
EXHIBITION PROGRAMME

2010 – 2012

CONTENTS

FRIDA KAHLO RETROSPECTIVE	5
AIVASOVSKY: PAINTER OF THE SEA	7
PIERRE BONNARD – THE OTHER MODERNISM	9

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FRIDA KAHLO RETROSPECTIVE

1 September – 5 December 2010



Frida Kahlo, Self-portrait with monkey, 1945, Museum Dolores Patino, Xochimilcho, Mexico, © VBK, Vienna, 2008

In autumn 2010, the Kunstforum is presenting the first comprehensive exhibition on Frida Kahlo ever shown in Austria. The myth of the Mexican artist has taken on global format; Frida is an icon with star character: identification figure of Mexican culture, forerunner of the feminist movement, flagship figure of a mega-merchandising machine, incandescent and exotic film material for Hollywood.

Kahlo's art is inextricably linked to her biography. Paintings and drawings are not only a mirror to her life, which was characterised by physical and mental suffering – the painter suffered the whole of her life under the effects of a near-fatal bus accident in her youth – but her oeuvre of painting and graphics also forms one of the most complex

chapters in the history of art between the wars, between *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity) and surrealism. The 1920s saw the production of finely drawn self-portraits, oriented on the figural ideal of Renaissance painting. By the early thirties she was painting her first surrealist pictures: her strategy was combinatory, influenced by the *cadavres exquis*, the spontaneous graphic collages of the surrealists, with whom Frida was in lively contact; the results were compositions of iconographic, multi-layered complexity ensuing from her inner world. Around 1940, Kahlo's self-portraits gain in expression. Instead of the neutral look we see the "authoritarian eye". Frida dramatises herself into a figure of sanctity, worthy of adoration. There is no escaping her dominant radiance.

The exhibition *Frida Kahlo Retrospective* includes around 70 paintings and 30 drawings, as well as a representative selection of photographic documents compiled by Cristina Kahlo, Frida's great-niece. The major part of Kahlo's artistic legacy is in Mexico, the rest mainly in the USA – most of Frida's major works come from public and private collections in these

countries. Considering the lack of Kahlo's works in European collections and the sparsity of exhibition projects in Europe, this show may be regarded as a sensation for Vienna.

Curators: Ingrid Brugger
 Florian Steininger
 Helga Prignitz-Poda (Gastkuratorin)

AIVASOVSKY: PAINTER OF THE SEA

17 March – 10 July 2011



Ivan Aivasovsky, *The Ninth Wave*, 1850 (detail)
State Russian Museum St Petersburg

The Kunstforum will be presenting a premiere in spring, 2010 - the breathtaking work of the Russian painter Ivan Konstantinovich Aivasovsky (1817-1900): Aivasovsky was a living legend, celebrated in international exhibitions and is today a household word in Russia. Yet he is for the most part unknown beyond his national boundaries.

Aivasovsky was born in the port of Feodosia (today the Ukraine) on the Crimean peninsula. He studied painting at the Imperial Academy in St Petersburg and became court painter to Tsar

Nicholas I. He was much travelled – he

accompanied Tsarist military troops as a marine painter – but he was always drawn back to his home on the Black Sea. The elemental might of the sea is a central subject in Aivasovsky's great oeuvre. For Aivasovsky, it is the ocean that nourishes all life, but which possesses cataclysmic power. The painter does not wish to show a freeze-frame of the subject, but far more express a generally applicable statement: the symbolism of a ship on the high seas is an allegory of human life. Becalmed, sun-and moon-reflecting waters alternate with billowing storm and turbulent spume. Forming an equal part of his repertoire are maritime coasts and land strips, urban views, ship manoeuvres, mythological scenes and gigantic wave pictures catapulting the beholder into the scene. Aivasovsky dashed light, water and air at a helter-skelter work tempo onto large-format canvases. He was often compared to William Mallord Turner because of this: the two artists did actually know each other's work and held each other in high esteem. Like Turner, Aivasovsky did not work from nature but from memory.

Aivasovsky: Painter of the Sea is the first major Aivasovsky exhibition in a West European venue and shows a cross section of his spectacular oeuvre. Loans for this ambitious exhibition project are being contributed by the Aivasovsky Museum Feodosia, the State

Russian Museum in St Petersburg and in Kiev, die Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and numerous private collections.

Curators: Ingrid Brugger
 Lisa Kreil

PIERRE BONNARD: 1867 – 1947

14 October 2011 – 1 January 2012



Pierre Bonnard, *La grande baignoire*, 1937-39
Private Collection
© VBK, Vienna, 2008

The Bank Austria Kunstforum is planning a retrospective of the work of Pierre Bonnard for spring 2011, the very first exhibition ever devoted to this artist in Austria. It will present around 90 paintings from international museums and private collections and trace Bonnard's work from its beginnings in the Nabis circle, the influence of symbolism and impressionism, and on to the 1940s.

Bonnard never questioned the validity of objective representation and – always seemingly in allegiance to French classicism – cultivated his own style of “the other modernism” off the beaten track of all the “-isms” cropping up in the early twentieth century. This project aims to understand him by means of his major themes, a treatment of subjects in which he – characteristically – exploded ad ultimo all strict classifications of genre: still life, unconventional in its integration of living protagonists; the landscape, coupled as opposites in cityscape and the wild portrayal of nature; the female nude, alternating between the intimate portrayal of the toilette and the concentration on complex interiors.

Bonnard was still being labelled shortly after his death in the mid-twentieth century as a representative of a superficial harmony and “harmless” chronicler of upper middle-class everyday life. Now, however, the general consensus reigns – at least since the 1980s – that perhaps Bonnard did indeed paint the great uneasiness of a society haunted by the premonition it was spending the last happy days of its life ...

The exhibition of the Bank Austria Kunstforum aligns itself as well to this assessment of Bonnard as an artist “on the brink” – Bonnard, who questions the validity of harmony by means of subtle nuances: dissonances of colour, spatial dislocations and ambiguous locations, “errors” in the placement of persons, etc.: Bonnard who, as he himself formulated, sought to find a way of overcoming nature by art.

Curator: Evelyn Benesch