

From the Collection
**Landscape Painting
from Waldmüller to
Thöny**

Permanent exhibition

Neue Galerie Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum,
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Waldmüller to Schiele**

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This exhibition explores the topic of 'landscape'. It does not, however, provide an overview of the history of landscape painting, rather viewing the term 'landscape' within a wider context, taking far more into account than just the use of images to present an exterior reality. Landscape is understood as a construct resulting from diverse interactions between the historical and natural world and the people living there. People create diverse images of their world by means of their perceptions, emotions, interests, imagination, research and use of the landscape, all which in turn influence and construct reality.

Ideal Landscapes

During the Classicism of around 1800, artists did not strive to transcribe immediate reality, but rather to compose a harmonious, ideal landscape containing classical elements. Artists, such as **Johann Kniep** and **Johann Nepomuk Schödlberger** sought to emulate the art of classical antiquity and began to make use of classical patterns of images from idealist landscape painting, creating pictures inspired by the real landscape of the Roman Campagna. Art was to embody the conceptions of rational order and universal harmony: The *Arcadian Landscape* represents a popular classicist motif and mythical subject of the Hellenistic period (circa 330–30 BC). According to legend, it was a place where humankind would forever live in peace and harmony. An example of not just idealizing, but also ideologising landscape was the relationship between Archduke Johann von Österreich (1782–1859) and Styria. Despite not having an official political function in this province, he focussed his activities on the area. This involvement led to him being revered and appropriated by

the people of Styria, feelings that are still evident today. A painting by Johann Peter Krafft from 1817 depicts him as a hunter, positioned high above the Styrian landscape, thus uniting the elements behind this reverence. Numerous copies, engravings, facsimiles and reproductions—such as the one by **Johann Huber** from 1839—transformed it into an icon of a national hero.

Tourist Landscapes

Many landscape images of the 19th century reflect the conquest of landscape by means of new forms of transportation, which brought with them new travel possibilities. For centuries, the Alps were seen as being inaccessible and terrifying, but the Enlightenment and Romanticism transformed this area into a place where city-dwellers yearned to be. Paintings recorded, communicated and spread this idealised perspective, defining which motifs and parts of the landscape were seen as sublime, scenic and picturesque. This in turn shaped which routes were taken by tourists. Viewed from today's perspective,

the Austrian Biedermeier paintings reveal a discrepancy between the requirement to be true to nature and the exaggeration, idealization and idylisation of the motifs, something which was clearly prompted by public taste.

Nature at Work

In the middle of the 19th century, painters increasingly focussed on changes to the appearance of the landscape caused by the changing seasons and weather. Cloud formations were observed and recorded. One painter, **Ignaz Raffalt**, also called 'cloud Raffalt', turned cloud formations into a line of business in its own right, and dramatic genre scenes depicting the landscape became incredibly popular. **Friedrich Gauermann's** *Homecoming in the Thunderstorm at Lake Atter* (1856) depicts such a lively scene. It shows peasant folk and their drove heading for the sheltering farmhouse, which despite its evident shabbiness nevertheless conveys an air of tranquillity. Alpine motifs also served to inspire landscape painting: Mountaineering and hiking had become

fashionable middle-class leisure activities, and hence also served as popular motifs.

Travelling to Distant Places

Foreign countries and cultures fascinated many 19th-century European artists. They either journeyed themselves or drew their inspiration from travel narratives, which were becoming highly fashionable. However, the Orientalists' view of the foreign was largely uncritical and exalted, which is why their depicted impressions do not necessarily reflect reality. Everyday life in Hungary, Italy and the Orient was set amidst the hustle and bustle of streets and markets. Accordingly, **Alois Schönn's** *Fish Market in Front of the Porticus of Octavia in Rome* (circa 1878) describes a typical 19th-century Italian scene in which ancient monuments, such as the Porticus of Octavia in this composition, play an equally important role alongside the assumed cheerfulness of everyday southern life. **Carl Leopold Müller** is probably Austria's most significant Orientalist painter. In a letter, he describes *The Caravan*

(1876) as ‘by far the best picture I have ever painted’. His artistic homeland was Egypt, which he visited nine times in all. The present composition attests to Müller’s love of multi-figural scenes and careful attention to detail. In the painting *Szolnok* (circa 1873), **Tina Blau**, who was one of the first successful female Austrian painters, depicts a view of the hamlet south of Budapest that became home to an influential painter colony during the second half of the 19th century. Enthralled by the light conditions and exotic atmosphere of the Hungarian lowlands, the Szolnok artists frequently painted impressions of turbulent life.

