

BERTHA WUILLEMIER

1907-1999, Switzerland/USA

Bertha Flora Wuilleumier Denneler was born in Bern, Switzerland. Little is known about her life. A single letter remains, dated 1954, written in French during a stay in the Waldau psychiatric clinic in Bern; at the foot of the letter she added drawings of female figures in her characteristic style, reminiscent of girlish mannequins.

This letter is held in Bruno Decharme's abcd collection in France. It is written in a neat, attractive script, accurately spelt and using sophisticated language. The writer appears to be an educated woman from a prosperous background, who has a house in Bern. The content of the letter reveals a Swiss patriot who was somewhat disdainful of the French women employed at the Waldau clinic. She feels trapped there and alone, and finds the other patients and the staff difficult to tolerate. She describes the clinic as attractive and modern in appearance, set in beautiful surroundings. Her family and parents are clearly important to her. There are indications that she had previously stayed in clinics in Neuveville and St-Imier.

The letter alludes to the difficulties involved in marrying a foreigner, specifically an American. Evidently she was married to a man named Denneler and later lived in the USA, where she died aged 91, in Cape May, New Jersey.

Her pictures are gentle images of fashionable women in pastel colours, with hats or other headwear, handbags and various animals. They are delicate, childlike drawings, full of careful details.

The Psychiatrie-Museum Bern owns a few works that also appear on the cover of an exhibition catalogue from 2003, *Von Bildwelten in der Psychiatrie* (Of imagery in psychiatry). Her work can be seen in the collection of Karin and Gerhard Dammann, and that of Amr Shaker, both in Switzerland, amongst others.

- HANNAH RIEGER | LIVING IN ART BRUT

Selected Exhibitions:

2018: Women in Art Brut?, Art et marges musée, Brussels, Belgium