

**THE DAGMAR AND
MANFRED CHOBOT
COLLECTION**

**A DONATION TO THE
ALBERTINA MUSEUM**

Exhibition Facts

Press conference	13 December 2019 10 am
Duration	13 December 2019 – 23 February 2020
Venue	Basteihalle, Gallery
Curator	Dr. Elisabeth Dutz, ALBERTINA
Works	ca. 60
Artists	14

Contact
Albertinaplatz 1 | 1010 Vienna
T +43 (01) 534 83 0
info@albertina.at
www.albertina.at

Opening Hours
Daily 10 am – 6 pm
Wednesdays & Fridays 10 am – 9pm

Press contact
Fiona Sara Schmidt
T +43 (01) 534 83 511 | M +43 (0)699 12178720
s.schmidt@albertina.at

Sarah Wulbrandt
T +43 (01) 534 83 512 | M +43 (0)699 10981743
s.wulbrandt@albertina.at

The Collection of Dagmar and Manfred Chobot

A Donation to the Albertina Museum

13 December 2019 – 23 February 2020

The Albertina Museum is pleased to announce the donation of a prominent collection: the museum's holdings have been augmented by the Collection of Dagmar and Manfred Chobot. The selection of works now being exhibited on the museum's lower level affords an initial glimpse into this major donation.

The activities of these two collectors and their Galerie Chobot, founded in 1971, have been tied quite closely to contemporary art output in Austria. Both as gallerists and as collectors, they have been involved above all with works on paper and sculptures. And it is Austrian sculptural output, in particular, to which Galerie Chobot has provided immeasurable support, including through its conferral of the Dagmar Chobot Sculpture Prize.

Alongside their business activities, the Chobots have also collected museum-quality works on a private basis. And even as they began doing so, the couple contemplated someday donating their collection to the Albertina Museum—a vision that now, around 50 years later, has indeed become reality. Dagmar and Manfred Chobot have presented the Albertina Museum with a generous donation of nearly 800 artworks.

These include works by Herbert Brandl, Gunter Damisch, Adolf Frohner, Bruno Gironcoli, Alfred Hrdlicka, Florentina Pakosta, Arnulf Rainer, Franz Ringel, Erhard Stöbe, Erwin Wurm, and Robert Zeppel-Sperl, to name just a few. Their donation additionally includes a significant portion of Karl Anton Fleck's artistic legacy. And with works from the art brut movement and by international artists, the Chobots' gift to the Albertina Museum also closes previously existing gaps in its holdings and makes possible new exhibitions and collaborative projects. A further opportunity to view works from this donation is the inaugural exhibition of Albertina modern, entitled *The Beginning. Art in Austria, 1945 to 1980*, which opens on 12 March 2020.

Artists:

Sevda Chkoutova | Johann Fischer | Karl Anton Fleck | Adolf Frohner | Bruno Gironcoli | Johann Hauser | Alfred Hrdlicka | Florentina Pakosta | Franz Ringel | Erhard Stöbe | Oswald Tschirtner | August Walla | Erwin Wurm | Robert Zeppel-Sperl

Wall Texts

Karl Anton Fleck (1928–1983)

Born in Vienna in 1928, the artist was a man of many gifts as a draughtsman, graphic artist, painter, and jazz musician, and his talent attracted attention even in his youth. Initially active as a musician, the young father moved to Sweden with his small family in 1953. Already in 1958, they returned to Vienna. Fleck soon began to exhibit and achieve success with his art, but he continued to work as a retoucher in various printing houses.

In the early 1960s, the artist relied on an abstract pictorial language inspired by Art Informel, before he increasingly integrated figurative elements, which resulted in surreal compositions of body and object fragments that partly echoed the approach of Pop art.

Fleck's criticism of Western consumer society is evident in a number of still lifes whose titles relate to affluence or dietary obsession, for instance. With his characteristic block letters, he combined text and image into "recipe poems." In the course of the seventies, the artist presented himself more and more as a hybrid between animal and human and created a rich, predominantly graphic oeuvre in which the (self-)portrait took on an increasingly central role. Alcoholism determined the artist's life to a higher and higher degree. Karl Anton Fleck died unexpectedly in late 1983.

From 1984 on, the Chobot Gallery regularly took over works on commission and, finally, the entire estate from his son Wolfgang Fleck (1951–1993).

