



PALAIS
LIECHTENSTEIN

THE PRINCELY PALACES

THE FRESCO- AND STUCCO DECORATIONS of LIECHTENSTEIN GARDEN PALACE

Prince Johann Adam Andreas I, who commissioned building of the Palace, envisioned appointing the entire building through a continuous programme of work using artists from Bologna. However, his initial prospective candidate for the project, Bolognese artist Marcantonio Franceschini (1648–1729), with whom he engaged in an intensive exchange of correspondence, disappointed his client and could not be persuaded to travel to Vienna as a fresco painter. Consequently, the Prince ultimately had to turn to Austrian artists, and his choice fell on Johann Michael Rottmayr, who had previously worked in Salzburg, as well as for the imperial family. The Prince entrusted him with decoration of the Sala Terrena, the two suites on the ground floor each with three rooms, and also painting of the two stairways with monumental ceiling panels, which were long believed to have been lost.

For the highlight of the project - decoration of the Hercules Hall - Prince Johann Adam Andreas succeeded in recruiting the great master of Roman Baroque, Brother Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709) who, in 1704, created his ceiling fresco depicting “The Admittance of Hercules to Olympus”, a late work of extraordinary vitality.

THE INTENSE COLOURS OF ROTTMAYR'S FRESCOES

The ceiling frescoes on the ground floor reveal a masterful command of fresco techniques. The *giornate* (sections comprising a "day's work") mostly consist of a whole figure with surrounding area of cloud. Rottmayr transferred his designs to the ceiling using compositional grids and preliminary sketches (cartoons), sketching the outlines of the design into the damp plaster. However, in terms of painterly execution, he took a very free approach to these designs. Rottmayr's ceiling frescoes represent an early high point of illusionistic fresco painting in Austria. Above the architectural painting (*quadratura*), which may originate from Rottmayr himself, the view opens up into an expansive depiction of the pantheon of gods.

The strong colours of the frescoes are characteristic of the artist's early period. Evidence exists dating from 1707 confirming that Rottmayr procured expensive ultramarine blue. He also used 19 books of gold leaf. He achieved the three-dimensional modelling of his figures not through gradations in the brightness of a colour, but through strong colour shifts, for instance from pink to violet to a strong shade of blue. The excellent condition in which the frescoes have been preserved means that the brilliance of the colours can still be appreciated in all their authenticity today.

THE ILLUSIONISTIC ARCHITECTURAL PAINTING OF POZZO'S FRESCOES

Andrea Pozzo had previously met Prince John Adam Andreas I during work on the Church of Sant'Ignazio in Rome through the agency of Prince Anton Florian, imperial ambassador to the Papal Court. Presumably, Johann Adam Andreas I also introduced Pozzo to the Viennese imperial court. Pozzo's fresco in the Hercules Hall at the Palace depicts the exploits of Hercules and his admission to Olympus. The story of Hercules is told through the architectural painting in the peripheral area of the fresco while, in the centre, the view opens up into an expansive depiction of the pantheon of gods. The figures in the pantheon are depicted in parallel form as far as possible in order to incorporate the viewer's perspective. By contrast, the protagonists in the scenes surrounding the pantheon are very



dynamic and often depicted in greatly foreshortened form, since the architectural painting offers them a separate arena.

The quadratura painting is kept fairly simple. Above the cove, which increases in height, it conveys a continued "heightening" of the Hall into the flat ceiling panel.

PAINTINGS

Although Prince Johann Adam Andreas I had failed to persuade Marcantonio Franceschini to come to Vienna as a fresco painter, he eventually did succeed in engaging him to provide almost the entire portfolio of oil paintings at the Palace. The Prince originally intended to decorate the interior Palace walls throughout with an integrated programme of oil paintings, but he soon realized that such a plan was unrealistic in terms of both time and finance, obliging him to turn to other methods and techniques of room decoration. Over time, he commissioned oil paintings from Franceschini which were then set into the ceiling panels. Franceschini had grown up in Bologna surrounded by Classicism; dating back to Annibale Carracci, the movement persisted through the 17th century as a stylistic trend alongside Baroque. Domenichino, Reni and Albani continued this tradition, on which Franceschini was able to build. He was particularly rigorous in his implementation of Classicist trends and, in his presentation of narrative, he strove for absolute clarity. In engagement with the ancient Classical artistic canon of the human figure, not only was beauty of form idealized, but the beauty of the line as a stylistic device was also central. For clarity of form, uniform illumination was also important, and colour was subordinate to form, the role of colour being to clearly define form rather than be a separate medium of expression.

STUCCO DECORATION

Uniquely, the stucco decoration throughout the GARDEN PALACE has been preserved in its entirety. It was executed by Santino Bussi (1664–1736), who also signed his work in the collar of a dog depicted on a hunting trophy on the ground floor of the Palace. It is without doubt one of the finest stuccowork decorative schemes of the High Baroque in Vienna.

