

Universalmuseum Joanneum Press

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Erzherzog Johann Museum A Life of Progress

Erzherzog Johann Museum

Opening: 11.05.2024

Curated by Karlheinz Wirnsberger with Barbara Müller and Maria Zengerer

Design by Werner Schrempf, Diana Brus, and the ORGANISATION Graz

Museums in Schloss Stainz, Schlossplatz 1, 8510 Stainz

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With the opening of the new *Erzherzog Johann Museum* at Schloss Stainz (Castle Stainz), the Universalmuseum Joanneum has added another museum. On about 650 square meters of exhibition space, it explores the life and achievements of its founder. The exhibition focuses on Archduke Johann's connection to Stainz, his family background, his impact on Styria, his military and political career, and his love of travel and nature.

Archduke Johann is remembered as a reformer who was close to the people and supported progress and development. His legacy continues today through the many institutions he helped to create.

Archduke Johann's wide-ranging influence on Styrian culture, science, and the economy is presented in seven themed rooms. To make this possible, new areas of Schloss Stainz were renovated and opened to the public. A central hallway connects the rooms and shows the historical background of the 19th century, along with portraits of Johann's contemporaries. In the first room, visitors are introduced to Archduke Johann's relationship in Stainz – a place he loved and helped shape. He first visited the region in 1807 and later bought Schloss Stainz to create a model farm. Historical documents and photographs show his impact on farming, wine production, and the drainage of farmland in the region. His support for infrastructure projects is illustrated through examples like the Graz-Köflach railway. Another focus of the exhibition is Archduke Johann's family history.

The next room focuses on Archduke Johann's family background, his upbringing and early influences in Florence, as well as his love for Anna Plochl, which was difficult at first due to their different social classes but ultimately fulfilled. While Johann was often traveling, Anna managed many of his affairs behind the scenes. For six years, she stood by his side as a "persona dubia" (a person of unclear status) before being granted the title of Baroness. Portraits and paintings in the room show Johann's relationship with his family and his role at the imperial court.

Many original paintings and portraits are on display, showing Archduke Johann both as a private individual and as a representative of the House of Habsburg. One well-known portrait shows him wearing a grey-green coat, symbolizing his close connection to the people. A special highlight of the exhibition is the faithfully recreated “Steirerfrackl” – a traditional Styrian tailcoat – made by the Styrian Heritage Association using historical patterns.

The fourth section of the exhibition focuses on Archduke Johann’s military and political career. On June 16, 1848, Emperor Ferdinand I, who had fled to Innsbruck, appointed Johann as his representative. This gave Johann the authority to act on the emperor’s behalf. Just a few days later, on June 29, 1848, the National Assembly in Frankfurt elected him as the Imperial Regent of Germany. In this role, he served as the provisional head of state of the newly formed German Empire. A special highlight of this section is a historical pointer telegraph with automatic interruption, still preserved in its original form. It was once used to send election results from Frankfurt to Berlin—a process that took about three hours.

Archduke Johann’s commitment to Styria and his support for education, business, and infrastructure had a lasting impact on the region.

Room 5 presents Johann’s visions and the many projects he helped realize to modernize Styria and support its economy. His efforts ranged from building the Southern Railway, promoting agriculture, to supporting scientific projects like the Brazil expedition. These examples show his strong interest in combining progress with science.

Johann also founded the Universalmuseum Joanneum and the Reading Society to promote education. In 1829, he helped establish a private mutual fire insurance company within the Agricultural Society, laying the foundation for an institution that still exists today as one of the leading insurance companies in the 21st century.

Other important initiatives include the Mining and Metallurgy School in Vordernberg, which later led to the founding of the Montanuniversität Leoben, now known worldwide. The Steiermärkische Sparkasse, a major regional bank, was also created thanks to his efforts.

The exhibition also highlights Archduke Johann’s passion for travel and nature. During his mountain hikes, he spent time observing nature and collecting specimens. He often slept in huts, talked with hunters, dairymaids, farmers, and woodcutters, and carefully recorded his observations along the way.

The final room of the exhibition looks at the myth of Archduke Johann, who continues to live on in folk culture, as well as in music, literature, and as a symbol of progress and connection to the people.

His life story is presented as a reflection of a century marked by major changes and the search for new paths.

During the research and renovation of Schloss Stainz, some old documents and objects were found that have never been shown before. These are now on display for the first time in the *Erzherzog Johann Museum*. For example, there are hand-drawn plans from 1872 for changes to Schloss Stainz, made by Archduke Johann's son. In the castle attic, soil samples were found. These helped explain the different types of soil to members of the Agricultural Society. You can also see original furniture from the Palais Meran in Graz, like a chair, a gun stand, a picture of Anna Plochl with her child, and old weapons.

The *Erzherzog Johann Museum* combines modern media with the historic setting of Schloss Stainz to create an innovative experience. Through interactive stations, visitors can explore the history of Archduke Johann in more depth.

3D figures help create a lively connection between the past and the present. The exhibition also shows details of the restoration work, giving visitors a behind-the-scenes look at some of the museum's work.

A brief history

Archduke Johann was a key figure in the development of Styria. He was born on January 20, 1782, in Florence as the 13th child of Leopold II and Maria Ludovica of Bourbon. Johann grew up during a time of political unrest and military conflicts.

He began his education at the Josefstädter Riding Barracks, where he received military training in 1799. In 1800, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the imperial army.

Even though he lost some early battles, Archduke Johann was determined and believed in what he did. He helped prepare a rebellion in Tyrol, which was given to Bavaria in 1805.

In 1809, when war started, he became leader of the Southern Army. He arrived late at the Battle of Wagram (July 5–6, 1809), and this was mostly why they lost.

In 1812, he and Joseph Hormayr started a secret group called the "Alpenbund" to fight against Napoleon. But in 1813, someone betrayed the group. Johann's brother, Emperor Franz II, was angry and punished him. After that, Johann was not allowed to go to Tyrol anymore.

Archduke Johann and Styria

After that, Johann focused more on Styria, where he started important cultural and economic changes. His marriage to Anna Plochl, who became Countess of Meran, strengthened his connection to the region. In 1811, he founded the Inner Austrian National Museum, which later became the Universalmuseum Joanneum. This also laid the foundation for the Technical University of Graz. During the economic crisis of 1817, he started a potato farming cooperative in Styria to distribute potato seeds widely across the region. By founding the Styrian Agricultural Society and other institutions, he encouraged new ideas in farming and helped the Styrian economy recover from the crisis of 1817.

After his death in 1859, Johann left behind an important legacy that can still be felt today in Styria and Tyrol. His vision for education, innovation, and culture continues to shape the region, and his legacy is honored in many institutions and monuments. Archduke Johann remains a key figure in Austrian history and a symbol of progress and dedication to the common good.

Archduke Johann died on May 11, 1859, in his palace on Leonhardstraße in Graz from lung paralysis. Following his wishes, his son Franz (1839–1891) built a mausoleum in the neo-Gothic style on the church hill of Schenna. Johann was buried there on June 23, 1869. His wife Anna, who died on August 4, 1885, and his son Franz rest beside him.

The Joanneum

The Joanneum was founded in 1811 as Archduke Johann's first project in Styria. He convinced the local estates to buy the Lesliehof and to continue funding the institute. The Joanneum was a museum, a collection of teaching materials, and a school all at once. It taught natural sciences like mineralogy, zoology, botany, mathematics, chemistry, agriculture, forestry, mining technology, and metallurgy. As of May 2024, with the addition of the Erzherzog Johann Museum at Schloss Stainz, the Universalmuseum Joanneum now includes 20 museums and a zoo

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