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Oskar Kokoschka

Oberwildling in Vienna

23 September 2022 - 12 February 2023



The Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris is presenting the first Paris retrospective devoted to Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980). Retracing Kokoschka's seven decades of image-making, the exhibition highlights the artist's originality as we accompany him through Europe's 20th century.

Painter, writer, playwright and poet, Kokoschka stands for his committed role in the artistic and intellectual upheavals of early 20th-century Vienna. Combining a drive to convey the intensity of the moods of his time with a very real talent for provocation, from 1908 onwards he became the "Oberwildling" for critical circles in Vienna. Meanwhile, with the support of Gustav Klimt and Adolf Loos, he inspired a new generation of artists, among them Egon Schiele. As a portraitist of Viennese society, he brought unrivalled skill to laying bare his models' innermost being.

Shaken by his breakup with the composer Alma Mahler after a tumultuous affair between 1912 and 1914, Kokoschka joined the army when the First World War broke out, and was seriously wounded twice. He went on to teach at the art school in Dresden while seeking new forms of painterly expression as counterpoints to such other contemporary movements as Expressionism, the New Objectivity and abstraction.

A tireless traveller, during the 1920s he made trips to European countries, North Africa and the Middle East. His financial difficulties led him to move back in Vienna, which experienced political unrest, and then in Prague in 1934. When his works, condemned by the Nazis as "degenerate", were withdrawn from German museums, he braved the forces of fascism with an unrelenting commitment to the defence of freedom. Exile becoming inevitable, he found a refuge in Great Britain in 1938 and joined the international resistance movement.

After the war, he became a leading figure on the European intellectual scene and participated in the cultural reconstruction of a devastated, divided continent. He explored Greek tragedies and mythological stories in search of the sources of social ferment. Distancing himself from Germanic culture and language, he settled in Villeneuve, in French-speaking Switzerland, in 1953. The works of his last years show an uncompromising pictorial radicalism close to that of his early career. His belief in the subversive power of painting as a vehicle for emancipation and education remained unshakeable until his death.

Oskar Kokoschka: Enfant terrible in Vienna is a unique selection of 150 of the artist's most significant works, brought together with the backing of major European and American collections.

Le Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris thanks its sponsors, Morgan Stanley, main sponsor, VIG Re and le Crédit municipal de Paris whose commitment contributes to the influence of this exhibition.

The exhibition will be on show at Guggenheim Bilbao from 17 March to 3 September 2023.

PRESS RELEASE

Museum director

Fabrice Hergott

Curators

Dieter Buchhart

Anna Karina Hofbauer

Fanny Schulmann

assisted by Anne Bergeaud and

Cedric A. Huss

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Oskar Kokoschka

Self-portrait, 1917

Oil on canvas

79 x 63 cm

Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal

Photo Patrick Schwarz

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Visitor information

Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris

11 Avenue du Président Wilson

75116 Paris

Tel. 01 53 67 40 00

www.mam.paris.fr

Open Tuesday – Sunday

10 am – 6 pm

Open late

Thursday until 9:30 pm

Admission

Full rate: 14 €

Concessions : 12 €

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Exhibition Texts

Introduction

Peintre Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980), a painter, poet, and playwright, is inextricably linked to the artistic and intellectual movements of early twentieth-century Vienna, and its pioneers Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and Egon Schiele (1890-1918). His first works sent shock waves to the public and the critics, who described him as "Oberwildling", the most savage of them all. However, the richness of his personal and artistic path goes beyond this Viennese context and enables us to live, with him, through the European twentieth century and all of its upheavals, without ever denying his foremost qualities.

His desire for independence kept him away from the established avant-garde movements, which explains why he was difficult to assimilate into the well-defined narratives of art history. If Kokoschka accepted one epithet to describe himself, it was that of expressionist, as he desired to convey his moods and those of his time through painting. "I am an expressionist because I do not know how to do anything other than express life", he declared one day. As such, the commitment he showed is evident in each of his works, making him an essential witness of his time.

