

The Cultural Work of Artist Gertie Fröhlich: (In)visibility in Viennese Post-war Histories

Abstract: The Cultural Work of Artist Gertie Fröhlich: (In)visibility in Viennese Post-war Histories. This article brings visibility to the life and exploits of Viennese artist Gertie Fröhlich. Her story illustrates the obstacles women cultural workers encountered during the post-war period. The contribution reveals how Fröhlich, to side-step these gendered obstacles, exerted influence through her relationships with male post-war cultural actors. Later in life, she finally achieved artistic success in her own right, both locally and abroad. Despite her many accomplishments, Fröhlich remains nearly invisible in prevailing post-war cultural histories. This article speaks to her relative obscurity while exploring the reasons behind it.

Key Words: Vienna, art, post-war cultural history, gender

This article brings visibility to the life and exploits of Viennese artist Gertie Fröhlich. Her story illustrates some of the obstacles women cultural workers and wage-earning mothers encountered in the post-war period. To side-step the prevalent sexism of the Viennese post-war art scene, Fröhlich exerted influence through her relationships with male post-war cultural actors. Despite her impact on post-war artists' social networks and their artistic developments and despite her local and international recognition as an artist later in life, Fröhlich remains relatively unknown.¹ Her passing in May 2020 lent her temporary visibility; however, prevailing narratives of Viennese post-war cultural history continue to neglect her contributions.²

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- 1 Heide Pils, Gertie-wer?, in: Die Furche online, 2 June 2015, <https://www.furche.at/feuilleton/gertie-wer-1183055> (2.8.2021).
- 2 See: Hans Rauscher, Malerin und Grafikerin Gertie Fröhlich verstorben, in: der Standard online, 25 May 2020, <https://www.derstandard.at/content/tcf/story/2000117689288/malerin-und-grafike->

Fröhlich's story belongs to a hidden history. The primary challenge in making her story visible is that the archival materials necessary to afford it traditional academic legitimacy are often absent. Prevailing accounts that rely heavily on archival records focus on the contributions of men because their actions tended to be memorialized while women's feats were not. This, in turn, reproduces the gendered biases present at the time in which materials were selectively preserved.³ In contrast, this study integrates oral history. One of the chief advantages of chronicling Fröhlich's narrative right now is that there are still surviving cultural protagonists to interview.

The use of oral history poses its own obstacles. Due to the advanced age of the surviving cultural actors and the distortions of memory, their accounts, although compelling, are not always the most reliable. Huge discrepancies in the various narratives offered emerged.⁴ In interviews, some alleged titans of post-war culture often trivialized Fröhlich's contributions to safeguard their gendered perspective or social standing.⁵ Their disinclination to commend her accomplishments reinforces the muting of post-war female contributions. The perusal of public and private archives unravelled many of these coloured accounts. Rather than deny these subjectivities, this article attempts to delineate their biases to reveal the constructedness of prevailing post-war cultural histories.⁶

To gain greater insight into Fröhlich's experiences, I was fortunate enough to interview her. Yet, our unfamiliarity made it difficult for her to speak openly about her accomplishments – most probably a product of her generation's gendered etiquette and her strict Catholic upbringing, which made a virtue of female meekness

rin-gertie-froehlichverstorben (24 Nov. 2021); Gertie Fröhlich 1930–2020, in: artmagazine online, 24 May 2020, <https://www.artmagazine.cc/content111971.html> (24 Nov. 2021); Brigitte Borchhardt-Birbaumer, Nachruf Gertie Fröhlich, in: Parnass online, 4 June 2020, <https://www.parnass.at/news/nachruf-gertie-froehlich-1930-2020> (24 Nov. 2021); Armin Thurnher, Erinnerung an eine stille Große, in: falter online, 24 May 2020, <https://cms.falter.at/blogs/athurnher/2020/05/24/erinnerung-an-eine-stille-grosse/> (24 Nov. 2021); Andreas Ugerböck, Zum Gedenken an die Künstlerin Gertie Fröhlich, in: ray Filmmagazin online, 24 May 2020, <https://ray-magazin.at/mehr-als-nur-information/> (24 Nov. 2021).

3 Julie M. Johnson proposes a similar thesis regarding art historical accounts of fin-de-siècle Vienna. Julie M. Johnson, *The Memory Factory. The Forgotten Women Artists of Vienna 1900*, West Lafayette, IN 2012. A recent exception to this is Charlotte Mullins, *A Little History of Art*, New Haven 2022, which integrates the contributions of women into prevailing historical narratives.

4 In "Angledool stories: Aboriginal history in hypermedia," Karen Flick and Heather Goodall point out that "[d]iscrepancies arise too between memories and archival sources because the speakers were either poorly informed or actively misled at the time of the events being recalled.," in: Robert Perks/ Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London/New York 1998, 425.

5 Some of Fröhlich's peers have suggested that her affairs with collaborators and their subsequent fall-outs played a part in her partners' silences in granting Fröhlich due recognition for her contributions. Interview with John Sailer, Vienna, 14 March 2019.

6 This approach reflects my partiality to "situated knowledges". See: Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in: *Feminist Studies* 14/3 (1988), 575–599, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

and self-censorship.⁷ At the advanced age of 89, she often made fragmented assertions that lacked context and left many details wanting.⁸ Extensive discussions with Fröhlich's daughter, multimedia artist and film director Marieli Fröhlich, aided me in clarifying Fröhlich's claims. Although Marieli was undeniably a biased witness, her claims were either verified with archival evidence or corroborated by other witnesses before being included in this article. A few months after our second interview, Fröhlich died. Her loss signals the urgency to record post-war female artists' contributions before interviews are no longer possible.

So, what were Gertie Fröhlich's contributions to the Viennese post-war cultural art scene? And how were those contributions neglected? Before answering these questions, a brief survey of the gendered landscape of the twentieth-century art scene in which she emerged is required.

1. Gendered art history of early twentieth-century Viennese art

When we think of fin-de-siècle Vienna, Carl E. Schorske's intellectual history probably comes to mind.⁹ But, even this Pulitzer prize-winning account androcentrizes the city's history. In her book, *The Memory Factory: The Forgotten Women Artists of Vienna 1900*, Julie M. Johnson points out a major shortcoming of Schorske's account: although he praises Jewish influence, he limits that influence to Jewish patronage, thereby omitting Jewish artists – who more often than not were women.¹⁰ Johnson finds similar fault with early feminist art historical narratives addressing the same period in their assumption that the display of artworks by female artists was limited to domestic, interior spaces. Johnson explains that although “[t]his model [was] applied ... to explain the aesthetics of Impressionists Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt” in nineteenth-century Paris, “[it] does not apply to the Central European context”.¹¹ Johnson's research on Vienna reveals a vibrant community of female artists whose works were prominently displayed in public spaces at that time.¹²

7 Caroline Daley argues that a gendered reading of oral history shows how men and women's memories have been partially formed by “prevailing ideas of gender-appropriate behaviour and values”. Caroline Daley, “He would know, but i just have a feeling”: gender and oral history, *Women's History Review*, 7/3 (1998), 343–359, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029800200173>. Fröhlich's omission of details could be another example of this.

8 Interview with Gertie Fröhlich. Tape recording. Baden bei Wien, 15 March 2019 and 25 March 2019.

9 Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture*, West Lafayette/New York City 1979.

10 Johnson, *Memory*, 2012, 3.

11 *Ibid.*, 5.

12 In her book, Johnson discusses the work and legacies of Jewish artists such as Tina Blau, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, Broncia Koller, and Teresa Ries.

Johnson credits the blunder of Schorske and early feminist art histories to “exclusionary exhibition and union policies”, “misogynist art criticisms”, and “gender prejudice in both the institutional and discursive realms”.¹³ These characteristics limited the documentation of exploits of female artists in existing archives, thereby misrepresenting the extent of their contributions. Furthermore, for those few female artists whose achievements were preserved, the antisemitic racial policies of the Nazi regime ensured the erasure of most of them because of their Jewish ancestry. Three generations of Central European women artists were – for non-aesthetic, racially motivated reasons – erased. Although many of these artists emigrated before the *Anschluss*, their artistic achievements did not survive the subsequent period of dispersal, destruction, and murder.¹⁴ They were either driven into exile or deported to concentration camps. In their absence, their works were removed from museum walls and public settings.¹⁵ So, how did this impact later generations of female artists such as Fröhlich? Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber explains that the memory of these artists was “hardly recognizable” and “seldom thought of by the guild of art historians”. Left with a *fictionalized* male-only Austrian art history, future women artists had “to begin all over again”.¹⁶

For those emerging female artists not targeted by the Nazi regime, the Second World War provided a unique, albeit brief, opportunity for advancement in art academies. Fighting on the front, most men were unable to attend university. In the absence of male students, art academies depended on female student enrolment.¹⁷ Female artists even received awards that, under other circumstances, might not have been awarded to them. Upon completing her studies at the *Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien*, Maria Lassnig received the *Staatsstipendium* and a travel grant of 500 Reichsmark.¹⁸

After 1945 women once again had to play second fiddle to returning soldiers and a new generation of male artists. In a documentary about the Art Club, Lassnig described her treatment in the male-dominated group as “*ein nettes Mädchen*” rather than a “*Künstlerin*.”¹⁹ In reaction to the group’s conservatism, Lassnig helped

13 Johnson, *Memory*, 2012, 5.

14 *Ibid.*, 337.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Malerinnen der Zwischenkriegszeit*, in: Ingrid Brugger (ed.), *Jahrhundert der Frauen*. Vienna Kunstforum 30 Sept. 1999–20 Jan. 2000, Salzburg 1999, 143. Quoted in: Johnson, *Memory*, 2012, 339.

