

Art, Madness—Chocolate

Adolf Wölfli

From May until October 2014

In 2013 the heirs of Paul Haldemann donated the drawing *Vusli-aana:Vulkan. Gross-Gross-Keiserinn Adolfina* (*Vusli-aana:Volcano. Great Great Empress Adolfina*) to the Adolf Wölfli Foundation. Haldemann was the son of the janitor at Waldau Psychiatric Clinic and became personally acquainted with Adolf Wölfli, who gave him the drawing as a present in 1920. In 1924, while he was training to become a teacher, Haldemann gave a talk on Wölfli and his art. His talk is published here for the first time.

In his talk (see below), Paul Haldemann presents his personal insights into Wölfli's art and what he was like as a person. He describes his encounter with the artist, explains three of his drawings and proposes that we view people in psychiatric clinics in a different way. This new understanding was, among others, influenced by Walter Morgenthaler's pioneer study of Adolf Wölfli, *Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler* (A mental patient as artist). Published in 1921, the monograph caused quite a furore in the early 1920s (see Morgenthaler's personal copy in the display case). While artists and intellectuals were very enthusiastic about it, the book was received in a rather condescending manner in psychiatric circles. The Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* devoted a two-part review to it, the German poet Lou Andreas-Salomé and Rainer Maria Rilke discussed it in their correspondence, and the Swiss artist Fritz Baumann visited Wölfli in Waldau where he purchased artworks from the patient. Additionally, in 1921, bookshops in Bern, Basle and Zurich exhibited Wölfli's drawings during the launch of *Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler*—so that Wölfli had his first exhibitions. Theodor Tobler, the owner of the chocolate factory in Bern (Toblerone!), visited Wölfli too. In the company's magazine *Jurnalo Tobler* exhibited here he tells the story of his encounter with the artist. Entitled "Kunst, Wahnsinn – Chocolate" (Art, madness—chocolate), it included a coloured reproduction of the drawing Wölfli made especially for him with, showing among other the Tobler factory on Länggassstrasse (now "Uni Tobler").

Publications, lectures, exhibitions, and reports were instrumental in paving the way for a new way of viewing art, the psyche, and ultimately humanity. With the spread of Fascism, however, this development came to a halt and after 1930 silence descended on Wölfli's works too. After World War II, the French artist Jean Dubuffet significantly contributed to the renewal of interest in artists such as Wölfli. Dubuffet, taking his idea of "Art brut" as a starting point, accrued a collection of art by social outcasts that is still a model today (In 1975 he donated it to the city of Lausanne.) On display are a series of his publications revealing Dubuffet's keen professionalism and knowledge in graphic design to promote his idea of an "Art brut".

Daniel Baumann
Curator, Adolf Wölfli Foundation

Talk given by Paul Haldemann, Seminar, Hofwil 1924
[Original in the display case]

A Dreamer

I would like you to acquaint you with a long-term patient of Waldau Psychiatric Clinic. We often hear people say: "Mr So-and-so is in Waldau; have things gotten that bad? He is probably in a padded cell; does he have to wear a straitjacket permanently? ..." And so on. But these are all outdated means of dealing with mentally challenged people. Those who suffer from seizures are put into a warm bath these days so that they calm down in good time. It is false to believe that the inmates of a psychiatric clinic are that sick that it is impossible to have a reasonable conversation with them. Among mental patients there are a good number who are highly intelligent. For example, they may be musicians, budding poets, actors, jurists and other intellectuals and, not least, draftsmen.

The patient I am speaking of today draws too, but he is not a draftsman. His biography is briefly as follows: He was born in Bern in 1864 [actually in Bowil]. Already as an 8-year-old he was forced to go to Schangnau in the district of Emmental with his mother, where he had to do all kinds of chores as a hireling and was subject to all kinds of maliciousness. For a while he had the reputation of a hard-working farm laborer. However, he fell victim to his animal urges and sought sexual satisfaction with children. After several terms of imprisonment his mental state was examined: The specialists who undertook this assessed Wölfli as a person who was suffering from a mental disorder and as a danger to the public. The person in question has now been residing in Waldau Clinic for some 30 years. He was only recently finally allowed to visit the City of Bern after not having seen it in all that time.