Kokoschka's unfettered attitude had a significant impact on the evolution of his reception. Initially a scandalous artist, he became a special target of the Nazis, who designated him and his art "degenerate". Having fought against fascism with his works, he became as an influential figure for European reconciliation after World War II and actively participated in the cultural reconstruction of a devastated continent. But, until his final works in the 1970s, he maintained his obstinacy and inventiveness.



Oskar Kokoschka shaved head, 1909
Gelatin Silver put on card board
23,7 x 18 cm
© Oskar Kokoschka Zentrum, Universität für angewandte Kunst Vienne
/ photo Wenzel Weis

An “Enfant Terrible” in Vienna (1904-1916)

Advocating the unity of the arts, the artists of the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte (1903-1932) invented soft, organic and plant-like forms, which spread throughout art and architecture. The sudden emergence on this art scene of Oskar Kokoschka came like an “explosion in a garden”, as the historian Carl Emil Schorske depicted it.

Kokoschka asserted himself with the crudeness of his drawings and texts, which foreshadowed the expressionist movement. In 1908, his first illustrated poem, *The Dreaming Boys*, dedicated to Gustav Klimt by way of thanks for his support, caused a scandal when it was exhibited at the “Kunstschau” in Vienna. This was repeated a year later on the opening night of his play *Murderer, Hope of Women*.

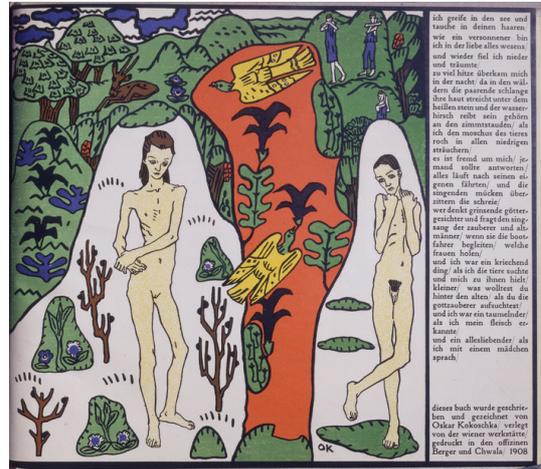
Described as wild by the critics, Kokoschka shaved his head in order to resemble a convict. He also met allies, in particular the architect Adolf Loos (1870-1933), who opposed purely decorative art. Thanks to his support, Kokoschka received many portraits commissions of members of the Viennese society, who did not always accept the artist’s keen look. By combining mannerist exaggerations and his own expressionism Kokoschka managed to bring to light the inner states of his sitters.



Oskar Kokoschka
The Trance Player (Ernst Reinhold) / Der Trancespieler (Ernst Reinhold), 1909
Oil on canvas
81 x 65 cm
Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles / photo J. Geleyns
© Fondation Oskar Kokoschka / Adagp, Paris 2022

With the Wiener Werkstätte

The Secession, a group of painters opposing academic art who gathered around Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), proclaimed an essential union with the applied arts. With this aim in view, the Wiener Werkstätte ("Vienna Workshop") was founded in 1903 on the model of the English Arts and Crafts movement, to connect artists and craftsmen in the creation of a total work of art. Numerous connections linked the Secession and the Vienna School of Applied Arts, where Kokoschka studied from 1904. In October 1907, the young artist organized a theatrical evening at the Cabaret Fledermaus, a major meeting place of the artistic scene, demonstrating his early interest in the theatre. Besides, he received several commissions, including his first important graphic work, *The Dreaming Boys* (1908), a poem written and illustrated by Kokoschka, which tells of the sexual awakening of adolescents. However, the coming together of Kokoschka and the architect Adolf Loos, who cast a critical eye on this movement, which he judged subjugated to the decorative, steered him away from the association in 1909.



