

MUSEUM FRIEDER BURDA BADEN-BADEN

PRESS RELEASE

THE PAINTERS OF THE SACRED HEART. André Bauchant, Camille Bombois, Séraphine Louis, Henri Rousseau and Louis Vivin

16 July – 20 November 2022



André Bauchant, Le triomphe de Neptune, 1929, Sammlung Zander © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022

The exhibition casts a new light on the works of the great French auto-didacts of the early 20th century. From the big city to nature and its flowers and fruit, from the temptations of the Bohemian lifestyle to mythological and religious scenes: using selected works, mainly from the Collection Charlotte Zander (1930 - 2014), the exhibition presents the cosmos of lifelike and phantasy worlds created by these painters, who sought artistic fulfilment beyond their civilian livelihoods. One man was always in the background: the prominent German art historian Wilhelm Uhde (1874 in Friedeberg/Neumark – 1947 in Paris), who so often criticized the coldness of modernity and found the authenticity he craved in their works.

Featuring five both important and diverse art personalities of his time, the exhibition reconstructs the artists around Wilhelm Uhde, who first brought them together in 1928 for his historic exhibition in Paris entitled "Painters of the Sacred Heart." Almost a century later, this exhibition pays homage once again to the great aesthetic attraction and immediate and direct effect of these works of art "untainted by training."

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The best known of them is the customs officer **Henri Rousseau** (1844–1910). His paintings often present an unspoiled, sometimes exotic landscape, in which animals rather than humans hold sway and nature is still at one with its primordial struggles.

The painter and postman **Louis Vivin** (1861–1936) also entices the viewer into idyllic landscapes and pastoral scenes of life in his homeland, into romanticized cityscapes and natural wonderlands, where flora and fauna still coexist in apparent harmony.

The gardener **André Bauchant** (1873–1958), in addition to landscapes, also depicted poetic and mythical visions. His art is characterized by its great passion for ancient mythology, with which he first came into contact as a soldier in Greece in World War One.

Séraphine Louis (1864–1942) is the only woman artist in the group. As Wilhelm Uhde's housewife, she was in close contact with him. Her vibrant, colorful still lifes of flowers and blossoms and fruit already suggest an abstract-ornamental understanding of images. In the course of her life, she became increasingly engrossed in her ever more suggestive imaginations of nature and art.

Camille Bombois (1883–1970) is one of the more well-known of the group. In his early years, Bombois did a series of different menial jobs, from farmhand to carnival wrestler – his pictorial cosmos explores the world of the Bohème, the other-worlds of circus artists and demimondaines, and seek the buxom and the dramatic as they play out scenes of lust and desire.

The five artists being shown at this exhibition, none of whom received academic training, remain largely unknown in Germany – with the exception of Henri Rousseau, who found powerful patrons at an early stage – as are with the complex effects of their work. For decades, their work was categorized as “naive art,” the artists as members of a rising modern primitivism and finally as outsider artists. The current exhibition attempts to place their work in a new context: as part of a critique of early modernity.

Wilhelm Uhde and his alienation from modernity

“I often had the opportunity to lead art historians and museum officials through collections and I was gratified to find that my personal, passionate connection with the individual object had led to an understanding of art that was superior to theirs, which was based on conclusions and theories. Furthermore, I would simply stop in front of a picture of two harmless lovers and they saw it as a chance to satisfy their own vanity with an original act of mental acrobatics. All too often, they saw works of art as an opportunity to prove their own theories with strokes of ink, to put their own brilliance on display.” -

Wilhelm Uhde in “Recollections and Conclusions“ (1938)

The German-born and Paris-based Wilhelm Uhde was not only an important art historian and trader, he was also among the first to exhibit the rising stars of the 20th century, such as Pablo Picasso and George Braque. He was also the key finder and patron of the “Painters of the Sacred Heart.” Uhde was quick to sense and recognize the fascination of these authentic works, created by auto-didactic artists without formal training or knowledge of the canon. He was in search of art that directly touched the human heart – away from the art canon, away from the art business, with its directions and movements, its traditions and academies and growing commercial interests.

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As he grew increasingly disappointed with this development, which saw the art of modernity veer ever more toward sophisticated conceptual and analytical approaches and discourses – and at the same time, drift away from its original spiritual force and emotional moments of experience. “The Painters of the Sacred Heart” brought him back to a world of senses and feelings, of genuine passion for art and its immediate effects.

Uhde, at once art trader, gallery owner, writer and passionate patron of the arts, understood art and the artwork as inseparable from the character of the artist. For him, art was based on “humanity” and this philosophy also included his own self-image. The great attraction of the artists he patronized was that they were guided by emotions, and as Uhde put it, a “big heart.”

His thinking in this regard is similar to that of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose “Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts,” published in 1750, placed the sentient soul, that which distinguishes the human being from other animals, above rational thought and declared virtue an important social value. The exhibition also honors Uhde’s work in the form of a cabinet presentation.



Séraphine Louis, Les cerises, ohne Jahr, Sammlung Zander

The curator of the exhibition, Udo Kittelmann on his so-called „outsider art“: “The exhibition “The Painters of the Sacred Heart at Museum Frieder Burda and the accompanying catalog are aimed, on the one hand, at honoring the unique pictorial inventions of the five artists on show and their unbroken topicality – and hence to give their personal visions a common and special place for the duration of the exhibition.” He goes on: “On the other hand, this artistic “liaison” sees itself as a programmatic and

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urgent plea to “pluck” those artists who do not subscribe to any prevailing artistic tendency from the wide-ranging oblivion to which they are subjected by the organs of the international art world – after all, the classification of art and artists in this category or another results in a constant in and out.

Henning Schaper, director of Museum Frieder Burda: “The exhibition consciously follows in the tradition of the museum and the specific aim of its founder Frieder Burda to continually rejuvenate and accentuate connections to French art. After the big, well-known positions, we are pleased to give voice to a different, hitherto largely ignored and underrated artistic language.”

The exhibition is based on a selection of works from the collection of Charlotte Zander, who collected art from outside the systematic artistic canon in great quantities and with great aplomb. It also includes works from the Scharf-Gerstenberg and Beyeler collections. Therefore, it is the most extensive exhibition ever of these important and often underrated artists, the painters of the Sacred Heart.

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Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm
Open on all public holidays