

# The Austrian Artist Maria Biljan-Bilger and the City of Vienna as Patron of the Arts.

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*Abstract: In December 1953 Franz Jonas, the mayor of Vienna at that time, wrote in a foreword to the publication, "Die Stadt Wien als Mäzen", that society was obliged to make it possible for everyone to fulfil their forthcoming social commitments: "the manual worker has as much right as the intellectual, the dependent as much as the freelancer, the scientist as much as the artist! Since that what reason alone is not in a position to do, then art should do: to enrich mankind and lead to humanity."*

*The Austrian artist Maria Biljan-Bilger (1912-1997) was one of many artists who, after the Second World War, was contracted by the Vienna City Council to create works of art for public spaces. The city invested large sums of money after the war in its re-building programme. The standard requirement was that finances were to be used not only for the urgently needed housing projects, nurseries and schools etc, but also a certain sum should be retained for the applied artists, painters and sculptors. Thus the city of Vienna became the biggest contractor for the artists and gave their works many new impulses. That of beauty should be harmoniously united with that of purpose. Maria Biljan-Bilger produced not just large plastics and ceramic reliefs, she also worked with textiles and glass. Some of her works are still to be seen today, others were destroyed during the demolition process to re-design and re-build some sites; some landed in the depots of exhibition halls and auction houses*

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## Prologue

The Austrian author Robert Musil made the rather sarcastic remarks that

*... the most striking thing about memorials is namely, that one doesn't notice them. There is nothing more invisible in the world than memorials. Undoubtedly they are erected to be seen, yes, and especially to stimulate the attention ... One can pass along a street month after month, one will know each house number, each costly window pane, each policeman on the way and it won't evade anyone's attention when a penny lies on the pavement ... but one is surely surprised every time to discover a not so small metal panel on which is engraved the letters stating that at this place in, from eighteen hundred and something to eighteen hundred and something else, the unforgettable so and so has lived and worked.<sup>1</sup>*

And so it is with artwork and buildings. "Kunst am Bau" (artwork and building/construction) is present everywhere, and everyone knows what is meant by it. The bandwidth of commentary about art and construction ranges from the highest accolades to withering critique such as "art and building/construction, that is a crime".

Umberto Eco saw this artistic arrangement as rather differentiated, "... the chastised mass culture has not occupied the place of advanced civilisation, rather it has spread amongst social classes who had previously no access to cultural modes of expression."<sup>2</sup>

After the Second World War the city of Vienna in the form of providing social housing and city planning, took over the responsibility and duties for a new educated society and patronage. The city saw it as their task and goal to achieve a "clear artistic reflection and impression; that the artist cherishes his time and his environment, in order that the inhabitants may recognise and affirm this city in its' artistic and pictorial depictions."<sup>3</sup>

There was scarcely any private patronage at this point in time. The destruction of the city following heavy bombardment and the occupation by Russian troops during the last weeks of the war left the survivors and those coming home with a picture of ravage and depredation.

According to surveys from the city's building department, 46,862 buildings had been damaged during the war, that was 41% of all buildings. With it 86,875 flats had gone, about an eighth of the total existing. Industrial concerns, complete bridges over the Danube, all the bridges over the Danube canal and all major railway stations had been destroyed. It was a similar picture with the infrastructure and historical or culturally important buildings. 850,000 cubic metres of debris lay in the streets. An estimate from the year 1945 set the damage to construction in Vienna at 2,5 million Austrian shillings worth (prices 1945, today about 182,000 €). The priority was, clear the debris, procure the building materials, and raise the buildings quickly since there was a severe housing shortage.

What was particular in Vienna at this time from 1945-1955 – the so-called re-construction time – was that the city was divided into four zones after the rest of the allied troops arrived. There was a Russian, French, English and American zone which required a special sensitive handling by the city council in their dealings with

<sup>1</sup> Robert Musil, *Nachlass zu Lebzeiten*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1962), 62

<sup>2</sup> Umberto Eco, *Apokalypse und Integrierte: Zur kritischen Kritik der Massenkultur*. (Frankfurt/Main, 1984), 45

<sup>3</sup> Stadtbauamt der Stadt Wien, *Die Stadt Wien als Mäzen III: Aufträge der Wiener Stadtverwaltung an Maler und Bildhauer von Ende 1949 bis Ende 1959*, 3.erw. Aufl. (Wien, 1959)

the occupiers.<sup>4</sup> These years were marked by tough negotiations by the municipal administrators with the occupying forces over the extension of free zones. It required great negotiating skills to take advantage of the internal differences between the allies in order to achieve the maximum benefit for the city.

