

THE LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM IN VIENNA

On 29 March 2004 the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM opened its doors to the general public. On display is the collection of Prince Hans-Adam II von und zu Liechtenstein, one of the world's most important private art collections, containing masterpieces of European art spanning five centuries. For generations the House of Liechtenstein has consistently nurtured the Baroque ideal of princely patronage, extending its holdings according to a systematic programme of acquisitions. In the setting of the restored Liechtenstein summer palace in the Rossau quarter of Vienna, where the Princely Collections were kept from 1807–1938 and were among the main attractions for connoisseurs of art in Vienna during that time, the results of centuries of collecting enable the visitor to experience the glories of the Baroque at first hand.

The LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM sees itself as a locus of *joie de vivre* and the pleasures of the senses in which all the different genres of art are exhibited together so that they can make their impact as an historic ensemble. Exhibited over an area of 2,300 m², this intensely atmospheric assemblage of painting, sculpture, *Kunstzimmer* objects and furniture displayed in the glorious setting of the Liechtenstein summer palace, their erstwhile home, breathes life once more into the long unseen glories of the Princely Collections.

On entering the palace via the spacious Sala Terrena the visitor is immediately drawn to the Golden Carriage of Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein, the finest surviving example of an 18th century French-built ceremonial coach. The sculpture gallery facing the gardens leads at one end into the former Ladies' Apartments, which host the temporary exhibitions at the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM, and at the other into the Gentlemen's Apartments, which now house the magnificent neo-Classical Library. Nothing reflects the multifarious interests of the Princely House of Liechtenstein better than its surviving holdings of more than 100,000 volumes.

A particularly impressive feature is the colourful fresco decoration by Johann Michael Rottmayr (1654–1730) on the ceilings of the ground floor and the two monumental stairways leading up to the *piano nobile*. Here the visitor is taken through a succession of galleries with fine stucco work and original decorative parquet floors in which are displayed works from the most important epochs of European art history – from the early Renaissance to the High Baroque. The princely paintings collection comprises more than 1,600 works, of which around 170 masterpieces are permanently exhibited in the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM alongside sculptures, *Kunstzimmer* objects and furniture. The holdings of art have been complemented and extended over the past few years with the acquisition of superb and sometimes spectacular pieces, such as the purchase in December 2004 of the Badminton Cabinet.

A further highlight on the tour of the museum is the Hercules Hall. Measuring 600 m², it is the largest secular Baroque hall in Vienna and provides the perfect setting for various kinds of events. The monumental fresco on the ceiling by Andrea Pozzo (1704–1708) depicts the life and exploits of the Greek hero Hercules, drawing the onlooker's gaze upwards into the Olympian pantheon.

This magnificent Baroque synthesis of the arts is complemented by a varied accompanying programme of activities developed by the museum (guided tours, concerts, readings, workshops at the in-house studio, etc.), as well as by the historic gardens which provide the visitor with space for recreation and relaxation, and last but

not least by the restaurant ensuring that the visitor's experience of Baroque culture at the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM can be accompanied by culinary enjoyment.

In addition to the summer palace in the Rossau quarter, the Liechtenstein family own another architectural gem in Vienna's first district: the city palace on Bankgasse, currently being reawakened to new life. On 1 December 2011 this palace, the first important High Baroque building to be erected in Vienna, will be ceremonially opened following three years of comprehensive restoration as the second venue of the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM.