



Alma M. Karlin
Alone Around the World
 16 September 2021 to 18 January 2022

The Weltmuseum Wien's new exhibition explores the moving and inspiring life story of Alma Ida Willibalde Maximiliana (M.) Karlin (1889-1950). The author, journalist, amateur scientist, theosophist and world traveller lived her life the way she wanted to, despite countless difficulties and dangers. Travelling on her own and without any financial support (unlike many of her fellow globetrotters), she set off at the age of thirty on a journey during which she encountered numerous obstacles and yet overcame them. Her travel books were published in the inter-war years, making her one of the period's best-known authors in Europe and beyond. However, her publicly stated opposition to the Nazis and her refusal to accommodate the demands of the Communists robbed her of the chance to continue and build on this success, and she was almost completely forgotten.

Childhood and Adolescence

The only child of German-speaking parents of Slovene origin, Alma M. Karlin was born in 1889 in Celje, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but now in Slovenia. Her mother was a forty-five-year-old teacher, her sixty-year-old father had been a major in the Austro-Hungarian Army. Born with a lowered left eyelid, she was openly rejected by her mother. The relationship between mother and daughter remained strained but she was very close to her father, who educated her like a boy, encouraging her fortitude and independence. Alma M. Karlin's father died when she was eight. Her mother's attempts to re-educate her more in keeping with contemporary social norms made her shy and fostered inferiority complexes that would bedevil her relations with other people for the rest of her life. But Alma M. Karlin resisted all her mother's attempts, growing into a brave and determined adolescent focused on her goals and hungry for knowledge. When



she was sixteen, she realized that education was the only way to ensure her economic independence and to free herself from her mother's influence, and to leave behind the confines of Celje, a small town marked by nationalistic tensions between Germans and Slovenians.

Setting Off into the World

When she was eighteen, Alma M. Karlin left her home and went into "voluntary exile" in London, where she taught languages. Learning about her students' cultures formed the basis of her longing to get to know these foreign cultures. In preparation she studied languages, taking exams in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, English, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian at the Royal Society of Arts, which she passed top of her class.

The outbreak of the First World War forced Alma M. Karlin to leave London for Norway and Sweden where she discovered what would become the leitmotif of her life: writing. In 1919, the thirty-year-old returned for a short stay to Celje, before packing the ten-volume dictionary she had compiled herself and her typewriter "Erika" and setting off on her world journey. She worked as a language teacher, translator, journalist and travel writer, but there were times when she did not find work and lived in reduced circumstances.

Lack of money and missing travel permits forced Alma M. Karlin to take many a detour to reach her main destination, Japan. She discovered and conquered the world for herself, although she was not spared numerous negative personal and illness-induced life-threatening experiences. Crossing the South- and North-American continent, she eventually reached Japan, where she spent a blissful year filled with profound impressions. From Japan she continued her travels, visiting Asia, Australia, the Pacific Rim and India, from where she returned to Celje in 1927.

Difficult Times

Alma M. Karlin remained in her hometown until her death, where, despite her success as a writer of novels and especially travel books, she was met with hostility and scepticism and was regarded, as she herself put it, as a "curiosity". Her travel trilogy which was published in Germany between 1929 and 1933 and translated into several languages, was an international success. But once the Nazis had occupied Slovenia, her books were proscribed and she was incarcerated as an enemy of Hitler and his ideology. She managed to evade the Gestapo when the officer questioning her turned out to be a fan of her travel books. She joined the partisans in 1944, but they too monitored her and restricted her movements. Thanks to her opposition to both the Nazis and later the Communists, and to her pro-British sentiments, Alma M. Karlin managed to survive although the Partisans had already ordered her liquidation. But she never made it back to England where she had wanted to spend the rest of her life. Ostracized in post-war Yugoslavia as a German-speaking writer, she was soon forgotten. And after a five-year battle Alma M. Karlin succumbed to breast cancer, dying in poverty in 1950.



Legacy

Alma M. Karlin loved nothing more than to collect data and record her observations and interviews with local populations to gain knowledge and share this with others. Although her interest in local populations was always genuine and we have to understand her as a child of her time – today her view of what is "foreign" might be regarded as problematic. The variety of her collection, now housed in the Celje Regional Museum, is the result of her limited financial means, which made it impossible for her to plan her acquisitions or collect systematically. Whenever she had money, she bought things. But the majority of the objects in her collection were gifts or were acquired by chance. Postcards, textiles or her own zoological and botanical watercolour drawings, which allow us to relive her eight-year-long journey round the globe, make up the majority of her collection.

In collaboration with the [Celje Regional Museum](#), the Weltmuseum Wien is showing both Alma M. Karlin's ethnographic collection and her photographs, which are now housed in the Slovenian National Library. Reinhard Blumauer (Weltmuseum Wien) and Barbara Trnovec (Pokrajinski muzej Celje) have curated the exhibition about the life of the unconventional traveler based on Ms. Trnovec's monograph *The endless Journey of Alma M. Karlin*.

The exhibition architecture is by Gerhard Veigl.



TOURS & EVENTS

Our program might change at short notice. Please refer to our Website for the current schedule:

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/programme/>

Guided Tour Alma M. Karlin

Curators Barbara Trnovec and Reinhard Blumauer give a guided tour through the special exhibition.

Sunday, 19 September, 3 p.m. – Barbara Trnovec and Reinhard Blumauer (in English)

Tuesday, 28 September, 5 p.m. – Barbara Trnovec (in English)

Thursday, 12 October, 6 p.m. – Barbara Trnovec (in English)

Sunday, 14 November, 3 p.m. – Barbara Trnovec (in English)

Sunday, 28 November, 3 p.m. – Barbara Trnovec (in English)

Sunday, 16 January 2022, 3 p.m. – Barbara Trnovec (in English)

Tuesday, 18 January 2022, 6 p.m. – Reinhard Blumauer (in German)

Duration: 45 min.

Attendance: € 6 (plus entrance ticket to the museum)

Meeting point: Cash point area

Tuesday, 28 September, 7 p.m.

The Endless Journey of Alma M. Karlin: Life, Work, Legacy

Book presentation with Barbara Trnovec (in English)

The Endless Journey of Alma M. Karlin. Life, Work, Legacy is the first comprehensive scholarly monograph on Alma M. Karlin written by anthropologist, researcher, and author Barbara Trnovec. Barbara Trnovec is also custodian of the Alma Karlin Collection at [Pokrajinski muzej Celje](#) (Celje Regional Museum) and curator of the exhibition **Alma M. Karlin** at Weltmuseum Wien.

Duration: 90 min.

Free attendance (plus entrance ticket to the museum)

Registration: info@weltmuseumwien.at

Meeting point: Weltmuseum Wien Forum



Tuesday, 9 November, 7 p.m.

From Celje to Oceania: Alma Karlin's Stay in the South Seas

Talk with Ao.Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr.phil. Hermann Mückler

Ida Pfeiffer did it and Alma M. Karlin followed her! Until the twenties of the 20th century women rarely travelled on their own around the world for several years. In this talk Hermann Mückler speaks about Alma M. Karlin's personal path as well as individual stops on her round-the-world trip, particularly her route in Melanesia. He will also outline her collected impressions.

Duration: 90 min.

Free attendance (plus entrance ticket to the museum)

Registration: info@weltmuseumwien.at

Meeting point: Weltmuseum Wien Forum

More information and further dates & Ticket-Shop at:

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/ausstellungen/alma-m-karlin/#rahmenprogramm>

BOOKS

The following books (all in German except one) by and about Alma M. Karlin are available at the museum shop of the Weltmuseum Wien:

Im Banne der Südsee

Part Two of Alma M. Karlin's travel trilogy

Alma M. Karlin

€ 22,70

Ein Mensch wird. Auf dem Weg zur Weltreisenden

Autobiography

Alma M. Karlin

€ 20,60

Die endlose Reise der Alma M. Karlin. Leben, Werk, Nachlass. / Endless journey of Alma M. Karlin. Life, Work, Legacy (available in German and in English)

Monography

Barbara Trnovec

€ 34

Alma M. Karlin. Mit Bubikopf und Schreibmaschine um die Welt

Biography of Alma M. Karlin

Jerneja Jezernik

€ 21

Alma M. Karlin – Weltbürgerin aus der Provinz

Graphic Novel

Jakob Klemencic und Marijan Pušavec

€ 19



Mit leichtem Gepäck. Siebzehn Mal um die Welt

Maud Parrish

€ 24,70

Weltensammlerinnen. Spektakuläre Reiseabenteuer mutiger Frauen

Armin Strohmeyer

€ 16,50

OPENING HOURS

Daily except Wednesdays

10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

TICKETS

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/information/#tickets>

The **Annual Family Ticket** for two adults and up to three children or teens under the age of 19 for only € 79! For more information, please visit <https://www.khm.at/en/family/>

CONTACTS FOR YOUR VISIT

Information, questions & suggestions

+43 1 534 30-5052, info@weltmuseumwien.at

Cultural education & outreach programme, guided tours, and programme registration

+43 1 534 30-5150, kulturvermittlung@weltmuseumwien.at

SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) (#AlmaKarlin) and [YouTube](#).

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Press photographs are available in the press section of our website free of charge, for your topical reporting: www.weltmuseumwien.at/presse/

Alma in Yukata robe

© KHM-Museumsverband



Alma and Li Tieguai

© NUK



Li Tieguai
© NUK



Yukata robe
© Celje Regional Museum



Alma in Tapa
© NUK



Alma with her typewriter *Erika*
© NUK



Alma with Fan
© NUK





MEDIA ACCREDITATION

Journalists visiting the KHM-Museumsverband for professional purposes are entitled to free admission to its exhibitions and locations. For this purpose, you need to register via info.pr@weltemuseumwien.at at least two working days in advance. We request that, in addition to mentioning your medium, you also specify the date of your visit and attach a scan of your valid press pass. Many thanks for your understanding!

PRESSEKONTAKT

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