17 Verena Pawlowsky, *Die Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien im Nationalsozialismus*. Lehrende, Studierende und Verwaltungspersonal, Wien 2015, 39.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Was war nun der Art-Club? YouTube, MMK Vienna, 1981, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3i79ZMcfZg> (9 Jan. 2020).

to form the offshoot *Hundsgruppe*, leaving Vienna entirely in 1961.²⁰ Although 11 years Lassnig's junior, Fröhlich belonged to the same generation of female artists, subject to the same biased treatment. Yet, Fröhlich's story began outside Austria in a small village in Slovakia.

2. Fröhlich's disruptive beginnings in Austria and as an artist

On 29 July 1930, Gertie Fröhlich was born in Klastor, Slovakia, where she grew up on a trout farm.²¹ In school, Fröhlich spoke Slovakian; at home, she spoke German.²² Rising anti-German sentiment, spurred on by the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and the Beneš decrees, compelled her German-speaking family to flee the country in 1944.²³ The memory of the trout pond and its surrounding vegetation became a recurring theme in Fröhlich's later artworks, a way for her to revisit what she had lost during the war. They resettled on a family-owned farm near Vöcklabruck in Upper Austria.²⁴

In 1949 Fröhlich applied to study painting at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Graz.²⁵ Her family disapproved of her decision, which weighed heavily on her until middle age. In a diary entry from 1981, Fröhlich rationalized her existential fears as an artist with her failure to meet her parents' expectations:

„Weil ich meine Eltern in ihren Erwartungen enttäuscht habe ... Immer einen Druck der an Verzweiflung und Wahnsinn grenzt. Könnte es sein, daß mir Lust und Freude im frühen Kindsein als böse und verworfen dargestellt wurde? mir mein Über-Ich, Gewissen verleitet Lust zu empfinden ... Der schöne breite Weg, der zur Hölle führt. Meine neurotisch katholische Mutter. Wie sie zwischen die Knie meines Großvaters geschmiegt ein blond gelocktes süßes, lustiges Kind im Hemdchen lacht. Was oder wer hat aus ihr die 'Märtyrerin' gemacht? Dieses Leben, dieses 'Jammertal' wie es in dem Kirchenlied heißt.“²⁶

20 John Sailer, Was ist ein Zyphius, in: Gertie Fröhlich. Plakate für das österreichische Filmmuseum 1964–1984, Wien 2005, 3–4.

21 Ibid.

22 Fröhlich's school diplomas. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Heidelinde Resch, Gertie Fröhlich. netzhäuten ein vollbad gestatten. design er leben – Band 20, Wien 2019, 7.

26 Gertie Fröhlich, Diary (1981), Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich. See: "O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf."

This passage reveals the rigour of Fröhlich's religious education, her protracted resentment at her parents' self-denying piousness, and her self-doubt over her choice of career. In her parents' eyes, her decision to become an artist was inappropriate for a woman and a Christian. Despite this, Fröhlich remained steadfast.

Her determination to study art had its own hazards. In a later interview, Fröhlich described the application process in Graz:

“Ich hab eine Aufnahmeprüfung machen müssen, da bin ich so knapp durchgekommen. Die männlichen Professoren haben mich aber gleich aufgenommen – und heftig mit mir geflirtet. Ich hab mich ein bisschen gefürchtet vor der Flirterei, und überhaupt: Was soll ich mit den alten Kerlen?”²⁷

By the age of 19, Fröhlich had already become aware of the sexist power dynamic in Austrian cultural institutions. Moreover, her father's disapproval meant she received no financial support apart from a small, secret allowance from her mother. During her studies, Fröhlich was forced to handknit jackets to support herself.²⁸

In 1953 Fröhlich completed her preliminary fine arts education under the tutelage of Expressionist painter Rudolf Szyszkowitz. In an interview, Fröhlich described her need to leave Graz to escape lewd advances – sometimes from married Catholic men – which transgressed her principles as “eine gläubige, praktizierende Katholikin!”²⁹ She moved to Vienna to continue her studies; yet, her problems followed her. She complained of unwelcome admirers in the arts, politics, media, and even the Church, and yet, refused to name names.³⁰ She communicated her experience while choosing to protect the men who had harassed her. In spite of all this unwanted attention, she was able to execute fashion sketches for the study of stage and costume design, thereby demonstrating her predilection for line drawing, figuration, and the applied arts in her first year at the *Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien*.

3. Invisible work in establishing the *Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan*³¹

Once again, Fröhlich's financial situation obliged her to work alongside her academic pursuits. In the summer of 1954, she found temporary employment at the

27 Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 7.

28 Ibid., 9.

29 Pils, Gertie, 2015.

30 Ibid.

31 Dissatisfaction within the Austrian Catholic Church for its association with the *Galerie Sankt Stephan* led Kardinal Franz König to pressure Otto Mauer to change the gallery's name to the *Galerie 'nächst' Sankt Stephan* in 1963. I reflect this name change by placing the *nächst* in parenthesis.

Katholische Aktion as the secretary of then priest Otto Mauer. While working closely with him, Fröhlich intuited the priest's love of art, most evident in his burgeoning collection of graphic artworks.

Mauer's interest in art stemmed from his involvement with the *Bund Neuland*. In 1923 16-year-old Mauer joined the *Gesamtdeutsch* Catholic youth movement, providing with him the perfect platform to perceive art's power to reform the Church and society at large.³² There, Mauer's circle of friends grew to include Expressionist artists such as Rudolf Szyszkowitz, Hans Fronius, and Alfred Kubin. They dealt in figuration to represent Christian iconography, the socio-economic conditions of the lower classes, and broader existentialist questions.³³ After the *Anschluss*, the *Bund Neuland* declared itself incompatible with National Socialism and disbanded.³⁴ In the wake of the Third Reich's dissolution, Cardinal Theodor Innitzer integrated its structures with the *Katholische Aktion*. After the war, Mauer worked there, eventually meeting Fröhlich in 1953.³⁵

When I broached the subject of Mauer and his *Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan* in my interview with Fröhlich, she asserted: "Ich habe die Galerie Sankt Stephan nicht gemacht. Ich habe den Otto Mauer gemacht."³⁶ Only after further research did I come to realize what she had meant.

At the *Katholische Aktion*, Fröhlich – in addition to discerning Mauer's passion for art – befriended Eva Maria Kallir, the daughter of the founder of the Viennese *Neue Galerie*, Otto Kallir-Nirenstein. His Jewish identity had forced Kallir to leave Austria in 1938.³⁷ After the war, he regained possession of the gallery, which he wanted his daughter Eva to run. But, as Fröhlich shrewdly observed, she had no interest in doing so. Putting two and two together, Fröhlich cajoled Mauer to approach Kallir about taking over the space.³⁸

In researching these events, Mauer's biographer Bernhard Böhler consulted Fröhlich as a source. She described accompanying Mauer to Attersee to visit Kallir in the summer of 1954.³⁹ Although Fröhlich facilitated and attended the meeting, Böhler sidelines her contribution to a mere footnote.⁴⁰

32 Bernhard Böhler, *Monsignore Otto Mauer. Ein Leben für Kirche und Kunst*, Wien 2003, 17.

33 *Ibid.*, 19, 114.

34 Its former members, including Mauer, were often taken by the Gestapo for interrogations. Robert Fleck, *Avantgarde in Wien. Die Geschichte der Galerie nächst Sankt Stephan, 1954–1982. Kunst und Kunstbetrieb in Österreich*, Wien 1982, 10.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Interview with Gertie Fröhlich, Baden bei Wien, 18 March 2019.