## **The Cultural Policy of the City of Vienna after 1945 and the so-called «Kunst am Bau»**

In many Viennese housing projects there still exists an abundance of work by trained artists, which reveal the patronage of the municipal authorities and their commissions to artists.

Previously in history the commissioning of works of art was sponsored only by the aristocracy and later by the emergent middle classes. The study of works of art for its own sake was a privilege for these social classes and offered intellectual stimulus and the joy of discovery promoting their personal spiritual growth. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries various mass political movements emphasised the value and importance of art work. Art was used in the servicing of propaganda. Art was used as an educational tool. In dictatorships art is used in the justification of the official propaganda.

Naturally it depends on the characteristics of a state whether they can afford to allow freedom and expression for the arts or not, and whether it is tolerated. There is a very nice statement on the Wiener Sezession written by Ludwig Hevesi, "*Der Zeit ihre Kunst – der Kunst ihre Zeit*" (*The time its art, the art its freedom*).

As residency to the Habsburg monarchs, Vienna had its own role. Andreas Gottsmann in his essay "Kulturpolitik und Kulturförderung in der Donaumonarchie (1848-1918)" estimated the city of Vienna spent 10,000 guilders a year on the purchase of art works.<sup>5</sup> The blending together of art and trade was always an important subject in this city.

After the end of the First World War Vienna was governed by a social democratic city council. They called the city "Red Vienna". Today the city is still governed by a socialist mayor. Already in the years immediately after 1918 the social housing projects in Vienna were being decorated with works from renowned artists. In the 19<sup>th</sup> District of Vienna, Döbling, the famous council estate in Vienna is named the "Karl Marx Hof". This council housing project was erected between the years 1927-1930 by the Otto Wagner follower and city architect Karl Ehn. The project has 1382 apartments housing around 5,500 people. In the "Ehrenhof" courtyard works by Austrian artists are displayed, such as the bronze figure "Sämann" (Sower) from the year 1929 by Otto Hofner (1879-1946). Joseph Franz Riedl (1884-1965) created the ceramic figures above the archways "Aufklärung" (Enlightenment), "Befreiung" (Liberation), "Kinderfürsorge" (Child Welfare), "Körperkultur" (Body Consciousness), and two vases for flowers in the year 1930.

In this massive housing estate those people less well-off and less fortunate should have the means towards finding a better life. With regards to the artistic decoration of this housing project, it offered the opportunity for the city of Vienna to slip into the role of patron. These efforts by the city found respect amongst the artists and art teachers as well as meaning in the social political sphere. However the small means that were available to the city at that time meant that there could be no legal determining of an annual set budget based on a certain percentage for public art work. Only in the 1930's during the Depression was it considered making law to have a budget for this. At that time it was called "*Arbeitsbeschaffung*" (provision of work). During the inter-war years there were certain movements which guaranteed a means of survival for artists. Other countries also recognised these means to support artists through the public purse. Even after 1938 after Austria's "Anschluss" with National Socialist Germany, contracts for public works were awarded to artists. Only on condition however, that they belonged to the "Reichskulturkammer" (The Reich's Cultural Office) which many Austrian artists did. A number of artists after 1945 denied having been a member of this office. Maria Biljan-Bilger belonged to those artists who had no right to work during the time of National Socialism. She had gone into hiding in Vienna and worked as an assistant in a small ceramic firm in Pöchlarn in Lower Austria.

Throughout many years cultural policy was an election theme. Today, however cultural policy is really not a subject anymore. It could be that politicians have lost their interest in it, that they tend to keep a low profile when questions about it arise, that artists themselves are not so politically engaged and that a general resignation about today's politics lies heavy around. Art is not provocation anymore. On the homepage for the City of Vienna, under the heading Cultural Division one can read the following sentence: "*The Cultural Division for the city of Vienna wants to offer the optimal framework for working artists and the Viennese public. The aim is to ensure a wide range of interesting cultural offers.*"<sup>6</sup>

In the years after the war it was completely different.

