

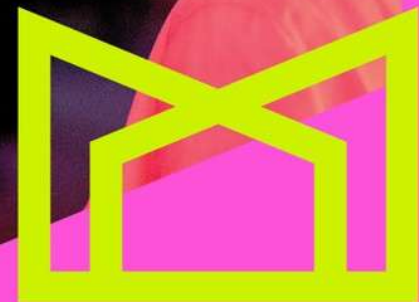


Deutsche
Kinemathek

Inventing Queer Cinema



Exhibition
Film program
7 May–13 Sep 26



Deutsche
Kinemathek

PRESS KIT

“Inventing Queer Cinema”

7.5.–13.9.26

With “Inventing Queer Cinema”, the Deutsche Kinemathek is opening its first exhibition at its new location in Berlin’s E-Werk – and, simultaneously, a new chapter in its work on queer film culture. The exhibition focuses on the films and filmmakers that have decisively shaped and repeatedly reinvented queer cinema in Germany since the 1970s. It is a chronicle of resistance, solidarity and innovation that extends to the present day.

Queer cinema tells the stories, experiences and realities of queer people. It typically shines a light on characters who defy normative expectations and structures – and who, for that reason, are often social outsiders even today. Queer cinema also formally challenges established conventions and develops its own visual languages of resistance.

The exhibition not only presents key films but also pays tribute to the individuals who have worked in various ways over the past decades to make queer cinema visible – including filmmakers, festival organizers, film distributors and many more. What kind of cinema did they dream of, or are still dreaming of? What are the reasons behind their failures and successes? “Inventing Queer Cinema” reveals how queer cinema has kept pace with and shaped social developments and even influenced the so-called mainstream. In addition, the show highlights the special significance of Berlin as a hub of queer film and subculture which has also been enriched by international artists. For the exhibition, the Salzgeber film distribution company is opening its extensive archive for the very first time. A prologue references early examples from the 1910s onward from the Deutsche Kinemathek’s own holdings. Further sections demonstrate how the medium of television has taken up, amplified and brought queer subject matters into the public eye.

A comprehensive retrospective in the Studiokino forms an integral part of the “Inventing Queer Cinema” exhibition which is also accompanied by a program of events beginning in June.

An exhibition by the Deutsche Kinemathek and the Queere Kulturstiftung.

Concept and curator: Björn Koll

Curatorial team, Deutsche Kinemathek: Kristina Jaspers, Georg Simbeni, Nils Warnecke

Artistic director, Deutsche Kinemathek: Heleen Gerritsen

Supported by: the Capital Cultural Fund (HKF) and the Queere Kulturstiftung

Intro | Quotes from Björn Koll and Heleen Gerritsen

Manfred Salzgeber in conversation with Gerd Hartmann ('taz') in 1992 on the question of what a 'gay film' actually is:

"I start with the perspectives of both the audience and the filmmakers. I want to see my films, not films depicting an emotional world that's alien to me. A gay man makes films with a different sensibility. As a film historian, I also have to ask to what extent gay men were obliged to act against their nature and tell different stories to those they wanted to tell. If, for example, you replace some of the female roles in Visconti or Tennessee Williams with a man, the characters suddenly make sense."

Björn Koll on the exhibition

"What remains of films are images, sequences, individual lines, moments and emotions. The approach of this exhibition is to gather all these aspects for queer cinema and combine them in a tangle of connections and relations. Of course, I'm aware that 'queer cinema' as such does not exist – and "Inventing Queer Cinema" is not about who invented what, either. Queer cinema is a notional space and a dream, fueled and shared by millions of people around the world. And the desire to see oneself and to become visible to others has always been stronger than all the adversities in production and distribution."

Heleen Gerritsen on the project

"In 2024, the Deutsche Kinemathek took over the analog film stock of Salzgeber's collection. This was an important stimulus for the Kinemathek to engage more profoundly with queer filmmaking, to recontextualize and reappraise it as part of German film history. Therefore, Björn Koll's proposal for the "Inventing Queer Cinema" exhibition came at exactly the right time. Of course, our archives have always contained material from queer filmmakers, festival organizers and crew members. However, our collaboration with the Queere Kulturstiftung means that the Salzgeber collection and this exhibition have the potential to bring about an important shift in perspective – both for the public and within our own archives. We are very proud and grateful to be able to offer a platform to this exhibition."

