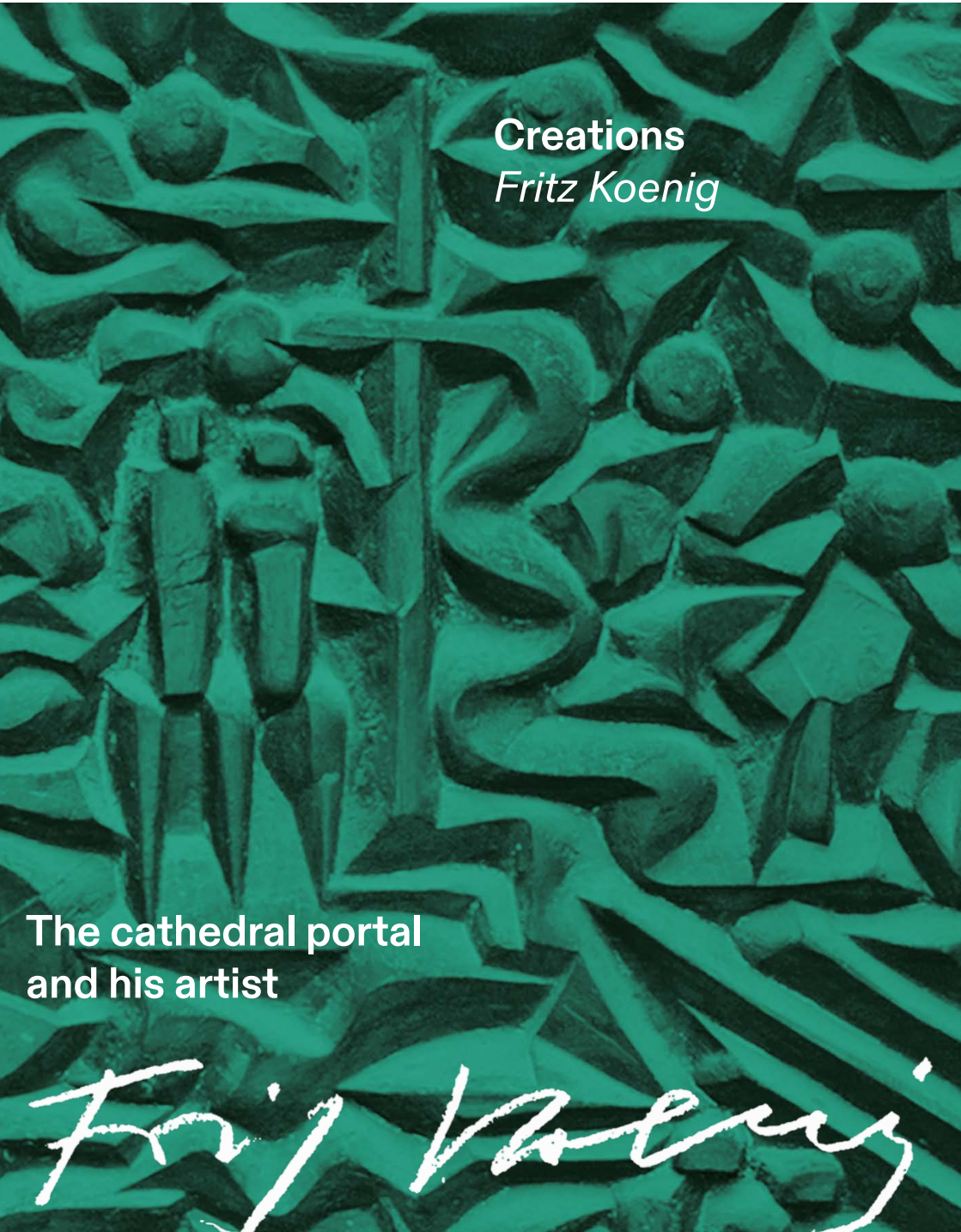
13. April—14. Juli 2024

MAD

Creations
Fritz Koenig

The cathedral portal and his artist



Who was Fritz Koenig?

Fritz Koenig was born on 20 June 1924 in Würzburg. His father Maximilian came from the prestigious family of printing press manufacturers Koenig & Bauer in Oberzell. His mother Gertrud is a modern woman with a love of contemporary art and literature. As centre forward for the Würzburg women's hockey team, she also pursued sporting ambitions.

In the garden of the house at Schellingstrasse 19, little Fritz plays with a carved Noah's Ark. He designs his own creation in the green foliage of the boxwood borders. Fritz speaks little as a child. He feels closer to animals, especially horses. He whinnies in response, gives himself animal names or moves like an animal.

At the age of five, Fritz moves to Landshut with his mother, who divorces in 1929, to live with her new husband Hermann Preisser. Fritz looks out at the cows from his bedroom. But the idyll is deceptive. His stepfather is intolerant and irascible. He beats him, hits his hands. Later, hands also appear in Koenig's sculptures. Does Fritz find his suffering reflected in the Catholic imagery surrounding him: the martyrdoms of the saints, the votive images?

Column hand with ball and cross 1976
Bronze and granite
Missioklinik Würzburg
Photo: Christoph Deuter / © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024

In 1942, Koenig reports to the front in Russia. He became a mountain infantryman, was wounded several times and was nursed back to health by locals in the Romanian Carpathians.

„I was a spiritual baby back then. I couldn't be broken in all the misery. I found some enjoyable life in every horror. I was not a warrior." translated according to Stölzl 2024: 35

Koenig experiences the end of the war in a military hospital in Zwickau. He poses as a horse breeder and is discharged home.

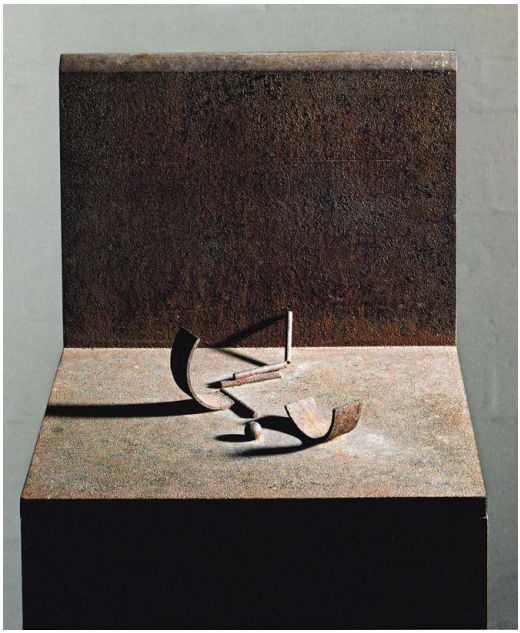
From 1946 to 1952, Koenig studied sculpture in Munich. After a brief marriage to Traudl, he marries Maria in 1956, with whom he remains together until her death. In 1958, gallery owner Günter Franke organises a Koenig exhibition at the Villa Stuck in Munich. This was followed by the Venice Biennale and the documenta in Kassel in 1959. The international breakthrough was achieved with his over seven meters high fountain sculpture The Sphere from 1967–72. The sculpture was placed on the plaza between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York until the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Damaged, but not destroyed, it was recovered from the wreckage and was re-erected in Battery Park as a memorial. Equally Koenig also designed his epitaph installation for the for the Mauthausen concentration camp memorial in 1982/83.

Together with his wife Maria, the childless Koenig founded the Fritz und Maria Koenig Stiftung in 1993. The Couple demised their belongings to the foundation, which is now managed by the city Landshut. Fritz Koenig died on February 22, 2017 at his estate Ganslberg near Landshut.

Laying animal 1951
Pottery, glazed
Photo: Toni Ott /
© VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024

The art of Fritz Koenig

Fritz Koenig's art moves between the figurative and the abstract. On the one hand, he intensifies the level of abstraction simultaneously to the progression of his works. The bodies loose their human-like form and are being reduced to geometric elements like a sphere or cylindrical wands. On the other hand he returns to the human figure, which can be seen in the *Dancing Couple* from 1993.



Small angleepitaph IV for Icarus 1980
Iron
Photo: Toni Ott / © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024

Presumably, these two poles of figurative and abstract are crucial for his passion of collecting African sculptures and craftsmanship. His soul is also moved by folkloristic votive offerings and their special form of archaism and immediacy.

Thematically, especially interesting to Koenig are the human and the animal, as well as the fusion of both into hybrid creatures. He does not need a big variety of topics, but rather perfects his topics. Drawings in letter or line format are used by him as messages to himself, showing the variety of his ideas.

In the end the human feelings and realities are what Koenig conveys in his sculptures: Sorrow and salvation, love and death, oblivion and remembrance.

„In all that I do, the viewer has problems to digest me, and the whole patheticness of being human behind it—that is what I want to let shine through what I do.“

translated according to Stölzl 2024: 63

In 1959 Koenig first called a sculpture a votive. Before, he collected these objects of popular piety. Through votives people ask for healing or thank for a cure. Koenig understands the votives as a thousand-year-long connection between human and God, between sorrow and art. He himself had a personal reasoning for a votive. Through his eye-votives he processed an eye condition, he suffered.

Directly linked to his votives are also the caryatids, which he made since 1965. The caryatids are known since antiquity as columns at buildings. Koenig concerned himself with this element of supportive carrying and burdening, which he often varied and put into relation with humans.

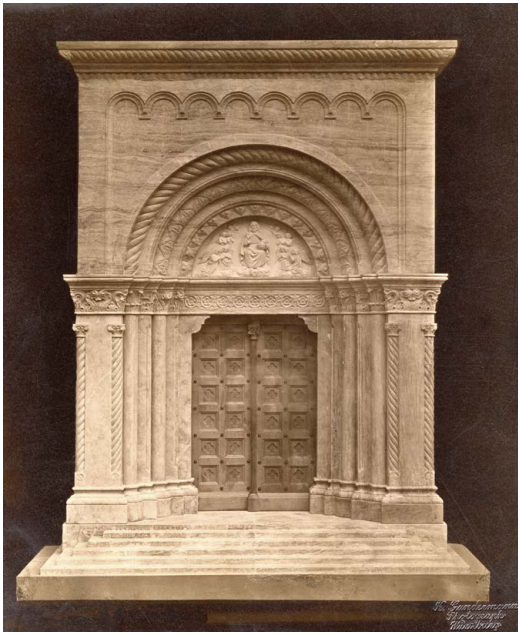
Through the subject of the eye-votive and the caryatid-format, he reaches the idea of the *spherical-caryatid,* which formed its peak in the seven meter high fountain sculpture The Sphere in New York. Afterwards the sphere stays as his subject.

Koenig's Epitaphs—memorials to the dead—symbolize his complaint against humankind. The memorials are dedicated to all humans. All those who have passed. This includes the pieta-image, so Mary with her dead son, as well as the tragedy of Icarus.

Eyevotive I 1963
Bronze
Photo: Fritz Koenig /
© VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024

The cathedral portal and his artist

Between 1880 and 1883, Friedrich Friedreich (1828–1895) created a Neo-Romanesque porch with a wooden portal as an entry to the cathedral.



West portal by Friedrich Friedreic
Photo: Konrad Gundermann, ca. 1883
Imprint stamp: K.(onrad) Gundermann Photograph Würzburg
Würzburg City Archive, photo collection, keyword *Dom*

After the destruction on the 16th of March, 1945, this still intact entrance was reduced. The focus of the artistic decoration was to be on the new portal, that had to be created, the gallery directly above it, and a sculpture between the two towers. For this, a competition was held in 1962/63. The portal should be understood as a passageway between the secular and the sacred, and depict the beginning of the story of salvation: creation, paradise, the Fall of Man, promise of salvation.

An additional door on the inside shielding from winds had mighty angelic creatures as a theme. By the spring of 1963, drafts were submitted by Fritz Koenig, Albert Schilling and Otto Sonnleitner. After a long discussion, the jury decided in favor of Koenig's design, a synthesis between the abstract design by Schilling (second placed) and the figurative design by Sonnleitner (third place).

Portal of the Würzburg cathedral 1967
Bronze
Photo: Ulrich Kneise 2001 / © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024

Because the assignment for the additional wind-shielding door fell through, Koenig was ought to design the gallery railing, the sculpture between the towers, and a stele of the Franconian apostles for the square in front of the cathedral. Unfortunately, there are no receipts of a draft. The portal was installed in mid-April, shortly before the reconsecration of the cathedral on the 6th of May, 1967.