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<sup>4</sup> See the film "Four in a Jeep", Switzerland 1951, by the Viennese born director Leopold Lindtberg, and produced by Lazar Wechsler and "Praesens Film" in 1950. It won the "Golden Bear" at the Berlin Film Festival in 1951.

<sup>5</sup> Gottsmann, Andreas, "Kulturpolitik und Kulturförderung in der Donaumonarchie (1848-1918)", in *Kulturstaat und Bürgergesellschaft: Preußen, Deutschland und Europa im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolfgang Neugebauer, Bärbel, Holtz (Akademie Verlag: Berlin, 2010), 106

<sup>6</sup> [www.wien.gv.at/kultur/abteilung/](http://www.wien.gv.at/kultur/abteilung/)

From 1947 the building of new housing began. The housing shortage was terrible. Up until 1970, 96,000 new homes were built in Vienna. Today the council of Vienna owns 220,000 homes in more than 2,300 council projects with over 500,000 tenants.

In 1948 the action “Kunst für Stadt und Land” (Art for City and Land), was started. The President of Austria at that time, Dr. Karl Renner, was the impulse behind this action. Already in this year the “*calculations for a percentage of the budget for artistic decorations on all public buildings*” on a nationwide scale was suggested. Three years later in 1951 this campaign ran on a fixed term of one year. For the Vienna Councillor Matejka, at that time, this was no “*plea for money*” rather a “*field of activity*” that was opened up.

The 1950’s shows a controversial picture: on one side the remaining debris from the war, and on the other side optimism and reconstruction. Whereby it must be said that the word “reconstruction” carried a certain ambivalence with it. In which direction should one go? Restoration? Or a completely new beginning? A detachment from the old traditional customs? Profitability against questions of style? Modernness and business against the preservation of old buildings and historical rubble? There followed partly a demolition of old precarious buildings and old symbolic buildings which led to a squaring up to the days gone by, a clearing away of the past, but also a reconstruction of old cultural values; for example, Saint Stephen’s Cathedral “*The old Stevie, the emblem of Vienna*”, the Vienna Opera House and the Burg Theatre (the national theatre). In the Burggarten the Mozart memorial was raised.

This paradox was reflected in the whole society at this time. One sees it for example in the depiction of a woman. On the one side she is pictured as the homemaker hard at work at the kitchen stove, on the side she is the “sexbomb” in the films. The influence from America was beginning to be felt, from a strict moral code to the so-called “teenage rebels” and their “wild side”. Austria had qualified for Marshall Aid, and this aid led to a faster rebuilding of the devastated industry. The State government chose a social market economy as their economic system. This little economic miracle in the first half of the 1950’s gave the citizens a new sense of self-esteem, encouraged the first mass motorisation of society which in turn led to demands for faster connections within the infrastructure. These characteristic traits in society after 1945 shaped a uniformity out of dissimilarities, a continuity and a new beginning, the upholding of old values and ideas and new visions for the future.

The era after the departure of the allied forces and the conclusion of a state constitution in 1955 saw a political consensus between the two largest parties the ÖVP and the SPÖ. It is worth noting here that after the First World War both parties were at such loggerheads with each other it ended in a short civil war in Austria in 1933. A fact which the ÖVP, up to this day, have not admitted. There was absolutely no consensus between the parties at this time – and incidentally there is none today although the Chancellor (SPÖ) and the Vice-Chancellor (ÖVP) make a public show of a “*Kuschelkurs*” a cuddling up to each other.

After 1945 a contract with the city of Vienna often meant a year of survival for an artist. Artists were not until quite recently socially insured.

In January 1950 the municipality laid down a procedure for awarding contracts and commissions. At the administrative level an official was determined who dealt with visual arts, and in whose department it fell to award the contracts for the so-called “Kunst am Bau”. The first of these was Eduard Gärtner who knew Maria Biljan-Bilger and correspondingly supported her since he was impressed with her works.

The decision of the official was however coupled with the decision of an advisory panel. Only later did they gravitate towards special consultants. The artist him/herself was never invited to take part in this decision making process, they were regarded as “*biased*”, and unsuitable and should be represented by an art expert. Today one sees things very differently and this previously laudable position strikes us as rather foreign.