37 Martina Pippal, *A Short History of Art in Vienna*, Munich 2001, 226.

38 Eva Marie Kallir, unpublished email exchange with author, 31 Oct. 2020.

39 Böhler, *Monsignore*, 2003, 140.

40 *Ibid.*

One of the few accounts to adequately acknowledge the critical role Fröhlich played in the inception of the *Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan* is Gerhard Habarta's socio-political account of the Viennese post-war cultural scene.⁴¹ Yet, even here, increased visibility comes with strings. Before formally naming Fröhlich, Habarta foreshadows her contribution with the statement: "Wie so oft im Leben, steht hinter den bedeutenden Taten eines Mannes, eine kluge Frau. So auch bei Monsignore Mauer und seiner Galerie St. Stephan."⁴² This marginalization is a repeated theme throughout Fröhlich's life. But was it by choice or out of necessity?

What Böhler and Habarta fail to take into account is that Fröhlich had her own ambitions for the gallery. In an email, Eva Kallir clarified that Fröhlich wanted the job of running the gallery herself but, at only 23, was deemed too young by Otto Kallir.⁴³ Only then did Fröhlich take steps to encourage Mauer to negotiate with Kallir to rent the space and open *his* gallery. Thus, the Stephansdom preacher became a gallery owner, and Fröhlich served as his secretary and close advisor.

4. Bringing young artists into the gallery fold

Perhaps Fröhlich's greatest contribution to the gallery was introducing Mauer to her art colleagues.⁴⁴ As a student at the *Akademie*, Fröhlich interacted with young, talented artists by default. As gallery secretary, she occupied an unusual position to potentially offer her colleagues a place to exhibit their work. The destruction of the city, combined with the conservatism of its surviving art institution, gave rise to a scarcity of exhibition space for new artists. Fröhlich was the bridge between these younger artists and Otto Mauer.

In an interview, Peter Kubelka stressed that "Gertie knew... the *real* people."⁴⁵ In 2003 Rainer related how Fröhlich put Mauer in touch with him during his first solo exhibition in 1954. He added that once Mauer opened his new space, it was Fröhlich who "ran the gallery".⁴⁶

Fröhlich's influence was not limited to bringing her friends into the fold. She organized the first *Weihnachtsausstellung junger Künstler* in 1955. Again, Habarta's

41 Gerhard Habarta, *Kunst in Wien nach '45. Frühere Verhältnisse*, Wien 1996.

42 Habarta, *Kunst*, 1996, 311.

43 Kallir, email, 2020.

44 Interview with Peter Kubelka, Cafe Tirolerhof Vienna, 14 Sept. 2020.

45 Ibid.

46 ... I just had to get away somehow the thinking was too hidebound. Arnulf Rainer on Carinthia. From a conversation with Matthias Boeckl, in: Agnes Husslein-Arco/Mattias Boeckl (eds.), *Eremiten – Kosmopoliten. Modern Painting in Carinthia 1900–1955*, Vienna/New York 2004, 345–352.

is one of the few accounts that credits Fröhlich for managing this event.⁴⁷ Yet, he thought to interview Rainer, Hollegha, Prachensky, and Mikl, but not Fröhlich. Nevertheless, his claim that the idea of supporting younger artists with a group exhibition was not Mauer's but Fröhlich's is correct. In an email, Rainer asserted that Fröhlich "curated" the early exhibitions for Mauer.⁴⁸ Moreover, the *Weihnachtsausstellung* was the first show in which Rainer, Mikl, Hollegha, and Prachensky, exhibited together. Shortly after this event, these four artists formed the *Gruppe Sankt Stephan*, and quickly became the most influential group of contemporary artists in Vienna.⁴⁹

In 1983 the *Österreichischer Rundfunk* (ORF) organized a television programme to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of Mauer's death.⁵⁰ Of the eleven invited speakers, Fröhlich was one of two women. On television, moderator Ernst Wolfram Marboe mistakenly reduced Fröhlich to the gallery's first secretary and participant in the first *Weihnachtsausstellung*. When Fröhlich politely attempted to clarify that she organized and curated the exhibition, Marboe interrupted her.⁵¹ During the hour-and-a-half programme, Marboe asked Fröhlich no questions. Again, when Fröhlich attempted to make a comment about the Viennese public's rejection of abstraction in 1954, her close friend Hollegha spoke over her. Fröhlich smoked through most of the programme in silence.⁵²

5. Sexism inside and outside the gallery

The *Weihnachtsausstellung* of 1955 was also the first exhibition in which the gallery displayed artworks by women, Fröhlich among them. In the most recent catalogue by the *Dom Museum Wien*, which was bequeathed with Mauer's collection, art historian Brigitte Borchhardt-Birbaumer devotes an entire article to Mauer's inclusion of women artists at his gallery. Borchhardt-Birbaumer complicates her claim by identifying instances of sexism in Mauer's writings: in 1947 he wrote: "frequently women create works of soul rather than works of art".⁵³ Acknowledging that these remarks

47 Habarta, *Kunst*, 1996, 311.

48 "Arnulf Rainer kann sich erinnern, dass Gertie Fröhlich anfangs die ersten Ausstellungen für Otto Mauer kuratiert hat. Aber es gibt nichts dazu in unserem Archiv." Petra Berndorfer from STUDIO A. RAINER (5 Oct. 2020).

49 Habarta, *Kunst*, 1996, 310–311; Pippal, Short, 2001, 235.

50 10. (zehnter) Todestag von Monsignore Otto Mauer, *Cafe Central/Folge 94*, Wien (5 Jan. 1983), ORF Archive.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Brigitte Borchhardt-Birbaumer, *Art as a Living Element: Women Artists in the Collection of Monsignor Otto Mauer*, in: Johanna Schwanberg (ed.), *Dom Museum Wien*. Art Religion Society, Berlin/Boston 2017, 466.

would not be “politically correct today”, Borchhardt-Birbaumer defends them by emphasizing their marginalism, which were “entirely common then”.⁵⁴

This is doubtlessly somewhat true. Lassnig, now internationally lauded as one of the greatest post-war Austrian artists, received less flattering contemporary reviews. In 1960 an article in the *Wochenpresse* reported on her appearance, describing her as: “Eine junge Frau zwischen gesunder Bäuerin und nervöser Gamine mit schwarzem Pagenhaar.”⁵⁵ Alfred Schmeller wrote a complimentary review in the *Kurier* in which he categorized a painting by Lassnig as “Eine Malerei, die in ihrer Natürlichkeit eigentlich sehr männlich ist”.⁵⁶ In *Neues Österreich*, Heinrich Neumayer disparaged her works in the same show as: “milder, weiblicher, [und] reifer”.⁵⁷ Lassnig dubbed Mauer’s gallery as dominated by men, against whom she had to persevere. She characterized Mauer as “naturally... macho”. She admitted that later on, Mauer “nevertheless brought me in for an exhibition”. But she explained that it was “because I really had already painted a great deal. And those [shows] were actually always great successes, and lots of things got sold.”⁵⁸ In a different interview, Lassnig specified: “Ich hab nur mitausstellen dürfen, wenn die Maler-Frauen auch dabei waren. Aber ich war dann die letzte, die beim Monsignore ausstellen durfte. Oder man war ein sehr schönes Mädchen wie die Kiki [Kogelnik], dann ist man sehr verwöhnt worden von Mauer.”⁵⁹

In her description of the sexism of the post-war art scene, Borchhardt-Birbaumer likewise mentions those female artists who benefited from Mauer’s “recognition”.⁶⁰ It is clear that despite the limited opportunities for women in this period, Fröhlich exercised great influence over Mauer, arguably leading to his success as a gallerist. Yet Fröhlich continues to be marginalized in footnotes, reifying earlier androgenized accounts of the gallery.⁶¹

In the recent *Dom Museum* catalogue, Johanna Schwanberg writes that she asked Mauer’s friend, fellow priest, and art collector Günter Rombold, point-blank: “So in your opinion [Mauer] didn’t hold women in very high esteem?” To which Rombold responded, “[n]ot as artists, at any rate. But we also shouldn’t generalize”. He added: “[Mauer] had some good female employees and thought very highly of them.” This

54 Ibid.

55 *Wochenpresse*, 1960, quoted in: Habarta, *Kunst*, 1996, 332.

56 *Kurier*, 1960, quoted in: Habarta, *Kunst*, 1996, 333.

57 (*Neues Österreich*, 1960), quoted in: Habarta, *Kunst*, 1996, 333.

58 In the MUMOK exhibition, *We Trailblazers: Pioneers of Postwar Modernism* (12 May 2016–26 Feb. 2017), <https://www.mumok.at/sites/default/files/cms/wirwegbereiter-wandtexte-e.pdf> (30 Jan. 2023).

59 Habarta, *Kunst*, 1996, 334.

60 Borchhardt-Birbaumer, *Art*, 2017, 466.

61 E.g., Fleck, *Avantgarde*, 1982.

latter comment almost certainly refers to Fröhlich.⁶² Despite the museum's latest efforts to disclose Mauer's questionable gender politics, it still neglects, even today, Fröhlich's significant contributions to the gallery.

