

belvedere

WOLFGANG PAALEN (1905–1959)  
AN AUSTRIAN SURREALIST IN PARIS AND  
MEXICO

Lower Belvedere

4 October, 2019 to 19 January, 2020



Wolfgang Paalen, "Nuage articulé II", 1937–40, Naturschwamm auf Regenschirm, Privatsammlung, Berlin  
Photo: © Succession Wolfgang Paalen et Eva Sulzer

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**Wolfgang Paalen was the only Austrian artist in the circle of Surrealists in Paris. He was not only a cosmopolitan, a visionary, a writer, and an influential trailblazer, he also established himself as a key figure in 20th-century art. Now the Belvedere is dedicating a long overdue museum review to the artist's oeuvre and activities.**

Wolfgang Paalen, born in 1905 in Vienna, galvanized European and American art of the 1930s through the 1950s with his work and publications. Today, however, his works are virtually unknown to the general public. The Belvedere is in possession of two works by the artist, which were acquired during the first Paalen retrospective, held in 1992 at the former Museum of 20th Century.

*Says CEO Stella Rollig: "Wolfgang Paalen was a global citizen with Austrian roots. His interest in other cultures and his ability to continually challenge himself and art had a lasting and profound impact on an entire generation of European and American artists. He was a restless individual who lived in many places; today his works of art are mainly found on the American continent. The Belvedere is now providing an impetus in Austria to properly acknowledge the artist and his work and to strengthen his position within the art historical canon."*

The exhibition at the Belvedere sheds light on Paalen's creative output, from his early fame as a painter alongside the Surrealists in Paris, to his move to Mexico at Frida Kahlo's invitation, to his role as the publisher of the influential art journal *DYN*. In recent decades, the Berlin-based art historian and curator Andreas Neufert has researched Wolfgang Paalen extensively. In 2015, he published an impressive biography of the artist comprised of

almost seven hundred pages. He developed the curatorial concept for the show at the Lower Belvedere.

Andreas Neufert: *“Not only is Paalen a Surrealist that has long been kept under wraps, but as an influencer, he fills a major gap in the research on Euro-American Modernity. He became a trailblazer not least because of his close ties with the tradition of skeptical mysticism in Viennese Modernism and its substructure of linguistic criticism. In the intellectual context of Wittgenstein and Musil, he is the only Viennese intellectual of this mindset to have embarked on the adventure of modern painting with passion. A true discovery.”*

#### THE ARTIST

Wolfgang Paalen came from an upper middle-class background. His father was a successful inventor and business founder, while his mother hailed from a distinguished dynasty of entrepreneurs and merchants. The family soon left Vienna and by 1909 Paalen's path led him to Silesia, Berlin, Paris, Mexico and various cities in the United States. His artistic socialization started in Berlin and Munich and continued in Paris and the South of France. In 1935, the thirty-year old artist joined the group of Surrealists in Paris. His signature contribution to this movement was the development of a technique known as fumage painting: Using the smoke of candles, he would “paint” hallucinatory motifs on blank canvases, wood, or paper, some of which he further embellished in an associative manner with oil paints, while others he left to stand on their own. Together with Duchamp, Man Ray, and Salvador Dalí, he conceived the ground-breaking 1938 *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme* at the Paris Beaux-Arts Gallery, and they shared responsibility for its spectacular design. A year later he moved to Mexico. Then, in 1940, an exhibition of his large *fumages* in New York brought instant fame. Paalen, who was an ardent collector of

works by the indigenous people of America and of pre-Columbian artifacts, established himself as a leading authority on anthropology, a topic that also appealed to young painters in New York at the time. Inspired in part by the latest findings in quantum physics and the art of totem poles from North America's northwest coast, Paalen finally abandoned surrealist imagery and developed a unique abstract design vocabulary. As early as 1945 these works were being exhibited in places such as Peggy Guggenheim's The Art of This Century Gallery, garnering him considerable attention. Despite being increasingly rooted in Mexico, he kept his ties with the American art scene, where he exerted considerable influence on the emergence of Abstract Impressionism through his work as an art theorist. As the editor of the art journal *DYN*, published from 1942 to 1944, he covered topics that were hotly debated in artistic circles. Little known, however, are Paalen's poems, short stories, and plays. During the last years of his life Paalen suffered from bipolar disorder and depression, which led him to take his life in 1959.

#### THE EXHIBITION

This comprehensive solo exhibition devoted to Wolfgang Paalen showcases loans from renowned institutions and private collections all over the world. The show features an unprecedented group of never-before-seen *Fumage* and *Spaciales* images, supplemented by numerous biographical objects such as photos and letters and a comprehensive archive of the *DYN* art journal. Paalen's research and collection over many years of indigenous art in British Columbia and Mexico, as well as his literary works including poems and short stories, are highlighted in the exhibition as further elements of his complex body of work.

