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Ferdinand Schmutzer: Freud and His Era in Portraits

- Sigmund Freud Museum, 26 Sept. 2008 – 25 Jan. 2009

The Sigmund Freud Museum is showing a selection of the work of the etcher Ferdinand Schmutzer (1870-1928), who in the early 20th century numbered among Vienna's most significant portrait artists.

Schmutzer's portraits provide a fascinating look at Viennese cultural and intellectual life at the turn of the century. The exhibition at the Sigmund Freud Museum focuses on the social, political and cultural surroundings in which Sigmund Freud lived and developed psychoanalysis. It will feature etchings with portraits of Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Emperor Francis Joseph, Karl Lueger, Arthur Schnitzler and other key figures of this era. Letters and other documents demonstrate relationships between Freud, Schmutzer and various portrait subjects.

Inge Scholz-Strasser, director of the Sigmund Freud Museum, elucidates: "Sigmund Freud sat model for Schmutzer in 1926; the etching was a gift from his students on the occasion of his 70th birthday. We will also be showing the humorously self-effacing letter that Freud wrote thanking Schmutzer."

Politics, Culture and Science

Part of the exhibition deals with those who exercised political power during Freud's lifetime, whereby Emperor Francis Joseph and Vienna Mayor Karl Lueger are to be seen as the dominant figures of the era preceding the First World War. Mayor Karl Seitz and City Councilor Julius Tandler stand for "Red Vienna" during the interwar period.

"Freud had a difficult relationship with politics," explains Inge Scholz-Strasser. "Lueger's anti-Semitic politics and the career obstacles it entailed angered him, as did the refusal for many years of Emperor Francis Joseph to appoint him to a professorship. While the ceremony of the imperial court inspired Freud's cynical commentary, he was nonetheless convinced of the rightness of Austria's intentions and aims at the outbreak of the First World War. But his opinion changed during the following years."

A second section of the exhibition explores overlapping relationships and mutual influences between culture and psychoanalysis. To illustrate the numerous thematic connections, the show presents depictions of the author Arthur Schnitzler, the composer Richard Strauss and the State Theater actor Josef Kainz.

Scientists and prominent intellectual figures are at the focus of a third section, with the rendering of Albert Einstein probably representing the most famous of the portraits. He met Freud in Berlin in 1927, and with him he initiated the correspondence "Why War?"

The archaeologist Emanuel Löwy, one of Freud's closest friends, assisted him in assembling and cataloging his collection of antiquities. Rudolf Chrobak had been a fellow student of Freud's in the medical school of Prof. Ernst Brücke, and their continuing relationship was characterized by mutual respect. Freud referred to Chrobak as "perhaps the most exceptional of our Viennese physicians." Schmutzer's portrait of the journalist Ernst Benedikt closes this section of the presentation. He was the owner and publisher of Freud's preferred daily newspaper, the "Neue Freie Presse".

Schmutzer's Working Methods

In addition to focusing on his subjects, the exhibition also devotes attention to Schmutzer's technical approach. The photographs upon which he based his etchings provide an understanding of his work, and their high quality demonstrates Schmutzer's expertise in this field as well. The exhibition has been created in cooperation with the Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts, whose director Monika Knofler is curating the show together with Inge Scholz-Strasser.

Ferdinand Schmutzer (1870-1928)

Ferdinand Schmutzer came from an artist family with a long tradition: his great grandfather Jacob Mathäus Schmutzer had founded the "k.k. Kupferstecher-Academie" (Imperial Academy of Engraving), which soon fused with the "k.k. Akademie der vereinigten bildenden Künste" (Imperial Academy of the Integrated Fine Arts). Today the institution is known as the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and it numbers among the world's most important art schools. In his early years Schmutzer followed the family tradition of devoting himself to sculpture before later studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. Of special importance for his artistic development was a stay in the Netherlands, where he – influenced by Rembrandt's work – developed his interest in etching, which henceforth stood at the center of his artistic activity. With his portraits of Viennese society figures he attained great commercial and artistic success. He joined the Vienna Secession in 1901, and in the following years he received numerous prizes and honors as well as increasing international recognition. In addition to their technical perfection, it was most of all the format of his works – they were significantly larger than previous etchings – that earned him fame as an innovative artist.

Academic recognition followed with his appointment to a professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1908. In the following years he pursued technical developments going beyond the larger format, using innovative etching processes and experimenting with new types of needles. Beginning in 1922 he served for two years as the Academy's rector. Ferdinand Schmutzer died in 1928 in his villa in Vienna's Sternwartestrasse, which to this day remains in the family's possession.

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26 September 2008 – 25 January 2009

Sigmund Freud Museum

Berggasse 19, 1090 Vienna

daily 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Exhibition composed by: Inge Scholz-Strasser (Director of the Sigmund Freud Museum), Monika Knofler (Director of the Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna), Tatjana Gawron

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The Sigmund Freud Foundation – A Brief Profile

The Sigmund Freud Foundation, with its seat in Vienna, was formed in 2003 as an independent scholarly and cultural institution. The Foundation represents the financial and administrative basis of the museum of the same name and of the research institute. In addition to a library for psychoanalysis and an archive devoted to Sigmund Freud's life, work and social and cultural surroundings, the Foundation also owns a collection of contemporary art. The Foundation presents exhibitions, offers an interdisciplinary program of scientific events and supports young scholars within the framework of the Freud-Fulbright Research Fellowship. The Sigmund Freud Foundation sees itself as an interface between science, history, culture and the arts and offers scholars, artists and culture producers an open discussion forum for psychoanalysis and related issues. Its aim is to maintain and develop the central aspect of European cultural heritage left by Sigmund Freud and his era, to study it and to actively promote scholarly discussion.