In 1992 pop artist Kiki Kogelnik was asked about her experiences with the *Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan*.⁶³ Kogelnik had settled in New York in 1962 but had remained close to her classmates from the *Akademie* – Prachensky and Rainer, among others – and had no trouble speaking about Mauer and his gallery: “I think Mauer was always fascinated by art, but I think in the beginning he was not that knowledgeable, of course. I think he was collecting art.” Kogelnik explained that Mauer had been an amateur collector at best when he opened his gallery. Much like Rainer in his interview from 2003, Kogelnik, unprompted, brought up Fröhlich: “I met a very important woman in Austria who was one of the few women in the arts group... Her name was Gertie Fröhlich.”⁶⁴ Her juxtaposition of Mauer as an inexperienced collector and Fröhlich as a contributor to the post-war art scene suggests that she shaped Mauer and turned him into the gifted gallerist portrayed in post-war Viennese histories. Fröhlich certainly believed this, repeatedly claiming to have “invented *Monsignor* Mauer” during our interview in 2019. Kogelnik certainly made no mention of her friendship with Fröhlich in 1992, even though this had solidified during the latter's year-long sojourn in the Big Apple between 1967 and 1968. Nor did Kogelnik ever mention how Fröhlich helped her organize her solo exhibition “Moon Happening Apollo II” at the *Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan* in 1969.⁶⁵ Instead, Kogelnik mentioned, somewhat disparagingly, that Fröhlich had “married one painter and lived with another one[,]” and that, “in the end... had the children and the problems” while “the guys had their careers”.⁶⁶ Kogelnik's remarks not only confirm Fröhlich's influence on Mauer but also give us a unique insight into the struggles that Fröhlich faced on account of her gender, her role as a mother, and her lack of support from her male partners, which was hardly offset by the tepid endorsement she received from female colleagues such as Kogelnik.

62 Johanna Schwanberg, *The Church Cannot Forego Art*. The priest and art collector Günter Rombold in conversation with Johanna Schwanberg, in: Johanna Schwanberg (ed.), *Dom Museum Wien*. Art Religion Society, Berlin/Boston 2017, 543.

63 Transcript of Billy Klüver and Julie Martin interviewing Kiki Kogelnik in 1992, unpublished, KKF_NY_Archive.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Interview with Marieli Fröhlich, Baden bei Wien, 18 March 2019.

66 Klüver/Martin, interview with Kiki Kogelnik, 1992.

6. Sonnenfelsgasse 11 as de facto salon

In addition to her work at the gallery, Fröhlich supported the art scene by opening her apartment doors to its artists. Upon moving to Vienna, Fröhlich's parents had secured her the *Ablöse* for an apartment at Sonnenfelsgasse 11 in Vienna's first district.⁶⁷ This was uncommon in the immediate post-war period. The war's destruction of habitable housing made securing an apartment difficult.⁶⁸ Young artists, most of them penniless, would often live with their families to make ends meet. Although no photographs exist documenting the goings-on in Fröhlich's apartment, interviews confirm that it became an intimate artist hangout.⁶⁹ When speaking about the post-war art scene, specific cafés, such as the Café Hawelka, are often mentioned, but Fröhlich's apartment was one of the few *private* places in Vienna where artists could congregate in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷⁰ Close friends such as Mikl, Hollegha, Rainer, Walter Pichler, Max Peintner, Christian L. Attersee, Lassnig, Hundertwasser, Rüdolf Schönwald, VALIE EXPORT, as well as some of the *Phantastische Realisten* such as Arik Brauer, Ernst Fuchs, and Wolfgang Hutter, and architects Wilhelm Holzbauer, Hans Hollein, Fritz Kurrent, Hermann Czech, Raimund Abraham were among them; so were the writers H. C. Artmann, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener, Dominik Steiger and Helmut Qualtinger, Barbara Coudenhove-Kalergi, and later André Heller and Christine de Grancy; filmmakers such as Kubelka and Ferry Radax; and countless others, who met on the second floor of Sonnenfelsgasse 11 for Fröhlich's legendary parties.⁷¹ This amalgamation of cultural actors ensured a constant exchange across media – a proverbial trait of Viennese post-war art.⁷² Her apartment became a de facto salon in everything but name. In addition to regular gatherings, some artists – guests from around the world, like the legendary La Mamma Group, actress Christine Kaufmann, or artist Al Hansen – stayed over. Fröhlich's apartment provided a haven for artistic exchange and an impromptu residence, while her secretarial job at the gallery provided a public place for the display of experimental artworks. Filling a void that had been created

67 Interview with Peter Kubelka, 14 Sept. 2020.

68 Interview with Oswald Wiener, Steiermark, 17 July 2020.

69 Ibid.

70 In an interview, Fröhlich spoke about her affinity to host guests: "Wahnsinnig gerne hab' ich Gäste eingeladen und aufgekocht. Die Leute haben das genossen und waren eifersüchtig aufeinander, wenn einer nicht dabei war. Eine Lieblingsbeschäftigung von mir in meiner Jugend. Dann habe ich lange Zeit Zahnpastaschachteln und andere Verpackungen gemacht und mich damit über Wasser gehalten. Ich verdiente damals nicht wirklich etwas." Kunst und Leben, in: Der Standard, 5 April 1998, 47.

71 Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 11.

72 E.g., Rainer commissioned Kubelka to create a portrait of him. Rather than a traditional portrait, Kubelka made a film inspired by Rainer's Informel paintings.

by years of repression, aggravated by a lack of art spaces, Fröhlich, with very little money, became an ad hoc patron of the arts.

7. The end of Fröhlich's studies and her stint at the gallery

Fröhlich's appreciation of post-war artists at the gallery and in her apartment did not extend to her artistic practice. Unlike Lassnig and Kogelnik, who experimented with Informel art, Fröhlich focused her efforts on developing her own unique style throughout her artistic career, even if this meant distancing her art from that of her peers.

At the *Akademie*, Fröhlich developed her own style under the influence of Albert Paris Gütersloh.⁷³ As an *Akademie* Professor and Art Club President, Gütersloh inspired many emerging artists.⁷⁴ He even gained the designation as the “geistige Vater der Wiener Schule des Phantastischen”.⁷⁵ Despite Fröhlich's close contact with the group and the kinship between her figurative artworks and the surrealism of the *Phantastische Realisten*, she never became a member. The group's overt Communist affiliations ran contrary to her Catholic identity. Yet, upon completing her diploma in 1956, she received the *Herbert Boeckl Preis* – unmistakable recognition of her talent as an artist. Yet, her autonomy from any art group affiliations ensured her artistic freedom, but it also meant there was no built-in network to display her art, contributing to her later obscurity as an artist.

In June of that same year, Fröhlich married Markus Prachensky. In a 1979 interview, she described her marital transformation: “Ich war nicht mehr ich, die Gertie Fröhlich, sondern die Frau vom Prachensky”.⁷⁶ Her new husband moved in with her in Sonnenfelsgasse 11. The birth of their son Nikolaus quickly followed.⁷⁷ After exchanging marital vows, Fröhlich's stint as gallery secretary ended. The exact reason for her departure is unclear. Her marriage and pregnancy, which worsened her financial situation, undoubtedly contributed to it. In addition to paying rent, she now had to support a son, to whom Prachensky did little to contribute financially.⁷⁸ Fröhlich found work as a graphic designer for the publications *Die Furche*

73 Kristian Sottriffer, *Modern Austrian Art. A Concise History*, New York/Washington 1965, 66.

74 Pippal, Short, 2001, 233.

75 Sottriffer, *Modern*, 1965, 66.

76 Marie Luise Kaltenecker, Ein Gespräch mit der Malerin Gertie Fröhlich: Eine Frau um die Fünfzig, in: *Extrablatt*, 10 Oct. 1979, 58.

77 Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 11.

78 In an article about raising children as a single woman, Fröhlich is cited describing Prachensky's absence in raising their son Nikolaus: “Der Vater von Nikolaus ging jahrelang ins Ausland, ohne seinem Sohn nur eine einzige Karte zu schreiben.” Wie problematisch das Alleinsein mit der Ver-

and *Wochenpresse* and as an editorial secretary of the magazine *Neue Wege* for the *Theater der Jugend*.⁷⁹

Her marriage to Prachenksy ended almost as soon as it started. After their divorce, Fröhlich began a long-standing relationship with Kubelka, who moved into her apartment but did not contribute financially. In 1958 they travelled to Sweden together because Fröhlich had received a scholarship to study art there, another confirmation of her merits as an artist.⁸⁰ To earn extra money, she worked part-time at an airport restaurant in Stockholm.⁸¹ After the couple returned to Austria, their daughter Marieli Fröhlich was born in 1959.

