

Susanne Heindl – the Weaver

exhibition text

For more than 40 years the textile artist Susanne Heindl, initiator of the summer symposium TEXTILE KULTUR HASLACH/Austria created textiles such as blankets, shawls and table linen as well as unique artistic works of art for interiors, quietly her studio. As she is now closing her studio, the exhibition „zartes Bunt“ [tenderly colorful] at the Textile Centre Haslach pays a thankful tribute to her work.

Susanne Heindl was born in Linz and grew up in Bad Zell and Linz. She studied Textile Art and Design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. After studying she worked in New York for four years designing printed fabrics for various companies. Back in Vienna, she continued working as a freelance designer. In 1973 she and her husband, the philosopher Bernhard Heindl, decided to buy an old farmhouse in the Mühlviertel in the north of Austria, renovated it carefully and set up a weaving workshop.

For several decades Susanne Heindl consistently concentrated on her hand weaving. She began with a simple peasant loom, that she had assembled herself from parts of old looms she had found in the area, until the expanding equipment and the experience she had gained allowed for more and more refined techniques. Over the years Susanne Heindl became a real master and developed a very personal thumbprint which was characterized by complex structures and lavish double and plaited weaves, yet never appeared technophile. It is rather a playful element that dominates her works and her intuitive way of handling colours – often multicoloured but never brash like the tender leaf of a flower that, although strong in tone, is nevertheless fragile.

There is no defined borderline between applied design and art in Susanne Heindl's works. Developing classical consumer textiles and unique works of art for interiors often went parallel. She cooperated with various interior decorating businesses in Vienna, Salzburg and Linz for whom she created textile interior decoration such as wall hangings, carpets and curtains to order. Orders by private customers and group exhibitions in Austria and abroad followed.

At the end of the 1980s the engagement with the history and the still extant textile culture of their environment – the Mühlviertel – became ever more important in Susanne and Bernhard Heindl's work. Bernhard Heindl's book „Textillandschaft Mühlviertel“ took stock of the Mühlviertel as a textile region and became the corner stone for the beginning of a process of change. A small network of like-minded people got together to counteract the widespread closures of factories and the loss of textile awareness at the time. Haslach became the centre of their activities. In 1990 Susanne and Bernhard Heindl became joint initiators of the newly founded textile workshop, today's Manufaktur Haslach, and developed many patterns in (using) regional sheep's wool for the project. Almost simultaneously the cultural initiative TEXTILE KULTUR HASLACH was launched. This summer symposium with exhibitions, courses, a weavers' market and experimental workshops soon brought artists and craftspeople from near and far to Haslach. What had begun on a small scale in 1991 and was at best smiled at, developed into a most successful event format over the years. Gradually the mood in the town changed. It is due to no small part to the doggedness of Susanne and Bernhard Heindl that the weavers' market town of Haslach did not end up in destructive straits, but was able to find new visions. They and their team prepared the ground for opening the Textile Centre Haslach years later in place of the former weaving mills Vonwiller and Obermüller, which today is home to the European Textile Network ETN.

In spite of the increasing organisational work for TEXTILE KULTUR HASLACH the artistic and technical development of Susanne Heindl never stagnated. She was driven by curiosity and little fear of new technologies. In 1988 she began a 2-months' study stay in Florence at Fondazione Lisio, a centre of Jacquard weaving. On historical looms she learnt the special technique which makes the weaving of free patterns possible. Back in the Mühlviertel it was clear that she make use of the new computer controlled Jacquard loom of the Haslach textile school. The school allowed Susanne Heindl the use of the loom and made it possible for her to engage totally with this new world of machine weaving. One of the most impressive projects created there was her work "Bruch", a series of jacquard weaves for an internationally renowned exhibition in a slate mine in Switzerland. By organising experimental workshops Susanne Heindl opened up the possibility for other hand weavers to work on the interface of handcraft and machine production – a visionary concept which many years later became routine in the context of the Textile Centre Haslach.

In 2013 Susanne Heindl was honoured with the cultural medal of the federal state of Upper Austria for her creative work. The quality of her textile work as well as her engagement for the association TEXTILE KULTUR HASLACH cannot be appraised highly enough. In her subtle, quiet way she brought colour into the region and created a network which though fragile has a permanency and motivates others to enlarge it.

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