

CARL BINDER

Recollections of Carl Binder

by his nephew, the renowned Swiss collector/author Josef V. John

In 1985 Carl Binder died. He was my uncle, and an artist I knew for a very long time. When I was a child I spent my holidays at our relatives' house in the Canton of Aargau (near Zurich). Of course this didn't mean a summer vacation in the usual style, but helping on the farm, which I honestly didn't like so much. I preferred to spend my time there together with my uncle, who did things a little slower than the other relatives and who always knew about something interesting.

We often went out into the fields early in the morning to cut grass for the cattle. When I look at his paintings today, with working cows or steaming horses, all those early morning moods, which Binder caught so realistically in his paintings, come back to my mind.

My uncle was a very good observer. He showed me the fields that had been destroyed at night by the wild boars. He knew every herd path (for deer) on the Rhine very well; he knew on which spot the boars swam across the Rhine, coming from the Black Forest in Germany. Once he was attacked by an aggressive one and had to defend himself with a pickaxe. This event was also a theme of a few of his paintings.

For our Sunday walks Uncle Carl often chose freshly ploughed arable land, because there he would sometimes find pieces from Roman times, ammonites, and petrified shell. We often passed the time in the ruins of the Castle of Bubikon, a ruin, which he, being a hobby archeologist, dug out of the ground himself, and found some important pieces which he gave to the historical museum of Zurzach.

I remember listening to his stories from the war at the airplane observation post in Baldingen. I still can see the bomber squadrons that flew over in a north-south direction. (during World War II).

He started to paint more in 1960 after he retired, moving from Baldingen to Rekingen, where he rented a small room at the restaurant "Bahnhof". In this little room he painted three big scale oil paintings (120 x 120 cm).

Every day Binder took long walks in the area. Probably, he was accompanied by crows, the big black birds that appear like a second signature in most of his paintings. The rest of the time he was drawing and painting, almost obsessively, especially in the last years of his life. Immediately after he got up in the morning he made his first drawings on paper, which he called "10 minute art".

Not only in his art, but also as a human being, Binder was an outsider, mistrusting and anxious—once he wanted to take a boat on the Lake of the Four Cantons, but he fell from the plank between the ship and the wall of the harbor and almost drowned. Never again would he set foot on a boat again. During a visit to Mellikon Binder read in the newspaper about poisoned oranges from Israel. From that moment on he never ate an orange again, although it was his favorite fruit.

Binder was able to sell only a very few pieces during his lifetime. I was his only regular customer. His family and few friends didn't take him seriously. Nowadays, I think he might have had a better chance to be understood and have a breakthrough as an artist. A museum show in the Kunsthaus Aarau was unfortunately cancelled after the death of the curator Heiny Widmer, a big supporter of outsider art. Widmer often visited together with Uncle Carl and me, bought some works, made some recordings and planned the exhibition. The curator and the artist were often talking about death, and death in Binder's paintings, unaware of their own sudden demise.

Josef John, St. Gallen