

## BETTER TIMES? WALDMÜLLER AND BIEDERMEIER VIENNA

Upper Belvedere

12 May 2021 to 27 February 2022



Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, *After Confirmation (The departure of the Godmother)*, 1859

On loan from the Society of Friends of the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere © Belvedere, Vienna

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When contemplating this era, are we looking back on *better days*? The current special exhibition at the Upper Belvedere speaks to the period of the Metternich restoration and the empowerment of the middle class, with the latter's simultaneous retreat from the sphere of political responsibility into the private sphere – just like today?

*"Rather than presenting the public with a conventional chronology of the Biedermeier era, the exhibition provides a narrative analysis of its many facets. A complete reexamination of what is – or could potentially hide – behind the 'beautiful veil' of the paintings was the prerequisite for the exhibition. The goal has been to place the pictures in a contemporary context to give them a voice,"* explains Belvedere CEO Stella Rollig

*Better Times? Waldmüller and Biedermeier* in Vienna is an opportunity for the Belvedere to focus on a core component of its collection: the museum's holdings from that period, especially those by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, include some of the world's best. This will be the first time in decades that the Upper Belvedere will host a major special exhibition covering the entire second floor.

Beginning with the Vienna Congress of 1814/15 and ending with the 1848 Revolution, curator Rolf H. Johannsen explores salient works of art from that period. Key themes from the Vienna Biedermeier era – the ideal of intimate privacy, the celebration of homeland, the growing

importance of the middle class, repression by the monarchy, and the cautious depiction of social grievances – are highlighted and carefully examined.

*"To this day, no other period is equated more with a 'perfect world' than the Biedermeier era: the scenes seem to be bursting with happy children, sweet homes, and serene scenes of life in the countryside. However, there were dark sides as well, and artists were not afraid of exposing them. They chose a quieter, more subdued approach by drawing attention to grievances and encouraging viewers to empathize with them, but never directly denouncing them. Social protest in today's sense was not their thing,"* explains Johannsen of the mindset of the time.

Viennese-style Biedermeier emerged from the political and social conditions at the beginning of the 19th century. The imperial court, nobility, and church were no longer the leading forces in art and culture; instead, it was the middle class that now set the tone with their very own notions of family, home, and homeland – ideas that to this day continue to prevail to some extent.

## THE EXHIBITION

Typical subject matter in the Biedermeier repertoire included portraiture, landscapes, and genre paintings; in other words, scenes from everyday life. Classical history painting had run its course. It was no longer the battle itself or the ruler on horseback artists chose to portray, but rather dramatic or touching scenes that took place or might have taken place on the periphery of the action. To appeal to the viewer's emotions was the objective, to touch hearts; and here, parallels to today's TV series are quite evident. Feelings such as love, especially between spouses and between parents and their children – no longer hidden but now openly displayed and depicted – emerge for the first time in the paintings of the Biedermeier period.

The setting for this private happiness was "home sweet home," where fitting wealth provided the means to adorn the walls with magnificent floral paintings. Nowhere else did flower painting achieve such diversity and importance as in Vienna during the Biedermeier period. For the first time in Viennese painting, female artists took on a significant role through this genre.

Despite all political restrictions, the middle class attained a previously unknown level of self-confidence. In no genre of painting was this expressed more than in portraiture. An essential aspect of the portrait's work was to reflect newly acquired prestige and social status as well the sitter's personality.

"Life in the countryside" drew the attention of painters. Rural life was glorified and featured people whose lives followed fixed, predetermined paths from baptism to death. These images convey a sense of comfort and security, or, in a nutshell, a sense of home. Landscape painting – the "view afar" – also experienced an unprecedented upswing in the 19th century, not only in Vienna and Austria but throughout Europe. The feeling of longing for Italy was undiminished, however, the north was also discovered. Caspar David Friedrich painted the Baltic Sea and the Elbe Sandstone Mountains. Unlike his fellow artist Carl Blechen, from Berlin, Friedrich was not drawn to the south. Classicism, Berlin Romanticism, and Viennese Biedermeier met with Joseph Rebell, Blechen, and Rudolf von Alt.

Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller was undoubtedly the most significant artist of the time. At the heart of the exhibition is the Belvedere's collection of Waldmüller's paintings – the most comprehensive in the world. Also on display are works by Friedrich von Amerling, Rosalia Amon, Carl Blechen, Josef Danhauser, Thomas Ender, Peter Fendi, Caspar David Friedrich, Pauline Koudelka-Schmerling, Carl Schindler, Franz Steinfeld, Adalbert Stifter, and numerous other artists.