We must be further clear here that there still existed a strong sense of conservatism amongst those artists who had been influenced by National Socialism, until the “Avantgarde” of this stronghold loosened, freed and improved itself. It often came to heavy blows between the so-called “*arrivierten*” (established) artists and the artists of the new generation. The “*arrivierten*” artists had, after 1918 and during war years, benefitted from receiving good local contracts and found support with the “Wiener Künstlerhaus”. Modern artistic organisations such as the “Art Club” were founded after 1950. Maria Biljan-Bilger was one of the founding members of the “Viennese Art Club”.

The procedure for the award of contracts by the municipality caused heavy arguments. The distribution of contracts was not always free from criticism, above all with regards to which political party the artist belonged, which again threw up the question, “where is the freedom in the culture?” The taste of those decision making persons became a point of criticism – especially when they turned a contract down. What had been decided “*under the table*” and then carried out? Was it again a question of being friends with the right person?<sup>7</sup>

A specifically earmarked budget, short-term planning, the ignorance of the official making decisions and the question of his competence, all this influenced the discussions. The artists were also afraid that if the contracts were criticised too much that the city of Vienna would want to reduce the amount of commissions given. There was therefore an uncertainty between the artists and the city council and conversely the city council towards the artists and their completed works. A further problem for the city council was the regularity in the distribution of

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<sup>7</sup> Absolon affair: Kurt Absolon (1925-1958), an Austrian artist, had to withdraw an artwork after harsh criticism; the artwork already was accepted by the city of Vienna.

contracts to the art community, because an art market hardly existed in Vienna. The local government felt itself to be the biggest awardee of contracts between the years 1946-1960.

One has to recognise however that the subject matter of the art work which was assigned differs greatly from that of art work whose subject matter was “*autonomous*”. The images found in public spaces held a specific message. A piece of work which was not a true image was often understood as “*degenerate*”. There is the question of whether this was an after effect from the time of National Socialism.

Artists were often called upon to be aware of their “*social*” task. “*The educated artist must always seriously make a critical study in both theme and design, of the present day problems in society. Then he will receive recognition and his work shall through the ages remain alive*”.<sup>8</sup> This was the cultural political viewpoint of the workers’ movement, which can however be applied in the 1950’s to the “*Reconstruction*” process.

The application of art objects on housing estates and residential complexes was directed so:

- Supraporte: an independent standing image not combined within a door frame starts initially as a relief then as a flat mosaic (a favoured motif).

- Architectural sculpture, window sills, door trims, door frames.

- Entry designs.

- Wall affixed plastic mouldings, with no direct relation to a particular building link.

- House signs, to lend more picturesque or graphic signature to a house.

A change of thinking happened slowly in the 1960’s when something more “*abstract*” was demanded.

In retrospect, for internationally recognised Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer the works produced for the Vienna City Council were absurd and embarrassing, an, “*horrific time for artistic work*”.<sup>9</sup> He saw himself ostracised from the cultural policy pursued by the city authorities at that time. He also never received a commission from the city.

From 1949 to 1962 1,526 commissions for 1090 works on 1191 artists were awarded. The costs of these commissions in this time amounted to about 35,4 million Austrian shillings (ca 2,5 million €). A panel in the Department for Art and Culture in the Vienna City Council advised about the distribution of the commissions to the various artists. The commissioned artists produced 109 sgraffitos, 622 mosaics, 288 reliefs, 271 sculptures, 45 fountain areas and a further 191 works of art.<sup>10</sup> Not all works met with the approval of the neighbours or residents of the housing estates. Conservative and modern patterns of thought clashed, led to hefty discussions and, as so often when the ructions settled down, found some resumption of normality.

The fashion with regards to building met with a great change in the 1950’s. The buildings of the 1950’s no longer formed a closed unit as they had previously done – individualisation was now the trait, instead of the former “*collectively altogether*”.

The demand now was for more open housing estates with more individual single units. People were looking at examples from abroad, such as in Switzerland and Sweden. A rationalisation process was making itself felt, and changes were being made in the architecture and in the building materials used. For example, walls were built thinner and were therefore less noise proof, in contrast function / technique and production / design of the 1920’s. The dwellings of “*Red Vienna*” out of the 1920’s have scarcely any meaning anymore. They are now just a memory.