Oskar Kokoschka
The Dreaming Boys/ Die Träumenden Knaben, 1908
Book with lithographs in colors on paper
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
© Neue Galerie New York/Art Resource / Scala, Florence
© Fondation Oskar Kokoschka / Adagp, Paris 2022

Der Sturm and the graphic cycles

Oskar Kokoschka made contact with an artistic and literary network through his friend Adolf Loos. Among others, he met the Austrian writer Karl Kraus (1874-1936), the founder of the polemical journal *Die Fackel* and, in 1910, the Berlin publisher *Herwarth Walden* (1878-1941), the founder of the gallery and journal *Der Sturm*. Playing a fundamental role in the development of the avant-garde in Germany, Walden made it possible for Kokoschka to leave Vienna for a while in order to go to Berlin and contribute to this venture, by illustrating several pages of his journal. Kokoschka's personal, outspoken, and at times misogynous themes found full expression in the illustrations for his play *Murderer, Hope of Women*. Graphic cycles remained fundamental to Kokoschka's oeuvre, in which he addressed, among other things, his stormy relationship with composer *Alma Mahler* (1879-1964). *The Bound Columbus* (1913) and *Bach's Cantata* (1914) describe the torments, the fusion of impulses of life and death, and the harmful role played by women in the destiny of men, according to a tradition stemming from Arthur Schopenhauer to Otto Weininger.

World War I

The outbreak of the war in September 1914 coincided with the painter's break-up with Alma Mahler. Adolf Loos recommended that he be enlisted in the Imperial Dragoons, an elite regiment of the Austro-Hungarian army which necessitated the sale of one of his masterpieces, *The Bride of the Wind*, so as to buy a horse. Wounded in the head and the lungs on the Russian front in 1915, he was treated in a hospital in Brno. He returned to the front in 1916 as a war painter during the Battle of the Isonzo, Italy. Wounded again by the explosion of a grenade, he was evacuated to Vienna, then to Berlin. From this dramatic period, only a few drawings testifying to the violence of the fighting have survived.

Resistance in Prague (1934-1938)

When Hitler came to power, Kokoschka publicly declared his intention to combat Nazism. In May 1933, in the German daily newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung* he protested against the resignation from the Prussian Academy of Arts of the painter Max Liebermann (1874-1935), because of his Jewish background. In Vienna, the civil war of 1934, which pitted fascists against socialists, deteriorated his mother's health, and she died a few weeks later. In financial difficulty, he emigrated to Prague, his father's hometown, where his sister Berta lived. There he met Olda Palkovská (1915-2004), a law student, whom he would marry in 1941.

From Czechoslovakia, he saw the Nazi trap gradually shutting on Europe. He published numerous articles and organized conferences to alert people of the danger. The travelling exhibition of degenerate art displayed nine of his paintings along many masterpieces of the European avant-garde. He responded with a brilliant *Self-Portrait as a Degenerate Artist*. His works have never been more vivid and bucolic as a response to the desperate state of politics. His brush-strokes precisely reflect opulent natural environments that become the setting for enigmatic stagings.



Oskar Kokoschka
Self-portrait as "a Degenerate Artist" / Selbstbildnis eines 'Entarteten Künstlers', 1937
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Scotland, Édimbourg
En prêt d'une collection particulière
© Fondation Oskar Kokoschka / Adagp, Paris 2022

Artworks in the Face of Fascism

With the Nazis' ascension to power in 1933, the European cultural avant-garde was accused of contributing to modern society's decadence; Kokoschka's paintings became major targets. In 1932, five of his paintings were seized in the museums of Dresden and, after Hitler came into power, all of his works were taken down from public collections. In total around six hundred works by the artist were seized from German museums — paintings, drawings, prints. Some paintings were part of the travelling exhibition entitled "Entartete Kunst" ("Degenerate Art"), which attracted great crowds in Munich, Berlin, and Vienna in 1937 and 1938. Others were sold, especially at the Lucerne auction in June 1939, to contribute to the war effort of the Nazis. *The Bride of the Wind*, a masterpiece by Kokoschka, seized from the collections of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg and presented in the exhibition "Entartete Kunst", was eventually sold to the Kunstmuseum in Basel by the gallery owner Karl Buchholz (1901-1992), just before the Lucerne auction. Because of this, and due to its extremely delicate state, it was never removed from the Basel Museum. Other works owned by Jewish collectors were confiscated, then resold or destroyed. Some of them are still missing today.