## BIOGRAPHY OF FERDINAND GEORG WALDMÜLLER

- 1793 Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller is born on 15 January in the Alservorstadt municipality of Vienna. His parents are the "servant" Georg Waldmüller and his wife Elisabeth, née Wittman, from Ried im Innkreis. Waldmüller grows up in modest circumstances. He attends the Piarist school and receives his first drawing lessons.
- 1806 His father passes away. Waldmüller does not follow his mother's wish to become a priest. He decides to become a painter.
- 1807 Waldmüller enrolls at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. He is forced to support himself; coloring copperplate engravings, for example.
- 1811 Upon recommendation, Waldmüller goes to the Hungarian Diet in Pressburg/Bratislava, where he paints miniature watercolor portraits. He lives in Agram/Zagreb, among other places, and tries his hand at oil painting. He works as a stage set painter at the Municipal Theater in Agram, where he meets Katharina Weidner, a singer from Vienna.
- 1814 He marries Katharina Weidner. The couple reside in Baden-near-Vienna, Brno, and Prague. Birth of a daughter, Aloisia (1815), and son, Ferdinand (1817).
- 1817 Katharina Waldmüller receives a contract with the Vienna Court Opera.
- 1818 Waldmüller takes lessons in oil and landscape painting. He copies paintings at the Imperial Picture Gallery.
- 1819 Birth of daughter Katharina Amalia. Waldmüller gains recognition as a portrait painter.
- 1822 The couple separates. Waldmüller participates in the Vienna Academy exhibition with six portraits.
- 1825 First of many trips to Italy.
- 1829 Appointed first curator of the painting collection at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts.

- 1830 First trip to Paris. Landscapes are beginning to play a significant role in Waldmüller's work, both as backgrounds for his portraits and in and of themselves. Waldmüller finds his motives in the Salzkammergut and the Prater in Vienna.
- 1833 A brief period of reconciliation with Katharina Waldmüller is followed by the couple's final separation.
- 1835 Appointed academic counselor. Waldmüller is one of the most respected painters in Vienna. He works as a portrait, landscape, and genre painter. He teaches privately at the painting gallery of the academy, but after two years, he is banned from doing so in 1838.
- 1844 Waldmüller travels to Sicily for the first time, and two more trips follow through 1846. These have a significant influence on his work.
- 1845 Waldmüller submits reform proposals to the academy, publishing them in 1846, which causes an uproar. The curator of the academy, Prince Metternich, steps in and sides with Waldmüller. Waldmüller continues to work on reforms. He demands, for example, the establishment of master schools.
- 1849 Death of his mother Elisabeth Waldmüller.
- 1850 Katharina Waldmüller passes away.
- 1851 Waldmüller marries 25-year-old Anna Bayer. Waldmüller's art is less and less appreciated by critics and the public.
- 1855 Participates in the Paris World Exposition.
- 1856 Exhibition in London. His paintings are being sold well below market value.
- 1857 Waldmüller publicly calls for the abolition of academies. Instead, master schools were to take their place. Waldmüller is forced to resign from his post and retires on half-pay.
- 1861 Participates in the *Zweite Allgemeine Deutsche und Historische Kunst-Ausstellung* (Second General German and Historical Art Exhibition) in Cologne. Waldmüller is awarded the Order of the Red Eagle, 3rd Class, of Prussia.

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- 1863 Waldmüller is awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph.
- 1864 His pension is raised to the amount of his last salary.
- 1865 Waldmüller dies on 23 August in Hinterbrühl near Mödling.

## EXHIBITION PROGRAM

Even though our museums have opened their doors again, we currently cannot allow group tours in the exhibitions – such a pity! We look forward even more then, to welcoming you back soon to our on-site guided tours and workshops!

In the meantime, we'll stay in touch via our numerous digital services

<https://www.belvedere.at/en/digital-start>

Please find updated information about our on site program on our website:

<https://www.belvedere.at/en/on-request-groups>

Let's keep the conversation about art going – and stay healthy!

Explore the exhibition with Smartify

Unleash the stories behind the works with our Smartify app. Immerse yourself in the world of Biedermeier and enjoy the free audio tour directly on your smartphone.



## GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition Title	Better Times? Waldmüller and Biedermeier Vienna
Exhibition Dates	12 May 2021 – 27 February 2022
Location	Upper Belvedere
Exhibits	107 Paintings
Curator	Rolf H. Johannsen
Exhibition Management	Werner Sommer / Monica Strinu
Art Education	Belvedere's Art Education T + 43 1 795 57-134   M <a href="mailto:public@belvedere.at">public@belvedere.at</a>
Opening Hours	Tuesday to Sunday 10 am - 6 pm (Monday only open on holidays)
Entrance Tickets	Regular Upper Belvedere € 16,00
Press Contact	Press Belvedere Prinz Eugen-Straße 27, 1030 Vienna T +43 1 795 57-177 M <a href="mailto:press@belvedere.at">press@belvedere.at</a>

*The press release as well as high resolution press photos are available at [belvedere.at/en/press](https://belvedere.at/en/press) for download.*

#Biedermeier