8. Work as a graphic designer and motherhood

In February 1960 Fröhlich started to work as a graphic artist at ORF, painting captions and subheadings – a job she performed begrudgingly.⁸² According to Fröhlich, her boss would condescendingly address Fröhlich: “Immerhin kann sie ein A von einem B unterscheiden!”⁸³ Her lifestyle as an artist and employee prevented her from fulfilling contemporary expectations of her as a mother. Her son Nikolaus grew up with his extended family in Upper Austria, and her daughter Marieli lived with foster parents in Vienna. Fröhlich would often ruminate over her role as a mother in her diary. In September 1981 she wrote: “There is no such thing as a successful mother. [I]s a mother successful if her son becomes President?”⁸⁴ Later in life, she seemed less concerned with success. In her reflections on the myth of Oedipus Rex, she criticized Freud for not addressing the willingness of Oedipus’ mother (and wife) Jocasta to go along with the murder of her innocent child. Unable to sleep at 4 a.m. on 3 November 2008, Fröhlich wrote:

“Was mich immer so erstaunt an den Ausführungen des Sigmund Freud.
Ödipus erschlägt seinen Vater und heiratet seine Mutter. Dieser Vater hat
seinen kleinen Sohn: Ödipus in der Wildnis aussetzen lassen. Nicht nur das,

antwortung für ein Kind oft ist – darüber berichten fünf Frauen, in: Österreich Magazin XI (1980). Magazine clipping in the Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

79 Fröhlich’s curriculum vitae from sometime after 1960 in the Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

80 On 27 May 1958 the Federal Ministry for Education sent Fröhlich a notification, outlining the conditions of her 810 Swedish-krones scholarship. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

81 Interview with Peter Kubelka, 14 Sept. 2020. Fröhlich’s employment records indicate that she worked at ORF as a freelance graphic designer from 1960 to 1963 and as a *Sachbearbeiterin* from 1963 to 1965. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

82 Interview with Peter Kubelka, 14 Sept. 2020.

83 Pils, Gertie, 2015.

84 Gertie Fröhlich, *Diary* (1981), Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

er hat seine kleinen Beinchen (*Füßchen) durchbohren und zusammenbinden lassen, damit das Kind, das zu dem Zeitpunkt noch nicht laufen konnte nicht etwa davonlaufen konnte. Vor wem? Wohin?
Eine unfassbare Grausamkeit! Was macht die Mutter? Sie schweigt dazu? Muß schweigen?
Kein Wort darunter bei Freud.
Kann hoffentlich wieder schlafen. Muß ein anderes Mal weiterschreiben.
Aber ist doch wahr oder?“⁸⁵

As the breadwinner, Fröhlich struggled to support herself, her partners, and her children while pursuing an artistic career. Meanwhile, her husband Prachensky and partner Kubelka consolidated their careers in painting and film. In an interview segment about single mothers, Fröhlich expressed her resentment toward her former partners for letting her raise their children alone and the consequences their neglect had on her career:

“Ich habe die ganze Familie erhalten, habe weiss Gott welche Arbeiten angenommen, während die Väter ihr Genie entwickelten. Beide Väter sind jetzt berühmt, für mich waren die 20 Jahre nur Kampf, die mir künstlerisch jetzt fehlen...Wo waren sie denn, als die Lehrer verlangten: Ihr Kind braucht mehr Liebe, mehr Zuwendung! Mutter sein heißt grenzenlos überfordert sein. Ich werde ständig benutzt. In meinem Arbeitszimmer gehen die Kinder jetzt noch pausenlos aus ein, während sie in den Häusern ihrer berühmten Väter nicht einmal eine Schublade haben, die ihnen gehört. Meine Sehnsucht, allein zu sein, ist unendlich.”⁸⁶

In 1964 Kubelka and Peter Konlechner founded the Film Museum to offer a venue for screening independent films in a post-war Vienna inundated with *Heimatfilme*.⁸⁷ Fröhlich worked as its in-house graphic designer and produced most of its marketing materials for two decades. She left her most iconic mark in her design of the museum emblem: the mythical sixth-century Zyphius fish.⁸⁸ The allegorical animal “swam on top of the water [and] had sharp teeth”, symbolizing that the museum “would not go under and...would bite if necessary”.⁸⁹ Neither the founders nor Fröhlich received compensation for their first two years of work.⁹⁰ For the remaining years, she received a meagre salary and had to find other work to support herself and her children.⁹¹

85 Gertie Fröhlich, *Diary* (2008), Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

86 *Alleinsein*, 1980.

87 Interview with Peter Kubelka, 14 July 2020.

88 Sailer, *Zyphius*, 2005, 3–4.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Interview with Peter Kubelka, 14 Sept. 2020.

91 In 1979 Fröhlich recorded receiving only 6,800 öS from the Film Museum for the entire month of July. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich. In 1986 she received 25,000 öS from the *Bundesministe-*

At the Film Museum, Fröhlich's most painstaking work was designing film posters. Receiving *carte blanche*, she used the advertisements for up-and-coming screenings as an opportunity to employ her fine arts education.⁹² Gradually, she integrated the applied and fine arts: first using simple film stills with typography; eventually replacing the facsimile photographs with original artworks.

In 1967 Fröhlich left Vienna for New York City to work in the graphics department of Holt, Rinehart & Winston publishing house. Other female artists had a similar idea. Kogelnik had been living in the Big Apple from 1962. Lassnig left Paris for New York one year after Fröhlich. In New York, Fröhlich lived in the legendary Chelsea Hotel and befriended Kogelnik, Roy Liechtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, Raimund Abraham, and Jonas Mekas.⁹³ Despite relocating, she had no intention of permanently leaving Austria. She continued to pay her Viennese rent and allowed other artists – especially her partner Kubelka – to stay at her Vienna apartment rent-free.⁹⁴

In 1969 Fröhlich returned to Vienna and her work at the Film Museum. On the tenth anniversary of its opening, the museum organized a film marathon and an exhibition of Fröhlich's posters.⁹⁵ For the show, Austrian poet Reinhard Priessnitz wrote a text from the perspective of Zephyrus in which the animal sheds tears of joy, intoxicated by the sight of Fröhlich's images.⁹⁶ In the same catalogue, Peter Huemer praised Fröhlich for creating: "a small work of art every month."⁹⁷ In her diary, Fröhlich described the arduous process of designing the posters month in and month out:

“Wie immer erscheint es mir unmöglich das Filmmuseumsplakat zu machen. Dabei hat mir Konlechner das Honorar bereits ausbezahlt. Was will ich? Wenn ich also einen Auftrag der mir gestellt wird mit totaler Blockierung beantworte. Will ich in mich gesetzte Erwartung grundsätzlich enttäuschen? Und warum? Aus Angst vor Versagen? Aus Angst vor Beurteilung/Verurteilung? (Die Fröhlich ist auch nicht mehr was sie war?) ... Es ist wahr, dass ich bis jetzt 200 gute Plakate oder Bilder gemalt habe und doch erscheinen mir alle diese 'Werke' als unwahr, als Betrug. Warum! Oft nicht (mit?) immer (? nimmer?) entstanden diese 'Werke', die ich im nachhinein nicht leiden

rium für Unterricht, Kunst und Sport for her tempera-on-canvas artwork "Ödipus und die Sphinx". Kunstbericht 1986, Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Sport, Wien 1986, https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/dam/jcr:d9afd30a-0eb2-406d-a057-2a5f8c3170b0/kunstbericht1986_ocr.pdf (24 Nov. 2021).

92 Interview with Peter Kubelka, 14 Sept. 2020.

93 Interview with Gertie Fröhlich, Baden bei Wien, 25 March 2019.

94 Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

95 10 Jahre Filmmuseum, https://www.filmmuseum.at/jart/prj3/filmmuseum/main.jart?rel=en&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1470219992961&gaeste_id=1536803420499 (24 Nov. 2021).

96 Reinhard Priessnitz, für gertie fröhlich, in: *malerei, plastik etc. aufsätze*, Graz/Wien 1997, 21–22.

97 Peter Huemer, *Wie es begann*, in: Alexander Horwath (ed.), *Das sichtbare Kino. Fünfzig Jahre Filmmuseum: Texte, Bilder, Dokumente*. Österreichisches Filmmuseum SYNEMA – Gesellschaft für Film und Medien, Wien 2014, 17–18.

kann unter entsetzlichem Leistungsdruck und nicht aus schöpferischer Kraft und Lust.⁹⁸

Between 1964 and 1984, Fröhlich created over 200 original film posters. Her posters are now eagerly sought by collectors.⁹⁹

9. Recognition and Fröhlich's reflections on sexism

At the age of 44, Fröhlich had her first solo exhibition at the *Galerie am Rabensteig* in 1974.¹⁰⁰ No catalogue was produced or record taken of the works sold. All that is now known is that her watercolours and drawings sold out.¹⁰¹ Although the show was a financial success, the lack of documentation exemplifies the dearth of sources authenticating Fröhlich's success as a painter. It seems only the Film Museum preserved her posters for posterity. The museum's conscious effort to preserve those works established Fröhlich's reputation as a graphic designer. In contrast, history does not recall her as a fine artist at all.

