

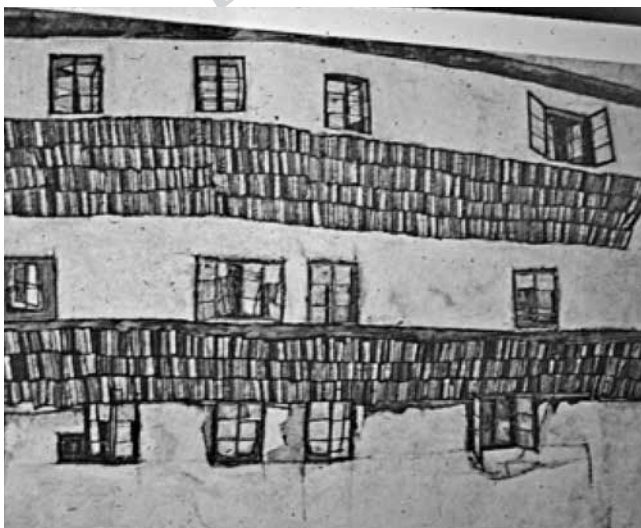
Hunting Down Hundertwasser

The brightly colored mosaiclike images by an artist intriguingly named Hundertwasser – Hundred Water – first delighted my eyes while I was visiting my Italian grandparents in Milan during the summer of 1963. Reproductions of his works adorned the bookstores there and I traveled on to Vienna with twenty treasured postcard reproductions of his fascinating paintings. As a twenty-eight-year-old graduate student working on her master's thesis for the University of California at Berkeley, I had been in the Austrian capital for several months researching the riveting Expressionist artist Egon Schiele. Immediately upon my return I wrote Hundertwasser a spontaneous letter of appreciation, declaring how struck I was by his use of decorative motifs that seemed to render homage to Vienna's foremost painter of the Art Nouveau generation, Gustav Klimt, as well as being reminiscent of some of Schiele's paintings, such as his 1914 *Façade of a House* (Fig. 1). Almost by return mail a charming letter typed in near perfect English and headed "Venice, the 29th July 1963" arrived for me from Hundertwasser (Fig. 2).

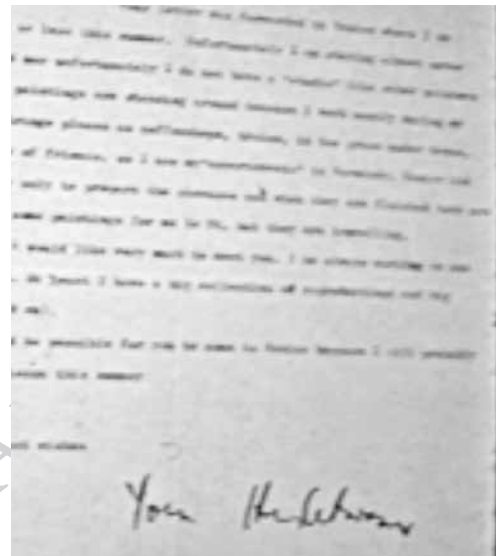
Embellished with a red insignia stamp at the bottom, the letter read as follows:

Hundertwasser, Giudecca 4, Casa de Maria, Venezia,
Tel 88007

Dear Alessandra Comini,



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Your letter was forwarded to Venice where I am staying more or less this summer. Unfortunately I am staying almost never in Vienna and more unfortunately I do not have a "studio" like other painters where paintings are standing around because I work mostly during my travels in strange places as coffeeshops, trains, in the grass under trees, in the houses of friends, so I use my "apartments" in Normandy, Venice and Vienna mostly to prepare the canvases and when they are finished they are gone. I have some paintings for me left, but they are travelling. Nevertheless I would like very much to meet you. I am always working on one or two things. At least I have a big collection of reproductions and big slides (12:9 cm).

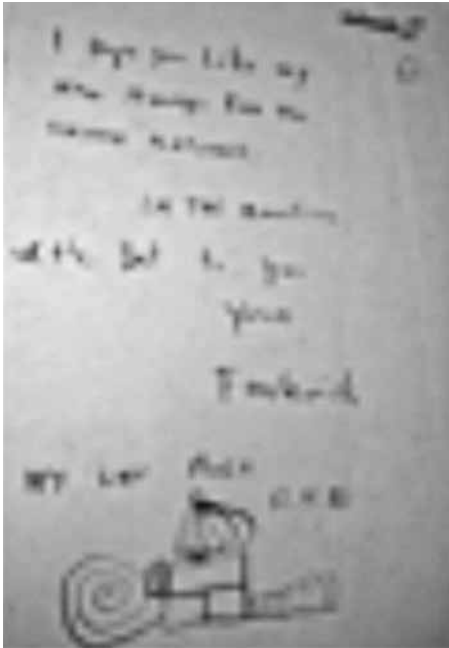
Maybe it would be possible for you to come to Venice because I will probably not come to Vienna this summer.

best wishes

Your Hundertwasser

Is 6708 Snider Plaza, Dallas 5 Texas your permanent Adress [sic]? If not please send me.

Please write me aoubout [sic] your research of Schiele. I am very interested. I sent you catalogues of my work separately.



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you all writings first prior to publishing for suggestion for appropriate wording (Fig. 23)."

Enclosed was the „corrected“ text of his speech for the United Nations. Entitled „The Right to Dream,“ the typescript began: “THE DREAMS ARE THE LAST KINGDOM WHERE MAN CAN TAKE REFUGE AND RECOVER.” However, the word “man” had been crossed out and replaced by the penciled-in word “we.” (Fig. 24).

The text continued in this vein: every time the word “man” appeared, Friedrich had crossed it out and printed “we” or “us” or “our.” A real triumph for feminism, I thought, and for many years I told my art

history classes this story when introducing them to Hundertwasser. I also showed them, in slide form, the second image I had received in the mail from the artist along with his corrected United Nations text: a brief note illustrated by a swirling, onion-dome topped building that read: „I hope you like my new stamps for the United Nations. In the meantime all the best to you Your Friedrich (Fig. 25).

This precious note, written again on Swissair paper and bearing the same date as the first one, was enclosed inside a wonderful gift: a handsome envelope bearing not one but three of the artist’s luminous first-day of issue stamps! (Fig. 26)

Although there were no further occasions for visits or letter exchanges between Hundertwasser and me, my two visits to his Vienna dwelling, the inscribed k & k brick, and the effervescent United Nations stamps have remained vibrant reminders of the rewards that can lie in store for those who hunt down the artists they admire.



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After eight scholarly books, the author has just published her first *Kriminalroman*:

Alessandra Comini

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