

Artist Report

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Residency Period: July 17 – August 15, 2017

I came to Krems with a two-part project already underway. First, I wanted to continue work on a novel in progress. My process is to write (or try to) every morning. This place – the quiet city and the beautifully spare but well-appointed apartment – proved to be a perfect distraction-free site and I made good progress. I have a policy not to talk about the content of fiction while I'm writing because it confuses me and tends to drain energy that would be better directed to writing so I won't say much more except that the work is concerned with the subject of schizophrenia and how it affects the relationship of siblings.

Which leads me to the second part of my project, my proposed article on Dr. Johann Feilacher, the Director of the Gugging House of Artists and Open Studio. Part of the reason I wanted to come to Krems is its proximity to the small town of Maria Gugging and the House of Artists, a unique community where artists with serious mental illness live and work and, if they want, get treatment for their illness – mostly schizophrenia. Also on the grounds is a museum that exhibits past and present residents' work, a gallery that sells it (and provides artists with a fair cut of the selling price), and a sweeping view of the Vienna Woods.

To me, it seems a kind of paradise. In the United State the mentally ill are largely neglected, housed in prisons, un- or undertreated, shamed, and

shunned. I wanted to meet this doctor who, in addition to being a visionary psychiatrist, is also a working sculptor.

I have been aware of Gugging since the late 1980s when I saw several traveling exhibitions in Chicago where I was writing my column about art for the Chicago Sun-Times. I recall being stunned and I saved catalogs. I always wanted to know more about this place but never imagined I would get to come here.

When I first contacted Dr. Feilacher in May he invited me to a July 19 museum opening, so two days after I arrived in Krems I made my first trip to Gugging to attend the opening of Karl Vondal and Johann Garber's show. It was a festive night. The speeches were all in German but the work ...! That is a language I know.

I met Dr. Feilacher briefly that night; the following Monday we met for nearly two hours in Krems, for an interview, and talked about art and schizophrenia and the human mind.

A few days later I went back to Gugging. The second visit allowed me a quiet chance to tour the grounds, interview staff, and meet some of the artists. One particularly gregarious artist, Karl Vondal, whose work is featured in the current two-man museum show and who has a temporary studio in the museum as a part of that show, rushed up to me immediately and requested that pictures be taken of him with me holding one of his paintings. Later, upstairs, he brokered an under-the-table art deal – two small drawings for ten euros.

I recorded my interview with Dr. Feilacher on two separate devices to be sure I'd catch every word, and I spent the next week transcribing it, listening over and over trying to get every word right. Of course that process just raised a hundred more questions. In the meantime I sent my transcript to a publisher. If they choose to run it, I'll write an accompanying essay. If they decline, I'll look for another publication. It's a story that needs to be told. What Dr. Feilacher has organized here – psychiatric care and community life for artists with serious mental illness, based on kindness and respect, in contrast to the shaky provisions in America – is astonishing.

That's where I stand now on Day 30 of my residency.

Of course I haven't only been working. After two weeks my husband arrived by car and we have had many excursions. Some of the non-work highlights of my stay: daily walks through beautiful Krems and Stein; daily breakfasts on the rooftop terrace overlooking the Danube; a leisurely boat ride to Melk and back; four visits to heurigen; daily imbibing of cold crisp Gruner Veltliner, also on the terrace, as well as everywhere else; a weekend trip to Budapest; daily walks to Hofer for fresh bread and more wine; the Kunsthalle; Minoritenplatz; daytrips to Wien; two nights of wonderful music at Glatt & Verkehrt; collegial and fascinating conversations with AIR people and fellow artists in residence – from Austria, Mexico, Israel, Portugal, Estonia.

Thank you, AIR and SAIC, for making this all possible! I am very grateful. I cannot predict what impact this trip will have on my work but I know it

already has begun and will continue. I will update AIR on my projects as they develop.

Margaret Hawkins

August 14, 2017

List of Project-related Events:

July 19, Maria Gugging: Attended exhibition opening for Karl Vondal and Johann Garber at Museum Gugging. Met Dr. Johann Feilacher and others.

July 31, Krems: Met with Dr. Johann Feilacher for 2-hour interview. A far-ranging discussion covered my prepared questions based on research as well as topical issues around mental illness and other psychiatric matters that arose in conversation. In further correspondence, the discussion continued.

August 1, Maria Gugging: Return to Gugging for a private tour by Maria Hoger of the museum, gallery, grounds, and Artist House including the Walla Room. Met Karl Vondal, one of the resident artists whose work is on exhibition now.

August 2–7, Krems: Transcribed audio recording of interview, researched content, sent transcription to publisher, corresponded with Johann Feilacher to clarify material and to follow up on further questions.

August 12, Vienna: Attempted to visit Atelier 10 to meet gallerist Florian Reese and to see another approach to exhibiting outsider art here but gallery closed.

Now awaiting response from publisher.

July 17 – August 15, Krems: Simultaneous with this project, I have been working daily on a fiction manuscript.

(Photos sent separately.)