

**MON**  
MONACENSIA

***Maria Theresia 23***  
**Biography**  
*of a Munich*  
**villa**

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A Monacensia exhibition  
at Hildebrandhaus

English Translations



## **Maria Theresia 23**

Does a house have a biography? Can a space, a neighbourhood have a biography?

Today, Hildebrandhaus welcomes everyone interested in discovering, exploring and experiencing literary Munich. When he had the villa built in the late 1800s, the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand designed it as both an imposing studio and a residence for himself and his family. Here, at Maria-Theresia-Strasse 23, life and art would intertwine in perfect harmony.

Between now and then, Hildebrandhaus bore witness to life stories shaped by cruel and tragic twists of fate. National Socialism is a chapter in its history shaped by persecution, dispossession and annihilation. At the villa and in its immediate neighbourhood, those persecuted lived side by side with profiteers and representatives of the Nazi regime.

Processes of repression and forgetting have left gaps and blind spots in our collective memory that persist far into the post-war period. Therefore, this exhibition also sets out to uncover events and stories of people, both lost and barely told.

## **An upscale residential neighbourhood on the high banks of the Isar River**

In 1890, Prince Regent Luitpold commissions Court Garden Director Jakob Möhl to extend Prinzregentenstrasse east across the high banks of the Isar River and toward the city boundary. The plans include an exclusive residential area. This upscale and elegant neighbourhood nestles between Maximilian Park and Ismaninger Strasse. Largely completed by 1910, it proves equally popular with aristocrats, officers, senior civil servants, scientists, industrialists, architects, artists, and their families.

In 1898, the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand, his wife Irene and their six children move to their prestigious residence and studio at Maria-Theresia-Strasse 23. Their household includes assistants, servants and a cook. The villa's organic mix of spaces for creative work, family life and socialising is Adolf von Hildebrand's own design, executed by the renowned Munich architect, Gabriel von Seidl.

## **Career location Munich**

In 1891, the City of Munich commissions the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand to build the Wittelsbach Fountain on the square we know today as Lenbachplatz. The memorial monument celebrates the completion of new pipework that will supply Munich with clean drinking water. The tender requires a Munich-based artist to build the fountain. Adolf von Hildebrand secures this major public commission by moving his primary residence from Florence to Munich. The fountain's inauguration in 1895 marks the starting point of his rise to fame in the city.

His next major public project is the Hubertus Fountain. He erects the temple-style fountain pavilion dedicated to Prince Regent Luitpold on the terrace of the Bavarian National Museum in 1909. Here, it serves as a companion piece to the Prince Regent's equestrian statue unveiled at a ceremony in November 1913. Today, Hildebrand's third monumental fountain in Munich, the Father Rhine Fountain, graces Museum Island.

## **Adopted country Italy**

Adolf von Hildebrand travels extensively in Italy, driven by his desire to study in depth the art and formal language of antiquity and the Renaissance. In 1874, he purchases San Francesco di Paola, a secularised friary on a hill overlooking Florence, and remodels it to include a studio and living quarters. For over 20 years, he lives at San Francesco with his wife Irene and their growing family: Eva (\*1877), Elisabeth (\*1878), Irene (\*1880), Silvia (\*1884), Berta (\*1886) and Dietrich (\*1889). The family includes Alfred, Irene's son from her first marriage to the writer Franz Koppel. Adolf von Hildebrand teaches the children himself. They learn to draw and model, and he encourages them to create art and make music. The doors to his studio are always open to them.

Under the care of its highly educated and wealthy hostess, Irene von Hildebrand, San Francesco emerges as a lively social meeting place for artists, musicians and the aristocracy. The women's rights activist and composer Ethel Smyth and Empress Elisabeth of Austria are among its visitors.

## **Teacher and art theorist**

Around the turn of the century, many consider Adolf von Hildebrand the pre-eminent German sculptor of his time. On the international stage, his name appears alongside that of the French pioneer of modernism, Auguste Rodin. Hildebrand has long had a strong desire to establish a stonework school in Munich, where he could teach based on his principles of art education. He elaborates on these principles in his highly acclaimed book *The Problem of Form*. In a special arrangement Hildebrand finds himself in a position to realise his plans when the Munich Art Academy appoints him as a professor in 1906. With his assistant Erwin Kurz, he takes over teaching the sculpture class and sets out to update the academic style that, until then, had heavily favoured historicism.

Hildebrand does not limit himself to major public projects but accepts numerous private commissions. His diverse artistic oeuvre comprises sculptures, reliefs, garden fountains, mantelpieces, funerary monuments, busts and portraits.

Today, he is widely regarded as the founder of the Munich School of Sculpture.

