

## ODD MAN OUT: HEINRICH VOGELER AND FIN DE SIÈCLE WORPSWEDE

*Welche seltsame Wege war dieser  
Mann gegangen, welche Begegnungen,  
Erlebnisse und Erschütterungen waren  
notwendig, um sich aus der Rosenketten  
einer romantischen Märchenwelt zu befreien  
und zum vorbehaltloser Kämpfer in den  
Reihen der klassenbewussten Arbeiter zu  
werden!*

[What strange paths this man trod, what encounters,  
experiences, shattering upheavals it took to free him  
from the rosy flower-chains of a romantic fairy-tale  
world and turn him into an uncompromising fighter in  
the ranks of class-conscious workers.]

-- Erich Weinert, Introduction to his edition  
Vogeler's *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Rütten &  
Loening, 1952), p. 14.

## Foreword

Shortly after I retired from the Department of Romance Languages at Princeton University, I developed an interest in Heinrich Vogeler, a German artist little known in the U.S.A. or the U.K. Partly, this was inspired by my discovery in Princeton's Firestone Library of a great number of books, from the years 1890 to 1914 approximately, that he had designed and illustrated in his then characteristic *Jugendstil* or *art nouveau* style. Around the same time I discovered similar work by two other German artists and book illustrators, "Fidus" (Hugo Höppener) and E.M. Lilien. All three were contributors to the well known avant-garde journals *Pan* and *Jugend*. I thought I might write a short book about the three of them, focusing on the way their ideological positions and hitherto largely shared *Jugendstil* artistic practices diverged in response to the shattering experiences of WWI, the difficult post-war period in Germany, and the coming to power of Hitler and the National Socialists in 1933. In brief: Vogeler became a revolutionary anarcho-socialist, then a Communist, finally emigrating to the Soviet Union in 1931; "Fidus" became a supporter of various "völkisch" movements and joined the National Socialist Party; and Lilien embraced Zionism, settled in Palestine and helped to found Bezalel, the Jewish art school in Jerusalem. The artwork of all three underwent similar changes.

I wrote an article on Lilien, in which I also discussed the other two, and in a short book on the Nazi writer and activist, Marie-Adelaide Princess Reuss zur Lippe, I touched on their initial seemingly common ground in *Jugendstil* as an artistic practice and in *Lebensreform* (the term generally used in Germany to describe a

wide range of movements advocating radical change not so much in social and economic structures as in life-style: nudism, free love, vegetarianism, theosophy, garden cities, etc.) as an ideology.\* But it was soon apparent to me that, of the three, Vogeler was by far the most interesting and engaging, both as an artist and as a human being. I determined that I would devote most of my energies to a thorough study of Vogeler, in whose tragic destiny, both personal and artistic, the history of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century seemed to me to be inscribed. I read everything in the limited but high quality literature on him in German (books and articles) and a great deal of the massive literature on the many aspects and artistic expressions of *Lebensreform*; I scanned hundreds of book and pamphlet illustrations and cover designs by both Vogeler himself and his contemporaries, as well as illustrations of his paintings and those of many of his associates and contemporaries; I was able to view directly those of his artworks (paintings and numerous etchings) that are presently in the Yale University Art Gallery or in storage at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin; and I read everything he wrote—a quite substantial body of texts for, like many German artists of his time, he was a writer as well as an artist. I even came up with a title for the projected book: “Heinrich Vogeler: From *Art nouveau* to *Agitprop*. A Modern Pilgrimage.”

What I did not reckon with is the diminished memory capacity of most people over the age of 75. After working on Vogeler for almost a decade, I realized that I could no longer wrap my mind around the vast amount of material I had collected. As I was dedicated to the project, however, (and to Heinrich Vogeler himself as a human being I had come to love, with all his strengths and

weaknesses) I resolved to seek out a younger scholar who might be attracted by it and to whom I could communicate all the material I had amassed. It is my earnest hope that Vanessa Troiano, a gifted and already learned graduate student in art history at CUNY, will produce the work I had to give up.

A fortuitous event -- an exhibition of work by Paula Modersohn-Becker, a Worpswede artist and friend of Vogeler's, at the Galerie St. Etienne in New York in early 2016, to the opening of which I was invited by Diane Radycki, the author of an outstanding recent study of this remarkable artist (Yale University press, 2013) -- led me to read up again on Becker and the other Worpswede artists and to take another look at the 100 or so pages of the projected work on Vogeler that I had written seven or eight years ago. These describe Vogeler's career up to and including his association with the Worpswede artists' colony. I decided to present them to the public now, in the hope of preparing the ground to some extent for Vanessa and with the understanding that she will use the material in her own work in whatever way she sees fit. It is also my way of thanking the Heinrich-Vogeler-Gesellschaft in Worpswede for responding to inquiries I made when I was actively working on the project, for making me an honorary member, and for keeping me informed of events and activities, notwithstanding my own failure to deliver a work that the Society no doubt hoped might go some way toward introducing Vogeler to the English-speaking world, where he remains virtually unknown.

Lionel Gossman

Princeton, February 2016



\* See “Jugendstil in Firestone: The Jewish Illustrator E.M. Lilien,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, LXVI (2004-2005): 11-78; *Brownshirt Princess* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2009). For a sampling of images related to these themes, including work by the three artists in question, see <http://www.princeton.edu/~lgossman/Documents/Lilien%20article-complete.pdf>

## 1. Introduction.

The name of Heinrich Vogeler, one of the most popular and successful German artists at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is unlikely to evoke a response even among professional art historians in most of the Western world, except perhaps for a small number of specialists in *fin de siècle* German art or *Jugendstil*. As a Communist, active opponent of National Socialism, and exile living in the Soviet Union, he ceased to be visible or mentionable in his native land after 1933. Thus in the immediate post-war years the poet Erich Weinert, his friend and fellow-exile in the Soviet Union, could observe in the foreword to a posthumously published 1952 edition of Vogeler's autobiographical *Erinnerungen* (Recollections) that "the present generation probably no longer knows much about this outstanding artist and humanist."<sup>1</sup> That situation has changed somewhat. There have been several exhibitions of Vogeler's work since the 1970s and there is now a moderately extensive, meticulously researched, and insightful literature on him in German, including a catalogue raisonné (2000). In addition he has been the subject of a couple of plays and no less than four films made for TV.<sup>2</sup> The *Heinrich Vogeler Gesellschaft* has a lively program of exhibitions, talks, and publications designed to promote awareness and understanding of the artist and his work. Nevertheless, even in Germany, those interested in him as an artist acknowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Vogeler, *Erinnerungen*, ed. Erich Weinert (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1952), p. 5. (All translations are by L.G. unless otherwise indicated.)

<sup>2</sup> The literature on Vogeler dates from the 1970s with the exception of a 1961 East German doctoral thesis on the frescoes painted at the Barkenhoff, Vogeler's estate in Worpswede (which he transformed into a commune and a progressive school after WWI), and destroyed by the Nazis.

that he owes the limited celebrity he still enjoys at least as much to his dramatic and tragic career and to the questions it raises about the relation of art, ideology, and politics as to his artwork itself. As a modern scholar put it, he is above all else “der Fall Vogeler” (“the Vogeler case”)<sup>3</sup> or, in the words of a contemporary of the artist, “die Erscheinung Vogeler” (“the Vogeler phenomenon”)<sup>4</sup>— that is, the case of a gifted individual who, in the eyes of some, probably a majority, let the artist in him wither for the sake of his politics, and in the eyes of others had the courage and imagination to break radically with his successful practice of a pleasing and decorative art in order to experiment with forms he believed appropriate, first, to the catastrophic and revolutionary situation created, in Germany especially, by the First World War and, subsequently, to the new and, in his view, more just and humane socialist society being constructed in the Soviet Union. Some of the disputes about the direction and value of his work, especially the work he produced after he became a Communist, and even about the facts of his later life as an émigré German artist in the U.S.S.R, reflect the political positions of the critics. A rare biographical notice about him in a modern work in English, for instance, seems based on historical commonplaces and is factually not accurate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bernd Stenzig, “Heinrich Vogeler in Worpswede,” in *Worpswede 1889-1989. Hundert Jahre Künstlerkolonie* (Worpswede: Worpsweder Verlag, n.d.), pp. 74-101, on p. 74. Stenzig is the author of many insightful and informative books and articles on Vogeler.

<sup>4</sup> S. D. Gallwitz, *Dreissig Jahre Worpswede* (Bremen, Angelsachsen-Verlag, 1922), p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> See the chapter on Worpswede – one of the very few accounts of the artist colony in English – in Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life. Artist Colonies in Europe and America* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), p. 130: “It is known that he was...expelled from the Communist Party, and sent to Kazakhstan, near the Caspian Sea. It seems that he died in Siberia in June, 1942 after having been forced to work on road construction.” This may be the source of the three-line entry on Vogeler in the brief artists’ biographies at the end of Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991): “Arrested in 1930 and sent to Kazakhstan, believed to have died working on a railroad in Siberia.” Another brief entry on Vogeler in the handsome catalog of an ongoing exhibition, *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, ed. Jennifer R. Gross (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), asserts in similar vein: “Interned in a wartime prison camp in 1941 and died there the following year.” (p. 185) According to

Though the artist himself has been largely forgotten, many university libraries in the U.S., including Princeton's Firestone Library, have significant holdings of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century books, brilliantly illustrated and decorated by him in the *Jugendstil* manner of his heyday. Generally these books are in the open stacks, rather than in rare books collections. For the most part they have been untouched and unread for decades.<sup>6</sup> Of his not insignificant production of oil paintings and graphic works, in contrast, relatively little is presently accessible to the public. Some of it is in private hands; some in museums in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other locations in the former Soviet Union. A number of works, executed during his prolonged residence in the Soviet Union and formerly in East German possession, are now in the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, but they are not regularly on display. The best place to see Vogeler's work is still in the various collections at Worpswede, the artists' colony near Bremen where, as a young man, he spent some of his most productive years and with which he deliberately

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Walter Laqueur "the painter Heinrich Vogeler...disappeared in the purges" – i.e. the Stalinist purges of the mid-to late 1930s (*Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany* [Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2002], p. 175). In fact, Vogeler, already a sick man, was sent from Moscow to Kazakhstan, along with many other native-born Germans, in late 1941 as the German army was approaching the Soviet capital. Conditions were harsh, neither his pension nor his medicines were delivered on time, he was reduced to begging, and he died in a poorly equipped collective farm clinic. He was not "arrested" or "interned in a wartime prison camp" or "sent to Siberia" in the commonly understood sense of that expression. The Heinrich Vogeler Gesellschaft, founded in Worpswede to preserve his memory, explains simply: "1941 wurde er mit vielen anderen Deutschen vor den Nazitruppen in Sicherheit gebracht. Vogeler kam nach Kasachstan in das Gebiet Karaganda. Als fast siebzjähriger verstarb er dort am 14.06.1942. Im Jahre 1999 enthüllte die Stadt Karaganda ein Denkmal, was an den vielseitigen Menschen Heinrich Vogeler erinnert." ([www.heinrich-vogeler-gesellschaft.de](http://www.heinrich-vogeler-gesellschaft.de)) As for his expulsion from the German Communist Party, it occurred in the late 1920s and never led either to his rejection of Communism or to his exclusion from participation in Soviet government-sponsored art projects. For a brief but accurate and informative biographical sketch, see the handsome catalogue of an exhibition at the British Museum in 1984 (*The Print in Germany 1880-1933: The Age of Expressionism*, ed. Frances Carey, Antony Griffiths, David Paisley [London: British Museum Press, 1984], pp. 78-80).

