

2016 TRUDI VON FELLEBERG-BITZI

Bote der Urschweiz, Friday, January 8, 2016

He lives and works in Steinen, is one of the most successful Schwyz artists and turns eighty on Saturday: the Illgau-born Alfons Bürgler

At the meeting with Alfons Bürgler the leaves shine in their colourful splendour. One of the last beautiful and warm autumn days in Illgau, high above the Muotathal. Just next to the only inn, the Sigristenhaus, Alfons Bürgler points to the house at the back of the Rain where he grew up. "Upstairs was the room for the boys. We were nine and had to share the beds."

Leaf bags served as mattresses. The two sisters, Marie and Agnes, had more room in their girls room. Next to the parents' bedroom there was the living room. This served the father Alois Bürgler, trained shoemaker, at the same time as a workshop.

Alfons raves about his childhood, about boyish tricks, lonely ski tours and a happy life far away from the turbulent world. The initial signs, however, were not of happiness, for his mother died at his birth. Her last words, according to a domestic helper years later, would have been for Alfons: What do you think will happen to this boy? The father quickly remarried. At that time he needed a wife in the house, because there were now six children.

But Katharina died of tuberculosis only eight months after the wedding, and again a strong hand was missing at her father's side. Four years later he married Margrith Bürgler, the two had five more sons, Alfons' half brothers.

Years of apprenticeship and travel

When Alfons Bürgler talks about his childhood and youth, it gushes out of him. The two sisters married very young. The father had raised money so that every boy could learn a trade. Alfons himself - inspired by students who spent their holidays in Illgau during the summer months - went to Disentis to attend grammar school, but dropped out after two years. Already at that time he painted in his spare time and with 16 first pictures for years.

From tailor to merchant

In Rothenthurm, he completed an internship with Dominik Schuler four years as a tailor. Years of training and travelling led him to Lausanne, Vevey and Ticino. Learning languages was important to him. Back home, he gave up his profession, completed a commercial apprenticeship and found employment in an architectural office. He married the Singer Margrith Suter. Later the two daughters Eva-Maria and Gabriela were born. Thanks to job sharing with his wife, he was able to invest more time in painting until he dared to become self-employed as a freelance artist in 1984.

In 1993 he and his wife went their separate ways. Margrith completed further training at the Lucerne School of Music, Alfons lived and worked during the summer months in a hut near Goldau and in winter in a small studio on the village square in Steinen. He sought this modesty in order to be independent and not have to work in a permanent position.

"Body writings"

From then on Bürgler devoted several years to experimental painting and discovered his "body writings" by chance. These pictures made him famous far beyond the Swiss borders. In a catalogue of the Hirslanden Clinic in Lucerne, the following can be found read: "Even as a child, Alfons Bürgler explored the world by drawing and spontaneously captured it in form". This immediacy is also evident in the "body writings." "It is easy to imagine that working on these images can be as much a meditative as a rhythmic, even a dance process. The figures and signs are arranged in rows together". They were created - as the catalogue says - "always from left to right, like a text. In fact, these figures can remind us of old hieroglyphs and thus of characters of bygone times, but at the same time they have an enormous present presence. It seems as if these pictures in their concrete and at the same time abstract forms communicate something to us, as if these figures wanted to enter into a communication with us, in a language that we will soon become familiar with when we look at them.

Recognized and in demand

In 2002 the municipality of Hünenberg chose Alfons Bürgler as a guest artist for one year and made a studio available to him. "The condition that the studio had to be open every Saturday and that people could look over my shoulder during my work was an obligation for me. I also took part in many events and drew the people present for nights on end," he says today. Over a thousand people are recorded in his sketchbooks. Many valuable contacts were made in this way.

Alfons Bürgler has been working with renowned architects for several years. He received many commissions, particularly in Lucerne and Zurich, for "Art in Construction." These have become an important part of his work. This also resulted in a creative collaboration with his nephew Hannes Bürgler, who is a glass artist by profession and has his studio in Albligen, Bern.

Active and rooted in Steinen

Eight years ago Alfons Bürgler opened the "tree figure cabinet" in Steinen. This cabinet has developed into a small regional cultural centre. He also bought a house on the village square in Steinen in which he had rented a studio 25 years ago. After he has tastefully renovated it, it now serves him as an exhibition house for his works.

Dancing for compensation

Bürgler learns English and regularly swings his dancing leg. Standard, Latin, Tango, preferably Lindy Hop, which originated in the 1920s in New York as the predecessor of BoogieWoogie and Rock 'n' Roll. "You have to be in motion in the mind and in the body. The dance not only promotes my health, but keeps me fit. Because I am painting almost every day in my studio and hardly come to hiking anymore, dancing has become my sport". People in motion, body writings, art in the building, glass art and Tree figures: Creativity permeates everything that Bürgler touches, implements and moves. This is how you can or could show your mother, Maria Bürgler-Betschart, who died on 9 January 1936, has died, today to her last question, what will become of the "Büebli", the Answer: Dancers of life. And much more ... What survives is dance. And Passion.