

BACK INTO THE LIGHT

- 6 **Welcome**
Karin Wolff
- 6 **Foreword**
Mirjam Wenzel
- 8 **Introduction**
Eva Sabrina Atlan
- 10 **Visiting the Studios of
Frankfurt Women Artists**
Sascha Schwabacher
- 12 **Frankfurt's 'Intellectual Spirit' in
the Weimar Republic**
Eva Sabrina Atlan, Rachel Heuberger
- 18 **The Particular Situation of Women's
Artistic Training in Frankfurt am Main
Before 1919**
Eva-Maria Höllerer
- 23 **ROSY LILIENFELD**
- 25 **An Almost Forgotten
Expressionist Artist**
Eva Sabrina Atlan
- 30 **Last Traces**
Dennis Eiler
- 36 **Works of Rosy Lilienfeld**
- 65 **AMALIE SECKBACH**
- 67 **A Belated Artist**
Annika Friedman
- 72 **Art in Captivity**
Annika Friedman
- 76 **Works of Amalie Seckbach**
- 95 **RUTH CAHN**
- 97 **A Lady Among 'wild beasts'**
Dennis Eiler
- 102 **One 'wild beast' Puts Down
Her Paintbrush**
Dennis Eiler
- 106 **Works of Ruth Cahn**
- 113 **ERNA PINNER**
- 115 **In Frankfurt and in the World**
Astrid Schmetterling
- 120 **Zoology as Art**
Barbara Weidle
- 126 **Works of Erna Pinner**
- 146 **FOUR FRANKFURT WOMEN
ARTISTS. LIFELINES**
- 162 **FORCED EMIGRATION AND
ITS CONSEQUENCES**
- 162 **Westerbork:
Transit Camp 1940 – 1945**
Pim Griffioen
- 166 **Art in the Shoah.
The Case of Theresienstadt**
Susan Nashman Fraiman
- 171 **In Search of Traces of Exile.
Jewish Women Artists in Chile**
Christina Wieder
- 174 **Creativity Against Even
Greater Odds.
Women Émigré Artists
in Britain after 1933**
Monica Bohm-Duchen
- 179 **CONTEMPORARY REFLEXION
A conversation between
Elianna Renner and Tim Voss**
- 182 **Appendix**



KERBER ART

Welcome

Karin Wolff

Recently, museums have been increasingly presenting exhibitions on women artists who were persecuted, murdered, or driven into exile by the Nazi regime. In most cases, the artists who managed to survive abroad were then unable to rebuild their careers in the post-war period.

For the first time, with *Back into the Light. Four Women Artists—Their Works. Their Paths*, the Jewish Museum Frankfurt dedicates an exhibition to four artists who influenced Frankfurt am Main's creative life in the 1920s and whose works were widely appreciated in their own time. Of these four, only the oeuvre of Erna Pinner (1890, Frankfurt am Main–1987, London) has been the subject of prior intensive research efforts, but her previously unknown drawings and photographs now on show offer new insights into her life and work. For the first time and after several years of research, works by Rosy Lilienfeld (1896, Frankfurt am Main–1942, Auschwitz) will also be presented together with an attempt to reconstruct her biography. In addition, thanks to intensive examinations of the holdings of museums and private collections as well as through contact with descendants, new light can be cast on the lives and works of Amalie Seckbach (1870, Hungen–1944, Theresienstadt) and Ruth Cahn (1875, Frankfurt am Main–1966, Frankfurt am Main).

Since the creative work of all four artists is intimately interwoven with the history of Frankfurt's art scene—at sites such as the Städel, the Kunstverein, and the Flechtheim, Kahnweiler, and Schames galleries among other institutions—the exhibition also locates them in their context in the city. The specific paths of their lives after the Nazi regime came to power in 1933 are also traced and documented through their works and biographical evidence.

I would like to thank all those involved in this ambitious and important exhibition project for their valuable research work and would be delighted to see this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue receive the recognition and acclaim they so rightly deserve.

Karin Wolff
Managing Director, Kulturfonds
Frankfurt RheinMain

Foreword

Mirjam Wenzel

The Nazi Party coming to power in January 1933 put an abrupt end to the careers of German-Jewish artists who had made a name for themselves in the years before. Publicly defamed, marginalized, and deprived of their rights, these artists were either forced to emigrate or were murdered, their works destroyed or branded as 'degenerate'. In the post-war years, hardly any of the surviving artists, whether women or men, could build on their successes of the 1920s—especially since Nazi decision-makers continued to hold positions of power in the Federal Republic of Germany's cultural and academic life.