<sup>6</sup> See the image portfolio below for a selection of book designs and illustrations by Vogeler in the open stacks of Firestone Library.

sought to be associated by signing himself “Heinrich Vogeler Worpswede.” There is nothing by him in any public or – to the best of my knowledge – private collection in the United States, with one notable exception.

The Yale University Art Gallery owns six paintings by Vogeler as well as some etchings and a large number of etched designs for bookplates. These works were acquired by Yale as part of the Société Anonyme collection, which was bequeathed to the university in 1941 by one of the three founders of the Société and its chief source of financial support, the American artist and advocate of modern art, Katherine Dreier. (The other founders were Man Ray and Dreier’s close friend, Marcel Duchamp.) Unusually for American collectors at the time Dreier, who was born into a German-American family in New York and spoke fluent German, was not uniquely focused on Paris but also had a keen interest in contemporary German and Russian art.<sup>7</sup> She appears to have visited Worpswede on several occasions between 1920 and 1924 and made her Vogeler purchases at that time -- that is to say, about a decade after Vogeler had fallen from the pinnacle of his popularity as a *Jugendstil* illustrator and designer and at a time when he was visibly moving in the direction that is sometimes held to have proved fatal to his art.<sup>8</sup> The very fact that this unusually enlightened artist-

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<sup>7</sup> The first one-man shows in the U.S. of Kandinsky (1923), Klee (1924), and Campendonck (1925) were sponsored by Dreier’s Société Anonyme. As a collector, Dreier contrasts strikingly with Barnes.

<sup>8</sup> Dreier’s sisters Mary and Margaret were actively engaged in the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) and other social reform movements of the Progressive Era, helping to form a coalition of wage-earning and middle-class women who fought for the eight-hour day, decent wages, women’s suffrage and protective workplace laws. Mary walked the picket lines with strikers and at one point was arrested; Margaret played a major role in organizing support for the strikes of 1909-11 in the garment industry. Mary was a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, who was also active in the WTUL, and Margaret was an enthusiastic supporter of the New Deal. (William Clark, “Katherine Dreier and the Société Anonyme,” *Variant*, no 14 [www.variant.org.uk]) In light of this family background, it is fair to assume that Katherine Dreier was more likely to be attracted than repelled by Vogeler’s reputation in the early 1920s as a

collector and writer on modern art<sup>9</sup> not only entertained a personal relationship with Vogeler<sup>10</sup> but deemed his work worthy of standing with that of other artists in her collection – these included, along with several extremely talented German contemporaries who are now only slightly better known outside Germany than Vogeler himself, such as Heinrich Campendonck and Conrad Felixmüller, many now prominent figures, such as Paul Klee, Max Ernst, Wassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, and Kurt Schwitters -- is in itself sufficient reason for looking further into an artist who has attracted almost no public attention in the West since 1898, when Solomon J. Solomon, the latter-day English Pre-Raphaelite, published a highly laudatory article about him in *The Studio* (vol. 13, pp. 52-54).<sup>11</sup> Dreier

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firebrand social reformer. In the early 1930s, however, Dreier's interest in revolutionary change drew her to Hitler and National Socialism -- despite her friendship with and support of the Schwitters. (Gwendolen Webster, "Kurt Schwitters and Katherine Dreier," *German Life and Letters*, 52 [October 1999]: 443-56)

<sup>9</sup> Dreier's *Western Art: The New Era* appeared in 1923, her *Modern Art* in 1926. Paintings by her are held by the Yale Art Gallery and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

<sup>10</sup> The Katherine Dreier-Société Anonyme Papers at Yale University's Beinecke Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts contain three undated letters from Vogeler to Dreier. The envelope of one is postmarked "Moscow 22.8.1923" and is covered in Russian stamps. In it Vogeler gives Dreier his impressions of Moscow and the Soviet Union. The other, probably earlier letters, tell of financial difficulties at the colony (both a school and a home for children of persecuted or executed leftwing leaders) that Vogeler had set up at the Barkenhoff, his elegant property in Worpswede, of unexpected costs associated with his purchase of a wood sawing machine for the colony, and even of the birth of a child to Walter Hundt, the overseer of the colony, and his wife Marie Griesbach (Vogeler's former lover). Dreier was obviously familiar with what he was attempting to do at the Barkenhoff, as well as with the main actors there, and Vogeler clearly expected her to be sympathetic, for he requests her help in selling some of his bookplates in the U.S. in order to raise funds to support the colony. A brief typewritten c.v., drawn up by Vogeler himself, must have been sent for the information of potential buyers of the bookplates. A postcard from the Director of the Chicago Art Institute (October 27, 1922) expresses interest in these, since Vogeler's work "is very familiar to me" and "I would be very glad to have this collection of bookplates kept in our Department of Printing Arts," but the price is said to be too high. Box 116 contains copies of several of Vogeler's pamphlets, such as *Die Freiheit der Liebe*, *Der Expressionismus*, and *Kosmisches Werden und Menschliche Erfüllung* (1921), the last two with handwritten dedications to Dreier (sent by the Kommunistischer Kunstverlag in Hamburg). In Box 35 there is a postcard addressed to Dreier at the Hotel Adlon in Berlin by a third party, obviously in answer to a request by her for Vogeler's current address. (Box 35, folder 1052; Box 116, folders 2764-2766)

<sup>11</sup> An excellent American Ph.D. thesis much concerned with his relation to Rilke appeared not in English, but in German: Richard Pettit, *Rainer Maria Rilke in und nach Worpswede* (Worpswede: Worpsweder Verlag, 1983)

exhibited one of her newly acquired Vogelers – *The Artist's Children* (Fig.1) -- at a show organized by the Société Anonyme in the Art Museum at Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1921. It was hung next to works by Man Ray, Picabia, Juan Gris, and Archipenko (whom Vogeler had met in Paris in 1906-1907). Dreier valued it then at \$2,000 (or was that the artist's own, somewhat inflated asking price?), which made it the most expensive work in the show after Van Gogh's *Adolescence*, acquired by Dreier at an exhibition in Cologne in 1912.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the apparently high regard in which he was held by Katherine Dreier or, at an earlier stage in his career, by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke -- who for several years was a close friend, dedicated several of his literary works to him, contributed a long essay on him to the journal *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* in 1902, and devoted the final, insightful chapter of his 1903 monograph on Worpswede to him -- there are other good reasons for revisiting Vogeler and bringing him out of the obscurity to which he has been relegated in the English-speaking world (as well as in most of Western Europe outside Germany). His *Jugendstil* work – etchings, book illustrations, furniture and silverware design, interior decoration -- is inventive and attractive; the many portraits he painted in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and on into the 1930s can stand comparison with those of better remembered artists; he adopted Expressionist forms and techniques effectively in the wartime and post-war periods not only in portraiture but in order to express the suffering, the anguish and the outrage provoked by

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<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter, Elise K. Kenney, eds., *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University. A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 709. The original identification numbers of the six oil painting are 745-750; the 1941 catalog numbers corresponding to those are 801, 800, 796, 799, 797, 798). Dreier included works by Vogeler in many Société Anonyme exhibitions – in Manhattan (1921), Philadelphia (1926), Springfield, Mass. (1939), the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut (1940).

the War<sup>13</sup>; finally, his later productions, dating from the 1920s and 1930s, notably the so-called “Komplexbilder,” are an interesting – even if questionably successful -- attempt to create an art adequate to a positive revolutionary political program, as distinct from the primarily negative and critical effect sought by other Weimar era artists, such as Dix or Grosz or Heartfield or the abstract Utopian constructions of some early Russian revolutionary artists like Aleksandr Rodchenko – by combining montage and realism.

In addition, his extraordinary career, marked as it was by radical shifts of style and earnest experimentation, both voluntary and in some measure politically imposed, does raise important questions about the ways in which social and cultural conditions and the artist’s ideological commitments affect both the practice of art and public responses to it and about the place of art in culture and public life in general. Despite the tendency in many artistic and art historical circles to dismiss such questions as naïve or ill-advised,<sup>14</sup> they have kept recurring since religious themes were displaced as the principal subject matter of art and the Church was displaced as the primary patron of artists, first by the Great and Powerful and then by wealthy private individuals -- a change that was

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<sup>13</sup> From Jugendstil to Expressionism was not as radical a move as it might at first sight appear to be. On the relationship of the two styles, see Eberhard Roters, *Europäische Expressionisten* (Munich/Gütersloh/Vienna: Bertelsmann, n.d. [c. 1971]), pp.31-32 *et passim*.

<sup>14</sup> For a quick overview of the depoliticizing of art, notably in the post-World War II U.S., see Klaus von Beyme, *Das Zeitalter der Avantgarden. Kunst und Gesellschaft 1905-1955* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), pp. 826-66. Redefining the place of art in society was a central preoccupation of the early nineteenth century German “Nazarene” school of painters, as well as of the later Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris’s Arts and Crafts movement in England. In our own time the question was obviously of central importance to totalitarian regimes, both of the left and of the right but it also interested many socialist thinkers and some independent art historians. For a brief overview of Sir Nicholas Pevsner’s concern with the relation of art and society, see the pages I devoted to him in my book *The Passion of Max von Oppenheim* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013), pp. 296-316.  
<http://www.openbookpublishers.com/reader/163#page/1/mode/2up>



accompanied, beginning in the early modern period, by the rise of easel painting, greater scope for individual artistic expression and experimentation, and ultimately the development of an influential commercial art market with ever greater emphasis on the artist's individual "signature." A passionate and critical engagement with modern capitalist, urban culture and society – expressed in dynamic, sometimes angry and violent composition and application of color – is what gives to German painting of the first three decades of the twentieth century in particular its unique character, strength, and fascination. Many artists working in those same years sought to redefine the place of art in social life by rejecting not only the traditional notion of art as representation but also the idea of art as an expression of individual subjectivity. George Grosz, Graf Harry Kessler reports, had "no time for 'art for art's sake'" but wanted "to become the German Hogarth, deliberately realistic and didactic; to preach, improve, and reform." Grosz's view, according to Kessler, was that "Art as such is unnatural, a disease." He "loathes painting and the pointlessness of painting as practised so far, yet by means of it wants to achieve something quite new or, more accurately, something that it used to achieve (through Hogarth or religious art), but which got lost in the nineteenth century."<sup>15</sup> Vogeler's "Komplexbilder" need to be viewed in that context.