A Cultural Resistance

Kokoschka resolved to fight by taking part in anti-fascist organizations and exhibitions, first in Prague, where he moved in 1934, and then in London in 1938. He was elected honorary president of the Freier Künstlerbund [Union des Artistes Libres] created in Paris by German artists and critics in exile ; then, in 1939, he was involved in the Free German League of Culture in Great Britain [Freier Deutscher Kulturbund in Großbritannien (FDKB)], where he mixed with John Heartfield (1891-1968) and the writer Stefan Zweig (1881-1942). At the time, the artist's leanings were staunchly pro-Soviet, which he would downplay in the postwar period. By taking public positions and participating in a number of artistic and political projects, he gradually reaffirmed his pacifism and the importance of reconciliation, which followed the advancement and victory of the allied forces.

Biography

1886

Born on March 1st in Pöchlarn, Austria

1904-1909

Studied at the University of Applied Arts of the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna.

1910-1911

In Berlin, contributed to the journal *Der Sturm*, founded by Herwarth Walden.
First solo exhibition at the Paul Cassirer gallery.

1912

Met Alma Mahler, travelled with her to Naples, Venice, and in the Dolomites.

1914-1916

Joined the dragoon regiment. Split up permanently with Alma Mahler. Wounded twice on the Russian and Italian fronts.

1916-1917

Convalescence in Berlin, then in Dresden. Contract with the Paul Cassirer gallery. His plays were performed at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, then at the Albert Theater in Dresden.

1918

Commissioned Munich artist Hermine Moos to create a doll based on Alma Mahler.

1920

Following the violent riots in Germany, controversy with artists George Grosz and John Heartfield, who published against him a column entitled "The Art Scoundrel" ("Der Kunstlump") in the journal *Der Gegner*.

1921-1922

Opening night of his play *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Works exhibited in the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

1923

Takes a two-year leave from his teaching position to travel.

1924-1929

Trips financed by the Paul Cassirer gallery across Europe (Switzerland, Italy, France, Monaco, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, The United Kingdom).

1927

Large retrospective at the Kunsthaus in Zürich.

1928-1930

Trips to North Africa, the Near East, and Europe (Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Greece, Turkey).

1930-1933

Financial crisis and breach of contract with the Cassirer gallery. First confiscations in Weimar and Dresden of Kokoschka's works considered to be "degenerate".

1934

Civil war in Vienna. Death of Kokoschka's mother; he settled in Prague, where he met Oldřiska-Aloisie Palkovská, also known as Olda.

1935

Painted a portrait of the Czech president Tomáš Masaryk, who helped him obtain the Czech nationality.

1936

Member of the Czech delegation of the Universal Peace Congress, Brussels.

1937

A retrospective was organized by Carl Moll and the Secession at the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna. The exhibition "Degenerate Art", including nine paintings by Kokoschka, circulated in Germany and in Austria.

1938

On October 8th, the couple fled to England on Olda's initiative.
Works by Kokoschka were shown in anti-fascist exhibitions in London and in Paris.

1939

Nine paintings by Kokoschka, seized from German collections, were sold by the Fischer gallery in Lucerne in favour of the Nazis. Began a series of political allegories.

1941

Marriage to Olda. Became president of the Free German League of Culture in Great Britain [Freier Deutscher Kulturbund in Großbritannien (FDKB)].

1942

Painted the portrait of Ivan Maïski, Soviet ambassador in London.

1947

Became a British citizen and prepared his retrospective in Basel.

1948

Travels in Italy. First travelling retrospective in the United States.

1951

Bought a plot of land in Villeneuve, on the banks of Lake Geneva, to have his Villa Dauphin built.

1953

Opening of the International Summer Academy in Salzburg, where Kokoschka founded his "School of Vision".

1954

Created *Thermopylae*: A Triptych for the University of Hamburg.

