

//Christina Tosoni //Maximiliane Buchner

fingerprints

Exhibition project in the context of “Speaking about Art: From small talk to theoretical discourse”

There are so many things that can be said about art — and doing so in a foreign language increases the challenge. The fields where talk about art occurs are widespread and require different skills: from presenting a topic at university and subsequently discussing your thesis to guiding tours through a museum or city, opening an exhibition, or leading or taking part in a panel discussion. Like in any other language, in English there are many special ways to talk about artistic matters.

What we wanted to do in the course “Speaking about Art” was to exercise patterns and expressions and try out ways of clarifying our opinion. Since swimming in sand is far from the real thing, we decided to organize a fictive happening, which would allow us to make use of everything we had previously discussed and learned. So we killed three birds with one stone and planned a “mock” exhibition, opened by a curatorial tour, and finished by a panel discussion with “specialists” discussing the exhibition’s scientific, historical, and artistic background. Our entire group took part in the show and assumed fictive identities, which resulted in a curatorial team, specialists on the presented artists and techniques, an heir and director of an archive, two journalists, and of course, the audience.

Based on two exhibitions being shown at the time; one at Salzburg Museum (*Von Mensch zu Mensch. Wilhelm Leibl & August Sander*) and one at Rupertinum Salzburg (*Tanz der Hände. Tilly Losch und Hedy Pfundmayr in Fotografien 1920-1950*), the curatorial team put together a new show called fingerprints. But how did we come to the idea of combining two exhibitions of seemingly different artists, genres, and techniques? The four artists at the center of these two exhibitions work with bodies in order to express their artistic aims. Wilhelm Leibl (1844–1900) and August Sander (1876–1964) deal with representative portraits of people using different techniques. While Leibl’s works refer to the tradition of Dutch portrait painters and are realized in oil on canvas or wood, Sander uses the then newly discovered technology of photography.

Hedy Pfundmayr (1900–1965) and Tilly Losch (1903–1975) became famous as expressive dancers in Vienna during the roaring twenties. During this era, dance developed from its former classical style in the sense of ballet dancing into a modern form, which placed special focus on the expressivity of hands. In addition, the meaning of the hand changed from its function as a working tool into a significant mirror of its owner’s character — and even more: As occultism and fortunetelling became a source of delight at dinner parties and women’s teas, scientific essays on the meaning of the hand’s lines and forms became popular.

The theme of our newly compiled Exhibition *fingerprints* thus became these very individualistic parts of the human body: Hands and faces.

When you think of someone, what do you remember first? Probably his or her face, perhaps also their voice. The face is also the first impression we get of people we meet, a business card of the person of sorts. Another “official ID” we have is located at the far ends of our hands; our fingerprint, which makes us absolutely

unique. Both, faces and hands, make us different from others at first glance, both change slightly through the years, show our character and our feelings. Throughout the ages, the tradition of making faces and hands the subject of art has changed and found different peaks, which we wanted to work out in our presentation:

Showing faces in the sense of portrait painting was one of the most highly esteemed genres in art for a long time. This tradition first arose in the context of a ritual or cultic context in early cultures, when masks gave the dead or even ghosts a face and made them visible. Today's theater or carnival masks are what have remained of this cultural tradition, along with the masks of the so-called death cult, which peaked in the second half of the nineteenth century.

When Man Ray published his photograph of the two differently colored faces in the journal "Vogue" in 1926, he referred to all the mentioned traditions. Entitled *Noir et Blanche*, the picture plays not only with the contrast of black and white, but also with the question: Which one is the face, which one the mask? In changing the tradition of presenting an object lying on a ground and a portrait en face to the viewer, Man Ray surprises and puts things in a different context.

This juxtaposition of mask and image of a female face leads me to an important point of the fingerprints exhibition: the tradition of portraying people, which started in the early Renaissance in depicting famous people.