Adolf Frohner (1934–2007)

Initially, Adolf Frohner was an exponent of Viennese Actionism. In 1962, together with Hermann Nitsch and Otto Muehl, he participated in the several-day action "Die Blutorgel" (The Blood Organ), for which a manifesto of the same name was published.

After his separation from the Actionists, Frohner went to Paris and worked in Daniel Spoerri's studio. He became known as Austria's representative at the São Paulo Biennial in 1969 and the Venice Biennial in 1970.

In the late 1960s, Frohner felt particularly close to Jean Dubuffet and Art brut. He created figures with misshapen bodies and twisted limbs, yet without mocking their ugliness or ridiculing them. He arrived at a figurative critical realism of his very own.

From the mid-1960s, Frohner's works increasingly revolved around the subject of women and their position in society. He showed women of distorted beauty, deformed and tortured. They are symbols of the oppression of women all over the world and expose the male image of women as that of an always available commodity.

Bruno Gironcoli (1936–2010)

Bruno Gironcoli's works address the fundamental problems of life: violence, oppression, sexuality, religion, death, power, alienation, and the relationship between mother or parents and child. Over the years, the artist came to prefer aluminum as the material for his sculptures, after he had experimented with polyester, among other things. The dimensions of his works also changed. Gironcoli created huge installations that he transformed into completely new carriers of artistic meaning without specifying it. There is always something implicitly threatening about his sculptures.

Gironcoli developed his sculptural concepts in drawings, unfolding them and running them through from A to Z. He reflected on different materials and the rapport between them and explored the relationship of bodies to space. His drawings are schematic, show different perspectives, and are combined with recurring motifs. Metallic paint is used extensively.

Draft No. 6, Project No. 6 is the design for Gironcoli's now famous sculpture *Column with Skull*, which was first cast in plaster and then in metal for the 1971 Biennial in São Paulo. Working with plaster, Gironcoli observed the fragility of the column, which made him think of a spine, and crowned it with a skull. This gave him the idea of attaching a swastika, inverting it because it was not supposed to be a real swastika. Gironcoli was guided by the material; it led him to the result: in this case a very political figure.

The Gugging Artists

The psychiatrist Leo Navratil motivated his patients at the Maria Gugging mental hospital to draw for therapeutic purposes as early as in the 1950s. The project saw its first prime in the 1960s. Navratil invited artists such as Arnulf Rainer, Peter Pongratz, Franz Ringel, Alfred Hrdlicka, and Adolf Frohner, who immediately recognized the creative quality of the Gugging artists. The first public exhibition of their works was presented in Vienna's Galerie nächst St. Stephan in 1970.

In 1981, the creative patients were given their own "House of Artists" on the premises of the clinic. The building became an attraction for artists from all over the world and began to unfold a momentum of its own. Numerous artists and writers began to integrate the Gugging artists' approach into their work.

Being acquainted with Leo Navratil, Dagmar and Manfred Chobot came into contact with the Gugging artists and Art brut ("raw" or "rough art") early on. The series of works they acquired at the first exhibition in 1970 became the basis of their collection.

Adolf Walla, Johann Hauser, and Oswald Tschirtner number among the best-known Gugging artists of the first generation. They are famous all over the world today, and their works are shown in museums in Austria and abroad.

Alfred Hrdlicka (1928–2009)

Alfred Hrdlicka is a naturalist. He likes to show his figures in extreme situations and postures: bent, stretched, stretched—as known from Auguste Rodin, who set new standards for sculpture in Paris around 1900 by relying on an all-pervading liveliness and dynamism and introducing the principles of torso and fragment.

Hrdlicka explored the story of Samson in a whole series of etchings as well as in this early sculpture, which shows the hero as a dying man, whose life expires after one last gasp. The blinded, empty eyes stare into nothing.

Samson was one of the last judges of ancient Israel before the establishment of a monarchy and a chosen one, endowed by God with miraculous power to deliver the people of Israel from the Philistines. God's condition for the strength bestowed was that Samson never cut his hair as a sign of his devotion to the ministry of God. He could thus perform heroic deeds until he fell in love with Delilah and entrusted her with the secret of his strength. Delilah betrayed Samson to the Philistines and cut his hair while he slept. He lost his strength and could be captured. His eyes were gouged out, and he was thrown into a prison where his hair began to grow again and his strength returned. One day, the Philistines had him brought to their temple to mock him. But Samson reached for the two central columns of the hall and collapsed the entire building. Three thousand Philistines were buried under it, and Samson himself died in its ruins.

