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Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898–1944) has received exceptional attention in Austria in recent years: beginning with an exhibition at the Lentos Art Museum in Linz, Upper Austria, in 2022. Vienna has seen two further shows since, one focused on her collaborations with the designer Franz Singer at the Wien Museum's MUSA Gallery in 2022/23, another at the University of Applied Arts in 2023. Emerging from these shows was her position as one of Austria's foremost avant-garde artists of the 1920s and 30s: Bauhaus-trained and working in multiple media, well-connected and politically engaged in leftist circles, Dicker Brandeis offers ties between Vienna, a place often considered to be without an interwar avant-garde, and other places of modernist production in the German-speaking world, most notably Berlin.

Born into a lower middle-class family, Dicker-Brandeis studied photography and reproduction at Vienna's School for Graphic Arts, attended the textiles class at Vienna's Academy of Applied Arts, as well as Johannes Itten's private art school in Vienna, following her teacher to the newly founded Bauhaus in Weimar in 1919. After leaving the school where she studied and taught, she led and worked in several design and architectural studios in Vienna, Berlin, and Prague. What she has been known for best until only a few years ago is her engagement with child art education, which led her to give children's art classes when she was interned in the Theresienstadt / Terezín Ghetto. Although she had several chances of escaping, she refused to leave her pupils and accompanied them when deported to Auschwitz. She was murdered with them in the gas chambers in 1944. Leading an exceptional life as a highly productive artist comfortable with many different media and finding a tragic end as one of many remarkable cultural figures of her generation, Dicker-Brandeis thus epitomises both a highly impressive artist and a generation of Central Europeans erased by fascism.

Out of the several exhibitions and publications that have been dedicated to Dicker-Brandeis based on her successful yet short career and life, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis: Works from the Collection of the University of the Applied Arts Vienna* is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and scholarly one. It brings together a range of art and architectural historians with the explicit aim of reconsidering the artist's work and offering new ways relating to her education, social networks, pedagogical commitment, politics, and interest in psychology. Published to accompany the exhibition mentioned above at the University of the Applied Arts, yet going beyond the scope of an exhibition catalogue, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* has the ambition of being a new authoritative work on her. Aside from contributions by leading scholars, it does so by building on the collection of the university, which houses the most significant

collection of the artist's work thanks to the efforts of its late director, Oswald Oberhuber, who laid the foundations of the collection in 1981. In the publication, insights into this collection, comprising textile work, paintings as well as graphics, are reflected by shorter sections between the essays that offer detailed descriptions of individual works, mediating between an evaluation of the artist's oeuvre in a broader context and an introduction to her wide-ranging oeuvre. In doing so, the publication has two main aims: first, to address 'the heterogeneity and disciplinary versatility of Dicker-Brandeis's work beyond monolithic concepts of the avant-garde or of modernism' (p.14), and second, to provide close engagement with individual works concerning this broader framework. Admittedly, this dual approach of extended essays and close work descriptions risks repeating information, since several essays also include detailed artwork analyses. The occasional repetition also points to the fact that reassessments of Dicker-Brandeis's work and life are constrained by the limited number of objects and sources available, of which some, such as the children's drawings from Theresienstadt, are more abundant than others: examples of her output from the Bauhaus, including the missing sculpture *Anna Selbdritt*, are rare by comparison. In light of these imbalances, however, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* represents the most critical sourcebook on the artist's work yet, most notably because it builds on themes rather than simply taking her biography as a guiding thread.

