

Exhibition opens on October 21, 7p.m.

ernst herbeck.! I prefer a silent language

October 22 2015 – May 22 2016

Press conference: October 20, 10 a.m.



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For the first time the museum gugging is devoting an exhibition to Ernst Herbeck (1920-1991), a witty, eloquent and yet silent poet among the Gugging artists.

At the heart of the show is the distinctive poetic voice of Ernst Herbeck. Moderated by selected text quotes and accompanied by images, film and sound documents, and memorabilia, different chapters of the story of his life and authorship will be opened. For the first time a large number of drawings, which have a close relationship with Herbeck's poetic work, are to be displayed.

The architecture and design of the exhibition reflect Herbeck's thematic world and his poetic method. In close cooperation, curator Gisela Steinlechner and exhibition designer Peter Karlhuber have brought to life an atmospheric presentation devoted to the poet from Gugging. The exhibition combines documentation and installation, and leaves visitors plenty of room to make their own associations. The curtain rises on Ernst Herbeck!

Curator: Gisela Steinlechner

Exhibition Designer: Peter Karlhuber

PICTURE DOWNLOAD: <https://celum.noeku.at/pindownload/login.do?pin=52NTX>

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The Curator Gisela Steinlechner about Ernst Herbeck:

“I was born in Stockerau on 4 June 1920 and did not learn anything because I could not deal with it. Then I joined the company Vogel and learned the art of typing.”

This is the very short CV Ernst Herbeck wrote in 1975. At that time, he had already lived as a psychiatric patient in the Lower Austrian state hospital of Gugging near Klosterneuburg for 30 years. Herbeck was born with a cleft of the lip, jaw, and palate, which is why he was only able to speak with a slur and great effort, an impairment that could not be remedied by several operations. *“Nicht jeder Mensch hat einen Mund / mancher Mund ist disqualifiziert / oder operiert. So wie bei mir“* [Not every human being has a mouth / many a mouth is disqualified / or has undergone surgery. Like in my case], is what he wrote in a poem tens of years later.

The son of a civil servant, who was born in Lower Austria in 1920, never arrived at feeling at home with everyday-life speaking and nevertheless he created a one-of-a-kind poetic body of work by virtually reinventing language as the *“Not-wendigkeit der Menschen“* [human necessity but also agility in hardship]. As from 22 October 2015, the **museum gugging** will show an exhibition which is dedicated to the silent poet among the Gugging artists. Herbeck’s distinctive linguistic creations have fascinated their readers since they were first published in the 1960s, and we could no longer imagine the literary canon of the German-speaking world without them due to their poetical idiosyncrasy and forcefulness.

About the Exhibition

The exhibition **ernst herbeck.! eine leise sprache ist mir lieber** [**ernst herbeck.! I prefer a silent language**] will provide insight into the impressive diversity of the work of this Gugging artist, which has emerged in a roundabout way and without any literary network. Thereby, Ernst Herbeck’s poetical voice will take centre stage. Moderated by selected text quotes and accompanied by images, film and sound documents, and memorabilia, different chapters of the story of his life and authorship will be opened: Childhood, the war, the decades-long experience of being a “foreigner” in the psychiatric ward, the exceptional circumstances of

his authorship with Leo Navratil as his vis-à-vis and supporter as well as the great response to his books and texts. Moreover, Herbeck's deep affinity to the "*Thierenshaft*" [animals] and nature will be thematised, his close and emphatic look at very small and everyday things, and his laconic reflections on life and death, time, waiting, or "*Das Lieben*" [love].

His photo albums, with pictures some of which he had taken himself, are from the last decade of his life, which he spent in the *House of Artists* in Gugging: They show the landscape in front of the window, housemates such as Oswald Tschirtner, August Walla and Johann Hauser, excursions and social events together, or brunches with visitors on the occasion of which Herbeck sometimes read from his books.

Along with original autographs, rare sound recordings of Herbeck's readings, photographs, books, and documents on the history of the reception and effects of his work, a larger selection of Ernst Herbeck's drawings will be presented, which open up multifaceted relationships to his poetical work. Among these, there are also very early works, which he created even before the time of his poetical production, when the writer was asked by the psychiatrist Leo Navratil to make "test drawings" like many other patients.

Ernst Herbeck's Writing Process and His Publications

All his life, Ernst Herbeck only wrote when his doctor, Leo Navratil, invited him to do this and, most of times, was present. He also had to provide the respective titles as inspiration, and he stored the texts which were thus sporadically created over tens of years. From 1960 to his death in 1991, Herbeck wrote about 1,700 poetical notes, initially on postcard-sized cardboards, later mostly on A4 sheets of paper. Today, the autographs are for the most part in the Department of Manuscripts, Autographs and Closed Collections of the Austrian National Library. In 1966, Leo Navratil published a selection of 83 texts written by Ernst Herbeck under the pseudonym of *Alexander* for the first time—in the book *Schizophrenie und Sprache* (Schizophrenia and Language), then still as case examples of psychopathological writing. As Navratil said repeatedly, he felt poetically touched already by the very first text his silent patient wrote upon his request, and precisely this poem, *Morning*, which was written in the early 1960s, became one of Herbeck's most-quoted texts in later years:

Morning

*In fall the wind-of-fairies
align
as in the snow the
manes beat.
Blackbirds whistle afield
in the wind and eat.*

After he published another poem in the anthology *a + b leuchten im Klee*.

