

Broken Promise



(c) Karin Berkemann

Exhibition on Churches and Department Stores

The Project

Churches and department stores both make a promise of happiness through striking architecture in prime locations – a promise they are increasingly unable to fulfil. To restore the appeal of these public places, four fellows developed new ideas over a period of three months. Their work was presented by the German Forum for Churches and Cultural Heritage in summer 2026 as part of the “Bauhaus Dessau 100” centenary celebrations.

The Background

In the video sculpture “TikTok Aesthetics”, artist Karla Zipfel staged commercial and sacred buildings as popular nostalgia content. In his project “Roofs of the Same Order”, photographer Louis Volkmann portrayed two East German modernist places of worship and a supermarket, all sharing the same HP shell-roof construction. Finally, the model installations “+” by architects Marius Busch and Maximilian Hartinger explored different concepts for how new forms of energy can breathe new life into abandoned places. The exhibition “Broken Promise” was shown in the former Zeeck department store in Dessau. The project was funded by the German Foundation for Monument Protection and curated by Prof. Dr Karin Berkemann of the German Forum for Churches and Cultural Heritage at Anhalt University of Applied Sciences.

The Outcome

Das The former Zeeck department store opened in Dessau in 1908 and was extended in the 1920s. Restored after the Second World War and given a sky-blue curtain wall in the 1970s, it later sold clothing under the name “Magnet”. Today, the building bears witness to modern department-store architecture, while its material layers tell more than a century of urban history.

Here, the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation’s exhibition “Algae | Debris | CO2” focused on interdisciplinary applications that combine and advance aesthetic and sustainable design. Curated by Barbara Steiner and Juliane Aleithe, the exhibition explored alternative approaches to building and was conceived to be carbon-neutral. On the same floor as “Algae | Debris | CO2”, “Broken Promise” formed part of the “renaissance” series. This satellite project by the Design and Architecture departments at Anhalt University of Applied Sciences addressed the rebirth of a new approach to resources.

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