



# THIRTY YEARS AT BILD-WERK FRAUENAU

## THE INTERNATIONAL SUMMER ACADEMY FOR GLASS AND ARTS

by Sarah Höchstetter

In the middle of the Bavarian Forest in the southeast of Germany lies a small town called Frauenau. The town, which looks back at a centuries-old tradition of glassmaking, is where the International Summer Academy Bild-Werk Frauenau is located. Every year from May until September, artists and art enthusiasts from all over the world meet there in order to work with glass, to paint, to sculpt, or to be creative in many other ways. They come to Bild-Werk to enjoy the unique character of the academy, which takes up the spirit of the cultural heritage of glass production on the one hand and of the International Studio Glass movement on the other. This summer the academy celebrated its 30th anniversary.

### How It All Began

In 1962 a momentous event took place in Frauenau—the encounter between the artist Harvey K. Littleton and Erwin Eisch, artist and son of a family of glassworkers from Frauenau. The Eisch family had become self-employed with their own glassworks in the 1950s, and Erwin Eisch had soon started to use the family owned business to experiment with hot glass in an artistic way. During his journey to Europe in 1962, Harvey K. Littleton visited Zwiesel, a neighboring town of Frauenau, where he fortuitously found a free-blown glass jug by Eisch. Littleton was excited about the unusual glass object and decided to visit its creator. By doing so, Littleton laid the foundations of a wonderful friendship as well as a lasting and fruitful reciprocal exchange between the two pioneers of the International Studio Glass movement. Eventually the relationship led to the founding of Bild-Werk in 1987.

On his numerous visits to the United States, Eisch became acquainted with the concept of American summer schools such as Pilchuck Glass School. The creative and unconventional atmosphere that the artist from the Bavarian Forest experienced there animated him to create something similar in Germany. With the support of his wife Gretel and many others from Frauenau, including a few artists who were inspired by this idea, Eisch's vision was realized in 1988.

Anne Petters, *Books of Disquiet, frit de verre*, 2017. Photo by Sarah Höchstetter.

## property of Glass Art

Two former industrial glass buildings were set up with workshops and studios, and even a small glass furnace was built. Finally the first *Academy for Head-, Hand- and Artwork* started in August 1988 and offered 10 courses in glass, ceramics, sculpting, and painting. About 60 international participants, quite a lot of whom had attended the glass symposium in Frauenau earlier that year, got together in the small town in order to share the enthusiastic atmosphere.

### Celebrating the Anniversary

Since August 1988, more than 250 artists and teachers from 30 nations and several thousand participants have filled the two academy buildings in Frauenau with life. This year the International Summer Academy took place for the 30th time. For this occasion, Bild-Werk has organized an exhibition in the Galerie am Museum in Frauenau that reflects the unique character of the academy in all its facets. Thirty-five artists, who over the years have taught at the summer academy several times and by that have shaped the nature of the school, contributed one or more objects to the exhibition.

With works by Eisch and his wife, glass engravings by Christian Schmidt, and glass paintings by Ursula Huth, four teachers from the very beginning are represented. A younger generation of artists at Bild-Werk are showcasing some of their work as well. Pavlina Čambalova from the Czech Republic and Anne Petters from London have brought fresh ideas to the academy by developing new modes of expression in glass engraving and in *pâte de verre*. The exhibiting artists are coming from near and far—Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Hungary, and Estonia, as well as from Great Britain, the United States, and Australia—thus representing the international network of artists at whose center Bild-Werk lies.



*Mark Angus. Three Angels.  
Etched and enameled stained  
glass. 2017. Thomas Ackermann*



*Stephen Paul Day and Sybille Peretti, Brüderlein und  
Schwesterlein, blown glass and bronze, painted.  
Photo by Michal Poustka.*



*Vladimir Klein, Toro, cast and sculpted  
glass, 2013. Photo by Sarah Höchstetter.*

property of Glass Art



*Erwin Eisch welcomes the participants of the Summer Academy in front of the academy building Tom's Hall.  
Michal Poustka*

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Just as diverse as the provenance of the artists are the exhibits. Even though the glass medium dominates the showroom, the diversity of materials and techniques that is characteristic for the courses of the summer academy can be seen. Glass engravings, blown, and kiln cast glass works are arranged side by side to wood sculptures, bronze objects and mixed media. Large-size oil paintings are attached to the walls right next to prints and glass paintings. Every single one of the objects tells its own story and expresses the identity of its creator. But as individual as the pieces might be, they have something in common as well. By operating between the poles of arts and crafts, they share an approach to their work that Bild-Werk has pursued and taught from its beginning. For almost 20 years, this approach of the academy was represented by Thomas S. Buechner on the one hand and Erwin Eisch on the other hand. Whereas Tom Buechner, former director of the Corning Museum of Glass, was an advocate of classical painting, Erwin Eisch has preferred and still prefers an intuitive and spontaneous approach to free painting.

Until today the school pursues a free didactic and artistic approach. Likewise it offers to impart craftsmanship as the basis for any artistic creation, especially concerning the glass medium. By emphasizing craftsmanship, Bild-Werk builds on the cultural heritage of the small glassmaking town that it has filled with international life for 30 years. It is a creative place where people meet and exchange ideas as well as being an infinite source of inspiration that brought the world to Frauenau. As Stephen Paul Day, glass artist and long-standing teacher at the academy, concluded in his opening speech for the exhibition, "Bild-Werk began 30 years ago as a tiny little school in a tiny little village, proving that great art has no boundaries."

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