Vogeler addressed the question of art's relation to "life" directly not only in his work but in countless pamphlets and journal or newspaper articles. Crises in public and private life always prompted him to reflect on his work and on what he

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<sup>15</sup> *Berlin in Lights. The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler (1918--1937)*, trans. and ed. Charles Kessler (New York: Grove Press, 1999; orig.Engl. ed. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p.64.

should be trying to achieve in and through it and he tended to communicate his reflections in writing. Like many German artists and writers around the turn of the century -- Max Dauthendey, Gerhart Hauptmann, Ernst Barlach, Else Lasker-Schüler, Emil Rudolf Weiss (known chiefly, like Vogeler himself, as a book illustrator)<sup>16</sup>, the Jewish artist and novelist Karl Jakob Hirsch (a fellow-Worpsweder), the poet Erich Weinert and the dramatist Friedrich Wolf (both friends of the artist in Soviet exile<sup>17</sup>), to name but a few -- Vogeler was multi-talented, a writer as well as an artist. In addition to his paintings, etchings, and drawings, his highly successful book designs and illustrations, and his designs for houses, furniture, cutlery, jewelry, clothing, gardens, and stage-sets, he had a strong literary bent. One of his most attractive early works was a volume of his own poems, entitled *Dir*, which he designed and illustrated himself, and which was published by the celebrated Insel Verlag in 1899. (Figs. 2-3) By 1922 this slim volume combining literature, art, and even typography in a single *Gesamtkunstwerk* had gone through six editions and 8,000 copies had been printed. New editions have continued to appear: in 1964, in the popular Reklam Universal-Bibliothek; in 1973, in the Insel-Bücherei series; and in 1985, in a facsimile reprint of the first edition, also in the Insel-Bücherei series. An autobiography -- composed near the end of his life and published posthumously in East Germany in 1952 in an edition prepared by Erich Weinert (with a second enlarged and completely revised edition in 1989) -- contains passages of fine narrative and descriptive writing, from the delightfully precise evocation of a

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<sup>16</sup> See the fascinating work of Kurt Böttcher and Johannes Mittenzwei, *Dichter als Maler* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne/Mainz: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> Wolf was also a resident for a time at the Barkenhoff, Vogeler's idyllic retreat in Worpswede, after he turned it, in the aftermath of WWI, into a commune. The play "Kolonie Hund" (1926) offered Wolf's not uncritical view of the commune.

middle-class childhood at the end of the nineteenth century in Bremen at the beginning of the book to the unsparing account, toward the end, of the horrific conditions on the jam-packed train on which, in the fall of 1941, as the German invaders were approaching Moscow, Vogeler and hundreds of German-born residents of the Soviet capital were transported to distant Kazakhstan. Some verbal pictures of the marshy moorlands around Worpswede in these fascinating and moving memoirs, which at their best combine, like much of the author's early art work, meticulous attention to detail with great sensitivity and poetic imagination, may even be superior to anything Vogeler was able to achieve as a painter of that landscape or, for that matter, as a *Jugendstil* poet. He clearly had a deep love and understanding of the North German country and its people and in a few quite lengthy passages uses their (and his) Low German dialect to great effect. Finally, as a passionately committed political activist after the First World War, Vogeler became not only a prolific author of pamphlets and articles, but a producer of political caricatures and cartoons. While a proper assessment of his artistic work requires first and foremost careful study of the work itself, it is equally true that the context of his artistic practice, his written reflections on his own art and on the art of his time, and his professed goals as an artist must form part of that study and cannot be regarded as of marginal significance.

Finally, the relation between art and "life" dominated Vogeler's own life. The Barkenhoff, the house he created for himself in Worpswede, expressed his Utopian longing for a fusion of art and life -- for a beautiful, creative life and a living art. To the pre-World War I *Jugendstil* artist such a fusion could be achieved only by creating a protected domain cut off from the ugly, moneymaking,

suffering world of everyday nineteenth century life. Vogeler's Barkenhoff was a refuge of art and beauty, a society of painters, sculptors, poets, and musicians. Even his own preference for Biedermeier-style collars and the Empire style dresses he designed for his wife expressed his turning his back on the ugly, increasingly industrialized world around him with its crass exploitation of man and nature. That Vogeler's fin-de-siècle Utopianism had nevertheless a social dimension, that he hoped life could be made beautiful for all, not simply for a few, even at a time when he seems to have embraced a kind of dandyism, is demonstrated by his interest in the Garden City movement in England, his visit to the specially designed settlement the Lever Brothers had built at Port Sunlight near Liverpool for the workers at their soap factory, his tour of the notorious slums of Glasgow, and his attempt to persuade a local Bremen industrialist to build a worker's village similar to Port Sunlight.

## **2. Vogeler's Education, and Early Years.**

Johann Heinrich Vogeler was born into a moderately well-to-do family in the ancient Hanseatic port and free city-state of Bremen in 1872, a year after the unification of Germany and the founding of the Second German Empire. As he was expected one day to take over the running of his father's successful ironware business, he was enrolled in a *Handelsschule* or trades school, rather than in a classical Gymnasium. His inability or unwillingness to accept the strict discipline of the school, his unhappiness with the uninspired instruction he received from his teachers, who were apparently much given to physically punishing their young charges, and finally, his habit of drawing caricatures of the teachers led to his having to withdraw from the *Handelsschule* and be placed in a *Realschule* – a high school emphasizing science and modern languages and frequented chiefly, according to Vogeler, by children of the *petite bourgeoisie*, with whom he felt he had nothing in common. Conditions there were seemingly even worse than at the *Handelsschule*. Once again it was a matter of rote learning, but the students themselves had no interest in learning and were hard to manage. There was much playing of cards under the desks and clandestine drinking. "Discipline in the school was strict," according to Vogeler himself; "there was a lot of beating of the youngsters; but the latter avenged themselves by forming gangs and attacking the teachers" after school hours [ "Die Zucht in der Schule war sehr streng, geschlagen wurde viel, und die Jungens rächten sich an den Lehrern bändenmässig"], as when one teacher was followed as he left the school building, dragged to a nearby water pump, and doused with cold water. (*Werden*, p. 16)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> All references in the text to *Werden* are to the new edition of Vogeler's autobiography, with a selection of his letters, prepared by Joachim Priewe and Paul-Gerhard Wentzlaff, and published as *Werden: Erinnerung mit Lebenszeugnissen aus den Jahren 1923-1942* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1989).

Vogeler was so unhappy at the *Realschule* that he worked extremely hard in order to be able to graduate early.

His artistic bent, already manifested in his impatience with the mechanical approach to art instruction in the schools he had attended and in the fateful caricatures he made of teachers at the *Handelsschule*, found more appropriate expression on hikes he took with his friends through the drained peat bogs to the northeast of Bremen. “I would take my painting things out of my rucksack and paint the path over the heath that then snaked up the Weyerberg” (a modest elevation of some 50 meters that dominates the otherwise flat North German landscape). (*Werden*, p.17) However, the hard-working Bremen merchant Carl Eduard Vogeler, though by no means an uncultivated man – he was a member of the local choir or *Liedertafel*, liked to sing Schubert Lieder at home on Sunday evenings in his deep baritone voice, accompanying himself on the piano (*Werden*, pp. 13-14), and had an interest in art<sup>19</sup> – had made clear what kind of career he had in mind for his three sons. It was definitely not the uncertain one of an artist. As the oldest of the three, Heinrich was apprenticed to a Bremen merchant firm; but the very thought of numbers, of adding and subtracting, he relates, filled him with anxiety. (*Werden*, p. 18) Fortunately for him, an illness that developed after he got soaked during a storm on one of his hiking expeditions on the moors proved serious; he had to be sent to Baden-Baden to convalesce; and there, as he himself relates, Carl Eduard came around to the idea that his son might have genuine talent as an artist and that it might be worth cultivating. On the family’s

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<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Von Worpswede nach Moskau: Heinrich Vogeler, ein Künstler zwischen den Zeiten* (Cologne: Du Mont, n.d. [1972]), p. 15.

return to Bremen, it was agreed that the young Heinrich could enroll in the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf, one of the most distinguished in Germany. That same year, at Christmas, he recounts, his father “gave me, as a present, a set of paints and a wood panel that he had made from a sugar crate. Together we painted a Swiss landscape in oils on it.” (*Werden*, p. 18)

The Düsseldorf Academy, with its emphasis on copying from models, turned out to be as big a disappointment to the young Vogeler as the Vienna Academy had been to the rebellious young “Nazarene” painters some eighty years earlier or the Académie royale des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp had proved to be, only a few years before, to the young Henry van de Velde.<sup>20</sup> “Openly resists the accepted methods of the academy,” one of his teachers, the successful history painter Peter Janssen, observed of him with irritation. (*Werden*, p. 19) In 1892, after several run-ins with teachers and finally with the Director of the Academy – along with a friend he had taken to skipping the late afternoon art history lectures and going out into the countryside to paint – Vogeler turned his back on the Academy and set off with two fellow-students for Holland. The trio found inexpensive lodgings in the little town of Sluis, where they painted from nature, and from where it was easy to cross the border into Belgium and visit Bruges, the once glorious Hansa port, now, in Vogeler’s words, “wie ein verträumtes Märchen aus alter Zeit” [“like a dreamed up fantasy tale from long gone times”]. (*Werden*, p.21)

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<sup>20</sup> Henry van de Velde, *Récit de ma vie*, ed. Anne van Loo (Brussels: Versa-Flammarion, 1992), 2 vols., vol. 1, pp. 71-72. Van de Velde compares the airless rooms in the Antwerp Art Academy to a barracks, derides the artificiality of the instruction, and deplores the “poids écrasant d’un mortel ennui,” which, he says, must have discouraged generations of budding artists.

“Bruges la morte” was already a focal point of the European “decadent” or “aesthetic” sensibility (the celebrated short novel, *Bruges-la-morte*, by the Belgian Symbolist writer Georges Rodenbach appeared in the very year that Vogeler and his friends visited the old city) and so it was too for the eager young refugees from the Düsseldorf Academy. They were enthralled by the rich treasures of art produced four centuries earlier for the merchants and churches of the ancient city – the paintings of Memling, Jan van Eyck, Gerard David, Hugo van der Goes, which they admired for the purity of their modeling and the sureness and delicacy of their brushwork [“Reinheit der Modellierung, Sicherheit und Feinheit der Pinselführung”], and the tomb of Mary of Burgundy in the Church of Our Lady, the “simple grace” of which, Vogeler claimed in his old age, made such a strong impression on him that it had “never been effaced from his memory”<sup>21</sup> – and it seems fair to surmise that they saw both in the grave beauty and dignity of its former grandeur and in the withdrawn stillness of its current, drastically diminished and eccentric situation a sharp contrast to the frenetic, mindless commotion and the ugly industrial and commercial development ravaging their own world as a result of Germany’s hectic economic expansion in the late nineteenth century. Shorn by its decline of all menacing power and frozen in a fairytale-like past, “Bruges la morte” almost certainly presented itself in Vogeler’s imagination as one of those “islands” in which he persistently sought asylum from what he experienced as the physical and moral ugliness of his own time and society and which constitute a recurrent motif in both his art and his life until his complete conversion to political Communism in the mid-1920s. Bruges, in short, was more than a metaphor for art; it was a concrete reminder of that unity of art

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<sup>21</sup> Petzet, *op.cit.*, p. 24.



and life, art and society, for which Vogeler and many others of his generation, sometimes inspired by the example of William Morris, sought, to create Utopian models on the margins of the real social life of their time.

