

## PRESS TEXT 2026

The City of Bleiburg has dedicated a monographic museum to the painter Werner Berg (1904-1981) since 1968. The representative building on Bleiburg's main square has since become a magnet for art lovers from all over the world. It presents the artist's oeuvre - whose artistic point of departure was German Expressionism - in a unique interplay of art and environment in the very region where his art took shape.

With the annually changing exhibitions, the museum always seeks to establish a thematic dialogue between Werner Berg's work and the respective special exhibition. In this way, Werner Berg's art can be experienced from ever new perspectives, even by returning visitors.

The Werner Berg Museum Bleiburg/Pliberk presents the following exhibition from May 8 to November 8, 2026:

### **MICROCOSMS**

### **Mercedes Helnwein | Werner Berg | Alberto Giacometti**

#### Short version

Three worlds at close range. Mercedes Helnwein portrays the "American way of life" in suburbs, living rooms, and colleges; Werner Berg condenses encounters in rural southern Carinthia into timeless pictorial formulas of human existence; and Alberto Giacometti's graphic cycle "Paris sans fin" opens up views of studios, cafes, and streets in the French metropolis.

#### Long text

The repeated, almost sociological "probing" of a world that is always very different yet always limited, with its characteristic human types and events, is the shared "theme" of this juxtaposition, so unusual at first glance. In their work, the three artists each confine themselves to their own microcosm, whose very particular qualities they explore in unmistakable ways.

Many of Mercedes Helnwein's (\*1979) motifs come from the world around the high school of the 1950s and 1960s, so characteristic of one facet of the USA, and from the "American living room." She depicts encounters among groups of people in scenes of suburban streets, hospital nurses' rooms, graduation balls, Halloween parties, or weddings - always with a keen sense for the exceptional. The uncanny undertone in seemingly ordinary everyday situations lends her works a mysterious depth.

Set against this, on the one hand, are Werner Berg's (1904-1981) depictions of encounters at markets, church festivals, in inns, or on the railway. Since settling at the Rutarhof, he strove to explore and depict in his paintings the small world of Lower Carinthia and its human encounters. Closely bound to the lives of rural inhabitants, he recorded their diverse gatherings directly in his sketchbook. He succeeded in capturing the particularity of the moment - those small incidents - in clearly formed compositions, usually within a matter of seconds; from these, his paintings and woodcuts were later pressed out and condensed in the studio. Thus, for him, depictions of a limited region that might appear inconspicuous to the fleeting observer became a universal parable of human existence.

"Paris sans fin" by Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) presents in 150 lithographs the places and people that mattered to the artist in the metropolis on the Seine. For years, the sculptor, draughtsman, and painter had moved through Paris almost exclusively between his studio and a few meeting places, but this changed when he met the prostitute Caroline in 1958. The twenty-year-old became his lover and model. In the red MG he gave her, he drew while she drove him through the city. The unique abundance of individual depictions thus shows groups of people, rows of houses, bridges, cafes, and automobiles - and again and again the studio, the models, and the beloved woman in his characteristic intersecting lines, in which the approximate increasingly condenses into the particular.

Here and there in this exhibition, exemplary works by the three artists directly encounter one another. At times, points of contact emerge that stand under a shared overarching title. This gives the museum the opportunity to pursue this defining aspect of Werner Berg's oeuvre - namely his lifelong exploration of a limited, "small" world - through a large number of works never shown before. Like a sociological field study, the concentration on a distinctive world in the works of these three very different artists - and, in the case of Mercedes Helnwein, artists separated by several generations - strikingly reveals universal human conditions.

In the museum's sculpture garden, the exhibition **"Against the Current" by Hans-Peter Profunser** will again be shown in 2026, as it was already in 2025.

Born in Lienz and raised in Berg im Drautal, this extraordinary artist first trained as a machine fitter. It was only in 1988 that he began his remarkable career as a sculptor. More than one hundred solo exhibitions and exhibition participations in Austria and abroad, participation in symposia, and numerous awards testify to Profunser's artistic creative power. Many of his works can be found in private and public collections, while more than twenty sculptures can be admired in public spaces.

His two large-format metal sculptures "Begegnung/srečanje" and "Die Getriebenen" have for years welcomed travelers arriving in the cultural town of Bleiburg/Pliberk at the northern municipal boundary.

The Art Facade campaign will also be continued in 2026. Large-scale facade designs extend the exhibition into the town center. Such an expansion of the museum presentation into the public space, shaping an entire urban ensemble, has by now become a distinctive hallmark of the cultural town of Bleiburg/Pliberk.

Curator: Dr. Harald Scheicher

Museum Director: Prof. Arthur Ottowitz

**Exhibition opening:**

**Thursday, May 7, 2026, 7 p.m.**

**Speakers: Gottfried Helnwein, Harald Scheicher**

**Music: The Talltones**

## Werner Berg Museum Bleiburg|Pliberk

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[www.wernerberg.museum](http://www.wernerberg.museum)

### **Opening hours:**

May 8 - November 8, 2026

Tue-Sun: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. - open on public holidays

Extensive audio-guide information via QR code

Guided tours (German/Slovene/Italian/English) for groups upon request.

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