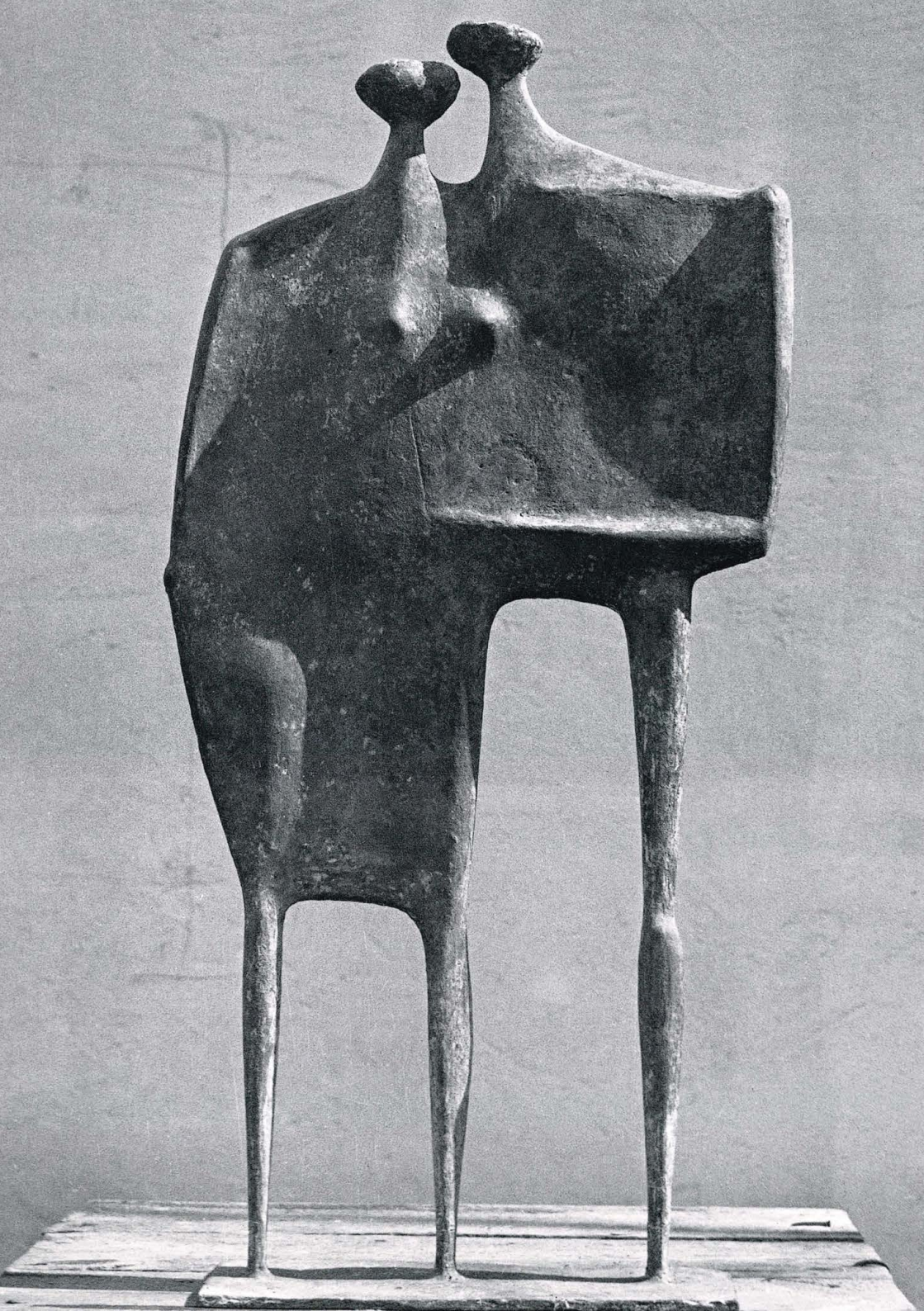
Koenig structured his portal in the two door halves and an upper part. The panel above shows God´s hand in a cloud formation dividing the water and the stone-like earth. The door on the left-hand side continues the six days of creation: Creation of celestial bodies, plants, water animals and birds, of land animals and of the human. The other door side shows the paradise, where the human was placed, with the four biblical rivers. Eva arises from the laying Adam. The tree of knowledge with the fruits and the snake lead to the temptation of both, which is why the archangel with the sword of flames expels them from paradise.

Couple 1958
Bronze
Photo: Fritz Koenig / © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024

Literature

Stölzl, Christoph (2024): **Das Leben des Bildhauers Fritz Koenig, erzählt von einem Freunde [The life of the sculptor Fritz Koenig, told by a friend].**
In: *Fritz Koenig 1924–2017. Leben–Werk–Wirkung [life-work-impact].*
Preprint; Publication planned for June 2024. With thanks for access.

Apple-rose box 1996
Silver, gold
Photo: Toni Ott / © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024



Accompanying events

Guided tour for senior citizens with Julia Pracher M.A.	**Wed**	**17.04.**	**15:00 Uhr**
Guided tour with Dr Johannes Sander	**Sun**	**21.04.**	**12:30 Uhr**
Art canteen—30 minutes of entertaining art enjoyment during lunch break—with curator Christoph Deuter M.A.	**Tue**	**14.05.**	**12:30 Uhr**
Guided tour with curator Christoph Deuter M.A.	**Sun**	**26.05.**	**12:30 Uhr**
Lecture and discussion on Fritz Koenig with Dr Alexandra von Arnim, Director of the Koenig Museum in Landshut	**Wed**	**05.06.**	**19:00 Uhr**
Guided tour 100 years of Fritz Koenig—The story of creation in pictures with Alexandra Rumpel	**Sun**	**30.06.**	**12:30 Uhr**

→ Duration of the guided tours: approx. 1 hour

→ Further events and information can be found at **www.museum-am-dom.de/en.**

→ Eine deutsche Version dieses Folders findest du unter **www.museum-am-dom.de**

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13. April—14. Juli 2024
Di—So 12—17 Uhr

Kiliansplatz 1
97070 Würzburg

Title: Fritz Koenig, Bronze portal Würzburg Cathedral, 1967 (Detail)
Photo: Urich Kneise / © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2024
Concept and design: dbdb.de
Translation: Anna Kohler

Bezirk Unterfranken