

WINTERREISE
ROBERT HAMMERSTIEL
Drawings and Prints
06.02. – 27.04.2009



Robert Hammerstiel, From the »Die Winterreise« Cycle: In the Village, 1996

REQUEST REFERENCE

Leopold Museum-Privatstiftung
MuseumsQuartier Vienna
1070 Wien, Museumsplatz 1
www.leopoldmuseum.org

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ROBERT HAMMERSTIEL
WINTERREISE
Drawings and Prints
6 February 2009 – 27 April 2009

“Drawing is the foundation of my work. I always look at the drawing first so that I know if the painting is good. To me drawing is like a mother who carries her child into life. There is a saying that the apple does not fall far from the tree trunk, and it is that way in art too. The apple is the painting, but the drawing is the tree trunk.” This is how the artist Robert Hammerstiel, who was born in 1933 in Vršac (Werschetz) in the Banat (today Serbia), expresses the significance of drawing within the entirety of his artistic creation.

As a follow-up to a 2006 exhibition of the artist’s paintings at the Leopold Museum (“Images by a Contemporary Witness”), Hammerstiel’s graphic work is the focus of the current show. Around 50 prints (woodcuts and steel monotypes) and 25 drawings provide insight into the many-layered graphic oeuvre of Robert Hammerstiel.

The exhibition at the Leopold Museum, which is personally curated by Rudolf Leopold, is entitled “Winterreise” (Winter Journey), an allusion to Schubert’s famous song cycle. The exhibition title accents Hammerstiel’s feeling of being a “kindred spirit” with the composer Franz Schubert (1797–1828). Like Schubert’s wanderer, who goes out into the cold winter night to undertake a journey without aim or hope, Hammerstiel experiences himself as a wanderer, driven and restless.

In a project marked by his childhood experiences of exile and internment – after escaping from the camp he one night heard his dead grandmother singing Schubert’s “Winterreise” – Robert Hammerstiel created a series of drawings and woodcuts inspired by Schubert’s song cycle after poems by Wilhelm Müller (1794–1827). The artist feels a deep admiration for Schubert and considers him the most important musician alongside Johann Sebastian Bach. For Hammerstiel, Schubert is the “greatest genius of all music” who made the “tremendous achievement of integrating the Slavonic minor modes into his music.” Schubert set the poems in the year of Wilhelm Müller’s death. The two never met. Only a year later, in 1828, Schubert died at the young age of 31. Hammerstiel’s “Winterreise” series was occasioned by the composer’s 200th birthday in 1997 as well as by the 50th anniversary of his own “Winter Journey”, his escape from the Gakova internment camp in 1947.

Music has always been a key source of inspiration for Robert Hammerstiel. He refers to visual art as the “twin brother” of music. The artist remembers: “When I heard music coming from a scratchy gramophone in my parents garden, I would draw or mould figures using the clay from the nearby pond while I was listening. Hearing music was linked to seeing my surroundings.”

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Hammerstiel did not limit himself to merely interpreting Schubert's "Winterreise". He also published a graphic cycle dealing with his own "Winter Journey". It is a story of war, exile, internment and flight. Toward the end of the Second World War, in 1944, Soviet troops and the Yugoslavian Liberation Army marched into Vršac. Robert Hammerstiel experienced the expulsion of the German-speaking population as an eleven-year-old. He was imprisoned in a camp, while his mother was abducted. On several occasions he was transferred to other camps. His internment was marked by cold, hunger, illness, terror and death. In 1947 he succeeded in fleeing the Gakova camp and escaping to Hungary, and later to Lower Austria.

In the small Lower Austrian city of Ternitz, Robert Hammerstiel found a new home. Nevertheless, the terrible, traumatic experiences of war and internment have never let go of him, and they contribute an admonishing element to his work. And yet despite all of the negative experiences of his youth, Robert Hammerstiel still feels attached to his old homeland. His thinking and creativity is dedicated to peace, to filling in the trenches and to renouncing ideologies.

In addition to the work involving the "Winterreise" theme, the exhibition also presents drawings and woodcuts as well as intensely colourful steel monotypes created between the 1960s and 2008, including two impressive large-format works of almost seven meter's length, the "Dance of Death" and the "Kindertotenlieder" (Songs on the Death of Children).

This exhibition is made possible through the co-operation of the Leopold Museum's long-time partner, the Vienna Insurance Group, whose art collection includes a number of important works by the artist.

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ROBERT HAMMERSTIEL

“Throughout one’s life, one draws strength and inspiration from childhood.”