## **Art, music and table talk**

Irene and Adolf von Hildebrand's open and welcoming home soon establishes itself as an influential salon for Munich's cultural elite. People congregate, celebrate, dine, chat and exchange witty repartee in the parlour and adjoining dining room. They read to each other and engage in heated, often controversial, discussions. House concerts are a regular entertainment that finds Adolf von Hildebrand playing the viola with great enthusiasm.

The family is on friendly terms with the Bavarian royal family. Prince Regent Luitpold is a frequent visitor at the studio, and Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria and his wife Marie Gabrielle often join the salon to mingle with its guests. The writer Annette Kolb and her sister Germaine, the conductor Hermann Levi, the actress Eleonora Duse, and the director of the Bayreuth Festival, Cosima Wagner, are all part of the inner circle. As are the reform pedagogue Georg Kerschensteiner, the banker and art collector Robert von Mendelssohn and his wife Giulietta, the archaeologist Adolf Furtwängler and his son, Wilhelm, who would later gain fame as a conductor.

## Literature and the Bohème

The writer Annette Kolb, the daughter of French pianist Sophie Kolb-Danvin and Munich landscape architect Max Kolb, is a frequent guest at the artist's villa and enjoys a long-standing friendship with the von Hildebrand family. When Kolb wavers between literature and music, Adolf von Hildebrand is a strong influence in Kolb's choice of career. In 1913, she celebrates her first major success with her novel *The Specimen*.

The writer Franziska zu Reventlow, too, has a personal relationship with Adolf von Hildebrand. Their acquaintance dates back to 1893 when she first came to Munich to train as a painter and sculptor. A letter from Adolf von Hildebrand suggests she was taking modelling classes with him at the time. When a lack of funds forces her to give up sculpting, Reventlow turns to writing and translating to support herself. The Monacensia literary archive houses the extensive literary estates of Annette Kolb and Franziska zu Reventlow.

## **Art, theology and resistance**

When Adolf von Hildebrand dies in 1921, his son Dietrich and his daughter Irene inherit equal shares of the Munich villa, where they live with their families. Irene, a sculptor herself, is married to Theodor Georgii, one of Hildebrand's pupils. Both work in the first-floor studios. To finance the house's upkeep, the siblings rent out individual rooms and studio spaces. Dietrich von Hildebrand is a philosopher and theologian and teaches as a private lecturer from 1919 and as an associate professor of philosophy of religion at the University of Munich from 1925. He continues the tradition of the intellectual salon until Hitler comes to power in 1933, forcing the vocal critic of National Socialism to flee Germany. In 1936, the regime bans sculptor Irene Georgii from practising her profession. Theodor Georgii shifts his focus to Christian art and accepts a teaching position in Vienna. Financial circumstances force the family to prepare for the villa's sale.

## **Writer from a Jewish Munich family**

In the autumn of 1934, Elisabeth Braun assumes ownership of Hildebrandhaus. She hails from a well-established and widely ramified Jewish Munich family. Her father, Julius Braun, and her grandfather, Heinrich Braun, were master tailors and owners of a tailor's shop at Theatinerstrasse 52. Elisabeth Braun is single and lives in her parents' flat on Promenadeplatz. From 1919 she maintains a second home in Tegernsee, where she is listed as a writer. In 1920, Elisabeth Braun leaves the Jewish Community to join the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Upon her father's death, she inherits a significant fortune, allowing her to lead an independent life. She takes over the running of Hildebrandhaus and plans extensive remodeling. While she herself does not immediately take up residence, her stepmother, Rosa Braun, moves into a six-room flat on the first floor. Little is known about Elisabeth Braun's personal life. Her literary legacy is yet to be discovered.

## **Maria-Theresia-Strasse 26 – Villa Benno Becker**

High-ranking Nazi officials soon home in on Bogenhausen as a desirable place to live. Starting in 1938, Jewish families face systematic threats: they are robbed of their rights and their property forcibly expropriated. Near Hildebrandhaus, Franziska Becker, the widow of the Jewish landscape painter Benno Becker, is pressured into selling her home to Martin Bormann, a Reichsleiter of the NSDAP, for a price far below its actual value. Specifically designed for Benno Becker and completed in 1905, the impressive villa was the architect Paul Ludwig Troost's first independent project. From 1930, Troost takes on commissions from Hitler to design extravagant representational buildings; these include the NSDAP party headquarters overlooking Königsplatz and Haus der Kunst on Prinzregentenstrasse.

In the years following the end of World War II, the heavily damaged Villa Becker is rightfully returned to Johanna Becker, the daughter of Franziska and Benno Becker. Subject to property speculation after its sale, the villa is torn down in 1969. Today, of the former Villa Becker, only two lion sculptures survive, serving as reminders of its past.

