

# The Hans Gross Museum of Criminology at the Karl-Franzens-University Graz

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## Abstract

*The Hans Gross Museum of Criminology combines scientific research and academic activity with a wide range of public events, such as crime thriller readings and stage plays, connecting the campus with the wider community.*

The Hans Gross Museum of Criminology was originally founded in 1912 by Hans Gross, one of the *fathers of scientific criminal investigation*. After decades of slumber, the museum was rebuilt and reopened in February 2003. From 2003 onwards, around 21,000 people visited the museum. In 2007, it attracted more than 5,000 visitors, and the highlight of every year is the *Long Night of Museums* in October, when 1,000 visitors on average come to the museum in one night. These numbers are huge if compared with the limited space available: a mere 100 square meters. Nonetheless it is an important part of the museum-landscape of the city of Graz, and its collection and activities make it a thriving centre of the history of criminology.

The museum team (three part-time but enthusiastic colleagues who have been responsible for the museum throughout rebuilding) offers guided tours leading through the development of scientific criminology. Visitors can see about 3,000 *corpora delicti* related to more than 1,500 criminal cases, many of which are rather spectacular. There is a wooden column that served as a stand for flower vases – and as a hiding-place for various parts of the body of a woman, who was murdered because of the jewels she used to wear. There is a collection of skulls which show the different types of injuries caused by various weapons, so that students of criminology were prepared for the practical work of an investigator; the museum was originally intended to be a collection of teaching materials. There are lots of weapons - fire arms as well as stabbing and cutting weapons - a variety of foot- and fingerprints, arsenic, prussic acid, verdigris and many other poisons, forged coins and banknotes, faked documents and forged seals, a manipulated roulette game and marked playing cards, lime birches for stealing money out of offertory boxes, an apparatus for arson, instruments for abortion, a preserved finger hacked off by a soldier who wanted to avoid military service in World War I (and was therefore put straight before a firing squad) and a spittoon that served as a hiding-place for a revolver.

Another focus lies on the various techniques of criminal investigation and on the History of Criminology, a discipline established as an independent science at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the central objects is the famous *Tatortkoffer* (*investigation case*) developed and used by Hans Gross. The development of criminological techniques like fingerprinting, the famous *Bertillonage* and other practices of body measurement are documented as well as the so-called Criminal Biology (a holistic and rather irrational form of the analysis of the criminal personality which was founded in Graz by the successor of Hans Gross, Adolf Lenz). Another criminologist, Ernst Seelig, elaborated a typology of criminal characters, including eight types of criminals, of which the 'work-shy thief' was thought to be the most widespread. In Seelig's time, criminology was intensively connected with Nazi politics, and the Graz school of Criminology became an instrument of national-socialist race policy. Visitors are thus confronted with political and scientific-historical aspects of criminology and the practice of criminal investigation and its changes in the course of history. The communication of the history of criminology is based on scientific research – the Hans Gross Museum of Criminology is also a centre for the History of Criminology and Penal Law. The results of the research are published in books and international journals and communicated in lectures and scientific as well as popular congresses.

The combination of scientific research and the communication with a wider public interested in different aspects of crime and criminology is very important. At the Hans Gross Museum of Criminology we organize a lot of events and thus reach a broad public: Readings of scientific books



Fig. 1 - Showcase

(Christian Bachhiesl, 'Der Fall Josef Streck') as well as crime thrillers (Elisabeth Hödl, Ralf B. Korte, 'Galatea Project') and detective novels (Heinz Auernig, 'Bell Canto'; Eva Rossmann, 'Wein und Tod', 'Ausgekocht' etc) take place in the showrooms of the museum. Sociological works (Martin Auer, 'Hurentaxi') are presented here as well as books describing the structural problems of the Austrian police (Max Edelbacher, 'Polizei intern'). Stage plays are performed in the Criminal Museum (Franz Strohmaier, 'Bartsch, Kindermörder'). Therefore, the museum is also a centre for cultural events and thus it is linking the university to the 'world outside'. For the Karl-Franzens-University of Graz, the Hans Gross Museum of Criminology is an important institution connecting the campus with a broad public usually not interested in universities and science. And for Graz and Austria, this unconventional little museum is a cultural enrichment that successfully demonstrates how widely received communication work can be achieved with rather modest personal and financial resources.

### Further reading

BACHHIESL, C. 2008. Die Grazer Schule der Kriminologie. Eine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Skizze. In: *Monatsschrift für Kriminologie und Strafrechtsreform* 91 (2): 87–111 (with bibliography and English summary).

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