## WOLFGANG PAALEN CURRICULUM VITAE

- 1905 Birth of Wolfgang Robert on 22 July in Vienna VI, Köstlergasse 1/Linke Wienzeile 38, the first of four sons to Clothilde Emelie and Gustav Robert Paalen. The mother, née Gunkel, hails from a merchant family in Lower Saxony and works as an actress until her marriage. The father comes from Moravia and works as a successful merchant, entrepreneur, and patent developer for, among other things, vacuum cleaners and thermos flasks.
- 1908 Gustav Robert Paalen acquires and renovates the Tobelbad spa hotel in Styria.
- 1913 The family moves to Sagan/Silesia, Germany.
- 1915 Wolfgang and his brother Rainer attend the Jesuit College in Sagan.
- 1917 Due to war, Paalen children given private lessons by the organist and private scholar Georg Lubrich.
- 1919 During the peace talks in Versailles, stays with his family in Paris.
- 1921 The family moves to Rome.
- 1924 Returns to Berlin. Unsuccessfully applies for admission to the Art Academy in Berlin; attends Adolphe Meyer's sculpture class; meets Eva Sulzer, a music student from a wealthy industrial family in Winterthur, the start of a lifelong friendship; participates in the autumn exhibition of the Berlin Secession.
- 1925 Moves into a residential studio in Paris.
- 1926 Exhibition at the Galerie Figuet, Paris.
- 1927 Studies at the Hans Hofmann School in Munich; participates in Hofmann's summer course in Cassis, South of France.
- 1928 Parents separate.
- 1929 Death of his brother Hans-Peter in a mental hospital in Berlin-Wittenau; Gustav Robert Paalen loses his fortune due to the world economic crisis.
- 1930 Moves to Paris, has a residential studio in the Rue Pernety, Montparnasse; June: participates in the Salon des Surindépendants; attends the painting class of Fernand Légers.
- 1931 Meets with the artist and poet Alice Philppot.
- 1932 Participates in a group exhibition at Galerie Bonjean, Paris.

- 1934 Membership in the artist group Abstraction-Création – art non figuratif; Paalen leaves the group the same year. Marries Alice Philippot; solo exhibition at Galerie Vignon, Paris.
- 1935 Participates in the group exhibition Thèse - Antithèse - Synthèse at the Museum of Art Lucerne; meets with André Breton, who admits Paalen to the Surrealist group. Participates in the Exposition de dessins surréalistes at the gallery Les Quatre Chemins in Paris.
- 1936 April: solo exhibition at Galerie Pierre, Paris; participates at the International Exhibition of Surrealism in London, New Burlington Galleries, where Paalen presents a fumage for the first time. Participates in the Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism exhibition at MoMA, New York.
- 1937 Breton opens the Galerie Gradiva in Paris, designed by Paalen together with Yves Tanguy and Marcel Duchamp. Participates in Surrealist exhibitions in London and Cambridge; series Paysage totémique.
- 1938 January: participates in the Exposition internationale du Surréalisme at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts (Galerie Wildenstein) in Paris with five surrealist objects and the environment Avant la mare; follow-up exhibitions in Amsterdam and The Hague; June: solo exhibition at the Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris; December: Frida Kahlo visits Paris and invites Paalen to Mexico.
- 1939 January: exhibition Mexique at Renou et Colle, Paris; February: solo exhibition at the Guggenheim Jeune Gallery in London; May: departs for New York; June: departs on an extended expedition to the native American territories around the Skeena and Fraser Rivers and to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada, then journeys on to the coastal islands via Ketchikan to Sitka/Alaska; September: arrives in Mexico City, meets with Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Juan O'Gorman.
- 1940 January: opening of the Surrealism exhibition in the Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City, with works by Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Wolfgang Paalen among others; May: solo exhibition in the Julien Levy Gallery, New York. In a series of experimental paintings and drawings, Paalen develops a new language of abstract forms.
- 1942 Launches the art and literary journal DYN and publishes three issues, which are hotly debated in New York artist circles. Paalen's mother Emelie dies in Güstrow, Mecklenburg – his brother Rainer dies in a Czech mental hospital. Formally withdraws from Breton's Surrealism group.
- 1943 Publishes the double issue 4-5 of the DYN art journal, which includes Paalen's influential essay "Totem Art."
- 1944 Moves into a studio residence in San Ángel; publishes the sixth issue of the DYN art journal.

