

Dreams and Nightmares

1.3.2012 - 22.5. 2012

The guest of the Montanelli Museum of Prague is the collection of paintings from the Museum of Persecuted Arts in Solingen.

Josef Albers, Hans Nathan Feibusch, Arnold Fiedler, Franz Frank, Teo Gebürsch, Georg Grosz, Alfred Hanf, Otto Hermann, Georg Paul Heyduck, Eric Isenburger, Hella Jacobs, César Klein, Else Lasker-Schüler, Ludwig Meidner, Georg Meistermann, Otto Nagel, Valentin Nagel, Otto Pankok, Carl Rabus, Hubert Rüter, Milly Steger, Erna Schmidt-Caroll, Wilhelm Schnarrenberger, Horst Stempel, Oskar Zügel

The Montanelli Museum has prepared the *Dreams and Nightmares* exhibition from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts of Solingen (Federal Republic of Germany). Highly expressive works of art with a unique testimony – this is art representing the catastrophes of the 20th century. The exhibition will open in the MuMo premises on 1st March and will run until 22nd May. On display will be works by Central European artists dating from the first half of the twentieth century who, in their life and work, made a stand against injustice and dictatorship. In fact these artists will be seen for the first time in the Czech Republic. The works militate against hope and hopelessness, since they embody dreams as well as nightmares. On the one hand they depict the “Dreams” by which human beings fight for humanity, whilst on the other “Nightmares”, meaning the danger of terrorism, dictatorship, wars and violence.

Paradoxically it was political dictatorships that contributed to the art of the last century, literally dislocating itself from the “business as usual” norm. The years 1933 to 1945 in Germany, and from 1938 onwards in Czechoslovakia, are characterised by the despotism of the National Socialist regime. The horrors of fascist dictatorship and, some 10 years later, the coming of Communist totalitarianism, forbade artists from creating, locked them in jail and either forced them to emigrate or into the arms of death, especially when the individuals concerned were persecuted for their origins or heterodox views. Between the years 1933 and 1945 around 20,000 works of art were either seized or destroyed, both in museums or in artists’ studios.

In the *Dreams and Nightmares* exhibition at the Montanelli Museum we can once again discover the works of art and the fate of those artists who had the courage to think freely and took the uncomfortable route of fighting against National Socialism and Communism. The Museum of Persecuted Arts in Solingen opened in 2008 with the exhibition “Heaven and Hell 1918-1989”. Both the exhibit on and the museum itself received the highest praise, while the press hailed the museum as one of the most important in Germany. As an institution the museum is unique in Europe. It brings together literature and the visual arts with reference to both the totalitarian regimes of the past century. The art collections of the Solingen museum who lent us their exhibits are: Bürgerstiftung für verfemte Künste with the collection of Gerhard Schneider and the collection of literary and art works of the Else Lasker-Schüler Society.

In 2011, with the Maria Maria 1511/ 2011 exhibition supported also by the Czech-German Fund for the Future, the Montanelli Museum already showed how to build bridges between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic. The Dreams and Nightmares exhibition takes the process a stage further.

Exhibition opening in the Montanelli Museum: 29th February 2012 at 7 p.m.
The exhibition will run from 1st March until 22nd May 2012

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Four artists whose works form part of the “DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES” exhibition:

Georg Meistermann (1911-1990)

Between 1930 and 1933 Meistermann studied at the Düsseldorf Art Academy under, among others, Ewald Mataré. His first exhibition in 1933 in Wuppertal-Elberfeld was shut down by the National Socialists. Subsequently he dropped out of university and he was banned from exhibiting. After 1933 Meistermann continued his studies auto-didactically and worked as a freelance art teacher in Solingen. In 1941 he refused to take an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler for which he was sentenced to death. He was saved from execution when a doctor declared him insane. In 1944 a bomb attack destroyed his studio. During the American occupation Meistermann became Head of the Office for Cultural Affairs in Solingen and Consultant at the Collecting Point Marburg (Collecting Point for German Cultural Assets). At the same time he turned down two offers: the first by the former French ambassador François Poncet to move into a studio free

of charge in Paris and the second by the future American president Dwight Eisenhower to start his own school in the USA. After 1946 he befriended Cardinal Döpfner, Heinrich Böll and Dr. Josef Haubrich. In 1953 he became a lecturer at Frankfurt Städelschule School of Art. Having received the Great Art Prize of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia for culture and participated in documenta I, he was nominated to teach at Düsseldorf Academy of Arts in 1955. After being awarded the first prize for painting on glass at the Biennial Exhibition in Salzburg in 1958, Georg Meistermann took part in documenta II in Kassel. From 1960 onwards he taught at the Karlsruhe Art Academy.

In 1964 he took up a lecturing position at the Academy of Visual Arts in Munich. From 1967 to 1972 Georg Meistermann was President of the Association of German Artists. Following a request by former Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt, he portrayed Brandt in 1977 for the gallery of Chancellors in the Federal Chancellery.