Robert Hammerstiel’s work is profoundly related to the course of his life and emerges directly from the reality that he experienced in his youth. He was born on 18 February 1933 in Vršac/Werschetz in the Banat (today Serbia). His mother Therese Hammerstiel, née Schiff, came from the Banat’s haute bourgeoisie, while his father Anton Hammerstiel grew up in modest circumstances and operated a bakery, working as an icon painter on the side. Toward the end of the Second World War, Hammerstiel became a witness and victim of the exile and persecution of the Banat’s German-speaking population. He was confined in a camp, while his mother was abducted.

Robert Hammerstiel survived the atrocities of the war. In 1947 he and his mother succeeded in fleeing to Austria via Hungary. As refugees they settled in Ternitz/Lower Austria. After completing an apprenticeship as a baker, he began work as a caster in the emerging Ternitz steel industry. In 1950 Hammerstiel’s father returned from captivity as a prisoner of war, and soon he awakened in his son an interest in painting and drawing. Studies at the Wiener Kunstschule followed. While initially he primarily depicted motifs from his immediate surroundings, Hammerstiel toward the end of the 1960s began working through the intense experiences of his childhood. His palette, previously naturalistic and light, became dark and gloomy, the figures faceless and like stencils or cut-outs. As a “survivor among many casualties” Hammerstiel has continuously warned in his painting and graphic work against forgetting the events of his youth. He is seeking his lost roots – his lost paradise – and thus endeavours to paint and draw them back into existence through art.

Gradually Hammerstiel became known to the public through his first exhibitions and awards, especially those involving his graphics and woodcuts. A solo show at the Austrian Cultural Institute in New York in 1988, and the encounter with American painting that it entailed, provided the impetus for a new work phase: Robert Hammerstiel discovered colour and form in his work anew, often forcing shrill colours into balanced harmony in radical compositions. After an exhibition of Hammerstiel’s paintings in 2006, Rudolf Leopold is now showing a cross section of the artist’s graphic oeuvre. In allusion to Schubert’s song cycle and the “kindred spirit” shared by Robert Hammerstiel and the composer Franz Schubert, the exhibition is entitled “Winterreise”. Like Schubert, Hammerstiel also feels that he is a wanderer, driven and restless. He has devoted numerous cycles, paintings and drawings to his favourite composer, and on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his own personal “Winter Journey” he created an autobiographical series.

“Throughout one’s life, one draws strength and inspiration from childhood,” says Robert Hammerstiel, who with advancing age travels with increasing frequency to Vršac, always seeking to rediscover his roots. He has also discovered the life and culture of Serbia, and thus his work also brings the proud history of the Banat into the present.

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1997, Schubert Journal

SCHUBERT WAR „DER WANDERER“, IN WAHRSTEN SINNE EIN GETRIEBENER. EIN LEBEN — HATTE ER WIE EIN BETTGEHER UND EIN-BITTGÄNGER. SCHUBERT IST EIN KIND DES FRÜHEN 19. JAHRHUNDERTS UND DES VOR-MÄRZ. DA GAB ES ABERTAUSENDE RUHELOSE, HERUMZIEHENDE SPIELLEUTE, BÄNKELSÄNGER, BETTLER, HAUSIERENDE TASCHENKRÄMER VON DER HAND IN DEN MUND LEBENETAG-LÖHNER IMMER DIE WANDERER, DIE EN-DLOSEN WANDERER.

ABER IST ES HEUTE VIEL ANDERS GEWORDEN? HEUTE IN UNSEREM RUHELOSEN, VON FORTWÄHRENDE KRIEGEN UND VERTREIB-UNGEN HEIMGESUCHTEN 20. JAHRHUNDERT? WENN MAN IN DIESEM JAHRHUNDERT DIE LEBENSWEGE GROSSER KOMPONISTEN BETRACHTET, SO WAREN ES AUCH DIE VON WANDERERN.

RACHMANINOV FLÜCHTETE 1917 AUS SEINER RUSSISCHEN HEIMAT NACH SCHWEDEN UND, OBGLEICH EIN GEFEIERTER PIANIST, IRRTE ER FOLGEND IN DER GANZEN WELT UMHERR. NIE WIEDER SAH ER SEINE HEIMAT, ER STARB 1943 IN DEN USA. BARTÓK FLÜCHTETE 1939 AUS UNGARN EBENFALLS IN DIE USA. WO ER VERARMT UND VERLASSEN 1945 STARB, OHNE JEMALS WIEDER SEINE HEIMAT ZU SEHEN. ÄHNLICHE SCHICK-SALE HATTEN AUCH BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ, ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG UND VIELE ANDERE.

