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## THE SCULPTOR TERESA FEODOROWNA RIES AND HER PRIVATE ARCHIVE

Teresa Feodorowna Ries was a famous artist of the turn of the nineteenth century, who received numerous awards for her sculptures, but unfortunately fell into oblivion. Some of her works have only been shown again in recent years, and in 2019 several works could be seen in Vienna the exhibition City of Women at the Belvedere. At the same time her self-portrait appeared on posters all over the city, and suddenly she was visible again.

Teresa F. Ries was born in Budapest in 1866 and died in Lugano in 1956. After moving to Moscow with her parents, she was married as a young girl, as it was intended for a young woman at that time. However, the marriage did not last long, and after the loss of her baby she moved back to the parents' house. She began to study painting at the Academy in Moscow. After criticising the Academy and the professors, however, she was expelled. Before leaving, the young Teresa retained her contact with sculpture.

Sculpting! Sculpting? What is that? I investigated with great curiosity (...). I followed her (a young lady, out through the entrance hall) across the yard into a small wooden building. There stood several barrels filled with a grey-brown mass. The pupils scooped it out with their bare hands and kneaded it into human forms! That made the most powerful impression on me. (...) My fingers literally twitched at the sight - I knew I just had to do that too!<sup>1</sup>

No longer a student at the Academy, she continued working at her parents' home, where the young artist made her first sculpture, *Die Sonnenambule* (The Sleepwalker). A photograph of this sculpture would be very useful to her on a later trip to Vienna.

Ries had moved to the city of Vienna. On a trip with her parents she fell in love with the city immediately. She wanted to stay there and study

art, especially sculpture. However, the young Teresa had to realise that as a woman she was not able to study at the Academy of Fine Arts, because women were not allowed to study there at that time. Ries inquired about other possibilities, and was able to find out that sometimes women were taught as private students by the professors of the Academy. So she applied to Edmund Hellmer, who initially wanted to reject her, reasoning that it made little sense to teach women, as they would eventually get married and be gone. At the request of Ries he allowed her to show her works to him. Ries presented the photograph of *Die Sonnenambule*, because the original sculpture was too heavy and too big to take with her to the meeting. Hellmer was so enthusiastic that he did not let the young woman go, and taught her as a private student from now on.

Ries was overjoyed and proud to be a student of Hellmer. Her sculptures rapidly became well known and she quickly gained fame in the city. Her first freely-made sculpture in Vienna, *Die Hexe* (The Witch) made her famous overnight. This sculpture was not only positively received in the newspapers by many male colleagues, but also strongly criticised. Emperor Franz Josef, who visited the exhibition, was so enthusiastic about the witch that he wanted to meet the artist, which also happened.

During all her years as a private student of Hellmer, Ries worked in his private rooms at the Academy. She helped her professor with his commissions, but also made sculptures for him all by herself. Hellmer and Ries both participated in the 1900 World's Fair in Paris. Hellmer exhibited *Die Herme* and *Die Lampenträgerin* (The Lamp Carrier), but the sculpture *Die Lampenträgerin* was created by Ries.<sup>2</sup> She was also represented with her works *Die Unbesiegbaren* (The Invincibles) and *Der Kuss* (The Kiss).

For her work *Die Unbesiegbaren* Teresa F. Ries was awarded the title *Officier de l'Académie*. The work *Die Lampenträgerin* received the *Grande Médaille d'Or*. Her sculptures received several awards and were shown at numerous exhibitions (Künstlerhaus, Secession, World Exhibition Paris, Munich, London, Venice and Rome). In 1903 and 1910 Ries exhibited at the

international art exhibition in Venice - today the Biennale di Venezia.<sup>3</sup> Many other well-known artists were also represented at these first biennales, such as Claude Monet, Jean-Francois Raffaelli, Auguste Renoir, Max Liebermann, Auguste Rodin, Paul Cézanne, Gustav Klimt, Edvard Munch and Käthe Kolwitz.

