

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1979)

Heft: 1756

Artikel: Adolf Wölflis art brut - creativity and madness

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691399>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 13.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

ADOLF WÖLFLI'S ART BRUT – CREATIVITY AND MADNESS



Over the last years traditional definitions of art and madness have disintegrated. Only lately has the work of *Adolf Wölfli* (1864–1930), a schizophrenic inmate for 35 years of the Psychiatric Clinic Waldau near Berne, gained art status, after being considered for decades a mere therapeutic occupation of an insane mental patient.

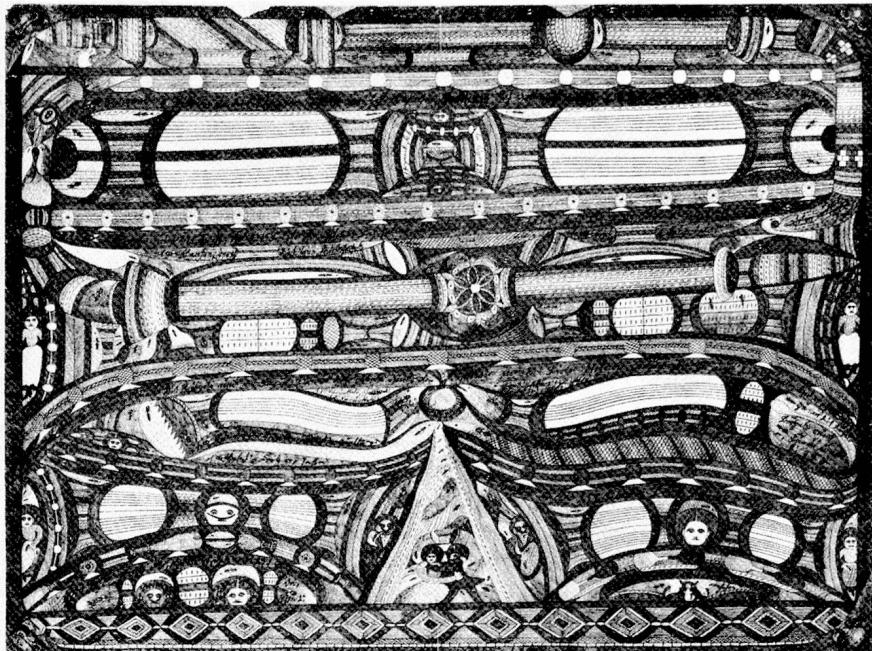
An itinerant farm labourer with no formal education, *Adolf Wölfli* began to draw in 1899 and continued to do so for the rest of his life—which was spent in a cell of a mental hospital.

The main body of his work consists of an enormous illustrated narrative depicting the travels of 'St. Adolf II', *Wölfli's* imaginary self. This fictional autobiography centres in *Adolf Wölfli's* sad childhood and explores the sexual fantasies from which *Wölfli* never freed himself, portraying the artist as both victim and transgressor and returning constantly to the theme of redemption. The elaboration of this private universe became an obsession and *Wölfli* covered 20,000 pages with a profusion of poems, drawings, texts and musical compositions (the first contemporary artist to include musical elements in his work). This subordination of word, image, number and musical notation to an ultimate design is the most striking feature of *Wölfli's* art, resulting in the creation of intricate and intensely rhythmic, decorative patterns which are reminiscent of mediaeval illuminated manuscripts.

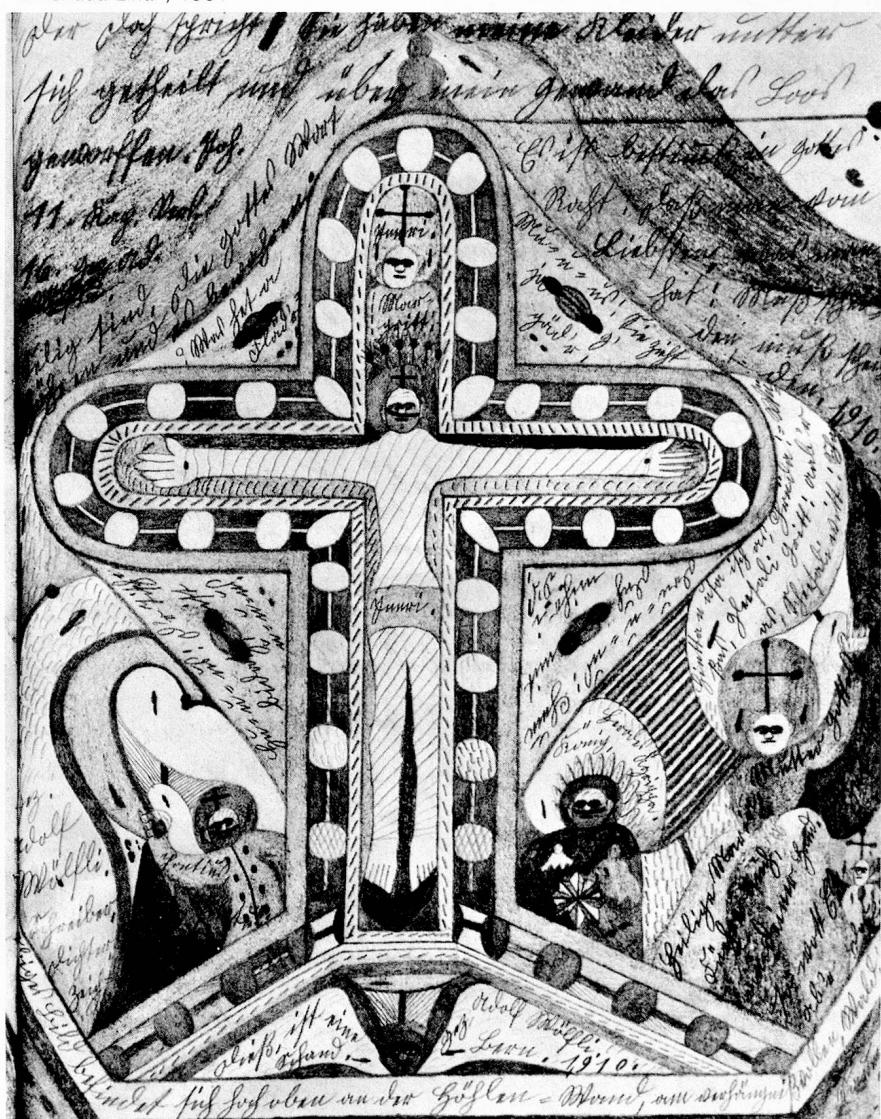
Wölfli's status as a "madman" may not allow us to accept his work simply as an object of aesthetic pleasure, but its visual coherence is nonetheless astonishing. Its impact is derived from the tension between its chaotic content and the ornamental sophistication of its form.

mhm

(The pictures were contributed by courtesy of the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, which held an exhibition of *Adolf Wölfli's* work from 10.5.—29.6.)



"Limonada Lina", 1904



"Crucifixion"