## **Persecution and disenfranchisement**

Because of her Jewish background, Elisabeth Braun faces systematic persecution. The authorities under the Nazi regime deprive her of her rights and possessions. In 1938, the “Ordinance on the Registration of Jewish Property” provides Nazis authorities with the legal framework to systematically confiscate the property of Jewish citizens, so Elisabeth Braun has to declare her assets. In addition to Hildebrandhaus, she owns half of the family’s ancestral home at Theatinerstrasse 52 and in 1939, she receives the first official order to sell Hildebrandhaus. She defends herself against the authorities’ coercive measures in legally sound letters. As the pressure mounts, she draws up her will on 21 June 1940, naming the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria as the sole beneficiary. In July 1941, increasingly menacing threats force Elisabeth Braun to sell her property at Theatinerstrasse 52 and the Nazi authorities order Rosa and Elisabeth Braun to vacate Hildebrandhaus by 16 August.

## **Humanitarian aid and Jewish culture**

In the years after the war, the Hildebrandhaus neighbourhood gains prominence as a vital meeting place for survivors of the Shoah; they call themselves She'arit Hapleta, the Surviving Remnant. For a brief period, Bogenhausen provides a unique infrastructure of Jewish life, boasting a synagogue, hospital, schools, eateries, theatres and newspapers. The American military government confiscates several "aryanised" villas in Möhlstrasse. Here, aid organisations offer assistance to Jews and displaced individuals liberated from concentration camps. Makeshift shops in the villas' front gardens sell relief supplies and a wide variety of goods. Möhlstrasse transforms into a bustling hub, attracting hundreds of people every day.

Joint, a US charitable organisation, and the Central Committee of Liberated Jews relocate to a building across from Hildebrandhaus. When the artist villa, too, is flagged for temporary seizure, the remaining residents use all means at their disposal to fight back.

## **Rescue at the last minute**

In 1948, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria officially acknowledges Elisabeth Braun's legacy. Some of the individuals who settled into Hildebrandhaus during the Nazi era continue to reside there. Sculptors work in the studios, and the Church provides flats to its employees. The villa falls into noticeable disrepair, leading to its sale in 1967. Munich citizens fervently protest the impending demolition of the cultural landmark. The Bavarian Monument Protection Act of 1973 saves the artist's villa at the last minute. Hildebrandhaus is the first case to fall under the new law that prioritises cultural value over financial concerns. With backing from the Bavarian Monument Protection Fund, the Free State of Bavaria acquires the property in 1974 for the state's capital city, Munich. On 19 October 1977, after extensive restoration, Lord Mayor Georg Kronawitter entrusts Hildebrandhaus to the Munich City Library as the new home of the Monacensia archive.

## **Literary voices**

Monacensia celebrates new and rediscovered texts: poetry, prose, comics, screenplays, theatre texts, songs, visual art texts, writing experiments, and literature that transcends genre boundaries. With readings, salons and dialogue series, the literary archive creates opportunities to explore and discuss literature.

Monacensia hosts newcomers, established authors and their respective audiences, bringing together the city's diverse literary voices. This is where Munich's independent scene meets.

## **Writing in the studio**

In 2022, Monacensia awards its first annual writing residency to authors from Munich, each residency spanning multiple months. The resident writers curate personal encounters and unconventional events that offer uniquely intimate insights into their creative process.

## **#FemaleHeritage**

From the perspective of the pioneers of the women's movement, we are enjoying the very future they endeavoured to shape. Their ideas about society stand at the core of their novels, poems, essays and plays. They have lost none of their relevance. Researching the literary archive and delving into their works is a worthwhile endeavour when searching for the blueprints for a society based on solidarity. Exhibitions, such as "Live free! The Women of Bohemia 1890–1920"; festivals like the "Female Peace Palace"; and #FemaleHeritage projects encourage audiences to engage with their historical ideas and demands. FEMale\*Society, an open network launched by Monacensia and the Münchner Kammerspiele theatre, stands for a contemporary artistic search for traces of utopias of coexistence. The discourses of early reformers and women's and human rights activists are essential points of reference.

## **A culture of remembrance for all**

Munich is a metropolis, and its literature mirrors its diverse voices and faces. In their literary worlds, as a matter of course, the authors who live here tend to focus on their narratives rather than the city itself. This is precisely why their works are vital as contemporary historical documents of everyday life and world events.

The Monacensia collections, though extensive, have yet to capture the metropolis' full chorus of voices. The voices of those who have experienced migration or exile, of women, and queer communities have gone largely unheard. This is why Monacensia is changing how it builds and adds to its collections. This fresh approach gives visibility to the Munich of the Many, both present and past. Artistic research enables interdisciplinary approaches and new insights into cultural heritage. In its network, Monacensia is developing new strategies to shape an open culture of remembrance for all and, in looking back, complement its past. The Monacensia serves as a source of inspiration for new literary texts, works and research projects.