



KOPPEL, HEINZ (1919 - 1980), artist

Name: Heinz Koppel
Date of birth: 1919
Date of death: 1980
Spouse: Renate Koppel (née Fischl)
Child: Hanno Koppel
Child: Ruth Koppel
Child: Siân Koppel
Child: Sarah Koppel
Child: Gideon Koppel
Child: Jessica Koppel
Parent: Paula Koppel (née Jalowicz)
Parent: Joachim Koppel
Gender: Male
Occupation: artist
Area of activity: Art and Architecture
Author: Mike Hawkins

Heinz Koppel was born on 29 January 1919 in Berlin, Germany. He was the second son of Joachim Koppel (1892-1946), a businessman, and his wife Paula née Jalowicz (1886-1942). His elder brother was Kurt (1916-2004). Joachim was an inventor who started a metal dealing business and specialised in the patenting and manufacture of zips and metal fasteners. Joachim and Paula separated in 1928 and were divorced in 1930. Kurt and Heinz continued to live with their mother in the Tiergarten area of Berlin. Their father married Cilly née Cohn, who had previously been married to Paul Pinkus and with whom she had had two children, Heinrich and Ilse. Joachim moved with his new wife to the Charlottenburg area of the city.

Heinz attended a private primary school and the Friedrichs-Werdersche secondary school but his brother said that Heinz was not a good student and was only interested in painting. He received instruction from the painter Grigorij Oscheroff who was both a neighbour and a tenant of his father and lived off commissions from the family.

As a wealthy Jewish businessman, Joachim was concerned about the rise of the Nazis, and moved to Prague with Cilly. Heinz and his brother joined them on 15 November 1933, and their mother some months later. Their German citizenship was revoked. The brothers travelled around and by 1936 had joined their uncle Leo Koppel in the Hampstead Garden suburb of London. There Heinz attended the School of Contemporary Painting and Drawing under Berlin émigré Martin Bloch (1883-1954). The family reunited in Prague in 1937.

The family fled to Britain, via Italy and Antwerp, in 1938. They escaped internment as 'enemy aliens' because Joachim had purchased Costa Rican citizenship in Austria. Poor health and then the onset of war prevented Heinz' mother from joining them and she stayed in Prague. In 1942 Paula was deported to Theresienstadt and then transferred to Treblinka where she was killed.

In 1939 Joachim established the Aero Zip factory in the Treforest Industrial Estate near Pontypridd, with their headquarters in London. By 1965 the factory made one third of Britain's zip exports. Heinz returned to London and lessons with Martin Bloch. In 1941 Heinz joined the teaching staff of the Burslem School of Art in Stoke-on-Trent and in 1942 exhibited at the Modern Art Gallery, London, with Kurt Schwitters and Oskar Kokoschka. In England Heinz was treated by Dr. Willi Hoffer (1897-1967) of the British Psychoanalytical Society and developed a lifelong interest in psychoanalysis. He gave painting lessons to a number of analysts including Marion Milner, Sylvia Payne and Masud Khan and remained close family friends with Milner in particular.

In 1944 Heinz moved to south Wales, staying with his cousin and fellow-artist Harry Weinberger in Hawthorn, near Pontypridd. He moved to Dowlais, near Merthyr Tydfil, and began to teach painting at the Merthyr Tydfil Educational Establishment and had taken charge of the Dowlais Art Centre by 1948. He had a studio in an old stable building in Dowlais, where that year he met the painter Renate Fischl (known as Pip Koppel). She was born in Dresden and had studied at the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing, and they married in 1949. They had six children, Hanno (1950), Ruth (1952), Siân (1955), Sarah who was born in 1958 but died tragically the following year, the film-maker and artist Gideon (1960) and Jessica (1963). Pip described her husband as eccentric and serious, but very approachable and having a very good relationship with students.

In 1949 his first large exhibition, with the sculptor John Brown, was at the Kingly Gallery London and there was an exhibition at the Glyn Vivian Gallery, Swansea in 1951. In 1956 the family moved to Highgate in London. He was a lecturer at the Hornsey College of Art 1960-1962 and the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts 1960-1963. In 1956 he was a founder of the 56 Group, later known as 56 Group Wales/Grŵp 56 Cymru which was established with the aim of promoting modernist art in Wales. Key to his development was his close relationship with the artist and curator Helen Lessore (1907-1994) and her Beaux Arts Gallery, where he had three one-man exhibitions between 1958 and 1963.

In 1964 he was appointed Senior Lecturer for Painting at Liverpool College of Art and the family relocated to Burscough. In 1967 his friendship with the artist John Heartfield was consolidated when Heartfield stayed with the family. Heartfield tried to encourage Heinz and Pip to relocate to East Berlin. In 1969 the family acquired the isolated smallholding Llety Caws in Cwmerfyn near Aberystwyth where they moved permanently in 1974 when he stopped teaching - designing two purpose-built studios to work in. In the 1970s he mainly worked from home producing more abstract works.

His style stems from German expressionism. His work is in the collections of the National Gallery of Wales (Cardiff), Newport Museum and Art Gallery, Bodelwyddan Castle, Cyfartha Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester Museum and the Tate Gallery and the Ben Uri Gallery in London.

In 1980, Heinz Koppel was diagnosed with angina. He died unexpectedly at his home in Llety Caws on 1 December 1980. He is buried in a tiny cemetery on a hill overlooking his farm. He is remembered for his significant contributions to modern art, his distinctive and surreal artistic vision, and his role in nurturing and inspiring future generations of artists.

Author

Mike Hawkins

Sources

Chana Schtz a Hermann Simon, *Heinz Koppel* (Berlin 2009)

'Heinz Koppel', Refugees from National Socialism in Wales: Heinz Koppel, Aberystwyth University

'Berlin honours artist's Welsh work', BBC South East Wales, 9 September 2009

Andrea Hammel, *Finding refuge* (Aberystwyth 2022)

'Heinz Koppel 1919-1980', Ben Uri

Email from Gideon Koppel to JHASW/CHIDC dated 1 September 2024

'The Holocaust and Wales: Aero Zipp Fasteners at Treforest Trading Estate', Centre for the Movement of People (CMOP), Aberystwyth University, and Jewish History Association of

Further reading

'The Holocaust and Wales: Jewish Artists in Wales - Heinz Koppel', Centre for the Movement of People (CMOP), Aberystwyth University, and Jewish History Association of South Wales/Cymdeithas Hanes Iddewig De Cymru (JHASW/CHIDC), People's Collection Wales

'KS3 Art and Design: Welsh artists - Heinz Koppel', BBC Teach

'Heinz Koppel (1919-1980)', Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig / Dictionary of Welsh Biography, People's Collection Wales

Gus Payne, 'The Dowlais and Merthyr Artists' Settlements', ArtUK

Wikipedia Article: [Heinz Koppel](#)

Works

'Heinz Koppel 1919-1980', ArtUK

Collections Online, Amgueddfa Cymru

'Heinz Koppel Artist (1919 - 1980)', Leicester's German Expressionist Collection, Leicester Museums

'Heinz Koppel 1919-1980', Tate

Sound and Film

'Ail-ddweud Stori'r Cymoedd/Valleys Re-told', Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales, YouTube, 2023

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