

# Lentos Kunstmuseum

**Ida Maly**

**Negotiating the Stylistic Maze**

**22 Oct. 2021 – 9 Jan. 2022**

**The Austrian artist Ida Maly (1894–1941) lived and worked in Vienna, Munich, Berlin and Paris. Sectioned in the late 1920s as a “schizophrenic” at a psychiatric institution, she continued to create works there that seem to foreshadow the atrocities of the National Socialists’ euthanasia programmes for patients in psychiatric clinics. In 1941, Ida Maly was murdered at the Schloss Hartheim euthanasia centre. Her work is a highly gifted artist’s testimony to the allegedly Golden Twenties, the era when, negotiating the stylistic maze, she found her own artistic language.**

Life and work of Austrian artist Ida Maly were shaped by the political, social, and artistic revolutions of the time. To expose herself to latest artistic influences, she left the cramped conditions of her native country to live from 1918 alternatively in Munich, Berlin and Paris. A keen athlete, she took part in competitions in swimming and high diving. She led the life of a freelance artist and when she found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, she eked out a living painting bookplates and copies of old masters. When her daughter Elga (1921–1989) was born, she did what she could to support herself and her child. When this proved impossible owing to the harsh economic climate of the time, she was forced to commit her child to the care of foster parents in Graz.

In the winter of 1923, Ida Maly was busy copying *Leda and the Swan* by Peter Paul Rubens in Dresden’s Picture Gallery Alte Meister. One of Maly’s friends, Hans Carl Müller, dipping his pen in a mixture of reportage and satire, describes how the “painter woman” set to work at her easel in front of the painting, bombarded with all kinds of funny questions and comments by museum visitors. Even if the story seeks to put a humorous spin on the scene, it cannot altogether hide the economic pressures Maly was subject to in the 1920s, when she was forced to put up a struggle merely to survive.

Maly created a multifaceted oeuvre, which brings to the fore entirely new aspects of art in interwar Austria. In addition to portraits of Kaffeehaus patrons that took shape in Vienna and Paris between 1925 and 1927, she made pencil drawings, some of which are noticeable for their fantasy motifs. In stylistic terms, her work shows the influence of a wide range of styles, such as art nouveau, expressionism, Art déco and New Objectivity.

“The dominant motif in the artist’s oeuvre”, says curator Anna Lehninger, “is the human being. From self-portraits to portraits of family members and friends and nudes, Maly is concerned above all with the human body, which she sees through the prisms of religion, ancient mythology, and the social developments of her time”.

The full development of Maly’s artistic skills suffered a serious setback when she was sectioned in 1928 in the “Landes-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt für Geisteskranke Am Feldhof” in Graz. The circumstances of this committal are as obscure today as is the fatal diagnosis of schizophrenia, which can no longer be validated. At the Feldhof, the artist portrayed other inmates, endowing them in empathetic portraits with that individuality and dignity they were being denied by the increasingly inhuman psychiatry of the 1930s.

From around 1930, Ida Maly’s style became more and more linear. Some works on paper make use of only one colour. Script, in the form of titles and soundbites emanating from the mouths of

the subjects, plays an ever more important role. At the same time, the figures continue to evolve, exhibiting cartoon-like exaggerations, such as oversized heads. Maly's late work is marked by an increasingly radical disintegration of form.

Ida Maly was murdered in 1941 in Schloss Hartheim in Upper Austria in the course of the National Socialist euthanasia programme. It was only in recent years that the extraordinary oeuvre of the Graz born painter and graphic artist was rediscovered. After the exhibition *Ida Maly (1894–1941). Eine Außenseiterin der Moderne* in the Neue Galerie Graz (2005) and the retrospective *Ida Maly alles Gute zum 111. Geburtstag* at Schloss Hartheim (2006) the show at the Lentos is only the third solo exhibition of the artist in Austria.

"The homage the museums of the City of Linz pay to outstanding female artists are an important contribution to the rewriting of Austrian art history. The exhibition and the publication that accompanies it are a testimony to Ida Maly, an outstandingly gifted, powerful artist. They remind us of her life and celebrate the quality of her oeuvre", says Lentos Director Hemma Schmutz .

"This exhibition of Ida Maly's work, excellently curated by Anna Lehninger, is another instance of what the Lentos does so well: putting the focus on the artistic achievement of female artists. In this case, it is the graphic oeuvre of an artist who has been denied recognition for much too long", says Arts Councillor Doris Lang-Mayerhofer. "In combination with the exhibition 'Female Sensibility' on the top floor, the museum is currently showing two exhibitions that put the power of women centre stage".

