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Linard Conference

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LINARD CONFERENCE

Neuvy-Deux Clochers, France
July 14, 2012



An international conference focusing on the preservation of art environments was convened at Jean Linard's Cathédrale environment. Organised by Laurent Danchin, Danilo Proietti and Chiara Scordato, and the association *Patrimoines Irréguliers de France*, this event featured illustrated presentations by

Laurent Danchin, writer and art critic; Jo Farb Hernández, writer, curator, and director of SPACES; and Roberta Trapani, doctoral candidate in art history. Other participants included Caroline Bourbonnais, director of La Fabuloserie; Déborah Couette, doctoral candidate in art history; and Patricia Allio, director, author, and president of the association L'Abri. In addition to the formal presentations and round-table discussions, the theatre company OpUS performed their interactive work, *Le Petit Répertoire*, and Linard's widow provided an in-depth tour of the site.

This event marked a symbolic beginning for an international network linking those who are involved in the advocacy for and preservation of art environments. Raija Kallioinen, director of the Union for Rural Culture and Education in Helsinki, provided a link to the European Outsider Art Association, and there are plans to further broaden this network. One immediate positive outcome was that the Linard Cathédrale was inscribed on the Supplementary Inventory of Historical Monuments, the first step towards preservation, as any potential purchasers of the property will no longer have the right to demolish the artwork. For further information on the cathedral, see <http://cathedrale-linard.com>.
Jo Farb Hernández

WALLA! WELTALLENDE

edited by Johann Feilacher
Galerie/Museum Gugging, Residenz Verlag
ISBN: 9783701732753



August Walla (1936–2001) was one of the most exuberant and wide-ranging art brut artists. His prolific outpouring of works included paintings, drawings, etchings, graffiti, sculpture, photography, painted and altered found objects, environmental interventions, and the remarkable fully-painted lived environment that was his room at the Haus der Kunstler at Gugging. At the heart of his oeuvre is a dramatically presented self-declared 'half devil' and 'communist angel.' Exploring all dimensions of existence, his works proclaim a fascination with the appetites and functioning of his body, particularly its astounding transformation during puberty, while they also invoke the threat of death and mysteries of the divine which Walla envisioned as a pantheon of all the gods in creation, including the God Death. He was equally struck by the cultural and political dynamics of his life, constantly incorporating symbols and textual references to his childhood fascination with Hitler and the Russian post-war occupation of Lower Austria. Furthermore, frequently mixed in with Walla's corporeal, cosmic, and political visions are querulous comments on his fellow Gugging artists and the indignities of institutional life, yet all are balanced by evocations of his life-long, loving bond with his mother.

What makes the existential and cosmological vision of Walla's art so distinctive is his intuitive understanding of the power of meaning vested in representational imagery, collective symbols, and words, all of which he mobilises in his colourful and boldly composed works. His figurative works usually depict significant beings/gods, mother or grandmother, and Walla, himself–face-front, flatly splayed against the canvas or paper. These images are accented by a swirl of historically familiar symbols (swastika, hammer and sickle) and by Walla's private signs for states of ambiguous religious and sexual identity, each finding a place amidst a barrage of words that identify the figures or comment on the work's themes in a variety of languages, real, hybrid, or invented by the artist. However impenetrable these messages may seem at times, the viewer has no doubt that for the artist

every element of every square inch in the work is intensely meaningful.

walla! weltallende (*walla! end of the universe*) extensively illustrates the range of Walla's media, imagery, and visual strategies. This publication – the catalogue for the recent retrospective at Museum Gugging – provides the most substantial documentation of Walla's work to date. The only previous major treatment of Walla was Dr. Leo Navratil's *August Walla: Sein Leben und seine Kunst* (1988) which interpreted works within the context of Walla's biography and Navratil's diagnosis of his mental condition. In distinct contrast, the current work demonstrates the critical perspective of Navratil's successor at Gugging, Dr. Johann Feilacher, who rejects the value of such diagnostic interpretations and focuses almost entirely on the artistry of the work.

The 750 page catalogue is massive, a four volume slip-cased work with 800 reproductions covering all aspects of Walla's creativity. Weighing 13 pounds, it includes two hard-bound volumes, a forty page facsimile of a notebook of drawings, and a stitch-bound volume devoted to his written works composed entirely of words and symbols, the latter presented with an insightful text by Gisela Steinlechner. In the first volume (240 pages) Feilacher presents an overview of Walla's entire opus in the context of his life history, supplemented by short texts by figures who knew Walla, and an essay by Margit Zuckriegel on his many photographic works. In volume 2 (300 pages) Feilacher focuses on Walla's paintings, drawings, and etchings, while Silvie Aigner illuminates Walla's 'sculptural' works – painted found natural and constructed objects. The composite catalogue will surely be the definitive work on August Walla for years to come. Charles Russell