Eventually Hellmer told Teresa that the time had come to stop being a student, and advised her to set up her own studio. At first she had a studio in the Prater, and later on in the Gartenpalais Liechtenstein, where she organised many salons, exhibitions and meetings with artists and guests. Many well-known people visited the studio and had themselves portrayed, including Mark Twain, who had a bust made of him. A photograph still reminds us of this work today. Gustav Klimt also visited Ries in her studio.

Ten years after the First World War, Ries wrote her autobiography and published it under the title *Die Sprache des Steines* (The Language of Stone) at Krystall Verlag Vienna in 1928. In September 1931 the sculptor applied for a professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She was probably the first woman to apply to be a professor. The documents of the application can be found in the Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.<sup>4</sup> The college of professors rejected the proposal. On the document there is a note: "On the entry of Teresa Teodorovna Ries is to write: At its meeting of 13 October 1931, the College of Academic Professors took note of the submission and declared that it was not possible to respond to this proposal." The Rector at that time was Prof. Dr. Clemens Holzmeister.

After the annexation to the German Reich in 1938, Ries, who was Jewish, remained in Vienna until probably 1942. Despite the imminent danger and difficult living conditions in Vienna, she tried to organise and regulate the preservation and whereabouts of her works. The studio in the Gartenpalais Liechtenstein was evacuated and the works expropriated. The whereabouts of many of these works are still unclear, and many are considered lost. Some of the works still exist, although some of these

have been severely damaged. Photographs of some works that can no longer be found have survived and give an idea of how comprehensive her complete oeuvre must have been.

In her autobiography Ries already refers to her work as a whole. She draws attention to the difference between a sculpture and the photograph of a sculpture.<sup>5</sup> As an artist and as a sculptor, she was already thinking about the medium of photography at that time. She put together a folder with photographs of her works, but unfortunately this folder is lost today.

In the private archive of Ries there is a photograph in which the artist stages herself. It is a small work that says a lot of about her position as a woman, an artist and a sculptor at that time. As a woman and as a sculptor, Ries wanted to be successful. She wanted to be an artist, whether she was a woman or not. She could not understand why she should be excluded from the Academy as a woman. "My God, to be allowed to be a student of such a great master, from whom I could learn! To work, to be allowed to create! And that I should be excluded from it because I am a woman?"<sup>6</sup>

In her autobiography *Die Sprache des Steines* there are also further passages in which she talks about the position of women at that time, and how she feels to be a woman and an artist.

Later on Ries taught female pupils privately and was a member of the group Die Acht Künstlerinnen, consisting of Eugenie Breithutmunt, Marie Egner, Marianne v. Eschenburg, Susanne Granitsch, Maria Müller, Bertha v. Tarnoczyn, Olga Wiesinger-Florian and Teresa Feodorowna Ries. The group exhibited at the Salon Pisko in Vienna.<sup>7</sup>

In her autobiography Ries also mentions that she can't express herself well with words and she prefers to speak through stone. However she seems to have written quite a lot. With the private archive<sup>8</sup> of the artist, which includes several poems, it is now possible to get a deeper insight into her work as a writer.

The poem *Der Marmorblock*<sup>9</sup> by Teresa F. Ries, probably written in her late years, is an ode to the stone.

### Der Marmorblock

Weitab von dem Weltgetriebe  
Lag ein Marmorblock: kalt, starr,  
Bis, gebannt vom Stein, mein Auge  
Ihn durchschaute ganz und gar.

Und ich sah in seinem Innern  
Ein Gebild' so wunderschön,  
Daß in mir der Gottesfunke  
Flammte auf zu Schaffenshöhn.

Und ich bohrte ihm das Eisen  
In sein kaltes Marmorherz.

So daß krümmte sich der Meissel  
Unter Schaffenslust und -schmerz:

'Deine Hülle muß verschwinden  
Unter Formen, Linien, Bug!  
Lasse, Stein, dich nur behauen,  
Deine Kälte ist bloß Trug!

Mein Empfinden will dir geben,  
Und mit meiner heil'gen Kraft  
Zaubre kühn ich ew'ges Leben  
Aus vieltausendjähriger Haft.'

Tiefer bohrte ich das Eisen,  
Immer tiefer in sein Herz,

Bis es - sich belebend - sprühte  
Feuerfunken himmelwärts.