The exhibition at the Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz showcases seventy select works to trace the trajectory of Ida Maly's life and shows how she found her own artistic idiom by negotiating the stylistic maze of her time.

# CV

## 1894

Born in Vienna on 22 October Ida Franziska Sofia Maly; baptised in Vienna according to the Roman-Catholic rite on 3 November. Father k. k. Calibration and Verification Inspector Franz Maly (1850–1920), mother Sofie Maly (1859–1946), sisters Olga (1889–1976) and Paula (1891–19 Oct. 1974). In late 1894, the family moved to Graz, where Ida Maly spent her childhood and youth and struck up a friendship with Martha Newes (1894–1984).

## 1912–1914

After the 'Matura' she studied painting at the Steirische Landeskunstschule and attended the k. k. Staatsgewerbeschule in Graz for four months.

## 1914–1915

Together with her sister Paula Ida attended the k. k. Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna. The courses she followed included General Instruction with Oskar Strnad, Ornamental Morphology with Franz Čížek, and Script and Heraldics with Rudolf von Larisch. Ida produced several designs for war memorials and ornamental studies. In February 1915 the sisters abruptly leave Vienna.

## 1916–1917

Between the autumn of 1916 and the spring of 1917 Ida is in St. Pölten. Two letters to her sister Paula have survived, in which she mentions working at an unspecified factory. She takes part in swimming and high-diving competitions. Only a few works date to this period.

## 1918–1925

In the autumn of 1918 Ida is in Munich, where she is registered as "painter and actress". She puts up initially with her friend, the actress Martha Newes, and her husband, director and actor Hans Carl Müller. After several changes of abode she takes up residence in the Giselastraße, where she lives from 1921 to 1925. She supports herself by painting bookplates and copies of old masters.

## 1921

On 8 January Ida gives birth to her daughter Elga (8 Jan. 1921–1 Nov. 1989) in Munich. A single mother, she is finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet.

## 1923

Elga is entrusted to foster parents in Graz. Ida stays in Berlin and Dresden, where on the evidence of a friend she copied Peter Paul Rubens's *Leda with the Swan* at the Gemäldegalerie in December.

## 1924

Visit to Graz. Ida makes prints and paints a self-portrait, which exhibits all the stylistic characteristics of New Objectivity.

## 1925

She is in Paris for several months, where she makes nude studies and a great number of drawings of coffeehouse patrons. She returns to Vienna in October.

## 1925–1927

Ida Maly lives and works as an "art student" in Vienna. She portrays coffeehouse patrons and makes pencil drawings, some of which are characterised by fantastical motifs. In stylistic terms, her work shows the influence of a wide range of styles, such as art nouveau, expressionism, Art déco and New Objectivity.

**1928**

On 29 March, Ida moves back to Graz, where she puts up at the house of her sister Paula. On 1 August, she is sectioned at the "Landes-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt für Geisteskranke Am Feldhof" in Graz, where she remains for twelve years, creating her stylistically autonomous late work.

**1941**

On 8 February a document attesting to her descent is issued in Graz. On 11 February, she is deported to Schloss Hartheim near Linz, a national socialist killing centre, where she is murdered, presumably on 20 February. The death certificate attributes her death to "pneumonia".

# Programme

## **The Making-of**

Thurs 22 Oct. 21 3 pm

Thurs 9 Nov. 21 11 am

A glance behind the scenes of the exhibition with Curator Anna Lehninger

Guided tour € 3 plus admission, duration: 1 hour

# Dates & Facts

<b>Title of the exhibition</b>	Ida Maly Negotiating the Stylistic Maze
<b>Duration</b> <b>Curator</b>	22 Oct. 2021 – 9 Jan. 2022 Anna Lehninger
<b>Exhibition venue</b>	Great Hall
<b>Exhibits</b>	About 70 drawings, watercolors, paintings and documents, 2 videos, 1 audio file
<b>Publication</b>	The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalog published by Michael Imhhof Verlag with a foreword by Hemma Schmutz and a text contribution by Anna Lehninger, 128 p., € 22.
<b>Exhibition Venue</b>	Tue–Sun 10 am–6 pm, Thurs 10 am–8 pm Mon closed For special opening hours, go to <a href="http://www.lentos.at">www.lentos.at</a>
<b>Admission</b>	€ 8, concessions € 6 / € 4.50
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# Picture Material

Press photos and views of the exhibition are available for downloads during the run of the exhibition [here](#). Licence free use while indicating the source reserved to the context of the topical coverage of the exhibition.