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The Vuvuzelas of the Soccer World Championship in South Africa were very noticeable during work on this edition as a shrill background noise. You could neither escape the noisy sound instruments from the stadiums nor the German colours Black- Red-Gold in the stands and on the streets.

One can vividly imagine what will go on if the German team should reach the finals and win.

Chris Schuster

Impressionism in Paintings

Inspired by the Viennese Exhibition of Impressionist painters »HOW THE LIGHT CAME ONTO THE CANVAS« the almost forgotten painter Michael Koch of the same epoch is evaluated

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Impressum



Vienna, in front of the Museum Abertina:

In former times you reached the entrance marching up wide stairs- nowadays, an escalator takes you to a modern entry. But you might still get to the Albertina the traditional way, by Fiaker.

Impressionism in Paintings

The exhibition of the impressionist paintings at the Albertina in Vienna Austria attracted a huge crowd. Hours before the opening people were queuing up under the futuristic roof at the entrance formed by a 300 square meter metal wing designed by the architect Prof. Hans Hollein. This roof above

CREMINA« OF BATTLE OF WHITE MOUNTAIN». No wonder: the palace had been the residence of the high commander of the imperial and royal Austro-Hungarian army. It is by no means a gap in your education if you didn't know about the Viennese real estate tycoons Hanno and Erwin Soravia who put their names plus two millions Euros into the renovation of the entrance of Museum Albertina.

A Rush to Admire the Masterpieces

Contemplation of the works at the exhibition was difficult because there were just too many visitors around. Occasionally though it was possible to understand about the theme of the exhibition »HOW THE LIGHT CAME ONTO THE CANVAS« in the dim light of the rooms. Pierre-Auguste Renoir's »Woman with Parasol« is a good example: the woman and her bright parasol look like dandelions and only after examining the painting for a while can one detect details of the garden. The points of colour not only form a flourishing garden but they do emit a lovely smell of blossoms. Renoir's impressions evoke pleasant memories stimulating all senses. Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet paint bathing women, nudes and dancers – the frivolous details hardly visible as if seen in a fogged mirror. The onlooker creates in his mind what the painter has kept invisible.

The exhibition »Impressionism« endeavoured to explain an additional aspect of this era. How and where managed did the painters execute their arts? Jules Ernest Renoux' equipment, which he used to set up for open air painting, has been carefully reconstructed. Light, easily transportable tools, stools, palettes, umbrellas and parasols, frames and packing cases to carry the luggage were arranged



SORAVIA WING: : with the sponsors' names on the roof entrance to the Museum Albertina in Vienna, former Palace of Archduke Albrecht. Foto: Helmut Flatscher

Inspired by the Viennese Exhibition of Impressionist painters »HOW THE LIGHT CAME ONTO THE CANVAS« the almost forgotten painter Michael Koch of the same epoch is evaluated

the visitors' heads looks like a high diving board. The construction provides hardly any shelter in rain and wind, therefore complaints about the roof's leaking are not being given a lot of attention. But in the long run, the destructive effects of water leakage will become obvious and apprehension for waiting under the »Dacherl« will increase, with visitors keeping a concerned eye on the inscription on its top.

The uninformed visitor to the Museum Albertina is tempted to interpret inscription SORAVIA as »BATTLE OF SORAVIA AT THE WING«, relating it to other inscriptions on the former Palace of Archduke Albrecht such as BATTLE OF



Michael Koch
*Neckar bridge
 near the city
 of Mannheim,
 evening*

*Oil on wood, 112 x
 60 cm
 no date given,
 likely 1908
 in the collection
 of Roger Übe,
 Frankfurt a. M.*



*Label on the back
 of the painting*

to get an idea how painting at *plein air* and *sur le motif* was accomplished. The luggage couldn't be hauled in spacious SUVs at that time to reach a remote spot off road. In those days, the painter might have left the city by railway to get to the countryside. There are some paintings showing railways, but generally the painters favoured idyllic sceneries. The then modern times with busy railway stations, smoking funnels and dark factories, miserable workers' quarters and backyard tristesse are rarely subject of the impressionists' paintings. They prefer the beautiful evanescent moment, they preserve the shortest impression on canvas for generations to come. Since this perception is independent of the »Zeitgeist« impressionist works of art are timeless.

On the Path to Discover an Impressionist

Still under the influence of the Expressionism at Albertina's I started to track down my own family for one impressionist painter, who belonged to my grandmother's family his name is:

Michael Koch called »Michel« Koch, born 6. November 1853 in Edingen, died 1. December 1927 in Mannheim.

