

# **Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne The Original**

Thursday, September 3, 2020  
Haus der Kulturen der Welt

as of September 3, 2020  
Subject to change

**HKW**  
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Press Release

**HKW**  
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**Gemäldegalerie**  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Haus der Kulturen der Welt

**Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne – The Original**

Curated by Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil, in collaboration with the Warburg Institute  
Exhibition

**Sep 4 – Nov 30, 2020**

Kulturforum, Gemäldegalerie

**Between Cosmos and Pathos. Berlin Works from Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas**

Curated by Neville Rowley and Jörg Völlnagel  
Exhibition

**Aug 8 – Nov 1, 2020**

Berlin, September 3, 2020

***Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne - the Original*, curated by Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil in collaboration with the Warburg Institute, is on view at HKW from September 4 – November 30, 2020. The accompanying exhibition at the Gemäldegalerie *Between Cosmos and Pathos. Berlin Works from Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas* runs from August 8 – November 1, 2020. In parallel, HKW shows *Errata*, with work by Ariella Aisha Azoulay, New Red Order and others.**

In the 1920s, the scholar of art and culture Aby Warburg (1866-1929) created his **Bilderatlas Mnemosyne** tracing recurring visual themes, gestures and patterns across time, from antiquity to the Renaissance and beyond to contemporary culture. At HKW all 63 panels of the **Atlas** will be reconstituted for the first time from Warburg's original, multi-colored images.

Parallel to the exhibition at HKW, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin will show in the Gemäldegalerie, Kulturforum, works of art from prehistory and early history to modern times, related pictorial sources Warburg used as the basis for his encyclopedic picture collection. Warburg's research repeatedly reveals the instability of the lines drawn by European civilization narratives.

Aby Warburg studied the interplay of images from different periods and cultural contexts. He designed the *Mnemosyne Atlas* to provide a pictorial representation of the influences of the ancient world in the Renaissance and beyond. The *Atlas* consisted of large black panels on which he placed photographic reproductions of artworks from the Middle East, European antiquity and the Renaissance, alongside contemporary newspaper clippings and advertisements. In the years leading to his death in 1929, Warburg and his closest colleagues Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl experimented with the form and function

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## Press Release

# HKW

Haus der Kulturen der Welt



Gemäldegalerie  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

of the *Bilderatlas*. Their goal was to present a publication designed for discussion among experts as well as the broader public. During the course of its creation, the *Atlas* developed into an instrument of cognition.

Warburg's method set new standards: it consisted in rearranging canonized images and looking at them across epochs. His project traversed the boundaries between art history, philosophy and anthropology and was fundamental for the modern disciplines of visual and media studies. Today, his use of visual memory provides inspiration and alternative routes through a reality dominated by visual media.

**The exhibition at HKW restores the last documented version of the 1929 Atlas almost completely with the original images. In collaboration with the Warburg Institute, the curators Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil have located most of the originals, some partly in color, 971 images from the 400,000 individual objects in the Institute's Photographic Collection to show all 63 panels of Warburg's unfinished magnum opus for the first time since his death. In addition, 20 unpublished large-scale photographs of panels that were previously only accessible in the Warburg Institute archives will be shown: Most of them made in autumn of 1928, they originated from the previous versions of the Atlas and are presented as large prints of the original black and white negatives.**

A [folio volume](#) gathers the 63 plates of Warburg's Atlas – newly photographed from the original, multi-colored images and the 20 panels from the previous versions in black and white along with essays by Axel Heil, Roberto Ohrt, Bernd Scherer, Bill Sherman and Claudia Wedepohl. The captions have been updated and supplemented by the authors Roberto Ohrt, Axel Heil and the Mnemosyne research group since 2012 and show the state of research as of February 2020. A second volume with extensive commentaries by the curators will be published in spring 2021. Both published by Hatje Cantz.

The [companion guide](#) to the exhibition of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin at the Gemäldegalerie has been published by Deutscher Kunstverlag.

*Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne - The Original, part of The New Alphabet (2019-2021) is supported by the Minister of State for Culture and the Media due to a ruling of the German Bundestag.*

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**Accompanying program**

For full program please go to: [www.hkw.de/en/bilderatlas](http://www.hkw.de/en/bilderatlas)

**Conference**

Sep 25 and Sep 26, 2020

Format analogue/digital. Please check [www.hkw.de/en/bilderatlas](http://www.hkw.de/en/bilderatlas) in advance.

With Linda Báez-Rubí, Philippe Despoix, Burcu Dogramaci, Steffen Haug, Axel Heil, Eckart Marchand, Johannes von Müller, Roberto Ohrt, Elizabeth Sears, Bill Sherman, Joacim Sprung, Giovanna Targia, Tullio Viola, Matthew Vollgraff, Claudia Wedepohl and others.

**Curatorial introduction with Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil**

3€/1.50€, Tickets available online, remaining tickets at the box office

Sun, Sep 27, 2020, 12:30 pm, Lecture Hall

**Art Dialogs**

Every Saturday and Monday, 2-6pm

In German/English

Registration is not required, included in the exhibition ticket

**Guided Tour**

Every Sunday

Fee: 3€/1.50€ plus exhibition ticket, max. 10 persons

Tickets available online, remaining tickets at the box office

Meeting point: box office

The individual dates of the guided tours in German and English and the exact times can be found at:

[www.hkw.de/en/bilderatlas](http://www.hkw.de/en/bilderatlas)

**Architectural tour**

Saturdays, in German, 3€/1,50€, max. 15 people

Tickets available online, remaining tickets at the box office

Meeting point: box office

Sep 12, Sep 19, 2020, 3 pm

Oct 03, Oct 17, Oct 24, 2020, 2:45 pm



THE WARBURG  
INSTITUTE

SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

02 September 2020

## ABY WARBURG'S *BILDERATLAS MNEMOSYNE*: A VIRTUAL TOUR

The Warburg Institute, London, is pleased to announce the creation of a new digital resource that will allow virtual visits to two major exhibitions devoted to Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne: Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne -- The Original* (4 September - 30 November 2020) at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) and *Between Cosmos and Pathos: Berlin Works from Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas* (6 August - 1 November 2020) at Kulturforum, Gemäldegalerie.

The virtual tours, which will be launched at the end of September, celebrate this pioneering project, and allow audiences and researchers around the world to explore these landmark exhibitions.

The Warburg Institute was founded in Hamburg by the historian of art and culture Aby Warburg (1866-1929), the scholarly scion of one of Europe's great banking families. It was exiled to England in 1933—becoming the only institution saved from Nazi Germany to survive intact in Britain. Today, as part of the University of London, it is one of the world's premiere institutes for the study of cultural history and the role of images in culture.

Warburg spent the last years of his life on an 'atlas of images' that he named *Mnemosyne*, after the Greek goddess of memory. By the time of his death, Warburg had arranged 971 images on 63 large black panels. This unfinished magnum opus is at once a map of ancient images and one of modernity's foundational projects. Known only from the black-and-white photos taken before Warburg's death, the *Bilderatlas* has become a legend for scholars, artists and curators.

The virtual tours have been created with financial support from the Warburg Charitable Trust and technical direction from Marco Vedana at documentart.de. They will allow visitors to explore the content of both exhibitions online and will also enable them to move freely between the panels of images at HKW and the original artworks in the Gemäldegalerie. The site will feature interviews with those who created the exhibitions and selected objects will be accompanied by expert commentary.

This commission forms part of the Warburg Institute's ongoing commitment to the digitisation of its assets as part of *Warburg Renaissance*, a capital transformation project to create in London the interdisciplinary laboratory that Warburg dreamed of in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hamburg. The Warburg Institute is working with Stirling Prize-winning architects Haworth Tompkins on a complete transformation of its much-loved but long-neglected building. This will not only improve the Institute's spaces for collections, students and visiting fellows but will also introduce a new public hub on the ground floor, with a greatly expanded lecture room and its first gallery for physical and digital exhibitions.

**Professor Bill Sherman, Director of the Warburg Institute, comments:** 'The exhibitions in Berlin will bring Warburg's legendary project to new audiences—and the Virtual Tour will allow those who cannot visit the exhibitions in person to see the *Bilderatlas* online. As a digital thinker before the creation of digital technology, Warburg would no doubt have embraced Virtual Reality and its ability to transmit images and ideas across space and time!'

The Virtual Tour will go live by the end of September and will be available on the websites of the Warburg Institute, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) and Gemäldegalerie (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).

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**For further information about the Warburg Institute, contact Matt Railton and Holly Unwin at Four Culture:**

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Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020

## The Bilderatlas in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Bernd Scherer

Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, created in the late 1920s, remains a central methodological touchstone for the process of knowledge generation in our times. These are times of upheaval and change: Globalisation and post-colonialism are challenging the Western art canon, not only in its reach – in the context of global art strategies, this is now simply being extended to the rest of the world while neglecting the Eurocentrism it involves – but in its fundamental approach of separating art from social, political and economic processes.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, established discipline-based knowledge systems have proven to be no longer adequate for either getting to grips with or mapping the processes of globalisation, let alone reflecting the transformations of the Anthropocene, which are upsetting the equilibrium of the planet's ecosystem and climate.<sup>2</sup>

This begs the question of alternative cultural practices for dealing with our own times. That is the context in which the true significance of the *Mnemosyne* project becomes apparent: not as historical artefact, but as a living aesthetic and cognitive process of utmost relevance to our age, above and beyond its specific content.

Aby Warburg developed his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* in the aftermath of the calamity of the 'Great War', which shook Europe's 'civilising project' to the core, and with it the existing knowledge systems and their institutions. For Warburg personally, the aftermath of the war led to a nervous breakdown and psychosis. Only after prolonged treatment by the psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger at a sanatorium in Kreuzlingen did the door open for the representational process of the *Bilderatlas*, which Warburg undertook in the last years of his life.

In his response to the crisis of civilisation, Warburg returned to a strand of work on human visual memory he had begun before the war: the study of art as anthropology. Long before the First World War, Warburg had developed an entirely original understanding of Antiquity and the Renaissance, consciously setting himself apart from colleagues, whom he accused of 'border police bias' (*grenzpolizeiliche Befangenheit*) in their efforts to derive eternal values from the art of those periods. Seen from today's perspective, it is remarkable that his programme already contains the seeds of interdisciplinarity.

Warburg was interested not in a definable sphere of art, but in the long-term existence of images, inscribed into memory as forms giving visual shape to affects. The profound crisis of civilisation facing both Warburg personally and society as a whole penetrated deep into the emotional world of both those responsible for and those touched by the crisis. Here – departing from a modern linear notion of time in which the past precedes the present – memory is understood not as a locus where something past is recalled, but as one element of a multi-layered, living consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

The visual constellations that Warburg created in 1928/29 on a series of large panels comprising the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* can be understood as cultural techniques that used spaces and surfaces to

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<sup>1</sup> The associated questions and issues are discussed in the HKW project 'Kanonfragen'.

<sup>2</sup> HKW addresses this in the 'Anthropocene Project'.

<sup>3</sup> The HKW project '100 Years of Now' builds on that insight.

Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020

reveal the layers of memory and the web of relationships manifested in them.<sup>4</sup> In this venture, Warburg harnessed the possibilities for the technical reproduction of both images and sculpture. His visual archive, amassed over decades using the medium of photography, allowed him to establish relationships between the works on the panels, independently of their temporal and geographical origins and thus – following Walter Benjamin – to generate particular constellations between the images. These transcend not only the boundaries of space and time but also those between artistic and ethnological objects, in pursuit of an anthropological approach. There is an aspect of performance to the presentation of the panels in space and the images on their surfaces. Warburg's intention was not to speak via images but to use images as vehicles for experience and thought.<sup>5</sup> The panels invite the viewer to participate in the production of meaning, moving between panels as if leafing through a book, and through his or her perception forging ever new connections between the images. In this sense, the surface of the panels functions as an experimental mechanism in the Foucauldian sense. Warburg's comments underline the special importance he attributed to the specificity and concrete nature of the individual images. It is not general connections he is after, but rather the specific nature of each one (comparable to Leibnitz's monads). It is the viewer's acts of perception that draw relationships between the singularities. Insight emerges from a process of navigation between panels and between images, on the one hand, exploring entirely tangible relationships between the images arranged by Warburg; on the other, opening up a fundamentally unbounded space of possibility for viewers to create their own dynamic relationships. The process consciously avoids defining meanings, while the spaces between the images allude to the realm of the unknown. In other words, we are navigating without a complete map in spaces that connect the known and the unknown.

