

LIVING IN ART BRUT IN VIENNA

Hannah Rieger immerses herself in her collection

JOHN MAIZELS

As she describes it, Hannah Rieger now lives in the art she has been collecting for 25 years. For her, living *in art brut* means more than just living *with art brut*. She quotes Goethe's famous 1772 letter about his preoccupation with the Greek poet Pindar: "I now live in Pindar." Similarly, she now lives in *art brut*, amidst a total of around 370 works. Art from Gugging makes up around two thirds of her collection. The rest comprises international *art brut* works. Recently, she has developed a focus on female artists.

Living in *art brut* means that Rieger increasingly orients her own life and work around it, allowing her whole identity to be influenced by this special field, and deliberately dedicating more and more of her time to *art brut*. Naturally, this approach means she applies the concept of "outsider" to her own existence. And therein also lies the deeper reason for her collecting *art brut*. It is essentially related to her family's experience of the Holocaust. This is presumably why she has such great respect for the element of fate surrounding every *art brut* artist. Although she only collects *art brut*, contemporary art is also important to her and she has been a member of the University Council of the University of Applied Arts in Vienna for the past eight years.

Trained as an economist, Rieger's knowledge of

the art world is self-taught. She sees one of the roles of collectors in designing creative spaces. This means, on the one hand, creating art compositions, and on the other hand, (symbolically) creating gathering spaces to facilitate emotional experiences. She also runs a consultancy for professional development from her apartment in Vienna.

Now that she is no longer a bank director, having worked for 27 years at corporate financing bank, her approach to *art brut* has improved in quality. Today, she views her collection as a professional project. This entails giving lectures, moderating workshops, taking part in discussions and recently publishing a book, entitled *United in Art*. Living through collecting in this way means pursuing strategies, networking and travelling for *art brut*.

Hannah Rieger's passion began in 1980, with an exhibition of Johann Hauser and Oswald Tschirtner in what was then the Museum of the 20th Century in Vienna. She took further inspiration from the exhibition "Primitivism in 20th Century Art" at MoMA in New York in 1984, which featured a whole section on surrealism influenced by art from psychiatric institutions. It was another 7 years before she bought her first works from Gugging in 1991. She has been collecting ever since. And the rest is history.



On the left and right walls, Johann Hauser drawings, on facing wall, a triptych by Oswald Tschirtner. Interior photos: Maurizio Maier



A wall of paintings by Martha Grunenwaldt



Two paintings by Arnold Schmidt



Painting by Oswald Tschirtner



A series by Franz Kamlander



Hannah Rieger, with drawings by Guo Fengyi and Madge Gill; photo: Petra Spiola