An outbreak of cholera put an end to the idyll of Sluis. The three friends managed to escape to Italy, where they lived from hand to mouth for several weeks.

Vogeler returned to Düsseldorf and resumed his studies at the Academy, passing his final examinations in the winter semester of 1893-1894. From that second, apparently more successful stint at the Academy he later recalled with gratitude the keen interest he developed, thanks in part to the friendly encouragement of one of his teachers, in arts and crafts – those of all times and all peoples, but especially those of ancient Greece and Rome, the Gothic, and the “Empire” period of the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In particular, he was drawn to the book illustration and typeface design of modern English designers like William Morris. (*Werden*, pp. 25-26) As he makes no mention of painting, it may be that that was not the main focus of interest for him at that point.

During his last two years at the Academy, Vogeler became a member of an art students’ fraternity known as “Tartarus.” As he and another student from neighboring Hanseatic Hamburg had become inseparable friends, the members of the fraternity nicknamed the two “Mining” and “Lining” after twin (female) characters in one of the Low German dialect novels of the prolific Fritz Reuter.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ut mine Stromtid*, ch. 2: In the Mecklenburg farmhouse tenanted by Jochen Nüssler, in Reuter’s story, all was still while everyone was busy raking in the hay, except for “two little maidens of three years, with round flaxen heads, and round rosy cheeks, playing in a heap of sand... These were Lining and Mining Nüssler, and they looked for all the world like a pair of twin apples, growing on one stem; and they were so indeed, for they were twins and one who did not know that Lining was not Mining, and Mining was not Lining, would be puzzled from morning to night, for their names were not written in their faces, and if their

The nickname “Mining” stuck to Vogeler for the rest of his life; both he himself and those closest to him used it regularly; and, as a sign of their affection for him, it was subsequently passed on to their first child by two of his most devoted friends of later years -- Walter Hundt, his right-hand man in running the experimental commune that he established on his property in Worpswede after the First World War, and Hundt’s wife Marie Griesbach, known as “die rote Marie” because of her politics as well as the color of her hair, a former lover of Vogeler’s and a fellow-activist in the revolutionary period immediately preceding and following the official end of the First World War.

Vogeler made many friends through “Tartarus” and relates the pranks they got up to with gusto in his autobiography. (My translations come nowhere near conveying the liveliness and inventiveness of his language, which includes many popular and dialect terms.) Neither a chore nor a bore, art outside the classroom had become fun. One incident anticipates modern graffiti artists and their reminder of a time before painting had become a personal and private experience disconnected from architecture and the public sphere. On a fall evening, Vogeler relates, as he and a group of his “Tartarus” friends emerged, elated and probably somewhat inebriated, from the pub where they had been drinking on to the deserted streets of the town, their fraternity leader stopped his followers at a corner. In the light of a gas street lamp, the high wall of a house that was in the process of being torn down and rebuilt was visible. “Tonight there is work for you,” the leader said. “You will give the Düsseldorfers a sample of your artistic

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mother had not marked them with a colored band on the arm, there would have been grave doubts in the matter...Jochen Nüssler was even yet in some uncertainty...” (Quoted from English trans., *Seed-Time and Harvest, or “During my Apprenticeship”* [Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1871], p.7)

talent and, for you, it will be your first opportunity to do mural painting. So get yourselves ready. The honor of 'Tartarus' is at stake. Go home, each one of you, and bring back black distemper. If you don't have any, scrape out some soot from your stove. Bring large brushes and one of you come to my place with me and help me carry a basinful of size [Leimwasser]." In a quarter of an hour, Vogeler relates, "everything was ready. There wasn't a cop to be seen. Two of our guys stood guard. The others clambered up ladders...and soon the walls had come to life. Everyone gave free rein to his imagination and painted. On the staircase, the owner of the house coming home drunk, the house keys in his hand; in an attic room, a servant girl with her lover; in another room, a husband squared off against a shrewish mother-in-law; scenes were painted in the couple's bedroom, in the children's room, and in the toilet." When the look-outs whistled a warning, the "artists" had to decamp in a hurry, but "not one...got caught by the flicks rushing to the scene," Vogeler reports with still palpable satisfaction fifty years after the event. "The next day all ranks of the Düsseldorf population were gripped by an unaccustomed interest in art. People came in droves to visit the house. The police had to make the builders plaster over the fateful walls immediately." (*Werden*, p. 25) Not the least interesting aspect of this anecdote is the keen pleasure the young artists evidently took in wall painting and in the public curiosity their daubing had aroused. From the Nazarenes in the early nineteenth century to Diego Rivera (and Vogeler himself) in the early twentieth and the graffiti artists of more recent times, wall painting, as opposed to easel painting, has generally signified a will to radically alter the place of art in culture and social life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> There is also a telling and highly admiring reference in Vogeler's autobiography to Hans von Marées'

It was also thanks to “Tartarus” that Vogeler “made yet another friend, the taciturn Fritz Overbeck, a landscape painter, who also hailed from Bremen.” The association with Overbeck was to have a decisive effect on the young artist’s life. After a brief trip, in April 1894, to Paris where, on his visits to the Louvre, he relates, he was powerfully affected by the seemingly incompatible qualities of three great artists of the past – the “monumental powers of composition of Mantegna, the grace of Botticelli,” and Rembrandt’s ability, notably in the small canvas entitled “The Slaughtered Ox,” to “give form to matter by means of color in such a way as to discover, as if for the first time, the organic character of natural objects” (*Werden*, p. 27) -- Vogeler returned to Bremen, looked up Overbeck, and learned from the latter’s mother that he had moved to the village of Worpswede in the Teufelmoor (Devil’s Bog), about 20 kilometers from Bremen, where several other landscape artists, led by Fritz Mackensen, had already settled and established a small artists’ colony dedicated to *plein air* painting and to representing nature as it is in its everyday reality in North Germany, instead of in the idealized form in which it often appears in art or in the form in which it appears at selected “beautiful” sites. Vogeler decided to follow him there, packed his bags and sent them on to Overbeck’s place, then set off himself by train for the nearest station to Worpswede at Osterholz, from where he completed the journey on foot and by hitching a ride on one of the punts, fitted out with sails, that the locals used to get around on the shallow waterways of the drained peatbogs. “Fritz Overbeck broke into a happy smile when he saw me coming,” Vogeler later recalled. “Then he took me to meet his friends, who were all eager

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“youthful, realistic, monumental wall paintings, depicting the lives of fishermen” (1873) in the Aquarium at Naples (*Werden*, p. 89).

to assist the young newcomer, and that evening I already lay in a clean bed in the attic room I had rented in the modest house of the widow of a local gendarme.”

(*Werden*, pp. 27-28)

Vogeler's happiness was complete when he was joined by Otto Sohn<sup>24</sup>, an old friend from Düsseldorf and the trip to Holland and Belgium. Along with Otto he rented the damp, crumbling, abandoned villa of a former tile-maker, whose business was in decline. The villa was situated in an untended, wild, overgrown garden that was the delight of the two lessees. The two took their midday meals at the local inn, where they were served by Martha Schröder, one of the daughters of the widow of the village teacher, Mackensen's former landlady. Vogeler was fascinated by and soon enamored of the young Martha, represented on a portrait he painted of her at the age of fifteen, in a style reminiscent of the Old German school, as child-like and serious, an icon of innocence and purity. He sought her friendship and trust as she grew into a young woman, arranged for her to be groomed and educated in music, the arts, literature and foreign languages by a woman friend of his in Dresden, and in 1901 -- the same year that saw the marriage of Otto Modersohn, one of the founding members of the Worpswede colony, and his gifted student Paula Becker, and of the poet Rilke and Paula's friend, the sculptress Clara Westhoff -- married her. For many years Martha was his muse and the grave, idealized subject of many of his paintings. She bore him

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<sup>24</sup> Otto Sohn-Rethel, born to a painter father in Düsseldorf in 1877 and educated at the Düsseldorf Academy, spent two years in Worpswede, before settling in Italy, first in Rome (1902), where Vogeler spent some time with him in 1903, then in Anacapri, where he lived until his death in 1949. Elected a member of the Berlin Secession in 1908, he is best known for his portraits and for his fine drawings of naked youths, bathing, wrestling or simply loafing. It may have been Sohn who drew Vogeler's attention to the great murals of Hans von Marées in the Naples Aquarium.

three daughters: Mieceke (Marie Luise), Bettina, and Mascha (Martha).<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 4) She herself took up weaving and handicrafts and was soon a respected member of the Worpswede community in her own right. Though she and Vogeler separated in 1920, they never lost touch with one another. They continued to correspond even after Vogeler remarried (Martha accepted a divorce without difficulty in order that the son born to Vogeler and his lover Sonja Marchlewska, the daughter of a noted Polish art critic and collaborator of Lenin, might be made legitimate) and both during Vogeler's lengthy residences in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and after his definitive emigration in 1931, he would turn to Martha whenever he needed someone to see to his affairs in Germany. Throughout her life, Martha showed a human interest in the young artists who came to Worpswede, as some pages about her in the writings of the Jewish artist and novelist, Karl Jacob Hirsch, testify.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Vogeler, she survived the War. Though probably not a Nazi sympathizer, she joined the *NS Frauenschaft*, one of the National Socialist women's organizations, and in 1936 participated in a "Volkstag der Kunst" (People's Art Day) in Worpswede. However, in 1942 the authorities conducted a house search of the Haus im Schluf, where she had gone to live with

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<sup>25</sup> Mieceke (1901-1945) was to share many of her father's political convictions, had a modest career of her own as an artist in ornament and jewelry, lived for many years with the left-wing writer Gustav Regler, whom she finally married in 1940 in New York, after she and Regler managed to escape from Europe just before the fall of France, and died in Mexico in 1945; see Regler's many lively and loving portraits of her in his memoirs, translated by Norman Denny as *The Owl of Minerva. The Autobiography of Gustave Regler* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959). Bettina (1903-2001) followed in her mother's footsteps as a weaver and in 1920 married the painter and architect Walter Müller. Mascha (1905-1993) married a local man and ran a boarding house. (With author's thanks for information about Bettina and Mascha to Ernstheinrich Meyer-Stiens, former President of the Heinrich Vogeler Gesellschaft in Worpswede, in an e-mail dated 5 February 2008)

<sup>26</sup> See especially Karl Jakob Hirsch, *Quintessenz meines Lebens*, ed. Helmut F. Pfanner (Mainz: Hase & Koehler, 1990), p. 299. In the years before and during WWI Hirsch was in frequent correspondence with Martha and her soon-to-be lover, the poet Ludwig Bäumer. (See Anne Mahn, *Karl Jakob Hirsch (1892-1952). Werk und Leben des Schriftstellers und bildenden Künstlers* [Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2010], pp. 16, 20, 21, 42-45, 67, 85, 331)

two of her daughters after separating from Vogeler in the early 1920s and where in the 1930s she had begun to take in paying guests. A hundred or so drawings by Vogeler were confiscated and she was taken to court. She was acquitted for lack of evidence, but the following year was thrown out of the *NS Frauenschaft* without a hearing “on account of behavior contrary to National Socialism.” Martha Vogeler died in Worpswede in 1961.

