

ART INTERNATIONAL Zürich

11. – 14. OKTOBER 2012 / KONGRESSHAUS ZÜRICH

Ada Wolpe Art Foundation

ADA WOLPE (1921 - 2004)

It is the second half of the 20th Century and the artist sits in her studio in the Swiss mountains finishing another of her inspired paintings, this one a larger piece, about 3x5 feet.

Like many of her other recent works, this is of flowers - magical, colorful, robust. Like a modern-day Seraphine de Senlis, the artist, who signed her work simply as Ada, shunned publicity and worked hard to earn a living, but quietly painted and painted, her work collected by a handful of international and local collectors. You won't find her on a Google search, or listed in museum collections at major galleries.

True, she did study art in South Africa and London (unlike Seraphine who was self-taught), held a number of exhibitions in Zurich, and her early illustrations of Romeo and Juliet for the book written by famous Swiss writer Gottfried Keller were published, but for the most part she drew and painted in relative obscurity. Sister of the famous South African sculptor Lippy Lipshitz, Ada was born in South Africa, and moved to London before settling in Switzerland in the 1960's. Over an extended period in the 60's and 70's Ada and her husband - holocaust survivor Leiser Wolpe - slowly built a retreat and studio in the Italian-speaking Ticino district - a retreat that became her haven from the bustle of Zurich, where they lived in a five-floor walkup. The stunning views of Lake Maggiore and the mountain light, combined with the rustic retreat, provided space and inspiration away from the more mundane activities of earning a living by teaching English and selling collectibles at the city flea market.

Ada's life revolved around drawing, painting, and expressing her thoughts and ideas. She kept letters she wrote, letters she received, drawings on small pads, larger folios, sketches of people, more people, faces, each a world unto itself. Just like the artist.

'It is astonishing that in the late 20th Century an artist of this calibre could remain virtually anonymous' says Colin Davis, a relative of her late husband. 'Her drawings are amazingly vibrant and connect deeply with people. Plus, the sheer quantity of her work is astonishing.'

The studio in Ticino has been sold and the new owners named it Casa Dell Artista and turned it into a bed and breakfast. Some of her works are still displayed on the walls. Tucked in a corner of the room where her works are currently housed, lie a number of so-called 'holocaust paintings', works she executed based on the experiences of Leiser, who survived Dachau while still a teenager. Leiser and Ada lived together for over 40 years until Ada passed away in 2004.

Ada left behind a substantial amount of work - hundreds of drawings and letters, and hundreds more paintings, on paper, canvas and some on board. Tucked amongst the letters is one from famous South African artist Gerard Sekoto when he was in exile in Paris. In fact most of the letters have not been catalogued so the full extent of them is unknown - who knows what other gems are hidden there?

But it is the drawings and paintings that of most interest. About two hundred paintings, some framed, others settled on their canvas bodies, radiate through the room, sharing hope and happiness. For Leiser Wolpe, Ada's paintings were 'schön' - beautiful - and he had said that without Ada he would not have survived living in the world - she was the veil between him and the Holocaust. He never told this to Ada, but there were times when, very short of money and unable to buy flowers, he would pick them for Ada from other people's gardens, just to be sure she had her flowers to paint and admire...

Now, the entire collection of paintings has been catalogued. It has been a difficult decision how to do justice to this vast body of work, and the current owner, a close relative of Leiser, decided for now to keep the collection together.

ART INTERNATIONAL Zürich

11. – 14. OKTOBER 2012 / KONGRESSHAUS ZÜRICH

FLOWERS AND TREES

They transcend emotions and thinking
unmoved by our feelings, our needs,
our limitations.

Yet influence our moods

Not just shapes and colors and textures
but life itself expressed from the inside out.

An inside as small as a seed, and inside that,
nothingness

And from that comes an expression of fullness.

So full that no matter our limitations

we can experience their joyful essence.

Ada Wolpe Art Foundation - Zurich

Website: www.AdaWolpe.com

ART INTERNATIONAL Zurich
Contemporary Art Fair

ART INTERNATIONAL Zurich is a forum which opens to a large public the actual art scene. The annual art fair developed in the last years to a meeting point between artists, gallery owners and art-lovers, offering an essential space for contacts, sales and cultural exchange.

Internet:

<http://www.art-zurich.com>

<http://www.twitter.com/artfairzurich>

<http://www.facebook.com/artzurich>