Recalling the cultural techniques presented in the *Mnemosyne* project is of enormous significance in the context of today's social crises and transformation processes, which can no longer be comprehended using the categories of existing knowledge systems. It is cultural techniques of this kind that open up new ways of relating to the world, beyond existing canonical and discipline-bound ordering systems. Techniques that enable us to experience and negotiate colonial power asymmetries and the planetary repercussions of human activity. Given that the violence of colonial relations as well as the material and technological transformations of our time are having just as profound an effect on the contemporary psyche as the First World War did on Warburg's contemporaries, the content dimension of the *Bilderatlas* plays an important role here. This would, however, require – very much in the spirit of Warburg's methodology – new archives to supplement the existing ones and to serve as the material basis for new movements in thinking and perception.

Various exhibitions since 1993 have presented Warburg's panels in their original size, with new reproductions on each occasion.<sup>6</sup> In spring 2019, Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil combed through the Warburg Institute's Photographic Collection for the exhibition at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW). Their meticulous detective work, supported by the Institute, located almost all the 971 original images for Warburg's *Bilderatlas* (in a collection containing more than 400,000 items). Thanks to their dogged tenacity, the original reproductions of Middle Eastern, Greco-Roman and Renaissance art – which Warburg himself mounted on panels in 1929 – can now be presented to the public for the very first time. Their patient recovery also forms the basis for the panels in this volume.

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<sup>4</sup> On the following see also Georges Didi-Huberman, *Das Nachleben der Bilder* (Berlin, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> In the *Bilderatlas* Warburg developed an alternative visual language of his own, which was different from the existing representational systems of the time. The HKW project 'The New Alphabet' explores such alternative forms.

<sup>6</sup> The first reproduction of the entire *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* was presented by Transmediale Gesellschaft Daedalus at the exhibition *Mnemosyne: Aby Warburg*, held in 1993 at the Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna.

Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020

## On the Recovery of the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* and the actual state of the Captions

Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil

After Ernst Gombrich failed to get the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* into a publishable form in the 1930s, a number of lists identifying individual images remained in the Warburg Institute Archive. Dorothee Bauerle was able to draw on these sources, which had been written by Gombrich himself, Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl, when she conducted the first comprehensive investigation of the *Bilderatlas* in the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> But when her pioneering *Gespensstergeschichten für ganz Erwachsene* was finally published in 1988 it was thoroughly ignored in scholarly circles. Bauerle turned her back on art history and left her research notes to the Transmediale Gesellschaft Daedalus. The Viennese group – whose members included variously Werner Rappl, Gudrun Swoboda, Wolfram Pichler, Marianne Koos, Gerhard Fischer, Andrea Sinnl, Michaela Heintz, Christine Dorner and Marion Deike – began its research around 1990 and published the entire *Bilderatlas* with a rather complete set of captions in 1994. Until 2007, however, copyright considerations meant that this publication could only be disseminated as accompanying material for exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> Daedalus exhibited the *Bilderatlas* in an approximately scale reconstruction for the first time in 1993.<sup>3</sup> Another decisive advance in knowledge about the origins of the *Bilderatlas* during this period was Peter van Huisstede's Ph.D. thesis, *De Mnemosyne beeld-atlas van Aby M. Warburg: een laboratorium voor beeldgeschiedenis* (1992), which for the first time also indicated the number of prior versions.<sup>4</sup> The Daedalus captions appeared in expanded form in the *Bilderatlas* that Martin Warnke published in 2000 in the context of Warburg's *Gesammelte Schriften*, but they still contained various errors and omissions.<sup>5</sup> These were only sporadically corrected in the translations – into French, Italian, Spanish, Hebrew, Japanese and Polish.

In May 2012, the Forschungsgruppe Mnemosyne in Hamburg launched a long series of events and exhibitions on the *Bilderatlas*. The group's members included Marcel Hüppauff, Jochen Lempert, Christian Rothmaler, Katha Schulte, Philipp Schwalb, Kolja Gollub, Regine Steenbock, Knut Wittmaack and us. We focussed above all on developing a commentary on each panel; the captions were only occasionally checked and corrected. In spring 2016 we asked the Warburg Institute if we could search its Photographic Collection for the original images from the 1920s for two panels. The idea was to show panel 32 and 48 as part of an exhibition of the reconstruction of the *Bilderatlas* by the Forschungsgruppe Mnemosyne planned for the following summer at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medien (ZKM) Karlsruhe at the invitation of Peter Weibel.<sup>6</sup> Most of the images that Warburg had handled himself were located relatively quickly, so we were encouraged to expand the experiment

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothee Bauerle, *Gespensstergeschichten für ganz Erwachsene. Ein Kommentar zu Aby Warburgs Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (Münster 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Transmediale Gesellschaft Daedalus, *MNEMOSYNE-Bilderatlas, Zur Ausstellung im Kunsthaus Hamburg* (Munich and Hamburg 1994).

<sup>3</sup> By 2007 the exhibition *Mnemosyne: Aby Warburg* had been shown in venues including Hamburg, Siena, Florence, Rome, Tel Aviv and Venice.

<sup>4</sup> See Peter van Huisstede, "Der Mnemosyne-Atlas: Ein Laboratorium der Bildgeschichte", a German summary of van Huisstede's voluminous work, in Robert Galitz and Brita Reimers (eds.), *Aby M. Warburg: Ekstatische Nymphe trauernder Flussgott: Portrait eines Gelehrten* (Hamburg 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften – Studienausgabe*, vol. 2, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Martin Warnke and Claudia Brink (eds.), (Berlin 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Exhibition: *Aby Warburg – Mnemosyne Bilderatlas: Rekonstruktion, Kommentar, Aktualisierung*, ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medien Karlsruhe, 1 September to 13 November 2016.



Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020



and search for the 'originals' of all panels. In autumn 2016, we gained the support of David Freedberg, then Director of the Warburg Institute, who gave us the go-ahead for the project. He had intended to show the original version of the *Bilderatlas* in London, but resigned as director just a few months later. This left the project hanging until the appointment of Bill Sherman. In 2018 Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin responded positively to our proposal to stage an exhibition on the recovery of the original version, and this initiative led to a revival of the cooperation with the Warburg Institute. Sherman put great effort into finally making our undertaking possible. Lorenza Gay had continued the search for the original images in the interim, but had only been able to pursue this as a sideline. Some periods of intense research in the Photographic Collection in March and May 2019 achieved the result we had hoped for, identifying about 80 percent of the originals for the *Bilderatlas* as a whole.<sup>7</sup> We were supported by Claudia Wedepohl and the Photographic Collection team, and crucially by Lorenza Gay. Mateusz Sapija, Susanne Förster and Amirkhan Saifullin also worked with us at various times in the Photographic Collection while Joacim Sprung and Giovanna Targia supplied valuable pointers from afar. The work of checking, correcting and improving the captions only began during the preparations for the present publication, for which Berenice Kortsik assisted the research team.

We felt it would be useful to expand the information provided in the captions: where it was possible to locate the information in the short time available, we added the dimensions of the illustrated works and the sources Warburg used. In all cases we endeavoured to determine the current attributions of authorship, while also indicating what Warburg assumed (or could have assumed) at the time. Aside from purely descriptive matter, we retained all information supplied by the captions published in the *Gesammelte Schriften* edition. In the end less than a dozen of the 971 images still lack certain data on location, place of publication or authorship. The numbering system used in the *Gesammelte Schriften* was retained on the grounds that it has become the international standard, even if it is inconsistent in places.

The groundwork for reproducing the panels – as seen on the right-hand pages of the folio volume – was laid in August 2019 at the Warburg Institute. All the original documents from the last version of the *Bilderatlas* that had been located by that point were arranged on panels (150 × 125 cm, covered with black fabric) in accordance with the historic photographic documentation of summer / autumn 1929. The new photographs taken by Tobias Wootton in London were remastered by Christian Ertel who subsequently created the digitally optimised composite files for this book.

Where it was not possible to find the originals in the Warburg Institute we drew on the Photographic Collection and the Warburg Institute Library to identify substitutes. Strictly reproducing each irregularity of the arrangements on the panels was not our primary concern. Apart from anything, in certain cases we were forced to use "originals" that had been altered in the interim, for example cropped or remounted. Keeping the provisional character of Warburg's work was uppermost. Thanks to the kind support of Bill Sherman and Uwe Fleckner we were also able to access materials from the collections of the Zentralstelle für wissenschaftliche Sammlungen, Universität Hamburg. We also drew on data from Daedalus and from the archive of Forschungsgruppe Mnemosyne / fluid.

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<sup>7</sup> It is probably only a matter of time before another 10 percent turn up, while the rest is likely lost for good.

## The Making of Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*<sup>1</sup>

Claudia Wedepohl

Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas* has come down to us as a series of black-and-white glass negatives of 63 panels displaying 971 items – photographic reproductions, newspaper clippings, postcards, advertisements, postage stamps, booklets and book pages, sketches drawn by his wife Mary and two original prints – attached to these panels with clamping hooks. The panels, wooden frames (c. 120 × 150 cm) covered with Hessian, were photographed in the Reading Room of Warburg's library, the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg at Heilwigstraße 116 in Hamburg. They are drafts for the large-format plates of a *Bilderatlas*, conceived as the visual component of a comprehensive, multi-volume book publication project with the overall title *Mnemosyne*, remembrance. It was never published; indeed, not even its final form was agreed upon, but we know that one of the volumes was to have contained source texts relevant for the argument Warburg was making with his selection of pictures and his commentaries. He planned to devote another volume to the major themes of the *Bilderatlas*, whilst the *Bilderatlas* itself was conceived as a sequence of plates, bound or unbound.

By taking artefacts out of their physical environments and inserting them into the artificial medium of a book through reproductions, Warburg was following a tradition that had gained ground in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Only the capacity to select and arrange objects in printed works, an essential aspect of the history of the book, allowed the comparative study of art, a development fundamental for establishing the disciplines of archaeology and art history. The '*Bilderatlas*', a large-format publication that foregrounded images usually taken from the realm of cultural or natural history, was introduced in the nineteenth century as a didactic tool. Such publications were conceived to appeal to a broad lay public, including students, rather than to a select scholarly audience, and as such can be seen as following the model of the popular single sheets of images called '*Bilderbogen*'. The young Aby Warburg possessed at least one of these, the *Art Historical 'Bilderbogen', Arranged for Use in Academic or Public Lectures and for Teaching History or Theory of Taste at Gymnasiums, Middle Schools and Girls Schools* from 1881–83 [Fig. 1].<sup>3</sup> The work, consisting of '*Bilderbogen*' and a textbook, is mentioned in a letter he wrote to his mother from Florence in November 1888, asking her to send this book to him, just as he was embarking on a semester of study of fifteenth-century art with the Breslau art historian August Schmarsow.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Reproductions

In Florence Warburg came to appreciate the possibilities of photography as a new means of reproduction, while at the same time aware of its limitations, and immediately began to build up a collection. He became a frequent customer at Fratelli Alinari, which had opened in the 1850s, selling photographs that document the history of Italy. Warburg ended up overspending his already

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<sup>1</sup> My sincere thanks are due to Elizabeth Sears for her critical reading of this text, her suggestions and corrections to my English. Translations of titles are either taken from English editions of Warburg's works or are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ulrich Keller, 'Visual Difference: Picture Atlases from Winckelmann to Warburg and the Rise of Art History', *Visual Resources* 17, 2001, pp. 179–199.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Arthur Seemann, *Kunsthistorische Bilderbogen für den Gebrauch bei akademischen und öffentlichen Vorlesungen, sowie beim Unterricht in der Geschichte und Geschmackslehre an Gymnasien, real- und höheren Töchterschulen zusammengestellt*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1881–83).

