KKR mittendrin x Manifesta 16 Ruhr x Kunstforum

"This is not a church"

Saturday, 20.6.2026, 1 - 3 pm

Location: Heilig-Kreuz-Kirche, Gelsenkirchen

The KKR mittendrin “This is not a church” symposium focuses on the adaptive reuse of post-war churches in the Ruhr region. It ties in with the curatorial concept of Manifesta 16 Ruhr, understood as a bottom-up initiative where human interaction and dialogue are central to the transformation of the region’s industrial heritage. The biennale highlights artistic and architectural experiments that reimagine church spaces as open, participatory platforms for civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and collective imagination.

The symposium sees artistic interventions as a key driver of transformation, exploring how cultural reactivation can generate new social meanings and functions. The goal is to renegotiate social and socio-political questions and to develop impulses for the future use of vacant sacred spaces in urban neighborhoods, also drawing on international model projects (e.g., from the Netherlands and the UK).

KKR mittendrin “This is not a church” is a joint event of Manifesta 16 Ruhr in cooperation with the art magazine KUNSTFORUM International, which dedicates its May issue’s cover story to the artistic concept of Manifesta 16 Ruhr.

Key discussion questions:

- Vacant churches become laboratories for innovative urban coexistence during Manifesta 16 Ruhr: Who sets the framework for negotiating new ideas and concepts? How can urban society be involved?

- What motivates and challenges artists, urban planners, and church/community decision-makers to repurpose vacant churches? What conditions are necessary?

- How do the artistic concepts and strategies of Manifesta 16 Ruhr convince? How is the topic addressed in neighboring European countries, such as the Netherlands? Which international concepts could be pioneering for transformation processes in the Ruhr area?

Process:

13:00 Welcome **Garrelt Duin**, Regional Director, Regionalverband Ruhr

Welcome **Hedwig Fijen**, Director Manifesta 16 Ruhr

13:10 Keynote: International perspective of the topic in relation to the specific situation of the Ruhr area

Judith Toebast, Program Management, Future of Religious Heritage, Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed

13:30 Panel discussion

Josep Bohigas, First Creative Mediator, Manifesta 16 Ruhr

Dr. Ann-Katrin Günzel, editor-in-chief, KUNSTFORUM International

Peter Köddermann, Managing Director, Baukultur NRW

Sven Thorissen, Architect and Director, MVRDV

Judith Toebast, Program Management, Future of Religious Heritage, Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed

Prof. Dr. Renée Tribble, Professor in the FG Urban Planning, Urban Planning and Urban Design Processes, TU Dortmund

Moderation: **Hedwig Fijen**, Director Manifesta 16 Ruhr

14:30 Q & A with the audience

The KKR mittendrin will be held in English.