

The documenta in Kassel

In 1955 Arnold Bode, artist, art professor, curator and resident of Kassel, created the first documenta. At that time it was considered an exhibition of Western European modern art. The documenta has evolved over the course of 14 exhibitions over a period of five years. It has become a place of major debates about contemporary art and the current socio-political context. For exactly 100 days every five years, Kassel is all about contemporary art. Installations, performances and lectures take place in a wide variety of locations.

Food for thought – war

The documenta is also about war time and time again. *The Polemos* tank stood as a warning, which Andreas Angelidakis set up in the Fridericianum during documenta 14. At documenta 2017, the artist arranged seating modules made of vinyl and foam into a flexible shell. In one performance, the flecktarn modules were assembled into a full-size tank twice a week. The tools of war were repeatedly dismantled into a cuddly oasis, and yet the viewer got an idea of war and destruction. Since February 22, 2022, with Russia's attack on Ukraine, this Angelidakis' art performance has become a staggering reality for Europe. Tanks roll again and their disassembly into seat modules, i.e. the return to diplomacy, as desired in Andreas Angelidakis' performance, seems out of reach.



War - always a topic at the documenta. Patch camouflage seat modules are assembled into a full-size tank in a performance twice a week. (Here on the internet it already works if you move the mouse over the picture) / © Photo: Georg Berg

Food for thought – exploitation and environmental destruction

Ibrahim Mahama from Ghana with a spectacular outdoor artwork in 2017. The veiling of the gate guards. The jute sacks are manufactured in Asia, distributed around the world and used in Ghana to pack cocoa for export to America and Europe. In these sacks, the history of world trade materializes, which even today often tells of exploitation. Cocoa beans in particular stand for low wages, child labor and environmental destruction.



The wrapping of the gate guards with jute bags by the artist Ibrahim Mahama from Ghana during documenta 14 in Kassel / © Photo: Georg Berg

Destination Kassel

Kassel is worth a visit, and not just during the documenta period. During the weeks of the big art show, visitors from all over the world flock to the North Hessian city. Concerts, performances or a variety of street food options enrich the cityscape. But it is also a fact that after more than 60 years of documenta in Kassel, many works of art have remained in the city. The density of museums is also impressive and the water features in Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe, which has been a World Heritage Site since 2013, offer impressive water power every year from May. A city trip to Kassel is also worthwhile outside of the documenta years.



In 1977, Joseph Beuys was also considered to have tended to be insane. Five years later, for documenta 7, he had 7,000 oak trees planted in the city of Kassel and placed a block of stone next to each one. Today Kassel is greener and more beautiful – also because of this documenta project by Joseph Beuys. / © Photo: Georg Berg

Other aspects: outdoor artworks in Kassel / curator of documenta 2017 Adam Szymczyk and his concept / installations and works by: Daniel Knorr, Martha Minujin, performance Carved Flow by Otobong Nkanga / Yugo export by Irena Haiduk / Andreas Angelidakis "Polemos" war tools and cuddly oasis

