

Press Release



Albin
EGGER-LIENZ

15.02.2008

prolongated until 22.06.2008



Albin Egger-Lienz: Der Bergmäher, erste Fassung (Ausschnitt), 1907, Leopold Museum, Wien

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EXHIBITION

140 years after the birth of Albin Egger-Lienz, the Leopold Museum presents the most extensive show of this important Expressionist ever.

The Leopold Collection in Vienna, with its inventory of more than 50 paintings and graphics by Albin Egger-Lienz, is predestined to host this exhibition, which is the most extensive show ever of this important pioneer of 20th-century Austrian painting. More than 180 works by Egger-Lienz from museums, galleries and private collections in Austria and abroad will be assembled at the Leopold Museum, documenting the artist's stylistic development. The Egger-Lienz oeuvre will be complemented by works of international artists including Hodler, Defregger, Meunier, Rodin and van Gogh.

In addition to featuring works from the Leopold Museum, the show will primarily be based on the private collection of Rudolf and Elisabeth Leopold, Vienna, the collections of the provincial government of the Tyrol, the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck and the Museum der Stadt Lienz auf Schloss Bruck. Some of the privately owned paintings in this fascinating documentation with its deeply moving themes are being shown publicly for the first time.

Thanks to his farsightedness and knowledge and his continued efforts over the course of many years, Rudolf Leopold in most cases succeeded in acquiring the first versions of the individual subjects. In the exhibition, additional variants, painterly detail studies and sketches will provide insight into the painter's formal strivings to achieve monumental and expressive compositions. For the first time, Egger-Lienz's working process becomes evident.

The show concentrates on work complexes dealing with memories of the artist's birthplace and of Munich, religious motifs and the genre subjects, tales of the struggle to liberate Tyrol in 1809, portraits and landscapes, the terrors of war, and finally sombre destiny motifs and meditations on life, death and hope.

Albin Egger-Lienz shows himself to be a form-giver of human existence between becoming and passing on, interpreting everyday agrarian life, but also creating gripping human images of the hopelessness of wartime and the burdens of destiny in the post-war period. These themes are given impressive treatments in motifs such as "Death Dance", "Life", "Human", "Finale", "Women of War", "Mothers", "Resurrection", and "Piet".

The position of Albin Egger-Lienz's work in an international context, and particularly its points of contact with European painting and sculpture in general, provide an illuminating overview

MAJOR THEMES

Memories of the Artist's Birthplace and Munich

His Tyrolean homeland and Munich offered Albin Egger-Lienz many points of reference. Egger-Lienz's time in Munich was dominated by the attachment to his countryman Franz von Defregger, whose motifs of domestic life served as his model. In their conception and colorism, these genre paintings show his devotion to the tradition of the waning 19th century.

Faith

For the rural population, stations in religious life are key positions in everyday life. In particular, Egger-Lienz devoted himself in his early work to themes like “The Holy Grave” (1900/1901) and “Holy Night” (1903/05), generally with a chromatically melodic joy in narration. He reduces the idyllic motif “Madonna with Child” (1921) to the deep bond between mother and child in the light of the lantern. “Pilgrims” (1904/05, 1920) became the first ambitiously dimensioned symbolic image conceived in a triptych-like composition.

Tales from the Year Nine

Reflection on the historical events of the Tyrolean struggle for freedom in 1809 went on for a long time. In Munich, Karl Theodor von Piloty and Wilhelm Lindenschmidt the Younger strengthened Egger-Lienz’s resolve to deal with this theme. However, Egger-Lienz overcame their tendency to stage these events theatrically. Already in “Ave Maria after the Battle of Mount Isel 1809” (1894/96), Egger-Lienz transferred the scene to a forest clearing in a manner resembling that of the French plein air painters. With “Cross” (1898/01) he fully broke through the theatrical backdrop, creating a “living” painting filled with concentration on human destiny. In “Haspinger” (1908/09) he for the first time found his way to the dynamic of diagonal composition and the plastic volume of figuration. In “King Etzel’s Arrival in Vienna” (1909/10), which was conceived for the Vienna Rathaus (City Hall), he was approaching a monumental decorativity.

Of Human ...

The portraits are marked by their immediacy and tranquillity: the “Portrait of the Artist’s Father” (1905) integrates the idyll of the garden in Schweizergasse in the artist’s hometown of Lienz. The portraits of “Lorli” (1907, 1922) are oriented toward the art nouveau concepts of sensuality and the beautiful line, while “Fred” (1908) depicts reality with loving and yet cool distance. Reality is enhanced in the portraits “Ila in Child’s Bed” (1916) “Ila Sitting on a Step in the Studio” (1919/1920). Contrastingly “Self-Portrait with Sport Cap” (1923) displays a “critical” self-observation.

