
This exhibition catalog accompanied the show by the same title at the Wellcome Collection London (April 1 – June 2008, 2009). While there are many publications on the subject of mental illness and art in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this work is a welcome addition to the literature. The most recent publications include Madness, Architecture and the Built Environment: Psychiatric Spaces in Historical Context (ed. by Leslie Topp, et al., 2007), and Andreas Killen’s Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity (2006). Other titles were written during the 1990s, including Louis A. Sass’ Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature and Thought (1992). Both editors of this publication under consideration have written earlier related articles: one by Leslie Topp in Art Bulletin (March 2005) and the other by Gemma Blackshaw in Oxford Art Journal (no. 3, 2007).

Madness and Modernity offers a fresh approach to the subject, in that it regards the cultural milieu of Vienna in which psychiatrists, artists, and designers mixed and sometimes worked together. The scholars who edited the catalog are the current specialists on the subject, and their publication offers a more in-depth exploration than previous publications. The catalog is divided into sections that explore the theme of madness and modernity in Vienna. The period’s contemporary study of psychiatry, the architecture of Otto Wagner, and artists such as Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele are also investigated. Most enlightening, for example, is the pairing of Schiele’s portraits with psychiatric photographs of patients. With this catalog, the reader gains knowledge of how mental illness influenced the work of selected artists as well as the design of Otto Wagner’s famous Steinhof psychiatric hospital.

The style and quality of writing is superb and is enhanced by the design of the book which allows plentiful white space on each page. Forty-five stunning color reproductions, chiefly in full-page format, include some double-page spreads. Coated paper allows for enhanced images throughout the book. The hardback binding is sturdy with pages sewn into signatures that will easily withstand the frequent use library books receive. The scholarly apparatus includes easily accessible footnotes at the end of each essay, an object checklist for the exhibition, and a thorough bibliography covering German and English language materials published from 1893 through 2008. The index is easy to read and methodical. This unique publication is essential to faculty and graduate level research in any academic library serving an art history collection.

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