

Hundertwasser to Kiefer – From Symbol of Freedom to Shadows of the Past

Around the middle of the 20th century, abstraction rose to become a symbol of freedom in both Europe and America. This supposedly final style of art history was viewed as a new worldwide language of art, as painting's climax and culmination. It came to epitomize the artistic temperament, expressive subjectivity, and heroization of the individual—in contrast to the propaganda embodied by representational art, the expressive form of dictatorships from National Socialism to Stalinism.

Abstract painting was the answer to this realism in service of propagandistic aims. Abstraction, which amounted to the existential self-expression of the artist, grew out of a refusal to adhere to formal and artistic laws and rules. The fact that a nonconforming abstract artist can become popular and even downright folkloric was proven in Austria by Friedensreich Hundertwasser, who was active both as a painter and as an architect.

During the 1960s, however, German artists—from Jörg Immendorff to Markus Lüpertz and on to Anselm Kiefer—began to grapple with the catastrophe of the world wars that Germany had twice visited upon the world: it was hence the shadows of a dark past that reintroduced identifiable objects, themes, and motifs to art. These painters employed representation not as propaganda but as criticism of their own history—of war, of Germany's division, and of society's atomization.

While American pop art of the 1960s dealt mainly with the consequences of capitalism and the commercialization of society and consumer goods, Georg Baselitz, Jörg Immendorff, and Markus Lüpertz turned their gazes upon their own nation's ominous past.

Press Images

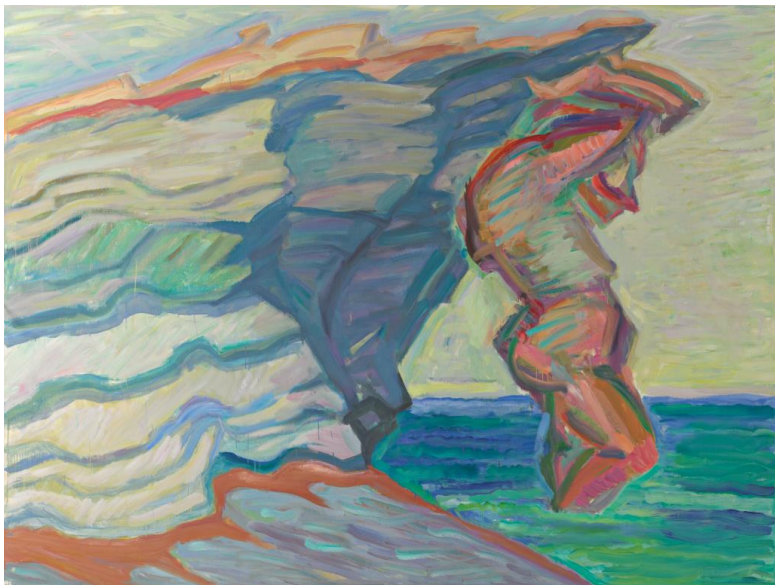
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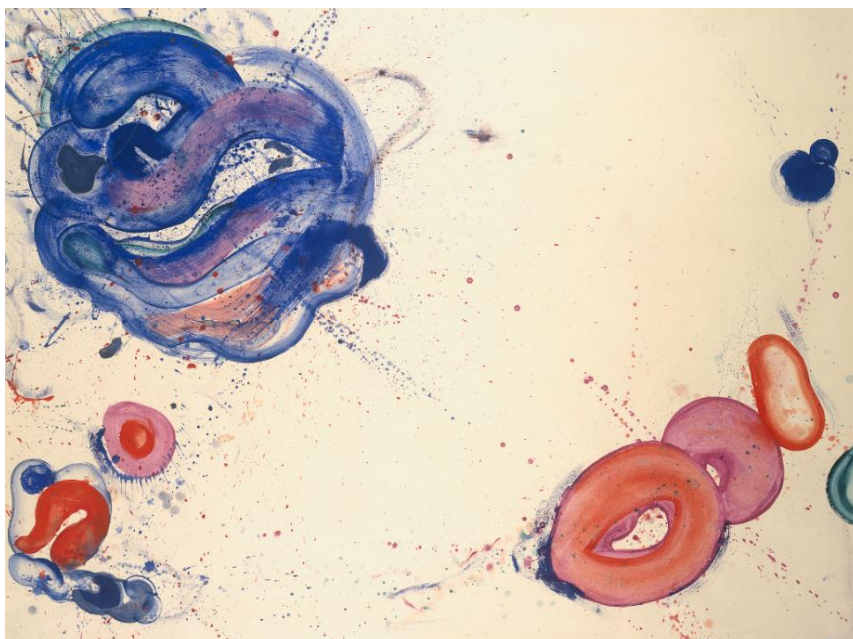
Friedensreich Hundertwasser
313 Du soleil pour ceux qui pleurent en campagne, 1957/1959
Egg tempera, watercolor, oil, and sand in oil on
“Japanese preparation” (pieces of paper glued together)
100 × 150 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection



Maria Lassnig
Fear of Cancer, 1979
Oil on canvas
130 × 180 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Permanent loan, Austrian private collection



Maria Lassnig
Atlas, 1985
Oil on canvas
200 × 270 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The Haselsteiner Family Collection



Sam Francis
Untitled, 1962
Acrylic on paper
155 × 195 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection



Sam Francis
Blood and Tears, 1962–63
Acrylic on canvas
65 × 80 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The Batliner Collection



Morris Louis
Quo Numine Laeso, 1959
Oil on canvas
270 × 200 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Loan of E. Ploil



Anselm Kiefer
San Loretto, 2008
Mixed technique on canvas
190 × 330 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The Batliner Collection
Photo: Ulrich Ghezzi



Arnulf Rainer
Black Streaks, 1974
Oil and charcoal on photograph, scratched,
mounted on wood
120 x 90 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Georg Baselitz
Crouching Dog, 1968
Oil on canvas
160 x 130 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL
Collection