Und die Hülle fiel vom Steine,  
Und er hub zu leben an ....

.....  
'Stein! Ich gab dir meine Seele -  
Nimm du Seelen nun in Bann!  
.....

Teresa Feodorowna Ries



- 1 Teresa Feodorowna Ries in front of a bust in Edmund Hellmer's studio around 1895; private archive T.F. Ries, tfr-archive.com, Valerie Habsburg
- 2 Sculptors staged themselves at their work (around 1895); (Teresa Feodorowna Ries is standing on the left); private archive T.F. Ries, tfr-archive.com, Valerie Habsburg
- 3 The private archive of Teresa Feodorowna Ries/close up; private archive T.F. Ries, tfr-archive.com, Valerie Habsburg
- 4 Newspaper article about Teresa, 1906; private archive T.F. Ries, tfr-archive.com, Valerie Habsburg
- 5 Back of the envelope from the last will of Teresa's mother Bertha Ries; private archive T.F. Ries, tfr-archive.com, Valerie Habsburg



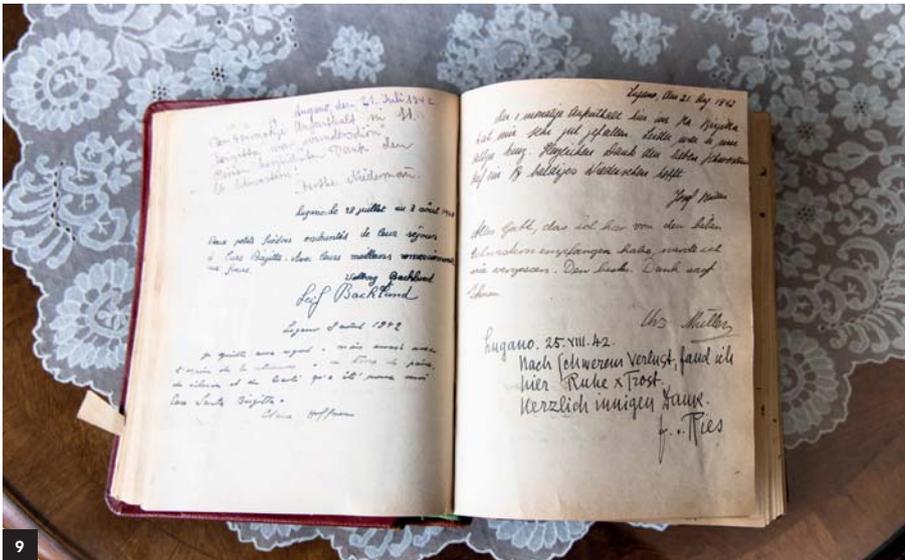
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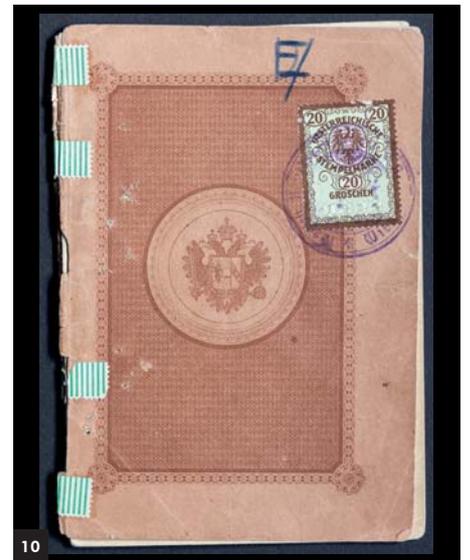
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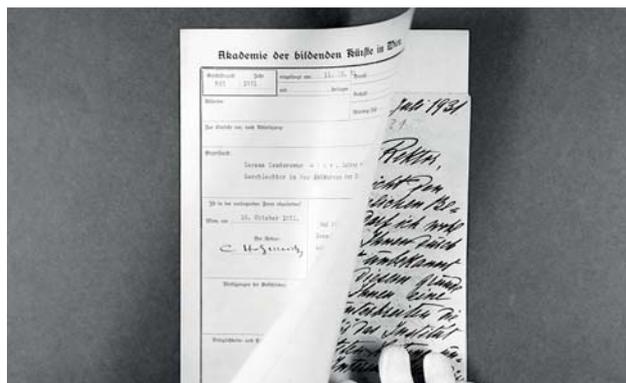