<sup>4</sup> WIA [Warburg Institute Archive], FC [Family Correspondence], Aby to Charlotte Warburg, 1 November 1888.

generous budget and had to ask his father for additional funds; it was at this point that he began to argue that he was laying the foundations for his own future library and photo collection.<sup>5</sup>

Family subsidies allowed him to print five commercially acquired reproductions based on photographs in his dissertation on Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*, published in 1893; this was still unusual at the time, even if the reprographic technique of printing the full tone range of a photograph, so-called halftone reproduction, was becoming commercially viable in the eighteen-nineties. It was during these years that photographs were introduced into the genre of the '*Bilderatlas*', although engravings were often still of much better quality. Warburg supplemented the photographs in his dissertation with two woodcuts and a drawing of a sarcophagus, all reproduced from published works. Until the 1920s and indeed in his *Bilderatlas* he relied on graphic works of this kind whenever he wished to emphasise the outlines of classical sculpture, reliefs in particular.

In both his 1905 lectures on Albrecht Dürer – 'Dürer as Man and Artist' (the inaugural lecture for his exhibition of reproductions of Dürer's drawings in the Hamburg Volksheim, a welfare institution) and 'Dürer and Italian Antiquity' (his contribution to the annual conference of German philologists, addressing the origin and transmission of a pathos-laden style) – Warburg was clear about the falsity of photographs. Robbing works of colour, giving a distorted sense of scale, just like images projected from a *Skioptikon* (also called a *Laterna magica*), a prototype of the slide projector, they would, he thought, never be able to replace the unmediated impression of the original.<sup>6</sup> Still, he recognised that photographs were methodologically indispensable. Nothing similar to Alinari's stock of photos was then available for purchase in Germany. The most important supplier was Ad. Braun & Cie, likewise founded in the 1850s. Although Warburg had used *Braun'sche Reproduktionen* not just for his dissertation but also for his Dürer exhibition, Braun's catalogue of photographic reproductions of works of art did not include all the images relevant to his projects. In 1909, when his own collection numbered a few thousand reproductions, he launched an initiative to document German monuments systematically to replace the use of postcards.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, throughout his life he hired photographers to take photographs of objects he needed for closer inspection and comparison, including, as early as 1901, Fratelli Alinari to photograph Lorenzo de' Medici's children in Ghirlandaio's *Confirmation of the Rule of St. Francis* in the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita in Florence [Fig. 2]; later he also asked his collaborators, first Wilhelm Printz then Fritz Saxl, to photograph manuscript illuminations in libraries throughout Europe. Quality, including faithful colour reproduction, was important to Warburg. When necessary, he worked with hand-coloured photographs (which he called surrogates), and some of these found their way onto the panels of his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*.

In 1925/26, when the new building of the K.B.W. was under construction next to Warburg's house at Heilwigstraße 114, Fritz Saxl, Warburg's librarian and deputy, began making inquiries about a photo reproduction machine. This machine was a so-called *Rectigraph* of the type Photo Clark, produced by Heinrich Jantsch in Überlingen; it was acquired in August 1926 when space was found in the new building for a photographic studio [Fig. 3]. Designed to reproduce manuscript pages, the Photo Clark soon became key to the preparation of the *Bilderatlas*, for it allowed the reproduction of images without negatives. With the hiring of an in-house photographer, first Carl Hansen and a short time later Carl Hoff, the preparation of reproductions and the recording of Warburg's arrangements of

<sup>5</sup> WIA, FC, Aby to Charlotte Warburg, 7 January 1889.

<sup>6</sup> WIA, III.60.1, *Dürer als Mensch und Künstler*, fol. 1: 'Die Photographie ist eine große einschmeichelnde Betrügerin, sie raubt die Farbe, zeigt ein falsches Format, gerade wie auch das vergrößerte Lichtbild ganz falsche Vorstellungen erweckt.' III.61.6.1, *Dürer und die italienische Antike*, p. 5: 'Durch das Faksimile in Ihrer Hand besitzen Sie ja die so sehr notwendigen Mittel, um den etwas brutalen Vergrößerungsstil des leider unentbehrlichen Skioptikons zu korrigieren.'

<sup>7</sup> WIA, GC, Aby to Fritz Warburg, 24 April 1909.

Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020

photographs on screens and panels became a new focus of library activities, so much so that by January 1928 Warburg was able to remark that without the photographer 'the elaboration of the "new method" would not be possible'.<sup>8</sup> This new method was being realised in the *Bilderatlas* project. In the 1920s Warburg worked on it actively for more than three years in which he drafted and recorded several preliminary versions of the *Bilderatlas* whose roots in his earlier work are deep and had been a long time growing.

## 2. The Genesis of Warburg's *Bilderatlas* - The Origins: 1905-1909

A miniature *Bilderatlas*, printed to be distributed among the audience of his 1905 lecture 'Albrecht Dürer and Italian Antiquity', can be recognised as a prototype for Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*.<sup>9</sup> This early *Bilderatlas* took the form of a folder with three unbound plates, printed in large format: two facsimile reproductions of the *Death of Orpheus* (Dürer's version and that of an anonymous Italian engraver – the works he was focusing on), and a third preceding plate that was an assemblage of comparative material, namely three vase paintings of the same motif from the fifth century BC and a Quattrocento *spalliera* painting depicting the story of *Orpheus and Euridice* by Jacopo Sellaio [Fig. 4]. Warburg introduced his comparative examples to demonstrate the use of *Pathosformeln*, visual formulas conveying strong emotion, as a cross-cultural theme. The comparison was sparked by his conviction that pathos formulas were shaped by subconscious memories, the collective repository of physical and emotional experience that derived ultimately from primitive religious ceremonies. Preserved in 'engrams' in the nervous system, Warburg believed, the memories were not susceptible to evolution or altered by changing historical circumstances. With this type of comparative material he was thus putting the form of the traditional *Bilderatlas* to strikingly new ends.

Warburg conceived the small *Bilderatlas* devoted to Dürer's *Death of Orpheus* even as he began working towards the publication of a major *Atlas* on 'The Entry of Classicising Pathos into the Artistic Style of the Early Florentine Renaissance'. This *Atlas* comprised materials he had gathered during his stay in Florence from 1897 to 1902.<sup>10</sup> It was to have illustrated his (never finished) study of the influence of antique models and primordial pathos formulas on the style of fifteenth-century Florentine secular art, a style originally shaped, as he would show, by contemporary Northern European imports. In order to organise the pictorial apparatus of this more comprehensive work, Warburg made use of a massive ledger containing thirteen ink renderings of artefacts, drawn by his wife Mary, a trained artist. These drawings copy classical and early medieval coins and medals as well as late medieval frescos and Quattrocento *cassoni* featuring depictions of triumphal processions, either *en face* or *en profile*. They served as placeholders for photographic reproductions of objects to be represented in his *Bilderatlas* [Fig. 5].<sup>11</sup> Some other single folio sheets give an idea of both the content and the layout of the projected *Bilderatlas*. In the style of his later *Bilderreihen*, his image series, Warburg sketched plates with constellations of images [Fig. 6]. Each sheet has a title relating to a prospective chapter on the formation of style in Italian literature and art: the reintroduction of triumphal processions *all'antica* by Petrarch, the transformative role of the prints of Baccio Baldini

<sup>8</sup> Aby Warburg, *Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, with entries by Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl, edited by Karen Michels and Charlotte Schoell-Glass (*Gesammelte Schriften*, Studienausgabe VII [Berlin, 2001]), p. 186: 'Ohne den Photographen im Hause würde die Entfaltung der "neuen Methode" nicht möglich sein'.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Michael Diers, 'Atlas und Mnemosyne, Von der Praxis der Bildtheorie bei Aby Warburg', in *Bildtheorien: Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des Visualistic Turn*, edited by Klaus Sachs-Hombach (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), pp. 181–213.

<sup>10</sup> WIA, III.58.10.1, *Notes and Drafts for Habilitation Project*, fol. 98: 'Der Eintritt des antikisierenden Pathos in die künstlerische Formensprache der Florentiner Frührenaissance'.

<sup>11</sup> WIA, III.10.3, *Notebooks-Diaries, 1894–1918*, pp. 31r, 56r.

and the promotion of pathos-laden motives, in particular sacrificial deaths like Orpheus's, by Angelo Poliziano.<sup>12</sup> The atlas format – here horizontal, emulating the *Bilderbogen* – would have allowed a comparative reading of images, while the author's accompanying book – as the fragments of the introduction to the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, written in 1929, demonstrate – would have presented and explained, in broad terms, the chronological progression. The idea of publishing the plates (atlas) and the text (book) of his major comprehensive work in separate volumes, an idea taken up in the 1920s, can thus be found early in Warburg's working papers. Elsewhere Warburg spoke of the *Bilderatlas* as a *Typenatlas*, atlas of types. *Typen-* refers to an abstraction that has materialised in concrete form, a concept inspired by Warburg's training in both biology and archaeology where the external form (*morphe*) or contour of a plant or figure was deemed to define its nature.

In November 1906 Warburg acquired *Tafeln* (boards or panels), not further described, to work out 'the disposition of the large book'.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, after having tried various systems for the disposition of his pictorial apparatus, but without having made significant progress towards finalising templates for a printed *Bilderatlas*, he again recorded his idea of creating a *Bilderatlas* with reproductions, this time giving it a new, more comprehensive title, 'The World of the Ancient Gods and the Early Renaissance in North and South'.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime Warburg had been widening his thematic scope beyond the expression of motion and emotion to star symbols and moralised allegories, both being a form of afterlife of classical mythology. He subsequently placed as much emphasis on the cross-cultural transmission and transformation of ideas as on the persistence of pre-coined expressive formulas and the artistic exchange of such formulas in a shared cultural territory. To present these different forms of renewal of the ancient heritage as aspects of one coherent story became a new challenge.

In February and March 1909 Warburg presented his new, much more comprehensive approach to the afterlife of Antiquity in fifteenth-century Italy in a series of seven lectures each in itself with a strong thematic emphasis on individual developments, such as Petrarch's influence on Early Italian Renaissance art, and the relationship between Mantegna and Dürer. In the preparatory notes he tried a new form of 'genealogical' diagram to highlight both the migration and the interdependence of ideas, forming a complex network rather than a linear narrative.<sup>15</sup>

## 1911–1917

Although the constantly increasing complexity of his project prevented Warburg from bringing his substantial book and the accompanying *Atlas* to completion, the idea of preparing a printable *Bilderatlas* never died, despite the obvious restrictions the narrative of a printed work imposed on his project. In the years after his mental breakdown at the end of the First World War that sent Warburg to psychiatric clinics (1919–24), the *Bilderatlas* again became his focus, although he had been working on the project steadily prior to this. We have proof that he borrowed *Gestelle*, support frames, for his *Tafeln* (later also called *Scheerwände*, partition walls) to illustrate a lecture titled 'On Astrological Prints from Old and Modern Times' in his own house at Heilwigstrasse 114 for an audience of laymen, the Gesellschaft für Bücherfreunde, a society of bibliophiles, in February 1911;<sup>16</sup> and he continued to use *Gestelle* for lectures and informal talks at his home until 1917. One example

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<sup>12</sup> III.61.1, fols. 48–58.