### **3. Worpswede**

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of a number of artists' colonies in places remote in feeling, if not always geographically, from the ever expanding great cities and industrial conurbations of Western Europe. Doubtless many factors contributed to this development: the artists' desire for mutual support in a situation in which they had become suppliers of a commodity in a highly competitive market; the typically modern (and constantly renewed) artistic goal of painting from nature as it "really" is or is really perceived, rather than according to academic conventions or from plaster models; dissatisfaction with what many deemed the frenzied artificiality of commercial and industrial society and its baleful influence on art. The sites chosen -- Barbizon, Grez-sur-Loing, Pont-Aven, and Gleize's Abbaye de Créteil in France, Staithes and St. Ives in England, Skagen in Denmark, Dachau and Worpswede in Germany, Cockburnspath ("the Scotch Dachau") in Scotland,<sup>27</sup> -- were not always "beautiful" in a picture-postcard way. Sometimes, as at Cockburnspath, Staithes or Worpswede, they appear to have been selected chiefly because they did not correspond to conventional ideas of beauty in landscape but were felt to be close to a still rough, unspoiled, originary nature and way of life.<sup>28</sup> The viewer of a

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<sup>27</sup> On the specific features of different artists' colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life. Artist Colonies in Europe and America* and the same author's, "La colonie de Worpswede et le contexte international," in *Les Artistes de Worpswede, 1889-1935* (Exhibition Catalogue, Musée départemental du Prieuré, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 1991), pp. 143-53, at pp. 147-48. See also Robin Lenman, *Artists and Society in Germany 1850-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 133-41. Similar attempts by writers to set up communities in opposition to the prevailing bourgeois society were usually located closer to the cities, like Wilhelm Bölsche's community at Friedrichshagen on the Müggelsee to the southeast of Berlin and the Hart brothers' at Schlachtensee northwest of the city.

<sup>28</sup> According to Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life* (pp. 143-44), the chief attractions of Staithes to the artists who gathered there "were its picturesque bleakness and the harsh lives led by the local fishermen." Similarly, the Scottish disciples of Millet and Bastien-Lepage, the so-called "Glasgow Boys," disdained to paint the spectacular Highland scenery around Brig o' Turk, where they had first congregated. The 25 year-old James Guthrie painted instead a gloomy "Highland Funeral" (1882) that anticipates, as Jacobs plausibly suggests, Mackensen's "Sermon on the Moor" of thirteen years later. (Guthrie's work in turn probably owes something, though the tones are more somber and the figures less



landscape painting would thus presumably be led to focus attention less on the prettiness of the scene represented or on the work's reassuring similarity to traditional, already familiar landscape paintings, less on features immediately perceptible and pleasing to the eye than on the underlying characteristics of the natural world as revealed by the artist. Similarly, in representing the local inhabitants in their peculiarity rather than according to the costume conventions the viewer was accustomed to, the figure painter could hope to stimulate the viewer's awareness both of the artist's particular vision and practice of his art and of the particular characteristics of his subjects.

The Worpswede artists' colony – the “Ultima Thule of German art,” as Richard Muther described it, alluding ironically to the notions of “Nordic” uniqueness and even superiority that inspired some of the founders<sup>29</sup> -- was located in a village in the so-called Teufelsmoor, a rather bleak area of drained peat bog and windswept moorland to the northeast of Bremen. In the 1880s and 1890s, when the first artists began to settle there, it was poor and backward. Almost half a century later, Vogeler still recalled the harsh life of the inhabitants. “The small holdings of eight acres or so into which the land had been divided after being drained at the end of the eighteenth century,” he explained, “were insufficient to support the families as they grew.” (*Werden*, pp. 28-29) Large families being the order of the day, emigration was the frequent lot of young people. The mother of Vogeler's future wife Martha Schröder, for instance, the widow of a local schoolteacher,

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individualized, to Courbet's “Burial at Ornans,” which was shown at the Salon of 1851-52.) The Glasgow Boys soon moved to the Berwickshire village of Cockburnspath, where they could paint “some of the drearier agricultural areas of the Scottish Lowlands.”

<sup>29</sup> *History of Modern Painting*, rev. ed., 4 vols. (London: J.M. Dent and New York: E.P. Dutton, 1907), vol. 4, p. 372.

had thirteen children, most of whom had emigrated to America. For those who remained behind life was not easy.

“Who had any knowledge of this country!” one art historian exclaimed in the mid-1920s. “The mail coach hurried through it, the train rushed through it, no Baedeker proclaimed it beautiful: a flat, low-lying landscape, here and there a slight, pine-covered rise in the ground, almost no corn or wheat fields, predominantly marshy moorland, through which the Hamme river and many small canals snake their way, the inhabitants living in wretched little bothies hardly distinguishable from the soil itself, a piece of folk life untouched by any urban culture, almost without any culture at all.” Utterly different, he went on, from Dachau in Bavaria -- the site of another, much larger artists’ colony. In contrast to Worpswede, Dachau was “an enticing spot for any painter, for seldom are so many widely varied landscape components found together: mountains, forests, plains, rivers, a village with the most picturesque background and villagers who are natural models.” Worpswede, in contrast, stood for *Heimatkunst*, an art rooted in and expressive of a particular local culture and people rather than inspired by an internationally shared standard of beauty. The great achievement of its artists, in the view of the same writer, was to have demonstrated that “the most unlikely landscape is beautiful when viewed lovingly by a receptive, sensitive, artistic eye” and to have brought about, through their art, an expansion of our feeling for nature.<sup>30</sup> Years later, in his novel *Hochzeitsmarch in Moll* (written in Denmark in 1933), the expressionist artist-

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Alfred Koeppen, *Die moderne Malerei in Deutschland* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1925), pp. 79-83.

writer Karl Jakob Hirsch, who lived in Worpswede at various times in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, evoked, without naming it, the sodden landscape to which he himself became deeply attached and which his hero says he finds so beautiful and loves so much that he cannot tear himself away from it even though, after the death of his wife, it has become filled for him with sadness. Worpswede, Hirsch was to declare on his return to the village as an American army officer in 1945, after twelve unhappy years in the Jewish émigré world of New York, was “where I always lived my real life.”<sup>31</sup>

The land is flat and endless. Rain drizzles down from the heavens on to the earth, which is already soaked from yesterday's rain, and wet through and through from the rain that has been falling on this land since the beginning of Creation. For two hundred days out of every year heaven and earth are wedded here in the dripping dampness of mist. The wetness rolls over the flat horizon, blurring the clarity of its line, flows around the houses, drops heavily from their straw roofs, creeps into living quarters, spreading damp everywhere, making beds heavy and wallpaper dull; it weighs on the inhabitants who go their ways bent under the drudgery of their daily lives until they finally sink back into the marshy earth from which they came. That is how the land is all the way to the sea: black earth carved up and heaped in piles forming low pyramids until the summer sun finally dries them out and turns them into fuel: peat. Two hundred days of rain and mist; a hundred days in which the seasons timidly change: autumn, wet and ghostly, moves

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Jakob Hirsch, *Quintessenz meines Lebens*, ed. Helmut F. Pfanner (Mainz: Hase & Koehler, 1990), p. 147.

with howling storms into winter; spring, mist dripping from the red branches of the birch trees, lurches suddenly and heavy-scented into summer. Now the sun pushes its way into the land with tropical ardor, mist and damp are forgotten, flowers and blossoms sprout everywhere. The nightingale sobs more sweetly than in milder lands, the inhabitants seize the short breathing space of summer more greedily, the waterfowl in the canals pierce the air with wild, shrill cries, and in the August nights stars shoot from the sky on to this endless land.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Karl Jakob Hirsch, *Hochzeitsmarsch in Moll*, ed. Hans J. Schütz (Bad Homburg: Oberon, 1986), p. 85. The death of the young wife of the hero of Hirsch's novel, an artist, shortly after giving birth to their first child, was undoubtedly intended to evoke the premature death after childbirth of Paula Modersohn-Becker, Worpswede's great woman artist. Nevertheless, the hero cannot tear himself away. See also Hirsch's better known novel *Kaiserwetter* (Frankfurt a. M.: M.: S. Fischer, 1981 [orig. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1931]), p. 115: "What kind of landscape was it? Meadows cut through by narrow ditches, puny birch trees, little woods no taller than a man, dilapidated straw-roofed houses. Wretched weather three hundred and fifty days out of the three hundred and sixty five in the year..." ["Was war das auch für eine Gegend? Wiesen mit schmalen Gräben durchzogen, mickrige Birken, mannshohe Wäldchen, verfallene strohgedeckte Häuser. Von dreihunderfünfundsechzig Tagen im Jahr war an dreihundertfünfzig schlechtes Wetter..."] As a Jew, Hirsch who in the first and second decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been a promising expressionist artist in Worpswede and who returned there with his first wife, August (Gulo) Lotz, a medical doctor, in 1920, had to emigrate after the National Socialists came to power. In his posthumously published memoirs, he recounts how on his return to Germany with the US army of occupation, he immediately found an occasion to travel to Worpswede not only to renew contact with his now ailing former wife, who had stayed on in Worpswede (where she remained until her death in 1947) and to whom he remained deeply attached, but to revisit a site that clearly occupied a central place in his life. In his own words: "Worpswede is where I always lived my real life" ["Worpswede, wo ich mein eigentliches Leben immer geführt habe"] (Karl Jakob Hirsch, *Quintessenz meines Lebens*, ed. Helmut F. Pfanner [Mainz: v. Hase & Koehler Verlag, 1990], p. 103). The return is recounted in loving detail: "Now comes the straight paved road to Worpswede. Only now do I really understand how closely bound up with all these things I am. Every tree, every house, every bend in the road is full of memories. In re-establishing contact with this landscape I feel truly reinvigorated. It is unchanged and still has the unique beauty that it always had" ["Jetzt kommt die gerade Chaussee nach Worpswede. Ich weiss eigentlich jetzt erst, wie sehr ich an all den Dingen hänge, jeder Baum, jedes Haus und jede Wegbiegung ist voll von Erinnerungen.... Das Wiedersehen mit der Landschaft ist für mich eine wirkliche Erquickung, sie ist unberührt und hat die eigenartige Schönheit, die sie immer hatte."] In scenes made poignant by the bitterness of his enforced exile and the uncertainty he feels about his former associates, he describes how the latter – they include Martha Vogeler, the art dealer Martin Goldyga, and the photographer Hans Saebens -- welcome him back warmly, as though he had simply been away on a long trip. (*Quintessenz meines Lebens*, pp. 297-303) Worpswede is again evoked at length in Hirsch's fictional biography of his first wife, written in 1949-50 after her death and first published 42 years after Hirsch's own death (*Der alte Doktor*, ed. Helmut Stelljes [Bremen: H.M. Hauschild, 1994]).

