

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS

## Conference “Materiality and Color in Modernist Architecture: From Science to Everyday Heritage Conservation”

The international conference took place in Berlin from May 7–9, 2026. It was organized in cooperation with ICOMOS Germany, the Berlin Heritage Authority, the Technical University of Munich, the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts, and the Berlin Chamber of Architects, and was sponsored by the Wüstenrot Foundation.

The conference project focused on the architectural surfaces of Modernism, particularly their materiality and color. The goal was to examine how historical knowledge, materials science research, and methodological approaches can strengthen today’s practice of preserving modern architecture.

The conference also marked the conclusion of the research project *The Materiality and Color of the ‘Berlin Modernism Housing Estates’ – A Critical Review of Conservation, Restoration, and Materials Science Investigation Methods throughout the History of Restoration*, which was carried out by the Technical University of Munich and the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts. At the same time, it was intended as a continuation of the project *Inventory of the Brenne Architekten material sample archive*, funded by the Wüstenrot Foundation.

Modernist architecture – for instance UNESCO-protected Berlin housing estates like the Hufeisensiedlung (Horseshoe Estate) and the Gartenstadt Falkenberg – is internationally recognized, but has thus far been studied primarily from the perspective of architectural history. Aspects such as materiality, surface aesthetics, and methodological principles have remained largely overlooked. Against this backdrop, a critical reassessment of restoration strategies and material analysis methods appeared necessary. The aim of the conference was therefore to facilitate an international and interdisciplinary exchange on materials science research, reproducible research methodology, and sustainable conservation strategies for modernist architectural surfaces.



The conference brought together experts from various disciplines (architecture, restoration, art history, and the natural sciences) in the field of heritage conservation.

The first section of the English-language conference focused on materiality and color. Topics discussed included the development of industrially manufactured building materials in Italy and the transition from hand-mixed to industrially prefabricated paints in England. In addition, case studies were presented, including Otto Wagner's Austrian Postal Savings Bank in Vienna, a stucco ceiling with an imitation carpet pattern, and the color scheme of the "Cuisine Atelier Le Corbusier, Type 1" built-in kitchen.



The second section focused on research methods. In addition to a case study on the long-standing research practice at the Pullman Court housing complex in London, scientific analytical methods – particularly for fine plasters – as well as approaches to standardized metadata collection for cultural heritage were presented.

The third section on the second day of the conference was devoted to the practical conservation of modernist buildings. Presentations covered investigations and restoration measures at Berlin housing estates, including the UNESCO World Heritage sites Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf and Hufeisensiedlung, as well as lesser-known complexes such as the Ceciliengärten. In addition, significant individual monuments such as the Rufer House by Adolf Loos in Vienna, as well as the Casa sobre el Arroyo and the Casa Estudio para Artistas in Argentina, were discussed.

The concluding session focused on the findings of the research project on Berlin Modernist Housing Estates. In addition to the history of restoration and the research methods employed, the materiality and color schemes were analyzed in particular. The methodological guideline for the investigation and documentation of these aspects developed as part of this project was presented and subsequently discussed with the audience in a participatory session.

The conference concluded with a panel discussion addressing issues of practical heritage conservation and urban planning challenges.

On the third day of the conference there were site visits, which took participants to the Hufeisensiedlung, the Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf, and the Academy of Arts' depot on display. The guided tours were supported by the Academy of Arts and the association "Friends and Supporters of the Hufeisensiedlung Berlin-Britz e.V."



There was considerable interest in the materiality and color schemes of historic buildings in general and in modernist housing estates in particular. A total of around 170 people attended the conference. The professional exchange on heritage conservation issues related to modernist buildings highlighted the diversity of conservation practice and opened up new perspectives that should be taken into account in the future.

Report: Jana Hainbach, Dörthe Hellmuth  
Photos: Dörthe Hellmuth, Sinead Uhle