Already in his first days at the clinic this patient sketched absurd drawings that were largely ignored until only ten years ago. By the acquisition of paper and color pencils through an enterprising doctor, the obscure squiggles turned into shapes and forms and eventually evolved into compositions. Adolf Wölfli has in the meantime created many hundreds of his so-called "portraits". This picture [see the photograph in Jurnalo Tobler] is of him in his cell alongside a pile of his drawings, which only represent a fraction of his entire oeuvre to date. We see him as a threat to society but this is not the case. In truth he is pleasant company. Several days ago I visited him and I found the encounter highly interesting.

Wölfli sat at a table composing because music was the art that currently preoccupied him. When I came in he got up, shook hands and bid me welcome. Immediately he began to explain his most recent song. He had received a picture cut out of a fashion magazine with pretty models dressed in the latest Parisian fashion. Then he sung the song he had given the title "der kleine St. Adolphskuss" (the tiny St Adolph kiss) in

KUNST
MUSEUM
BERN

CREDIT SUISSE
Partner of the Kunstmuseum Bern

Burggemeinde
Bern

praise of the young women whom he called holy princesses. Soon, however, Wölfli interrupted his song and told me of his travels with the family of God the Father. It is always more or less the same story: "Wölfli travelled on subway, an airplane and by sea too. At a certain point they entered the earth's interior and rode on a train that travelled exceptionally fast (many times faster than a stroke of lightning) along very tight hairpin curves up a huge tunnel until they reached the mountain peak, which was so high that one could no longer see the earth below. There were terraces in the tunnel every now and again and large cities had been built on them—or they were covered with alpine meadows and glaciers. In a careless moment, Wölfli fell but was called back to life by his father, the Almighty Creator." This is his story and he tells it in every conceivable way. (p. 4 the large tunnel)

Wölfli explained the various drawings in his cell in response to my asking about them. He had stuck pictures all over the walls and the ceiling. On the four walls of his cell there were some 800 postcards he had been given as presents and between them he had put his own compositions.

Then I asked him to explain the drawing I had acquired some four years ago. He began to tell me about it and I had the pleasure of listening to him explain it for around a whole hour. The same content had to be repeated often before I could understand the logic of it all. As with all his pictures, in this case too the corresponding text was written on the back. (You can check out the orthography afterwards for yourself.) It begins with: "No.12. This picture is in keeping with the 6-million-hour calculation method, the 333-quadrillion-hours-high mountain Hochalpstock and volcano with numerous, every one of them gargantuan, glaciers and mountains, Vladivostok on the northern borders of Japan." This is supposed to be Hochalpstock. The artist has given the mountain the shape of a raven. Why he linked the Hochalpstock of the Glarus Alps with the Japanese port of Vladivostok I cannot say. "The latter, (meaning Vladivostok) has 600 Ysanteron cubic hours content with a total of around 9 Benitif souls." Here we hear of the content of the city that amounts to a nearly 68-digit number. The population can also only be given in a 63-digit number. "With the same moniker, St Adolph-Throne-Gigantic-Ridge on the ridge of Hochalpstock has some 2 trillion hours according to the calculation method; 66 Unitif hours elevation; 600 Warantt cubic hours content, with a total of 9 Zorn [anger, a very high number invented by Wölfli] souls." He means this ring: "On the entire Throne-Hochalpstock-Ridge there is, in keeping with the calculation method, 100 Unitif hours, Vladivostok St. Adolph-Ring; Almighty Gargantuan City." This is where Vladivostok is supposed to be, and then he included the name Vusliana Volcano. "Right at the bottom is Vladivostok and ditto St Adolph's Cradle, both inconceivably large cities." Underneath all of it he has included this arch. At the end he added the note: "Christmas gift in value of 20 francs for P.[au]l H.[aldemann], janitor, Waldau Clinic. St Adolph II, Neubau, Bern 1920." He calls himself St Adolph II as the son of the Almighty Creator. Neubau is the name of the building in which he is kept.

That was his explanation 4 years ago. Now he describes the meaning of the picture as follows: "The raven represents Hochalpstock, framed by a large ring of farms. They are all large farms with 4 farm centers, each with over 100 subsidiaries. This is a so-called cross of lights, building part of the center, and these are cherries with canaries. Here are prehistoric birds. This represents a huge cellar vault in Hochalpstock through which the almighty train travels and where you find expansive sidewalks—as well as traffic with cars, pushbikes, carriages and planes 'that no devil would ever get over the stack', as he said. The veiled woman's head is only decoration just as the small, 5-colored St Adolph birds are too. This is a rock tribune around Hochalpstock and so is this one, with the difference that here we also have alpine meadows. Both eyes and ears are locked in by the birds of the mountain pastures. The nostrils are protected by an umbrella. Here he made a drawing also of the great-great Em-press St Adolphina with the small double-tailed bird. As you have seen, fantasy obviously plays the key role in the case of this person.