Uncle Michel's paintings and drawings hung on the walls of residences of relatives, parents and grandparents; his pictures gave me an early understanding of visual arts. The delicate subjects of his paintings, half obscured by the mist of the landscape incited my imagination: »What might be hidden beneath?« I decoded the colour spots as shimmering treasures and licking flames as a Kindergartener I was unable to compose a landscape from impression – a landscape which would conform perfectly with any criteria of classic impressionism. How could I have known otherwise? In post war Germany the museums provided no edutainment. Nowadays toddlers are taken care of at the Städel's in Frankfurt* where patient PhD staff instruct them in counting the cats on paintings of Max Beckmann or Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. By the age of five they know exactly the difference between impression and expressionism.

The image shows the river prior to the construction of the Neckar Canal with Friedrichsbrücke, a suspension bridge supported by two pillars.

The bridge was destroyed during bombardment of the city in 1943.

This painting got the number 1 out of 384 works of art in the painter's atelier, when they were appraised on 5. January 1928, 9 a.m. The total valuation was 19,410 Reichsmark equivalent to 19,410 U.S. Dollars of the time .

The following persons were at the scene:

- Professor Michael Gött
- Factory owner Karl Friedrich Koch from Edingen
- Felix Nagel as expert
- Judge G. Landsittel

** Johann Friedrich Städel 1728-1816 laid the foundation for the present day collection, art school and library. A banker and spice trader of Frankfurt, Städel was entirely in the spirit of the Enlightenment.*



Michael Koch: *Portrait of Michael Emanuel Gött, the painter's godson*
Oil on canvas, ca. 1882.

Looking at the picture nowadays one might be reminded of an an drogynous Pop Icon compare Bill Kaulitz, page 5

The Impressionist in Our Family

Who was Michel Koch, the painter? He was an uncle to my mother's mother, Susanna Koch, who died at the age of 102 in the year 1990. Thanks to her long life my grandmother could tell her children and grandchildren about uncle Michel Koch, the painter. Susanna, who married in the adjacent village of Wieblingen 1909 and took the surname of Merdes, was born and raised in Edingen, the same birthplace of Michel Koch. The painter used to drop in on his parental

home between his frequent trips. As a young girl my grandmother had posed for her uncle's paintings several times. During this period Michel Koch was already well established as painter of portraits for Mannheim's »high« society. The portrait of Frau Geheim Oberbaurat Anna Klinghöffer can still be seen at the Municipal Art Collection in Darmstadt. The portrait of the later sculptor Eugenie Kaufmann was put in a prominent spot in the main wing during the 1893 exhibition at the Glass Palace in Munich.

Connections to the United States

Michel Koch did also a portrait of Jerome Straus, son of the American owner of Macy's, Nathan Straus. There is no information passed on about why and when it happened. But it is well known that many people from the Kurpfalz emigrated to the U.S. from the 17th century on. There even exists a village New Paltz in the Hudson Valley, near the Mohonk Preserve in the state of New York. A fair number of Michel Koch's kin also emigrated during the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore a good number of his works of art ended up in America. My first grade cousins, Howard and Gustave Schultheiss, who were born and raised in Queens NY, possess several paintings by Michel Koch. They cherish the inherited artwork. They feel the common root when they visit the German branch of the family and see the counterpart paintings over there.

The friendship for the poet Emil Gött inspired Michel Koch to two exquisite portraits which mirrored his deep appreciation for the free spirited man only one year younger than he. The pictures hang in Freiburg, Breisgau, the last place where Emil Gött served as Professor. One painting is at the Augustiner Museum and

the other one at the head master's room in the school by his name, the Emil Gött Schule. The wonderful painting of his godson Michael Emanuel Gött seemed to anticipate the Pop icons of the 21st centuries. The Artist's Studio in Mannheim

Michel Koch was in high demand as a portraitist of the Wilhelminian bourgeoisie up to World War I. He lived in an apartment in the centre of Mannheim since 1901. He was registered as the main leaseholder, occupying the third floor of the building K1, 13 until his death. He had established his atelier in his apartment as well. Not many people are familiar with the numbering system of streets in Mannheim: the blocks in the city called Quadrante =quadrants are identified by an alphanumeric system, rather than by street numbers and names. Though the layout of the city, much in the way ancient Beijing was laid out, stems from 1684, the alphanumeric system is of relatively recent origin, 1816. This peculiar address system could lead people to think that when they received a letter and looked at a Mannheim return address e.g. from Mannheim K1, 13, as sent by Michel Koch the sender might have sent it from jail, denoting a number in a cell block.