It is remarkable to note that the architects and artists did not cooperate with each other. The architect took hardly any account for the artistic design of the plans he submitted. The art work was an additional element, an arrangement.

An exception to this was the Austrian architect Roland Rainer. He built the Wiener Stadthalle at the end of the 1950’. It was the biggest public building for cultural events that the city council had planned. Rainer commented later:

*In great contrast to the public housing at that time, was – as far as I myself experienced – the fact that the architect was completely free with regards to the design of public buildings, in terms of architecture as well as the accompanying or additional artistic work. At least the artists whom I recommended to work in conjunction with the building of the Stadthalle, were contracted without any restrictions imposed on them, and these were major Viennese artists of this time, such as Wotruba, Boeckl, Bilger, Bertoni, Leinfellner, and Unger. It was a free collaboration of like-minded artists with a friendly understanding, which gave each the possibility for far-reaching development at the most appropriate place, but which imposed no pressure or constraints upon us; and this is what plainly may still be felt in the Stadthalle today.<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> Irene Nierhaus, *Kunst – am – Bau im kommunalen Wohnbau der fünfziger Jahre*, (Böhlau Verlag: Wien, Köln, Weimar, 1993), 28

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Grisseemann, Hans Veigl, *Testbild, Twen und Nierentisch; unser Lebensgefühl in den 50er Jahren*, (Böhlau Verlag: Wien, 2002), 95

<sup>10</sup> Stadtbauamt der Stadt Wien, *Die Stadt Wien als Mäzen IV*, (Wien 1962), 5

<sup>11</sup> Nierhaus, *Kunst – am – Bau*, 177; see: Roland Rainer, „Bauten und Kunstwerke“, in *Wellenbrecher*, 1988/12

## Maria Biljan-Bilger and her works commissioned by the Vienna City Council for public spaces

The artist Maria Biljan-Bilger returned to Vienna after the end of the Second World War. Like many other people she had fled from the advancing Russian troops to the west of Austria. At the end of the 1940's she was introduced to the Viennese councillor for Culture Viktor Matejka to try and gain one or two art commissions. She had to earn a living with her artistic work. She had brought an object along with her in her bag which was supposed to demonstrate that she worked with plaster and had command over various other materials. The object she presented to the city official was a coloured hedgehog made of sandstone. Matejka was astounded and shaking his head said to her: *"But child, she brings a hedgehog, a hedgehog! We need memorials now. Memorials!"*<sup>12</sup> Despite this first rather disenchanting exclamation, a time began for Maria whereby she would receive quite a number of commissions from the City of Vienna and which would prove to be a very fruitful collaboration.

Maria Biljan-Bilger was born in Radstadt, Salzburg, on 21 January 1912, into a family of oven makers. Her father worked as an independent oven master and had his own workshop in Graz. He was a very influential figure for Maria. In her artistic work she always depicted him as an eagle. Maria graduated from the school for arts and crafts in Graz, where she qualified in the ceramics department. With her marriage to Dr. Ferdinand Bilger (who she divorced in 1947) she found herself introduced to a social circle filled with poets, musicians, and scientists and a very active, intellectual scene in Graz before the Nazi time. During the war years the young woman spent her time alone in Vienna and Lower Austria. In her atelier in Vienna she created quite a number of works out of sandstone which she dyed in different colours. She also worked with clay. A lot of the work from this time has gone missing. Maria Biljan-Bilger was a founding member of the International Arts Club section Austria in 1947. With her own very individual creative works she withstood the demands of the new artistic movements with bravour. The membership of the Art Club enabled her to participate in many international exhibitions, which earned her many international prizes and medals. In 1970 she became director of the European Sculptor's Symposium in St. Margarethen in Burgenland. Four years (1978-1982) she directed the master class for ceramics at the former Hochschule (college) of Applied Arts in Vienna, (now the University of Applied Arts). She remained creatively active into a very old age, until a stroke left her paralysed on the left side and brought an abrupt end to a creative and rich body of work. She died on 1 May 1997 in Munich.

