

Obituary: Emil Bosshard

Submitted by Graham on 16 Nov 2016

Emil Bosshard died on 9 February 2006 after two years of fighting a very aggressive Leukaemia, leaving his wife Veronika and their two children, Titus (27) and Miriam (23).

Emil Bosshard was born on 30 August 1945 in Zuerich, Switzerland, as son of Emil Bosshard, a haulage contractor, and Louise Fischer. Together with his (older) sister Marianne he had a peaceful childhood in close-by Altstetten in a pleasant environment. School wasn't what he enjoyed most, but he was fascinated by music and in particular by Jazz, hanging out at the best Jazz places in town, in direct contact with the musicians; at that time he started playing the flute and became part of the Youth orchestra of Zürich. He left school at the age of 17 to start a work year to get acquainted with wood and metal working. Thereafter he became apprentice as intaglio colour print retoucher in the renowned Zuerich publishing house Conzett, Editor of DU, the most respected art magazine of Switzerland. Having achieved his apprenticeship certificate, he went to Vienna as part of his years of travel and found a position in his field, went to concerts and museums and enjoyed this culturally so rich city. Somewhere there and then he must have developed his intention to become a restorer. After one year he returned to Zuerich and as of 1968 trained as a paintings conservator for three years with Dr. Thomas Brachert, then Chief Art Technological Research at the Swiss Institute for Art Research (SIK) Zuerich. There Emil met Veronika van der Brüggen, a fellow student, later to become his wife, specializing in paper conservation. In 1971 they went to Amsterdam where he had been offered a one year internship at the Central Research Laboratory in Amsterdam in the Netherlands; thereafter he became Deputy Restorer at the Rijksmuseum. It is from this period that stemmed his regard for and understanding of Dutch and Flemish painting and in particular his love for tuechlein painting. He had been asked to restore, together with Veronika, the Hans Bol tuechlein "St. John at Patmos" from the Maurithuis. It was then also that his friendship with Ernst van de Wetering, director of the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP) in Amsterdam began. Emil once told me having worked with Ernst van de Wetering for two entire weeks, investigating and analysing X-Radiographs of Rembrandt paintings had been the most fascinating period of his professional life. In 1973 the Bosshards followed Nathan Stolow's call to come to Canada, who then was the first director of the Canadian Conservation Institute CCI, to help put in place the Canadian Governments new museum and conservation policy, established in 1970. So did others including the undersigned, as did Stewart Meese, later also Rustin Levenson, both having remained good friends with the Bosshards. Emil, hired as paintings conservator in the department headed then by the late Ursus Dix, contributed to CCI's survey of the conservation needs of all the Canadian museums and did conservation and restoration work on North American paintings, before returning to Zuerich in 1975 to become the successor of Thomas Brachert, his former teacher, at the SIK. In this period their two children were born, their son Titus and three years later their daughter Miriam. Emil Bosshard took over at the Swiss Institute for Art Research in a period of heavy economic restraints not only in Switzerland but also at the Swiss Institute for Art Research; his department Kunsttechnologie had to let go most of its conservation training program and also its

conservation scientist; by force and fortunately the institution changed site within Zuerich and thus became larger; studios which allowed for larger objects to be accepted, which allowed for better finances, and thus for some more staff, all of which brought a rise in reputation and thus also more funds for important research projects to be acquired. He concentrated on developing treatments, helped to consolidate the Institute's own collection of art and artist related material and samples, and pursued numerous research projects. Among those he engaged in a systematic investigation of the underdrawings of Niklaus Manuel's paintings (1484–1530) using infrared reflectography. As the same Niklaus Manuel had used often and in an ingenious way a technique today called Tuechlein malerei, the same technique that was used by Hans Bol, on whose painting he had worked in Amsterdam, it is a logical consequence that Emil Bosshard should develop a particular interest for paintings produced the Tuechlein way; these are distemper paintings, on fine linen with no preparation applied, water soluble, so very delicate, fragile and thus particularly endangered. He also became an expert in the history, investigation and treatment of Panoramas, as one of the most prestigious samples of this art, the Bourbaki-Panorama in Luzern, , had to be saved from decay, a major enterprise. So he fostered research and took part in organising an international Symposium on the history and conservation of Panoramas. 1982, upon invitation from Gerald Hoepfner, Emil Bosshard went to the Williamstown Art conservation Laboratory, Mass., where he enjoyed three month as a guest conservator, working hands-on, lecturing and holding seminars. 1985 he left the SIK to take up the position of chief conservator at the magnificent Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Lugano, the best known city in the Ticino, the Italian speaking part of Switzerland, at the beautiful Villa Favorita. As of then Emil was a lot on the road and in the air, for this collection, for exhibitions of the collection and external exhibitions at the Villa Favorita; but all the same he managed to lecture and teach, in Switzerland and other European countries and in Northamerica, at the Getty, in Mobile-Alabama and elsewhere, he also served as an expert; at times he acted as a UNESCO consultant in the Arab Emirates. It was left to him - before leaving for new undertakings - to direct the move of the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection to Spain into its new home via-à-vis the Prado in Madrid, another major enterprise and a major problem of logistics as well. In his years with this collection, he was very active conserving paintings, developing infrared reflectography further towards colour reflectography within the whole spectrum of visible light perceptible by humans, but also in providing data and art-technical information for the series of the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection's different volumes of their catalog-raisonné – there were nine, when he left in 1994, but his collaboration is indicated in only four of them, though his individual contributions there are not signed; in the five others he is unfortunately not even mentioned. Emil published important papers about his work, but not only in professional conservation journals, but also in those of art historians and of other art-related professions and for an eager and learned public, to explain to them what his profession and what conservation is about. He warned early on that conservator-restorers should get out of the ivory tower and talk to and write for the public and include the public into their work, otherwise conservation may run into the wall; wise he was. I am aware of sixteen signed publications of Emil, of which seven appeared in RESTAURO (including in its forerunner, Maltechnik-Restauro), others in renown newspapers, conference preprints, and also in Apollo. His lectures and conferences given in many countries addressed art and scientists' associations, curators and historians; he always was on the go to inform the larger audiences, the art "consumers", collectors and students. He tried live up to this concern and was able to do so particularly after he had left the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection to finally establish together with his wife Veronika a private conservation business. So the Bosshards moved from the warmer southern Swiss cantone Ticino up north to

the Swiss town of Bischofszell in the Kanton Thurgau, his wife's hometown, into her parent's house, where they finally were able to build their own studio. He soon was asked to become member of the board of the Thurgauische Kunstgesellschaft, the regional art society and was delighted to contribute to this important institution and thus to have contact with the public. It was this institutions' president, Dr. Bänninger who read the funeral oration, a splendid and precise characterisation of Emil's, which moved greatly the rather large morning audience. One cannot honour Emil Bosshard without referring to his splendid free copies in oil after old master paintings he had done for his own pleasure, a gifted painter to say the least and a master in creating light in a painting. And he dearly enjoyed flying, in a glider or motorized. People who knew him will miss Emil's slightly ironic observative look, his retained and somewhat satiric smile and his bursting laughter, his story telling, his way to make one understand he wanted to change subject if things didn't interest him. He was cool, and too young yet to die. *Hans-Christoph von Imhoff, Vicosoprano, March 2006*