



ein museum der **wienholding**

## Media Information, June 2022

### **Love Me Kosher**

Starting on June 22, the Jewish Museum Vienna will be focusing on love and sexuality in Judaism. The exhibition at the Museum Dorotheergasse proceeds from the paradisiacal state after the creation of the world. Visitors can learn about how love and sexuality are regarded in the Torah and the Talmud, about Jewish wedding rituals, Vienna as the center of sexology around 1900, as well as “Dr. Ruth” Westheimer and the current discussions in modern Judaism on partnership and LGBTIQ issues.

### **Heavenly Sex**

Love and sexuality are vital elements in Judaism. The Torah already proclaims that the beginning of life requires an interpersonal relationship: “God blessed Adam and Eve and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’” Sexuality is thus a natural part of life. It is a duty for both partners to feel happiness. The joyful and life-affirming tradition of Judaism has an impact on marriage and relationships. The Laws of Family Purity play an important role in this. In Kabbalah, sexuality possesses a spiritual and cosmic dimension. The union of man and woman is a bond of wisdom and understanding that creates knowledge. Marriage is a sacred event that makes the human being perfect. In order to show the constant renegotiation of these fundamental principles, the views of currently active rabbis in Vienna on a wide variety of topics are also to be articulated through interviews in the exhibition.

### **André Heller's Garden of Paradise and Contemporary Art**

The examination of sexuality and contemporary art also has a high priority in the exhibition. André Heller's Garden of Paradise is being presented in a museum for the first time. André Heller's paradise garden *Anima* near Marrakesh is described as a magical place of sensuality, amazement, contemplation, joy, healing and inspiration. André Heller creates an image of the Garden of Eden on Earth with his botanical works of art. They are to lead us into paradise as the origin of all life and thus of sexuality as well. Our journey of discovery into love and sexuality in Judaism begins there.

An open approach to sexuality is particularly evident in the artistic exploration of the subject. Many artists, such as Arik Brauer, Marc Chagall, Eva Schlegel, Benyamin Reich, Pablo Picasso and Friedensreich Hundertwasser, deal with love and sex in their works and are represented with their works in the exhibition.

### **The Viennese Jewish Community before 1938**

Before the Jewish community was wiped out in 1421, Jewish weddings in Vienna had probably been able to take place freely for the most part, which later changed due to massive restrictions. Edicts restricted wedlock. Marriages were mostly arranged. They often served to provide for the daughters, to strengthen family and professional alliances—as was common in the aristocracy. “Ringstrasse families,” for instance, married among one another. After Emperor Franz Joseph I permitted the establishment of a Jewish community in the mid-nineteenth century, thousands of Jewish women and men from all over the monarchy flocked to Vienna. The number of marriages likewise increased rapidly. From 1868 on, there was the possibility of civil marriage if a “denominational” obstacle stood in the way. This also enabled mixed marriages to be concluded, which afforded the Jewish spouse certain protection during the National Socialist era. In 1938, the National Socialists made civil marriage compulsory.

### **Vienna as the Center of Modern Sexology**

In the late nineteenth century, Vienna became a center of modern sexology. This is also where Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis was born. On the other hand, the city was characterized by bigotry. Leo Schidrowitz, for example, who had founded a modern institute for sexology on Vienna’s Kohlmarkt based on the model of Magnus Hirschfeld, had to close it again around 1933. These ambivalences led to fruitful debates, which particularly manifested in the cultural sphere.

### **Sexuality and the Holocaust**

When the National Socialists seized power, many of the leading Jewish women and men in the field of sexology were persecuted, expelled, deported and murdered. Sexuality that did not conform to Nazi norms meant the death sentence for countless people during the Shoah. While the Nazi regime used sexuality as a violent weapon of humiliation and destruction, there are also examples of love and sexuality as survival strategies and glimmers of hope among the persecuted and imprisoned.

But even after the war, what the women and men had gone through continued to affect their personal lives. The consequences of forced sterilization or medical experiments, as well as malnutrition, torture and the psychological processing of what they had experienced, made it

difficult for many of the survivors to enjoy carefree sexuality again. Many had also lost their partners during the Shoah. In the postwar DP camps, however, couples who got to know each other usually got married after a short time.

### **One Hundred Percent Unkosher? Jewish and Queer**

Basically, male homosexual acts are forbidden in Judaism. In the Torah it is written: “Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence.” (Vayikra/Leviticus 18:22).

Female homosexuality is neither mentioned in the Torah nor in rabbinic literature. In contrast to Orthodox Judaism, conservative and liberal communities are more open. Marriages of same-sex partners are also celebrated in the Viennese Or Chadasch community. With the founding of the Kibbutz Club in 2013, a more cosmopolitan attitude towards life, based on the model of Tel Aviv, spread in Vienna as well. Nevertheless, queer members of the Orthodox Jewish community in Vienna see themselves confronted with a widespread rejection of homosexuality.

### **“Love Me Kosher. Love and Sexuality in Judaism”**

can be seen from June 22, 2022 to November 13, 2022 at the Jewish Museum Vienna, a Wien Holding museum. Curated by Danielle Spera, Daniela Pscheiden and Julia Windegger, and designed by Fuhrer, Wien, the exhibition is accompanied by a self-published German/English catalog that costs €29.90. The Jewish Museum Vienna, Dorotheergasse 11, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The second location, the Museum Judenplatz, Judenplatz 8, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (wintertime), respectively 5 p.m. (summertime). Further information can be found at [www.jmw.at](http://www.jmw.at) or [info@jmw.at](mailto:info@jmw.at).

#### **Queries**

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Photos and press material for the current exhibitions are available on the Jewish Museum Vienna website at [www.jmw.at/en/press](http://www.jmw.at/en/press).