<sup>13</sup> WIA, III.10.3, p. 64v: 'Dispositionstafeln für das große Buch angeschafft'.

<sup>14</sup> WIA, III.71, *Schematismus der Pathosformeln*, pp. 79/80: 'Die antike Götterwelt und die Frührenaissance im Norden und im Süden'.

<sup>15</sup> Aby Warburg, *Il primo Rinascimento italiano. Sette conferenze inedite*, edited by Giovanna Targia (Turin, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> WIA, III.81.1.1, *Über astrologische Druckwerke aus alter und neuer Zeit*.

**Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020**

is his talk on 'Luther's Date of Birth' on 6 September 1917 [Fig. 7] whose research culminated in his long essay 'Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther'.<sup>17</sup> When away from Hamburg and forced to rely on slides, Warburg would at least mention the not yet materialised *Bilderatlas*, for example in the conclusion of a lecture in Göttingen in 1913, titled 'The Migration of the Ancient Gods before Their Entry into the Italian High Renaissance'. On this occasion he described his images as 'just preliminary materials for a roadmap to a world atlas illustrating the history of education, unfortunately not yet existing'.<sup>18</sup>

**Two Strands: 1926–1928**

Warburg's reflections during his recovery from his mental breakdown, specifically his thoughts about culture as a site of memory and preserver of history, were fundamental in the search for a theoretical basis for all his works on the afterlife of Antiquity, both mythical and classical; yet, the first time a *Bilderatlas* is explicitly mentioned in the 1920s is in Warburg's jottings for his classes on the 'Artistic Culture of the Early Florentine Renaissance', taught in 1925/26 at the recently founded University of Hamburg. Warburg's notes for the final session in February 1926 contain a comprehensive list of prospective panels for an *Atlas*.<sup>19</sup> In a report from May 1927 he referred to these classes as being instrumental in conceiving (or rather reviving) the idea of a *Bilderatlas*. Preparations had forced him to review all his older materials, that is, virtually everything he had collected in Florence for the book and atlas he had projected between 1903 and 1909.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of returning to his *Bilderatlas* did not materialise immediately. In August 1926, Warburg mentions a *Bilderatlas* for the Claudius Civilis (Rembrandt's *Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis* of 1661/62 in the National Museum, Stockholm). We find this note in the *Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, the journal kept since the opening of the new K.B.W. building in May 1926; its function was to document day-to-day business, events and internal discussions. Warburg was probably referring to a *Mappe* (folder) to accompany the planned publication, by B. G. Teubner, of his programmatic lecture of 26 May 1926 on the relationship between drama and art in seventeenth-century Holland, 'Italian Antiquity in the Age of Rembrandt'.<sup>21</sup> At the same time he revived his consideration of the interconnection between commercial trade routes and the migration of images and ideas, going back to research he had conducted in the early 1900s on the business relations of the earlier Medici and other Florentine bankers with Flanders and their role as collectors of Flemish artworks, which subsequently influenced the local style of painting.<sup>22</sup>

Warburg's entries for 1926/27 in the *Tagebuch* seem to refer to two different types of atlas: a topical one, relating to a particular object or motif such as the *Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis* or the *Death of Orpheus*; and the comprehensive *Bilderatlas* (later called *Mnemosyne*), which was now becoming the focus of his efforts. Early in 1927, on the occasion of a lecture by Max Ditmar Henkel of the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam on illustrated editions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, he created an

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<sup>17</sup> WIA, III.90.3, *Luthers Geburtsdatum*; A. Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 26, 1919, [Heidelberg, 1920]).

<sup>18</sup> WIA, III.84.1, *Die Wanderungen der antiken Götterwelt vor ihrem Eintritt in die italienische Hochrenaissance*, p. 81: 'Die heute abend allzu kinemato-graphisch vorüberziehenden Reisebilder aus den Wandertagen der heid-nischen Götter sind eigentlich vorläufige Materialien für eine Verkehrskarte zu einem leider noch nicht existierenden bildungsgeschichtlichen Weltatlas'.

<sup>19</sup> WIA, III.95.2.6.2-3, *Übungen über die künstlerische Kultur der Florentini-schen Frührenaissance*.

<sup>20</sup> WIA, I.9.8.4, *Report on Warburg's and the K.B.W.'s Activities between Autumn 1925 and May 1926*, fol. 1.

<sup>21</sup> WIA, III.101.2, *Italienische Antike im Zeitalter Rembrandts*; Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 544.

<sup>22</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 8.

image series, *Bilderreihe*, of such illustrations, and called this series of panels an 'Ovid-Atlas' [Fig. 8].<sup>23</sup> In the same month, February 1927, and probably related to this, Warburg described the concept of his *Bilderatlas* in a letter to his brother Max, in charge of the Hamburg bank M.M. Warburg & Co. and in this capacity a major funder of the K.B.W. He had 'taken the decision', Aby wrote, 'to summarise the results of [his] research in an "atlas of types" as far as they relate to the influence of Antiquity on European culture'. This kind of publication would offer 'a firm yet adjustable frame' for all his materials.<sup>24</sup>

Entries in the *Tagebuch* from the summer of 1927 until Warburg's death on 26 October 1929 record almost every step in the conceptual and technical development of the project. Much of it takes the form of a dialogue between Warburg and his closest collaborators, Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing, usually starting with Warburg's progress description as an invitation to comment critically on the *Bilderatlas*' developing concept. On 30 July 1927, before his departure for a summer retreat, he writes 'the framework for the entire Atlas is taking shape' and he goes on to say that its theme would be the 'enduring power of ancient expressive values' to 'imprint' themselves onto artefacts. He also expresses the aspiration to outline a 'grammar of the languages of gestures' that highlights a 'morphological law': the experience of rituals, either 'mythical-religious' (in the Greek world) or historical-political (in the Roman world) as 'coining devices' for the 'realm of expressions of tragic passion', in other words pathos formulas.<sup>25</sup>

In the same year, 1927, Warburg began to conceive a documentary photographic exhibit on the pre-history of astronomy for the *Deutsches Museum für Wissenschaft und Technik* in Munich, which had moved to a major new building in 1925. The display – only posthumously realised in the *Hamburg Planetarium* – was built on a *Bilderreihe* compiled for attendees of the annual conference of Orientalists in Hamburg in October 1926. This initiative, undertaken in close collaboration with Saxl, had prompted an extension of the *Bilderatlas*'s scope to include the evolution of images of the cosmos. It also sparked the idea of including theoretical elements – a so-called systematic digest – which Warburg designated as 'the map of migration routes' and 'religious psychology'.<sup>26</sup> When Warburg travelled to Florence for several weeks in September 1927, Saxl undertook to firm up the ground plan for the *Bilderatlas*, and saw it as imperative to somehow combine 'primordial forms of the language of gestures' with 'astrology'; he suggested adopting common themes such as 'the liberation from monstrosity', treating the afterlife of antique images of Perseus, both mythological

<sup>23</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> WIA, FC, Aby to Max Warburg, 22 February 1927. 'Ich habe den Plan gefasst, in einem grossen Typenatlas meine Forschungsergebnisse zusammenzufassen, so weit sie sich auf den Einfluss der Antike auf die europäische Kultur beziehen. Diese Art der Publikation würde einen festen Rahmen, der auch zugleich verstellbar ist, für mein gesamtes Material ergeben.' For a first reconstruction of the project see Peter van Huisstede, 'Der Mnemosyne-Atlas. Ein Laboratorium der Bildgeschichte', in Aby M. Warburg, *Ekstatische Nympe ... trauernder Flussgott. Porträt eines Gelehrten* (Schriftenreihe der Hamburgischen Kulturstiftung, 2) edited by Robert Galitz and Brita Reimers (Hamburg, 1995), pp. 130–71.

<sup>25</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 127: 'Der Gesamtrahmen für den Atlas formuliert sich (kulturwissenschaftliche Betrachtung) von der überlebenden Prägestalt antiker Ausdruckswerte im europaischen Geisteshaushalt (Kulturkreis). Dabei wäre eine Sprachlehre der Gebärdensprachen im Umriß zu liefern: Formenschatz und Satz Ordnungsprinzipien. Eine morphologische Maxime würde sichtbar werden: Das kultische Erlebnis (griechisch-mythisch-religiös oder römisch-historisch-politisch) als Prägwerk der Ausdruckswelt tragi-scher Ergriffenheit.'

<sup>26</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 147: '[Saxl] Zur Publikation ist die Atlasform sicher die richtige. Und zwar muß die Sache so wie im Völkerkunde Museum gemacht werden: es gibt zwei Abteilungen a) die Material-Sammlungen, auch diese im einzelnen geordnet, etwa nach chronologisch-topographischen Gruppen, b) die systematische Synopsis: Perseus, Saturn, die Wandlungen des Mikrokosmos-Männchens und so weiter. [Warburg] excellent! Ich hoffe aber daß der gemeinsame Nenner gefunden wird, um auch die "Urformen der Gebärdensprache" im Atlas (Teil II) zu publizieren (Perseus als Gestirn im Titel). [Saxl] Es ist zu überlegen, welcher Publikations-Teil zuerst in Angriff zu nehmen ist. [...] [Warburg] Das noch so reiche Material wird nur durch die beizugebende Wanderkarte und religionswissenschaftliche Psychologie wirklich lebendig werden!'

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and astral.<sup>27</sup> In November 1927, eventually, after intensifying his search for precursors of fifteenth-century mythography, Saxl suggested a markedly rigid structure for the *Bilderatlas*, consisting of around 550 reproductions divided into three groups:

- ‘1. The transformation of ancient gods and demons in the Middle Ages and their restitution in the Renaissance;
2. Tradition and reception of ancient pathos formulas in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance;
3. The transformation of individual figures and forms in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.’<sup>28</sup>

But Saxl’s attempts to bring a strict order to Warburg’s rapidly evolving and expanding ideas did little to come to grips with the complexity that made it impossible to turn all aspects of the *Bilderatlas* project, specifically the theoretical premises, into a printed book. This state of constant evolution is registered in the search for an appropriate title, that is, one that would point to the core of the project.<sup>29</sup>

By March 1928 the ‘first volume’ of the Atlas was displayed in the old reading room in Warburg’s home, next to the new library. Bing called this first volume, that is, the collection of images on panels, the ‘methodological introduction, almost the manual on how to use the entirety of the pictorial material devoted to the afterlife of antiquity that will follow in the second volume.’<sup>30</sup> What drove Warburg at this time to try to finish the work was the desire to take a completed *Bilderatlas* to the United States on a planned, but never realised trip later in 1928. His intention was to promote his method at the most prominent and influential of American universities. Accordingly, he pushed for an agreement with a publisher, either Friederichsen De Gruyter or his regular publisher Teubner, and discussed costs and layout with Saxl,<sup>31</sup> without, however, having finalised the order of the whole. In early May 1928 Warburg settled on six major themes, ranging from courtly Burgundian realism to ancient and revived pathos formulas, astrology, festivals and drama and including the dynamics of contemporary political symbolism *all’antica*. He displayed all his materials, 670 reproductions on forty panels, spread out over three rooms in both the old and the new buildings; he also tried to find a way to integrate a further roughly seventy images on Perseus,<sup>32</sup> none of which he would manage to include in the last series of 1929 either.

