

# **Alfred Klinkan**

## Wasnichtallessorauskommt

27.09.2019 – 12.01.2020

Neue Galerie Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum

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This text is published on the occasion of  
the exhibition

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Alfred Klinkan died 25 years ago, at the age of just 44. In 2020 he would have turned 70. The Neue Galerie Graz now presents a major retrospective devoted to this maverick artist. Klinkan's delight in the fantastical is impossible to ignore. His narrative worlds of wonder shift between man and animal, between humour and provocation, while revealing something profoundly human.

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‘You should simply dream along with the following pictures and sounds, because they are like a dream or like a day in the life of Alfred Klinkan.’

(in: Alfred Klinkan, *A Self-representation*, 1976)

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## The Beginning

In 1970 Alfred Klinkan moved from Judenburg to Vienna in order to study art. His unusual looks made him stand out: a thin man sporting long hair, a narrow moustache drooping over the corners of his mouth, unfashionable glasses and even, sometimes, a traditional Styrian suit. According to his friend, artist Dargo Prelog, ‘Klinkan was not one for brooding or meditating, he painted impulsively and with boundless imagination.’

He experimented with language, revered Ernst Jandl, formulated short texts into large-format pictures on canvas. The form assumed by the pictures became in itself a statement: his support mediums took the shape of windows, eggs and gingerbread hearts. The boundary between the real, found elements mounted onto the picture through to painted illusion was fluid. Wit, sarcasm and heaps of irony were articulated in his immaculate joined-up writing. Dress patterns, maps or wrapping paper served as a base while everyday objects were depicted as motifs. Woolly hats, socks and pullovers appear

in graphic wavy lines that sometimes act as a signature too. Writing, image, drawing, painting—many of these pictures are at first glance reminiscent of school homework. The Krampus, an Alpine demon who punishes naughty children at Christmas time, and which still played an important role in parenting in the 1970s, served as an identification model for him, becoming a provocative troublemaker, a fool who gets away with everything because he simply can’t help being ‘nasty’.

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## Antwerp

On his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday Alfred Klinkan exhibited 25 graphic suitcases in Vienna. The catalogue was likewise presented in the form of a suitcase, and included some partly biographical texts written as poetry, demonstrating a sensual playfulness in its concept. A year later, in 1976, he was awarded a residency abroad and moved to Antwerp. Here he was fascinated by the Early Netherlandish painters such as Adriaen Brouwer or Hieronymus Bosch; their imagery had a lasting impact

on him. He made small corrections to Alfred Dürer's woodcuts and painted over them. These were exhibited at the Galerie De Zwarte Panter in Antwerp, together with works done on wrapping paper. He steadily completed his *Hausübungen* (Homework, 1976), filling an entire book page by page and day by day, and worked on a *Hirschmalbuch* (Deer Painting Book, 1979), which he himself described as 'spontaneous ideas sketched out and some extra work for related canvases and graphics.'

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### Wondrous World

He soon shifted his focus from graphic works to the powerfully coloured painting that became his hallmark. Brilliant reds, radiant yellows, warm oranges—intense hues that give his fabulous creatures, fairy-tale characters and mythical beasts a vibrancy and a vast density of contrasts on the large-scale canvases. The expressivity of his images is reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh, whom he admired. He used colour to trigger strong sensual reactions. It stimulated him as he painted, gave

shape to themes. He himself slipped into the various roles, sometimes appearing as a bear, at other times as a donkey, lion or deer. Attached to the 1968 movement, he was interested in shamanism, occultism and the transmigration of the soul. He had always read a lot, studied a wide range of sources (including those relevant to hippies), and experimented with various substances, deliberately employing them to produce a mind-altering effect. The narrative in his pictures became more condensed, while the element of performance also gained in importance. Two short films from the time attest to this. 'I want to live in my world of wonders, for me it is the land flowing with milk and honey..' says Alfred Klinkan in Werner Fenz's film, made at the Neue Galerie Graz in 1978. He was also enthusiastic about the emerging pop music of the time, above all Frank Zappa.

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### New Painting

Time and again he felt drawn back to Antwerp, which became a second home for him, somewhere he never really left despite the fact

that, due to his young family, the focus of his life had later shifted to Munich. From the 1980s on, Alfred Klinkan was celebrated as an exponent of 'New Painting'. That was also a merit of Wilfried Skreiner, director of the Neue Galerie Graz at that time. Themes from Dutch painting, tavern scenes, card players, smokers and drinkers became central, interpreted in large-scale formats and condensed into the Dream of the Golden Age. We see private subjects intermingled with his fairy-tale world, rendered in what might be a private mythology. Intense, sheer colours are applied generously onto large-format canvases. The pictures are hung close together, so that we can perceive the intoxicating thrill of the colours. Alfred Klinkan created his own fabulous world, visual narratives in which he loses himself. Events from his life merged with fantasy, fiction blended with actual experiences. In this way the loss of his friend Jan Cox was incorporated into his pictures and also into *A Code for Friendship*, a comprehensive book containing original screen prints produced jointly with Roger Vandaele in Antwerp.

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### Late Works

From 1992 on, his 'pictures of all kinds' lost their colourful radiance and their large dimensions, and with it their lightness. His loyal and supportive collector was killed in an accident; his marriage was increasingly unhappy and about to fall apart. He commuted between Vienna, Freising, Munich and Antwerp, apparently unable to find a home or base. In 1994 Klinkan died suddenly and quite unexpectedly from heart failure. The legacy he left behind is an incredibly dense, vast and varied body of work whose myths and stories constantly strive to ensure that 'fantasy is never lost'.

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## Biography

1950 Born in Judenburg, Styria

1970 to 1974 Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (Prof. Josef Mikl, Prof. Wolfgang Hollegha)

1976 to 1977 Residency abroad at the Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp

1977 Austrian State Scholarship for Visual Art

1979 to 1981 and 1984 Mainly in Antwerp

1985 Moved to Freising, studio in Munich, married Hedwig Abert, birth of sons Adrian (1985) and Tobias (1987)

1991 to 1994 Work at Munich studio together with long stays in Vienna and Antwerp.

1994 Died on 17<sup>th</sup> September in Vienna

Numerous prizes and awards

[www.alfredklinkan.net](http://www.alfredklinkan.net)

The design of the catalogue for this exhibition was based on a screen print book produced by Klinkan and Roger Vandaele in Antwerp in 1981 (*Een Code voor Vriendschap*).