

Universalmuseum Joanneum Press

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Alte Galerie Schloss Eggenberg

Alte Galerie, Schloss Eggenberg, Eggenberger Allee 90, 8020 Graz
Opening hours: 26th April to 31st October 2019, Tue–Sun: 10am–5pm
Closed from November to März
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Visitors of the Alte Galerie experience five-hundred years of European history as reflected by art and cultural history: In seven display rooms, outstanding examples of Gothic art testify to the religious faith of the Middle Ages; in fifteen redesigned themed rooms, masterpieces created in the Renaissance and Baroque periods bring to life the misery and splendour of the early modern period. A constantly changing selection of precious hand drawings and prints from the Graphic Collection enriches the permanent exhibition through its use of complementary themes.

Between Dying and Dancing. Tales of the early modern period

Around 30 masterpieces from the Dutch Golden Age have enriched the Alte Galerie collection since 2017. These precious permanent loans from the Kaiserschild Foundation now form the core of a comprehensive, new presentation of the Old Masters collection in Graz. In it, paintings and sculptures from three centuries offer a survey of a fascinating period that combined glitter and misery. The epoch's two faces in this regard are characterised by two of the most valuable paintings in the Alte Galerie: Pieter Brueghel the Younger's *Flemish Carnival*, which depicts high spirits and uninhibited pleasure, albeit accompanied by moralistic warnings. Contrasting with this is *The Triumph of Death*, Jan Brueghel's apocalyptic vision of man's powerlessness, and the absolute power of death.

Turning point

The centuries between 1500 and 1800 – we call them the Early Modern Period – mark the transition from the Christian world view of the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, on the eve of Modernity. We associate this time with the splendour of the Renaissance and the Baroque, yet hidden behind the glittering façade lies unsparing reality. On the surface, we see the grandeur and glamour of courtly festivities. We see a stream of goods flowing to Europe from all corners of the world, the first step toward globalisation; we see erudition filling the libraries.

Yet in reality we find a period of upheaval, of radical change, which is paid for with great suffering. These are centuries of war, which particularly in the first half of the 17th century brings the century to the brink of disaster. The immense devastations and number of victims of the legendary 'Iron Age' result in this conflict being deeply embedded in the collective memory of Central Europe. Under the pretext of religion, all the parties pursue the same ruthless policy of

violence to achieve domination of Europe and – in one of the first moves towards globalisation – of the ‘new continents’, too.

War and deprivations

The omnipresent war sets Europe in motion, too. Armies and baggage trains criss-cross the entire continent, leaving behind a trail of destruction. Hardship forces droves of war victims, religious refugees and people who have lost everything, to flee, or to a life on the streets. A period of massive climate change after 1550 accentuates the impact of war. Accompanied by global natural disasters and extremes of weather, this so-called ‘Mini-Ice Age’ leads to a fall in temperatures. Endless winter, rainy summers and crop failures are the result. This in turn brings about a dramatic food crisis, which further exacerbates the sufferings of a population that has been severely tested by war and deprivations. People begin to despair. Yet, they learn how to adapt: alongside the rigours of everyday life, an entirely new Baroque culture of celebration emerges, and moments of intense enjoyment of life.

Artworks as eye-witnesses

Creative artists lend a face to this world, they report and propagate, they warn and accuse. In the great religious conflicts of the age, art becomes a weapon, too. In a series of fifteen theme-based rooms (*Under the Star of Fortuna, The Return of the Gods, The Fight For Souls, The Endless War, A Continent on the Move, The Dream of Abundance, Moments of Happiness, Art and Connoisseurs, Role Play, Virtuous Heroes and Strong Women, From Trauma to Triumph, Carnival of the Gods, Turning Point*), the curator team presents the artworks as eloquent eye-witnesses of their period. Such terms as religious conflict and propaganda, migration, climate catastrophe and globalisation remind us, too, of how current many of the exhibition themes are even today – or have become so again.

Works of the following artists are on display in the exhibition:

Willem van Aelst, Denis van Alsloot, Martino Altomonte, Sofonisba Anguissola, Herri met de Bles, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Pieter Brueghel the Younger, Pieter Claesz, Hendrick de Clerck, Lukas Cranach the Elder, Dosso Dossi, Domenico Fetti, Franz de Paula Ferg, Frans Floris, Teodoro Ghisi, Giambologna, Jan van Goyen, Norbert Grund, Franz Christoph Janneck, Angelica Kauffmann, Veit Königer, Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder, Giulio Licinio, Johann Carl Loth, Franz Anton Maulbertsch, Jan Miense Molenaer, Joos de Momper, Aert van der Neer, Adriaen van Ostade, Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini, Johann Georg Platzer, Pietro de Pomis, Johann Michael Rottmayr, Salomon van Ruysdael, Martin Johann Schmidt (known as Kremser Schmidt), Johann Heinrich Schönfeld, Bartholomäus Spranger, Jan Steen, David Teniers the Younger, Francesco Trevisani, Paul Troger, Lucas van Valckenborch, Dirk Valkenburg, Marten de Vos, Sebastiaan Vrancx, Hans Adam Weissenkircher and Philips Wouwerman.

Eternity and its Effigy. Art in the Middle Ages

The collection of medieval art from the Alte Galerie contains objects originating from Styria and constitutes – due to its wealth of excellent panels and sculptures – the most significant art collection in Austria, alongside the medieval section of the Austrian Gallery at the Unteren Belvedere in Vienna. Furthermore, the displays (which range from the late 13th century to well into the 16th century) reflect international trends in the development of medieval art, which clearly shows the European dimension of the collection. This is underlined by several world-class works, such as the Admont Virgin Mary, the *votive tablet* from the St. Lambrecht Benedictine seminary and the *enthroned Virgin Mary with shining wreath*.

The objective of medieval thinking was eternity. All life on Earth is temporary; Christian belief determines every stage of life. Correspondingly, medieval art is not meant to lend to pleasure; the representation of God and the saints has a higher purpose: it should serve as a bridge towards eternity. The commencement of the medieval period at the Alte Galerie sees a key piece of indigenous work from the late Romanesque period, a piece which also presents us with a curiosity: an original door-hanging, painted on both sides with a depiction of St. Nicholas, who appears to welcome the visitor with a blessing. He opens the entrance to the sacred world of the medieval period (in which Mary, Mother of God also plays a central role) in a literally welcoming and bafflingly modern way. Mary is the most prominent saint in the Christian world, worshipped for having given birth to God, for preparing the way; she is called the 'helper' of Christians and the heavenly queen of ultimate beauty. The core of the 'Mary room' is the *Admonter Virgin Mary* and the *votive tablet* from St. Lambrecht. Mary, the 'heavenly preparer of the way' links up with the next room, which bears witness to glass painting and communicates a 'heavenly light' captured by this medium. Thus, the church room is not just a place of worship, but is also a depiction of the heavenly town of Jerusalem.

The adjoining four rooms are devoted to 'God's servant' himself: Jesus Christ. Theological teachings imply that Christ has a double nature: a godly one and a human one; the latter is shown in the portrayal of His life when a child. The undiluted, gruesome realism of the story of the Passion (which deals with the suffering and death of Christ) stands in stark contrast to this. It is the spiritual core of medieval piety and finds expression in the innumerable crucifixes with the pain-racked Christ. The Passion is also the basis for the appearance of the Apostles and the saints who are seen in His wake. A large number of medieval paintings attest to this both descriptively and vividly, including the outstanding works of Michael Pacher, the creator of the Bruck Martin tablet, as well as two large, detailed altar works from Mariazell – the most significant place of pilgrimage in Austria.