Carl Rabus (1898-1983)

In 1934, in order to escape from restrictive measures, Rabus fled from Munich to Vienna where he was able to remain together with his Jewish girlfriend Erna Adler. Shortly before the occupation of Austria by National Socialist Germany, Erna Adler emigrated to Belgium, soon followed by Rabus. In 1940 Carl Rabus was arrested for being an “alien close to the enemy” and interned in the St. Cyprien camp on the Mediterranean, which lay in the unoccupied southern part of France. Apart from St. Cyprien, the French maintained the camps Les Milles and Gurs, under the administration of the Vichy regime; in these camps thousands of German refugees were interned. Rabus documented the unbearable conditions in the camp, the hopelessness and the lack of prospects for the imprisoned people in about one hundred drawings which he subsequently converted into woodcuts, and further created the “Passion” cycle, which is also on display in the exhibition. Later, when he was allowed to return from St. Cyprien to Brussels, he lived under Gestapo surveillance from autumn 1941 on. He was still under this supervision in 1943 when he painted the painting “Self in a Mirror Shard”. In 1944 he was sent to a Vienna prison accused of “racial defilement”, since he continued to stand by his Jewish girlfriend.

Oscar Zügel (1892-1968)

In 1914 Zügel started an apprenticeship at the Stuttgart Art College. He had to curtail his studies on being called up for military service, resuming his training from 1919 until 1922. Afterwards he worked as a freelance artist in Stuttgart. After 1933 Oscar Zügel's paintings suffered an almost unbelievable fate. In 1934 the painting “Propaganda Minister” (1933) was confiscated from Zügel's studio in Stuttgart together with the five-part series “Raped Art” for being “degenerate”. They were to be burned in the courtyard of the Stuttgart State Gallery. Oscar Zügel was part of the critical intelligentsia of Stuttgart and, after receiving a warning that he would meet the same fate as an assassinated Jewish friend, Zügel took the advice of his French friends and went into exile in 1934 in Tossa de Mar in Spain. There he met artists, writers and philosophers and befriended André Masson and Marc Chagall. The Franco-Hitler Alliance caused Zügel to leave his Spanish exile and, after a short stay in Germany, he emigrated to Argentina in 1937. However, in 1950 Zügel returned to Europe since the Peronists had started taking reprisals against his family. He found his house in Tossa de Mar had been looted, but Spanish fishermen had rescued and hidden some of his most important paintings for him. In 1951, after a meeting with the director of the Stuttgart State Gallery, Zügel came across the caretaker there who told him that there were three crates of his paintings down in the engine room, which had been overlooked during the burnings. These were the paintings confiscated in 1934, the “Propaganda Minister” among them.

Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945)

Her first marriage to the doctor Berthold Lasker, sealed in 1894, ended nine years later in divorce. In 1899 her son Paul came into the world. The artist never divulged the name of Paul's father. Her first collection of poems came out in 1902 under the title *Styx*. In 1903 she married Georg Levin, for whom she thought up the pseudonym Herwarth Walden as well as the name of the magazine he published "Der Sturm". After another nine years this marriage also ended in divorce. At this time Else Lasker-Schüler was going around dressed in oriental costumes under the name Tino of Bagdad; subsequently, however, she cooked up a new existence for herself as Prince Yussuf of Thebes. On 19th April 1933 the artist fled to Switzerland. Here though she was forbidden to work and was followed by the aliens' police. Permission to remain as an "asylum seeker" was twice given after lengthy procedures, however, on the third occasion it was denied. In Germany her books were burned while her drawings, now displayed at the Museum Montanelli, were removed from the National Gallery in Berlin. Nevertheless Else Lasker-Schüler remained faithful to the symbiosis of German and Jewish elements and today is counted among Germany's most distinguished poetesses. She died on 22nd January 1945 in Jerusalem.

On 5th April 1913 during her stay in Prague Else Lasker-Schüler was invited to read for the "Club of German Women Artists".

Prager Tageszeitung Bohemia / The Poetess and the Policeman:

"Today at around twelve o'clock at night a minor incident attracted the attention of passing pedestrians. In Old Town Square some kind of bizarrely attired woman suddenly lashed out impulsively at a police officer, gazing up heavenwards with a staring expression and making rhythmic body movements while singing incoherently. [...] That lady, who was wearing a black dress and an onyx necklace around her neck which was wrapped in her black curly hair, was Else Lasker-Schüler. The poetess's companions [...] allegedly advised the policeman that this was a highly exotic visitor from Thebes (Else Lasker-Schüler always speaks of herself in her poems as the Prince of Thebes), who was performing her oriental prayers here. 'I don't give a damn!' the policeman reputedly retorted, 'Nobody is allowed to sing here,' whereupon he energetically set about making repeated requests that the artist, manifestly elevated above such earthly concerns, stop singing. This startled her so much she recoiled and, shouting the word 'prince' at the irritated policeman to his face, summarily departed the square [...]"

in: Hartmut Binder, "Else Lasker-Schüler in Prag" [Else Lasker-Schüler in Prague], in: *Wirkendes Wort* 3 (1994), pp. 405-438