

# PAPAGENA AND OTHER ODD FISHES

A Multimedia Exhibition at the Musée Visionnaire

16. Januar — 28. Juli 2019

The exhibition «Papagena and other Odd Fishes» at the Musée Visionnaire is an opulent show of creativity and originality where life and art become one or life is performance.

The oeuvre of Bernhard Vogelsanger, self-proclaimed «Impresario of the Opera Schwamendingen», is not widely known. Placing his work at the center, the Musée added pieces by other artists who also thematized opera, dance, costumes, theater or saw life as their own personal stage. All of the exhibited artists are or were unconventional people, odd fishes, and cannot be integrated into the established context of the art world. As artists, they forged ahead towards their own Gesamtkunstwerk, to stage the passions they harbored inside. Passion and desire, not convention and commerce, are the forces that drove them.

In addition, Oliver Matthias Meyer (FilmArts) made a video especially for this exhibition. In this production, people who knew Bernhard Vogelsanger or Walbaum recout their personal encounters with the artists.

BERNHARD VOGELSANGER (1920–1995) worked as a decorator and was known in and around Schwamendingen as an oddball who walked around in eccentric costume. Only few people knew that he ran the Opera of Schwamendingen in the two-bed-room apartment that he shared with his mother. Probably around the age of 25 or 30, he began — clandestinely at first — to design small cardboard figurines and sets made from shoe boxes. Vogelsanger had seen his first opera when he was a school boy and, over the years, his passion for opera, operettas and musicals grew, literally taking up more and more room in his life. Eventually, he wrapped up his former bedroom in red crepe paper and, after laying his hands on eight discarded cinema chairs, set up his own private opera house. Every Saturday, he invited friends over for a performance, even making his own poster advertising beforehand, and he played out the great dramas of love, passion, and death on his stage. Literally pulling his own strings, he moved the figurines on cords across the board, with the orchestra playing on gramophone. And when he couldn't change the vinyl in time because he couldn't handle all the necessary movements simultaneously, he simply broke into song himself.

Besides Vogelsanger's original stages and his figurines, a documentary film by Oliver Matthias Meyer

of the exclusive opera experience of Schwamendingen.

The wool and clay buffets by MADAME TRICOT (\*1948) and the Zürich artist ROSA BÄR (\*1938) are reminders of Vogelsanger's hospitality. Vogelsanger loved opulence and during the breaks of his opera performances, he offered his guests finger food and champagne. Later in life, he had to pace himself and replaced the canapés with plastic mockups. The objects on the tables, Madame Tricot's knitwear and Rosa Bär's ceramics, are a sight to behold, revealing themselves as fakes only at second glance.

The objects by Rosa Bär are auctioned off until July 4, 2019 (please ask museum personnel for help).

While Vogelsanger's operas were free but only open to a few chosen initiated, state-sponsored opera houses are open to the public but only a few can afford the tickets. In 2007, a Zürich media group, !MEDIENGRUPPE BITNIK, commented on that aspect with their work «Opera Calling». Linking an unknown number of bugging devices to a random generator, the group wiretapped live performances at the opera house and delivered them for free to landlines in the Zürich phone network. Whoever answered the call was greeted with the words: «Yes, hello, this is the autonomist opera telephone of the City of Zürich. For your pleasure and entertainment, we placed a bug into the Zürich opera. In a few seconds, you will be connected live to the opera house. In the comfort of your home, you can be part of today's performance of The Cavalier of the Rose by Richard Strauss. Enjoy!». Possibly, «Opera Calling» prodded the «opera for all» events, free live performances of the opera house Zürich that have been attracting tens of thousands of opera fans to the giant outdoor screen at the Sechseläutenplatz (square in front of opera house) since 2014.

Not operas, but costumes, dance, and theater are the topics of Bibo and Black Berty, («Schwarzes Bertchen»), the identities of the mask dancers and couple LAVINIA SCHULZ (1896–1924) and WALTER HOLDT (1899–1924) who revolutionized dance culture at the beginning of the 20th century with their body masks. Until the bitter end, they insisted that artistic performances must be offered for free. Finally, the couple collapsed under their idealism: on June 18, 1924, Lavinia Schulz killed her husband and succumbed to the shot wounds that she had inflicted upon herself. They left behind two dozen

body masks, a light-footed, free-spirited legacy that conceals its tragic history.