The two juxtaposed artists in the *Von Mensch zu Mensch* exhibition; painter Wilhelm Leibl and photographer August Sander, worked on portraits of people within their specific life and work contexts. The gap in time between the works is 40 years. Leibl is represented primarily by portraits of men of influence sitting on a big chair or in their study, painted in the tradition of Dutch artists. Sander's extensive work *People of the 20th Century* deals basically with the same topic, but concentrates on people of the new era. As they are not named, they stand for their profession; for example the elegantly dressed secretary, short haircut, cigarette in Hand — as a type of modern young women. Sanders' project of portraying new century types is forward looking, but not as innovative as the work of Wilhelm Leibl roughly 40 years earlier: When we look at the painting of a farmer's wife with her guest, the hunter, we can imagine a life full of hard work engraved in the woman's wrinkled face and her red, knotty hands. This differs completely from what we call a representative image of a couple, for example, the self-portrait of Peter Paul Rubens and his first wife Isabella Brant, sitting in a honeysuckle arbor. The wedding picture shows a wealthy couple in expensive clothes, especially the bride with her large white collar. The hands of both are lying in the composition's geometrical center. Her hand, resting on his, decorated with golden rings and a bracelet of gemstones, which gives us a sign of the success Rubens had already achieved, at the time of the painting's creation.

Focus moved to the hands as a new level of expression not only in paintings and photography. Until the middle of the ninetieth century, dance choreography was all about feet and legs. Classical ballet still focuses on the dancers legs — hands and arms wasted as decorative elements. But this very grounded way of dancing changed into a full body experience. From tip to toe, every part of the body became an important part of expression. Hedy Pfundmayer and Tilly Losch were the forerunners of this choreographic innovation. Their "Dance of Hands" laid the foundation for modern dance.

An affinity for hands became evident mainly in the interwar years; hands even became an object of scientific research; they were useful not only for telling the future, but could also indicate a person's character. "Show me your hands and I can tell you who you are" became the new mantra. Not only art and dance, but also

commercials and movies played with this new subject.

Against this background, it is no surprise that we, the curatorial team, found it easy to link the two exhibitions. With the help of the museums' catalogues we soon had a nice collection of photographs and paintings from both exhibitions. Our *fingerprints* exhibition was divided into six sub-categories: hand studies, artist portraits, couples, representative portraits, and foreign arts. In just one and a half hours we managed to turn the study room into a white cube of sorts, even including comfortable sofas for the discussion panel after our guided tour.

Out of breath, sweaty, but absolutely satisfied with the result, the exhibition fingerprints was opened, accompanied by Ravel's "Bolero" and the hypnotic video of Tilly Losch's "Dance of Hands." But the exhibition was not ready yet. The main act was still missing. Our guests were invited to complete the exhibition with their individual fingerprints put on colored tape and marking their favorite exhibit. After the introduction by the curatorial team the discussion panel of mock experts was ready to start. A hand expert, a grand nephew of Tilly Losch's first husband, and a specialist on Leibl's paintings were invited to discuss the exhibition with the curatorial team. A moderator from the radio station FM4 led the discussion and a journalist was ready with some tricky questions.

Even if everything was in fact a mock, we could not stop being human or stop having emotions. We soon realized, that we were prisoners of our own mock reality. What could have been a boring and daring discussion soon became very emotional and every single one of us began to react as the mock characters would have reacted.

Being part of the curatorial team was a very inspiring experience. Our ideas came to life and the cheap black and white prints became oil on canvas paintings and photographs, our study room with the orange floor transformed into a light filled room in the Amelia Redlich tower on top of the Mönchsberg, and our mock experts were truly well-known specialists. Sometimes all that is necessary is just a lot of fantasy and the right person to switch the right button in your head.

It is indeed no surprise that our teacher Lisa Rosenblatt is CEO of the Dream Coordination Office. She not only has the ability to tickle out everyone's lost and forgotten English skills, but she is also able to create the base for us to build a palace of thoughts in our minds.

//Zur Person

Christina Tosoni

Christina Tosoni studierte in Klagenfurt, Toulouse und Freiburg im Breisgau, bevor sie für ihre Doktorarbeit im Fachbereich Germanistik nach Salzburg zog.

Am Theater Freiburg betreute sie den Social Media Bereich und wirkte als Dramaturgieassistentin an der Freiburger Inszenierung von Hauptmanns „Ratten“ mit. Durch eine Theater-Uni Kooperation inszenierte sie in der studentischen Gruppe *Frischfleisch* szenische Lesungen mit Schauspielern des Theaters.

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