1966

Painted the portrait of Konrad Adenauer, the former chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

1975

Got back his Austrian nationality.

1980

On January 4th, Kokoschka suffered a stroke and died on February 22nd in Montreux.

Sponsors

Morgan Stanley, main sponsor of the exhibition

Morgan Stanley is delighted to sponsor one of the first exhibitions in France dedicated to the Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka: Un Fauve à Vienne at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris.

The Firm partners with arts organisations around the world and supports an extensive international programme of cultural, arts and educational projects. We firmly believe in the benefits these bring to communities by encouraging individuals to enjoy new experiences, gain an understanding of other cultures, and share knowledge.

Spanning seven decades (1907-1973), this exhibition brings together a unique selection of Kokoschka's most significant works. It follows the artist's rich journey across Europe (Dresden, Paris, Prague, London, Montreux) and provides the opportunity to explore the ongoing innovation shown by Oskar Kokoschka in his approach to painting.

We congratulate the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris on this inspiring exhibition, celebrating the life and work of Oskar Kokoschka.

About Morgan Stanley

Morgan Stanley (NYSE: MS) is a leading global financial services firm providing investment banking, securities, wealth management and investment management services. With offices in more than 41 countries, the Firm's employees serve clients worldwide including corporations, governments, institutions and individuals.

Opened in 1967, Morgan Stanley's Paris office combines global expertise with a leading offering in investment banking, securities and investment management, tailored to the French market.

Morgan Stanley

VIG Re, Proud sponsor of the exhibition Oskar Kokoschka, Enfant terrible in Vienna

VIG Re is the reinsurance arm of Vienna Insurance Group, the leading insurance group in Austria and Central and Eastern Europe. Within its history of almost 200 years, VIG group has a longstanding tradition and reputation in fostering local art. VIG Re's Paris branch has been opened in 2018 and today it services 68 clients in France and Western Europe.

As a reinsurance company, the purpose of our existence is to strengthen the resilience of our society. Climate change, digital transformation, sociodemographic changes, (de-)globalisation or pandemics are examples of changes which also come with unprecedented risks. We, as a reinsurer, mitigate the impacts through sharing the risks with our clients, helping our insurance partners to stay solvent even if the unexpected happens.

As part of our everyday business, we encounter stories of bad luck and misfortune. They highlight the power of our empathy and willingness to help beyond financial compensation. Ultimately, it is arts and culture which gives testimony about our society and the values it stands for.



Crédit Municipal de Paris

Crédit Municipal is a public administrative credit and social aid institution belonging to the City of Paris. It provides a range of simple and flexible services that are adapted to the needs of each individual. Created in 1637 by the philanthropist Théophraste Renaudot, its primary purpose was to prevent usury by offering a pawnshop service.

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As a loyal sponsor of Paris Musées, with thirty exhibitions supported since 2011, Crédit Municipal also allocates part of its sponsorship toward projects concerning the field of social issues at Paris Musées, addressing audiences with little access to culture.



Visitor informations

MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE DE PARIS

Postal address

11, Avenue du Président Wilson, 75116 Paris
Tél. 01 53 67 40 00
www.mam.paris.fr

Public transport

- Metro : Alma-Marceau ou Léna (ligne 9)
- Bus : 32/42/63/72/80/
- Vélib's bike station : 4 rue de Longchamp ; 4 avenue Marceau ; place de la reine Astrid ; 45 avenue Marceau or 3 avenue Bosquet
- Bike : Bicycle parking spaces are available in front of the museum entrance.
- RER C : Pont de l'Alma (ligne C)

Opening hours

- Tuesday-Sunday, 10am - 6pm (last entry 5:15pm)
- Closed Monday and on some public holidays
- Open late: Thursday 9.30pm

Admission

Full rate: 14 €
Reduced rate: 12 €
Free for under 18

The exhibition is accessible to people with motor disabilities and reduce mobility.

Wearing a surgical face mask is recommended.

No-queue tickets: www.mam.paris.fr

Press Officer

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