



FRIEDENSREICH HUNDERTWASSER

(Vienna 1928–2000 aboard the Queen Elizabeth 2 off Brisbane)

Der gelbe Platz - Flugplatz. 1958.

Watercolour with varnish between layers on wrapping paper, primed with chalk (sheet folded in the middle).

Signed, dated and inscribed centre left: HUNDERTWASSER 1959 AM 26. MAI 1981
AUSGEBESSERT DUNKELBUNT REGENTAG.

98.5 × 64 cm.

Provenance: - Collection Dr. R. Brunner, Munich. - APP ART PERSPECTIVE
PROJECT, Munich. Exhibitions: - 1964/65 Exhibition Tour: Kestner Gesellschaft
Hannover, Kunsthalle Bern, Karl-Ernst-Osthaus Museum Hagen, Stedelijk Amsterdam,
Moderna Museet Stockholm also Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts Vienna. -

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1975 Munich. Haus der Kunst, February - April. - 1979 World Exhibition Tour: Museo Espanol de Arte Contemporáneo Madrid, Seedamm-Kulturzentrum Pfäffikon. - 1980 World Exhibition Tour: Palazzo Barberini Rome, Palazzo Reale Milan, a.o. - 1980/81 World Exhibition Tour: Museum Ludwig Cologne, Secession Vienna. Literature: - Fürst, Andrea Christa: Hundertwasser 1928 - 2000. Werkverzeichnis - Catalogue Raisonné, Vol. II, Cologne 2002, no. 509. - Schmied, Wieland: Hundertwasser. Bibliophilic monograph with 100 coloured collotype prints, Salzburg 1974 (with colour ill.). "The spiral signifies life and death in all directions." Friedensreich Hundertwasser February marked the 20th anniversary of the death of Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1928-2000) and he was duly honoured with a large exhibition at the Leopold Museum in Vienna. The painter, pioneer of the ecology movement and designer of living spaces, who worked far beyond his own national borders, shaped the art of the 20th century in his characteristic and unmistakable way with his gorgeously coloured utopic designs. Born in 1928 in Vienna as Friedrich Stowasser, even at school he was acknowledged to have an outstanding sense of form and colour. His talent and passion were recognised and fostered early on until the rise of the National Socialists overshadowed everything. Although she was Jewish herself, his mother had Friedrich baptised a Catholic in 1935, and after the annexation of Austria, Hundertwasser joined the Hitler youth. Unlike his grandmother and 69 of his relatives, Hundertwasser and his mother survived the Nazi terror, so that he was able to complete his final examinations in 1948 and became a student at the Viennese Academy of Fine Art, which he left, however, after three months. At this time, in 1949, he took on the name of Hundertwasser, by apparently germanising the first syllable "Sto" (Slavic for "hundred"). In the 1950s Hundertwasser lived in Paris and engaged with the avant-garde of the time in the discourse between geometric and expressive abstraction, Informel and the burgeoning Nouveau Réalisme. In response to this, he formulated his own vision, "Transautomatism", which was not only a new development in art, but also a new perception that required a viewer who was active, responsible, and involved. The vegetative-organic principle of nature is as much a leitmotif of Hundertwasser's creative work as the artistic influences of

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Egon Schiele, Paul Klee or the Viennese school of Fantastic Realism, which provided the foundation of his early work. In addition, his experiences while travelling to Italy, Paris, Morocco, Tunisia, Sicily, Japan, and New Zealand influenced him and he developed a colour-intensive abstract painting style. The beauty and harmony of his paintings has often earned him more criticism than appreciation. Yet this criticism only responds to a very superficial examination of his pictures, as Wieland Schmied explains in the 1974 catalogue raisonné (p. 15): “Hundertwasser does not say (...) that our world is idyllic. On the contrary: he denounces the world – and at the same time in his paintings he counters that with the model of a possible better world.” The work presented here at auction “Gelber Platz” (yellow square) fulfils this promise of a critical view of our world presented as a paradigm. The horizontal division of the picture already seems to indicate the discrepancy between utopia and reality. Two yellow spirals dominate, and, mirrored along the central fold, they draw the eye. The composition of the upper half is very dense, complete, and harmonious. The lower half, on the other hand, extends rather loosely and hesitantly over the pictorial space, with elements of the incomplete, and with space for the unexplained. The upper half creates the context of a harmonious world, whereby the spiral tilts into the topographical depictions, taking a bird’s eye view with different elevations and surrounding fields rendered in cartographical style. In the lower part, however, nature appears to have moved into the background, and traces of industrialisation such as factory chimneys and cube-shaped residential elements form the centre of the incomplete spiral. Hundertwasser loves the friction which arises from the juxtaposition of nature and man, through various perspectives and points of view such as the vertical views of houses versus the horizontal landscapes. The viewer becomes actively involved in the work, carried along by the power of the colours, which are used instinctively by the artist regardless of the object represented. In this extraordinary painting we have a rare opportunity to trace Friedensreich Hundertwasser’s working and thinking process – and to tap fully into the range of themes. The three documented states of this work reveal a conscious, step by step approach: State 1: painted in Hamburg

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(summer 1958) / State 2: further worked in Vienna (autumn 1961) / State 3: later reworking with a note by the artist "AUSGEBESSERT DUNKELBUNT REGENTAG" (corrected dark-coloured rainy day) (26 May 1981). This explains why the original work diverges from the one that was illustrated in the catalogue raisonné of 1974, since it is only later, on a visit by the artist to the owner of the time, that it was changed. We would like to thank the Hundertwasser Foundation Vienna for their valuable assistance.

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