

Art and Architecture

The Deutsche Bundesbank's Central Office



Preface

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Most people only know our Central Office, located in the north of Frankfurt am Main, from the outside, often from pictures in the media. Its massive frame has symbolised the Deutsche Bundesbank's steadfastness and culture of stability for forty years now.

This brochure describes the architecture of this building and takes a brief look at its interior and at our art collection. This glimpse inside the Bundesbank's headquarters includes some surprising features, for the building offers unexpected perspectives. For instance, the lightness of the spacious entrance hall, with its long, high window fronts, contrast with the building's monumental exterior. Elsewhere, the striking colours and vibrant vitality of the artworks set a counterpoint to the overall austerity of the architecture.

The Bundesbank's art collection contains a wide variety of works by renowned artists. These are complemented by creations of younger artists, attesting our ongoing commitment to promote contemporary art. The collection reflects the Bundesbank's long tradition of involvement in art – one that today spans more than five decades and began long before the construction of our current Central Office was completed. We encounter these works of art in our working environment, each and every day: in the corridors and offices as well as on the lawns surrounding the Central Office buildings. They constantly attract the eye and fire the imagination, triggering discussions among staff and visitors alike.

This brochure invites you to form your own impression of the architecture of our Central Office building and of the art collection it houses. We hope it will provide you with new and interesting insights.

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The Deutsche Bundesbank's Central Office looms stark and striking within extensive park-like grounds in the north of Frankfurt. It was designed by the architects ABB Beckert and Becker. The foundation stone was laid in 1967 and construction was completed in 1972. Plainly visible from afar, the 13-storey structure is surrounded by a number of smaller edifices: the older Cash Department building and Guesthouse as well as the more modern Money Museum and several more recently constructed office buildings.

The extremely elongated building is a concrete and glass slab measuring 217 meters in length yet less than 17 metres in width. Its structure and articulation are exceptionally clear-cut. Two solid perpendicular markers housing the lift shafts optically divide the building into three sections of contrasting proportions. However, the main structural contrast lies in the vertical-horizontal tension between the two perpendicular lift shafts, which are replicated by the slender side-pillars at either end, and the lateral grid pattern of the two longitudinal façades. The façade of grey exposed concrete is accentuated, with the rows of windows with their dark metal frames receding behind this frontal grid. The resulting distance between the protruding outer frame and the indented window cavities creates a strong effect of plasticity, heightening the interplay of light and shade. This gives the building a changing spatial ambience, depending on the time of day and the light conditions. The Cash Department and Guesthouse offer variations of the main building's formal theme and supplement its long, tall outline with their own more horizontal emphasis.



South façade of the main building

The style of the Central Office's original architectural ensemble – the main building, Cash Department and Guesthouse – dates back to the 1970s and, following in the tradition of classical Modernism, can be termed "Brutalist". Although the expression sounds rather negative, it was originally intended as a neutral term. The French architect Le Corbusier coined the phrase *beton brut* (raw concrete), meaning concrete with an unfinished or a roughly finished surface – an element Le Corbusier himself used in the buildings he designed. This eye-catching use of reinforced concrete flourished internationally in the 1960s and 1970s, and was used in public buildings, in particular, including in Germany. Features typical of such buildings are the visibility of the skeletal construction as well as the use of rough and unprocessed building materials, which were left in this unfaced state. The objective was to create a piece of honest and truthful architecture. After Brutalist architecture fell out of favour somewhat during the past decades, its qualities are now being discovered and discussed anew.

While the Bundesbank Central Office was still under construction, the Bank's Executive Board sought to complement the stringently modern building with artworks that shared a uniform concept. In 1969 the Bank set up an art advisory council, which included the architects, tasked with giving particular consideration to contemporary developments in art. The minutes of the advisory board's meeting in 1969 state that "there is an agreed notion and desire to give the entire building an atmosphere that is open to what is new by introducing artworks of our time". Three architecture-related works were ultimately commissioned: an installation by Jesús Rafael Soto, a room designed by Victor Vasarely, and two large tapestries based on designs by Max Ernst.



