

## PRESSEMITTEILUNG

**BILDFABRIKEN. Infographics 1920–1945: Fritz Kahn, Otto Neurath et al.**  
**A temporary exhibition of the German Museum of Books and Writing of the German National Library in Leipzig**  
**Opening at 19:00 on 7 September 2017**

From 8 September 2017 to 7 January 2018, the German Museum of Books and Writing in Leipzig, in cooperation with the Institute of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Erfurt, is exploring the beginnings of infographics based on the example of two distinctive visual languages. Emerging from different traditions, the Austrian economist Otto Neurath, who became a museum director in Leipzig in 1918, and the physician Fritz Kahn, born in Halle, almost simultaneously developed abstract imageries based on a formal stylisation of the human body. For the first time, the exhibition highlights comprehensively the relationships between the two different approaches: each made a unique contribution to the "Iconic Turn" of this era with its strong interest in the internationalisation of science and knowledge.

In 2002, when the 9/11 infographics of the New York Times garnered journalism's highest award, the Pulitzer Prize, it was clear that infographics had truly found their place in today's media world. However, their roots go back to the early 1900's: in response to the increasing information overload, attempts were made to express complex relationships using simple images. The increasingly globalised world made use of graphical means for explanation. The demand for visual communication rose dramatically from the beginning of the 20th century: the complexity of social processes engendered a desire for simple rules and orientation, which in turn gave rise to a new visual language in the field of art and design.

The "Bildfabriken. Infographics 1920–1945: Fritz Kahn, Otto Neurath et al." exhibition, funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation as part of the Fellowship International Museum programme, focuses on this rapid increase in visualisation in the early 20th century, in particular on two specific responses within the newly established genre of infographics.

While Neurath's concept of the "isotype" (International System of Typographic Picture Education) developed pictogram-like graphics as tokens of social realities, Kahn's

"factories of the human body" yielded mechanistic process diagrams in which man becomes an "industrial palace".

The two protagonists shared the fate of being hunted as exiles throughout the world. As Jewish citizens, both were exposed to persecution by the Nazis. Their lives were marked by numerous disruptions and long exile journeys, but also by professional reorientation.

Following Otto Neurath's motto of "words divide, images unite", infographics as non-linguistic pictographs are still transporting complex information concisely in eye-catching forms and colours. In this respect, the exhibition is contributing to the current debate on new forms of information economy by focussing on the historical positions of Otto Neurath and Fritz Kahn.

The bilingual exhibition is divided into eight modules: Idea & Machine The New Body, Image Inventors, World Tour of Ideas, Isotypes: Signs of the Modern World, Worldview, Visual Education and Infographics and Media. Its exhibits include not only publications from the rich holdings of the German National Library, but also unique objects from the German Museum of Books and Writing of the German National Library and from US and British archives - especially the Leo Baeck Institute, New York and Reading University, UK.

Funded by the International Museum Fellowship programme of the German Federal Cultural Foundation in cooperation with the University of Erfurt, the exhibition is accompanied by a bilingual book published by Spector Books Leipzig and edited by curator Helena Doudova together with Stephanie Jacobs and Patrick Rössler, generously supported by Gesellschaft für das Buch e. V. It is available at the museum at a price of EUR 24.

Funded by the International Museum Fellowship programme of



In cooperation with Erfurt University



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**LEIPZIG  
FRANKFURT AM MAIN**

**Bildfabriken. Infographics 1920–1945. Fritz Kahn, Otto Neurath et al.**

Exhibition of the German Museum of Books and Writing of the German National Library in Leipzig

8 September 2017 to 7 January 2018

Tuesday to Sunday 10:00-18:00, Thursday 10:00-20:00,

National holidays (except Mondays) 10:00-18:00

Free admission.

**Official opening of exhibition: 7 September 2017 at 19:00**

Welcome speech: Michael Fernau, Director of the German National Library in Leipzig

Introduction: Dr. Stephanie Jacobs, Head of the German Museum of Books and Writing

Opening Speech: Dr. Marie Cathleen Haff, German Federal Cultural Foundation, Fellowship Internationales Museum

Talk: "Information in time and place", Prof. Eric Kindel, Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading

The curator Helena Doudova will conduct a tour of the exhibition afterwards.

**Background**

The book has shaped our culture and civilisation like no other medium. For centuries our knowledge about the world and its peoples has been stored in books. The task of the German Book and Writing Museum of the German National Library is to collect, exhibit and process evidence of book and media history. Founded in 1884 in Leipzig as the Deutsches Buchgewerbemuseum (German Book Trade Museum), it is the oldest museum in the world in the field of book culture, and also one of the most important with regard to the scope and quality of its holdings.