Maria Biljan-Bilger belonged to those Austrian artists who consistently went their own artistic way. She refused to work for the international art market. This attitude had its consequences, because this extraordinary artist has now been forgotten today. Thus one finds scarcely any of her works at national or international auctions. In Sommerein her widower, the architect Friedrich Kurrent, built an exhibition hall in memory of her. There the major part of her huge body of work is in permanent exhibition. Her estate has been ensured for posterity in her former atelier in Sommerein.

In art history she is known as the *"Grande Dame"* of Austrian plastics and sculptures. Her small ceramic plastics, her large format terra cottas, her textile designs using Gobelin technique, her coloured stone sculptures, all offer the observer a polarity and often a radical solution. It is, however, a reflection upon the archaic period at the same time, timeless and current. Sometimes the edge to arts and crafts is fluid, since it does produce works of applied art. Works which can be used in every-day life. Her works are touching, on the one side through the variety of her designs, the freshness of the colours, their exuberance, though the spirit which they contain. There is never a loss of equilibrium, the balance to the equal and fair. It is a new, old world view influenced by more sensual ideas, a fall back upon the archaic traditions.

One of the first commissions was the design of a fountain in one of the housing complexes in Vienna, in Ottakring, Possingergasse/Gablengasse 1950/51. It measured 2,5 metres in diameter with fountain bowls decorated with coloured mosaics made out of cast stones, and with three bronze sea lions sitting on the edge of the fountain basin. This construction no longer exists today. It was taken apart many years ago, the basin has disappeared; the sea lions were auctioned off at the Wiener Dorotheum and are privately owned. Soon after the Ottakring project there came a commission for three designs for housing complexes in the Veitingergasse in the 13<sup>th</sup> District. They were restored several years ago and show two pairs of birds – comoros and seagulls – and one eagle. The figures are designed as an immersion in a sandstone relief. In the same year there followed a wall design *"Heiteres Ornament"* (Cheery ornament) made from terra cotta and which can be seen today in the foyer of a primary school in the Prückelmaiergasse, 23<sup>rd</sup> District, Vienna.

For the Viennese Rathauspark, the artist created a small weather house which is still standing, however the ornamental wooden panels have disappeared; the mosaics that depict the 12 signs of the zodiac do remain. In 1955/6 she designed a sandstone relief called *"Die Schlafende"* (Sleeping Woman) for a housing complex in the Abelgasse 12, 16<sup>th</sup> District Vienna.

In 1956 Maria Biljan-Bilger received the "City of Vienna Prize for Sculpture".

In 1958/59 she created coloured abstract ornaments on beaver boards for a youth centre in the 3<sup>rd</sup> District Vienna. After this house was demolished in recent years these wooden panels, after public bidding, came into the

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Kurrent, „Leben und Werk“, in *Maria Biljan-Bilger: Leben und Werk*, ed. Verein der Freunde der Maria Biljan-Bilger Ausstellungshalle, Müry-Salzmann: Salzburg, Wien, 2012, 12-13

restoration master class at the Vienna University of Applied Arts, where, after much expenditure, they were carefully restored. They can now be seen by the public in the geriatric centre of the Franz Joseph Hospital.

1957/58 Maria designed a 30 metre long wall called "Mäander" (Meander) in the north foyer of the Wiener Stadthalle. A Gobelin was also woven for this Stadthalle, which she also conceptualised. It was hung in the bowling alley there, but has, however, now gone missing.

Three years later in 1961, she made three terra cotta owls for a Kindergarten in Junggasse 1 in the 20<sup>th</sup> District. One of the owls was damaged over the years and was destroyed during careless removal. A cat family made of bronze casting can be found in-front of a school in the Tomaschekgasse 44, in the 21<sup>st</sup> District.

In 1962/63 the architect couple Wolfgang and Traude Windprechtlinger built the excursion restaurant "Bellevue" on the Pfaffenberg hill in Grinzing on the outskirts of Vienna, on commission by the city council. In collaboration with them, Maria Biljan-Bilger made six large terra cotta plant pots and designed a nine metre long wall out of coloured sandstone called "*Menschen und Tiere*", (People and Animals). The restaurant comprised seating for 1500 people, 800 of these places were outdoors, and it offered an incredible view over Vienna. However, the restaurant was not favoured by the Viennese, since it was built in the style of the 1960's, cold and straight lined concrete. Inside another wall was decorated by a two and half metre by two metre long Gobelin designed by Maria and called "*Vögel im Himmelszeichen kreisend*" ( Birds circling up to the sky). The restaurant no longer exists today, and the plant pots have been lost. The sandstone wall was taken down and removed to the Maria Biljan-Bilger Exhibition Hall in Sommerein where it can be seen in the open court there. The Gobelin is owned by the Vienna City Council.

