

Hans Krüsi

(Swiss, 1920 –1995)

Born in Zürich, raised in Speicher, Appenzell, Switzerland. He never knew his father, and only consciously met his mother in 1936, a year before her death. At the age of two, he was placed with foster parents, and into an orphanage when he was ten. After completing eight years of elementary school, Krüsi worked as a farmhand; later on he was a gardener's and nursery labourer. After World War Two, he became self-employed, riding daily from St. Gallen to Zürich to sell flowers in tony Bahnhofstrasse.

It was only in the mid-1970s that Krüsi began to paint and to sell his postcard-size pictures, along with his flowers, or at flea markets and on the train. Some time later, in around 1980, a gallery owner discovered the painting street-vendor. Swept along on the new wave of the art-world's enthusiasm for the "Wilde Malerei" (Wild Painting) of the 1980s, Krüsi rapidly achieved the status of a widely popular, artistic celebrity.

From 1975 Hans Krüsi created an enormous, almost chaotic oeuvre. His art was chiefly informed by his idea of creatures and creation. The cow in its Alpine pasture, the man in front of his house, the cat, the pigeon — they are all creatures living together in the great union of nature; sometimes in paradisaical harmony, at others under mutual, demoniacal threat. The thematic scope — an endless parade in Krüsi's paintings — is immense. While his proximity to Appenzell folk art is evident, his treatment of the popular, traditional motif of the "Alpaufzug", — the ceremonial transfer of cattle and household goods to Alpine summer pastures — is an expressive explosion of colour.

Krüsi was not concerned with esthetic issues, nor were his paintings a conscious analysis of art, or of his environment. He was driven to paint by a creative urge that demanded to be put to paper, and by the sheer pleasure of pictorial representation. However, painting also was doubtless an important means of communicating with his environment, and of benefiting from it, both commercially and in an exchange of ideas.

Krüsi's napkin drawings show the starting-point of his work. As a group, they are among the few recurring creative forms in Krüsi's work. The napkins with their grid imposed by the folds are playing-fields with regularly spaced markings, inviting the inscription of patterns, of composition and variation. However, the concept presented to the artist by these napkins is never dealt with in a stereotypical manner. As elsewhere, contents often evolve during the drawing process itself. Nevertheless, and unlike Krüsi's painting, his themes are strongly influenced by the shape of the napkins, and by the technique employed.

The large-scale works were mostly done in mixed media on ready-made supports found by the artist. They show his closeness to the popular art of the Appenzell region where he grew up. However, Krüsi's use of the traditional idiom is quite loose and carefree.

The large selection of works from Krüsi's legacy will allow insights into the great variety of his oeuvre, both as regards techniques, and quality. Spraying techniques with paint spray over plants, transfer prints, collages, scissor cuttings, pouncing, the use of photocopies, etc. — they all testify to the experimental daring of this artist, and the wide scope of his creativity.