AUCH ICH HABE SEHR UNTER DEN VERHEER-UNGEN UND DEN TRAGÖDIEN UNSERES JAHRHUNDERTS GELITTEN UND HABE UN-

GEHEUERLICHES ENTSETZEN EMPFUNDEN UND SCHRECKLICHE BESTIALITÄTEN ERDULDEN MÜSSEN, VOR ALLEM IN MEINER KINDHEIT UND JUGEND. AUCH ICH BIN EIN WANDERER, IMMER, UND HABE NOCH IMMER DIE UNRUHE DES FORT-WÄHRENDE UMHERZIEHENS IN MIR. ICH KENNE DAS VERTRIEBENWERDEN UND DAS AUSGESETZT SEIN, DAS IRREN IN EINEM WINTER.

AUS DIESEM GRUNDE VERSTEHE ICH SCHUBERT UND SEINE LIEDER, DASS ER DIE LYRIK VON WILHELM MÜLLER, HEINRICH HEINE UND JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE AUSGEWÄHLT HAT, UM SIE ZU VERTONEN. DA AUCH ER DAS AUSWEGLOSE WANDERN AM EIGENEN LEIB ERFAHREN MUSSTE. AM ENDE BLIEB IHM NUR „DES BACHES WIEGENLIED“, ABER DOCH AUCH DER — ER — BÄRMÜCHE „LEIERMANN“ MIT SEINEM LEER-EN TELLER UND DEN KNURRENDE HUNDEN.

Robert Schumann

BIOGRAPHY

- 1933 Robert Hammerstiel is born on 18 February as a child of German immigrants in a working-class neighbourhood of Vršac (Werschetz) in the Banat. Part of Austria-Hungary until the First World War, the Banat was divided between Rumania, Yugoslavia and Hungary in 1920. The region around Vršac was assigned to the former Kingdom of Serbia, thus becoming a part of the newly formed country of Yugoslavia. Robert Hammerstiel's family was also an interwoven net of various nationalities and social classes. His father Anton Hammerstiel came from a family of modest means and worked as a baker and icon painter. His mother Therese, née Schiff, came from the Banat haute bourgeoisie. In addition to a dyeworks, her family also owned a bakery.
- 1939 Hammerstiel attends a German and a Serbian primary school.
- 1941 The German army occupies the Banat.
From this point on, Hammerstiel attends a German primary school.
- 1944 Soviet troops and the Yugoslavian Liberation Army enter the Banat.
As an eleven-year-old Hammerstiel experiences the expulsion of the German-speaking population. He is transported to the Zichydorf internment camp; his mother is abducted.
- 1945 Together with his great-aunt and his brother Alfred, Hammerstiel is transferred to the Setschanfeld camp. Shortly thereafter all children are transferred to a camp in the northern Banat. Here Hammerstiel is reunited with his mother.
- 1946 Typhus breaks out in the camp at Molidorf. Hundreds of inmates die. Hammerstiel experiences widespread starvation and the psychological terror of imprisonment.
- 1947 Transfer from Molidorf to the camp Gakova. Hammerstiel contracts malaria. After his recovery he flees with his mother and brother across the border to Hungary, where they live from charity and odd jobs. In September the family succeeds in fleeing to Austria and is taken in by farmers in Lower Austria.
- 1948 Stay in a Viennese refugee camp.
- 1949 Hammerstiel begins an apprenticeship as a baker in Ternitz/Pottschach.
- 1950 Hammerstiel's father returns from imprisonment as a prisoner of war under the Soviets and gives his son instruction in painting and drawing; he also introduces him to icon painting.
- 1951 Completion of his baker's apprenticeship.
The artist's first painted and drawn studies depict motifs from his surroundings: portraits, still lifes, landscapes. Painting increasingly becomes a key aspect of his life.
- 1954 Austrian citizenship.
- 1955 Hammerstiel begins work as a caster at the Schoeller-Bleckmann steel mill in Ternitz.
- 1956 Marriage to Margareta Springer.

