

Johann Hauser



JOHANN HAUSER... DER KÜNSTLER BIN ICH! (I AM THE ARTIST!!)

Museum Gugging, Art Brut Center
Gugging, Austria
June 6, 2016 - Jan 8, 2017

Johann Hauser (1926-1996) was one of the most distinctive members of the original group of residents of the House of Artists at what is now known as the Art Brut Center Gugging, an institution on the north-western outskirts of Vienna. That residence for self-taught art-makers evolved out of what had been an earlier Centre for Art and Psychotherapy, which had been set up by the psychiatrist Leo Navratil (1921-2006) in 1981. (Today's Gugging art complex has its roots in a former psychiatric hospital.) After the psychiatrist and sculptor Johann Feilacher became Navratil's successor in the mid-1980s, he transformed the clinically oriented artists' residence, focusing instead on their artistic creativity, not on their mental illnesses.

To mark the tenth anniversary of its founding, Museum Gugging is presenting a comprehensive exhibition of Hauser's drawings and hand-coloured etchings. Featuring more than 200 works, it includes some of the Austrian autodidact's early depictions of aircraft, along with pictures of animals, palaces, rockets, and his emblematic, erotic-expressionistic images of women. With a sure line, using plain pencil, coloured pencils or wax crayons, Hauser portrayed female figures of ambiguous and haunting beauty, whipping up voluminous

piles of hair and highlighting their mouths, breasts and other body parts in ways that bring to mind the Cubists' experiments with exaggerated forms. These pictures also recall the figuration-abstract tug of war that characterised the imagery of certain Abstract Expressionists. Hauser's palette is plain and powerful; he used mainly primary and secondary colours.

In this exhibition's superbly illustrated catalogue, Feilacher, the show's curator, fondly recalls his first interactions with Hauser many years ago. He points out that admirers of his work included the French modern artist Jean Dubuffet and the Austrian avantgardist Arnulf Rainer. Museum Gugging's exhibition is a milestone presentation that both celebrates and vividly documents the raw creative energy that lies at the heart of art brut art-making.

Edward M. Gómez

LINDA NAEFF: LES COULEURS HABILLENT LA SOUFFRANCE

Musée de Carouge, Carouge,
Switzerland
April 27 - August 28, 2016

Linda Naeff (1926-2014) was born near Paris to an authoritarian father and an emotionally troubled and suicidal mother. Naeff's parents were unmarried at the time; her out-of-wedlock birth provoked the ire of her mother's relatives, which led to considerable family tension.

In 1940, the Naeffs settled in



Linda Naeff

Switzerland, where the young Linda was sexually abused by a male teacher. That traumatic experience wounded her psychologically for a lifetime; although she later married and bore two daughters, Naeff also suffered four miscarriages. Nevertheless, she studied hairdressing, took part in amateur theatre and was active in a volunteer organisation that aided people facing psychological and other hardships.

At the age of 61, Naeff began making art. She took some basic classes that introduced her to materials but mostly developed her own art-making techniques, often employing found objects, including clear-plastic candy boxes and mattress-support slats from old beds. As this exhibition, whose title means "Colours Dress Up the Suffering", makes clear, for Naeff, creating art was a therapeutic activity. In a short film made by Mario del Curto and Bastin Genoux, which is part of the exhibition, Naeff suggests that she regarded her work as potentially serving a therapeutic purpose for its viewers, too.

Her impulsive, unbridled creative energy, along with an uninhibited sense of raw emotion, can be felt in many of her works, most of which are untitled. Among them: a picture of a girl who is chained to a chair and gnawed at by rats; her self-portrait as a naked woman who has just miscarried a child; and her ceramic figures, with their big holes for eyes, tilting necks and gaping mouths. In one of her many one-of-a-kind artist's books, Naeff wrote, "I am a joyous pessimist and a sad optimist."

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