Landscapes in Changing Light

Established around 1830 not far from Paris, the ‘Barbizon School’ not only paved the way for Impressionism, but also exerted considerable influence on Austrian painters of what is known as Atmospheric Realism. The Barbizon artists introduced a radical change to 19th-century landscape painting. Turning away from arranged landscapes and favour-

ing nature studies instead, they made their first attempts at ‘plein air’ (outdoor) painting. The Barbizon School developed the intimate landscape genre (*paysage intime*) that would set the scene for the expression of personal nature experiences. Austrian Atmospheric Realists adopted this approach for their own work, especially to depict various times of day and seasons, harmony between man and nature and everyday rural life. **Emil Jakob Schindler** (*Dutch Riverscape*, 1875/76; *Farmhouse in Théménau*, circa 1882) is regarded today as the most significant representative of Austrian Atmospheric Realism. Since the 1880s, Schindler had given private tuition to **Olga Wisinger-Florian** (*Pergola at Mentone*, circa 1900) and **Marie Egner** (*Quay in England – Putney Bridge*, circa 1888; *Blooming Poppy Field*, circa 1896; *Sea Surf*, circa 1899). Many Austrian painters drew inspiration from French Impressionism. Typical characteristics of the French Impressionists, the precursors of modern art who had exhibited from the 1870s, are short brush strokes, blurred contours, painting with unmixed colour and the study of

different light qualities. **Alfred Zoff’s** paintings of the Italian Riviera reflect his interest in the subject of sunlight. His favourite motif was the Italian coastline and its ever-changing atmosphere.

Egon Schiele, *End of Town* (1917/18)

In 1909, Egon Schiele founded the ‘Neukunstgruppe’ together with his colleagues Oskar Kokoschka and Anton Kolig. Seeking to distinguish themselves from Viennese Art Nouveau, the group became a precursor of Expressionism in Vienna. The young artists introduced a new artistic perspective in order to break away from tradition and focus instead on independent innovation and creative, subjectively experienced stimulus. The artist’s own emotions determined creative expressivity, dominated by sombre undertones in the interplay of form and colour. Painted in 1918, Egon Schiele’s *End of Town* is the most valuable painting at the Neue Galerie Graz. It was acquired for the collection by way of exchange. The composition dis-

plays a frequent motif in Schiele’s works: Krumau (Český Krumlov), the birthplace of his mother and his temporary residence in 1911. In 2011, it was discovered that the portrait of Heinrich Benesch on the reverse side of the canvas was actually a stain from the painting on the front. Schiele had apparently integrated the unfinished portrait of his patron into the later representation of Krumau, so that the person’s head is discernable on the right of the canvas, just as in a picture puzzle.

Herbert Boeckl, *Erzberg* (1942)

Herbert Boeckl arrived in Eisenerz for the first time in 1942 in order to execute a wall painting commissioned by the Austrian Mining Corporation. Although the commission finally failed, he filled a sketchbook, completed several water paintings and a series of six oil paintings. Starting with the one shown here, he increasingly abstracted the characteristic shape of the mountain up to 1948. Similar to Cézanne sixty years previously, Boeckl studied the mountain closely, capturing form, surface, light and shade

solely by using the dynamic force of colour. Radically contrasting colours emphasize the rugged contours of the mountain without leaving any visible lines.

Wilhelm Thöny (Graz 1888 - 1949 New York)

Wilhelm Thöny, who is considered to be a pioneer of Modernism in Styria, was born in Graz on February 10, 1888. In 1908 he left for Munich, where he studied painting. During the First World War Thöny volunteered as a regimental painter, after the war he lived in Switzerland from 1919 to 1922. In 1923 he returned to Graz, where he co-founded the 'Graz Sezession' and was the association's first president. The pressures of political turmoil and an ardent wish for an international career made him move to Paris (1931), the Côte d'Azur and subsequently to New York (1938). Thöny was a nomadic cosmopolitan, who throughout his life lived mostly in hotels. He remained a lone wolf all his life, with a consistent yearning for his hometown Graz. Wilhelm Thöny died in New York in 1949.