The Jewish Museum Frankfurt sees one of its key missions to be countering the violent stigmatization of Jewish artists and their omission from twentieth-century art history. Hence, since it was founded, the museum has collected, researched, and preserved works by the artists of this 'lost generation'—in particular those from Frankfurt am Main, a city characterized in the 1920s by its vibrant and internationally networked art scene. Just one year after the museum opened, for instance, it presented Samson Schames (1898–1967) to the public. A member of a long established Frankfurt family, he was the nephew of Ludwig Schames, an art dealer specializing in Expressionist art. Samson Schames fled to London in 1939 and ultimately emigrated to New York. In 2023, the museum will again be dedicating a showcase exhibition to this important artist and painter. In 2017, the Jewish Museum Frankfurt acquired the artistic estate and personal papers of Jakob Nussbaum (1873–1936), Frankfurt's leading Impressionist painter in the 1920s. This acquisition led to the founding of the Jakob Nussbaum Archives, created to house all works by Frankfurt artists who lived and worked in the city until 1933 and were later marginalized, persecuted, forced to flee, or murdered.

With *Back into the Light. Four Women Artists—Their Works. Their Paths*, the museum is focusing specifically, for the first time, on four Jewish women artists. These women influenced Frankfurt's art scene in the 1920s, exhibited or published internationally, cultivated a cosmopolitan lifestyle, and knew how to assert themselves alongside their male fellow artists. The Nazis drove them out of public life, confining their artistic potential to the Jüdischer Kulturbund (Jewish Cultural Association) before seeking to take their lives and destroy the memory of their works and activities. Countering the injustice of these women's removal from history, the exhibition brings four remarkable figures into the public eye: Erna Pinner (1890, Frankfurt am Main–1987, London), Rosy Lilienfeld (1896, Frankfurt am Main–1942, Auschwitz), Amalie Seckbach (1870, Hungen–1944, Theresienstadt), and Ruth Cahn (1875 Frankfurt am Main–1966, Frankfurt am Main).

Thanks to intensive research, not only could the team preparing for this exhibition reconstruct much of Ruth Cahn's and Amalie Seckbach's biographies with the help of personal documents, but they also successfully identified some of their works previously thought to have been lost and now in private collections. To reflect the remaining biographical gaps, contemporary artist Elianna Renner (born 1977) was asked to continue her critical engagement with the relationship between biography and history, remembrance and forgetting and, in the context of this exhibition, create an installation on the life and work of Ruth Cahn and Amalie Seckbach.

Today, Erna Pinner is the best known of these four artists. By presenting some of her previously unknown sketches and photographs for the first time, the exhibition offers new insights into her life and oeuvre. The exhibition's greatest discovery, though, may well be Rosy Lilienfeld. An extremely talented artist who suffered from poor mental health, she fled Frankfurt for Rotterdam and was murdered in Auschwitz. She had been largely forgotten until some years ago when Eva Atlan, formerly curator at the Jewish Museum Frankfurt and now deputy director, began to research her life and work. In the meantime, Eva Atlan has built up an important Rosy Lilienfeld collection at the museum, which now has around 200 of her prints and drawings. After several years of research, the works of this artist can now be shown and contextualized for the very first time.

Just like every exhibition, *Back into the Light* is the result of a long and intensive period of teamwork. I would like to thank Eva Atlan for the idea and conceptual design for the exhibition as well as for taking on, among her many other tasks, the curatorial project management. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank and commend for their work Annika Friedman, an academic trainee, who looked after the curatorial cooperation, and Dennis Eiler, a freelancer at the museum, who provided curatorial assistance.

My thanks also go to architects Bach/Dolder and Anna Sieveking von Borck for an atmospheric exhibition setting which not only pays tribute to these four artists but also evokes their biographies; and I similarly thank Formfellows Kommunikations-Design, Thomas Klöß, and Regina Schauerte for the sensitive yet eloquent design of the exhibition and catalogue.

Back into the Light honours and contextualizes the works and lives of Ruth Cahn, Rosy Lilienfeld, Erna Pinner, and Amalie Seckbach. With the historical and art historical articles and discussion in this catalogue, the Jewish Museum Frankfurt hopes to make a lasting contribution to the memory of these four artists, their works, and biographies. I am particularly delighted by the involvement of widely recognized experts, so successfully arranged by Eva Atlan, and would like to thank the external authors Monica Bohm-Duchen, Pim Griffioen, Rachel Heuberger, Eva-Maria Höllerer, Susan Nashman Fraiman, Astrid Schmetterling, Tim Voss, Barbara Weidle, and Christina Wieder von Herzen for their contributions. In this context, I would also like to thank copy-editors Amanda Gomez, Hannah Sarid de Mowbray, and Katrin Günther for their meticulous work, and Andrew Boreham and Martin Hager for their thorough and careful translations.

