

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **NEW DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL OFFER AT THE STÄDEL: THEME DIGITORIAL ON THE REFORMATION ONLINE**

**A DIGITORIAL ON THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT LAUNCHES A NOVEL  
KIND OF DIGITORIALS ON SPECIAL THEMES AND ARTISTS OF THE STÄDEL  
COLLECTION: REFORMATION.STAEDELMUSEUM.DE**

**Frankfurt am Main, October 26, 2017.** The successful and prizewinning digitorial format on exhibitions (which received the Grimme Online Award 2015 in the category “Art and Entertainment,” for example) is undergoing further development on Städel Director Philipp Demandt’s initiative: As of now, the Städel Museum also offers digitorials on subjects whose visual presentation can be based on selected works from the Städel’s rich collection. Digitorials on outstanding artists with works in the Städel Museum will follow. Free of charge for the user, this extension of the Städel’s digital educational offer has been made possible by the FAZIT-Stiftung and starts with a comprehensive theme digitorial on the Reformation.

In line with this year’s quincentennial of Martin Luther’s posting of his theses, the Städel Museum’s first theme digitorial explores the consequences of the renewal of the Church for art: The shift from devotional to didactic image, the emergence of new pictorial subjects, and the interpretation of existing iconographies in the spirit of the Reformation were as much part of this development as the loss of commissions on the part of the Church and the development of a private art market. Drawing on works from the Städel’s holdings, the digitorial highlights the historical differences between the Catholic and the Protestant understanding of images and sheds lights on protagonists of the Reformation such as Luther and Melanchthon or key places like the Wartburg or Rome. The free multimedia educational offer visualizes the decisive impact of Luther’s theological positions like the priority of the word over the image on artists and illustrates how this turn has influenced the way how images are dealt with to this day.

“We are pleased that the FAZIT-Stiftung supports us to tell ‘art history’ in the truest sense of the word and to do so by relying on works from our holdings and for a wide public. Our new digitorials are aimed at contextualizing the wealth of our collection with all its subjects within a historical perspective beyond our special exhibitions and

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at spanning a wide arch to the present,” says Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum.

“Our newly conceived theme and artist digital series serve a better understanding of art—particularly within the historical context of their time. The current anniversary year provides a perfect starting point to digitally visualize art’s function and modes of operation and how these are influenced by religious, political, and social factors,” Chantal Eschenfelder, head of the Städel’s education department, explains the new format.

The new digital educational series will be continued with an artist digital on Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510) forthcoming in the first half of 2018. His painting *Idealized Portrait of a Lady (Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci as Nymph)* ranks among the Städel’s main works and is well known to a wide public.

#### **Theme Digital: Art under the Flag of the Reformation**

Retrievable under <http://reformation.staedelmuseum.de> without cost, the new digital starts with fathoming the religious function of panel painting before the Reformation. The Städel’s fifteenth-century holdings comprise works by Rogier van der Weyden and the “Master of Flémalle”. Such paintings were revered as cult images in their era, catering to the believers’ pleasure in looking; worshipping images of saints was to bring salvation and reduce the time to be spent in the impending Purgatory.

Martin Luther refused to accept this convention. For him, salvation was solely based on inner faith and Christ. This was also why he rejected the worship of other saints. He equally opposed the selling of indulgencies practiced by the Church and came into conflict with the Pope. Luther not only relied on the power of his words for his reformatory plans; he knew about the impact of images and collaborated closely with the painter Lucas Cranach the Elder in Wittenberg. Consequently, a special focus of the digital is on Cranach’s works in the Städel’s collection.

The Reformation movement had a decisive impact on the understanding of art. Accordingly, the digital likewise centers on other countries where similar reformatory demands were brought forward at the same time. The battle for religious innovation merged with conflicts within the European power-political structure and showed its bloody side: Iconoclasm in the Protestant regions was followed by the Great Peasants’ Revolt as well as by the Huguenot Wars and the Dutch Revolt, which led to the Thirty Years’ War at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Flight and expulsion ensued, to which also artists fell victim.

The Church ceased to be an important patron of the arts particularly in Protestant regions. A free art market with private buyers emerged. Pictorial genres such as still life painting—exemplified by Georg Flegel's or Jacob van Walscapelle's works in the digital—received a new impetus. Reminding viewers of the transitoriness of life, still lifes appealed to the viewer's virtuousness and thus fulfilled an educational function according to Protestant conviction.

Starting from Rome from the mid-fifteenth century on, the so-called Counter-Reformation formed in response to the reformatory movements in Europe. This development resulted in a fundamental reform of the Catholic Church itself. Art again came under the influence of theological decisions. The didactic style of Protestant art was countered with an emotional kind of painting that sounded out all possibilities of a mise-en-scène aimed at sensorily overpowering the believer, as works by Guido Reni or Cornelis de Vos evidence.

The consequences of the Reformation movement were still to be felt in the nineteenth century. Illustrating this, the theme digital explores an iconoclastic controversy in the early days of the Städelisches Kulturinstitut where conflicts between the Catholic-minded director Philipp Veit and the Protestant-oriented administration arose over acquisitions.

Finally, a work by Hermann Nitsch from 1989 demonstrates an artist's engagement in archaic rituals and elements of Catholic religious practice. Nitsch emphasizes the shared roots of religious rituals. The digital clearly conveys that both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation continue to exercise their influence to this day, informing art in manifold ways.

The digital comprises the following chapters:

- 1) Art Under the Flag of the Reformation
- 2) From Cult Image to Didactic Image
- 3) The Pope Under Fire from All Sides
- 4) A Bible for Everybody
- 5) Iconoclasm, War and the Art Market
- 6) Visual Overpowering—the Counter-Reformation in Art
- 7) An Iconoclastic Controversy at the Städel

Following the example of the Städel's hitherto produced exhibition digitals, the theme digital responsibly presents enlightening information, overarching contexts, and backgrounds in a new visual way. The multimedia concatenation of image, sound, and text creates a multifaceted web of contents and allows for entirely new forms of presenting, narrating, and communicating art.

**THEME DIGITORIAL: ART UNDER THE FLAG OF THE REFORMATION**

<http://reformation.staedelmuseum.de>

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**Social media:** The Städel Museum uses the hashtag #Reformation to communicate its digitorial in the social media.

**Städel Museum:**

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