

PRESS RELEASE

July 2024

SUPERHEROES

13 September 2024–11 May 2025

The NRW-Forum Düsseldorf is being transformed into a superhero universe: with more than 1600 exhibits over 1200 square metres of exhibition space, visitors can expect a blockbuster show that shines a light on the entire pop culture world of superheroes and their adversaries. From Batman and the Joker to manga and anime and even politics and propaganda, the exhibition demonstrates the diversity of the genre across a total of eleven themed areas. In addition to numerous comic books, visitors can also marvel at original drawings, sculptures and action toys as well as film clips and media art installations.

Locked in an eternal battle between good and evil, superheroes have been saving the world over and over again for 100 years. Equipped with a strong moral compass, superhuman abilities and high-tech gadgets, they embody our desire for justice and symbolise the defence of well-fortified democracies. The first stories about superheroes emerged in the USA in the 1930s and have since spread around the world. They are often full of crazy ideas and storylines – anything is possible in comics and there are no limits to the imagination. Supernatural abilities give the fictional characters their superpowers: they can effortlessly scale walls, fly, absorb energy, read minds and are virtually invincible.

The exhibition begins with a chapter titled **Myths and Blockbusters**, which explores the beginnings of superheroes and traces an arc from Greek mythology and literary precursors such as Zorro and the Phantom to the founding of leading comic book publishers Marvel and DC. In the 1990s, their reimagining of well-known characters such as Spider-Man, Wonder Woman and Batman established modern heroes whose stories were no longer only

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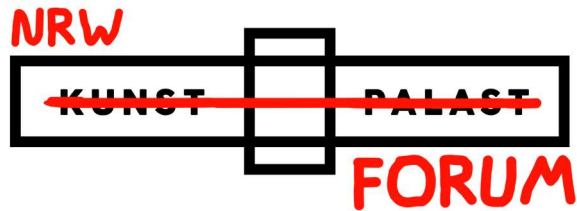
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told in comics but also in cinematic blockbusters. The Batmobile film prop is one of many highlights in the exhibition.

An entire room of the exhibition is dedicated to Düsseldorf-born comic book artist **Nic Klein**, one of only three Marvel illustrators in Germany. On display are his original drawings for the comic book publishers Marvel and DC, including for *The Hulk*, *Thor*, *Captain America* and *The Punisher*.

In addition to numerous comic books, several original drawings by famous illustrators such as **Jim Aparo**, **Joëlle Jones** and **Jim Steranko** will also be shown, combined with works by contemporary artists including **Sebastian Utzni**, **Patricia Waller**, **LuYang**, **William Pope.L** and **Barbara Hammer**.

Around 150 limited-edition statues of the most famous superheroes from the DC and Marvel universes, including life-size figures of Spider-Man and Batman, as well as hundreds of limited-edition collector's figurines can be seen in the **Ahnengalerie** at the NRW-Forum. Tools such as Thor's hammer, as well as the capes, masks and accessories that give the characters their superpowers are also on display.

The exhibition takes a humorous turn in the **Pop and Parody** section, which is dedicated to bootleg figures that are imitations of well-known superheroes and artistic parodies of the superhero genre, as well as humorous superhero comics. These might have a local flavour, such as the Bavarian *Tracht Man*, who goes on the hunt for criminals armed with a dumpling gun and a beer tankard. The show also features works that reveal the weaknesses of superheroes in humorous ways. For example, a Superman crocheted out of wool by artist **Patricia Waller** is stuck in the wall, while her Spider-Man is caught in his own web. In this chapter of the exhibition, visitors will also be able to play a vintage version of Marvel's *Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter*, which was developed especially for the exhibition by the Düsseldorf art collective **Grotesk Group**.

During World War II in particular, but also in the years that followed, comics and their characters served as a medium for **Politics and Propaganda**. The

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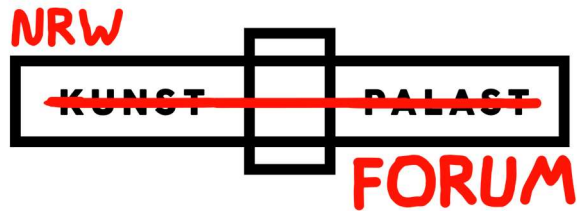
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exhibition explores this theme in a separate room. Wearing his patriotic Star-Spangled Banner costume, Captain America punched Adolf Hitler in the jaw in 1941, while the South African apartheid government spent millions on creating a Black comic superhero, Mighty Man. The exhibition also presents Captain Berlin: conceived by indie director Jörg Buttgereit, the German superhero fights against Kim Jong-II as well as Erich Honecker and is thus an important protagonist in the politicised comic scene.

Superheroes are not solely a US invention; they can also be found in Japanese **Manga and Anime Culture**. Series such as *Sailor Moon*, *Saint Seiya* and *My Hero Academia* are juxtaposed with US superheroes and complemented by rare action toys, manga books and images by the Hong Kong cosplay photographer **Thurstan Redding**. In addition to this, the chapter titled **Diversity and the Future** focuses on the rich variety of the art form: **YouNeek Studios** epitomises the flourishing comic scene in Africa and is establishing Black superheroes with characters such as EXO and Fury, who can also be seen in the exhibition. Leading comic book publishers like DC and Marvel are also expanding their range of characters. Created back in 1968, Miss Marvel was originally a white American superhero who served as a role model for the burgeoning women's movement. Since 2022, she has enriched the Marvel universe as its first Muslim superhero. A selection of ten artistic works from the open call for the *Superhero of the Future* will also be on display.

In the **Cult and Commerce** room, students from the University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf present an installation as part of a semester project entitled "Do we need another hero?" led by illustration professors Mone Schliephack and Frank Höhne and illustrator Ulf Keyenburg. There will also be absurd merchandise on display, from an Iron Man dildo to a toilet paper holder in the shape of Thor's hammer.

The staging picks up on themes from the exhibition by displaying the rivalry between Batman and the Joker in a black and white cabinet or presenting villains such as Harley Quinn and Magneto in a prison cell. This rich variety of settings creates an entertaining tour through the superhero universe.

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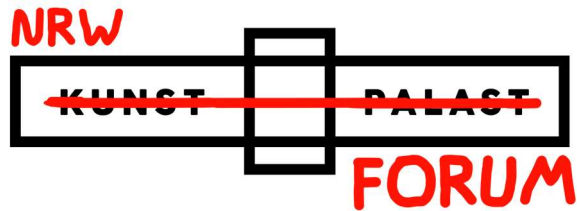
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“In addition to the historical heroic figures and superheroes we are familiar with, the show also presents the latest developments in the pop culture genre,” says Alain Bieber, artistic director of the NRW-Forum and curator of the exhibition. “We are also delighted to support aspiring comic artists through the selected submissions from the open call for the *Superhero of the Future* and to offer them a platform in the exhibition.”

SUPERHEROES thus allows visitors to reunite with their childhood heroes, presenting pop culture icons alongside numerous surprising interpretations by contemporary artists.

Curator: Alain Bieber, artistic director of NRW-Forum

Staging: Dilara Öztürk, NRW-Forum Düsseldorf & Lukas Philipp Schulz, Studio Mudio

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