

Richard Lindner – American Artist from Nuremberg

Richard Lindner was born in Hamburg on November 11, 1901. He was the second child of Jüdel (Julius) Lindner and his wife Mina (née Bornstein), and had an elder sister named Lissy (born 1894). His mother, the daughter of German-Jewish emigrants, born in New York in 1869, had returned to Germany at the age of 20. Her husband, a member of the High German Israelite Community, worked as a salesman. Around half a year after Richard was born the family moved to Christiania, today's Oslo. A second son, Arthur, was born to the Lindner family in 1904, and an address book makes it clear that in 1905 the Lindners were living in Nuremberg. Numerous moves from one apartment to the next in the city prove the modest conditions in which young Richard was brought up. His father was a travelling salesman, and from 1913 onwards his mother also contributed as a breadwinner by running a tailormade corsets business from home. The death of Richard's sister Lissy in 1915 came as a great blow to him. In 1922 he began a study course at the school of applied arts in Nuremberg. After a spell in Frankfurt he returned to Nuremberg in the summer of 1925 and continued with his studies there. He was a gifted pupil for his professor, Max Körner, and in the late 1920s he emerged as a brilliant commercial artist. In 1927 he moved to Berlin, where he worked on several publications including "Drei Bücher des Lachens" for the Ullstein Verlag. In 1929 he went to Munich to work for the publishing house of Knorr and Hirth. His illustrations appeared in the "Münchner Neuesten Nachrichten", the "Süddeutschen Sonntagspost" and the "Münchner Illustrierten Presse".

On June 24, 1930 Richard Lindner married his former fellow student Elsbeth Schüle, who soon followed him to Munich and attended fashion school there. His career as a graphic designer, which had started so promisingly, came to an abrupt end with the political events of 1933. The moment Hitler had been appointed chancellor, Richard Lindner emigrated to Paris with his wife. His brother Arthur escaped to Barcelona. In contrast to his wife, who worked as a fashion artist for the magazines "Vogue" and "Jardin des Modes", Richard Lindner was unable to make a proper living in Paris. In September 1939, after the outbreak of war, the married couple were interned as enemy foreigners, together with around 15,000 other Germans and Austrians – many of whom were Jews and political opponents of the Nazi regime. After the defeat of France, Richard Lindner managed to escape to unoccupied Lyon. There he heard that his wife, who had made it to Casablanca, had fallen in love during their separation with his friend Joseph Bornstein. Both were already in New York when Richard Lindner arrived there on March 17, 1941 as a passenger on the "SS Bonet". The separation from his wife, who eventually married author and journalist Joseph Bornstein, cast a shadow over Lindner's first few years in America, which were tough enough as it was. Lindner felt completely uprooted. National socialism had robbed him of his homeland. His father was

murdered in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1943. Friendship with other exiled artists and intellectuals became increasingly important to him.

These included the novelist Hermann Kesten from Nuremberg, and his wife Toni. Lindner made a living as a commercial artist, and his best work during the 1940s included book illustrations. On November 15, 1948 Richard Lindner received his US citizenship. In 1950 a reasonably long stay in Paris formed the basis for Lindner's painting oeuvre. "I went back to Paris for six months, and the journey was my farewell to Europe. I realized that you don't become an American in America – you become one on returning to Europe." His "early" works included portraits of the French poets Proust and Verlaine, women in corsets, and strange "child prodigies". Stylistically his work can be defined as European "classic modern". In 1954 he had his first personal exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York. He also began to establish himself as a teacher. In 1952 he was offered a teaching post at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. To commute between Manhattan and Brooklyn, the artist bought a Volkswagen. In 1960 he became assistant professor of art at the Pratt Institute, where he continued to give lectures until 1966. The purchase of his painting "The Meeting" by the Museum of Modern Art in 1962 was his first big success. The group portrait from 1953 combined friends from Lindner's American present with figures from the past, including Lissy, the sister who died so young. At the centre of the autobiographical group is the Bavarian king Ludwig II, a figure often used by the artist in his work. In the early 1960s, Richard Lindner started drawing inspiration from the city of New York and its people. His highly colourful, hard-edge style seems to have brought him close to Pop Art, which he rejected. Nevertheless, he is immortalised on the cover of the Beatles record "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" (1967) as a patron of the pop culture. In 1965 he returned to Germany to deliver a series of lectures at the Hamburg University of the Fine Arts. In 1970 he was awarded the Lichtwark Prize there. In 1968 Richard Lindner took part in the "documenta" art exhibition in Kassel with four paintings. This was followed by his first museum retrospective, with stops in Leverkusen, Hanover, Baden-Baden and Berlin. In the USA, too, a Lindner retrospective honoured the painter's work, with stops in Berkeley and Minneapolis. In 1969 the artist married for a second time. Since his wife, the painter Denise Kopelman, had relatives in Paris, the couple spent a lot of time there, and in 1971 they purchased an apartment in the city. It would be several more years before Richard Lindner returned to Nuremberg. Only in 1974 did a retrospective of his work arrive in his former homeland of Germany, with stops in Paris, Rotterdam, Düsseldorf, Zürich and Vienna. During the following year the city acquired the painting "Telephone" (1966), which can today be seen in the Neue Museum in Nuremberg. In 1976 the artist paid a brief visit to Nuremberg – the first and last time since his emigration. Richard Lindner died on April 16, 1978 in New York at the

age of 77. He lies buried in Westchester Hills Cemetery at the Stephen Wise Synagogue in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.

Thomas Heyden

Literature

This article is based on the Lindner biography by Claudia Loyall in the Richard Lindner exhibition catalogue. Paintings and watercolours 1948–1977, Haus der Kunst, Munich, February 7. April 27, 1997, Munich / New York 1997, S. 147 ff., as well as the essay by Judith Zilczer: "Zirkus des Absurden: Die Bilder Richard Lindners", ebd. S. 13 ff.

Richard Lindner (second person above George Harrison) showed himself amidst the stars on the Beatles cover of Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band, London 1967

Richard Lindner in his atelier in Paris, 1976

Richard Lindner drawing "Telephone", 1966