

Hans Robert Pippal

22 January – 28 March 2016

Many people know Hans Robert Pippal (1915–1998) above all for his charming views of Vienna. As perhaps the “most Viennese” of 20th-century Austrian painters, Pippal began devoting himself with great passion to his hometown during the 1950s, depicting representative streets and buildings in the city centre as well as atmospheric views of the Vienna’s outer districts. Pippal was virtually unexcelled at capturing the city’s ambience. The Albertina is holding a solo show to honour this artist’s unique and diverse output, an oeuvre that is so resistant to stylistic classification due to its well-considered alternation between different styles, techniques, and themes.

Hans Robert Pippal was not a revolutionary. In contrast to the modernist avant-garde, he refrained from diving into the adventure of abstraction. His oeuvre can much rather be considered a reflection of his times. It was made fertile by the post-war atmosphere in Vienna, where the city as a whole and its artistic life in particular were slowly recovering from the tragedy that was the Second World War.

Pippal’s city portraits reveal not a pulsating modern metropolis, but rather enraptured, calm views of the historic architectural substance, resplendent with harmonious compositions and colours. His works cast an affectionate gaze on a cheerful, beautiful, prospering, and above all—after the war’s horrors—peaceful Vienna. During the era of post-war reconstruction, Pippal’s paintings hinted at a better, more carefree life. Many of his views originated during winter, with the bare trees offering an unfettered view of the architecture that makes Vienna so unique. His 1950s portraits of women, in their rococo-like elegance and opulence, breathe the spirit of that period’s Sissi movies and simultaneously give expression to the hope for peace and prosperity.

Furthermore, Pippal’s numerous trips to Italy and France saw the creation of vedutas in which he gave himself over fully to the lightness and fresh colours of French artists such as Henri Matisse, Maurice Utrillo, and Raoul Dufy, with whose works he had already become acquainted thanks to presentations of modern French art organised by the occupation authorities in Vienna. On the basis of the sketches done on location, Pippal—back at his studio in the 8th district—then went about creating his large-format pastels that reflect the beauty of the cities he had visited.

In the still-lives and interiors created during the same period, one sees the interest that Pippal took in cubism. And even if he thereafter refrained from continuing down the path toward abstraction, his works on paper—in which he allowed himself greater freedom than

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in his paintings—would continue to serve him as a field of experimentation in this newer stylistic vein.

The artist's entire oeuvre is characterised by the desire to catch up to international figurative modernism following the war, as well as by his struggle to arrive at an appropriate style for his respective motifs or themes. While Pippal's paintings of cities are oriented toward late impressionism, his early illustrations take after those of Alfred Kubin. And the small number of his works that deal with Christian content follow the example of Georges Rouault, a central figure of modern religious painting.

The stylistic diversity employed by Pippal is by no means random eclecticism, but rather bears witness to the artists' constant quest to find an adequate form of artistic expression for the motif at hand. This makes his artistic output a highly individual contribution to the history of modern fine art in Austria.

Prof. Martina Pippal, the artist's daughter, recently donated a large group of watercolours, pastels, drawings, and sketches to the Albertina, and this solo exhibition features a representative selection of these works in their first public showing.