

## STUDIO HERBERT BOECKL

Argentinierstraße 42  
1040 Vienna



Boeckl in a black suit near a stove, 1952  
© Herbert Boeckl Estate, Vienna  
Photograph: © Barbara Hirschenhauser\*

## STUDIO HERBERT BOECKL

With his prolific oeuvre, spanning from the First World War to the 1960s, Herbert Boeckl (1894–1966) ranks among the chief exponents of Austrian modernism. Besides portraits, landscapes, nudes, and still lifes, Boeckl conceived a great variety of ordinary motifs. Between 1928 and the time of his cerebral stroke in 1964, the artist worked in his studio at No. 42 Argentinierstraße in Vienna's 4<sup>th</sup> district. This truly unique art historical treasure is now open to the public. His workplace presents itself today in its original condition, as the artist left it behind. Easels, old paint tubes, brushes, books, and other painting utensils as well as furniture can still be seen in situ.

Visitors will be able to experience for themselves the view from the studio's window, which Herbert Boeckl captured in many pencil drawings, some of which are now kept in the Belvedere's collections. His *Large Family Portrait*, for which all of the family members were obliged to pose for the artist in his studio, was also painted here. Treating the subject of family time and again until 1945, he explored his own life and that of his family through painting. A large number of works depict his offspring, which had eventually grown to nine children. He frequently captured his children in pencil and charcoal in a sketchy manner when they considered themselves unobserved. The most superb and significant of his numerous portraits represent the painter's wife. Her portrait from the time of their engagement marks the beginning of a series that would eventually comprise many likenesses of her, as well as several self-portraits. After 1945, Boeckl did not paint any other portrait of a family member, and he only completed one more self-portrait, which dates from 1948.

The artist's characteristic vehemence and unwillingness to compromise resulted in the development of an art that pursued a unique, highly individual aesthetic approach. The most typical features of his style are a pronounced dynamism and expressive gestures, which are encountered not only in Herbert Boeckl's extensive painted oeuvre, but also in his countless watercolours and drawings. The unusual series of anatomy scenes from 1931 stands out as a singular example in Austrian art production. Few years later, the artist received the Grand Austrian State Prize for an altarpiece. Even in his late period, when he produced monumental paintings and tapestry designs, Boeckl set new artistic standards, arriving at a very personal interpretation of Cubism. His masterpiece of the late years is the cycle of frescoes for the Chapel of Angels in the Basilica of Seckau Abbey. Boeckl's stance towards art and aesthetics became formative for the generation of Austrian artists after 1945.

In 1935, Herbert Boeckl received a call from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where he headed a master class for painting until 1939. Between 1939 and 1964, he was in charge of the nude studies class held in the evening, the attendance of which was compulsory for all of the students, including Agathe von Auersperg, Walter Eckert, Karl Kreutzberger, Sepp Orgler, Stefan Pichler, Carl Unger, Fritz Wieser, and Grete Yppen. In 1945/46 and between 1962 and 1965, he was the Academy's principal.

His studio was an important place of inspiration for Herbert Boeckl. Even when the windows were broken due to bomb damage, the artist unflinchingly continued working in the cold. In 1945 a visitor interested in his pictures reported: *“Boeckl’s studio [...] has remained undamaged, merely the panes of the tall windows have been smashed. Consequently, because of the rough weather, it is icy cold in the unheated room. Today there was a snowstorm accompanied by a biting wind. The snowflakes were dancing right into the room. Boeckl does not allow anything to keep him from working. He has stored his paintings and drawings away in the basement of the Academy of Fine Arts and therefore could only show me the panels that currently occupy him. These are the two side wings of a polyptych, which are painted on wood on both sides [...]. These pictures were painted by a profound, truly pious man.”*<sup>1</sup>

It is owing to the artist Marie-Cécile Boog, Boeckl’s muse during his final years, that the studio has survived as it was. A sculptor and pupil of Fritz Wotruba, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts between 1951 and 1956. After Herbert Boeckl’s death, she left everything unchanged. Thanks to the generosity of the landlord, Ingenieur Koch, it has been possible for the Belvedere to maintain the studio. The furniture and the painting utensils have carefully been restored and convey a fascinating impression of this important painter’s working environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Harchel, “Besuch bei Herbert Boeckl”, 7 March 1945, copy in the archives of the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.

## BIOGRAPHY

### Herbert Boeckl

#### 1894

Herbert Boeckl is born in Klagenfurt on 3 June, the second of four sons to the state trade school teacher Leopold Böckl and his wife, Paula, née Münichsdorfer.

#### 1904–1912

Boeckl attends secondary school in Klagenfurt and makes his first artistic attempts at the Carinthian State Museum.

#### 1912–1915

Having applied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts without success, Boeckl studies architecture at the Technical University, but continues pursuing a career as a painter, taking part in an exhibition at the Vienna-based Kunstsalon Pisko for the first time in 1913.

#### 1915–1918

War service on the Italian front, together with the art historian Bruno Grimschitz, the future curator and director of the Österreichische Galerie.

#### 1918–1931

Boeckl enters into a commission agreement with the Viennese art dealer Gustav Nebehay that entitles him to advance payments. In 1919 he marries Maria Plahna; his quickly growing family (by 1941 they have nine children) frequently changes residence in Carinthia.

#### 1921–1924

Study trips to Berlin, Paris, and Palermo.

#### 1927

First solo exhibition of thirty oil paintings within the framework of the Vienna Secession's autumn show.

#### 1928

Boeckl moves to Vienna and rents the studio in Argentinierstraße. The family first lives in Perchtoldsdorf and then moves to Alliiertenstraße in Vienna's 2<sup>nd</sup> district, Leopoldstadt.

#### 1934

Boeckl receives the Grand Austrian State Prize, which is awarded for the first time, for his painting *Hymn to Mary*.

**1935**

The artist is appointed professor at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and functions as Austria's official government commissioner for the art exhibition at the Brussels World's Fair. He travels to London.

**1937**

Participation in the *Exposition d'art Autrichien* and study trip to Paris.

**1938**

The painter changes the spelling of his name from Böckl to Boeckl; the first painting signed with this new version of his name is *Yellow Quarry near St. Margarethen*. From now on, he almost exclusively signs his pictures and letters in this way.

**1939**

Boeckl resigns from his master class at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and instead teaches the compulsory evening class for nude studies. His art is marginalised in the official art scene.

**1945**

After Vienna's liberation, Boeckl is made principal of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts (until 1946), while Albert Paris Gütersloh and Fritz Wotruba are appointed professors.

**1946**

Retrospective at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts.

**1951**

Study trip to Spain. The artist starts working on the frescos for the Chapel of Angels in the Benedictine abbey of Seckau in Styria.

**1955**

Study trip to Greece.

**1956**

President of the Austrian section at UNESCO's Association internationale des arts plastiques; Boeckl attends its first congress in Paris.

**1959**

Study trip to Egypt.

**1960**

Host of the third conference of UNESCO's Association internationale des arts plastiques in Vienna; completion of the frescoes at Seckau.

**1962**

Boeckl is elected principal of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts.

**1964**

Retrospective at the Vienna Museum of the Twentieth Century. On 29 October, Boeckl suffers a cerebral stroke and remains confined to bed until his death.

**1966**

Herbert Boeckl dies on 20 January and is buried in a grave of honour provided by the City of Vienna.

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[www.belvedere.at/press](http://www.belvedere.at/press) (login: pr2015).

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