To organize a retrospective of her paintings today would be nearly impossible because records of her sales do not exist. Fröhlich's success at the Film Museum at least led the British Film Institute to display her film posters at the National Film Theatre in London in 1975.¹⁰²

The following year, Fröhlich made seven etchings based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In an ORF interview in 1981, she explained that, aside from landscapes, myths were her preferred subject matter.¹⁰³ Her selection of myths addressed the female experience, often omitting male protagonists. In *Ceyx und Alcyone*, Fröhlich focused on the story of Alcyone. The piece depicts two moments in the myth: first, Alcyone drowns herself in the ocean over the news that her husband has perished in a storm; and second, Alcyone transforms herself into a kingfisher – a gentler fate than death, decreed by the commiserate gods who were moved by her suicide. The result is a dreamy, surreal image composed of lightly drawn, short lines that instil a feeling of dynamic movement in the form to complement its transformative content. In each of the other pieces, Fröhlich chose to portray the female protagonist – Andromeda,

98 Gertie Fröhlich, Diary (1981), Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

99 Peep Show #1. Gertie Fröhlich, in: filmmuseum online, 2 July 2020. https://www.filmmuseum.at/en/galleries/peep_show/peep_show_archive/1_gertie_froehlich (24 Nov. 2021).

100 Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 16.

101 Fröhlich: "Erst mit 44 Jahren habe ich meine erste Ausstellung gemacht. Und gleich bei der Eröffnung alles verkauft". Kunst und Leben, in: Der Standard, 5 April 1998, 47.

102 Ibid.

103 Sonnenfelsgasse 11. Ein Alt-Wiener Haus und seine Bewohner, ORF Kultur Sendung, Wien (29 Oct. 1981), ORF Archive.

Daphne, Arethusa, Io – at the moment of her metamorphosis.¹⁰⁴ The style, as well as the choice of subjects, unifies the series. Although she never identified herself as a feminist, Fröhlich's choice of Greek myths had strong ties to feminist psychoanalysis. Her focus on the female protagonists in these Greek myths was implicitly feminist. Yet, the subtlety of the feminist themes did not fit in with the provocative works of the feminist avant-garde emerging out of Vienna in the 1970s.¹⁰⁵

Fröhlich ran in the same circles as the feminist avant-garde. In the exhibition catalogue *Vanilla. Ein Lokal und seine Zeit Wien 1970–1974* Fröhlich appears in multiple photographs – having a heated discussion with Peter Noever in Friedrich Hundertwasser's atelier;¹⁰⁶ sitting in a park listening to Hubert Aratym, surrounded by Erika Pluhar, Lui Dimanche, Maria Burczik, André Heller, Paul Kruntorad, Rita Ackermann, and Helma Pach;¹⁰⁷ laughing in the Austrian countryside with Christl, Monika Pöschl, Christine de Grancy, and Peter Pilz.¹⁰⁸ Despite her intimate connection with these artists, she did not actively participate in any of their artistic experiments or performances. Her art practice took place in the studio and was not considered radical enough to be included in the 1994 catalogue.

The *Katholische Bildungshaus* in Salzburg paid Fröhlich 40,000 shillings to produce a tapestry for their interiors in 1977.¹⁰⁹ Inspired by Matthew 6:25-34, Fröhlich designed two tapestries entitled “Lilien auf dem Feld” and “Vögel des Himmels”.¹¹⁰ As with all of her commissioned work, Fröhlich made extensive preliminary sketches: in this case in watercolour, which she later transformed into the tapestry. These works led to a similar commission from the Zentralsparkasse branch at Franz-Josefs-Kai in Vienna.¹¹¹

In 1978 Fröhlich won first and third prize in the special programming category at the Hollywood Reporter 7th Annual Key Art Awards for her film posters.¹¹²

104 To view these images, see: Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 32–33.

105 For example, VALIE EXPORT had started performing her infamous Tapp- und Tastkino (1968–1971). For a description of the performance see: MoMA exhibition, *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980*. (5 September – 3 January 2016), <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/159727> (3 Dec. 2021).

106 Chistiane Dertig/Lorenz Gallmeister Picus (eds.), *Vanilla. Ein Lokal und Seine Zeit Wien 1970–1974*, Wien 1994, 101.

107 Dertig/Picus, *Vanilla*, 1994, 105.

108 *Ibid.*, 163.

109 Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

110 Restaurant. *Kunstraum. St. Virgil*, Salzburg, <https://www.virgil.at/kunstraum/ort-der-kunst/restaurant/#inhalt> (24 Nov. 2021).

111 Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 17. According to her ledgers from 1979, Fröhlich received 30,000 shillings for this commission. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

112 The winners were judged for their “[A]rt posters promoting motion pictures released during the 1977 calendar year.” List of winners of the 7th Annual Key Art Awards, Los Angeles, 1978. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

That year, for a second time, the British Film Institute showed Fröhlich's film posters, exhibiting 43 of them at the National Film Theatre in London.¹¹³ On 13 May 1978 Fröhlich appeared in a short TV programme "Galerie," which featured close-ups of her film posters and praised her contribution in establishing the Film Museum's identity as a studio cinema.¹¹⁴ In May 1979 Fröhlich received 16,200 shillings to design posters for the Wiener Festwochen. That year also saw passage of the Equal Treatment Act in Austria, which required equal pay for equal work regardless of gender.¹¹⁵ The law was never enforced and even now has not fully taken effect. All it did was confirm the conspicuous wage gap between male and female artists in Austria.

On 16 October 1979 Fröhlich appeared on the ORF TV programme "Club 2" to discuss the Museum of Applied Arts' exhibition, *Die unbekannte Sammlung. Materialien zur staatlichen Kunstförderung in Österreich* and the larger question of public funding for the arts.¹¹⁶ Of the eight speakers, Fröhlich was the only woman invited to appear. She used the opportunity to vocalize the unfair treatment of female artists on live television. Austrian journalist Marie Luise Kaltenecker then chose Fröhlich as the subject of her 1979 November editorial of *Extrablatt. Österreichs illustriertes Magazin für Politik und Kultur*, in which she described the event in detail:

"Männer kriegen 2 Millionen Schilling für Kunst, Frauen 4.000 Schilling. Da saß nun Gertie Fröhlich... sagte etwas von der Benachteiligung der Frau durch die Kunstförderung. Die Männergesichter erstarrten in Langeweile. Schon wieder diese Weiber. Immer dasselbe. Muss das sein? Der Einwurf wurde abgewürgt, und hurtig fochten die Männer einen gallertartigen Ästhetikzopf, der keinen Einsteig mehr ermöglichte, warfen sich Bonmots und Gescheitheiten an den Kopf, dass es eine Freude war, und ignorierten Gertie Fröhlich."¹¹⁷

The ORF archive has since misplaced the actual footage.

In the exhibition catalogue on state funding of the arts, radio journalist Heidi Grundmann published an article entitled "Künstlerinnen in Österreich". It addressed the inauspicious situation of female artists in Austria. To illustrate her point, Grundmann collected the acquisition statistics from the *Bundesministerium für Unterricht und Kunst* and classified each purchased artwork according to the gender of its creator. Excluding 49 artworks whose authorships were unknown or ambiguous, Grund-

113 Ibid.

114 ORF Archive.

115 Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, 8th edn., Cambridge 2012, 274–275.

116 Georg Eisler/Josef Secky/Harald Sterk/Manfred Wagner (eds.), *Die unbekannte Sammlung. Materialien zur staatlichen Kunstförderung in Österreich*, Wien 1979.

