

Press Release

6 March 2023

To celebrate the 100th birthday of Walter Jens on 8 March 2023 the archives of Inge and Walter Jens have been indexed in full

The 100th anniversary of Walter Jens's birth falls on 8 March 2023. Even during his lifetime, the writer, classical philologist and translator, literary and social critic, essayist, accomplished speaker and professor of rhetoric was honoured with titles such as "Homme de Lettres", "Poeta doctus" and "Master of Rhetoric".

Jens has a strong connection with the **Akademie der Künste** having been its president between 1989 and 1997. Following German reunification, the two Academies that had emerged in East and West Berlin were amalgamated, and particular credit is due to Jens for the skill with which he managed this difficult and controversial process, which was the subject of heated discussion. In the face of strong resistance, he advocated an equal union of the two academies and his work to achieve this goal did much to secure the future of the Academy with its large interdisciplinary art archive.

Jens consigned the writings in his pre-mortem estate to the Literature Archives of the Akademie der Künste in 1994. This was followed twenty years later by the personal archive of his wife, the philologist and editor Inge Jens (1927–2021). The **Inge and Walter Jens Archive** has since been fully catalogued and is now available to the public for research purposes. Some 20 linear metres of manuscripts from all periods have been preserved: these include literary and scholarly works and essayistic and journalistic pieces as well as speeches in manuscript form, translations and publications. There are also letters, biographical documents, photos and audiovisual materials and the estate library. Files in the Academy's Historical Archives provide information about Jens's membership of the West Berlin Akademie der Künste, which he joined in 1961, and his time as a corresponding member of the Akademie der Künste der DDR (East German Academy of Arts) from 1986 on. They also shed light on his involvement in various Academy committees and his work as president and honorary president.

Walter Jens was born in Hamburg on 8 March 1923. Disqualified from military service on account of his asthma, Jens studied classical philology and German studies in Hamburg and Freiburg between 1941 and 1944. From 1947 until his retirement, he was professor of classical philology and general rhetoric at the University of Tübingen. His first novel came out in 1950. Jens's early belletristic works made him one of the key young exponents of critical literature in post-war West Germany. He subsequently shifted focus and concentrated on writing essays of literary criticism – he became a prominent and highly influential literary critic.

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As a committed democrat, Jens spoke in public debates, taking a position on political issues in particular: as a result, he had an impact on cultural and political events. He was one of West Germany's most important intellectuals. He died in Tübingen on 9 June 2013 after a long illness.

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Inge and Walter Jens Archive

[Estate catalogue](#) (German only)

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