Due to the revolutionary changes in society after World War I 1914-1918 Koch lost most of his higher circle clientele. Whether the loss of portrait commissions led him to paint more landscapes, is unknown. Most of his artwork – all in all 400 paintings, drawings and water color paintings aquarelles – is neither signed nor dated. Many portraits must have been executed on commission, but after they were sold nobody really knows where they could have gone. His oeuvre as far as it is registered consists of one third of portraits, including self portraits. According to his estate, and research about his artwork in private hands, half of his

paintings feature landscapes, towns and villages – fairly often in Mannheim, its surroundings and in the Heidelberg region. But Koch painted scenes of the Black Forest and the Alpes, as well. He often stayed in Arosa, Switzerland. His paintings of snow covered landscape and the chapel in Arosa represent the purest impressionism. A rare photograph shows the painter with an impressive white beard in front of his easel page 6. The picture was taken presumably in springtime, as suggested by his knitted vest being open and the patches of snow beside the canvas; one assumes that the year was 1926.

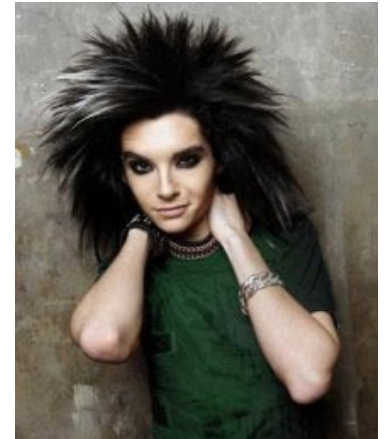
Lauffenburg in the High Rhine region, with its cataracts, was painted several times by Michel Koch and is a superb documentation of the original untamed waters of the Rhine at that time. But before a hydro power station was to be built, the cataracts of Lauffenburg had to be blown up. The city of Lauffenburg bought Koch's painting of the Rhine River for 28,000 Goldmarks about 7,000 U.S. dollars at that time in 1907. This painting with the former riverside of the Rhine can still be admired at the town hall of Lauffenburg.

Allegory of Flowers

Still life, predominantly large paintings of flowers, accounts for one tenth of Michel Koch's artwork. His large format flower cycle containing six different tableaux with blossoms – each type arranged in a precious vase – is regarded as a masterpiece. The flower paintings show:

- Red Poppy
- Fire Lily
- Golden Chain Laburnum
- Chrysanthemum
- Corn flower
- Blue Iris

The title of the cycle refers to Goethe's Faust II: »Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir



Bill Kaulitz
Singer and performer of the German band »Tokio Hotel« he seems to be a modern version of Michael Emanuel Gött's portrait, painted 1882 by Michael Koch.

das Leben«. Michel Koch had started with flower cycle paintings already in 1900 but was finished only by 1912. The six flower paintings were presented at Mannheim Kunsthalle in October 1912 for the first time.

Sole Acquisition

In summer 1913 the German Art Association Deutscher Künstlerbund had an exhibition at the Mannheim Kunsthalle. The Berlin sculptor Louis Tuaillon and the painter Lovis Corinth were part of the jury, among others. Corinth in his later years painted in a very expressionist, provocative way which led the Nazi regime to declare those pictures as »entartet« degenerated. But on the eve of World War I Corinth voted for the peaceful landscape »Evening at Reiss Island«. The Mannheim City Council decided to buy the genre painting »Reiss Island« together with a winter

landscape, on occasion of Michel Koch's 60th birthday 7th November 1913. Koch, the painter in residence, got only 1,200 Mark for both oil paintings from the local authorities while a painting by



Michel Koch at his easel, likely in 1926, Arosa, Switzerland

Ludwig Thoma, a professor at Karlsruhe, received a record sum of 11,000 Mark for one of his paintings. The Kunsthalle

in Mannheim was the only museum to buy Koch's artwork during his lifetime. The highly praised painting »Evening at the Reiss Island« was destroyed together with the entire museum when Mannheim was bombed on 5./6. September 1943. The winter landscape got lost after a lease.

Michel Koch was found dead by his nephew Prof. Michael Gött who shared his apartment in Mannheim, K 1.13, on 2nd December 1927. The newspaper Neue Mannheimer Zeitung stated in the obituary the painter Koch has died of heart failure at the age of 74 years and continued: **»He became the true painter of Mannheim's society and has stayed as such ever since. But he was also the painter of impressive landscapes with a fine atmosphere, but most of all, Michael Koch was highly cherished as a painter of flowers. We are mourning an artist and man who is connected forever with Mannheim's best times.«**

It would be highly appreciated if the 100th year of Michel Koch's death in 1927 were remembered not only by the city of Mannheim, but also by the art scene at large. ■

Impressum



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Photo: Martina Pipprich, Mainz

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