Entrance hall with an installation by Jesús Rafael Soto, 1972



Jesús Rafael Soto, detail of the wall installation in the entrance hall

Visitors entering the Central Office foyer are surprised by the sensation of spaciousness produced by the two ceiling-to-floor glass fronts: one looking northwards to the forecourt and beyond, and the other facing south to the park. The impression of lightness inside stands in stark contrast to the massive façade outside. Jesús Rafael Soto, a Venezuelan artist who lived and worked in Paris and was one of the outstanding proponents of Op Art, created a mural sculpture and a ceiling installation with integrated *luminaires* for the large entrance hall. As his twin creations for the Bundesbank clearly illustrate, the artist sought to combine his interest in formal construction with kinetic rhythm. The eastern wall of the entrance hall is adorned by a sculpture fashioned from a compact arrangement of vertical metal rods in two colours. Secured either to the floor or the ceiling, they converge at the lower part of the wall. The structures appear to vibrate and evaporate as the viewer retreats, only to reform in new constellations. The variegated perspectives from different positions or angles are an integral part of the sculpture, challenging the viewer to reflect on perception. The ceiling installation, too, refashions the entrance hall's spatial geometry by optically dynamising the hall's static contours.

The other two art projects that were completed for the opening of the building in 1972 are located in the suite of conference and dining rooms on the top floor. Here, as in the entrance hall, the normal layout of the building, with offices leading off to the right and left from a central corridor, is deliberately broken. Instead, the corridor runs directly along the glass-fronted southern side of the building, thereby presenting an impressive vista of Frankfurt's city skyline. The original interior fittings and furnishings are still largely preserved. Dark wood-panelled walls contrast with floor-to-ceiling windows and elaborate ceiling installations. As with the exterior façade, the architects' overriding organisational principle for the interior design was stringency and clarity. They focused on a small number of high-quality materials and classical furnishings to create clear, smooth surfaces, self-repeating geometric patterns and prolonged visual axes. Two conference rooms feature ceiling installations that are paradigmatic of the interior architecture of the 1970s.

