

Gertie Fröhlich: Invisibility in Viennese Postwar Cultural Histories

In 1996, Gerhard Habarta published his postwar history, *Frühere Verhältnisse*, arguably, one of the most comprehensive accounts of the Viennese postwar art scene. In his book, Habarta mentions the artist Gertie Fröhlich three times. Before naming Fröhlich, Habarta writes: “As so often in life, behind the significant deeds of a man, there is a clever woman. As was the case with Monsignor Mauer and his Galerie (nächst) St. Stephan.” This talk focuses on the “clever woman,” artist Gertie Fröhlich, and the part she played to the postwar art scene and how that role were more often than not omitted from written accounts, which, I will argue, is symptomatic of the general invisibility of female contributions in Viennese postwar cultural history.

In this talk, I will argue that Fröhlich’s responsibilities at the gallery extended far beyond those designated by her nominal title as gallery secretary to something more akin to that of a curator today. She was instrumental to both the conception and establishment of the Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan, the person who conceived the first Weihnachtsausstellung of 1956, which led to the formation of the *Gruppe Sankt Stephan*. However, Fröhlich’s influence did not stop there: I will also discuss her role in building the carriers of artists such as Arnulf Rainer, Josef Mikl, Wolfgang Hollegha, Markus Prachensky, Maria Lassnig, and Peter Kubelka, and her own gifts as a painter and poster designer at the Film Museum. In addition, this talk will discuss the role of her apartment on Sonnenfelsgasse 11 in supporting young, un-established artists. Artists regularly gathered there for parties, and some artists even stayed there. For example, the La MaMa group from New York bivouacked in the apartment for weeks on end, as did the architect Raimund Abraham, the actress Christine Kaufmann, the photographer Brian Spence, and the American Fluxus artist Al Hansen, who lived with Fröhlich multiple times between 1984 and 1986.

As this conference will transpire only a few months after Fröhlich’s passing on May 17, 2020, this talk will be a celebration of her life, using a combination of both oral history and archival materials to narrate an alternative (more inclusive) postwar cultural history.

Short bio:

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Julia Jarrett completed her BA in art history at Columbia University in 2015 and her MA in art history at the University of Vienna in 2020. Her MA thesis focuses on the role of the Galerie (nächst) Sankt Stephan in the postwar Viennese art scene. Her research interests include demystifying the Austrian postwar victim myth, postwar gender politics, twentieth-century cultural history, and Cold War artistic production.