- 1945 February: exhibits at the Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City; May/June: solo exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery The Art of this Century in New York; meets with the artist Luchita Hurtado del Solar. Paalen's father's dies in Örsundsbro, Sweden. November: Paalen's collection of essays entitled "Form and Sense" is published in Robert Motherwell's magazine Problems of Contemporary Art; Paalen completes the play The Beam of the Balance.
- 1946 Solo exhibition at Galerie Nierendorf, New York; Gustav Regler publishes the first monograph on Wolfgang Paalen.
- 1947 Divorces Alice Philippot and marries Luchita Hurtado. Obtains Mexican citizenship.
- 1948 February: travels to New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Solo exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art.
- 1949 Moves to Mill Valley near San Francisco. Establishes the Dynaton Group together with Gordon Onslow Ford and Lee Mullican.
- 1950 Participates in the Metaplastic exhibition at the Stanford Art Gallery in Palo Alto.
- 1951 The Dynaton Group exhibits under the title A New Vision at the San Francisco Museum of Art and publishes the Dynaton art journal. Divorces Luchita Hurtado; meets the painter Marie Wilson; August: Paalen returns to Mexico. Exhibits at the Willard Gallery, New York.
- 1952 Beginning of a several-year residency in Paris together with Marie Wilson; repeatedly visits André Breton in Saint-Cirq-Lapopie and stays for several months; October: solo exhibition at Galerie Pierre Loeb, Paris.
- 1955 Returns to Mexico. Paalen moves into a studio in Tepoztlán/Morelos. Solo exhibition at Galerie Paul Kantor, Los Angeles; theater play Elorn, A Ballad of Brittany.
- 1956 February: exhibits at the Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City; short story Paloma Palomita.
- 1957 Short stories The Axolotl, In the Hacienda, The Story of the Peruvian Mirror.
- 1958 Paalen marries Isabel Marín, the younger sister of Diego Rivera's first wife Lupe Marín.
- 1959 On the night of September 24, 1959, commits suicide by a shot to the head not far from the Hacienda "San Francisco Cuadra" in Taxco.

## BLICKLE KINO

Tuesday, 8 October 2019, 6 pm

Free of charge

### **WOLFGANG PAALEN. Crystals of the Mind.**

Tufic Makhoulouf Akl, FR/MX 2019, 85 min., Spanish w. German Subs

Produced by Aube Elléouët Breton, Oona Elléouët, Seven Doc and Tufic Makhoulouf Akl

An approach to the life and work of the 1905 Vienna-born Austrian-Mexican artist Wolfgang Paalen that shows his biography and the development of his thoughts and artistic expression: Paalen exhibited his works at the Berlin Secession in 1925 and moved to Paris in 1929 where he later joined the Surrealists. In 1939 he emigrated to Mexico, where he organized the first international exhibition of Surrealism. As a painter, he went through several stylistic stages while his writing influenced emerging painters of Abstract Expressionism such as Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, and Mark Rothko. He died in Taxco, Mexico in 1959.

**After the screening there will be a conversation between the director of the documentary, Tufic Makhoulouf Akl, and Christian Kloyber (Paalen-expert and head of the federal institute for continuing education).**

The screening is part of the exhibition *Wolfgang Paalen (1905-59). The Austrian Surrealist in Paris and Mexico* at the Lower Belvedere. An event organised and supported by the Embassy of Mexico.



## GENERAL INFORMATION

<b>Exhibition title</b>	Wolfgang Paalen (1905–59). An Austrian Surrealist in Paris and Mexico
<b>Exhibition duration</b>	4 October, 2019 to 19 January, 2020
<b>Venue</b>	Lower Belvedere
<b>Exhibits</b>	43 paintings, 23 graphics, 69 photos, 9 sculptures and reconstructions as well as archive material such as films and magazines
<b>Curator</b>	Andreas Neufert
<b>Co-Curator</b>	Franz Smola
<b>Curatorial Assistant</b>	Miroslav Halak
<b>Exhibition Management</b>	Sibylle Reichmann / Kristof Viola
<b>Exhibition Design</b>	Margula Architects
<b>Exhibition Catalogue</b>	<i>Wolfgang Paalen. An Austrian Surrealist in Paris and Mexico</i> <b>Editors:</b> Stella Rollig, Andreas Neufert, Franz Smola   <b>Authors:</b> Dawn Ades, Colin Browne, Timur Alexander El Rafie, Markus Hallensleben, Christian Kloyber, Andreas Neufert, Stella Rollig, Franz Smola <b>Graphic Design:</b> Willi Schmid   <b>Publishing</b> Buchh. Walther König; 252 pages, 199 pictures, 16 × 24 cm, EUR 32,- ISBN 978-3-903114-76-0 (german) ISBN 978-3-903114-94-4 (english)
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<b>Guided Tours</b>	T + 43 1 795 57-134   M <a href="mailto:public@belvedere.at">public@belvedere.at</a>
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<b>Regular Entry</b>	EUR 14,- (Lower Belvedere)
<b>Press Contact</b>	Press Office Belvedere Prinz Eugen-Straße 27, 1030 Vienna T +43 1 795 57-177 M <a href="mailto:press@belvedere.at">press@belvedere.at</a>

Complimentary images can be downloaded for press purposes at [www.belvedere.at/press](http://www.belvedere.at/press).  
#WolfgangPaalen