Worpswede also exercised its strange charm on the poet Rainer-Maria Rilke, who stayed in the village or in nearby Westerwede for varying periods of time between 1899 and 1903. “Colorful, dark land under high skies constantly in motion. Birches, tall chestnut trees, knotty fruit trees laden with red, ripe fruit,” he noted in his diary. “A strange land,” he added two years later. “Standing on the small sand hill of Worpswede, one can see it stretched all about...It lies there in all its flatness, almost without a fold, and the roads and creeks run far into the horizon.”<sup>33</sup> In a letter, Rilke describes “a strangely beautiful meadowland, rich in change and movement”; “flat, with avenues of birches, old farmhouses, rowans, the ground divided between wonderfully scented heather and singular moorland cut through with canals.” Like the painters, the poet responds to “the clarity and color of the varying moods of the atmosphere and the splendid cloud effects.”<sup>34</sup> “One learns to see something different here,” he explains in a diary entry. “Along with the wide skies and the landscape there is a third element of no less importance than the other two: the atmosphere. Things always used to appear to me like arms and extremities, all belonging together with the great body of the earth; but here many things are insular – they stand alone, bright, surrounded by the ever moving atmosphere. That is what makes their forms so strong.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cit. in Ralph Freedman, *The Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), pp. 124-25.

<sup>34</sup> Cit. in Donald A. Prater, *A Ringing Glass: The Life of Rainer Maria Rilke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 68. See also R. M. Rilke, *Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit*, ed. Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1973 [orig. ed., 1942]), pp. 203-205 (6.IX.1900)

<sup>35</sup> Rilke, *Tagebücher*, p.223 (11.IX.1900).

Fritz Mackensen (b. 1866) and Otto Modersohn (b. 1865), two artists who had preceded Vogeler and Overbeck at the Düsseldorf Academy were the first to settle in Worpswede. (Mackensen had also studied at Munich, where one of his teachers had been Wilhelm von Diez, an important influence on colorists such as Franz Marc and Max Slevogt; after Düsseldorf, Modersohn had studied at Karlsruhe under Hermann Baisch, a painter of country scenes.) Both moved there in 1889, Mackensen having visited the area for the first time in 1884 as the guest of friends and having returned several times subsequently. By then the artist Carl Vinnen, the son of a wealthy Bremen patrician, also had a house fairly close by in Ostendorf, near Bremerhaven. Vinnen had been one of the members of the Berlin Artists' Association (*Verein Berliner Künstler*) who, in 1892, voted against the proposal by the Association's president that an invited exhibition of work by the original and unsettling Norwegian artist Edvard Munch be terminated within days of its having been set up, thus participating in what at the time, in a reference to the Munich Secession of the same year, the newspapers termed a "Secession." (An effective and enduring Secession was not created in Berlin until 1898.)<sup>36</sup> Soon Mackensen and Modersohn were joined by Hans am Ende, who had been a fellow student of Mackensen's at Munich. Fritz Overbeck came for the summers of 1892 and 1893. Heinrich Vogeler joined his friend Overbeck for the summer of 1894. By the following year both Overbeck and Vogeler had settled permanently. Otto Ubbelohde, one of the founders of the Munich Secession, was another early resident during the summer season. He and Vogeler had a good deal in common and got on well but, as a "Bavarian" (though born and raised in Marburg an der

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<sup>36</sup> On the Berlin "Secession" of November, 1892, see Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 50-52.

Lahn, in Hesse, he had spent ten years in Munich), Ubbelohde was regarded with suspicion by the earnestly Nordic Mackensen, and he left for good in 1896.<sup>37</sup> After visits of varying length in 1897 and 1898 to study with Mackensen, Paula Becker, an aspiring artist from a respected Bremen family (she married Otto Modersohn after the death of the latter's first wife and is now generally known as Modersohn-Becker) moved in permanently in 1899, along with two other women artists who had also come to study painting with Mackensen, Otilie Reyländer and the daughter of another Bremen family, the future sculptress Clara Westhoff.<sup>38</sup> That early group included, in addition, several artists now almost completely forgotten, such as Karl Krummacher, who settled in Worpswede in 1899 on Carl Vinnen's recommendation, Walter Bertelsmann, who arrived in 1902, and Udo Peters, who came in 1906. The last three spent the rest of their lives in Worpswede (Krummacher died in 1955, Bertelsmann in 1963, and Peters in 1964), painting harmless modest landscapes and, with the possible exception of Peters, immune to new developments in art, notably Expressionism, the

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<sup>37</sup> Ubbelohde resembles the young Vogeler in several respects. He too earned his living mostly as a highly successful illustrator (his illustrations of Grimm's Fairy Tales enjoyed great popularity) and designer (he worked closely with a carpet manufacturer), painting in whatever time he could spare from those more lucrative activities. As in Vogeler's case, his illustrations and his design work reflected a close relation to the ideas of the "Lebensreform" movements that at the turn of the twentieth century had as their goal the transformation of modern industrial society, the "redesigning of the world" (in the words chosen by Peter Stansky for the title of his book on William Morris and the English Arts and Crafts movement) through changes in "lifestyle" and mentality. Reuniting art and life, which modern culture had allegedly drastically separated, was a principal objective of "Lebensreform." A high premium was thus placed on craft and good design. At Gossfelden in Hesse, where Ubbelohde finally settled, he designed and built a house-cum-studio for himself in a carefully planned mixture of local traditional style, Jugendstil, and English style, and ensured the stability of the view from it by tree-planting – exactly as Vogeler did at the Barkenhoff, his house-cum-studio in Worpswede.

<sup>38</sup> Reyländer subsequently moved on to Rome and Paris and spent eighteen years (1910-28) painting in Mexico. Becker, Reyländer, and Westhoff, who all came to study with Mackensen, had been preceded in 1896 by another woman artist, Marie Bock. In addition, Hermine Rothe, Overbeck's wife was a serious painter, photographer; and designer of home furnishings in the Arts and Crafts style.

influence of which began to be felt in the colony by the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century.

Despite differences among them, the early Worpswede artists shared a common desire: to free themselves from both the dead hand of traditional academicism and the modishness of the modern market. They were influenced by the *plein air* practice of the Barbizon school and to a lesser extent by French Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism, though the more radical versions of the latter, such as the pointillism of Seurat and Signac, is nowhere in evidence. But they had a complex relation to both French schools. They rejected as “materialist” both the naturalist representation of physical reality and what they deemed the Impressionists’ emphasis on the optical experience of the moment. The critic Karl Scheffler once described their art as “a compromise raised to the level of a program,[. . .] an art of the middle way.”<sup>39</sup> Their professed aim, shared in some measure with the Expressionists of the following decade but far more timidly pursued, was rather to discover in the physical presence of things, be it of a tree, a house, a landscape or its inhabitants, their enduring inner being or essence -- “das Ding an sich in Stimmung,” as Paula Becker would later say.<sup>40</sup> To the dissolution of stable forms in Impressionist painting they responded with a renewed emphasis on firmer, more solid forms. (Figs. 5-6) In so doing, they

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<sup>39</sup> Karl Scheffler, *Die europäische Kunst im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1927), vol. 2, p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Hans-Christian Kirsch, *Worpswede. Die Geschichte einer deutschen Künstlerkolonie* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 1987), p. 149. Cf. the Danish poet Jens Peter Jacobson, who was admired by Rilke and several of whose works were illustrated by Vogeler: “An art that reaches out almost beyond optical vision, that aspires to the substance, the uniqueness of things, is my ideal.” (Quoted in Eric Torgensen, *Dear Friend: Rainer Maria Rilke and Paula Modersohn-Becker* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 35.



believed, in representing nature in its mysterious otherness rather than simply as a subjectively experienced visual phenomenon or, as allegedly in naturalist painting, a mere object, they would not only feel and communicate “den Pulsschlag göttlichen Lebens” (“the pulse-beat of divine life”) in it, as Otto Modersohn put it even before he came to Worpswede,<sup>41</sup> but also discover, beyond the distorting clichés of convention, an original pictorial language through which they could make contact with and project their own innermost being. In Rilke’s words in his 1903 monograph about Worpswede, “Only because nature is so different from us, so completely opposite to us, is it possible for us to express ourselves through it.”<sup>42</sup>

The goal of the Worpswede artists was thus neither an objective, “naturalist” reproduction of the visible world nor the recreation, still less the creation of a momentary sensuous optical experience. It was rather an attempt to overcome what they perceived as the alienation of modern urban life and the alienation of modern art from life by reaching out through the natural world to a hidden life-force, active in the land, in its inhabitants (plants and animals, as well as people), and in the artist alike, and thus to what they believed to be a far deeper and more enduring reality than anything positivist natural “science” and rational calculation, the preferred intellectual instruments of the soulless, man-made “civilization” of

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Arn Strohmeyer, “Der neoromantischer Protest – das deutsche Bürgertum um der Jahrhundertwende und die erste Generation der Worpsweder Maler,” in *Landschaft, Licht und niederdeutscher Mythos: Die Worpsweder Kunst und der Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Arn Strohmeyer; Kai Artinger; Ferdinand Krogmann (Weimar: VDG, 2000), pp. 19-41, at p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Worpswede* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1903; Künstler-Monografien, LXIV), p. 47, left col. Cf. Modersohn’s comment that nature has “eine originalere Kraft als die tüchtigste, bewusste Arbeit des Menschen” [“a more elemental, primordial energy than the most industrious effort of human consciousness”] (cit. by Arn Strohmeyer, “Der neuromantischer Protest,” p. 36) As a poet, Rilke’s goal was similarly to discover the inner being or essence of things, as in the well known poem “Der Panther.”

the modern world, on which they had turned their backs, were capable of comprehending. Subject and object, man and nature, the artist and the reality represented in art were united for the Worpsweder, as they were to be later for the Expressionists, in a quasi-religious, pantheistic worldview, much influenced by Nietzschean philosophy and reinforced by Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, a basic text of anti-positivist and anti-rationalist *Lebensphilosophie* (as well as of Germanic racism), with seemingly irresistible appeal to a varied population of disaffected writers, artists, intellectuals, and members of the Wilhelminian *Bildungsbürgertum*. Just under two decades after the founding of the Empire, Langbehn's book spoke directly to those who felt a whole way of life threatened by Germany's rapid transformation into a dynamic (and troubled) urban and industrial society or to whom it seemed that the deep-rooted values and characteristics of the German *Volk* or people – values and characteristics they might have expected to see thrive and blossom in the new unified state -- were being undermined and corrupted by alien, inhuman forms of industry and commerce, by the power of new money and the rootless individuals who wielded it, and by the ever more pervasive influence of the materialism they associated with liberal notions of "progress" and "modernity." What Langbehn, like Nietzsche, offered those disaffected individuals and groups was less an "anti-modern" program or doctrine – they were dismayed by what they perceived as the rationalization of every sphere of human life and culture and the elevation of selfish pursuit of gain into a universal guiding principle, but they did not reject all change or all forms of modern science or advocate a return to the ancien regime - - than an "alternative modernity," as one scholar has put it, a modernity based not on the analytical-mechanical outlook of positivist philosophy and technology

but on the synthetic-organic worldview of *Lebensphilosophie* to the expression of which art and literature were singularly suited.<sup>43</sup>

