

IDA KERKOVIVUS

Text by Anne Vieth

Triptychon, 1965, oil on canvas, 3 parts, each 100 x 70 cm, Mercedes-Benz Art Collection, acquired 1979,
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The **MERCEDES-BENZ ART COLLECTION** is one of the most prestigious corporate art collections in the world. Here, director Anne Vieth presents her highlights. This time: a painting by Stuttgart artist Ida Kerkovius, in which she puts a modern spin on sacred motifs

Bright and vivid colours – that is the first thing that leaps to your eye when viewing Ida Kerkovius's works. Her painting *Triptychon*, completed in 1965, is no exception and is a remarkable example of Kerkovius's later work. The painting was acquired for the Mercedes-Benz Art Collection in 1979 and is one of the collection's earliest works of art. The three-part format is a nod to the three-winged devotional images popular in sacred spaces. So-called triptychs were often used to place individual scenes in a narrative sequence. In Kerkovius's case, the depictions can be read both as a biblical reference to the Three Marys under the cross and as an everyday scene of hope. *Triptychon* demonstrates Kerkovius's grasp of the artistic means of colour, form, and lines as the fundamental principles for expressing (personal) emotions in her paintings. She explored landscapes as well as still lifes and religious themes in terms of motifs, always striking a tension between abstraction and figuration.

Who was Ida Kerkovius? The artist is one of the most important female exponents of classical modernism in Germany. Her preferred media were painting, pastel, and watercolour techniques as well as carpet weaving. Born in Riga, she moved to Stuttgart in 1908, where she spent the majority of her artistic life. She studied at the Stuttgart Art Academy under Adolf Hölzel, a pioneer of abstract art who had a formative influence on her thinking and work.

Her first encounter with Hölzel's new style of painting was through Martha Hellmann, one of Hölzel's students. The 22-year-old Kerkovius was captivated by the compositions, which moved between abstraction and figuration. She decided to study with the Bauhaus mastermind and became Hölzel's master student and assistant with her own studio at the academy in 1911. She was part of an extremely innovative and experimental group of artists who, under Hölzel's tutelage, pushed the boundaries of traditional painting and also broke new ground in terms of artistic training and equality between male and female students. At the age of 41, she went to the Bauhaus in Weimar to further her education. She also learnt to weave there. Ida Kerkovius died in 1970 aged 90. Her artistic work continued unabated well into old age.



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