The original condition of the stuccowork is particularly remarkable given that the 18th-century stucco decorations in almost all other Viennese locations were extensively revised in the 19th century since, from the perspective of Historicism, they were no longer considered suitable for the status and prestige of the buildings in question. Santino Bussi came to Vienna from Milan in 1694 at the invitation of the Prince of Liechtenstein. At the time, a veritable construction boom had begun in the imperial capital, of which Bussi knew how to take advantage, becoming the leading stucco artist at the palaces of the early 18th century. Besides the Liechtenstein CITY PALACE and GARDEN PALACE, he also executed stuccowork at the Winter Palace and the Upper and Lower Belvedere Palaces of Prinz Eugene, as well as the palaces belonging to the Trautson and Harrach families. Bussi's stuccowork at the GARDEN PALACE followed directly on from his work at the CITY PALACE.

The two main themes of the painterly decoration are reflected in the three-dimensional ornaments: allegories and mythological scenes provide *exempla virtutis*, i.e. examples of virtuous action, or illustrate princely rural life. Bussi signed a contract for decoration of the vestibule in 1704, which he fulfilled the following year. From 1706 he worked on the stucco of the staircases and the piano nobile. By 1708, the gilded wall decoration on the side walls of the Hercules Hall and the simpler stucco on the second floor followed.



VESTIBULE AND SALA TERRENA

A vaulted structure of bays and transverse arches characterizes the ceiling of the vestibule and the Sala Terrena. Rottmayr's frescoes in the bays are flanked by stucco reliefs, the spaces between them filled with delicate acanthus tendrils, leafwork and leaf garlands. Slender candelabra grotesques with putti and various animals, or simply flower bouquets, are set on the transverse arches. Wider arches provide space for hunting trophies and small hunting scenes: storks snapping at frogs, herons at grapes. Putti and satyrs adorn sprays of twigs and flowers. The stuccowork of the Sala Terrena also affords an initial encounter with the theme of Hercules, a theme that assumes epic dimensions in the fresco by Andrea Pozzo in the grand hall of the piano nobile, the Hercules Hall.

STUCCO CEILINGS ON THE FIRST FLOOR

The stucco ceilings of the piano nobile rooms have round or octagonal central panels framed by the décor. The Great Gallery, with its curved, contoured panels, follows the same pattern. For the most part, medallions with reliefs are set in the corners. A profiled strip, incorporating angles and curves, connects them to form a frame around which leaf tendrils wind or on which flower festoons hang. In every room, however, the fundamental form as well as the shaping is slightly varied, so that no two ceilings are the same.

The medallions contain reliefs of the cardinal virtues, classical busts of generals, personifications of the continents, centaurs fighting and plundering, as well as a triumphal procession of a laurel-crowned general with the spoils of war and prisoners in his entourage. Scenes of Hercules in the Great Gallery take up the theme of the fresco in the Hercules Hall.

Santino Bussi's delicate tendril work was style-defining in Vienna around 1700. It evolved from the more impressively developed acanthus ornamentation, which was increasingly adopted in Germany from about 1650 onwards, where it acquired the form of organically climbing leafwork. Bussi's leafwork exhibits very individual shapes; where the motif tapers out towards the edge, the fleshy stems are reduced to almost thread-like, linear structures and the clearly-defined profile of the vigorous leaves fades to shallow relief.

DISCOVERY & RESTORATION OF ROTTMAYR'S FRESCOES, BELIEVED LOST

Since April 2006, the fully-restored stairways of the Liechtenstein GARDEN PALACE in Rossau have been open to the public once more. In the course of restoration work at the Palace, major frescoes by Johann Michael Rottmayr were rediscovered in both stairwells. Following long and detailed discussions concerning the works, which are so significant in art-historical terms, Prince Hans-Adam II von und zu Liechtenstein decided to have them restored and their missing sections reworked.

HISTORY

In a contract signed on 30 October 1705, Prince Johann Adam-Andreas I commissioned artist Johann Michael Rottmayr to paint two ceilings above the two grand staircases. By the 19th century, parts of the frescoes in both stairwells had either collapsed or been damaged, probably due to water ingress. As so often happened with the historical use of princely buildings, the cheapest option was chosen: in both stairwells, the decision was made to cover them over with the large-scale paintings by Antonio Bellucci which had become available during redesign of the princely palace in Bankgasse, when the gallery was relocated to the Rossau quarter. Each had a large centrepiece – the painting on the eastern staircase measured 12 x 8 metres – surrounded by four smaller paintings, oval in shape, at each corner. They were given simple stucco frames, while the remaining ceiling surfaces were plastered over. As a result, knowledge of the original fresco decoration faded. Only a description of the Palace dating from 1815



provided clues as to the iconography of the vanished imagery, giving rise to speculation that fragments of frescoes might still exist beneath the oil paintings.