*Rembrandt als Erzieher* addressed itself particularly to German artists, outlining – most directly in the first chapter, entitled “Deutsche Kunst” [German Art] -- the tasks its anonymous author, who was identified on the title page only as “a German,” held that they were called upon to perform in response to a crisis situation that was described on the very first page of the book as “the slow, some would rather say rapid decline of the German people’s spiritual and cultural life.” As the strength and vigor of the organic culture of the people is undermined by a soulless positivism, he claimed, every domain of culture is being parceled out into distinct fields of study occupied by multitudes of industrious professionals. There are no more original characters, no epoch-making writers and philosophers, only diligent specialists. Even though some outstanding talents are to be found in the plastic arts, a monumental style capable of expressing the soul of the nation and exercising wide popular influence has not been created. While practitioners of music abound, genuine musicians are few and far between. There is vast and comprehensive knowledge of different historical styles, but the age has failed to produce a style of its own. All this, in Langbehn’s view, reflects the democratizing, leveling, analytic, and atomizing spirit of the age. The entire culture of the present

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<sup>43</sup> “...eine lebensphilosophische ‘zweite Moderne’.” The phrase was applied by Gangolf Hübinger to the publishing program of the celebrated house founded by Eugen Diederichs; see Hübinger’s “Der Verlag Eugen Diederichs in Jena: Wissenschaftskritik, Lebensreform und völkische Bewegung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 22 (1996): 31-45, at p. 36.

time, he holds, is historical, Alexandrian, backward-looking, busy cataloguing old values instead of creating new ones.<sup>44</sup>

To remedy this situation greater attention must once more be paid in Germany to the arts than to the natural sciences, which some striking successes have led many to identify erroneously with the German spirit as such. In fact, the sciences are by their very nature anonymous, impersonal and international; it is art that is the creation and expression both of the individual and of the community, people or race to which that individual belongs.<sup>45</sup> In mind and spirit, the scientist is always a parvenu, a product of artifice and education, for “it is possible to make oneself into a scientist or a scholar, but one must be born a poet.”<sup>46</sup> Artists and poets are thus a kind of aristocracy of their race and their people; they rise up from the people but remain rooted in the common local soil. Their virtue is not abstract logical consistency, as with scholars and scientists, but “character,” and character, being concrete, organic, and natural, accommodates inconsistencies and contradictions. Where science analyzes and breaks down, art synthesizes and combines. In their very individuality great artists are thus able to express fully the spirit of the particular people and land from which they come and to which they are organically joined. The more successfully the individual element frees itself from egoism and arbitrariness, the more effectively it will contribute to the building of a people’s life and the more productive and useful it will become. Thus

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<sup>44</sup> [Julius Langbehn], *Rembrandt als Erzieher. Von einem Deutschen* (Weimar: Alexander Duncker Verlag, 1943 [orig. Leipzig, 1890]), p. 1. This critique of nineteenth-century culture was, of course not original with Langbehn. It is a recurrent motif in Burckhardt and Nietzsche among others.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

“it is the task of the [individual] German to serve the German spirit and culture.”  
 (“Der Deutsche soll dem Deutschtum dienen.”)<sup>47</sup>

Being organically rooted in a particular people and a particular land, the true German artist, Langbehn continues, must be a local artist. “The genuine artist cannot be local enough. A healthy and truly flourishing development of German artistic life can therefore be expected only when it is made up of as many separate, particular, and -- in terms of geography and landscape -- sharply differentiated local artistic schools as possible.”<sup>48</sup> A common German-ness (and in Langbehn’s broad conception of the culture of the Nordic or Germanic race Shakespeare and Rembrandt are as Germanic as Luther and Goethe) will emerge out of these expressions of particular and local Germanic cultures in the same way that these local expressions themselves emerged from the expressions of individuals. Inevitably, Langbehn roundly condemns imitation of pre-established models and every attempt to institutionalize art. True to his emphasis on individuality and locality, he has little good to say of art academies, such as those of Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Munich, where students from all parts of the world congregate and study according to internationally recognized norms and conventions or reigning artistic fashions – or, for that matter, of museums, where works of art are arranged, as he put it, like words in a dictionary, that is to say, torn out of context, cut off from the time, place, and people from which they sprang.<sup>49</sup> The aim of the true artist should not be to reproduce what was done

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

before or what is being done somewhere else (in France, for example!); it should be to create a modern style for his own people, a style expressive of his own time and place. This he cannot do by being faithful to earlier artistic achievements (“Kunstleistungen”) but only by being faithful to the deep and enduring artistic ethos or orientation (“Kunstgesinnung”) of his own people.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, Langbehn outlines what he believes are the proper principles of a true Germanic art. Such an art will not be naturalistic. Rembrandt is “anything but true to nature in his use of color...No real fire, for instance looks like a fire painted by Rembrandt. Rembrandt’s fire is a fire from another world, a world named Rembrandt.”<sup>51</sup> What the true Germanic artist paints, in short, is his vision of nature, and to the degree that Rembrandt has an even more intense personal signature in his work than Raphael, for instance, he also has more “style” than the latter. The Germanic artist is also not an allegorist. His art is not simply a vehicle for ideas. If the artist has more ideas than knowledge of nature, he will produce only a mirage, a kind of “Fata Morgana” – in the manner of both the neoclassical and the Nazarene artists of the early nineteenth century, a Carstens, an Overbeck, a Cornelius.<sup>52</sup> The wretched traditions of the two most recent periods in German art – the idealist (i.e. neoclassical and Nazarene) and the naturalist (i.e. genre painting) – must both be abandoned if a genuine style is to be realized, and with it

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Langbehn’s opposition to removing artworks from their original locale in order to place them in art museums was based on altogether different premisses from Quatremère de Quincy’s opposition in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to Napoleon’s removing artworks from conquered lands in order to place them in the Musée du Louvre, then known as the Musée Napoléon..

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

a genuine monumentality, a capacity for reaching out to all the people, which is the highest achievement of art.<sup>53</sup> Similarly – in defiance of some critics who claimed that the German artist is by nature a draughtsman rather than a colorist - - neither drawing nor color is the supreme value in art, but rather “drawing with color” and the principal task of the plastic arts, indeed of all art, is to “combine a rich imagination with a sharp eye and precise observation,”<sup>54</sup> the immediate experience with the enduring vision of a particular race or people: “True art will arise when the instantaneity of Impressionism has combined with the sempiternity of a people’s character and has as a result been technically consolidated.” (“Wenn das Momentane des Impressionismus sich mit dem Ewigen des Volkscharakters verbunden und infolgedessen sich auch technisch konsolidiert hat, so wird die rechte Kunst geboren.”)<sup>55</sup> The Germanic, Nordic artist has a better chance of meeting those high standards than the southern artist, because nature in the North, Northern light and Northern color, are better suited to achieving them. “The tropical sun coarsens; it makes nature speak in shrill, crass tones: a parrot, a goldfish, an orange cannot be compared for true richness and refinement of color with a hen, a herring or an apple.”<sup>56</sup> In the end, Germans must be thankful to the invading and tone-setting French Impressionists for having made clearer “the need for a healthy, clear, vital, modern *German* art.”<sup>57</sup>

[Italics added]

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

Such an art cannot be created either in the academies or in the upstart large cities with their rootless polyglot populations. The artist must flee an internationalism that is destructive of all authentic artistic impulse and withdraw to the unspoiled countryside, to his own native territory. For it is only the principle of localism that will again produce German painters and sculptors of the stature of Rembrandt – “the most Nordic” painter of all times, who, precisely by being true to his character as a “Low German” (“Niederdeutscher”), had incorporated in himself and his work the “Volksphysiognomie” of the entire Germanic people.

Langbehn’s book was read eagerly by the Worpswede on its publication in 1890. Overbeck is said to have described it as a “Bible of Art.”<sup>58</sup> Vogeler’s admiring account of Rembrandt’s “ability to reveal the organic character of natural objects” on his visit to Paris in 1894 almost certainly reflects his reading of it. Thanks to *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, Otto Modersohn noted in his diary, he had developed a new “wunderbares Kunstideal.” The ten points of this new artistic ideal correspond closely, as Kai Artinger has pointed out, to the program outlined in the first chapter of Langbehn’s book.<sup>59</sup> For his part, Fritz Mackensen was described by the moderately liberal critic Richard Muther as “the painter of that

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life*, p. 121. Torgensen notes (*Dear Friend*, p. 132) that Langbehn’s book “influenced all the young Worpswede, including Paula Becker.” At the end of the chapter on Modersohn in his book on Worpswede, Rilke quoted explicitly the passage about the superiority of Nordic to Southern color in *Rembrandt der Erzieher*, adding that Modersohn is “ein stiller, tiefer Mensch, der seine eigenen Märchen hat, seine eigene, deutsche, nordische Welt.” (*Worpswede* [Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1903; Künstlermonographien, LXIV], p. 62). The influence of Langbehn can still be discerned in the ideas of Wilhelm Pinder and his better known student Sir Nicolas Pevsner.

<sup>59</sup> “Die erste Generation der Worpsweder,” in pp. 119-20.



rugged, earthy, weather-toughened Friesian race to which, according to the predictions of the Rembrandt-German, the future will belong.”<sup>60</sup>

The early Worpswede's enthusiastic reception of Langbehn is understandable. There was a strong strain of nativism in their artistic credo, reflecting hostility not only to academicism but to the new Germany of heavy industry, big business, and international science, and to foreign influences. There was also, in varying degrees in some of them, a racial consciousness, an acute sense of “Niederdeutschland” [Low – i.e. Northwest Germany] and especially “Niedersachsen” [the state of Lower Saxony surrounding Bremen] as the home of a Nordic race and a Nordic culture -- even as, in Langbehn's words, “die Wiege des Ariertums” (“the cradle of Aryan culture”).<sup>61</sup> In the view of several modern scholars, this distinguished Worpswede from other artists' colonies, tilted it from the beginning toward the political Right, and makes treating it simply as part of a wider European movement disingenuous and deceptive.<sup>62</sup> In Langbehn's first chapter on “German Art” especially, the pioneer Worpswede's may well have found an eloquent articulation and justification of their own ideas and aspirations. Was it not also their aim to be true to their deepest selves, the essential part of them that was joined organically, by ancient bonds of birth and tradition, to a particular community and a particular land – rather than slavish imitators of others? Did not Mackensen and Modersohn often express their

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted by Kirsch, p. 41.

<sup>61</sup> *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1943 ed.), p. 280.