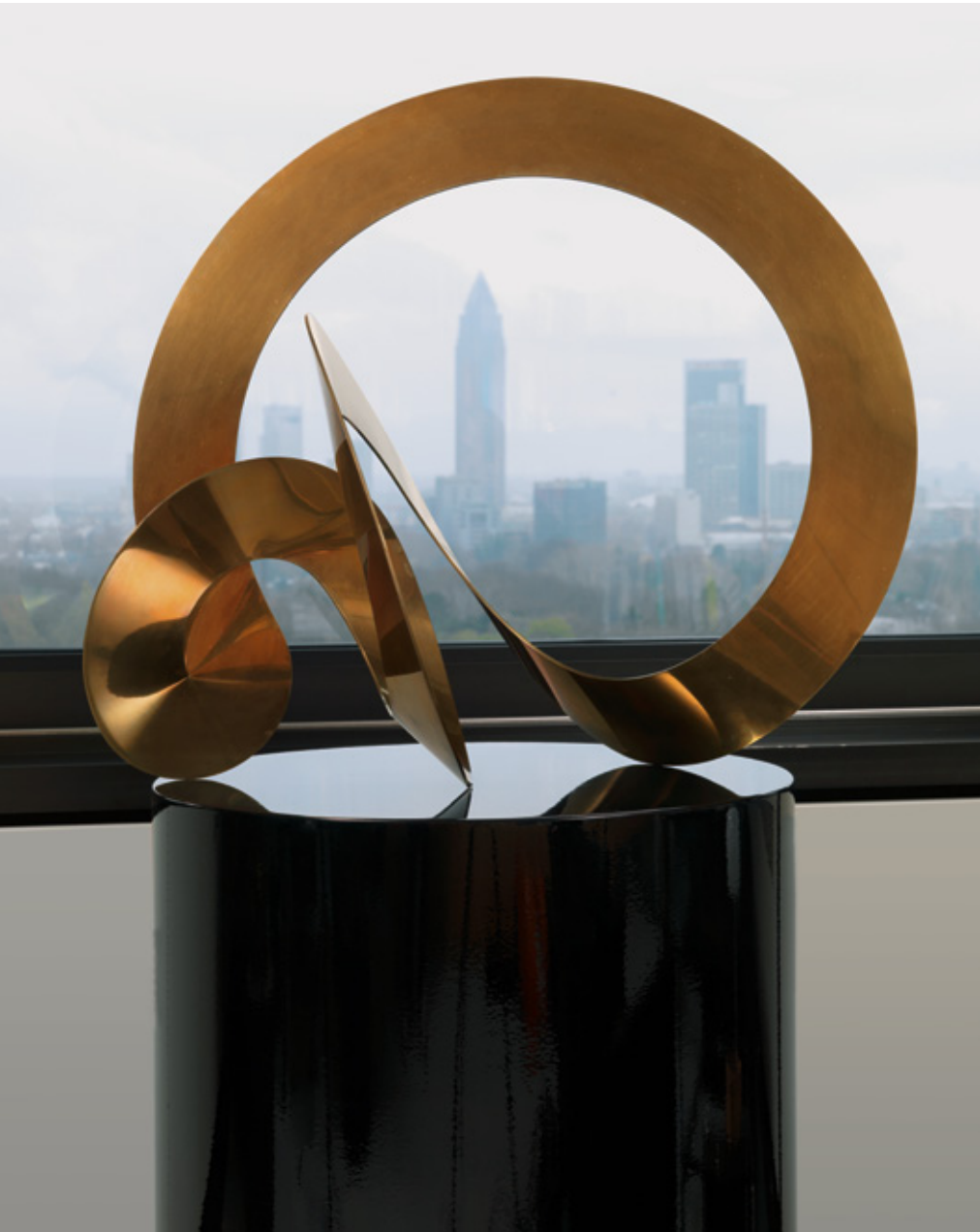
One of the long suite of multifunctional rooms on the 13th floor was designed by Victor Vasarely and his son, Yvaral, as a dining room. They created an artistic ensemble that is characteristic of their work: the artists strove to produce art that was both contemporary and socially relevant. One of its salient features was the pervasion of everyday life, another was the integration of artistic design into architecture. The walls are decorated with plastic and aluminium discs painted yellow, gold, grey and silver. The discs are arranged in symmetrical and mirrored configurations. The colours of the ceiling, floor and doors match those of the walls. Vasarely's artwork thus envelops the entire room and – through the interplay between materials and colours – offers the observer a wide array of perspectives.



Section of the 13th floor, with paintings by Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz



Victor Vasarely and Yvaral, interior design for dining room, 1972



Max Bill, *Fläche aus einer Spirale* (Plane borne of a spiral), 1974, gold-plated brass

By contrast, the artworks proposed by Max Ernst for the Bundesbank followed a classical concept: he designed two wall-sized tapestries for a large conference room. The tapestries *Hesperiden* (Hesperides) and *Turangable* were woven by an old established manufactory located in France. These works are based on collages by the artist which represent variations of elements taken from Ernst's early work from the 1920s.

Irrespective of these works that were produced specifically for, and relate directly to, the building's architecture, art has gained its own *raison d'être* within the Bundesbank's headquarters. From the outset, the Bundesbank's senior management considered culture a key component of social life and started to build up an art collection as early as the 1950s. Over and above the purely "decorative" function, they were prompted by an idealistic motive. They wanted the Bundesbank, as a public institution, to promote art and culture, embrace the new and look beyond its own professional doorstep. This tradition is every bit as valid today. For many of our staff, art at the workplace is a given: in particular, pictures that individual staff members select for their offices often remain with their temporary owners and accompany them from position to position throughout their careers.

The Bundesbank's art collection, which has evolved regionally over the decades and is dispersed across various locations in Germany, today comprises several thousand works. At the Central Office in Frankfurt, the Bundesbank sought to gradually build up an integrated portfolio of artworks that reflect developments in German painting since 1945. Not least in view of the relatively modest budget available for acquisitions, it goes without saying that the objective was never to amass a representative body of art spanning German art history. Instead, the Bank set out to embellish the collection with highlights by obtaining outstanding individual works.