Tour | Halle, ground floor

Prologue

The prologue explores the beginnings of queer filmmaking in Germany, presenting exhibits from the Deutsche Kinemathek's own collection to introduce groundbreaking films and figures. It spans a timeframe from the early 1910s to the post-war period, with a particular focus on the Weimar Republic of the 1920s – a time when cinema first began to experiment extensively with gender roles and sexual identities. Cross-dressing comedies and films that placed physical closeness and intimacy in the limelight challenged societal norms and opened up new avenues for identification. The film 'Anders als die Andern' (1919) marks a significant milestone, openly addressing homosexuality for the first time and transforming cinema into a forum for social debate, while 'Mädchen in Uniform' (1931), the first feature film with an explicitly lesbian theme, garnered considerable international acclaim.

With the National Socialist takeover of the German government, this development suffered a radical break and queer filmmakers were persecuted, forced into exile or pushed into invisibility. In the post-war period, conservative values and heteronormative interpretations shaped the cinematic landscape. Only in the 1960s did cautious changes emerge when films – some of them drawing on the 1920s – began to address the conflicts within society surrounding sexual identity more openly.

Documents, photographs and costumes from the Deutsche Kinemathek archive are on display. Also included are excerpts from the following films:

'Aus eines Mannes Mädchenzeit', GER 1913, Messter-Film GmbH

'Ich möchte kein Mann sein', GER 1918, dir. Ernst Lubitsch

'Anders als die Andern', GER 1919, dir. Richard Oswald

'Der Fürst von Pappenheim', GER 1927, dir. Richard Eichberg

'Der Himmel auf Erden', GER 1927, dir. Alfred Schirokauer

'Die Büchse der Pandora', GER 1929, dir. G. W. Pabst

'Morocco', USA 1930, dir. Josef von Sternberg

'Mädchen in Uniform', GER 1931, dir. Leontine Sagan

'Viktor und Viktoria', GER 1933, dir. Reinhold Schünzel

Idea and concept: Kristina Jaspers, Nils Warnecke, Georg Simbeni, Deutsche Kinemathek

“Rosa von Praunheim” installation

‘Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt’ is the unwieldy title of an epoch-defining film. Commissioned by the WDR public television station, gay filmmaker Rosa von Praunheim made the film in 1971 to address the reform of Paragraph 175 of the German penal code. His work responded to the new legal possibilities with the demand: “Out of the toilets, into the streets!”

This six-channel installation connects excerpts from the TV film with the history of its impact. Three television events are juxtaposed on six monitors: alongside excerpts from ‘Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt’, footage from a contemporary WDR discussion program from 1972 and an RTL show with the filmmaker from 1991 reflect on the film’s demands. In the RTL program ‘Explosiv – Der heiÙe Stuhl’ (Explosive – The Hot Seat), recorded twenty years after the premiere of his work, Rosa von Praunheim once again calls on members of his community to end secrecy and publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation.

Rosa von Praunheim was born Holger Radke in Riga in 1942. He studied fine art at the University of the Arts in West Berlin and adopted the alias “Rosa von Praunheim” in the mid-1960s. During this time, he made his filmmaking debut with experimental and short films and soon also began creating television films for the Hessischer Rundfunk and ZDF public television channels which garnered considerable attention.

His film manifesto ‘Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt’ heralded his breakthrough in 1971. Over the next five decades, Rosa von Praunheim directed more than 150 short and feature-length films, staged plays for the theater, painted and wrote poetry. He was also an active advocate for the gay rights movement, appearing on talk shows and participating in public debates. The filmmaker died in Berlin in December 2025; part of his estate is held in the Deutsche Kinemathek archives.

‘Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt’ (FRG 1971, WDR, dir. Rosa von Praunheim)

Panel discussion about ‘Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt’ (FRG 1972, WDR)

‘Explosiv – Der heiÙe Stuhl’ (FRG 1991, RTL, guest: Rosa von Praunheim)

Idea, concept and editing: Klaudia Wick

Visuals

Mainstream film history comprises iconic images and memorable one-liners from stars such as Marlene Dietrich, James Dean and Billy Wilder. But how can queer cinema history be told in an iconic way when a canonization of queer filmmaking is still largely lacking to this day? In the “Visuals” section of the exhibition, themed chapters guide visitors intuitively through the Halle.

A queer cinema “by us for us” could only emerge in Germany after the abolition of Paragraph 175, when male homosexuality was no longer prosecuted as a crime. In the wake of Rosa von Praunheim’s film ‘Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt’, gay and lesbian initiatives sprang up all over West Germany and film was a key medium for such groups from the very beginning. In 1985, Manfred Salzgeber founded his independent film distribution company in West Berlin and created its first catalogs with glue sticks and scissors.