A key aim throughout all chapters is to offer a framing for her oeuvre that overcomes the longstanding emphasis on her role as leader of the child art classes in Theresienstadt, which effectively defined only the last years of her life. Instead, the essays build on her multi-valent practice and try to gauge it with a focus on specific topic areas, including a broader contextualisation of her work with children in the Central European context (Bernadette Reinhold, pp. 225–243), her collaborations with the architect Franz Singer (Mark Wigley, pp. 69–91; Katharina Hövelmann, pp. 303–332), and the artist's political trajectory in light of the rich yet turbulent atmosphere of interwar Vienna (Stefanie Kitzberger, pp.117–199). In doing so, the publication also frames the artist as a representative of the Central European avant-garde in interior design and the applied arts that connected Vienna to the Bauhaus in Weimar and Berlin. The key to such an interpretation, it emerges from the essays, is to move beyond medium-specific approaches, allowing Dicker-Brandeis's oeuvre to stand for the multimedia approaches in the applied arts that defined creative production in interwar Vienna. This approach is particularly evident in Julie M. Johnson's essay, which emphasises the breadth of Dicker-Brandeis's work in order to reshape approaches to Viennese modernism more broadly. Using the metaphor of Indra's net, a Buddhist concept to emphasise the interconnectedness of different phenomena, Johnson builds an image of Dicker Brandeis as a 'remediator extraordinaire' (p. 148), whose 'rule-bending' approach to artmaking she takes as exemplary for feminist interdisciplinary creative production. While Johnson is most direct in this emphasis on Dicker-Brandeis as a 'great artist,' relying intensely on the interdisciplinary character of the artist's output, a similar approach can also be found in other contributions. As such, her work with children, her interest in interior design, as well as her psychological portraits after spending several months in an Austro-fascist prison all find a connection in the depiction of the artist as an intensely socially engaged figure interested in psychology, music and pedagogy. In this light, the stress on the artist's social networks,

particularly in the essays in the volume by Bernadette Reinhold and Stefanie Kitzberger, places Dicker-Brandeis at several hotspots of innovative thought in interwar Central Europe. At the same time, the shorter analyses of individual artworks dissecting these discussions were integrated into the wider interpretation of her practice. Even aspects of the artist's work that have lately been contested, such as the fact that she contributed architectural designs to her and Singer's company when in fact she had primarily focused on interiors, textiles and colour compositions, gain a different angle in this light and emphasise the importance of interiors and soft furnishings (which she designed) to form an architectural 'whole.'

Given its discussion of all the different aspects of the artist's work, and the aim of combing them in order to form an image of her as a whole, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* is the most detailed and scholarly book about the artist that has yet been published. It offers a thorough and critical analysis that clearly supports the claim that she was an essential figure of Central European modernism.

Despite this achievement, however, some notable omissions indicate areas where consideration of the artist's work should still be undertaken. Specifically, even though all the contributions make an effort to view Dicker-Brandeis in a *transnational* context, the project adopts the perspective of specialists on Viennese modernism and interwar German culture. As a result, Dicker-Brandeis's time in Czechoslovakia, which, after all, amounted to the last six years of her life before Theresienstadt, is mentioned in several places, yet without much detail beyond the artist's close networks, relying on letter exchanges and personal testimonies by friends such as Hilde Kothny. Moreover, what the contributions fail to mention or discuss more closely is that Prague was a significant refuge from 1933 onwards, and became a place of exile for many German and Austrian artists fleeing totalitarian regimes at home. This led to numerous collaborations between Czech and German / Austrian artists, the most famous of which is probably John Heartfield's involvement in the International Exhibition of Caricature in Prague in 1934. Given that Dicker-Brandeis was a highly politically interested artist with strong ties to leftist circles since her teenage years, as Kitzberger and Reinhold so convincingly outlay, it is hard to imagine that Prague's position as an antifascist, multi-lingual staging point went past her. Admittedly, Dicker-Brandeis's frequently cited connection to the communist *Schwarze Rose* ('Black Rose') bookshop and its networks are mentioned, yet this information appears to be based on oral testimony alone (first published by Elena Makarova, who played a pivotal role in recovering the artist's work since the 1990s) and would merit further attention.

This omission aside, and from the perspective of recent writing on Viennese modernism in particular, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* is a commendable publication. It shows that it is certainly worth breaking up and revaluing established narratives, trying on new theories, and shifting the importance given to one aspect of an artist's work to another. Indeed, this is an approach that the history of Central European modernism would benefit from more broadly.



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