About the Artist—Theodore Kern



To find out more information and to see more work by Theodor Kern, visit:

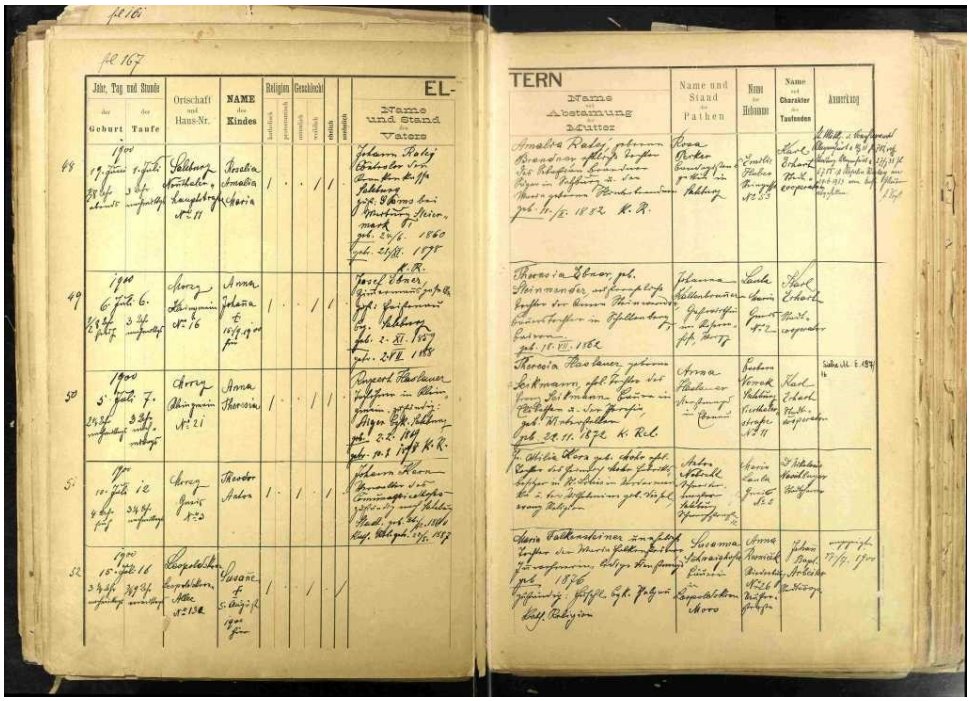
Website: https://artuk.org/discover/artists/kern-theodor-19001969

Stefania Bednarova article: https://artuk.org/discover/stories/theodor-kern-an-austrian-born-artist-who-made-england-his-home

Blog: https://theodorkern.wordpress.com/

Theodor Kern was born, on 10th July 1900, in the village of Morzg on the southern outskirts of Salzburg, Austria. His parents, Ottlie Kern and Johann Kern, who was a municipal cemetery supervisor. Theodor was the youngest of their three children.

The record of Kern's baptism, (ref: https://theodorkern.wordpress.com) The ceremony took place on 12th July 1900, when Theodor was two days old, in the parish church at Morzg. This is the church that he and his friend and artist mentor Anton Faistauer would be asked to decorate 25 years later.



About the Artist—Theodore Kern

Theodor Kern was artistic even as a young boy. Growing up in the mountains around Salzburg, he would spend much of his time drawing and painting. His parents did not want him to study art. When he left Salzburg at the age of 17 to study at university, he told his parents he was going to study architecture but he had actually signed up to do a degree in Fine Arts in Vienna.

In 1938, Kern left Austria to move away from Nazi rule of Europe just before the start of WW2. As an artist and a Jew, he moved to England for his safety as many others has lost their jobs as teachers and were no longer allowed to even have their work on display in exhibitions in Germany or Austria because of their religion. At first when he arrived in the UK, he was held as an "enemy alien" in an internment camp on the Isle of Man, together with lots of other Austrian and German artists. After he was released he settled in Hitchin in the early 1940s.