117 Marie Luise Kaltenecker, Editorial, in: *Extrablatt*, 6 Nov. 1979. Translation printed in: Anna Gadzinski, *Calliope Austria. Women in Society, Culture and the Sciences*, Vienna 2016, 15.

mann discovered that the Austrian government had acquired artworks from 2,143 male artists and only 750 female artists between 1945 and 1978.¹¹⁸

In the same editorial cited above, Kaltenegger paraphrased Fröhlich's interview in the October 1979 *Extrablatt*:

“[Fröhlich] sprach von dem Egoismus der Männer, insbesondere von Künstlern, die auf Kosten ihrer Frauen Karriere machen, indem sie beispielsweise die Verantwortung für die Kinder auf die Frau abwälzen. Sie sprach davon, wie Frauen reduziert und zurechtgestutzt werden. Männer wollen problemlose fesche Katzen, Künstler wollen Musen. Wenn die Muse den Mund aufmacht, dann – ‘kusch, Muse’ (authentischer Ausspruch eines Wiener Künstlers). Frauen werden verkleinert, entpersönlicht, kastriert. Dann sind sie keine Konkurrenz mehr. Das Rollenangebot ist unattraktiv: hübsches Ornament, fürsorgliche Ersatzmutter, alte Schachtel. Nur ja kein Frau-Mensch, nur ja nichts Schöpferisches.”¹¹⁹

According to Kaltenegger, the views Fröhlich expressed were far from new and hardly unique. Indeed, her feelings were ubiquitous among working Austrian women. Kaltenegger's fascination with the interview stemmed from the readers' reactions, which can serve as an informal barometer of beliefs about gender at that moment: “Die Männer reagierten... mit bösen Briefen und gehässigen Telefonanrufen. Die Frauen mit Betroffenheit und Zustimmung.”¹²⁰ Ostensibly divided along gender lines, it seemed that public opinion had not yet caught up with the progressive legislation spearheaded by the *Frauenstaatssekretärin* Johanna Dohnal. Kaltenegger concluded that “Die Frauenfrage ist eine leidige Frage.”¹²¹

It was also in 1972 that Fröhlich established the “*Lebkuchen Manufaktur*”. She was already designing gingerbread figures as Christmas gifts for friends. The edible tokens grew to be so popular that Fröhlich started selling them, initially only in Austria.¹²² Through sheer talent, Fröhlich raised a new applied art medium, Christmas cookies – traditionally associated with women and the domestic sphere – to a level where they could be sold and provided the foundation of a lucrative business. To meet popular demand, she involved her daughter Marieli, producing what became known as Fröhlich's *Eat-Art-Objects*.¹²³

118 Heidi Grundmann, *Künstlerinnen in Österreich*, in: Eisler/Secky/Sterk/Wagner (eds.), *Sammlung*, 1979, 234.

119 Kaltenegger, Editorial, 1979. Printed in: Alexander Horvath (ed.), *Das Sichtbare Kino. Fünfzig Jahre Filmmuseum*, Wien 2014, 137.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Our story, in: Katharina Fröhlich (ed.), *Fröhlich's Lebkuchen-Manufaktur*, Wien http://www.froehlichs.at/eng/froehlichs_geschichte.html (7 Aug. 2021).

123 Interview with Marieli Fröhlich, 18 March 2019.

Within her social network, her reputation as an artist and graphic designer often secured Fröhlich various creative jobs. In 1980 architect Luigi Blau introduced Fröhlich to Andrew Demmer, who asked her to be his graphic designer during the expansion of his grandfather's coffee company into the field of tea. Demmer credits Fröhlich with the name "Demmers Teehaus".¹²⁴ Fröhlich's business savvy shaped the corporate identity of Demmer's enterprise. The requests did not end there. Publisher Christian Brandstätter asked Fröhlich to create illustrations for the first of a series of books on the different regions of Austria. She executed 14 drawings and vignettes, representing the exquisite landscapes of her youth for Brandstätter's book on Upper Austria.¹²⁵ In addition to pursuing her professional interests, Fröhlich maintained intellectual ones. The same year that the book on Upper Austria was published, she accompanied the Egyptological Institute team of the University of Vienna to Egypt, where they carried out excavations for three months.¹²⁶ On-site, Fröhlich drew the objects found after surveying them. She was also slowly receiving belated recognition for her previous work. In 1982 she received the *Preis der Stadt Wien für angewandte Kunst*.¹²⁷

In 1984 Fröhlich left Vienna to live in Berlin for several months. Still connected with the Viennese artists Oswald and Ingrid Wiener, she cooked in their legendary restaurant *Exil* in Kreuzberg.¹²⁸ Fröhlich also continued to work as a graphic designer remotely. The Austrian lifestyle magazine *Diners Club Magazin Österreichs* commissioned Fröhlich to create an illustration to accompany the article "Das Klassentreffen" by Kaltenegger.¹²⁹ In September 1985 Fröhlich had another solo exhibition – this time in Vienna at the *Peter Pakesch Galerie*. Fröhlich's daughter Marieli, a close friend of Pakesch, suggested the idea.¹³⁰ Unlike her previous exhibitions, a catalogue was printed to which the Austrian writer Friederike Mayröcker contributed the piece "Profilblüte einer Frau (für Gertie Fröhlich)".¹³¹

124 Nadja Fanari, Das Teeblatt. Demmers Zeitung für Tee & Kultur, Jubiläumsausgabe 30 (Herbst-Winter 2011/12), 2, <https://issuu.com/demmersteehaus/docs/dasteelblatt/2> (2 Aug. 2021).

125 Christian Brandstätter (ed.), Oberösterreich, Wien/München 1982.

126 Sailer, Fröhlich, 2005.

127 She received a letter from the Viennese Mayor Leopold Gratz congratulating her on her award on 26 April 1982. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

128 Oswald and Ingrid Wiener ran *Exil* with Michel Würthle from 1972 to 1985. Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 18.

129 Marie Luise Kaltenegger, Das Klassentreffen, in: *Diners Club Magazin*. Vienna, 6 Dec. 1984, 114–115.

130 Interview with Peter Pakesch, Museum Café, Vienna, 13 Oct. 2020.

131 Fröhlich received a subsidy of 12.000 schilling for her work on this catalogue. *Kunstbericht* 1984. Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Sport, Wien 1984, <https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/> (24 Nov. 2021).

In 1987 *Galerie Schwarz auf Weiß* in Kreuzberg, not far from *Exil*, organized a solo exhibition of Fröhlich's works.¹³² Jürgen Henschel documented the exhibition, photographing its paintings, such as "Die Philosophin und der Taucher" (1986). In this work, the woman occupies the place of the intellectual, challenging traditional gender roles. The inspiration for this work was drawn from Fröhlich's travels to Patmos, where she met the Greek fisherman Vassily, with whom she had a brief love affair. Apart from these photographs, no other evidence seems to be available.

10. *Eat-Art Objects*: international fame came and went

Around this time, Fröhlich's close friend, artist André Heller, invited her to exhibit her *Eat-Art-Objects* at his amusement park of modern art, entitled "Jahrmarkt der modernen Kunst, Luna Luna". The two artists were long-standing friends and had a history of collaboration. Out of appreciation for Fröhlich's work, Heller had asked her to design one of his album covers in the early 1970s.¹³³ "Luna Luna" was on a much larger scale. Heller had received a \$500,000 grant from the German magazine *Neue Revue* and organized the event in Hamburg from 4 June to 31 August in 1987.¹³⁴ He attempted to "create a traveling terrain of modern art, that in the centuries-old principle of the fairground involves people of all ages and educational levels in playful acts".¹³⁵ Among the participating artists were Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Roy Lichtenstein, Salvador Dalí, and Sonia Delaunay. Heller wanted to create "an amusement park designed by the most important artists of the period".¹³⁶ For Heller, Fröhlich belonged in this category.

The designer and journalist Lillian Langseth-Christensen was so impressed by Fröhlich's edible artworks that she put her into contact with the Branca Gallery, Inc., in Chicago, which invited Fröhlich to exhibit her *Eat-Art-Objects* in October 1987.¹³⁷ The Senior Vice President of Tiffany's in Chicago then made sure that Fröhlich's edible creations were displayed in the company's annual Christmas window displays.¹³⁸ The following year, the American Craft Museum (today, the Museum of Arts and

132 Jürgen Henschel, Kleinbildnegativ. Galerie Schwarz auf Weiß, Berlin 1987, <https://nat.museum-digital.de/singleimage.php?objektnum=468206&resourcencn=647345> (24 Nov. 2021).

133 Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

134 André Heller, Luna Luna. Ermöglicht von Neue Revue, München 1987.

135 Ibid., 9.

136 Dieter Buchhart interviews André Heller. June 1, 2016, Vienna, in: Dieter Buchhart, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Vienna/New York 2016, 7–9.

137 Christmas Art, in: Wolfgang Petritsch/Irene Freuden-Reichl (eds.), Austrian Information. 40/12 (1987), 8.

138 Ibid.

Design) invited Fröhlich to participate in “The Confectioner’s Art” exhibition, composed only of edible artworks. By autumn, her participation in “The Confectioner’s Art” show landed her twice in the *New York Times*.¹³⁹ Of the 200 objects in the Craft Arts exhibition, the publication featured one of Fröhlich’s edible artworks. The caption read: “One of the Three Wise Men, by Gertie Froehlich of Austria, created from gingerbread”.¹⁴⁰ *Country Living Magazine* also featured the exhibition and included colour images of all three of Fröhlich’s wise men.¹⁴¹

These successes did not lead Fröhlich to neglect her painting or other intellectual pursuits. In 1988 Fröhlich returned to Egypt to work with the Egyptological Institute and had a solo exhibition in the *Atelier Galerie* in Vöcklabruck.¹⁴² Again, no catalogue or record of the show is available.

