

'Cranach – The Early Years in Vienna'

12 March – 12 June 2022

Press Release

The exhibition 'Cranach – The Early Years in Vienna' is a collaborative project between the Oskar Reinhart Collection 'Am Römerholz' and the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna. It explores the early work of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472 – 1553), providing a unique insight into his artistic beginnings.

Lucas Cranach the Elder made his mark through his early artistic mastery and is one of the best-known painters of the 16th century. He was a contemporary of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and a friend of Martin Luther (1483–1546). While we know and understand a lot about the middle and later stages of Cranach's life, very little is known about his training and formative years.

Sources suggest that Cranach moved to Vienna around 1500 aged just under 30, probably in the hope of supplying portraits to the emerging humanist circles in the city. It seems that he was welcomed with open arms. His highly expressive and emotionalised visual style and his at times radical use of form – likely influenced by Dürer – were well received in the humanist circles, with his works meandering between religious tradition and the new humanist philosophy.

The exhibition in Winterthur and the one subsequently taking place in Vienna are alike in that they both pick up on Cranach's hitherto largely unknown early work and link up their insights in a jointly published exhibition catalogue. On the basis of the works in their respective collections, the two exhibitions feature slightly different emphases. While the one in Winterthur focuses on Cranach's portraits, the exhibition in Vienna concentrates on his religious painting.

In addition to the double panel wedding portrait of Johannes Cuspinian and his wife Anna (c.1502) from the collection in Winterthur, the exhibition features additional portraits from Cranach's early work, as well as those of other early Renaissance artists. Particular emphasis is given to the double panel portrait (known as a diptych), which was a frequently-used form in panel painting during this period. With the aid of on-screen animations created especially for the exhibition, visitors can virtually discover how these diptychs were probably presented at the time.

Cranach's handling of figures and landscapes is also worthy of note. He demonstrated a radical artistic technique of incorporating figures in the middle of wild landscapes – a motif that he evidently developed in his early religious works. *St. Jerome* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is a prime example of this.

Of the ten known paintings from the Viennese period, the majority will feature in the joint exhibition project, also thanks to some high-calibre international loans. In addition, there will be some superb examples of Cranach's very rare drawings from this period. A particular focus will be Cranach's documented work as a printmaker, and his early prints will be presented in their entirety. In this context, some rarely-seen examples of early printing will be exhibited, such as the *Missale Salisburgense* from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

The diverse exhibits reveal a colourful and rich picture of Vienna's humanist scene, which was one of the artistic centres of the early Renaissance. The exhibition is accompanied by interactive elements and an extensive programme of practical workshops and thematic tours for young and old, exploring the landscape style of the early 16th century and related topics.

A catalogue in English, German and French accompanying the exhibition will supplement the curatorial aspects with insightful and engaging texts by renowned Cranach experts. The exhibition is an outstanding collaborative project between two prestigious museums each with their own key examples of Cranach's early work. It rounds off a collaboration that started with the joint research project and exhibition on Pieter Bruegel the Elder in 2018.

The exhibition will move in a slightly changed form and with a different focus to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna from 21 June to 16 October 2022.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern EDI
Département fédéral de l'intérieur DFI
Dipartimento federale dell'interno DFI
Departament federal da l'intern DFI
Bundesamt für Kultur BAK
Office fédéral de la culture OFC
Ufficio federale della cultura UFC
Uffizi federal da cultura UFC