“In my life as a film distributor, I’ve watched thousands of queer films and brought hundreds of them to German cinemas. We can now hang a small selection of 246 images from these films in this grand hall, and the design by the Chezweitz scenography firm allows for both order and disorder. Some of the images were created in very different places and at very different times, and yet they all belong together and tell similar stories of experiences and longings. This is an invitation to look closely, to look from a different perspective and to wander through the Halle.” (Björn Koll)

“Celebrating Queer Cinema” media installation

A triptych of film screens for moving images has been deliberately placed at the top end of the Halle, serving as a focal point of the tour. Here, Derek Jarman, Monika Treut, Greta Schiller, James Bidgood and many more come together with excerpts from a total of 90 films being displayed. This, too, is an invitation to look more closely and discover more.

Forty-one and three-quarter years of Salzgeber on three screens with a total of 90 films – and there are still a few hundred more in the archives. This media installation of approximately 30 minutes in length presents a montage of 90 films on three six-meter-wide screens and forms the emotional heart of the exhibition. The title refers to the history of the Salzgeber film distribution company.

Twenty-two key films deserve to be mentioned here:

‘The Summer with Carmen’, GRE 2023, dir.

Zacharias Mavroeidis

'Captain Faggotron Saves the Universe', GER
2023, dir. Harvey Rabbit

'Blue', GBR 1993, dir. Derek Jarman

'Équation à un inconnu', FRA 1980, dir.
Dietrich de Velsa

'100 Days Before the Command', USSR 1990,
dir. Hussein Erkenov

'No Skin Off My Ass', FRG/CAN 1990, dir.
Bruce LaBruce

'Kamikaze Hearts', USA 1986, dir. Juliet
Bashore

'Canary', RSA 2018, dir. Christiaan Olwagen

'Before Stonewall', USA 1984, dir. Greta
Schiller

'The Garden', GBR 1990, dir. Derek Jarman

'Sequin in a Blue Room', AUS 2019, dir.
Samuel Van Grinsven

'Westler', FRG 1985, dir. Wieland Speck

'Nighthawks', GBR 1978, dir. Ron Peck and
Paul Hallam

'Kiss Me – Kyss mig', SWE 2011, dir.
Alexandra-Therese Keining

'Verführung: Die grausame Frau', FRG 1985,
dir. Elfi Mikesch and Monika Treut

'Fireworks', ITA 2023, dir. Giuseppe Fiorello

'Common Threads – Stories from the Quilt',
USA 1989, dir. Rob Epstein and Jeffrey
Friedman

'120 BPM', FRA 2017, dir. Robin Campillo

'Pink Narcissus', USA 1971, dir. James
Bidgood

'Bent', GBR/JPN 1997, dir. Sean Mathias

'Woman of...!', POL/SWE 2023, dir. Małgorzata
Szumowska and Michał Englert

'Viva', IRL 2015, dir. Paddy Breathnach

Based on an idea by: Björn Koll

In collaboration with: Nils Warnecke and Georg Simbeni

Editing: Stanisław Miłkowski

Manfred's box

The diversity of Manfred Salzgeber's outreach work is presented in its own viewing station. Recordings from the Kino Babylon in Berlin-Kreuzberg document Manfred Salzgeber's "Introduction to Queer Film History" from 1993. Video recording: Wieland Speck
Interviews with colleagues present Salzgeber as a dedicated cultural mediator.

Among the colleagues and friends who express appreciation of his work are:

John van den Broek, historian and former AIDS counselor

Jürgen Brüning, producer and filmmaker

Erika de Hadeln, then head of coordination and protocol at the Berlin International Film Festival

Moritz de Hadeln, then director of the Berlin International Film Festival

Peter Hedenström, founder of the Prinz Eisenherz bookshop

Jim Hubbard, co-founder of MIX – the New York Queer Experimental Film Festival

Ulrike Ottinger, filmmaker

Rosa von Praunheim, filmmaker

Heiner Roß, film historian and long-time manager of the Metropolis cinema in Hamburg

Gus van Sant, filmmaker

Margaret von Schiller, then program coordinator of the Panorama section at the Berlin International Film Festival

Wieland Speck, director and long-time program director of the Panorama section at the Berlin International Film Festival

Ula Stöckl, filmmaker

Jerry Tartaglia, filmmaker and film historian

Monika Treut, filmmaker

The interviews were conducted by curator Ingo Taubhorn in 1999 for the exhibition entitled "Unmittelbare Vergangenheit – Unterbrochene Karrieren. Drei Kulturvermittler der achtziger Jahre" ("Immediate Past – Interrupted Careers: Three Cultural Mediators of the Eighties") held at the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (New Society for Visual Art, nGbK) in Berlin.