In 1990 Fröhlich suffered a stroke, from which she never fully recovered.¹⁴³ Yet, institutions continued to invite her to display her works in group exhibitions. In 1991 she participated in the exhibition “20 Jahre Moderne Kunst am Rabensteig” at the *Neue Galerie* in Vienna. Two years after that, the city of Vienna awarded her an honorary professorship for her contribution to the arts.¹⁴⁴ In 2000 she exhibited her work in her last group exhibition entitled, “natura morte – still-life”.¹⁴⁵

In 2005 Fröhlich’s close friend and advocate John Sailer organized a retrospective of her film posters at his co-owned *Galerie Ulysses*.¹⁴⁶ Fröhlich had long-standing ties to this Viennese cultural institution. In her diary entry from 1974, Fröhlich records the moment when “Johnny Sailer” asked her “to make the typeface for his stationary. As I did for the ‘Journal.’ Called ‘Galerie Ulysses’”.¹⁴⁷ The 2015 show was her last exhibition before retiring in 2017 to the Hilde Wagener artist’s retirement home in Baden bei Wien. She resided there until her death on 17 May 2020.

139 Assistant Curator Anthea Zonars of the American Craft Museum wrote Fröhlich a letter, confirming the gingerbread figures’ proposed arrival schedule in the US on 10 May 1988. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

140 The *New York Times*. Sec c 10., 9 Nov. 1988. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/09/garden/craft-museum-s-edible-collection-of-art.html> (24 Nov. 2021); The *New York Times*. Sec 4. 24, 12 Nov. 88. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/11/opinion/topics-of-the-times-the-sweet-season.html> (24 Nov. 2021).

141 *Country Living Magazine*, 12/1988. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

142 Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 18.

143 Marieli Fröhlich Interview, 18 March 2019.

144 Invitation from the Federal Minister for Education and the Arts Dr. Rudolf Scholten to the award ceremony to present the honorary title of professor on 19 May 1993. Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

145 Resch, Fröhlich, 2019, 18.

146 John Sailer (ed.), Gertie Fröhlich. Plakate für das Österreichische Filmmuseum 1964–1984, Salzburg 2005. The *Bericht über die Kunstförderung des Bundeskanzleramts* awarded the project 6,000 euros to fund the catalog’s printing costs. *Kunstbericht 2005. Bericht über die Kunstförderung des Bundeskanzleramts*, Wien 2005, <https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/> (24 Nov. 2021).

147 Gertie Fröhlich, Journal entry (1974), Private Collection of Marieli Fröhlich.

11. Conclusion

Let us return to our initial questions. How did Gertie Fröhlich's actions influence the Viennese post-war cultural art scene? How were her actions either left unrecorded or systematically erased from the annals of cultural history? And for what reasons?

Early in her career, Fröhlich influenced the art scene through her art and networking, and she sometimes received either informal or formal recognition. Despite the limitations placed on her gender, she exerted significant influence over prominent Viennese institutions. Her gallery work at the *Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan* and her introductions of young, experimental artists to Monsignore Otto Mauer transformed his conservative Catholic gallery into a vanguard exhibition space that sustained the Viennese post-war abstractionist movement of Informel at a time when such art was not accepted by the wider public. Her apartment became an important salon, where emerging artists could flock and exchange ideas in a private setting. As an art student, she received the *Herbert Boeckl Preis* and a travel scholarship to Sweden to enrich her studies. Her graphic art in the form of marketing materials at the Austrian Film Museum shaped that institution's corporate identity. Her film posters eventually gave her both international recognition – through exhibitions in London and Los Angeles – and local recognition – including selection for the *Preis der Stadt Wien für angewandte Kunst* and an honorary professorship from the Federal Ministry for Education and the Arts. Magazines and newspapers regularly featured her graphic artwork. Later in life, her paintings landed her solo shows all over Austria. Her obscurity as an artist today is even more confounding when one considers the international fame she achieved for her edible art later in life. She exhibited this body of artworks alongside the work of Basquiat, Dalí, and other notable artists in Heller's "Luna Luna".

The lack of archival materials is a major reason for Fröhlich's lack of visibility. Some female artists did achieve long-standing recognition, such as Lassnig and Kogelnik. However, they belonged to a group of post-war female artists who left Austria and achieved recognition elsewhere. In contrast, Maria Biljan-Bilger was one of the few female artists who stayed in Austria and managed to garner some local recognition. In Sommerein, the eponymous Maria Biljan-Bilger exhibition hall is devoted to the display of her multimedia work. In her case, however, her husband, Friedrich Kurrent, was a well-received Austrian architect who designed and built the aforementioned museum and started an association aimed at the promotion and preservation of his late wife's work and memory. Kogelnik also had a devoted and financially secure husband to support her. Therefore, Lassnig, Biljan-Bilger, and Kogelnik had more time and resources to invest in their artistic careers. Fröhlich did not have these luxuries.

As a *female* artist in post-war Vienna, as a refugee from Slovakia with little financial support, and as a young mother, Fröhlich frequently put her artistic career on hold in favour of paid work. As a result, her work often took the form of marketing materials. In the historically fixed hierarchies of the fine arts, these are not generally held in high esteem. Such works are still not considered 'worthy' of epochal art historical surveys of the period. The same can be said of Fröhlich's edible artworks. Her *Eat-Art Objects* existed outside the bounds of artistic hierarchies. Her unconventionality granted her visibility in "Luna Luna", but it also contributed to her obscurity in subsequent art history. The paintings that Fröhlich did manage to execute, despite her financial difficulties, never subscribed to contemporary trends. Fröhlich's work existed on another plane, entirely unhinged and not driven by her peers. Instead, she drew on themes of her childhood and mythology, cultivating her own dreams and fantasies. The surveys that omitted her applied artworks thus also excluded her paintings. Fröhlich, despite her friendships with the *Gruppe Sankt Stephan* and the *Phantastische Realisten*, never became a member of either group, which further contributed to her invisibility.

Most of Fröhlich's better-known female contemporaries did join art groups. Biljan-Bilger, for instance, was a member of the Art Club. In New York City, Kogelnik was a self-proclaimed pop artist at the height of pop art, while Lassnig ran with a group of feminist experimental filmmakers that included Carolee Schneemann, Silvianna Goldsmith, and Doris Chase. Fröhlich's lack of a group identity made it more challenging for her to participate in group shows. This, in turn, was an obstacle for her to secure solo shows. Consequently, she was not invited to exhibit in contemporary art galleries until much later in life, sometimes at the behest of her daughter. To further contribute to the lacuna of archival materials, her solo shows were rarely accompanied by catalogues, and no record of purchases was made. The artworks sold are lost in private collections with no documentation available. Her legacy as an artist was unaccounted for because of her need to sell combined with a lack of foresight.

Fröhlich was apprehensive about asserting her contributions because she came from a generation of Austrian women who were discouraged from talking about themselves. As much as she was erased, she submitted to her erasure. We see this in her lack of participation in the ORF discussion commemorating the tenth anniversary of Mauer's death. Her mixing of work and romantic relationships further contributed to her relative erasure because her former partners became unwilling to associate with her after subsequent fallouts. Even in her old age, Fröhlich was reluctant to speak poorly of the men who had forgotten to credit her contributions to their *mutual* successes. The result is a scattered, dispersive history in which Fröhlich appears everywhere and is credited nowhere.

As the history of the *Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan* shows, some of Fröhlich's contributions have been preserved in the literature. Yet, that visibility hinges on a man. And, even her most visible contributions have been marginalized to the footnotes of the gallery's history. As these written histories are referenced in more contemporary sources, these inaccuracies become ossified. We see this with her waning visibility in the *Dom Museum Wien* catalogue, which cites Fröhlich as a witness rather than as a protagonist in the gallery's history.

What can we learn from her story? As an artist, Fröhlich stayed true to herself. Although her circumstances were challenging – her traumatic escape from Slovakia as a teenager, her issues with her parents, and her lack of material success – she sustained a protean passion for culture and a thirst for knowledge. Despite external and internal obstacles, she has left behind an impressive legacy as an emancipated woman who earned her own money and made her own decisions despite societal limitations placed on her gender. Her power as an influencer, her achievements intertwined with the accomplishments of the men she influenced (Mauer, Kubelka), and her legacy as an artist are all slowly being recovered through current research and reassessments of the post-war cultural scene in Vienna from a perspective that no longer ignores women.