In 1998, D R E H U M «La mode folie» a fashion show took place at the famous Kaufleuten Club in Zürich. The whimsical appearance of Lavinia Schulz und Walter Holdt's costumes compares with the outfits on the Kaufleuten catwalk, yet their raison d'être differs significantly: Ursula Sax, head of design at Theater Hora, a company for people with intellectual disabilities, had connected people with intellectual disabilities and fashion professionals for a two-year costume design project. Inspired by pictures from art history, people with intellectual disabilities drew the costumes that fashion designers and theater seamstresses then realized. Beyond fashion dictates, their joy of design and pure pleasure pushed boundaries, broke down stereotypes or simply REVERSED them (D R E H U M).

WALBAUM (1915–1993) was an exceptional human being — a happy-go-lucky person whose life was his stage. After two apprenticeships as iron-ware dealer and decorative and house painter in his father's workshop, he continued winning his bread with his trade skills until he retired. But he was also a poet, moralist, bar fly, philosopher, actor, baker and a through and through loveable, good-natured and social person. Without much ado, he played to the gallery and attracted attention. He was a showman who claimed to like himself in order to like others: «He who doesn't love himself cannot love others, but simply wants to own what he doesn't have» – the motto that carried him through life. His hallmark theatrics included his snow-white shoulder-length hair, the flowing beard, and his legendary, expressive saucer eyes that fascinated his contemporaries, especially when he recited his poetry impromptu. The Zürich historical archives are home to an unmanageable amount of his poems, and in addition, a myriad of aphorisms on flash cards. Only a few poems were ever published. Walbaum's Zoo (Walbaums Zoo) is his best-known work, a small

booklet with 69 verses on animals and illustrations by Scapa, printed 1973 by the publishing house Benti. At first, his texts come across as debonair, accommodating, but — like a wolf in a sheep's clothing — close readings reveal Walbaum's biting, yet humorous criticism of human nature and our times.

The Musée Visionnaire exhibits many original documents by Walbaum himself as well as commentaries on him. For 24 years, Walbaum lived on Chorgasse 7 in the Niederdorf neighborhood, just a few steps away from the Musée.

The Musée also shows the documentary film that Oliver Matthias Meyer made for Swiss tv about Walbaum, a differentiated, subtle portrait of an outsider (the Swiss term for outsiders like him is *Stadtoriginal*, which loosely translates into original human being).

CONCEPT: Manuela Hitz, Yvonne Türlér / CURATOR: Manuela Hitz / TEXTS: Christoph Doswald (preface), Yvonne Türlér / COPY-EDITING AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION: Nina Zimnik / FRENCH TRANSLATION: Françoise Dufey / GRAFIC DESIGN: Afrika, Florian Jakober & Michael Zehnder / SUPPORT: Alex Cekic, Meret Draeyer, Jörg Furrer, Norbert Günther, Oliver Matthias Meyer, Samira Nann, Sinai Mutzner, Rainer Maria Trinkler, Mägi Rizzi, Christina Studer / ART EDUCATION AND MUSEUM TOURS: Manuela Hitz, Michèle Matthäus, Yvonne Türlér

The following institutions, foundations and individuals supported the exhibition «Papagena and Other Odd Fishes»: Maya Behn-Eschenburg Stiftung, Cassinelli-Vogel-Stiftung, Curdin Cassutt (Theater Hora), Flickbar, Dr. Jörg Furrer, Ernst Göhner Stiftung, Hirzel-Stiftung, Oliver Matthias Meyer, MIGROS-KULTURPROZENT, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Ursula Sax (D R E H U M — «La mode folie»), Stadtarchiv Zürich, Rainer Maria Trinkler (Filmkollektiv Zürich AG), Anna Voegtli (Verein Bernhard Vogelsanger), donors and members of the Verein Musée Visionnaire.

The Musée Visionnaire is deeply grateful for their support. A sincere thanks also goes to the Musée's volunteers and to all the people who contributed with their personal memories to the video of the exhibition on Walbaum an Bernhard Vogelsanger.