Psychopathologische Texte (1971) under the pseudonym of *Alexander Herbrich*, a number of poems under Herbeck's real name were published by Leo Navratil, and were welcomed by the literary public with great interest and admiration. *Alexanders poetische Texte* (1977), *Bebende Herzen im Leibe der Hunde* (1979, mit Zeichnungen von Oswald Tschirtner), *Alexander* (1982), *Im Herbst da reiht der Feenwind* (1992); most recently, the anthology *Ernst Herbeck: Der Hase!!!!* (2013), edited by Gisela Steinlechner, was published. In 1978, Ernst Herbeck was accepted as a member of the GAV – Grazer Autorenversammlung (a writers' and artists' club); and in 1981, his legal incapacitation was successfully revoked with reference to the appreciation of his literary work.

“Poetry is an oral form of characterising a story in slow motion. [...] Moreover, poetry is an aversion against reality which is more serious than the latter.”

From the beginning, the memorable tone and the often amazing imagery of these laconic works of language art have touched their readers, but they have also challenged them because they could not be easily classified within traditional literary categories. As a poet who never wrote on his own initiative and did not follow or participate in any literary discourse, Herbeck also puts our common concepts of artistic autonomy and authorship up for discussion.

Herbeck as a Source of Inspiration

Among writers and artists in particular, Ernst Herbeck's poetry found many admirers and advocates, among them W.G. Sebald, Gerhard Roth, Friederike Mayröcker, Ernst Jandl, Heinar Kipphardt, or André Heller. Among other things, dedicated poems and letters bear witness to these “elective affinities”. Moreover, there will be several excerpts from Heinz Bütler's 1980 film *Zur Besserung der Person* (For a Person's Improvement), with which the Swiss filmmaker created a powerful portrait of Ernst Herbeck and other Gugging artists.

This writer's life story and his poetical work have been the subject of several artistic, literary, and dramatic adaptations such as Heinar Kipphard's not uncontroversial play *März* (which premiered in 1980 and was also published as a novel in 1976) or, most recently, the play *Ein schöner Hase ist meistens der Einzelle* written by the young Austrian playwright Philipp Weiss, which premiered in 2014. References and documents on the history of the reception and effects of his work, which also reflects society's relationship to psychiatry, supplement the multi-part portrait the exhibition dedicates to the Gugging artist Ernst Herbeck.

Curated by: *Gisela Steinlechner, literary scholar* (Über die Ver-rückung der Sprache. Analytische Studien zu den Texten Alexanders 1989; *editor of the Herbeck anthology Der Hase!!!!, 2013*); *lives and works in Vienna as a literary scholar, curator, and writer. Publications i.a. on more recent German literature, art brut, psychoanalysis, and contemporary culture.*

Exhibition design: *Peter Karlhuber studied Stage Design at the Mozarteum Salzburg; exhibition design with a focus on literature—by Stefan Zweig, Arthur Schnitzler, Frank Wedekind, Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke among others.*

Selection of Literature:

Leo Navratil: Schizophrenie und Sprache. Zur Psychologie der Dichtung. München: dtv 1966

Leo Navratil: a + b leuchten im Klee. Psychopathologische Texte. München: Reihe Hanser 1971

Alexanders poetische Texte. Hg. von Leo Navratil. Mit Beiträgen von Otto Breicha, Roger Cardinal, André Heller, Ernst Jandl, Friederike Mayröcker, Reinhard Priessnitz, Gerhard Roth. München: dtv 1977

Ernst Herbeck / Oswald Tschirtner: Bebende Herzen im Leibe der Hunde. Hg. von Leo Navratil. München: Rogner und Bernhard 1979

Ernst Herbeck: Alexander. Ausgewählte Texte 1961-1981. Salzburg und Wien: Residenz Verlag 1982

Ernst Herbeck: Im Herbst da reiht der Feenwind. Gesammelte Texte 1960-1991. Hg. von Leo Navratil. Salzburg und Wien: Residenz Verlag 1992

Ernst Herbeck: Der Hase!!!! Ausgewählte Texte. Hg. von Gisela Steinlechner. Salzburg und Wien: Jung und Jung 2013

W.G. Sebald: *Eine kleine Traverse. Das poetische Werk Ernst Herbecks*. In: Die Beschreibung des Unglücks. Salzburg und Wien: Residenz Verlag 1985

Gisela Steinlechner: Über die Ver-rückung der Sprache. Analytische Studien zu den Texten Alexanders. Wien: Braumüller 1989

Ernst Herbeck: die Vergangenheit ist klar vorbei. Hg. von Carl Aigner und Leo Navratil. Kunsthalle Krems, Wien: Verlag Christian Brandstätter 2002 [mit Aufsätzen von Roger

Cardinal, Heinz Bütler, Helmut Gollner, Leo Navratil, Iris Radisch, Gerhard Roth, W.G. Sebald u.a.]