For 5 years he helped ex-servicemen, soldiers and RAF personnel who were in hospitals recovering from injuries or suffering with depression.

He helped them to enjoy and appreciate art and encouraged them to take up an interest in drawing as part of their healing and rehabilitation.



Dying man and woman

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Theodor Kern converted to become Catholic and was then known for his devotion to the faith. He made many beautiful sculptures for churches carved from wood. He had taught himself how to carve. He worked with another artist called Gordon House for some time repairing damaged sculptures in churches that were bombed in WW2.

Between 1950 and 1955, Kern taught at Luton University and it was then when his abstract compositions came to life. Kern spoke of his compositions as being images "reflecting memory or emotion, constellations of movement or colour". In his memoir, the artist mentions that his compositions are "sometimes almost abstract, but almost always resulting from an experience of inner or outer nature" (ref: Stefani Bednarova).

The Sphere newspaper of February 1961 (see image on page 4) talks about Theodor Kern's work as a wood carver. The three photographs show Theodor Kern at work in his studio in Bearton Green, Hitchin. The first photo shows a wood carving of the Madonna and Child, the sculpture is now in the Catholic Church of Our Lady Immaculate and St. Andrew in Hitchin (you can see the sculpture on the shelf in the photo). Hanging on the wall in the third photo is Kern's painting of Christ as Man of Sorrows., which is also on display at the church in Hitchin.

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Article from the Sphere Newspaper, 4th February 1961

(ref: https://theodorkern.wordpress.com/page/3/)

doctor in Maugham's unforgettable story, *Of Human Bondage*. (As a book about a doctor, one can say that that did pretty well, too.) Mr. Frede's young men and their old masters and superiors have different preoccupations and different neuroses, for not all of these medical graduates, by any means, are the balanced, sage or even the normally ambitious or dedicated beings one imagines young doctors to be. These particular takers of the Hippocratic oath vary from the nervously introspective to the good time Charlie, and their drunken parties have to be read to be believed. But read I think they certainly will be, because Mr. Frede has a more than competent narrative gift.

Miss Yael Dayan, the young Israeli author, has a new novel with ENVY THE FRIGHTENED (Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 13s. 6d.), in which she tells the story of a youth born and brought up in present-day Israel. Even as a child he has taught himself independence and courage; to despise cowardice as a deadly sin and to regard strength and fearlessness as great virtues. Miss Dayan writes with the force and simplicity which made her one, earlier book so remarkable, and which one cannot help thinking must reflect her own character.

O'HOULIHAN'S JEST (Gollancz. 15s.) is as Irish as its title would imply; an early eighteenth-century theme of conflict between the English and the Irish, with a vividly dramatic climax and some powerful writing by a new and welcome novelist, Rohan O'Grady.

Of the three thrillers this week, THE KILROY GAMBIT (Cassell. 15s.), by Mr. Irwin R. Blacker, is an American spy story with some very brisk action shuttling between the Iron Curtain and the Pentagon. NIGHT'S BLACK AGENT (Gollancz. 13s. 6d.) is a first-rate thriller by Mr. John Bingham and has a *really* original twist. Recommended, naturally. PIERCE WITH A PIN (Macdonald. 12s. 6d.) is more discursive and less tense, but Mr. Kenneth Hopkins has made quite a good thing out of his reporter-sleuth.