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- 1957 Through his participation in a competition held by the Austrian Federation of Trade, Hammerstiel wins a prize for young talent and is given the opportunity study art at the Wiener Kunstschule (Vienna Art School) beginning in 1959.
- 1959–1961 Studies in painting under Professor Gerda Matjeka-Felden at the Wiener Kunstschule.
- 1963–1965 Studies in painting and graphic art under Professor Robert Schmitt, Gerhard and August Swoboda, and Hans Stockbauer at the Wiener Kunstschule. Alongside his art studies, Hammerstiel continues working as a caster in Ternitz.
- 1964 Death of the artist's mother.
- 1968 First solo exhibition in Vienna.
Hammerstiel gradually begins to thematize the traumatic memories of his childhood. His palette, previously naturalistic and light, becomes dark and gloomy.
- 1971 First trip to the Banat and to Vršac since the exile of his family.
- 1972 Award and work purchase by the Wiener Städtischen Wechselseitigen Versicherungsgesellschaft (today the Vienna Insurance Group).
Graphic Prize of the Zentralsparkasse Wien.
Graphic Prize of the Voestalpine Linz.
- 1973 Austrian Graphic Prize Krems.
- 1974 First solo show abroad (Berlin West).
- 1979 Death of the artist's father.
- 1980 Trips to Florence and Rome with the director Wolfgang Lesowsky.
- 1981 Work in his birth city Vršac and in Austria on the film "Und da ich gesehen habe. Künstlerporträt Robert Hammerstiel" (And Since I Have Seen: A Portrait of the Artist Robert Hammerstiel; directed by W. Lesowsky).
- 1983 Retrospective on the occasion of the artist's 50th birthday at the Stadthalle Ternitz.
Publication of the book "Der Baum des Lebens" (The Tree of Life; Herold Verlag, Vienna/Munich).
- 1984 State Diploma of the Austrian Ministry of Commerce and the Economy for the book "Der Baum des Lebens".
- 1985 Awarded the title "Professor" by Austrian President Rudolf Kirchschläger.
- 1986 Symposium in Radevormwald on the cycle "Woodcuts on the Gospels".
- 1987 Stay in Lübeck. The City of Lübeck acquires the woodcut cycle "The Stations of the Cross".
- 1988 Hammerstiel leaves his day job, becoming a full-time artist. His first stay in New York on the occasion of a solo show at the Austrian Cultural Institute is of key importance in initiating a new work phase. The artist encounters the work of American artists and – fascinated by their large-format and vividly colourful approach to painting and by the brashness of big-city life – discovers colour and form in his work anew.
- 1989 Woodcut cycle "Braunschweig Dance of Death" for Galerie Schmücking.
Participation in a symposium on the woodcut cycle "Woodcuts on the Bible" in Reineberg und Lübbecke.
Trips to Israel and Ireland.

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- 1990 Woodcut cycle "German Catastrophe".
1993 Series exhibitions on the occasion of the artist's 60th birthday.
Hans Czettel Medal.
Honorary Ring of the City of Ternitz.
1995 Prince Eugene Medal in Vienna. Prize and Medal of the Galerie Körmendi in Budapest.
1996 Woodcut cycle "Schubert Songs", graphic cycle "To Franz Schubert", graphic cycle "Die Winterreise".
1997 Attends the "Schubertiade" in Feldkirch.
Teaching activity in Lübbecke, Reineberg and Geras.
1998 Series exhibitions on the occasion of the artist's 65th birthday. Golden Cross for Science and Art of the Republic of Austria.
Decree of Honour and Thanks of the National Museum Vršac.
1999 Trips to New York, Morocco and Holland. Cultural Prize of Baden-Württemberg.
Great Golden Medal of the Society of Austrian Artists at the Künstlerhaus, Vienna.
2000 Trips to New York, Cleveland, Philadelphia and Atlantic City.
2001 Protracted stay in New York.
2002 Trip to Vršac. Symposia in Budapest, Düsseldorf and Essen.
Awarded the honour "Knight of Hungarian Culture".
2003 After recovering from a serious illness, Hammerstiel pays tribute to his favourite artists in the cycle of the so-called "Homages".
2004 Trips to Novi Sad and Vršac.
Shooting of footage for Austrian National Television in Novi Sad, Vršac, and Vojvodina (production: W. Kienreich/D. Heller).
2005 Stay in Novi Sad for work on oil paintings at the National Museum.
Golden Laurel of the Society of Austrian Artists at the Künstlerhaus, Vienna.
Papal Order of Chivalry (Order of St. Sylvester).
2005 Film "Robert Hammerstiel. Bilder eines Zeitzeugen" (Robert Hammerstiel: Images by a Contemporary Witness; directed by W. Kienreich/D. Heller) on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition at the Leopold Museum.
Membership in the Serbian Academy of Science and Art in Novi Sad.
2007 "Tower of Life": in a large-scale project, the entire Ring Tower, headquarters of the Vienna Insurance Group, serves as a surface for the presentation of the artist's work.
Participation in the "Art Calendar" on the facade of the Vienna City Hall.
2008 St. Leopold Peace Prize for Humanitarian Engagement in Art, Klosterneuburg Abbey.

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CATALOGUE ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION:

Leopold Museum Foundation (ed.)
Robert Hammerstiel. Winterreise
Zeichnungen & Druckgrafik
92 pages, 81 illustrations
in German
€ 19,90

FILM ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION

Robert Hammerstiel
DIE WINTERREISE

Idea: Peter Weinhäupl
Director: Walter Kienreich
Camera: Dietrich Heller
Sound: Udo Wolf
Duration: 15 min.

A Kienreich TV production
Commissioned by the Leopold Museum

Made possible by the support of
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Sandra Tretter

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