

Press release from the
Deutsches Ledermuseum in Offenbach/Main

Exhibition

Deutsches Ledermuseum: AT A TURNING POINT

12 June 2026 – early 2027

A last glance: You'll never see the Deutsches Ledermuseum look like this again

In 2027, the Deutsches Ledermuseum will celebrate turning 110.

Meanwhile, on June 12, 2026, you'll have an opportunity to experience the building like you never have before, or ever will again – because in spring 2027, the museum will be closing its doors at the current site to undergo comprehensive refurbishment. **Deutsches Ledermuseum: AT A TURNING POINT** will thus be the last major exhibition before it closes. The Deutsches Ledermuseum will then continue its work at an interim site, albeit in a different form.

Dr. Inez Florschütz, the museum's director, emphasizes: "We consider this a double opportunity. First, with this last major exhibition, we will be giving the general public an overview of the museum's colorful history that is more extensive and more exciting than ever before. Second, the museum sees the occasion as a decisive turning point: 110 years, over 150 exhibitions, and over 30,000 items in the collection together mark a good moment to ponder how we see ourselves and how we present our work. We are pursuing this process in the exhibition with a critical but appreciative look at what those 110 years have achieved."

Deutsches Ledermuseum: AT A TURNING POINT traces the history of the museum – from its foundation in 1917 by Prof. Dr. h.c. Hugo Eberhardt (1874–1959), through historical upheaval, to its emergence as a significant international specialist museum dedicated to leather as a material in all its shapes and forms, and subsequently its present-day form with the new focus of its content since 2015.

The centerpiece of the exhibition will turn the Deutsches Ledermuseum into a visitor experience: An entire gallery is devoted to a walkthrough timeline, with the most important events, exhibitions, moments of upheaval, and highpoints in the museum's history all brought to life in chronological sequence. Historical posters, exhibition publications, invitation cards, visitor responses, photographs, press coverage, and film material will enable visitors to immerse themselves once more in the museum's 110-year history.

The crucial thing here is not only what is on show, but how it is displayed. The development of forms of presentation, the sheer diversity of curatorial approaches, and a changing exhibition design combine to create a cultural overview that extends beyond the museum – and across an entire century. Be it in selected film productions such as “Polizeiruf 110” or “Die Museumsratten” with the “Augsburger Puppenkiste” – the museum is further brought to life and itself morphs into the role of protagonist.

The exhibition takes up the entire building, with a total of 11 interactive media stations spread throughout it on all three floors, forming a decentral tour. Each station can be viewed in its own right, and visitors can simply choose what they are interested in, depending purely on what they want to find out more about. In this regard, the museum remains faithful to itself – after all, in the 1950s it was the first such institute to boast an automated museum guide system: Visitors simply sent a signal to the front desk and the porter activated a tape recording that played the information in the respective room. Today, the technical realization of the stations relies on MESO, a firm that specializes in digital presentation of complex content and the brains behind the successful THAT'S LEATHER! From A to Z project room, which has been so very popular with visitors ever since it was launched in 2018.

Some of the 11 stations explicitly address the founding history of the museum and the career of its first director, Hugo Eberhardt. They shed light, among other things, on the close links and institutional overlap with today's HfG Offenbach University of Art and Design, which date back to the museum's founding phase. At the same time as being museum director, Hugo Eberhardt was head of the Technische Lehranstalten college, which later evolved into HfG Offenbach. He originally intended the museum to act as a collection of models for the college trainees, with the idea being to use exemplary pieces from a variety of cultures and epochs to enable young people to hone their judgment and develop a more profound sense of taste. The new exhibition also presents more recent and contemporary ways in which the two institutions collaborate.

The exhibition also focuses on Hugo Eberhardt as the founder and director of the museum. His visionary ideas, his efforts and commitment, and the standards he set for an all-round institution emphatically shaped the Deutsches Ledermuseum. But the exhibition also takes a critical look at Eberhardt as a person, with close examination of his actions during the Nazi period.