Last but not least, I am very grateful to those who, through their generous funding, have made this exhibition possible—the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain, the Grunelius-Stiftung, the Jewish Museum's Society of Friends and Patrons, and the Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft. I would also like to thank the Georg and Franziska von Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung for their readiness to fund this exhibition catalogue.

My sincere thanks also go to the descendants of these four artists: the Oldham family, the Buch family, and Ruth Cahn's family. Not only have they kindly loaned or donated works, but they have also offered valuable biographical information that enabled us to reach a better understanding of the lives of these four artists.

I would also like to thank the museums, archives, and private collections which have generously loaned us works and documents for this exhibition: the Arolsen Archives, Auktionshaus Arnold, Beit Theresienstadt (Israel), the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, the Exil-Sammlung Memoria Thomas B. Schumann, The Ghetto Fighters' House (Israel), the Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, the Historisches Museum Frankfurt, the Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt, the Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Michael Kopp, the Museum Kunst der Verlorenen Generation, the National Library of Israel, and Gabriele Reber.

Finally, I would like to ask you, dear reader, not to leave the four artists to whom this catalogue is dedicated in the dark and between the covers of this book, but to bring them back into the light—something which can only succeed with your appreciation and goodwill.

Mirjam Wenzel
Frankfurt am Main, 1 September 2022

Introduction

Eva Sabrina Atlan

The idea for the exhibition *Back into the Light. Four Women Artists—Their Works. Their Paths* initially came from years of research into the life and work of the Expressionist artist Rosy Lilienfeld. Her oeuvre is now being shown for the first time in all its many facets in the hope of granting her, once again, the recognition and acclaim she enjoyed in her own day. Following her forced emigration from Germany and, later, her murder in Auschwitz, she became a forgotten artist. The illustrator and author Erna Pinner was a contemporary of Rosy Lilienfeld. Thanks to the gift of a substantial part of Pinner's artistic estate, the Jewish Museum Frankfurt can now set her oeuvre within its larger context too. But the decision to include the two other forgotten women artists came down, in the end, to a fortunate coincidence: the chance discovery of an article by art historian Sascha Schwabacher recalling her visits to the studios of four Frankfurt women artists. Her account, published in the *Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt* in 1935, not only describes Pinner and Lilienfeld as outstanding and renowned artists, but also Ruth Cahn and Amalie Seckbach, similarly largely forgotten today. The article also casts a light back on a time when its author and the artists she wrote about no longer had the right to work freely or to exhibit. When she was writing, Schwabacher could neither know the things which were to happen nor the paths she and these four artists would have to tread. In contrast, the exhibition *Back into the Light* is specifically dedicated to commemorating and narrating the lives of Rosy Lilienfeld, Amalie Seckbach, Ruth Cahn, and Erna Pinner. The main focus is on their lives and work in Frankfurt am Main in the 1920s and early 1930s, and hence the time 'before' as well as 'after', and the journeys all four were forced to take.

'Before': Frankfurt in the 1920s

When visitors enter the exhibition, they are first introduced to the places familiar to these four artists in their day and which provided inspiration—not only the principal spaces and milieus in which they moved in the 1920s, but also the city of Frankfurt itself. Those spaces were, most prominently, Frankfurt's Westend district with its art salons of renowned collectors where art journalists and other actors in the city's cultural scene met. At this time, the Zoo as well as the Palmengarten botanical gardens with its exotic motifs also provided a source of inspiration for artists, as did the primary locations of Frankfurt's cultural life, from the Hauptwache, Börsenstraße, and Opernplatz to the Schauspielhaus, Schumann-Theater, and the entertainment quarter around Main Station or the Römerberg, at times also used as an open-air theatre. The Ostend district, with Börnestrasse Synagogue, the banks of the River Main in Sachsenhausen, and the artists' quarter around the Städel were similarly crucial, as were, on the right bank of the river, the Untermainkai, as well as, from the mid-1920s, the two harbours of the Westhafen with its recent industrial developments and the new Osthafen. The exhibition not only looks at these spaces as important sources of inspiration, but also considers the influences of Frankfurt's intellectual and artistic life. Who noticed these four artists? What was written about them? Here, the crucial figures in the artistic milieu in those days included Georg Swarzenski (1876–1957), the director of the Städel; Benno Reifenberg (1892–1970), journalist and head of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* arts pages; the art critic Sascha Schwabacher (1875–1943) mentioned above; art teacher and mentor Heinrich ('Ugi') Battenberg (1879–1957); as well as other artists such as Jakob Nussbaum (1873–1936) and Ottilie W. Roederstein (1859–1937) who supported aspiring young artists. Frankfurt's Städelisches Kunstinstitut played a seminal role in art and artistic training in the city, as did Max Beckmann (1884–1950), one of its most influential teachers and artists. At that time, talented and outstanding artists could hope to show their works and gain public attention at venues such as the Städel's own department of prints and drawings, the Kunstverein exhibitions, or the city's galleries, for instance the Galerie Flechtheim branch, opened in 1921, or the Galerie Ludwig Schames. In order for visitors to be able to fully immerse themselves in this artistic milieu, we have also brought together all the historical articles we discovered to create a newspaper to read in the exhibition and take home.