Thus, the collection contains a very wide range of representational and abstract works up to the present day. Informal painting of the 1950s was one of the early focal points and features works by Karl Otto Götz and Bernard Schultze. These were in fact displayed back then at the Bank's in-house exhibitions, and collected. The subsequent painting style, which concentrates on colour and form independently of the subject, is represented in the collection by the likes of Rupprecht Geiger, Gotthard Graubner and Georg Karl Pfahler. Pfahler's painting *Argus* comprises large black and red shapes on a white ground. With his pictures characterised by stark contrasts, Pfahler was a pioneer of 1960s painting, combining a symbolic pictorial language with dynamic compositional principles.



Georg Karl Pfahler, Argus, 1961, oil on canvas

The collection includes artists who integrate figurative elements into their works – like Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz – as well as painters whose works have an explicitly historical and social context – like Jörg Immendorff and Anselm Kiefer in the west of Germany and Bernhard Heisig and Wolfgang Mattheuer in eastern Germany.

To ensure that it remains in touch with contemporary developments in art, the Bundesbank holds regular exhibitions of the works of young artists. This provides them with a platform through which to show their artworks and, not least, allows the Bank's staff and visitors a direct confrontation with contemporary art.

Because the Bundesbank buys some of the items it exhibits, contemporary works are successively added to its art collection. In 2007, the Bundesbank showcased paintings by Matthias Bitzer. His works bring together two disparate pictorial worlds: in the picture opposite, the figurative depiction of a young woman is merged with the formal idiom of abstract art, which was elaborated at the beginning of the 20th century. Viewed with historical hindsight, Bitzer fuses the geometric vocabulary of abstraction with a narrational dimension. The woman portrayed in *Red dress of rain* is not a fictitious person but Emmy Ball-Hennings (1885 – 1948), one of the founders of Dadaism in Zurich. Herself a protagonist of Modernism, which constantly reinvents itself, Ball-Hennings serves as a model for Bitzer, who is fascinated by the possibilities of constructing identity and presenting it aesthetically.



Matthias Bitzer, *Red dress of rain*, 2007, acrylic and ink on unprimed canvas

To cater for the growing need for working space at the Bundesbank's Central Office as a result of organisational restructurings and the assumption of more complex tasks, further office buildings have had to be erected. The associated landscaping of the grounds surrounding the Central Office created new spaces for a number of statues. In the southern park area, a four-metre-high sculpture by Bruce Beasley offers a marked contrast to the façade of the Central Office building. This work by the US sculptor follows in the tradition of Constructivism. Members of this art movement, which arose at the beginning of the 20th century, reduced their formal language to basic geometric elements to create abstract compositions. Beasley's playful work *Messenger II* toys with the unusual distribution of weights and centres of gravity by placing ever larger shapes on top of each other on a slender base.

To the north, in front of the Money Museum, visitors cannot fail to see a monumental, sprawling steel object by the sculptor Erich Hauser. In this geometrically abstract work of industrially manufactured steel parts, Hauser presents a variation on the themes at the heart of his work – statics, dynamics and balance – and places them in relation to the modern façade of the architecture of the museum building. The Central Office grounds also contain works by Gerhard Marcks and Joan Miró.




View of a conference room



The grounds with a bronze statue by Bruce Beasley, Messenger II, 1993

The Deutsche Bundesbank is the central bank of the Federal Republic of Germany. Together with the European Central Bank (ECB) and the other central banks of the Eurosystem, it is responsible for ensuring the stability of the euro. The President of the Bundesbank is a member of the Governing Council of the ECB, which decides the euro area's monetary policy. The Bundesbank contributes towards fulfilling the Eurosystem's primary objective, which is to maintain price stability, and implements the Governing Council's decisions in Germany. Moreover, the Bundesbank plays an active role in both national and international committees and institutions working to safeguard a stable financial and monetary system. Jointly with the Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin), the Bundesbank has the additional task of supervising banks in Germany. The Bundesbank's mandate also includes ensuring the smooth settlement of payments within Germany and abroad. Through its branches, the Bundesbank puts euro cash into circulation in Germany. To perform all of these tasks, the Bundesbank employs some 9,500 staff at its nine Regional Offices, its branches and at its Central Office in Frankfurt am Main.



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