Texts and quotes

"Inventing Queer Cinema" not only aims to capture iconic images of queer filmmaking, it also seeks to put queer film history into words. Texts, books, interviews and quotations all play a prominent role in the exhibition. A large-scale projection confronts visitors with controversial statements from

Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Frank Ripplloh, juxtaposed with interpretations, assertions and commentary by Barbara Hammer, Manfred Salzgeber, Todd Verow and many others.

Elsewhere, quotations are presented in the form of a screenplay-style dialogue. In a fictional neighborhood bar, exhibition curator Björn Koll discusses utopian queer cinema, equality and the lack of both appreciation and funding – as well as love, hope and tenderness – with Arabella Wintermayer, Catherine Deneuve, Wieland Speck and others. The ‘Inventing Queer Cinema’ screenplay can be found in the reading corner where various books on queer film history are also available for visitors to browse.

Queer! Focus on television

The portrayal of queer diversity on German television has changed dramatically in recent decades: from isolated, often stereotypical characters to more nuanced and varied stories and images. The “Queer! Focus on television” section explores this development across four thematic areas: “Films and series”, “Entertainment”, “Talk shows” and “Children’s television”. The shift is particularly evident in fictional productions: previously, homosexual characters were rare in films and series and, when they did appear, were usually depicted in stereotypical ways. Today, while still underrepresented, they are more frequently portrayed as complex characters with their own individual stories and lifestyles. Entertainment has also opened up new avenues: since the 1990s, particularly the private television channels have produced talent shows and reality TV formats in which queer contestants have shared their personal stories and become the protagonists of their own experiences. Talk shows reflect the social debates of their time: topics such as AIDS, coming out and trans identity have been publicly discussed in such programs and queer people have spoken about their own experiences. Children’s television has only recently started to address questions of sexual and gender diversity – and, even today, simply mentioning these topics sparks repeated and heated public debate.

Films and series

Programs include ‘Das Ende der Beherrschung’ (FRG 1977, WDR), ‘Lindenstraße’ – episode 225: Räumaktionen (FRG 1990, WDR), ‘Schwarze Früchte’ (GER 2024, ARD Degeto)

ausgeschlossen’ – episode 6 (FRG 1975, WDR), ‘Kroymann’ – episode 14: Viele gute Vorsätze (GER 2020, RB/SWR/NDR/WDR), ‘Die Küblböck-Story – Eure Lana Kaiser’ (GER 2025, BR/WDR)

Talk shows

Entertainment

Programs include ‘Spätere Heirat nicht

Programs include ‘Je später der Abend’ from 4.9.1976 (FRG 1976, WDR) guest: trans

activist Gerda Hoffmann, 'Explosiv – Der heiße Stuhl' from 10.12.1991 (GER 1991, RTL), guest: Rosa von Praunheim, '13 Fragen – Mann, Frau, divers: Sollten wir unser Geschlecht selbstständig wählen dürfen?' (GER 2022, ZDFmediathek)

Children's television

Programs include 'Die Pfefferkörner' – episode 181: Weil ich ein Mädchen bin (GER 2017, NDR), 'Raketenflieger Timmi: Der dunkle Planet' (GER 2021, RBB/MDR/NDR), 'Die Sendung mit der Maus' – episode 2461: König und König (GER 2024, WDR)

Idea and concept: Tom Winter and Klaudia Wick

SCHALTWERK (SWITCH ROOM), 2nd Floor Schatzkammer (Treasure Chamber)

Queer cinema talks about us: our stories and experiences, our perspectives and desires – from our own points of view. For this exhibition, the Salzgeber film distribution company has opened its archive for the very first time and made it available to the Deutsche Kinemathek Foundation. Records from the 1970s and 1980s attest to the commitment, ingenuity and networking of Manfred Salzgeber and his colleagues who have significantly shaped the history of queer German film. Through their distribution company, the Panorama section of the Berlin International Film Festival, the Teddy Award and numerous other initiatives, they have made a substantial contribution to the institutionalization of queer film.

In the "Schatzkammer" ("treasure chamber"), this story is also told via personal objects – emotional, contradictory and queer in the best sense of the word. These objects nod to the memories and conflicts, key moments and seemingly trivial details without which queer film history would be inconceivable.

Homage to Manfred Salzgeber: the short film 'Ich liebe Dich', GER 1994, dir. Wilhelm Hein

Film program

“The biggest queer film retrospective in the smallest cinema!”