Four Artists— Four Studios

The exhibition then locates the roles played all by these people and places in more detail in the individual presentation of each of these four artists. The four rooms, set off in four different colours, can be read as studios and creative spaces. Here, visitors learn more about the artists, discover the innovative artistic practices each of them developed, and find out what makes them so remarkable. A visionary Expressionist, Rosy Lilienfeld (1896, Frankfurt am Main–1942, Auschwitz) explored a wide range of topics and literature and was one of the few women taking Jewish mysticism as an inspiration for her art. She studied at the Städel'sches Kunstinstitut under Ugi Battenberg, but was equally influenced by Max Beckmann. She exhibited her works in the Städel's department of prints and drawings and, together with Bertha Pappenheim, in the exhibitions of the Jüdischer Frauenbund (The League of Jewish Women in Germany). The writings of renowned contemporaries such as Samuel Agnon and Martin Buber also had a direct influence on her work as an artist. When Amalie Seckbach (1870, Hungen–1944, Theresienstadt) turned to creating art, she was already famous internationally as a collector of high-quality Japanese and Chinese art. She only started working as a painter and sculptor when she was fifty-two years old, after the death of her husband, the architect Max Seckbach. In 1929, she showed her works together with James Ensor and took part in the Salon des Indépendants exhibitions in Paris. Ruth Cahn (1875, Frankfurt am Main–1966, Frankfurt am Main) initially trained in Munich. Afterwards, she moved to Paris to study with Fauvists Othon Friesz and Kees van Dongen, both prominent in the French avant-garde. Later, her solo shows in Paris and Barcelona gained her an international reputation as a Fauvist. Erna Pinner (1890, Frankfurt am Main–1987, London) epitomized the 'Neue Frau' ('New Woman'). She not only became famous for her travels around the world with her partner, but also independently as an author and illustrator. After some years at Frankfurt's Städel'sches Kunstinstitut, Erna Pinner went to Berlin to study with Lovis Corinth and later enrolled at the Académie Ranson in Paris. With the outbreak of the First World War, she returned to Frankfurt, where she first exhibited at the Galerie Ludwig Schames and then the Galerie Flechtheim.

The Rupture and 'After'

As varied and diverse as these four artists' forms of creative expression were, after the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, they all had one thing in common—their access to public space was steadily limited, and they could no longer exhibit their works. From that point on, the exhibition traces each of the four paths these artists were forced to follow. On leaving the individual 'studios', visitors enter an area of forced departures from Frankfurt, interpreted as a narrowing space in subdued colours. Here, along with works by the artists, the display includes contemporary documents and details of the particular geographical and historical contexts.

Unsuccessful Flight and Deportation

After the Nazi regime came to power, Amalie Seckbach and Rosy Lilienfeld initially stayed in Frankfurt. In 1939, Rosy Lilienfeld saw that she had no choice but to leave the city. She went to the Netherlands. In 1942, she was arrested by the German occupying forces, deported from Westerbork to Auschwitz, and murdered. On 16 September 1942, Amalie Seckbach was deported to Theresienstadt. In the final two years of her life, she still drew and sketched. Some of her surviving works from this time are shown in this room together with related documents.

Surviving in Exile

In 1935, Erna Pinner decided to emigrate to London. That same year, Ruth Cahn left Germany for Chile. While Pinner found opportunities to start a new career in art, Cahn was unable to build on her successes during the years of the Weimar Republic. Ultimately, Erna Pinner settled permanently in London; Ruth Cahn left Chile in 1953 and settled in Barcelona. In 1961, she returned to Frankfurt.

Contemporary Critical Dialogue

Since the significant gaps in the available sources on Amalie Seckbach's and Ruth Cahn's lives and works presented considerable challenges, especially as a starting point for an exhibition, this art historical display is accompanied by an intervention by a contemporary artist.

Elianna Renner (born 1977) has explored and engaged with just those empty spaces in Ruth Cahn's and Amalie Seckbach's biographies. She works at the intersections of biography and history, making remembrance and forgetting into part of the narrative. In this way, she has succeeded in creating three fascinating and surprising media works.