I was likewise able to bring along 2 further paintings. By appearances we see that all the pictures have a certain similarity, but according to his explanations each of them has its own special meaning. The small one represents a 25-ton-heavy diamond. I could not comprehend the 2nd one. I will read out the number and perhaps one of you may find a clear meaning.

To conclude I would like to recommend Dr. W. Morgenthaler's book *Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler* (A mental patient as artist) to all those who

are interested in finding out more about this patient. The book was published by Verlag E. Bircher in Bern.

Explanation. The center of this picture: the Greater-East-Sea-Horologe, with the Sabock-Pointers, my humble self in the middle: the Gaschnee Snail and the wissa Koralla-Glökkeli-Song is north of Lake Garden, Bäl-berg, St. Adolph's Cradle. left, or to the north, is the Fryctoria. To the right is St Adolph's Farm. In its entirety, complete with the bird book and cherries, it is perhaps 80 quadrant hours surface area and is a huge city with an average height of 48 storeys and with 5,550,000 souls. The latter, created by the Almighty Creator himself in the fall of 1868, is a presidency with the Swiss coat of arms & memorial monument. The latter, with a grove of tall trees and also encircled by a three-part, large ring of farms does not belong to the total Swiss population. In the aforementioned during our presence there I fell down outside the city over a densely forested cliff to my death. However, our Almighty Leader woke me up again straight away. If you go vertically downwards under this city you will find in 10 hours, in keeping with the calculation method, 450 storey-high Bälberg-St. Adolph-Cellar as a county with around 100 million souls. The year of my birth Linde 1864 has been inscribed in the courtyard of the spa rooms where our beneficiary is. My own brother printed it there with the permission of the manager Streit (?). In the winter of 1864/65 we lived in the little house where the morgue now is. We request an adequate token of appreciation toward St Adolph II Neubau 1924.

Short biography: Adolf Wölfli

Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930) grew up in utter poverty in Emmental and Bern. He became an orphan at the age of 8 and worked as a hireling. He came up against the law several times and was locked away in Waldau Psychiatric Clinic near Bern in 1895 at the age of 31, where he stayed until he died in 1930. In Waldau Clinic he transformed his life history into a splendid vision: in text and image he described on over 25,000 pages how the future "Skt. Adolf-Riesen-Schöpfung" (St Adolf gigantic creation) would come to be with him as St Adolf II at its head. The Adolf Wölfli Foundation was inaugurated in 1975 and represents Wölfli's estate.

2014 will see Wölfli's 150th birthday. On this occasion various events will be taking place. The first highlight will be on the weekend of August 28 and 29, 2014.

For more information please visit: www.150woelfli.ch

Friday, August 29 (Kunsthalle Bern)

12-hour reading out of: Adolf Wölfli *Von der Wiege bis zum Graab* (From the cradle to the grave) from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

Saturday, August 30 (Kunsthalle Bern)

4:00 p.m.	<u>Kokosnüsse</u> (Coconuts) Balts Nill und Lorenz Pauli. For children from 7 to 10 years
6:00 p.m.	5x music and text about Adolf Wölfli with <u>Eric Förster, Kjell Keller</u> and others.
8:00 p.m.	<u>Bern ist überall</u> . Texts on Wölfli by Gerhard Meister, Antoine Jaccoud, Michael Stauffer, Ariane von Graffenried, Michael Pfeuti and Adi Blum
10:00 p.m.	Concert featuring <u>Fred Frith</u>

Sunday, August 31 (Waldau, Psychiatrie-Museum and Waldaukappelle)

3:00 p.m.	Guided tour through the Psychiatrie-Museum, Bern
6:30 p.m.	Waldaukappelle: <u>Trio Montin</u> (Christine Ragaz, violin; Rosemarie Burri, piano; Matthias Schranz, cello) with compositions by <u>Roland Moser</u> (premiere) and <u>Sándor Veress</u> . <u>Daniel Glaus</u> is playing his organ compositions for Wölfli (premiere)