Warburg’s collaborators, Hamburg students and visitors to the library would later recall his work on finalising the drafts for the printed book, first from March to May 1928, and again in August and

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<sup>27</sup> WIA, GC, Fritz Saxl to Aby Warburg, 4 October 1927: ‘Wir müssten dann für jedes der Probleme folgende Stufen haben: 1. Antikes Vorbild 2. Mittelalterliche Handschrift 3. 15. Jahrhundert im Westen 4. 15. Jahrhundert in Italien und 6. Barocke Gestaltung und Theater. Fraglich ist mir, wie die Astrologie einzubauen ist. [...] Man müsste dann schon den Grundplan so anlegen, dass man die Idee der “Urformen der Gebärdensprache” verbindet mit der Kosmologie. [...] Etwa unter dem Schlagwort: Befreiung von dem Ungeheuer, antike Perseusdarstellungen, a) mythologischer, b) astraler Art.’; GC, Fritz Saxl to Aby Warburg, 6 October 1927.

<sup>28</sup> WIA, Ia.1.7.1: ‘Der Atlas, wie er wirklich jetzt vorliegt, umfasst meiner Schätzung nach ungefähr 550 Bilder, die in zwei grosse Gruppen geordnet sind 1. Der Gestaltwandel der antiken Götter als Olympier und Dämonen im Mittelalter und die Restitution ihrer antiken Formen in der Renaissance. 2. Tradition und Rezeption antiker Pathosformeln in Mittelalter und Renaissance. 3. Formwandel einzelner antiker Gestalten in Bildformen in Mittelalter und Renaissance.’

<sup>29</sup> For some of the titles see Ilsebil Barta Fliedl and Christoph Geissmar (eds.), *Die Beredsamkeit des Leibes. Zur Körpersprache in der Kunst* (Salzburg and Vienna, 1992), pp. 171–72, and Huisstede, *Mnemosyne-Atlas*, pp. 151–52.

<sup>30</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 217: ‘Das Buch, das jetzt im alten Saal aufgestellt ist, ist der erste Band des Atlas, die methodologische Einführung und quasi Gebrauchsanweisung zur Verarbeitung des gesamten Bildmaterials, zum Nachleben der Antike, das im 2. Band folgt.’

<sup>31</sup> WIA, GC, Friederichsen publishers to Aby Warburg, 14 May 1928; GC, Fritz Saxl to Aby Warburg, 26 May 1928.

<sup>32</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, pp. 252–54.



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September 1928, ordering ever more *Gestelle* for his panels. Alfred Neumeyer, who participated in one of Warburg's seminars, recalled that 'as in the preparation of a battle plan the individual components would be moved around and supplemented until hitherto invisible relationships revealed themselves by the juxtaposition of images.'<sup>33</sup> The first photo session to record the disposition of forty-three panels took place in the week of 7 May 1928 after Warburg had left Hamburg for medical treatment in Frankfurt am Main, from where he asked for further modifications.<sup>34</sup> Between the first and the second photo session – which occurred between 28 August and 13 September 1928, just two weeks before his departure for Italy (instead of America) where he stayed until June 1929 – Warburg re-organised his materials, with great difficulty, according to subject categories and topological aspects, shifting cosmology from the second half of the series to the beginning. He believed that illustrating both the practice and the history of converting constellations in the heavens from powerful demons into abstract symbols was a significant new way of demonstrating the 'self-awareness of thinking men', assuming that 'the development from the concrete to the abstract' follows 'an organic cycle in the human capacity to reflect'.<sup>35</sup> On 28 August 1928, the second series, comprising seventy-seven panels with 1292 reproductions, was ready and photographed, but soon Warburg made further changes to make his argument visually clearer. Three weeks later a new order was established. Some panels had to be re-photographed, others were added; all in all eleven panels differed from the series of 28 August. On 1 September Warburg called the 'preliminary' new sequence definitive; on 26 September 1928 he left Hamburg for Italy.<sup>36</sup>

## Synthesis: 1929

The aim of Warburg's prolonged trip to Italy together with Bing and Franz Alber as assistants was to collect more materials and resolve unresolved problems. The journey's highlight was a lecture at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome on 19 January 1929, for which he intentionally displayed photographs on very large, purpose-built horizontal screens, [Fig. 9], rather than using slides, to introduce parts of his *Bilderatlas* to an international community of scholars. Dictated lecture drafts of the opening and conclusion of the lecture provides valuable information on how he was then interpreting his constellations of images. Compiling the lecture helped to shape what was to be the central chapter of the *Bilderatlas*, devoted to Ghirlandaio as a poignant representative of the tensions involved in the development of fifteenth-century style. A local photographer was hired to record the constellations of images at the end of the Hertziana event; this yielded twenty vertical photographs. The photographer was commissioned again in May to photograph another five 'plates' the size of the original screens, recording further thoughts about sequence and placement.<sup>37</sup> At this point Warburg felt he had reached a conclusion and made repeated attempts to dictate an introduction to the *Bilderatlas*.

The transcultural idea of ascent to heaven, the turning point of understanding the physics of the universe and the subsequent discovery of the infinitude of space, dominated the research he undertook on the Italian journey. Back in Hamburg, at the meeting to constitute a K.B.W. *Kuratorium*,

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<sup>33</sup> Alfred Neumeyer, 'Four Art Historians Remembered: Woelfflin, Goldschmidt, Warburg, Berenson', *Art Journal* 31/1, 1971, pp. 33–36, here p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 254.

<sup>35</sup> WIA, FC, Aby to Max Warburg, 5 September 1928: 'Das allgemein Bedeutsame besteht nun darin, dass ich dadurch Material zur Selbsterkenntnis des denkenden Menschen einliefere, dass ich den Weg von der Konkretion zur Abstraktion nicht als ausschliessende Gegensätzlichkeit sondern als organischen Kreislauf im menschlichen Denkvermögen auffasse und nachweise.'

<sup>36</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, pp. 337–38.

<sup>37</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, pp. 402, 448.

Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020

an advisory board, on 29 August 1929, Warburg convinced his brothers to give him free rein for the *Bilderatlas* project for the following two years.<sup>38</sup> Until his death he continued to work on both selection and sequence, and recorded the changes almost daily. He passed away on 26 October 1929 without having completed the project. Sometime after this date sixty-three numbered and an unknown number of unnumbered panels were photographed of a *Bilderatlas* clearly incomplete. Most striking is the gap between panels 8 and 20, a lacuna of 11 numbers. Warburg was possibly trying to finalise the so-called development of Perseus as a fighter against monsters, for him a mythical incarnation of the human soul in its struggle against evil, or to identify materials to illustrate the impact of Giordano Bruno's thought, the early modern philosopher for whom myths were an allegory of cognition. Only recently had he recognised his works as key to the story he wished to tell through his *Bilderatlas*.

### 3. The Printed *Bilderatlas*

On 8 April 1929, feeling he was approaching the conclusion of the project, Warburg noted a programmatic title in the *Tagebuch*, namely: 'Mnemosyne. The awakening of the pagan gods in the (era of the) European Renaissance as an energetic coining of expressions of value. An attempt at an art-historical cultural science. 2 volumes of text. In addition, an atlas of about 2,000 images. Indexes by Gertrud Bing. By Aby Warburg'.<sup>39</sup> This was the largest number of illustrations posited during the entire process of planning for a printed work. Yet, only three weeks before his death, Warburg wrote quite differently, suggesting only about 500 to 600 images on circa 200 plates in two *Mappen*. He also then spoke of two additional volumes to supplement the plate volume, one containing commentary and sources, the other an explanation of the five major themes of the *Bilderatlas*, namely, 'A. Sphaera barbarica', 'B. Gestus heroicus' (i.e. the pathos formula), 'C. Ascent to Mount Olympus', 'D. Surviving Demons', and 'E. Rembrandt's Holland and Italian Antiquity' as well as 'The Leyden Bottle as Hamlet-problem'.<sup>40</sup> This record indicates that he wanted to reduce the number of images on each printed plate drastically and to keep the plates (as strongly recommended by Saxl) moveable instead of fixing their order in a bound volume. We can presume a structure very similar to the slim folder distributed in October 1905 at his Dürer lecture, containing three plates combining full-size images and a comparative panel with smaller reproductions. In a letter to Saxl, written in May 1928, Warburg had called this kind of layout with large images accompanied by comparative visual material an *Archetypus* (archetype), accompanied by an *ikonologischer Spiegel* (iconological mirror).<sup>41</sup> That a layout very different from the photographed drafts of the *Bilderatlas* was at least considered is confirmed by letters from Saxl written in 1927 and 1928, where he spoke of 200 plates with one image each and urged Warburg not to print the illustrations 'as small as stamps'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 497.

<sup>39</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 434: 'Mnemosyne. Das Erwachen der Heidengötter im (Zeitalter der) der europaischen Renaissance als energetische Ausdruckswertbildung. Ein Versuch kunstgeschichtlicher Kulturwissenschaft. 2 Bände Text. Dazu ein Atlas mit etwa 2000 Abbildungen. Indices von Gertrud Bing. Von Aby Warburg.'

<sup>40</sup> Warburg, *Tagebuch*, p. 543: "'Mnemosyne". Bilderreihen zur Untersuchung der Funktion vorgeprägter antiker Ausdruckswerte bei der Darstellung bewegten Lebens in der Kunst der Europäischen Renaissance. Atlas von circa 200 Tafeln (2 Mappen) (circa 5-600 Abbildungen). 2 Bände Text: I Tafel-erklärungen und Dokumente. II Darstellung. (A. Sphaera Barbarica B. Gestus Heroicus) C. Auffahrt zum Olymp D. Ueberlebende Daemonen) E. Das Holland Rembrandts und die italienische Antike. Die Leydener Flasche als Hamlet Problem.'

<sup>41</sup> WIA, GC, Aby Warburg to Fritz Saxl, 23 May 1928: 'Sie suchen sich die ältesten und besten Typen mit historisch einwandfreien Darstellungen aus und photographieren und publizieren sie vollständig [...] Dieser Archetypus müsste begleitet sein von einem ikonologischen Spiegel, der Parallelkompositionen bringt, die wir nach unserem Auswahlprinzip der Pathosformel nach der Auswahl jener ovidianischen Motive treffen, die für die Mnemosyne wichtig sind (Lauf, Verfolgung, Raub, Griff nach der Locke [Perseus, Fortuna], Schmerz, Tod, Sieg, Schlacht, Triumph).'

<sup>42</sup> WIA, GC, Fritz Saxl to Aby Warburg, 6 October 1927, 26 May 1928.

**Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020**



Throughout the process of its making, with the production of a book in mind, Warburg meticulously recorded the number of images pinned on panels and their original medium [Fig. 10]. In December 1927 one of several student assistants had been asked to catalogue all photographs selected up to that point, and Saxl and Warburg together discussed storage and a new system for ordering the existing collection of reproductions. Later, in July 1929, Warburg called attention to Bing's task to compile a comprehensive index. The index did not materialise, but a significant number of extant glass negatives of works to be reproduced in the *Bilderatlas* prove that preparations for the production of steel cliché plates (also known as prototypes) for its printing were under way when Warburg died.

Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020



## Under the Sign of Mnemosyne

Bill Sherman

We at the Warburg Institute work under the sign of memory. Indeed, every time we cross the threshold into our building, we walk under a sign bearing the name of *Mnemosyne*, the Greek goddess of remembrance and the mother (with Zeus) of the Nine Muses. In the 1920s, when the German historian of art and culture Aby Warburg designed his legendary library in Hamburg – the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (K.B.W.) – he asked the architect to inscribe the name of *Mnemosyne* on the stone lintel above the door. And in 1957, when the institute bearing Warburg's name was given its new home in London, the same sign, this time engraved in wood, was installed in the entrance.

When I give tours of the Warburg Institute I often start in front of this sign, not just because it is the first thing we see when we enter the building but because it captures, in a word, the *genius loci* – both the presiding deity and the spirit of the place. Warburg is best known as an art historian, but the Warburg Institute has never been a centre for art history alone. Its books, courses, events and publications are devoted to everything we need to know in order to put images into context, to track the movements of culture through time and space. It is where, I sometimes say, we come to remember how to remember.

Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* – the famous atlas of images shown in this book and in the exhibition for which it is being published – set out to map the collective memory of old ideas, motifs and gestures. In the century since it was created, the project has itself become part of *our* collective memory. Warburg's unfinished *magnum opus* has haunted our cultural, curatorial and artistic work over the last few decades and taken on the kind of iconic status afforded to modernity's other foundational projects such as Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* (better known, in English, as the *Arcades Project*). Benjamin's work was inspired, in part, by Warburg's, and the two projects were deeply marked by the times in which they were created. Both were ambitious, experimental and ultimately unfinishable; both reinvented inherited forms of inquiry and communication; and both suffered from the traumas inflicted by National Socialism. Benjamin's life was disrupted, and prematurely ended, by the rise of the Nazis. Warburg died before that development, but only a few years after his death it forced his Library and Institute into exile.

When the materials used by Warburg found their new place in London (and it took twenty-five years before they settled into their permanent home), they became absorbed into the evolving collections and shifting obsessions served by the Institute's library, archive and photo collection. The great art historian Ernst Gombrich (who worked at the Warburg Institute from 1936 to 2001 and directed it from 1959 to 1976) had been hired to turn the fragmentary *Bilderatlas* into the finished publication Warburg had wanted; but he found the project impossible and turned his attention to a biography of the Institute's founder and to the creation of his own texts on images – including *The Story of Art*, the world's best-selling book on the subject.

Outside the Institute, interest in Warburg's *Bilderatlas* has steadily grown and may well be greater now than it has ever been. The *Bilderatlas* has been the subject of monographic studies, and entire sections of journals are devoted to it. It has inspired countless artistic projects and, in the last decade, a series of major exhibitions: after all, the project offers new forms of association and argument familiar to artists and curators alike, and it makes the connections between research and display visible and even vital. Through these projects, Warburg's work has been credited with both killing

**Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020**

and inventing art history, and his peculiar methods described as both a sign of madness and a stroke of genius. But the Warburg Institute itself – where all of Warburg’s working materials are housed – has for the most part served as the keeper of memories rather than the active agent in these enterprises.

The exhibition at Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) has given us the opportunity to revisit Warburg’s most mysterious work. The effort of its curators Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil was fundamental in the recovery of the last-known version of the *Bilderatlas*.

For this they used – for the first time since 1929 – Warburg’s original materials with some one thousand images on more than sixty cloth-covered panels. We are grateful for the inspiration (and perspiration) of our partners in Germany, and have used the moment to carry out a complete campaign of conservation and photography that will give the *Bilderatlas* a new life for generations of scholars and artists. And we are delighted to be working with Hatje Cantz on a fresh facsimile that will present the reconstructed original materials (as seen until now in reproductions of Warburg’s black and white photographs of the project as it stood when he died) for the first time in full colour and in the large format demanded by the dense array of images.

The exhibition and the book will give new viewers and readers a place at what Warburg liked to call ‘the workbench in the laboratory of the study of civilisation’. It will create future memories of past culture, bringing us together under the sign of *Mnemosyne*.

## The Mnemosyne and its Afterlife

Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil

Viewed retrospectively, the story that led to the creation of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* in 1929 could be told as a linear sequence of events. General preconditions played a role, including the steadily improving possibilities of technical reproduction in the early twentieth century and the rapid expansion of book publishing over the same period. There were also specific aspects attributable to decisions made by the Warburg family and Aby Warburg himself, above all the autonomy with which he was able to expand his research. Specific precursors are also identifiable, hints of the form that was to emerge in the late 1920s. There is a logic to the trajectory, especially when we consider the content, for Warburg's final work draws together the research of the previous decades. Nevertheless, we are dealing with the invention of an instrument hitherto unknown to – and for decades rejected by – scholarship. Thus nobody should be surprised that there were difficulties associated with this project. It was only after Warburg's death, however, that they proliferated in a quite different form with grave consequences. Hence we must keep in mind the fact that the *Bilderatlas* for so long remained largely *invisible* or appeared to be *lost*, as another of the mysteries inherent to this exceptional work.

But let us begin by retracing some easily comprehensible initial steps. When planning a lecture about Dürer in Hamburg in 1905, Warburg organised a small exhibition for his audience, with exhibits illustrating his thought processes. At the same time he commissioned three plates to be printed that reproduced some of the works discussed in the lecture as a hand-out for the audience.<sup>1</sup> Both aspects, the exhibition and the three prints, are significant steps on the long road to the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, which was originally conceived as a book project. It was in no way foreseeable – and still less intended – that the process of creating them would end up with images mounted on panels that have more in common with the medium of the exhibition. Our knowledge about this aspect of the story is itself a stroke of fortune; not always do archives grant such insights into how a workshop employs its resources for such experiments. Another unexpected turn is that the panels – ultimately the only result of the project – were *inaccessible* despite being comprehensively documented in photographs. In a sense they could even be said to have been *invisible*, as the originals in fact appeared to have been lost and the hitherto published reproductions were scarcely legible.

Even before the Dürer talk, Warburg had expanded the scope of his research to include the entire Early Renaissance, and soon he was also speaking of the necessity of publishing a major work on the period. It is in this connection that the first mention of an 'atlas' appears. But at that time the terms '*Bilderatlas*' (lit.: 'atlas of images') and '*Tafel*' (panel)<sup>2</sup> had no more than very general meanings in the publishing context. A '*Bilderatlas*' was a volume of illustrations, which at that time still had to be printed using a different technique and on paper that was different from the text volume it accompanied. The same applied to plates included in a text volume: they were always bound separately, either as individual folios or sections usually at the back. The '*Bilderatlas*' had been a product in its own right since the late nineteenth century, as a large-format stand-alone picture book focusing on a particular field of knowledge. It tended to be didactic and consisted principally of plates containing multiple smaller, individual illustrations. In other words, it prioritised an attractive

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus A. Hürttig, *Die entfesselte Antike: Aby Warburg und die Geburt der Pathosformel in Hamburg* (Cologne 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The term normally refers to 'plate' in English, but specifically in connection with the *Atlas* it denotes 'panel'.

Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020

appearance, while the explanatory texts were mostly general and brief. Advances in printing technology after the Second World War allowed a freer combination of text and image, and as a result the old terms, '*Bilderatlas*' and '*Tafel*', fell into disuse. Today they are used almost exclusively in association with Warburg's project – lending them an air of significance and exclusivity that they did not originally possess.

By the time Warburg held a series of lectures in Hamburg in 1909, the scope of his argumentation was already as broad as the later *Bilderatlas*: a highly condensed succession of seven chapters starting with Petrarch and ending with Dürer. To clarify the order of projected images he prepared a scheme that resembles the outline of the *Bilderreihen* (series of images) that he was not to produce until sixteen years later.<sup>3</sup> His quickly sketched thoughts clearly demonstrate the necessity for a different form. The complexity of the connections he wished to demonstrate between the works now transcended the linear confines of the slides he was still using at the time.

On 20 April 1914 Warburg gave a lecture on 'The Emergence of the Antique as a Stylistic Ideal in Early Renaissance Painting' at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, condensing no less than twelve hundred years of visual history into his talk.<sup>4</sup> There was something demonstrative about the act of collapsing such distances, connecting them with the reverberations of particular forms, gestures and images, and with the tensions involved in their actualisation. Warburg wanted to make the ungraspable tangible; he wanted to know how something that now appeared so self-evident originally came into being. This was a journey from the Arch of Constantine built in Rome in 315 AD to the fresco of the Battle of Constantine painted in the Vatican in the 1520s. A journey from the suppression of Classical Art to the conflicts triggered by its rediscovery in the fifteenth century.

Just four months later, Europe's rulers plunged the continent into war. Warburg turned his visual research to the contemporary news media, conceiving sketches for three panels that are structured like a two-page spread in a magazine.<sup>5</sup> This detour into the violence of war propaganda might appear remote from his actual research interest: art history. What it did reveal was the material base shared by both: the modern communication technologies that were decisive for the *life of images*, for their movability or mobility, but which in 1914 also bore responsibility for the *deaths of human beings*.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, expeditions seeking to bring art and architecture of all epochs from the remotest outposts to the major Western cities were systematically using modern recording techniques. The *Age of Mechanical Reproduction* had begun – under conditions of colonial power driving territorial expansion externally and pursuing scientific rigour internally. The cultural assets that photography had rendered mobile were supposed to benefit the education of the home population. One prime example of the drive for modernisation and its intimate ties to industrial progress was the initiative of the British elites that led to the founding of the South Kensington Museum (today Victoria and Albert Museum). Every available form of reproduction was used to present art from all eras in the format of a permanent world exhibition. The most spectacular manifestation was the life-size reproduction of Trajan's Column, which is still on display at the V&A today.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Giovanna Targia (ed.), *Aby Warburg – Il primo Rinascimento italiano, sette conferenze inedite* (Turin 2013); sketch p. 145 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Tremml, Sigrid Weigel and Perdita Ladwig (eds.), *Aby Warburg: Werke in einem Band* (Berlin 2010), p. 281 ff.; held in Florence on 20 April 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Steffen Haug reconstructed these panels while a Frances Yates Fellow at the Warburg Institute (2017/18), in the scope of a project on the First World War.

<sup>6</sup> 'Saving' the past is frequently understood to mean 'rescuing from deterioration' or 'bringing back to life'. This stance is often discernible in the self-perception of colonial collections vis-à-vis artefacts arriving from distant cultures.

Collecting reproductions was also a widespread artistic practice at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> On the walls of academies and studios they elucidated possibilities, suggested interpretations and supplied guidance within a canon that was largely based on the study of Antiquity and saw itself as realising the ideals of that age. Occasionally the possibilities to manipulate elements of form offered by printed reproductions on paper even led to experiments resembling the techniques of collage and montage that were to emerge in the twentieth century.

Ever since Wölfflin's study of Renaissance and Baroque style, it has become evident that the way art appears in books has direct effects on how it is understood, a phenomenon that became a subject of discussion on more than one occasion.<sup>8</sup> But instances documenting how reproductions were treated in academic contexts are few and far between. Warburg made use of the possibilities of photography and spoke of its advantages, and we know a surprising amount about his practice because he always painstakingly documented his work and carefully considered every step.<sup>9</sup> But otherwise little is known about the ways media were used in scholarship. The *International Exhibition of the Book Industry and Graphic Arts*, which was staged in Leipzig shortly before the First World War, represents an exception in this respect; partly on account of the specific field, copious use was made of illustrations.<sup>10</sup> Karl Lamprecht, one of Warburg's teachers, was involved, and the form and content exhibit astonishing similarities with the *Bilderreihen* and the *Bilderatlas*.

Another early example of systematic utilisation of reproductions falls in the immediate post-war period. In 1918 Fritz Saxl, since 1912 one of Warburg's closest collaborators, organised a series of didactic exhibitions in Vienna in which he used exclusively reproductions.<sup>11</sup> Little is known about his concept, but he plainly wanted to bring art as a medium of knowledge to broader sections of the population and to persuade the public to consider questions that had been drowned out by the clamour of war propaganda. When Warburg returned to Hamburg from the sanatorium in 1924, Saxl prepared a little exhibition to welcome him, using visual examples from Warburg's areas of research. One of the myths around the genesis of the *Bilderatlas* is that this was the moment when Saxl showed the 'revenant' new possibilities for working with art and laid the foundations for the *Bilderatlas*. In reality, this is not based in fact. Warburg had begun creating a photographic collection at a very early stage, both to advance his own research and to communicate his findings. Creating *Bilderreihen* and using illustrations to communicate his findings to a small circle of listeners was already part of his practice before the First World War. The *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (K.B.W.) systematically expanded this instrument; once the new building had been completed in 1926 it also possessed a photographic laboratory and new techniques for reproduction.

