

Collecting for the Future

250 Years of the ALBERTINA

19 June – 11 October 2026

At the beginning of July 1776, the Austrian envoy in Venice, Count Giacomo Durazzo, presented Duke Albert of Saxe-Teschen and Archduchess Marie Christine with a collection of 10,000 engravings. This moment, coinciding with the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America on July 4, 1776, retrospectively marks the beginning of the ALBERTINA's famous collection. It stands at the dawn of an era of profound political, economic, and social transformation on the eve of the French Revolution. At the same time, it was the age of the Enlightenment, in which reason, science, education, and individual freedom became central ideals. From this intellectual climate emerged a collection that remains guided by the conviction that art should not only be preserved, but made meaningful for future generations.

250 years later, the ALBERTINA, with around 1.2 million works, ranks among the world's most important art museums. What began as an aristocratic private collection of graphic art has evolved into an internationally renowned museum whose holdings range from drawings and prints to photography, painting, sculpture, installation, and media art. This development is the result of the vision and dedication of generations of directors, curators, collectors, and patrons.

The anniversary in 2026 provides an opportunity to reconsider the history of collecting. Who collected? What was collected, and how? Where were the works stored, how were they presented, and to whom were they accessible? Such questions lead directly into the history of the institution and its protagonists. In this context, Archduchess Marie Christine also comes more strongly into focus. Although the ALBERTINA bears Duke Albert's name, it was her fortune that made the acquisition of

art possible to a decisive extent. She also brought her own early enthusiasm for art into the marriage and thus played a key role in shaping the origins of the collection.

The exhibition tells the story of these beginnings as well as of those works that are now inseparably linked to the ALBERTINA. How and when did Dürer's Young Hare enter the collection, becoming the museum's worldwide emblem? When did the famous works by Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele become part of the holdings? Since when has there been a photography collection? And when did the museum expand into painting, sculpture, installation, and media art? Each of these questions demonstrates that the history of the collection is always also the history of the museum itself.

Throughout its history, the ALBERTINA has continuously transformed while remaining true to its core identity. A private archducal palace became a public museum of international standing. Growing collections required new storage and exhibition spaces, new scholarly methods, and new forms of mediation and outreach. At the same time, the ambition to collect the art of its own time and thereby help shape the future has remained unchanged.

As part of this special anniversary, the internationally renowned artist Rosa Barba has been invited to create a site-specific work reflecting on the historical dimensions of the ALBERTINA as a place where past, present, and future intersect. Following the exhibition, the work will become part of the very collection that this anniversary seeks both to reflect upon and to redefine for the future.

For an anniversary is not merely an occasion to look back. It is also an invitation to think ahead: collecting means responsibility, legacy, and mission — for the present and the future of the ALBERTINA.