Another exhibition theme is leather itself as a material. What actually is leather and how is it manufactured? One way the answers are provided is with a mechanical tanning model dating from the 1950s – after many decades, it is now back on show and fully functional again. “Leatherware from Offenbach” used to be a mark of quality long before brand names and designers came on the scene. The exhibition thus uses selected exemplary items to trace the history of the Offenbach leather industry, which constitutes the museum’s DNA and the importance of the products made here, with pieces ranging from early examples of wallets through to contemporary luxury models – such as those made by designer duo TSATSAS, which is based in Offenbach/Frankfurt am Main and distributes its products internationally.

Since 1951, the museum has officially been called “Deutsches Ledermuseum” (the Deutsches Ledermuseum), with “Deutsches Schuhmuseum” (the German Shoe Museum) attached to it. With over 10,000 items, the shoe collection is one of the most significant of its kind in Europe, if not worldwide. The exhibition therefore not only outlines the history of the culture and meaning of shoes but also presents key content from this extensive collection in the form of selected pieces of footwear – from extraordinary shapes and cherished designer items to the famous sneakers in which Joschka Fischer took his ministerial oath. A particular eyecatcher here will be the wax dolls by Düsseldorf sculptor Ruth Bene Horadam (1901–1991), who made these costume dolls between 1937 and 1953 as a way of demonstrating the close interaction of clothing and footwear.

The museum’s exhibition history itself becomes part of the exhibition. From its foundation, followed by the war-time years and the post-war period through to the 1980s: The presentation paints a lively picture of how the museum saw itself and its educational work in each respective epoch. In the mid-2010s, the change of director gave the Deutsches Ledermuseum a new substantive thrust: The division into three sections – Applied Arts, Ethnology, and Shoe Museum – gave way to a curatorial approach that addressed the collection in thematic terms. Previously, objects from outside Europe had been classified geographically, and from now on they were placed in a new context in changing exhibitions.

The exhibition **Deutsches Ledermuseum: AT A TURNING POINT** does justice to its title by opening up gallery spaces that have been closed for years – and which will never be seen in this way again. Thus, the Africa section, which forms a coherent unit for scholarly and conservational reasons, and which was conceptualized back in the 1980s, will be partly on view again, this time with critical commentary.

A special place is allocated to the media station on the museum's collection of shadow puppets. This had as good as disappeared from the public eye, and yet it is one of the most important of its kind worldwide. For the first time in many years, four exhibits will go on show again: one each from China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Turkey. Another station will whisk visitors away into the museum's architectural history, swiftly familiarizing them with the shape of the current museum building and also showing, over and above all conservational and facility technology stipulations, why the refurbishment is so urgently needed. Finally, the plans and the model by Rustler Schriever Architekten that won first prize in the architectural competition offer an outlook on the future of the Deutsches Ledermuseum.

Education formats

In addition to the extensive program of guided tours, several of the media stations along the exhibition route present offerings that will actively involve visitors, encouraging them to write down their own memories and impressions of the Deutsches Ledermuseum along with suggestions and wishes for its future. These opportunities are rounded out by creative, hands-on stations and a quiz with questions relating to the exhibition. There will therefore be a variety of ways of approaching the museum's content, all of which help to foster personal engagement with the museum.

Booklet

The exhibition will be accompanied by a beautifully designed compact booklet, which documents the timeline presented in the exhibition gallery. As a standalone medium, it brings together the central stages in the museum's 110-year history and features selected documents from the archives and hitherto unpublished photos. The booklet provides a concentrated, visual overview of how the museum developed across an entire century, and thus documents its institutional memory over and above the exhibition. A special event will mark the launch of the booklet sometime in the second half of the year.

Concluding program and closing event

The exhibition is intended not only as a retrospective but also as a last stage of this familiar location – a place that once again gives grounds for celebration. The multifaceted events program will run for several weeks and will include open workshops, concerts, and films – culminating in a truly final weekend and the building's closure to the public.

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And Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain.



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