ALMINE RECH

Heinz Berggruen, a Dealer and his Collection Masterpieces from the Museum Berggruen/Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin

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Along the same lines as Paul Guillaume, German dealer-collector Heinz Berggruen built up an exceptional collection of 20th century masters. This exhibition explores the relationship of this unusual gallery owner with his artists and his art market network in post-war Paris.

It would be wrong to describe the life of Heinz Berggruen as destiny. He was born to a Jewish family in Berlin, and sought refuge in California at the dawn of the Second World War. After studying in France, his first contacts with the art world were in San Francisco. When the war was over, Berggruen preferred to return to Europe, first to his native country as a journalist, and then to the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. He became weary and little by little made his way into the art market: first he had a gallery on Place Dauphine, and then moved permanently to Rue de l'Université where he specialized in graphic arts of modern artists.

He was passionate about his work and quickly made contacts in the Paris world of culture, and met not just artists to exhibit but also poets, art dealers, historians, critics and collectors of the time. Berggruen made a name for himself in the capital and due to his great success became "his best client". Guided by his own tastes and affinities, he built up a solid collection of 20th century works from his favorite masters: Picasso and Klee.

The exhibition layout, between monographs and theme-based focuses, emphasizes above all Berggruen's specific and personal tastes. Although it is clear that it will almost exhaustively highlight the entire careers of Picasso and Klee, as well as Matisse's remarkable cut-outs and Giacommeti's skinny sculptures, the exhibition will revolve around Heinz Berggruen, his choices, his encounters and his affinities that guided the creation of this collection.

Donated to the German state in 2000, a few years before the collector's death, this vast collection resonates particularly with the Walter-Guillaume collection at Musée de l'Orangerie Around a hundred masterpieces by Picasso, Klee, Matisse and Giacometti serve to raise the profile of a major player in Parisian art from the second half of the 20th century.

The Museum Berggruen's collection is perfectly in tune with the Musée de l'Orangerie's new scientific programming devoted to actors in the 20th-century art market. Sold to the German State in 2000, a few years after the collector's death, this impressive assemblage resonates particularly well with the Musée de l'Orangerie's Walter-Guillaume collection. The hundred or so masterpieces by Picasso, Klee, Matisse and Giacometti testify to the major role this particular actor played in the Paris art market in the second half of the 20th century.

“Preordained destiny” would hardly seem an appropriate term when trying to define Heinz Berggruen’s life. He was born to a Jewish family in Berlin, and sought refuge in California at the dawn of the Second World War. After studying literature and journalism in France, he first came into contact with the art world at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Unaccustomed to the American way of life, Berggruen decided to return to the old continent once the war was over, first of all to his native land as a journalist, and then to UNESCO’s head office in Paris. He became weary and little by little made his way into the art market: first he had a gallery on Place Dauphine, and then moved permanently to Rue de l’Université where he specialized in graphic arts of modern artists.

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The exhibition’s itinerary combines monographic groups of works and thematic focuses, above all emphasizing Berggruen’s particular personal tastes. Hence, it is structured around Heinz Berggruen’s choices, the encounters and affinities that governed the constitution of his collection; at the same time, it highlights the well-rounded groups of Picasso’s and Klee’s works, which he assembled by covering their careers in almost systematic fashion, along with Matisse’s remarkable cut-outs and Giacometti’s filiform sculptures.

Curatorship

Claire Bernardi, Director, Musée de l’Orangerie
Dr. Gabriel Montua, Director, Museum Berggruen

Curatorship

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