easier to find. Besides enjoying a prominent location, it now has more room at its disposal for its programme of educational activities. Some 200 m² of exhibition space on Level 2 have been set aside for the Young Museum's temporary exhibitions, while Level 3 and the vaults on Level 0 house a total of ten workshops as well as fully furnished period rooms. These are open not only to parties of schoolchildren and other groups, but also to all the HMF's visitors, especially families visiting at the weekend.

Space for Creativity and Learning about History

Even while at the Hauptwache, the Young Museum was constantly developing the concept of its workshops, which after all are its second major educational offering alongside exhibitions. These workshops give children and young people a chance to broaden their individual skill set through independent work. Here, they can put their own creativity and artistic skills to the test and are given scope for reflection, action, and discovery, all of which are essential to the creative process. The acquisition and application of manual skills, the understanding of technical and social change as on-going processes, and the development of a capacity for aesthetic judgment are likewise among the key objectives. That the kids should also have fun goes without saying!

The period rooms have long been extremely popular with young and old alike. The Colonial Goods Store of 1872 and Great-Grandparents' Kitchen (with laundry room) have now been supplemented with an additional attraction, a 19th-century pharmacy complete with around ninety porcelain jars and various other items, given to the museum by the Wella Group. These rooms are installed in adjoining cabinets on Level 3 and are available for activities on the theme of everyday life around the year 1900. The new Researchers' Lab installed in the vaults on Level 0 is equipped with interactive media stations where visitors can learn about the research work of some of Frankfurt's famous scientists and naturalists, such as Eduard Rüppell, Maria Sibylla Merian, Paul Ehrlich, Otto Hahn, Tilly Edinger, and Georg Fresenius.

The Papermaking and Printing Shops and the Painting Studio have also been enlarged. For several years now, the museum has been collecting old type, tools, and printing presses, which have now been installed in the little Printing Shop in the vaults of the Bernuspalais. There, young visitors can try their hand at a trade with a very long tradition. They can typeset printed matter by hand and then print it on historical printing presses! The focus is on traditional methods of typographic text design, composition, and printing. Next to the printing shop is the Papermaking Shop, where some very curious papers indeed are made. The Computer Lab, meanwhile, is all about the composition, editing, layouting, and printing of texts and graphic designs, meaning that here there is plenty of scope for both experimental image-processing and creative writing. There is also a Radio Workshop containing reels of tape, LPs, music cassettes, and all the relevant recording equipment, where with professional guidance visitors can learn how recordings are made – for example by recording their own interview, survey, or radio play, or converting their own texts into audio material.

The Young Museum – Something for Everyone

Most visitors to the Young Museum are children aged between six and twelve who visit it together with their classmates or their families. These can include parents, grandparents, and youngsters of all ages from toddler to teenager, some of whom may have disabilities, short attention spans, poor reading skills, or limited German. Some families even bring babies along, too. Fortunately, the Young Museum has something for everyone. Stressed parents, for example, can opt for a Baby Sling Tour and let themselves be piloted through the city's history together with their young offspring and others like them. Then there are walking tours through the city for pre-schoolers and schoolchildren of all ages, as well as visits to exhibitions on Frankfurt and related themes. Background material can be downloaded from the museum's own web portal either before or after such tours, and school parties have the option of piecing together their own tailor-made tour using a web app that then guides them through the museum. At weekends and during school holidays or its special project weeks, the Young Museum lays on a wide range of arts and crafts activities as well as extra family events on the history of Frankfurt. Special

birthday programmes are also available. Working in collaboration with Frankfurt's youth and social services and various vocational colleges, the Young Museum also offers projects for teenagers and young adults, young refugees, and children in those parts of town that are covered by Frankfurt's Active Neighbourhood programme.

Young Museum on Tour

The mobile unit Young Museum on Tour (formerly Kinder Museum unterwegs) has been taking the museum to children in outlying parts of town since 1999. A free service, it takes the form of a mobile research station where potential visitors can learn more about a current or forthcoming exhibition at the Young Museum.

The aim is to take the Young Museum and its current exhibitions and events out of its own four walls and into the city itself. It thus reverses the traditional roles of visitor and museum so that instead of children coming to the museum, the museum goes off in search of them, and on finding them provides active, barrier-free access to a cultural institution on home turf, as it were. Young Museum on Tour thus gives youngsters a chance to experience new things and to discover and develop their own creative potential almost without leaving home. By taking part in projects, moreover, they can actively influence the exhibition content. The programme has both a cultural and a social component in that the children's own neighbourhood also plays a role. The activities thus vary and are adapted to the concerns of each new location. Through research, experimentation, and creativity, therefore, children are encouraged to pay more attention to their own part of town, and are taken seriously as experts in their own home environment. The Young Museum on Tour is aimed at a target group of seven- to twelve-year-olds, although both younger siblings and adult family members like parents and grandparents are naturally welcome to come along and interact.

