

# GLOBART.

Press Release

## Art Brut in the Imperial Corridor.

**Works from the Hannah Rieger Collection**

Imperial Corridor/Melk Abbey, Abt-Berthold-Dietmayr-Straße 1, 3390 Melk

June 26 – September 1, 2025. Opening on Wednesday June 25, 2025 at 7.00 pm



# GLOBART.

Press Release

## Art Brut in the Imperial Corridor.

### **Works from the Hannah Rieger Collection**

Imperial Corridor/Melk Abbey, Abt-Berthold-Dietmayr-Straße 1, 3390 Melk

June 26 – September 1, 2025. Opening on Wednesday June 25, 2025 at 7.00 pm

### Exhibition

The abbey of Melk which is located in the World Heritage Region of Wachau and certainly occupies an important place in human history provides space for Art Brut for the first time in its Imperial Corridor. Linking the former imperial guest rooms, the corridor constitutes the frame for the special dramaturgy of the exhibition curated by Hans Hoffer, the president of GLOBART, who already contributed to important creative endeavors in Melk abbey, such as the redesign of the Chapel of the Cross (1999) or of the abbey museum in the former imperial rooms (2001). For this exhibition Hans Hoffer positioned 45 works of Art Brut between the paintings depicting the Austrian sovereigns of the Babenberg and Habsburg families. The contrast to academic commissioned art for nobility and Church particularly emphasizes Art Brut. The total work of art which is Melk abbey is brought face to face with the fragile, the breakable, the marginal of Art Brut. The individual mode of expression and personal signature of each artist illustrate the wide range of the Art Brut genre. The diverse works of art created without the influence of current art trends penetrate the “precious coat” of the abbey’s Southern wing, starting a critical dialogue with the environment.

According to Father Ludwig Wenzl OSB, head of tourism and culture in Melk abbey, *“The placement of Art Brut which often developed on the verges of the official cultural scene in a setting which once served traditionally imperial representation is a conscious sign of appreciation and revaluation.”*

Art Brut artists are predominantly autodidact and create art outside of the traditional cultural sphere. The term Art Brut was coined after the Second World War by Jean Dubuffet who was a collector himself. It distinguishes itself from academic art which is often influenced by contemporary taste as well as by the global discourse taught by art universities. Art Brut stands for radical individuality beyond the cultural mainstream. The artists follow their inner urge, their mission or obsession and have their own formal language. Art Brut focuses on the quality of the artistic expression and not on the artists’ status or their mental state.

**The cover shows “Kaiser Franz Joseph von Österreich (*Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria*)”** by Josef Wittlich (1903 – 1982) from the mid-70s. The artist worked as an unskilled laborer in a family-owned business which produced industrial ceramics in Höhr-Grenzhausen in the German region of Palatinate, between Frankfurt and Cologne. He lived in a tiny home on the factory premises of today’s Steuler Group and had never visited an exhibition. At night Josef Wittlich painted bold colorful pictures of battles, women, and celebrities, most often using pictures from magazines or mail order catalogues as references. His work is evocative of pop art. The family-owned business where he worked allowed him to put his pictures on display which led to his artistic discovery. In 2014 a 352-page monograph written by the art historians Hans Körner and Manja Wilkens was released by Walter König publishing. The presentation of the catalogue raisonné took place in the same production hall where Wittlich had worked until his retirement. The Cologne gallery owner Dieter Lange who has been in charge of Wittlich’s Estate since 2006 has thus succeeded in providing a late tribute to a one-of-a-kind artist.

33 of the works displayed in the Imperial Corridor were created in Gugging, Austria’s Art Brut center. Already in the 1960s the psychiatrist Leo Navratil – who headed a psychiatric department for men – sent drawings by his patients to Jean Dubuffet who accepted them as Art Brut. Nowadays Gugging is not part of a psychiatric hospital anymore and has in the meantime been transformed into a center for art production, with a museum and a gallery.

The exhibition includes 10 works by Laila Bachtiar, a pioneering female artist in Gugging, and 4 works by Karoline Roskopf. 5 sheets by Franz Gableck, Otto Prinz, Karl Reisenbauer, Johann Scheiböck/Oswald Tschirtner and Erich Zittra come from Leo Navratil’s “Artists’ Guest Book (Künstler-Gästebuch)”. The psychiatrist invited his patients to draw in the art book, which was later taken apart. A work by the Uruguayan artist Magalí Herrera represents another connection to Gugging where her art is currently on display in the exhibition “herrera & dubuffet. ! a spark of light in this world” in the Museum Gugging. Herrera’s works are barely represented in private collections worldwide.

The **Collection Hannah Rieger** ([www.livinginartbrut.com](http://www.livinginartbrut.com)) has its focus in the tradition of Gugging, Austria’s Art Brut center, and is internationally oriented. Since 1991 it has grown to include approximately 550 works of art and counts among the largest specialized Art Brut collections in Austria.

A workshop with the curator and the collector regarding this exhibition will take place on August 30, 2025 in the context of GLOBART’s Days of Transformation 2025.

Online PDF-Catalogue: [www.livinginartbrut.com](http://www.livinginartbrut.com) (Projects/Publications)

### **The 24 artists in the exhibition**

Laila Bachtiar (\*1971, Austria), Ida Buchmann (1911 – 2001, Switzerland), Aloïse Corbaz (1886 – 1964, Switzerland), Franz Gableck (1910 – 1974, Austria), Johann Hauser (1926 – 1994, Austria), Ernst Herbeck (1920 – 1991, Austria), Magalí Herrera (1914 – 1992, Uruguay), Franz Kernbeis (1935 – 2019, Austria), Johann Korec (1937 – 2008, Austria),

Michel Nedjar (\*1947, France), Misleidys Castillo Pedroso (\*1985, Cuba), Michaela Polacek (\*1972, Austria), Otto Prinz (1906 – 1980, Austria), Heinrich Reisenbauer (1938 – 2025, Austria), Karl Reisenbauer (\*1940, Austria), Karoline Roskopf (1911 – ?, Austria), Arnold Schmidt (\*1959, Austria), Harald Stoffers (\*1961, Germany), Johann Scheiböck (1905 – ?, Austria), Takuya Tamura (\*1992, Japan), Oswald Tschirtner (1920 – 2007, Austria), Karl Vondal (1953 – 2024, Austria), Josef Wittlich (1903 – 1982, Germany), Erich Zittra (1915 – 1980, Austria)

**Biographies:** [www.livinginartbrut.com](http://www.livinginartbrut.com)

Josef Wittlich, Kaiser Franz Joseph von Österreich (*Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria*),  
mid-1970s  
62,2 x 44,9 cm, tempera on paper

© Josef Wittlich Estate, Galerie Lange, Siegburg  
Photo: Maurizio Maier

**Contact:**

Heidi Dobner 0043 676/4281728      [heidemarie.dobner@globart.at](mailto:heidemarie.dobner@globart.at)