Vernon Fane

WALPOLE, THE YEARS OF FAME

I have often regretted the gaps in my education in history, one of which was the first half of the eighteenth century. The second volume of Dr. Plumb's SIR ROBERT WALPOLE (Cresset Press. 30s.) covers the years 1722 to 1734, during which Walpole attained the heights of power and set his feet on the downward slope. A very important biography, for me at least it is not an easy book to read; for the European scene was as complex and intrigue-ridden as English domestic politics, and the clarity of Dr. Plumb's admirable summaries does not deny the complexities. Those years of the Spanish succession quarrel saw a war between aristocracy and trade, Louis XIV against the maritime powers. In those years the power of individuals, kings and statesmen, to direct events was almost as great as in the days of Hitler. In England in those years the King could not, if he would, do without Walpole, who supported the Hanoverian succession and the Protestant religion, and in those same years laid the foundations of our colonial policy and of free trade. As for the man himself, there were good reasons for his unpopularity. He was gross in figure and manners, he enriched himself in the public service and practised nepotism and, as he began to fall, he clutched at power. Yet he was a faithful friend and not petty, and turned some of the wealth he amassed to good purpose at Houghton. As a statesman, he was a "Commons" man and, in serving the country, he kept the country in mind concentrating on the business of the day, concerned little with planning for the future. He hated war. Yet it was the fate of this great "Commons" man to lower public respect for Parliamentary institutions. Like Bacon, his weaknesses must be judged by the moral and political standards of his times. Neither Bacon nor Walpole will ever be painted as angels, nor, indeed, emerge otherwise than as enigmas even from the researches of the greatest biographers; but both, in their different ways, were outsize phenomena.

John Gore



In his studio, Mr. Theodor Kern begins the preliminary work on a statue



The wood-carver uses chisel and mallet



WOOD-CARVER AT WORK

A large part of the charm of wood-carving is the use which can be made of the natural properties of the timber—its grain and texture. For this reason, wood-carvers often spend considerable amounts of time searching for the right piece of wood. In addition, well-seasoned timber is greatly in demand, since it does not split or warp like green wood. For Theodor Kern, whose carvings adorn a number of churches in England, demolition sites are a happy hunting ground. His favourite wood, as for other wood-carvers, is oak. In two of the pictures, Mr. Kern is starting work on an old beam picked up on a demolition site. He has turned 400-year-old beams of a church into statues which now stand in a modern church at New Merstham, near Redhill, in Surrey. Some of Mr. Kern's recent work can be seen in the Church of St. Mary and St. Andrew at Hitchin. Not only does Mr. Kern execute a large number of wood-carvings in his studio at his home in Bearton Green, near Hitchin, he also carries out commissions for stained-glass windows and murals. He and his wife left Austria to settle in England just before the last war.

Left: Besides a large amount of wood-carving, Mr. Theodor Kern works in silver and gold leaf and designs stained-glass windows

Image © Illustrated London News Group

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Kern also taught himself how to create stained glass windows and how to paint frescos and wall murals. He has experimented with many different styles of painting, example of which are in the collection at Wardown House, Museum and Gallery. He was particularly influenced by the Post-Impressionist movement of Art, with the work of Paul Cezanne, Vincent Van Gogh and Georges Vuillard.

As well as the portraits on display, we have a large collection of landscape, still life and abstract paintings. Theodor Kern also paints with different materials such as oil paints, watercolours and Gouache, drawing with pencils, pastels and charcoal.



He Taught Composition classes at Luton College of Art, now Barnfield College. Whilst working in Luton and living in Hitchin, he made good friends with the then curator of Luton Museum, Peter Smith.
He exhibited his works at Luton Museum in 1968 just before his death.

About the Artist—Theodore Kern

Theodor Kern died in Hitchin in 1969. After his death, his paintings were shared among several museums, Luton Museum (now Wardown House, Museum & Gallery) being one of them..



Exhibition of friendship

WHEN Hitchin artist Theodor Kern had an exhibition of his works at Luton Museum in 1968 he struck up a firm friendship with the curator, Mr Peter Smith.

Their friendship was cut short by Mr Kern's death in 1969. But Mr Smith has a lasting memory of his friend — in the shape of more than 100 of his works.

The paintings, drawings and lithographs have been given to the museum by Mr Kern's widow Freda.

And most of them are now on show at the museum in a month-long Theodor Kern exhibition, where Mrs Kern is pictured.

Mr Smith said: "Nothing gave me greater surprise when Mrs Kern rang me to tell me that we could have the pick of his studio collection."

Picture: JOHN JONES

EVENING POST - 29.3.72

Friedl Kern, nēe Franck, in 1972, at a retrospective exhibition of her late husband's work (photograph via Luton Evening Post).

