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## **Jonathan Fine, the new director general of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, presents his vision for the future: ‘ReMastering KHM: open, accessible, excellent’**

On 1 January 2025, Jonathan Fine took office as director general of the KHM-Museumsverband, which comprises the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Weltmuseum Wien and the Theatrumuseum and includes the Imperial Treasury, the Imperial Carriage Museum in Schönbrunn, and Ambras Castle Innsbruck. It is Austria’s largest museum group.

At his inaugural press conference, Fine, who has a PhD in art history from Princeton University, presented his new vision and his comprehensive new approach: ‘ReMastering KHM – open, accessible, and excellent.’

The choice of location for the press conference, the Theatrumuseum, signalled one of Fine’s central strategic goals: creating a stronger collaborative environment among the three museums through joint and coordinated exhibition projects and research.

*‘Being responsible for these three unique museums is an honour and a challenge. Their collections are a peerless cultural treasure for Austria and the world’, said Jonathan Fine. ‘My aim is to build on our strengths and, together with my colleagues, make the museums more open and accessible. We want to expand and strengthen our tradition of excellence for the future. Old movies and records need to be “remastered” to reach new audiences. That’s what our museums need too. This is why I call my strategic plan “ReMastering KHM”.’*

Jonathan Fine’s core management team includes Paul Frey, the group’s CFO, Franz Pichorner, the director of the Theatrumuseum, and Claudia Banz, the new director of the Weltmuseum Wien (the latter museum is at present led by the interim director Bettina Zorn). The new secretary general is Agnes Stillfried, an art historian who joined the staff of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1994.

### **Open: museums for everyone**

*‘Our museums must be open and welcoming for Austrian and international guests’, said Fine. This idea will animate all the museums’ programmes. Fine regards museums as ‘connecting spaces’ that help bring people together regardless of social, cultural, or geographic boundaries. ‘Regardless of where our visitors hail from, how old they are, or their social background, we want to reach and inspire them. This is true for all our locations’, said Fine. ‘I regard outreach as a fundamental value.’*

In order to better reach its audiences, the team will develop specific, targeted measures in the coming months. For children and families, for instance, the three museums are planning new programmes that will make a museum visit even more appealing and fun. In order to attract visitors from outside Vienna, Fine plans to show highlights from the collections throughout



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HISTORISCHES  
MUSEUM

THEATER  
MUSEUM

Austria, for example in collaboration with local museums. He believes that *‘the exceptional collections housed in our three museums belong to all Austrians, and everyone in Austria should be able to enjoy them’*.

In addition to these external measures, Fine also plans to intensify the collaboration within the museum group, especially with respect to research and exhibitions: *‘At present the three museums coexist next to each other; my plan is to spur their collaboration in order to promote innovative research, exhibitions, and programming.’*

### **Accessible: removing barriers, both physical and digital**

Improving accessibility will be another focus of Fine’s work – both physical and digital. For the Kunsthistorisches Museum Fine is planning long-overdue adaptations to the building to remove physical barriers for visitors with disabilities and to improve emergency routes.

*‘It is no longer contentious that public buildings must be accessible to people with disabilities. I find it extremely troubling that people with reduced mobility must still enter the Kunsthistorisches Museum through the back door’*, said Fine. He plans to present details of the building project in the first quarter of 2025. Work on a new improved entrance to the Theatrumuseum will also start in the summer of 2025. *‘A great deal remains to be done. The Imperial Treasury that houses the crown jewels is unique and represents a millennium of world history. Here, too, we must ensure barrier-free access and replace wiring and other technical systems that are approaching the end of their lifespan’*, said Fine.

Digital access to the collections will also be improved and extended. New digital tools will make them more accessible for the public around the world and appeal to new audiences. *‘Our collections contain marvellous hidden masterpieces and treasures that we want to showcase on the world stage’*, explained Fine.

### **Excellence: research and scholarship in the service of society**

Fine regards research and scholarship as central to the KHM-Museumsverband’s mission. *‘Museums are the mass media of scholarship. They can reach many more people than other scholarly institutions, such as universities. Museums have the potential to make complex ideas accessible to a broad public audience’*, said Fine while announcing new initiatives: research scholarships will be introduced along with junior curatorships to nourish young talent and introduce fresh perspectives into the KHM-Museumsverband.

In addition, Fine wants greater international visibility for research carried out in the three museums: *‘Together, our museums are an encyclopaedic world collection here in Vienna.’*



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## The exhibition programme for 2025: a year full of highlights

The exhibitions planned for 2025 reflect the excellence of the KHM-Museumsverband. The Kunsthistorisches Museum begins with *Arcimboldo – Bassano – Bruegel. Nature's Time*, which opens on 11 March and showcases masterpieces by Arcimboldo, Jacopo and Leandro Bassano, and Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The complex and fascinating exhibition comprising around 100 objects presents paintings, sculptures, and objects such as clocks, globes, and scientific instruments. They splendidly illustrate how people in the Renaissance sought to navigate and find their place in the world.

The internationally much-anticipated exhibition *Michaelina Wautier, Painter* will open in late September 2025. Banished to undeserved obscurity for far too long, this outstanding Flemish female baroque artist (1613/18–1689) is one of the greatest discoveries of art history in recent decades. Wautier is rightly lauded as a peer to Rubens and van Dyck, and her paintings number among the finest works of art produced in the seventeenth century. Almost all her known works will be on display in Vienna.

The Weltmuseum Wien is asking ‘**Who’s Wearing the Pants?**’, a major show, that opens on 25 March 2025 and takes visitors on a journey through three millennia of the history of trousers. Treasures as well as whimsical or bizarre pants document how people from all parts of the world lived and what they wore.

To celebrate the bicentenary of the birthday of the ‘Waltz King’, the Theatermuseum, in collaboration with Wienbibliothek in Rathaus, is showing **Johann Strauss – The Exhibition** dedicated to the life and work of this world-famous composer, which runs until 23 June 2025. In the summer, Palais Lobkowitz will close for a few months for adaptation and renovation work.



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## About Jonathan Fine

Jonathan Fine was born in 1969 in New York. He studied history and literature in Chicago and Cambridge/UK and completed his law studies at Yale University. He worked as a lawyer in the US, specializing in human rights, commercial and constitutional law, before gaining a PhD in art history from Princeton University. Fine worked as curator and director at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin/Germany (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz), and in 2021 he became director of the Weltmuseum Wien, which is part of the KHM-Museumsverband. Since 1 January 2025, Fine is director general of the KHM-Museumsverband, charged with turning the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Weltmuseum Wien, and the Theatermuseum into open, accessible, and excellent institutions.

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