In 1964 a small shopping centre was built near to the Schönbrunn Palace. Maria made a two metre high fountain for the inner courtyard there. It measured 4 metres in circumference and was made from sandstone there were also seven plant pots and a mosaic "*Weltenrad*" (Wheel of the World, 12 metres high, 14 metres wide) which she designed on the wall of the house to the shopping centre. The fountain and the plants pots were removed in the 1990's, and are exhibited in Sommerein. The fountain is in the main square in-front of the church, the plant pots in the open court of the exhibition hall.

In 1967 there followed the design of a children's swimming pool in Floridsdorf Vienna. A 15 metre long and 20 metre wide pool was decorated with colourful mosaics and there were four large ceramic "houses". The pool was demolished and the four ceramic houses are in the in the open court of the exhibition hall in Sommerein.

The project "Stadt des Kindes" (The City of Children) was from 1974 to 2002 a home for vulnerable children and teenagers, funded by the Vienna City Council and built by the architect Dr. Anton Schweighofer. In 2008, it was partly demolished and rebuilt as a housing complex. Maria-Biljan Bilger created a large bronze cast sculpture "*Mutter mit zwei Kindern*" (Mother with two children, 2,4 metres high, 2,8 metres wide) which was re-erected after the end of the building work in 2013. A second casting of this sculpture stands in Sommerein before the artists' former home and atelier, and was officially presented on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the exhibition hall on 1 May 2014. For the project "Stadt des Kindes" Maria further made four large wooden houses painted with animal motifs and with roofs made of straw. These no longer exist today.

From 1973 to 1975, during the course of the building of the underground rail in Vienna, plans emerged for the re-designing of St Stephen's Square "*Stephansplatz*". Maria Biljan-Bilger was the chairperson for the artist representatives, at least the sculptors who were to work on this project. After some terrible quarrels with the municipality this project was abandoned.

Maria Biljan-Bilger's last commission for the city of Vienna in 1980 was a wall relief made from St. Margarethener sandstone called "Kreise" (Circles). This can be seen in-front of the "Pablo Neruda Hof" housing complex Gersthofstraße 126-128, in the 18<sup>th</sup> District of Vienna.

## Resumee

After 1972 there was a drastic reduction in the amount of art commissions from the Viennese municipality, and from the mid 1970's came and end to the action "Kunst am Bau". In the 1970's there were only about 40 objects which were erected. The reason for this is seen in the change in the perspective of the decorating of public buildings. The concentration was now on single large free space objects, since these were more highly rated.

Maria Biljan-Bilger was one of the most well-known and longest serving artists in the project "Kunst am Bau". Generally it can be said that female artists at this time had the opportunity to apply for contracts and commissions regarding "Kunst am Bau", but were rarely granted the contracts. Maria's works impressed the powers that be.

In 2012 the estimated cost of art for the Republic of Austria amounted to 88,342,000 €. Furthermore, yearly there are instructions for the buying of art work in the areas of art and photography. These works are managed and exhibited on behalf of the Austrian Republic, by Artothek des Bundes in the Belvedere Gallery, and the photographic collection by the Museum of Modern Art in Salzburg. The works in the Artothek des Bundes may be borrowed and used by the civil service as features and decorations in their offices.

The Vienna City Council owns a considerable collection of art work. In MUSA – Museum Stadtgalerie Artothek – there is to be seen the collection of contemporary art by the Culture Department of the City of Vienna; it is a very significant collection which has developed since 1951. It is an illustration of the history of Austrian culture since 1945. In these rooms one may observe the leading representatives of Austrian artists, and also the development of various styles and movements of individual artists.

According to the Art and Culture report of the City of Vienna 2012 the cultural building inheritance that the City of Vienna is responsible for maintaining is worth about 5,5 million €.

*Translated by Tracey Bernhard*

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