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- 6 Die Unbesiegbaren, sculpture from Teresa at the Kongresspark Vienna, 2018; photo by Valerie Habsburg, 2018
- 7 Meisterschule für Bildhauer, studio at Prater, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2018; photo by Valerie Habsburg, 2018
- 8 Die Seele kehrt heim zu Gott, sculpture from Teresa at central cemetery Vienna, 2018; photo by Valerie Habsburg, 2018
- 9 Entry in the guestbook at Casa S. Birgitta Lugano from 1942, 2019; photo by Valerie Habsburg, 2018
- 10 Passport of Teresa Feodorowna Ries; private archive T.F. Ries, tfr-archive.com, Valerie Habsburg



Teresa, 3:30 min, HD-Video  
Valerie Habsburg, 2019

## The Private Archive of Teresa

### Feodorowna Ries

In 2018 this private archive was offered for sale in an auction house in Monaco. Since there was no interested party, I was lucky enough to acquire it about half a year later.

The private archive contains letters, documents, photographs, a diary, poems, newspaper articles, lists of artworks, the last will and testament of her mother Bertha Ries and her own, handwritten by Ries. In 2019 I examined, studied and digitised all the documents it contained. This was an important first step, so I didn't have to work with the original documents, which are partially quite delicate and fragile. The title *The Private Archive of Teresa Feodorowna Ries* as it was used by the auction house for the offered item, I retained unchanged. The term 'archive' includes different aspects which reflect in the work of Ries in both artistic and historical perspectives. The archive, the accumulation and the collection starting from the beginning, should be transferred into the here and now. The archive, as a place for the memory, for memories and records, returns to its starting point – Vienna. Another important aspect of the archive is that it now has a house – a home.<sup>10</sup> It has now come back to Vienna, found a home and people who take care of it, even if it is uncertain that this home is permanent. But that's the goal, to find a final home. It should be accessible to everyone. This further step will still take some time, though, also because the studies, the analysis and interpretation are not yet finished. In the meantime, parallel to Teresa's, another collection or accumulation, another archive, was created. Documents, letters, notes, old photographs and texts about the artist Ries were collected, and photographic and cinematic recordings of her work and reactions to it were created. We noticed various topics that are highly relevant today: woman/artist, the life of a female artist, what to do with the artworks, the inventory and persistence of artworks, the memory/memories, justice/remembrance, history/historiography and many

more. With all the gathered material it is now for the first time possible to gain an insight into the life of Ries, and to start a closer investigation.

Simultaneously an extensive research in different archives in Vienna and Lugano<sup>11</sup> took place, and more archive visits (mainly outside Vienna) are planned and in preparation. Another important aspect is the lingual component. Hungarian, Russian, French, Italian and German are the languages that appear. Ries spoke and wrote in various languages. Many documents have to be translated before they can be processed. In the cooperation within and throughout the project language appears to be an important factor – collective work in different languages and finding solutions for communication problems.

So far several documents have been found, for example old registration forms, applications for export, her death certificate, and various letters. In many of those letters written in Lugano Ries tried to find out where her works ended up after the war was over. With our accumulated list of artworks, we can now start an extensive programme of research, an exciting part of this project begins, and we expect new insights and discoveries. The artwork-lists have to be compared, adjusted and elaborated regarding every single piece. A sensitive handling regarding each work, the idea behind it and the path it took, is necessary. Exposure to environmental influences, the transitory nature of the material used and the impact of war (bombardment, vandalism, etc.), for example, can transform artworks over time. All these influences have to be considered and they open up different interpretive approaches. Old photographs of the sculptures need to be compared with the most recent ones, damage or missing parts have to be analysed and investigated. New traces will be discovered and followed.