Frankfurt Live!

Frankfurt Live! is a biographical archive conceived for teenagers and young adults aged between fifteen and twenty. The programme was first launched in 2000 as a writing and printing workshop for girls and young women, but has now been broadened to cover groups of young school-leavers on the threshold of working



— Interactive stations along the Family Trails make these tours a memorable experience for visitors of all ages

life. It is intended mainly for those who have arrived in Germany fairly recently. The aim is to promote participants' communication skills, articulacy, and ability to express themselves. Participants have a chance to engage with language on several different levels: They are invited to condense their own – often traumatic – life experiences in biographical or even literary texts, narrative interviews, and portraits, and by doing so to paint a “picture” of themselves that encourages self-reflection. Through public readings and the on-going presentation of their “books” and audio texts in the Library of the Generations (cf. pp. 96 ff.), moreover, these young people are able to leave their mark and to become part of Frankfurt's collective memory. For new arrivals especially, this kind of anchoring is very important.

Family Museum

The HMF is now more family-friendly than ever with presentations for all the family in all sections of the

museum. The Young Museum is an important partner that proactively supports the work of the HMF in pursuit of this goal, not least through its interactive exhibitions, educational tours and events, and regular services for families throughout the museum. Far from being confined to its own premises inside the Saalhof, therefore, the Young Museum actually informs the work of the whole museum at every level.

Family Trails

There are Family Trails leading through all the permanent exhibitions. What this means in practice is an array of hands-on stations for families, installed either next to or in close proximity to the original exhibits or object groups. To ensure that these stations do not go unnoticed they are painted orange, the signature colour of the Young Museum. And they are aimed not just at children, by the way, but at visitors of all ages who like to learn not just by looking, but by listening and doing, too. The extent to which these services are used depends on each family's preferences and interests; they are certainly not a must. The point is rather to spark an interest in certain aspects of the Frankfurt-related themes presented so that visitors will want to find out more.

Study Rooms

The special Study Rooms provided on both levels of Frankfurt Once? invite visitors to delve deeper into certain subjects and to seek additional information on specific objects, events, or periods. The key factor here is personal curiosity, which visitors can satisfy through independent research and by broadening their own knowledge horizons.

The dominant feature on Level 1, which is where the galleries Town Scapes, 100 x Frankfurt, and Citizens' Town are located, is a large object wall displaying fifty different exhibits on the theme of historical sources. The exhibits include both museum pieces presented behind glass as well as aids to learning that visitors are welcome to touch and even pick up. Opposite this object wall is a “Shelf Work” by contemporary artist Karsten Bott of Frankfurt. Systematically arranged inside its forty-five brim-full compartments are miscellaneous items and everyday objects of the past fifty years, all of which are connected in some way to Frankfurt.



— In the Researchers' Lab of the Young Museum Frankfurt scientists and naturalists are presented

One large object, a model of the city made by Klaus Grapow after the famous Merianplan of 1628, presents a visually attractive connection to the maps and plans of the city exhibited in the section Frankfurt from Above. Next door to this are rotating viewing stations showing still more views of the city as well as two paintings by Sandip Shah, a contemporary Frankfurt artist whose own interpretation of urban space is presented here.

The Study Room on Level 2 takes its cues from the adjoining theme galleries, Money Town and Global City. Here, too, there is an object wall with both museum pieces and hands-on objects on the theme of elections, coronations, the National Assembly of 1848, Frankfurt's trade fair, and trade. There is also an interview station where visitors can record their own stories of Frankfurt.

The two-square-metre paper collage of an imperial coronation was reconstructed after the account in

Goethe's autobiography, *Truth and Poetry, From My Own Life*. It was made by the pupils of a primary school in Frankfurt-Zeilsheim in 1968 and now hangs in the Study Room as a pointer to the many different subjects that visiting families might like to learn more about.

The Young Museum is a special place where visitors of all ages can broaden their cultural horizons. It empowers individuals to actively take part in larger social processes, to become acquainted with historical and contemporary arts and media, to embrace diversity, and to express themselves in a multitude of ways.