

else blankenhorn.! a retrospective the life of thought is real after all

Special exhibition from April 12 to August 18, 2024

museum gugging

Am Campus 2, 3400 Maria Gugging

www.museumgugging.at

This exhibition provides an in-depth overview of the oeuvre of Else Blankenhorn (1873–1920), the best-known woman artist from the Prinzhorn Collection. Previously presented at the museum of the Prinzhorn Collection, an institute connected with the Heidelberg University Hospital, this retrospective shows 135 works that depict a variety of themes and clearly demonstrate the expressive and colorful diversity of Else Blankenhorn’s visual worlds. The exhibition presents paintings and drawings as well as notebooks and sketchbooks containing poems and compositions.

“We are very proud and pleased to be able to host the first Austrian presentation of this impressive exhibition about Else Blankenhorn at the *museum gugging*,” explains Nina Ansperger, Artistic and Scientific Director of the *museum gugging*, regarding the decision to present the show from the Prinzhorn Collection. And she also thanks the Heidelberg University Hospital for their positive cooperation. “After Laila Bachtiar, this exhibition enables us to present another fascinating woman artist this year.”

“Else Blankenhorn was the only woman artist that Hans Prinzhorn wanted to include in his 1922 classic ‘Artistry of the Mentally Ill,’” explains curator Ingrid von Beyme, Deputy Director of the Prinzhorn Collection and curator of the exhibition. “However, she was excluded from the publication due to a lack of space, and a planned monograph never

appeared either. Now, over 100 years after the release of Prinzhorn's work, we are making up for all this — with a retrospective and a publication about this many-sided and impressive woman. The *museum gugging* is certainly a very appropriate place to present this show in Austria."

Else Blankenhorn composed and played music, created photographs, wrote, translated, knitted and worked in embroidery before she began drawing and painting in 1908. Her knowledge of Symbolism, Expressionism and Japanese art can be recognized in her work. In spite of such echoes, she developed her own artistic visual idiom into an expressive manner of painting that features simplified forms, energetic brushstrokes and bold color contrasts.

"Take into your heart a great happiness music"

The first part of the exhibition deals with the joy(lessness) of love in Else Blankenhorn's life. At the age of 26, this extremely musically talented woman lost her voice in an exceptional psychological situation. This was presumably triggered by her friend's marriage to Max Freiherr von Holzing-Berstett, whom she had wished to marry herself. At the Bellevue private sanatorium, she selected Emperor Wilhelm II, the "most inward man of all," as her "spiritual husband." In numerous self-portraits, Else Blankenhorn lived out various identities — from singer and composer to a defiant tree-woman to the crowned empress consort — together with fatherly, imperial or divine ideal men.

"Billions infinitely"

One highlight of the acclaimed exhibition are the banknotes that Else Blankenhorn produced in order to finance the resurrection of couples. She believed she had been assigned this charitable task by Wilhelm II, her "spiritual husband." They were to experience "eternal domesticity" in the House of Lovers and the Resurrection in heavenly scenes. The symbiosis between Empress Else and Emperor Wilhelm is evoked in "double-angel-images," and it also finds expression in the merging of their names as "Wilhel-else-m."

“Love-filled blossoming”

The next section of the exhibition is devoted to symbolic motifs in Else Blankenhorn’s pictures. These are loaded with meaning down to their last detail and are often difficult to decipher. Many of them remain enigmatic in their reflections of her inner world. Sexual elements are usually depicted in the form of pairs of plants: The union of man and woman only seems to be possible when embedded within nature. Vulval and phallic forms grow towards one another as a camouflaged procreation in the form of plants and blossoms.

“And worlds of religions pass you by”

Religious themes play a large role not just in Else Blankenhorn’s visual oeuvre but also in her texts. In her notebooks and diaries, she cites verses from the Bible and Ascension hymns. Mythological and religious motifs are often woven into her depictions of landscapes and architecture: nocturnal landscapes under a full moon, a mausoleum with mourners, a monastery cloister, chapels, temples and pagodas with people praying. A spiritual-cosmic element and the “pain of the soul” are palpable in Blankenhorn’s — sometimes expressive and abstract — studies. Throughout the show, quotations from Blankenhorn’s journals and notebooks accompany the symbolically charged and visionary universe of her pictures.

The Catalogue

A 232-page catalogue, richly illustrated with high-quality images, was published in connection with the exhibition “‘The Life of Thought Is Real After All’: Else Blankenhorn – a Retrospective,” which was shown at the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg from September 15, 2022, to January 22, 2023. In addition to the editors Ingrid von Beyme and Thomas Röske — Director of the Prinzhorn Collection — Bettina Brand-Clausen, Chantal Marazia, Jan Merk and Doris Noell-Rumpeltes have provided profound analyses of Blankenhorn’s work.

The catalogue is available in the shop of the *museum gugging* for € 41.20.

Press Breakfast, Opening and Lecture

Nina Ansperger invites you to attend the press breakfast on Thursday, April 11, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. Curator Ingrid von Beyme will be providing a tour of the exhibition (registration: presse@museumgugging.at).

The opening will also be held on Thursday, April 11, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. by Christoph Kaufmann, Member of the State Parliament of Lower Austria and Mayor of Klosterneuburg, on behalf of Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner. Curator Ingrid von Beyme will also talk at the opening (registration: anmeldung@museumgugging.at). A free shuttle bus from Operngasse 4 (1010 Vienna) to the opening will be available (departs 6:00 p.m., returns 9:00 p.m.). Due to the limited number of seats, it is absolutely necessary to register in advance at anmeldung@museumgugging.at by April 9, 2024.

The Prinzhorn Collection

The Prinzhorn Collection is a museum for art by people with exceptional psychological experiences. It is part of the Center for Psychosocial Medicine at the Heidelberg University Hospital. Its famous historical collection comprises around 8,000 drawings, watercolors, paintings, sculptures, textiles and texts created by patients in psychiatric institutions between 1835 and 1945. This body of works is the only one of its kind in the world and was primarily assembled by the art historian and psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn (1886–1933) during the period he spent as an assistant physician at the psychiatric hospital of the University of Heidelberg. In 1980 the institute once again began expanding the collection of art by people with psychiatric experience, and it now holds a total of around 40,000 works.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact:

Florian Müller, MA, florian.mueller@museumgugging.at, +43 664 604 99-911