

# The Prinzhorn Collection – Psychiatric Clinic Art with International Standing

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Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933)

## 1 The Prinzhorn Collection

Dating back to a post World War I project led by the art historian and psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933), the famous Prinzhorn Collection is based on over 5,000 works created by psychiatric clinic inmates in German speaking countries between 1850 and 1930. Since the 1980's, the fund has been enriched by approximately 12,000 new works by "psychiatrically experienced people" from 1900 to the present. In 2001, the Collection was moved to its own museum, in a converted late 19<sup>th</sup> century lecture hall building (► [image](#)).

The Prinzhorn Collection in the general psychiatric department of the University Clinic in Heidelberg is world famous for its fund of institutional art. It contains over 5000 sketches, paintings, sculptures, and textile works originating from the period, between 1850 and 1930 from a variety of psychiatric institutions, clinics, and sanatoriums, mainly in German speaking countries. The majority were sent to Heidelberg in the early 1920s in response to an appeal by the art historian and physician Hans Prinzhorn.

## History of the Prinzhorn Collection

In 1919, the then head of the psychiatric department, Karl Wilmanns (1873-1945), appointed Hans Prinzhorn assistant doctor in Heidelberg. It was his task to expand the small teaching collection that had been started between 1890 and 1903 by Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926), and to evaluate it in a scientific study. Prinzhorn's book *Artistry of the Mentally III* was published in 1922. The exceptionally elaborately produced and richly illustrated volume aroused curiosity amongst many art lovers for the often astoundingly original works of art by individuals who had been marginalised as "insane", which until then had barely been noticed. Regarded as a classic, this pioneering work has been reprinted many times.

After Prinzhorn's departure in 1922, the senior physician Hans Gruhle took over the collection. He accepted further donations and organised exhibitions at home and abroad. Between 1933 and 1945, some of the Heidelberg works were only on view once as "reference material" as part of the travelling exhibition "Entartete Kunst" ("Degenerate Art"), which was on display in several German towns between 1938 and 1941.



The Prinzhorn Collection Museum in Heidelberg

After the war, interest in the collection did not awaken again until 1963 when the Swiss exhibition organiser and Museum Director Harald Szeemann (1933-2005) presented 250 works on loan from Heidelberg in the *Kunsthalle Bern*. In 1966, the psychiatrist Maria Rave-Schwank took over the collection and organised further small exhibitions. In 1973, the post of curator for the collection was created for the physician Inge Jarchof, later Jádi. Under her management and with the aid of the Volkswagen Foundation the works of art were preserved and scientifically documented. In 1980, the first large travelling exhibition took place, returning the collection to fame in Germany. In 1984/85 and 2000, further travelling

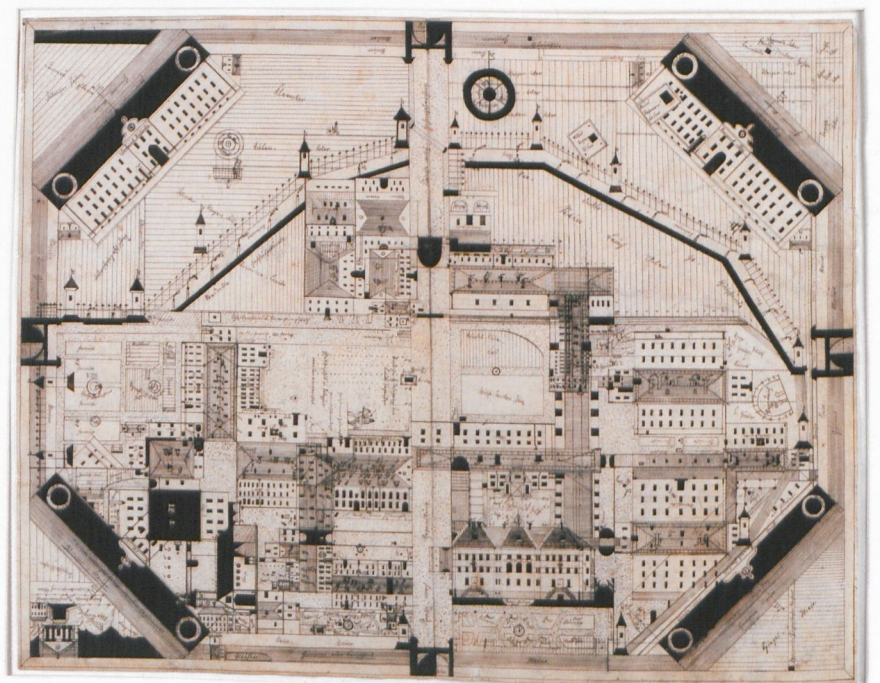
exhibitions were to be seen in US cities and in 1996/97 in Europe.

## The collection today

It was not until 2001 that the collection's own museum finally opened in a converted 19<sup>th</sup> century lecture building (► [image](#)). The author was made director of the museum in 2002. Since then the situation has changed radically. Two to three temporary exhibitions addressing topics from the field of "psychological crisis and art" are shown each year. The exhibits mostly come from the historical Prinzhorn Collection. The exhibitions are accompanied by meetings, lectures, readings, concerts, and performances. Requests from other museums and exhibition institutions are now accommodated more than in the past. Thus, works from the collection can be seen abroad, either in



Alternative Worldview: the former businessman Heinrich Grebing's (1879-1940) depiction of his imaginary commercial empire



Subjective view of a psychiatric clinic; Franz Kleber, site plan of the Karthaus Prüll psychiatric clinic in Regensburg, circa 1880-1896

exhibitions dedicated to the Heidelberg collection, or as works on loan to thematic exhibitions where they are shown alongside other exhibits. The map 1 clearly shows that in recent years the museum has, in this way, been able to build on its international reputation.

### Expansion of the collection

Since 1980, the collection has been added to, often in the form of gifts, sometimes in the form of permanent loans, and rarely in the form of purchases. By 2011 the collection had

grown by more than 10,000 works, mainly from the years 1960 to 2000. Since then the collection has been expanding by up to 100 works per year. On the one hand the collection needs to keep up with modern developments to prevent it becoming stuck in history. On the other hand there will be an increased focus on ensuring that art from the decades between 1930 and 1960 is represented.

Since the opening of the museum, there have also been more publications with the latest findings from cultural

history research into the collection, mostly in the form of catalogues accompanying exhibitions. In addition, interest from external researchers from different fields has increased. In recent years, theses, examination papers, and other publications have been written in art and cultural history, medicine, psychology, German studies, and other disciplines on the subject of the Prinzhorn collection. Artists, writers, and composers explore works or groups of works from the collection and allow themselves to be inspired.

### Outlook

The developments in recent years have made the need for an extension more pressing. Alongside storage areas, this will provide space for a permanent exhibition of classics, a graphics room where visitors will be able to request to view works, a specialist library and bookshop on the subject of "outsider art". This will allow the Prinzhorn Collection to meet the increasing requirements of an exhibition centre and research establishment in the future. ♦

Worldwide Prinzhorn Collection exhibition venues 1921-2011



Number of exhibitions with exhibits from the Prinzhorn collection



year of exhibition (list corresponds to the order of segments)

Time period in which the exhibition took place