THE DECISION TO EXPOSE THE FRESCOES

In order to be able to realistically estimate the extent of the missing sections and the damage caused by chisel marks made in the stucco, a thorough appraisal was undertaken. The investigations concluded that it was worth taking the risk of uncovering the hidden works. The key issue of debate was the question of how to deal with the missing sections; possible solutions ranged from neutral coverage of the destroyed surfaces with a base coat of plaster, to neutral coverage using coloured surfaces, to interpreting the content of the works through additions using a grisaille technique, or complete reconstruction. Following extensive consultation and discussion, Prince Hans-Adam II decided on full restoration, the only option which would restore the decorative value of the fresco enabling an immersive experience of the original Baroque features.

The decision to expose the fresco was contingent on a watercolour sketch by Rottmayr from a private collection in northern Italy. For a long time, this sketch had been associated with a commission given to Salzburg-born Rottmayr for work at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna. Indeed, it was not until 1989 that Hellmut Lorenz identified a link between this sketch and the fresco in the eastern stairwell of the GARDEN PALACE, though he could not prove it at the time. However, when the fresco was finally uncovered in 2002, his presumption was finally confirmed. Happily the sketch, which depicts all the central groups of figures as well as the lost sections, corresponds exactly to the executed parts of the fresco.

THE RESTORATION (2002–2006)

Work began in late summer 2002 on the eastern stairwell. Firstly, all the covering plasterwork was removed, followed by the protective wire mesh. Then the entire fresco could be carefully cleaned. While the surface of the middle section in particular was covered in vast quantities of cobwebs, as well as dust, there was also a thin limewash film over the plastered areas that needed removing, as this initially made the surfaces appear relatively dull.

As a result of this cleaning operation alone, the untouched areas in the middle section and the previously covered surfaces matched up well. The condition of the preserved sections of the frescoes was particularly gratifying since, protected from light and having gathered virtually no dust, they had survived the past two centuries in all their vivid colour.

The restorers then proceeded firstly to cover the chisel marks and then to remedy the smaller defects using lime mortar. Here, their skill lay in matching the surface structure of the puttying as closely as possible to the original. For areas of large defects, the old reeds – the plaster base – were first removed, and then two intersecting layers of reeds were applied to the ceiling beams, serving as the new plaster base. The retouching work took over eighteen months to complete. The condition of the frescoes having improved appreciably, the lead restorer, Herbert Schwaha, embarked on the final step: completing the additions. All the missing parts were pre-drawn in a 1:1 proportion on foils, and their outlines were then engraved into the fresco plaster.

Just as with the original frescoes, these engravings in the plaster are still clearly visible after painting. However, the restorer also used the technique of first roughly sketching the composition onto the plaster base using charcoal. The sequence of work steps, too, was based on the historical divisions and techniques of labour. First of all, the quadratura painting was completed, the trompe l'oeil architecture that opens up into an expansive view of the pantheon. Only then did Herbert Schwaha start to complete



the groups of figures. If he did not manage a scheduled day's work (*giornata*), the whitened surface was cut out and scraped off. Furthermore, if work on a particular compartment failed, then likewise it was scraped off and the work was repeated the next day.

This classical fresco technique was also the one used originally. Due to a silicate layer forming on the surface, it ensures optimal binding of colour pigments and a luminosity of colour that cannot be achieved using any other technique.

THE FRESCO ON THE EASTERN STAIRCASE: THE ADMITTANCE OF MILITARY GENIUS TO OLYMPUS

The ceiling fresco on the eastern staircase of the Liechtenstein GARDEN PALACE depicts almost the entire classical pantheon of the gods over an area of around 220 square metres. The composition consists of three main groups who, having regard to the changing viewpoints from the staircase, are arranged in relation to each other at 90-degree angles. Referring to the central representation, in which a boy - to be interpreted as an embodiment of the military genius of Prince Johann Adam Andreas I von Liechtenstein, who sponsored construction of the GARDEN PALACE – is carried into the pantheon by the goddess Minerva, the fresco bears the title "Admittance of Military Genius to Olympus". This so-called apotheosis is symbolized by a genius who hands the boy a laurel crown and palm branch while, below, two putti play with the club of Hercules.

THE FRESCO ON THE WESTERN STAIRCASE: THE FALL OF THE GIANTS

The western staircase depicts "The Fight of the Giants against the Gods". The focus is on Zeus, carried by an eagle, who directs his thunderbolt towards the giants. Mars, Venus, Mercury and Diana stand as if behind a bank of cloud serving as a shield, observing events. Minerva involves herself much more actively in the fight, not protected by the clouds, but by a resplendent image of Medusa. Contrasting with the attractive physiques and visages of the deities are the powerful figures of the intertwined giants as they battle the gods, lifting mighty boulders to hurl against them. The composition is magnificent; while the fresco in the eastern stairwell is conceived with focus towards the centre, here, the figures move from the edges towards an almost empty centre.