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<sup>7</sup> See Roberto Ohrt, "Die Erinnerung im Archiv ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit", in: *Café Dolly. Picabia, Schnabel, Willumsen. Hybrid Painting*, Willumsens Museum Frederikssund 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock: eine Untersuchung über Wesen und Entstehung des Barockstils in Italien* (Munich, 1888). (Published in English translation in 1966 as *Renaissance and Baroque* by Cornell University Press, translated by Kathrin Simon.)

<sup>9</sup> Explicitly in Aby Warburg, 'Bildniskunst und florentinisches Bürgertum' (Leipzig, 1902), in idem, *Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike: kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, reprint of the 1932 edition, edited by Gertrud Bing with Fritz Rougemont. Published as *Gesammelte Schriften: Studienausgabe*, vol. I. 1, and vol. I. 2, edited by Horst Bredekamp and Michael Diers (Berlin, 1998), pp. 89 ff., esp. p. 101; see also Mick Finch, 'The Technical Apparatus of the Warburg Haus', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, vol. 15, no. 2–3, pp. 94–106.

<sup>10</sup> Halle der Kultur, *Internationale Ausstellung für Buchgewerbe und Graphik*, Leipzig 1914. We are grateful to Marcus A. Hurrting for pointing us to this exhibition, which was reportedly seen by 2.3 million visitors. See also *Aby Warburg: Mnemosyne Bilderatlas: Rekonstruktion – Kommentar – Aktualisierung*, exh. cat. ZKM (Karlsruhe, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Steffen Haug, 'Fritz Saxl's Exhibitions in Vienna (1919)', in *Image Journeys: The Warburg Institute and a British Art History*, edited by Joanne W. Anderson, Mick Finch and Johannes von Müller (Passau, 2019), pp. 105–13. It has, regrettably, proven impossible to locate any photographic documentation on the exhibitions.



Leaving aside the actual importance of Saxl's exhibition, the two researchers decided then and there – perhaps swayed by the possibilities of photography – to create a *Bilderatlas* on the history of the Renaissance. Gertrud Bing, a doctoral student of Erwin Panofsky's, entered the inner circle at this point and quickly became Warburg's personal assistant. She was ultimately the person most closely involved in the evolution of the *Bilderatlas*. A broad understanding of the concept of enlightenment was crucial to the concept. The idea was that the book should open up a new perspective on the established values of art, both for experts and for a wider audience. Warburg became the driving force of the project, but always understood it as a collective undertaking: 'Our Atlas' did indeed emerge piece by piece out of the 'research community' at the Warburg Library. The *Bilderreihen* installed in the reading room between 1926 and 1928 represented its first stage.<sup>12</sup> Presentation in semi-public contexts was generally preceded by intense internal discussions or even trial sessions. Then Warburg gave his audience detailed explanations about the subjects and media of the complexly structured image constellations. Various external guests were invited, depending on the occasion, and all those who studied, researched or taught at the Warburg Library were able to attend.

Vertical-format panels were used for the first time in spring 1928. These were boards covered with dark Hessian, roughly 150 centimetres high and 125 wide. The format was a major shift; until then the *Bilderreihen* had been horizontal.<sup>13</sup> Realisation in book form was plainly on the agenda and they were taking the standard publication format into account. By October 1929 three more or less clearly distinct versions of the *Bilderatlas* had been produced, all of which are documented in photographs.<sup>14</sup> The first, from 1928, encompassed forty-three panels. The second, with sixty-eight panels, was the most extensive and can be dated to autumn 1928, before the trip to Rome where the 'dress rehearsal' for the *Bilderatlas* was to take place, Warburg's legendary lecture at the Bibliotheca Hertziana.<sup>15</sup> After returning from Italy Warburg fundamentally revised the concept, applying a chronological structure and developing the final version.<sup>16</sup> While the content of the panels, of which there were sixty-three by this stage, is noticeably clearer in the third iteration, new inconsistencies appeared in the numbering sequence: a gap between No. 8 and No. 20 and a smaller one between No. 64 and No. 70. Certain panels now bore more than one number – No. 28-29, No. 50-51 and No. 61-64 – where Warburg plainly planned to expand the content, and the lower-case letter 'a' identified two others as later additions: No. 23a and No. 41a were presumably inserted at a stage when subsequent panels had already been numbered.

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<sup>12</sup> Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II 2, *Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen*, edited by Fleckner and Woldt (Berlin, 2012). The book fosters the impression that 'Bilderreihen' were only produced in the preparatory work for the *Atlas*. There is various evidence for the self-conception of the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft' (research community) that formed at K.B.W., first and foremost: the 'Widmung' (dedication) to Aby Warburg, in Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Hamburg, 1926); and the collective journal of the Warburg Library, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VII: 'unser Atlas', p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> It is not possible to determine the dimensions any more precisely, because the position of the camera in relation to the panels varied.

<sup>14</sup> The second – and most extensive – version is in fact documented with three different sets of numbers; the content and extent of the panels varies little. Occasionally the numbers were also amended on the negatives.

<sup>15</sup> On the lecture at the Bibliotheca Hertziana see Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II 2, *Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen* (see note 11).

<sup>16</sup> Research on the early versions is nascent. Katia Mazzucco distinguishes five different stages of the *Atlas* (Katia Mazzucco, 'Il Progetto Mnemosyne di Aby Warburg', Ph.D. diss., Siena University, 2006), Joacim Sprung, six (Joacim Sprung, 'Bildatlas, åskådning och reproduktion: Aby Warburgs Mnemosyne-atlas och visualiseringen av konsthistoria kring 1800/1900', Ph.D. diss., Copenhagen University, 2011, p. 16 ff.). For the sake of simplicity we will confine ourselves to three versions here; the intermediate versions differ principally in their numbering but to a much lesser extent in the imagery itself. Panels from the early versions have been published only sporadically and unsystematically.

Thus it stands beyond doubt that version three was not intended to be the final one. This is easy to explain: Warburg died on 26 October 1929. Some of the photographs documenting the final configuration were certainly taken only after his death. He had applied the new chronological structure to almost all the panels, but was far from finished. Obtaining an overview of the order and numbering was both necessary and difficult. We identified twenty panels in earlier versions whose images are completely absent from the last, and are therefore reproduced in a large format for the first time in the present volume.<sup>17</sup> Because the new structure involved sweeping changes these panels no longer fit into the gaps in the last version, and creating new spaces to accommodate the different chrono-logical stages of their development would have meant renumbering the entire sequence. Nevertheless, it is almost unimaginable that topics as important as *Perseus* or *Bildpropaganda zur Zeit Luthers* were simply to be dropped.

At the time, in 1929, the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* was neither conceived as an exhibition nor was it ever shown in its entirety. Along the curved shelf structure of the oval reading room – the backdrop for the *Bilderreihen* – there was only space to show about ten panels at a time. The room's architecture, in which Warburg himself had been essentially involved, nevertheless played a notable role in structuring the *Bilderatlas*. Warburg appeared to have developed the panels in groups of ten (continuing with No. 20 and No. 70 respectively after the two gaps), within which a degree of coherence can be identified: Nos. 1 to 8 showing art in Antiquity, the 'ancient models'; Nos. 20 to 27 for the return of the Gods from Arabian exile and their journey to the Palazzo Schifanoia; Nos. 28-29 to 39 for the first phase in Florence, until Botticelli; No. 40 to 48 for the second phase, until Ghirlandaio, the 'Nympha', and Fortuna; Nos. 49 to 59 for the after-effects (Mantegna, Rome, Raphael, Manet, Michelangelo, Dürer); Nos. 60 to 61-64 for the Age of Neptune, with the conquest of the Atlantic as the new key to power; Nos. 70 to 76 for Rembrandt and Antiquity; and Nos. 77 to 79 for the present day and a kind of résumé (counterbalancing the three introductory panels, which are identified by letters).

Gertrud Bing, Fritz Saxl and Edgar Wind, the most dedicated members of the K.B.W., pursued the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* publication project until well into the 1940s, in the latter stages at the Warburg Institute in London, where this unique laboratory of cultural studies remained safe from the Nazis. When it was shipped in December 1933 the collection comprised about fifteen thousand photographs, including more than two thousand images Warburg had selected for the *Bilderatlas*. It is unlikely that the *Gestelle* (as Warburg himself sometimes referred to the wooden supports for the panels) made it to London; they certainly never reappeared. Gertrud Bing engaged Ernst Gombrich in 1936 specially to prepare the *Bilderatlas* for publication. All he had to show in 1937 was a wispy intimation, but nothing that could ever have come close to the realisation of the intended book. Bing pursued her project of publishing Warburg's late work into the 1940s, but was unable to assert herself against Gombrich.<sup>18</sup>

That is not where the story ends, unfortunately. For his failure to fulfil his task, Gombrich blamed the initiator of the project. In his so-called 'Intellectual Biography' he characterises Warburg as lacking

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<sup>17</sup> On pp. 152 – 171. Creating an index for these panels was beyond the resources of the present project. The concordance (p. 173 ff.) gives pointers for thematic orientation.

<sup>18</sup> The Gombrich version was presented to Max Warburg on the occasion of his seventieth birthday and is referred to in the literature as the 'Birthday Atlas' ('Geburtstagsatlas'). Some of its 'panels' have been published in various books as historical documents. On the unfortunate relationship between Gombrich and the Warburg Institute see Claudia Wedepohl, 'Critical Detachment – Ernst Gombrich as Interpreter of Aby Warburg', in *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus*, vol. 12, *The Afterlife of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*, edited by Uwe Fleckner and Peter Mack (Berlin 2015).

the necessary organisational talent and methodological rigour to complete the *Bilderatlas*.<sup>19</sup> In other words, its creator's 'shortcomings' were etched into the *Bilderatlas* as an irresolvable structural or conceptual problem. This assessment was to determine the *afterlife of Mnemosyne* for decades and ultimately represents one central reason why the original illustrations lay neglected in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute for almost a century. While researchers came to believe that the *Atlas* had been lost, in fact the 971 photographs had been sorted back into the Photographic Collection at some point in the course of the 1930s – without any record of exactly where. The last remaining evidence of the individual elements on the sixty-three panels was lost in the 1940s when the Collection was indexed iconographically at Rudolf Wittkower's instigation. By 2019 the Photographic Collection had grown to about four hundred thousand items: a *sea of images* out of which the originals now had to be recovered.<sup>20</sup>

In its final version the *Bilderatlas* remains a fragment, abruptly truncated in the process of its development. Yet it bears no resemblance to a kaleidoscope, where the next rotation might create a new random pattern of pretty colours. The panels definitely gain in precision from the first version to the last; they are increasingly more clearly structured and more legible. It would be unreasonable – and unproductive – to treat them as a transient moment in an ever-changing process, whether professing sympathy for their 'artistic character' or – as Gombrich does – alleging a lack of scientific rigour. All presentations of the *Bilderatlas* prior to this volume, whether in book form or an exhibition, have been based on the black and white photographs from the 1920s.<sup>21</sup> For the viewer today our recovery of the original relativises the effect of uniformity and strengthens – to put it bluntly – the impression of chaotically distributed visual components (which precisely reflects the prejudices of critics and supporters in the past). Therefore, at first glance 'the original' might appear to confirm what so long stood in the way of it being properly appreciated. Lack of clarity and the revelation that it is a work in progress might distract from the precision of the content or simply cause irritation, but the visibility of the different sources also highlights the experimental nature of the undertaking. The element of montage becomes more apparent, the impulse to extract something new from the sources as well – and this we must grant Warburg, even if we understand his conceptual venture as a struggle for clarity and more keenly comprehend the thoughts he is formulating *between the images*. In the dimensions in which they have been rendered in this volume the reproductions now permit the panels to be examined in detail. It thus becomes possible to make proper use of them and should help dispel the long-standing reservations.

