

Abstract Art from Austria.

1960–Present

10 June 2015 – 6 September 2015

To mark its assumption of the Ploner Collection, the Albertina is mounting an exhibition on the development of abstract painting and drawing in Austria since 1960. This presentation sets a selection of the newly received works in relation to outstanding drawings and paintings from the Albertina's extensive related holdings.

The Albertina's rich holdings of post-1945 Austrian art exist thanks to consistent acquisitions over the past decades as well as generous gifts and permanent loans, made particularly under the aegis of directors Konrad Oberhuber (1987 to 1999) and Klaus Albrecht Schröder (since 2000).

Collecting new art was already an important concern of Albertina founder Duke Albert, who – above all during the final two decades of his life – concentrated on acquiring works by the contemporary artists of his day and supporting young talents. These so-called *Maîtres Modernes* ultimately made up around a third of his collection of drawings. And the continued growth of this collection in the present day thanks to the generous gift of the Ploner Collection is a happy occasion indeed.

The Ploner Collection, the focus of which is on abstract art from Austria, was compiled beginning in 1997. Following the death of collection founder Dr. Heinz Ploner in 2011, his wife Regina Ploner decided in 2014 to give large parts of it to the Albertina, the Belvedere in Vienna and the Joanneum in Graz in order to preserve it for the long term and make its works accessible to the largest-possible number of viewers. Her gift lends further depth to the Albertina's holdings thanks to outstanding works by Erwin Bohatsch, Herbert Brandl, Gunter Damisch, Josef Mikl, Hubert Scheibl, and others. And an accompanying publication, produced jointly by the Albertina, the Belvedere, and the Joanneum, makes it possible to grasp the Ploner Collection in its entirety even following its division.

The selection featured in this exhibition lays no claim to comprehensiveness; instead, it centres on the artists represented in the Ploner Collection. These works are joined by just a few specifically selected examples from the museum's pre-existing holdings by Franz Grabmayr, Wolfgang Hollegha, and Markus Prachensky, as well as by a small number of outstanding loan items from the collection of the Austrian National Bank.

For Heinz Ploner, painting and graphic art always enjoyed equal status. Many of the drawings he collected are of a "painterly" character, with some of the works produced since the 1980s even being in monumental formats. These are anything but unfinished sketches, preparatory studies, or preliminary versions of paintings, but are rather equal to them, influencing and being influenced by them, and ambivalent in the best sense of the word.

The Ploner Collection accordingly contains paintings and high-quality works on paper done by one and the same artist; such examples come from figures such as Erwin Bohatsch, Gunter Damisch, and Hubert Scheibl. Common to all of them – and a central interest of the collector Heinz Ploner – is the fact that they explore the possibilities of drawing and painting long after both art forms' widely heralded demise.

With its selection of around 125 works, this showing encompasses the most important aspects of abstract art's development in Austria from 1960 up to the present:

The successive abstraction of the human figure marks the beginning of that radical development that was touched off by Wolfgang Hollegha, Markus Prachensky, Arnulf Rainer, and Josef Mikl in 1956 with their group Galerie St. Stephan, which took its name from a gallery owned by the key contemporary art patron Monsignore Otto Mauer (1907–1973). Josef Mikl, in his nudes, examined the form and structure of the human body as well as the proportions of weight and encumbrance, of body and space. Such translation and transformation of the naturalistic image is also a theme in the oeuvre of Jürgen Messensee, who fragments the figure and thereby arrives at memorable ciphers and abbreviations. Markus Prachensky, on the other hand, made early contact with French Art Informel as well as with the painting of Pierre Soulage, after which he proceeded to create works of a gestural and expressive quality. And Hans Staudacher employed spontaneous scribbles to examine the tension between forms' coalescence and dissolution.

With his pastose, motion-filled mode of painting, Franz Grabmayr assumes a unique position in this showing that recalls how, back in the nineteen-eighties, he served as a role model for the painting of the so-called young upstarts Gunter Damisch, Erwin Bohatsch, Hubert Scheibl, and Herbert Brandl. These artists, in their intense experiments with colour and materials, deal with the alternation between surface and visual depth as well as with drawing and painting as gestural acts and processes.