Björn Koll

“Inventing Queer Cinema” also includes a comprehensive retrospective which is showing a total of 96 films from seven decades and 34 countries.

The program comprises iconic films from the extensive Salzgeber archive by directors including Monika Treut, Frank Ripplloh and Wieland Speck, alongside more recent works. It is complemented by films from the Deutsche Kinemathek’s own holdings and its network, including works by Rosa von Praunheim, Elfi Mikesch and Ulrike Ottinger.

Many of the topics and decades explored in the exhibition are mirrored in the Studiokino program: with reference to the exhibition’s Prologue, we are screening ‘Michael’, a silent film by the Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer from 1924 which uses suggestive glances and gestures, as well as extravagant artworks and sets, to depict a love triangle and the unrequited love of one man for another. Leontine Sagan’s film ‘Mädchen in Uniform’ (GER, 1931), about repressed lesbian love at a girls’ boarding school, is considered the first film in history to openly address lesbian desire.

Another important chapter in queer film history is that of films about AIDS. Made in 1985, ‘Buddies’ was the first feature film about the epidemic. The fact that Arthur J. Bressan Jr.’s film was unable to find a distributor or theatrical release in Germany prompted Manfred Salzgeber to found his own independent distribution company in the same year. The British director Derek Jarman must also be mentioned in this context: ‘Blue’ (GBR 1993), in which the director profoundly grapples with his own AIDS diagnosis, is an aesthetically challenging and thought-provoking film. The artist unflinchingly confronts the illness which is slowly causing him to go blind and will lead to his inevitable death with a blue canvas that is open on all sides.

Several documentaries portray the early gay and lesbian movements as well as iconic figures of queer resistance including ‘Before Stonewall’ (USA 1984, dir. Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg) and ‘Audre Lorde – Die Berliner Jahre 1984-1992’ (GER 2011, dir. Dagmar Schultz). And, in their classic ‘The Celluloid Closet’ (USA 1995), Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman adapted Vito Russo’s eponymous book on queer film history.

The diverse range of countries represented in Salzgeber’s film, distribution and cinema work is reflected in the Studiokino program with works such as ‘Rafiki’ by Wanuri Kahiu from 2018 – the first Kenyan film with a queer subject matter. Other films being shown include ‘100 Days Before the Command’, directed by Hussein Erkenov (USSR 1990), and ‘Tropical Malady’ by Apichatpong

Weerasethakul (THA 2004), as well as works by internationally renowned filmmakers such as Raoul Peck, André Téchiné, Yony Leyser, Bruce LaBruce, Angelina Maccarone, Sébastien Lifshitz, Małgorzata Szumowska and many more.

The 96 films in the program can be viewed in their entirety in the Kinemathek's Studiokino during the exhibition's opening hours. Admission to the cinema is included in the cost of the entrance ticket and the intimate Studiokino offers 28 comfortable seats – on a first come, first served basis. A reasonably priced season ticket for the exhibition allows for multiple visits.

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General Information

Title: **Inventing Queer Cinema**

Duration: **7.5.–13.9.26**

Location: Deutsche Kinemathek, Mauerstraße 79, 10117 Berlin

Opening times: Thursday to Sunday, 10 am to 6 pm

Admission: €10 day ticket, €7 concessions

Season ticket €25, permits multiple visits to the exhibition and the film program in the Studiokino

Exhibition spaces: Halle (former machine hall), Schaltwerk (former switch room), Studiokino (studio cinema in the Halle)

Halle: ground floor, 600 m² exhibition space, 8.75 m floor-to-ceiling height

Schaltwerk: 2nd floor, 162 m² exhibition space, 4 m floor-to-ceiling height

Accessibility: unfortunately, the Schaltwerk (switch room) has limited accessibility. The “Schatzkammer” (“Treasure Chamber”) can be reached by elevator with assistance and some of the exhibits there are located on levels that are not wheelchair accessible. Supplementary panels and illustrations are being provided to ensure that all significant information is available to all visitors.

Studiokino: ground floor, 55 m² auditorium, 28 seats

14+

The exhibition is recommended for visitors aged 14 and over.

Content notes

Some of the works and film excerpts shown in this exhibition address and, in some cases, explicitly depict violence, sexuality and nudity.

In addition, topics such as discrimination, mental health issues and suicide are explored.

The projection on the three large screens intermittently features high-impact audiovisual techniques, including strobe-like and rapidly changing image sequences.

Please note that each of the films showing in the Studiokino has its own FSK age rating. We ask all visitors to heed these age ratings when attending a screening.