To a certain degree, the original colour tones of the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* lead back to the moment of its invention, and as such to all the difficulties associated with an endeavour for which there were virtually no precedents. Not all of these difficulties were resolved – and at this point it is obsolete to do so – but neither can we simply pass them over. Warburg's book would certainly have had a different appearance. The panels were not conceived as the final manifestation of his project. Yet in this form they offer us a two-fold opportunity: on the one hand, to explore the full complexity and precision of a process that was interrupted on 26 October 1929 and to face the same challenge as Warburg did; on the other hand, the productivity engendered by the fragmentary and incomplete nature of the work need not be constrained by demands for a definite conclusion. Instead, we hope that the present publication will serve as a tool for future expeditions.

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<sup>19</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, 2nd ed. (Chicago 1986).

<sup>20</sup> For details of the recovery, see our contribution 'On the Recovery of the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* and the Completion of the Captions' in this volume, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> The first series of exhibitions was initiated by Daedalus in Vienna in 1993, the second by the research group *Mnemosyne* in 2012 (Hamburg, 8. Salon). Both produced black-and-white reprints to investigate the *Bilderatlas* in detail.

Excerpt from: folio volume, Hatje Cantz, 2020



It is therefore not our intent to retrieve reproductions and present these as 'originals'. First and foremost, we wish to pay tribute to a body of work that Warburg sought to shape until the very end of his life, aiming to achieve thematic precision and a certain openness, which he felt was crucial to maintain towards the aesthetic material he explored. He occasionally characterised his method as 'polyphonic' and 'multi-dimensional', which is why the *Bilderatlas* was so exceptionally difficult to complete.<sup>22</sup> Up to now, this appreciation of his work has been denied to him. In itself, this book required a particular form, size and quality; and although we know we could not realise the work that Warburg had hoped to accomplish, his ambitions – and the vast potential provided by the library he created – were key to our endeavour: 'I use the books like instruments in a scientific laboratory.'

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<sup>22</sup> Warburg used the 'multi-dimensional' panels as tools in his quest for constructing the Atlas until the final days of his life. Thus, it is erroneous and misleading to assume that in the summer of 1929 he would employ a folder with unbound plates as a solution to the difficult question of the most optimal form of publishing the Atlas. In fact, he had already found this 'one-dimensional solution' 24 years earlier in the course of preparing his Dürer lecture. Cf. Christine Kreft *Adolph Goldschmidt und Aby M. Warburg* (Weimar 2010), *Warburg in his letters to Goldschmidt*, pp. 145 and 220. The concluding quotation is taken from a letter written in 1918, see: Dorothea McEwan, *Ausreiten der Ecken. Die Aby Warburg – Fritz Saxl Korrespondenz 1910 bis 1919* (Hamburg 1998), p. 16.

## Biographies



**Axel Heil** is an artist and professor for Experimental Transfers and Artistic Research at the State Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe. He studied painting in Karlsruhe, Paris and The Hague as well as art history and ethnology in Heidelberg and Berlin. In 1999 he established *fluid*, a platform for a wide range of activities. Since 2007, he edits the series *Future of the Past* for Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne. In 2009 he produced *Paul Thek, Artist's Artist*, for MIT Press, Cambridge. He has published widely on artistic movements such as CoBrA, SPUR and the Beats as well as essays on Asger Jorn, Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia, Jacqueline de Jong, Lee Bontecou, John Armleder and Tal R. He has curated exhibitions at the Museum Folkwang, Essen, the ZKM | Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Deichtorhallen Hamburg – Sammlung Falckenberg and Museum Jorn, Silkeborg. He is represented by Galerie Michael Haas, Berlin. In 2012 he was one of the founders of the Forschungsgruppe Mnemosyne.

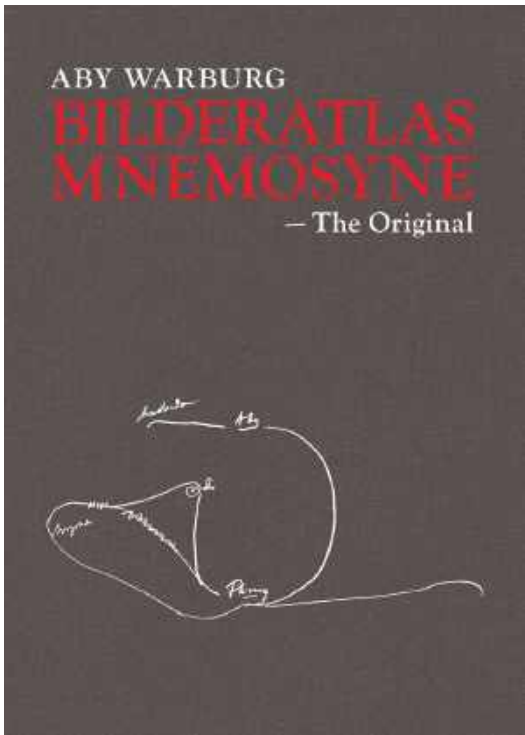
**Roberto Ohrt** lives in Hamburg. He received his doctorate from the University of Hamburg in 1988 (*Phantom Avantgarde*, 1990) and has published numerous writings on the history of modern art (particularly on the Situationist International) and artists such as Martin Kippenberger, Raymond Pettibon, Andy Hope 1930, Paul Thek, Philip Guston, André Butzer, Albert Oehlen and Jason Rhoades. He has taught as guest professor in Munich, Frankfurt am Main and Kassel. He has also designed and organised exhibitions for, among others, the Centre Georges Pompidou (with Martin Kippenberger in 1993), Golden Pudel Club (1993–2001), ZKM Karlsruhe (2001 and 2016), Museum der Moderne (with Margrit Brehm, Salzburg 2005), the 8. Salon (since 2010) and the Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York (2016 and 2019). He was a cofounder of the Akademie Isotrop (1996–2001) and the Forschungsgruppe Mnemosyne (2012) and is a member of the curatorial team of the 8. Salon (since 2009).

**Bill Sherman** is director of the Warburg Institute and Professor of cultural Studies at the University of London's School of advanced Study. He earned his BA from Columbia University and his MPhil and PhD from Cambridge. He was founding director of the interdisciplinary Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies at the University of York and moved to the Warburg from the Victoria and Albert Museum, where he was director of Research and Collections and head of the V&A Research Initiative (VARI). Sherman has published widely on the history of books and readers and has served on many editorial and advisory boards on both side of the Atlantic.

**Claudia Wedepohl** is the archivist of the Warburg Institute. She studied Art History and Italian Literature in Göttingen and Hamburg and joined the staff of the Warburg Institute in 2000. Since 2006 she has been responsible for the Archive. She has held fellowships at the Center for Literary and Cultural Research in Berlin and at the Center for Advanced Studies, Morphomata, at the University of Cologne (2010-2011). Her academic work focusses on fifteenth-century Italian art and architecture and on art historiography around 1900. Wedepohl has published widely on the genesis of Aby Warburg's ideas and key terms, with a special interest in his concept of myth and mythology; she also serves as co-editor of the edition of Warburg's collected works (Studienausgabe).

# Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE

## The Original



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From 1925 until his death in 1929 the Hamburg-based art and cultural scholar Aby Warburg worked on his Mnemosyne Atlas, a volume of plates that has, in the meanwhile, taken on mythical status in the study of modern art and visual studies. With this project, Warburg created a visual reference system that was far ahead of its time. In cooperation with the Warburg Institute, Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil have now undertaken the task of finding all of the individual pictures from the atlas and displaying these reproductions of artworks from the Middle East, European antiquity, and the Renaissance in the same way that Warburg himself showed them, on panels hung with black fabric. This folio volume and the exhibition in Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin succeed in restoring Warburg's vanished legacy—something that researchers have long considered impossible.

Ed. Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin und The Warburg Institute; Roberto Ohrt, Axel Heil, texts by Roberto Ohrt, Axel Heil, Bernd Scherer, Bill Sherman, Claudia Wedepohl, graphic design by Axel Heil, Christian Ertel, fluid editions

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# HATJE CANTZ



Berlin, 6. August 2020

## **PRESEMITTEILUNG**

### **Kulturforum, Gemäldegalerie**

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### **Zwischen Kosmos und Pathos**

#### **Berliner Werke aus Aby Warburgs Bilderatlas Mnemosyne**

8. August – 1. November 2020

Eine Sonderpräsentation der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin in Kooperation mit dem Haus der Kulturen der Welt und dem Warburg Institute, London

**Anlässlich der Ausstellung „Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne – Das Original“ (4. September – 30. November 2020) im Haus der Kulturen der Welt zeigt die Gemäldegalerie Kunstwerke von der Vor- und Frühgeschichte bis zur Neuzeit, die dem Kunsthistoriker Aby Warburg als Vorlagen seiner enzyklopädischen Bildersammlung dienten. Werke aus zehn Sammlungen der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin treten als dreidimensionales Reenactment in einen eindrucksvollen Dialog mit Warburgs Magnum Opus.**

Aby Warburg (1866–1929) war einer der bedeutendsten Kunsthistoriker des späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts, der unermüdlich das „Nachleben“ antiker Motive in der europäischen Kultur seit der Renaissance studierte. Warburg war überzeugt, dass die Antike für die Künstler der Renaissance nicht nur ein schematisches Modell darstellt, sondern darüber hinaus auch eine urbildhafte, emotionale Bedeutung besitzt, die sich in Schlüsselmotiven und Kernthemen herauskristallisiert. Warburgs letztes Werk war eine gigantische Zusammenstellung von fast 1.000 Fotografien in seiner Hamburger Bibliothek, genannt „Bilderatlas Mnemosyne“, die seine Studien der vergangenen Jahrzehnte resümierte und zugleich neue Wege in der Bildwissenschaft aufzeigen sollte.

2020 werden – erstmals seit 1929 – alle originalen, mehrfarbigen Abbildungen des Bilderatlas in der Ausstellung im HKW präsentiert. Parallel würdigen die Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin den Bildwissenschaftler mit einer Präsentation von rund 50 originalen Kunstwerken, die von Warburg für die Themenbereiche Kosmos und Pathos im Bilderatlas ausgewählt wurden. Die Werke aus zehn Sammlungen der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – der Antikensammlung, der Gipsformerei, der Kunstbibliothek, dem Kunstgewerbemuseum, dem Kupferstichkabinett, dem Museum Europäischer Kulturen, dem Münzkabinett, der Skulpturensammlung, dem Vorderasiatischen Museum sowie der Gemäldegalerie – die mit Meisterwerken von van Eyck, Botticelli, Rembrandt und Rubens prominent vertreten ist – zeigen eindrucklich die Fülle der Berliner Sammlungen, verdeutlichen die Beziehungen von Werken und Kulturen über Raum- und Zeitgrenzen hinweg und erläutern zugleich in exemplarischer Form das komplexe Denken, welches Warburgs Magnum Opus zugrunde liegt.

Ein Katalog zur Ausstellung ist im Deutschen Kunstverlag erschienen: ISBN 978-3422982888, Buchhandelspreis: 29 €, Museumspreis: 19 €.

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Die ursprüngliche Laufzeit der Ausstellung vom 2. April 2020 bis 28. Juni 2020 wurde wegen der coronabedingten Schließung des Museums verschoben. Über die geltenden Hygienevorkehrungen und Sonderöffnungszeiten während der neuen Ausstellungslaufzeit informieren wir Sie aktuell über: [www.smb.museum](http://www.smb.museum)

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Authors: Ariane Pauls, Norbert Witzgall

Duration: 60 min

Editors: Julia Tieke, Nancy du Plessis

Speakers: Nancy du Plessis, Joachim Schönfeld

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Password: Mnemosyne2020

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##### **Between Cosmos and Pathos. Berlin Works from Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas**

Curated by Neville Rowley and Jörg Völlnagel

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