Alfred Hrdlicka is interested in the fringe existences of society, in the humiliated, the enslaved, and also in the evil ones: in people in exceptional situations. His artistic work is dedicated to tracing the manifold aspects of human tragedy. It is often the conflict between high, noble claims and inadequate actions that defines the basis of this tragedy. Hrdlicka shows us people who fail to master the challenges they are confronted with and commit mistakes that result in catastrophes. He reveals the power of the irrational but also shows that every tragedy can have a ridiculous, grotesque or comic side. Hrdlicka wants to fathom what people do to other people and why they do it: violence in all its varieties, open or hidden, the brutality of war and the military.

Execution is one of Hrdlicka's few large-format paintings. It depicts the execution site Plötzensee in Berlin, where countless prisoners were murdered by the National Socialists. Later, the artist conceived the cycle "Plötzensee Dance of Death," which consists of sixteen large panels, for the memorial church in the Protestant community center Plötzensee.

Again and again, Hrdlicka returns to the horrors of National Socialism, but also to the absurdity of symbols such as the Nazi salute in *Naked Women Dancing in Front of Adolf Hitler*.

Florentina Pakosta (*1933)

Florentina Pakosta is one of those artists of her generation who have devoted themselves to art against all resistance from outside. From the very beginning, her work has been politically and socially committed and responds above all to the discrimination experienced by women. In contrast to other representatives of feminist art, she does not deal with her own body as a projection surface but with the body of powerful men.

From the late 1970s, Pakosta addressed the dissolution of the individual in the masses, the disappearance of the subject. *Spectator with Beaked Head* shows a crowd of bald people (Pakosta usually depicts her figures bald and thus almost genderless in order to focus on their facial expressions), from which a figure with a beaked head stands out. Pakosta's representation draws on Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1736–1783) and his eponymous versions of the subject, in which he transforms the upper and lower lips into a long snout or has them pout far forward as for a kiss. Pakosta's beaked heads push the facial expression to extremes, straight out replacing the lips with a beak. The beak becomes an attacking weapon, a phallus substitute, or a grotesque pout.

Franz Ringel (1940–2011) and Robert Zeppel-Sperl (1944–2005)

When Franz Ringel and Robert Zeppel-Sperl left Styria for Vienna in the 1960s to study painting, they neither joined the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism nor closed ranks with the city's abstract or expressionist painters. Together with Wolfgang Herzig, Martha Jungwirth, Kurt Kocherscheidt, and Peter Pongratz, both artists presented their works in the legendary Secession exhibition "Realities" in May 1968. The title of the show would provide the participants with a name although they never regarded themselves as a group in the narrower sense. Yet they all stood for a departure of Austrian painting toward a new, expanded concept of art.

Ringel painted mainly figures representing motifs of the human unconscious or classical legends. Recurring themes are fear and Eros. In close contact with the artists of the Gugging mental hospital, Ringel also dealt with topics from this sphere. His *Daniel Paul Schreber* portrays the author of *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* published in German in 1903.

Zeppel-Sperl's watercolors from the early 1980s depict fantastic hybrid creatures between humans, animals, and comic figures in an almost monochrome manner.

Erhard Stöbe (*1943)

Erhard Stöbe is a trained painter, graphic artist, and restorer. He always tries out new things, and his work shows a wide range of different styles. In the 1960s he devoted himself to Pop art and acrylic painting. A complete reorientation took place in 1971. For the first time, he painted watercolors that were completely contrary to the advertising aesthetics of earlier Pop art pictures: heads and human bodies that do not correspond to any ideal of beauty, but also interiors such as *Café*. In the same year, Stöbe's watercolors were presented in an exhibition at the Vienna Secession.

Stöbe's approach repeatedly underwent an abrupt change of style, which may be traced back to the restorer's constant occupation with art history and its traditions.

Erwin Wurm (*1954)

Erwin Wurm's work is full of irony, humor, and absurdity. Our everyday experience is turned topsy-turvy. Subversively, the artist takes the world as we know it apart and playfully creates a universe literally presenting things to us from a different perspective.

In the late 1980s, Wurm began to develop his *one minute sculptures*, which are drawings instructing the viewer how to transform himself into a sculpture for a short time: to adopt a certain preposterous pose or do something grotesque while using certain objects. The artist sees himself as a director who, with an extended concept of sculpture, sets something in motion, causes people to become active.