

Reading
girls

Press Kit

Albert Anker

22.3. —
21.7.2024

KUNST
MUSEUM
BERN



Between 22 March and 21 July 2024, the Kunstmuseum Bern is putting a unique focus on Albert Anker in the context of its collection. At the centre of *Albert Anker. Reading Girls* are Anker's efforts in favour of the education of girls. Not only did he advocate for children's right to an education as a politician, but as a painter often represented girls and young women reading and writing.

Albert Anker (1831–1910) is one of the best-known Swiss artists, and is loved for his detailed, idealising representations of traditional peasant communities. Aside from his work as an artist he also held official posts in the municipality and the canton. As a citizen of the Ins farming community he was active in school policy until well into old age, and dealt with educational matters such as the foundation of the local secondary school in 1896. The exhibition of his works in the Kunstmuseum Bern locates the motif of the reading girl within Anker's vision of the world and recognizes in his work a contribution to the emancipation of women in Switzerland.

The presentation is based on the Kunstmuseum Bern's own collection holdings, and shows them in a new light. The holdings are complemented by selective loans from museums and private collections. The concentrated exhibition brings together 25 paintings, watercolours and drawings and emphasises the significance that the motif of reading girls held in Anker's thought and work.

Small manifestos for equal opportunities

In both Anker's time and our own, reading girls are a sign that society invests in the education of women. During Anker's time as an artist and a politician in Bern in the 19th century, girls' access to education could not be taken for granted. It was only after the total revision of the Swiss constitution in 1874 that compulsory education – for both boys and girls – was imposed across the whole country.

In his capacities as a politician, Anker spoke up for children's right to education and campaigned, for example, for the introduction of a kindergarten and a secondary school in Ins. As an artist, too, he picked up the theme of education and represented it with images of children on the way to school, in class and with many depictions of reading girls. Against the backdrop of his commitment to educational policy, these latter works look like little manifestos for equal opportunities.

Reading girls

Among Anker's many depictions of village life in Ins, his portraits of children have a quiet and impressive power. The girls and young women – always portrayed as individuals – are immersed completely naturally in their reading and writing. One prime example of this is the watercolour *Cécile Anker* in blue faience, a portrait of Anker's youngest daughter reading.

Reading fires the imagination, it opens up access to knowledge and helps us to train our own thought. This means that Anker's representations are not only genre-style portraits of children, but young girls at the start of an intellectual emancipation that the artist desired for all Swiss citizens, male and female.

The occasion for the focus on Albert Anker in the presentation of the Kunstmuseum Bern's collection is the opening of the Centre Albert Anker in Ins in the early summer of 2024.

Opening

The opening of the exhibition will take place on

Thursday, 21 March 2024, from 6 pm.

Admission to the exhibition is free on this evening.

Curator

Kathleen Bühler

Assistant Curator

Anne-Christine Strobel

With the support of

Kanton Bern, Pierre Kottelat, Susanne and Franz Portmann

Digital Guide with Patti Basler

There is a freely accessible Digital Guide to accompany the exhibition. Apart from classical exhibition information the Digital Guide also includes a tour of the exhibition with the award-winning satirist and cabaret artist Patti Basler. From the exhibition opening the Digital Guide can be accessed under the following QR code:



Biography

1831

Born on 1 April in Ins, the second of three children of the vet Samuel Anker and Marianne Elisabeth Gatschet. Attends schools in Neuchâtel.

1845–48

Takes private drawing lessons with Louis Wallinger (1819–1886). 1847 death of his brother Rudolf and his mother.

1849–51

Grammar school in Bern. University entry qualification. Begins to study Theology at Bern University. First trip to Paris in September 1851.

1852–54

June 1852 death of his sister Luise. Continues studying Theology at the University of Halle in Germany. In the autumn of 1854 he moves to Paris, where he becomes a pupil of the Waadtland classicist Charles Gleyre (1806–1874).

1855–60

Attends the Ecole Impériale et Spéciale des Beaux-Arts.

Ab 1856

Takes part in rotating art exhibitions of the Swiss Art Association.

1859–85

Takes part in the Paris Salon.

1860

Death of his father. From now on Anker regularly spends the summer in Ins and winter in Paris.

1861

First trip to Italy, with his friend François Ehrmann.

1864

Marries Anna Ruefli (1835–1917) from Biel. They have six children: 1865 Louise / 1867 Rudolf (d. 1869) / 1870 Emil (d. 1871) / 1872 Marie / 1874 Moritz / 1877 Cécile.

1866

Anker wins a Gold Medal at the Paris Salon.

1870–74

Member of the Great Council of the Canton of Bern, advocates for the construction of Bern Art Museum.

1878

Appointed Knight of the Legion of Honour.

1889

Is elected to the Federal Art Commission along with Frank Buchser, Arnold Böcklin, François Boccion and others.

1890

Abandons his residence Paris. Begins work on the illustrations for the Gotthelf edition, repeated trips to Emmental.

1891–1901

Member of the Federal Commission of the Gottfried Keller Foundation.

1900

Honorary doctorate at Bern University.

1901

Suffers a stroke in late September. Impairment of his right hand. Largely abandons oil painting.

1910

Anker dies on 16 July in Ins.

Press images

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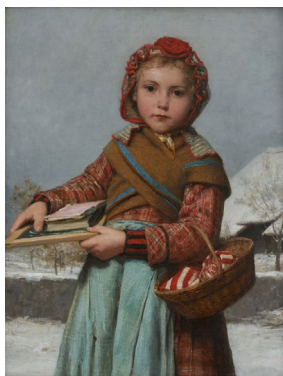
01

Albert Anker
Cécile Anker, 28 September 1886
Blue faience paint on paper
16,9 x 23,3 cm
Centre Albert Anker, Ins
Photo: © Kunstmuseum Bern



02

Albert Anker
The Reader [Die Lesende], 1883
Oil on canvas
94 x 110 cm
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Le Locle
Photo: © Le Locle, Musée des
Beaux-Arts, Lucas Olivet



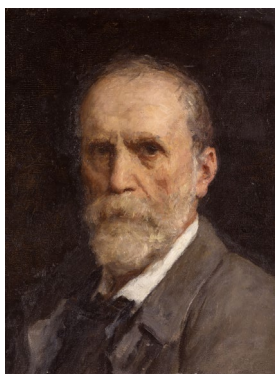
03

Albert Anker
Schoolgirl with Slate and Sewing Basket [Schulmädchen mit Schiefertafel und Nähkörbchen], 1878
Oil on canvas
60 x 47,5 cm
Stiftung für Kunst, Kultur und
Geschichte, Winterthur
Photo: © SKKG 2020



04

Albert Anker
Exam at the Village School, 1862
Oil on canvas
103 x 175 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Staat Bern
Photo: © Kunstmuseum Bern



05

Albert Anker
Self-portrait, 1901
Oil on canvas
48,2 x 36,2 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Donation by
the artist's widow
Photo: © Kunstmuseum Bern