... and Nature

Nature serves not only as a backdrop, but also as an autonomous subject. The landscape “Virgl” (1913), with its sun beaming down in three rays, epitomises the natural space. “Alp Landscape in Ötz Valley” (1911) stands for the lost grandeur of “Earth”, while “Early Spring” (1906, 1917) links nature and human labour. Much later, “Sunset on the Mendel” (1919) and the practically abstracting panoramic paintings of “Sigmundskron” (1921) and “Mount Calvary” (1922) manifest visions of light. These late landscapes stand in contrast to the spontaneous atmospheric interpretations in “Sea” from the time in Katwijk (1913), which are certainly some of the freest painterly impressions by Egger-Lienz, contrasting with the carefully considered composition of “Mountain Landscape” (1911).

Agrarian Life

Egger-Lienz came from a rural area but lived in major cities, in Munich and Vienna. He always yearned to return to the familiar surroundings of his early life, for example the Sarn and Ötz Valleys. Here he found the models upon which he based his art: “Sower” (1903), “Sower and Devil” (1908), “Mountain Reapers” (1907), “Resting Shepherds” (1911), “Noon Meal” (1910) and “Mealtime” (1920). However, it is very incorrect to label Egger an agrarian painter. He was an important artist who made great effort to wrest form and expression from his material. The simplest form and the highest level of expression are at the centre of his work. Egger-Lienz maintained: “I do not paint farmers, but forms.”

Of Life ...

In Egger-Lienz’s oeuvre, the motifs of death and life occupy a central position. His major theme is becoming and passing on, which had already made itself apparent in “Death Dance” (1906/07) and is celebrated in “Life” (1910/11). As in a winged altarpiece, the man and the woman stand in the middle section, while those representing the generations are grouped in the wings. Most of all, the plastic volume of the bodies becomes apparent in the fragments of the painting “Work” (1914) and in the painting “Human” (1914).

... and Death

In "Death Dance Anno Nine" (1916, 1921), Death leads on the group of farmers. In the background is the Tyrolean struggle for freedom in 1809, but the theme is detached from the historic event and conceived as a monumental allegory of death. "They are all, however, more than they suspect, surrounded by doom, certain to fall prey to annihilation": with almost oppressive bitterness, Egger puts this thought at the basis of his painting. The four walk on as if they were in a dream, only half in possession of themselves, as if they had a premonition of their destiny." Here as well, the succession of generations is readily apparent. Formal links to the work of the Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier are evident.

War, Heroes and Destiny

Battlefield painters have the assignment of documenting everyday life in the tactical struggle for position and of recording the heroic deeds of soldiers. This is not the case with Egger-Lienz: he is primarily interested in fate of the soldiers acquiescent to their destiny. One could claim to see an element of heroisation in the lithograph "1915". However, in "The Nameless 1914" (1916) the human machinery of the World War is already being dramatically articulated. In "Field of Corpses" (1917/18) lifeless corpses pile up in the trench, and the deformed expressivity of the bodies in "Finale" (1918) is an outcry against war. The painting shows the senselessness of such murder.

Under the Destiny of War

Egger-Lienz also devotes his work to the sorrow and tragedy of the women whose men remained behind on the field, as in "Women of War" (1918/22). The "Mothers" (1922/23) only experience hope under the sign of the crucified Saviour; its figures symbolise human existence in the highest degree. The consequences of war are immediately communicated by the "Blinded" (1918/19) in their baleful hopeless clumsiness.

Thoughts on Passing ...

The constriction of life and the shattering effects of age were elementary motives for Egger-Lienz, who repeatedly devoted his attention to the phase of decline. Egger-Lienz symbolised this transformation in the painting "The Elderly" (1914) and most of all in "Generations" (1918/19), where the stations of life from childhood to old age are made manifest, as in "Death Dance (1906/07) and "Life" (1910/1911).

... and on Hope

"Prayer at the Table" (1923) resonates with devotion and isolation, "Font" (1924) with harmony and the unity of man and nature. In the painting "The Resurrection of Christ" (1923/24) the hope for life and the victory over death are carried to the agrarian family by the Resurrection. In "Piet" (1926) the circle is closed. The stillness of the hour of death is a gripping event in human life. This work stands at the end of the artist's life and of the exhibition.

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Guided tours

are available in a variety of languages.

Tour ticket € 3.-

1 guide + max. 25 persons € 70.-

1 guide/evening after 6 p.m. and Thursdays after 7 p.m. € 105.-

Bookings and Information: +43/1/525 70-1525

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Opening Hours:

Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Thursday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

www.leopoldmuseum.org

Address

Leopold Museum

Museumsplatz 1

1070 Vienna

Museumsquartier

Admission Prices

Adults € 9.-

Pupils and students € 5.50

Seniors € 7.-

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Press Conference: Thu, 14 February 2008, 11 a.m.

Opening: Thu, 14 February 2008, 7 p.m.