To see more of Theodor Kern's work in Oil Paints and other paintings in Oils from the collection of The Culture Trust, Luton held at Wardown House, Museum and Gallery, visit ArtUk.org.

FAQs about Portraiture

Portraiture is a very old art form going back at least to ancient Egypt, about 5,000 years ago. Pharaoh's and important people often had their faces painted or sculpted as part of their tombs decoration and to make a record of their likeness.

Before the invention of photography and cameras, a painted, sculpted, or drawn portrait was the only way to record the appearance of someone.

The purpose of a portrait is to show the likeness, personality, and even the mood of the person. For this reason, a portrait normally shows a person looking directly at the painter or photographer.

Portraits have been used to show the power, importance, beauty, wealth, taste, learning or other qualities of the 'sitter'—the person portrayed.

Artists' self-portraits can often be used to experiment with techniques and compositions. They can be more truthful, less flattering and even ugly compared to portraits that artists have been paid lots of money to create of important people. Someone might not pay them if they look too ugly in a picture!

Artists sometimes include portraits of themselves in larger group compositions. They may include a self-portrait in another type of picture– such as a landscape.

Portraits don't have to be an exact representation of a person, sometimes artists use the sitter's pose, the picture's composition or objects and props to tell us extra information about the subject.

Glossary of Terms



Artist— a person who makes and creates works of art either as their hobby or job.

Abstract Art—After WW2 in the 1940s and 1950s a new art movement called Abstract Expressionism started in America. It tries to show how artists feel about world problems at the time as well as expressing their thoughts. The paintings don't show objects of people but use colours, shapes and brushstrokes to show the artist's innermost feelings. Your reaction to the art is also very important.

Charcoal—is a black crumbly drawing material made from carbon that is often used for sketching and under drawings for paintings.



Chalk—is a soft powdery white or off-white material usually used on a blackboard.

Composition—is the arrangement of elements within the work of art.

Cubism/Cubist—The first Cubists were the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso and the French artist Georges Braque. Cubists wanted to find a new way of showing their subjects form and perspective in paintings. To do this they painted objects from several angles at once in the same picture which makes the image look like its made up of broken fragments with many angles. Cubism was influenced by African Art and the artist Paul Cézanne, but the name Cubism came from a journalist who thought their paintings looked like they were made of "little cubes".

Glossary of Terms

Fresco—a type of wall painting. Comes from the Italian word "fresh" as the pigment/colour is painted on to the wall while the plaster is still wet so it becomes part of the fabric of the wall.

Gouache— is a type of water soluble plaint that, unlike watercolour, is opaque so the white of the paper does not show through.



Mark making—ways of making marks in a picture that don't always mean using a brush.

Medium—can refer to either the type of art (painting, sculpture etc) as well as the materials used.

Mural—a painting applied directly to a wall, usually in a public space.

Muse—describes the inspiration to an artist or influence on their the way their make art in their creative process. It often is a favourite model or subject for a painter or sculptor.

Oil paint—is a slow drying type of paint where particles of pigment are mixed with oil to create a paint.



Pastels—A cross between a chalk and a crayon, pastels are made from the same pigment and use a binder to make them in to a stick.

Portrait / Self-portrait— a drawing or painting of a person's likeness, a group of people or animals.

Continued. . . .

Profile—When the subject or sitter is sat side facing to the artist so the profile of their forehead, nose and chin is captured.



Props— Objects included in the picture's composition that can help with the storytelling of the picture. The props might relate to the sitter's job, their hobby's, their culture or important events in their life.

Sitter— The person who the artist is making a portrait of. This is because the sitter would sit for long periods of time in front of the artist to have their portrait painted in the past—sitting still for the artist to capture every detail.

Stained Glass—made from the coloured glass used for making decorative windows and other objects through which light passes. The art form popular in medieval art c.1000—1400 and often found in monasteries and churches.

Watercolour—refers to both the medium and works of art made using the medium of watercolour. A water soluble type of paint which is transparent and allows the white of the paper to show through.