

Research Project

„Sonderfall“ Angewandte [The Angewandte: ‘An Exceptional Case’.] The University of Applied Arts Vienna under Austrofascism, National Socialism and during the post-war period

The Angewandte began to grapple with art and cultural policy under National Socialism in Austria comparatively early, at a time when the paradigm shift in understanding recent Austrian history was gradually becoming apparent. Exhibitions such as *Die Vertreibung des Geistigen aus Österreich: zur Kulturpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* [The Ousting of Intellectuals from Austria: On the cultural politics of National Socialism, 1985] and *Zeitgeist wider den Zeitgeist: eine Sequenz aus Österreichs Verirrung* [The zeitgeist against the zeitgeist: A sequence from Austria's aberration], 1988 set milestones for this previously overlooked field of art, followed by publications on the history of the Angewandte university. A few decades later a research project took on the task of delving deeper into the chequered history of one of Austria's most important art institutes under Austrofascism and National Socialism, right up until the early post-war period.

Art and culture were not only important functional elements of Austrofascism and National Socialism, but also tools of the propaganda machine and therefore essential for the representation of those in power and the spreading of their political interests. The particular political importance of art and culture and their many points of intersection with the economy meant that the Wiener Kunstgewerbeschule [the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts, now the University of Applied Arts Vienna] was of public interest and was expected to participate in the political exploitation of the creative arts with the support of lecturers and students.

As early as 1933 the elimination of the Parliament and the ban on oppositional parties (KPÖ, Communist Party of Austria; NSDAP, National Socialist German Workers Party; SPÖ, Social Democratic Party of Austria) paved the way for the Austrofascist regime to interfere in staff matters: Lecturers considered politically unacceptable were forced out. Those who were able to remain had to join the Vaterländische Front [Fatherland Front] in order to remain in their posts. Although politically motivated staffing decisions under Austrofascism were already giving rise to an aesthetic alignment of the university with the regime's cultural policy, the teaching programme was also to be restructured and politically radicalised in 1938. The National Socialist takeover of the School of Arts and Crafts after the 'Annexation' in March 1938 marked a turning point for Jewish members.

Large numbers of lecturers were forced into early retirement due to being deemed 'politically untrustworthy' and were subject to a de facto professional ban, while Jewish students were banned from enrolling. At the same time, zealous National Socialists, illegals and followers of the regime among both the teaching staff and the student body were waiting in the wings, ready to take on prestigious university and faculty management posts and to set the National Socialist takeover in motion as quickly as possible.

The research project „*Sonderfall*“ *Angewandte* [The *Angewandte*: 'An Exceptional Case']. *The University of Applied Arts Vienna under Austrofascism, National Socialism and during the post-war period (1933–1955)* looks at personnel and structural continuities and discontinuities at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. The project tracks the history of the School of Arts and Crafts and its members from 1933 to 1938, as well as the institution's upgrade to university status in 1941 right through the period from the end of the war in 1945 and into the post-fascist post-war years ending around 1955. The development of the institution in the context of art schools and academies both at home and internationally, the origin of the courses and workshops and the influence of the regime on the teaching program are retraced and the forms of artistic collaboration and subversion examined. In addition, the project sheds light on the biographies of well-known figures with special focus on unearthing artists who were exiled, persecuted or murdered.

The project investigates the politico-cultural significance of the School of Arts and Crafts, the University and (from 1948 until 1971) the Academy of Applied Arts under Austrofascism and National Socialism, as well as the key aspects of cultural policy from 1945 onwards. The project title refers to the elevation of the 'State School of Arts and Crafts' to the 'Reich University of Applied Arts' in October 1941. Robert Obsieger, the Vice-Chancellor at the time, celebrated the occasion as a welcome 'exceptional case', as the 'unique model' of art education was to be integrated in the National Socialist university system. Furthermore, the project illuminates the areas of action and development on both an institutional and an artistic and aesthetic level during a period of systemic change. Finally, the question of the school's international artistic and cultural legacy, the work of its members in exile and the related transcultural processes arises, along with that of the transformation and reinterpretation of the ideas and concepts of the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts in an international context.