With all the collected documents and gathered information it is now possible to achieve an insight into the life of the artist Teresa Feodorowna Ries, and to continue the search for missing parts and links. New questions arise: who should store and preserve this archive, where should its home be? How can it be made

accessible to the public? How do artists today deal with, respond or react to the archive? What can be learned from it? How does a public institution handle it today? What was life like for Ries in Lugano – in exile? Did she still work there?

Writing about Ries and rectifying incorrect facts is another important aspect. Several sources indicate a wrong date of birth for example, because it was not verified until now.<sup>12</sup> With her passport and other documents located in the private archive it can be confirmed now that Ries was born in 1866.

The fact that today the original or complete form and condition of certain sculptures can only be seen in photographs is obviously a limiting factor when writing about the artist and her work, but also raises further interesting questions: how to write about something that does not exist any longer?

Initial findings and traces led to Lugano in August 2019. In various documents we found the indication that Ries had lived in Lugano in the Casa Santa Birgitta, but it was difficult to contact Casa Santa Birgitta via email. In Lugano we were able to visit the house of Casa Santa Birgitta, and the nuns there were very helpful and kind. In the course of this visit an entry of Teresa F. Ries was found in the guestbook from 1942. This was the first evidence found in this house confirming that Ries had really lived there. Ries may have fled to Lugano only late, in 1942, because she was anxious in Vienna until the end to organise the location of her works and the preservation or storage of her private objects. In the end, however, she had no choice, and had to flee. The question here is how was the artist able to escape from Vienna so late, and how did she get to Lugano?

So far it was known that Ries had died in Lugano, but not where her grave was. Ries lived in Lugano under a different name, and was also buried under this name. But there are more details to be found and clarified. So far it has not been possible to ascertain the circumstances of her funeral, whether it was organised by her family, the Jewish Community or the nuns of Casa Santa Birgitta, and where her private property from Lugano remained. An equally

interesting question is whether the artist still worked in exile. Was Ries integrated into a social life while in Lugano, or did she live in seclusion after all her terrible war experiences?

With the help of the Rabbi of Lugano, the grave of Ries was finally found. The grave bears no name and no gravestone. It is now our concern to find a suitable stone to commemorate the artist.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Teresa Feodorowna Ries, *Die Sprache des Steines* (Wien: Krystall Verlag, 1928), 10.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibidem, 25.
- <sup>3</sup> *Catalogo Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia*, Seconda Edizione (Venezia: Premio Stabimento di Carlo Ferrari, 1903), 73; *Catalogo Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia*, Terza Edizione (Venezia: Premio Stabimento di Carlo Ferrari, 1910), 25, 95.
- <sup>4</sup> Archiv der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Geschäftszahl 963/1931.
- <sup>5</sup> Ries, *Die Sprache des Steines*, 26.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibidem, 12.
- <sup>7</sup> *Wiener Hausfrauen Zeitung*, 17. Jänner 1904 (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).
- <sup>8</sup> Teresa Feodorowna Ries Archiv owned by Valerie Habsburg, Wien, <http://tfr-archive.com>.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dem Archiv verschrieben - Eine Freudsche Impression* (Berlin: Brinkmann + Bose, 1997), 9-11.
- <sup>12</sup> ANNO - AustriaN Newspapers Online ([anno.onb.ac.at](http://anno.onb.ac.at)), Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Archiv der Akademie der bildenden Künste, Archiv des Bundesdenkmalamtes/Provenienzforschung, Dokumentationsarchiv Wien, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Archiv Künstlerhaus, Archiv Belvedere, Liechtenstein Archiv, Stadtarchiv Lugano.
- <sup>14</sup> Julie M. Johnson, *The Memory Factory: The Forgotten Women Artists of Vienna 1900* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2012), 209, 390; *Die bessere Hälfte - Jüdische Künstlerinnen bis 1938*, eds. Andrea Winklbauer and Sabine Fellner (Wien: Jüdisches Museum Wien, Metroverlag, 2016), 79, 212; *City of Women - Female Artists in Vienna 1900-1938*, eds. Stella Rolling and Sabine Fellner (München: Prestel Verlag, 2019), 287.

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