<sup>62</sup> Strohmeyer, Artinger, and Krogmann, *Landschaft, Licht und niederdeutscher Mythos*, “Einleitung,” pp. 16-17: “Es hat den Anschein, als ob der zur Zeit populären Tendenz, Worpswede ganz unkritisch in den Zusammenhang und die Tradition der anderen europäischen Künstlerkolonien zu stellen, die etwa zur selben Zeit entstanden, auch das Motiv zugrunde liegt, der Auseinandersetzung über das völkisch-niederdeutsche Worpswede aus dem Weg zu gehen.”

dislike of cities, especially Berlin, the brash, ceaselessly expanding upstart capital of the new German Reich, where, as the art critic Karl Scheffler observed, far more even than in Paris or other European capitals, no one was a native, everyone an immigrant from somewhere else.<sup>63</sup> In the modern big-city environment, they too alleged, cosmopolitanism, modishness, and imitation were the order of the day, and it was impossible to have a direct relation to the fundamental forces of the natural world or to be authentically oneself. “Das Leben in der Grossstadt,” Modersohn declared, “besonders Berlin, zerstört jede gute echte Regung in mir, im Menschen, im Künstler.” (“Life in the modern metropolis, Berlin especially, destroys every good, authentic impulse in me, in humanity, in the artist”). “Berlin ist gänzlich kunstöde und leer.” “Heillos, heillos!!! Wäre ich doch geblieben auf meiner Heiden.”<sup>64</sup> (“Berlin is a totally barren desert for art.” “Irremediably, irremediably!!! If only I had stayed in my native heath.”) And years later, after his marriage to Paula Becker, the latter’s need to get away from Worpswede and spend part of the year in contact with the

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<sup>63</sup> Karl Scheffler, *Berlin. Ein Stadtschicksal* (Berlin: E. Reiss, 1910)

<sup>64</sup> Strohmeyer, “Der neuromantischer Protest,” p. 35. It is worth noting that similar notions had been expressed decades before in France by the anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in a commentary on one of Courbet’s paintings of rural scenes, *The Peasants of Flagey*: “Here is rural France, with its indecisive mood and its positive spirit, its simple language, its gentle passions, its unemphatic style, its thoughts more down to earth than in the clouds, its mores as far removed from democracy as from demagoguery, its decided preference for the common ways, [. . .] happy when it can preserve its honest mediocrity under a temperate authority . [. . .] What characterizes our people, what you will find in all classes of French society regardless of distinctions of wealth, age, or sex [. . .] is a moderate temperament, [. . .] evenness of habits, no ambition to rule and even less to rebel, and the most profound antipathy for all that departs from the common, everyday direction. No doubt we are no longer today, in Paris especially, like those I have described in explaining Courbet’s painting. Our political middle road has resulted in shameful destitution. The respect for sufficiency that characterized our fathers has given way to the impatience of industrialism and the greed of stockbroking; we have given up our Gallic common sense for a pretentious and sophisticated terminology and the eccentricity of our pleasures makes our old customs look insipid.” (Quoted from *Du Principe de l’art*, in James Henry Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in Courbet and Proudhon* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], p. 70)

lively Parisian art world was a source of friction between the two, for Modersohn was deeply unhappy in Paris.

The early Worpswede artists, in short, saw themselves in the role prescribed by Langbehn as rebels seeking an original and authentic form of expression and the way to a new, specifically German art. They did not want to be mere imitators, least of all of the French, except in so far no doubt as some French artists had seemed to lead the way by themselves underlining the importance for the artist of being rooted in a particular locality. In an 1885 article in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, for instance, the immensely popular and influential Bastien-Lepage, a leading figure of the *plein air* school and one of the French artists whose work was respected by the Worpsweders, was reported to have told a young disciple that an artist without roots could not be a proper artist and that it was much better to paint the countryside one had been brought up in than to practice one's art in alien surroundings.<sup>65</sup> In a similar spirit, the Worpsweders wanted their art to express their own country and its people. If it was not beautiful in a conventional way, the Teufelsmoor was a landscape of great character and constantly shifting and dramatic light effects. What drew the first artists to it, was "love of a landscape dominated by wind and light" and characterized by "limitlessness," "infiniteness," and "mysteriousness," according to Manfred Hausmann (1898-1986), a prolific and successful writer who himself settled in Worpswede in

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<sup>65</sup> *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, February 1885, quoted by Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life*, p. 15. In Lepage's work, however, as in that of his Scottish followers, the so-called "Glasgow Boys," peasant figures, though by no means idealized, are not represented as an organic part of the landscape in which they are seen working or resting.

1926.<sup>66</sup> Otto Modersohn's immediate reaction to it, when he first arrived in Worpswede, was that it was "truly a land after my own heart and mind." "The entire countryside," he declared, "breathes an elemental Nordic spirit that fills me with a feeling of wellbeing."<sup>67</sup> The task the artists set themselves was to bring out what was essential and particular to that plain, flat, North German landscape and to the local people in whose midst they had deliberately chosen to implant themselves – a move that for most of them signified a return to roots. Above all, it meant making landscape the expression of the elemental and mysterious inner powers of nature, especially "Nordic" nature – both subjective (as the creative life force experienced by the painter and guiding his eye and hand) and objective (as the creative life force informing and shaping the natural and human world) – rather than the evocation by a freestanding individual consciousness of a momentary sensuous experience, as allegedly in French Impressionism, or the pretext for a mere arrangement of forms and colors. A "Heimatkunst," as the Worpswedeers imagined it, would be an art of the people; not, to be sure, in the sense that it was produced by the people – Paula Modersohn, Vogeler later recalled, "did not believe in the creative power of the masses," but, under Nietzschean influence, according to him, was convinced that culture was the work of great artists and leaders<sup>68</sup> – but in as much as it was informed by the same

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Arn Strohmeier, Kai Artinger, Ferdinand Krogmann, *Landschaft, Licht und niederdeutscher Mythos*. Introduction, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> "Es ist wirklich so recht ein Land nach meinem Sinn, die ganze Gegend atmet einen so urwüchsigen nordischen Charakter, der mir ungemein wohltut." (Quoted in Strohmeier, "Der neuromantischer Protest," p. 37) Even Paula Modersohn-Becker claimed to "have a very close feeling for the Nordic people." (To Otto and Helen Modersohn, from Paris, May 1900, in Paula Modersohn-Becker, *The Letters and Journals*, ed. Günther Busch and Liselotte von Reinken, trans. Arthur S. Wensinger and Carole Clew Hoey [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990], p. 187)

<sup>68</sup> *Werden*, p. 83 (cf. also p. 80 and p. 121: "Paula believed in great leaders, the giants, as she called them, who were subject, in her view, to different laws from the untalented broad mass of the people").

living forces of nature that informed the land and the people. The land, its people, and the art produced by its leading artists, in short, were to be parts of a single organic whole.

The cheerless, rough-hewn peasants depicted in the paintings of most of the Worpswede artists, for all the differences in individual style among them, share a common essential quality: they seem to belong in a primitive way to their windswept, waterlogged land, like their houses, their ducks and geese, and their birch trees. (Figs. 7-8) They are neither represented with compassion as victims of a harsh social order nor idealized as participants in a modern form of pastoral. Nor, one critic has aptly noted, are they represented in a strictly realistic style.<sup>69</sup> As Rilke put it in the Introduction to his book on Worpswede, which may be closer in spirit to Langbehn than is generally acknowledged,<sup>70</sup> “the hard work it takes to win a livelihood from this land binds its inhabitants to it like a strong root. They belong to it like tenacious plants arduously eking out a meager subsistence from

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That was also, as one might expect, the view of Langbehn, for whom “Aristokratismus” was the supreme value. “Der oberdeutsche Edle, Schiller, lehrt theoretisch das, was der niederdeutsche Edle, Rembrandt, praktisch lehrt,” according to the author of *Rembrandt als Erzieher*: “Ariertum, Deutschtum, Aristokratismus sind sich bedeckende Begriffe.” (p. 280) This emphasis on individuality and “genius,” however much rooted in the “Volk,” contrasts sharply with the creative powers attributed to ordinary craftsmen by William Morris and the English Arts and Crafts movement – a major influence on continental Jugendstil artists, not least among them Heinrich Vogeler. As we shall see, Vogeler, like other Jugendstil artists such as Henry Van de Velde, downplayed the difference between the “creative” individual and the practicing craftsman, were themselves active in the field of everyday design, and admired and borrowed from folk decorative and ornamental motifs. In Russia, he greatly admired the ornamentation of peasant houses and furniture. Vogeler’s great aim, especially in his revolutionary period after World War I, was to release the creative, artistic potential in everyone. That was an essential part of the pedagogical program of the experimental school he established on his estate in Worpswede in the early 1920s.

<sup>69</sup> Gill Perry, “Primitivism and the ‘Modern’,” in Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, Gill Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1993), p. 38.

<sup>70</sup> See Ferdinand Krogmann’s severe “Rilke als ‘Kulturheld des Jahres’” in the bi-weekly on-line Socialist journal *Ossietzky*, no. 13 for the year 2003. <http://www.sopos.org/aufsaetze/3f15fd57cbc38/1.phtml>

the stony soil.”<sup>71</sup> And in the chapter on Otto Modersohn: “The gestures of the men have been taken from the trees and the girls have learned to sing from the brooks and to dance from the winds. They all live in nature, as in a lake”<sup>72</sup> – that is, as in an element of which they are unquestioningly and unreflectingly a part. The artists do not depict them as socially and psychologically defined individuals, more or less abstracted from any natural context, in the manner of modern urban portraitists. They look on them in the same way that they train their gaze on other elements of the natural landscape, on trees or rivers -- that is, so Rilke claimed, with the childlike wonderment of the true artist, to whom nature is not something casually observed from the outside, something with which humans have an easy, superficial relation, but something strange, powerful, and virtually undecipherable in its mysterious beauty.<sup>73</sup> In one of his *Letters to a Young Poet*, dated Worpswede, July 16, 1903, Rilke evoked in a more general way what drew the artists to the Teufelsmoor landscape: its elemental character and its remoteness from all accustomed civilized ways of thinking, feeling, and speaking. And he tried to convey to his young correspondent the insight and understanding that an artist might hope to derive from association with such a landscape:

Here, where all around me a powerful land stretches, over which the winds blow from the seas, here I feel that no human being anywhere can

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<sup>71</sup> *Worpswede*, p. 10; cf. Hirsch's description in *Hochzeitsmarsch in Moll*, p.119, of the subjects of paintings by the hero's wife, Eva Rasmussen, whom he has persuaded to settle in Worpswede: “Sie fand alte Frauen und Männer mit tiefgefurchten Gesichtern, verwittert und zerrissen wie das Land aus dem sie stammten.” [“She found old men and women with deeply furrowed faces, weatherbeaten and worn like the land from which they came”]; in similar vein the testimony of S.D. Gallwitz in her *Dreissig Jahre Worpswede: Künstler, Geist, Werden* (Bremen: Angelsachsen-Verlag, 1922), p. 41: “Fest und breit wie ihre Häuser stehen diese Menschen mit allen ihren Lebensäusserungen in der Landschaft; Abbilder eines Beharrens, das hier Verwurzeltheit mit dem mütterlichen Boden ist.”

<sup>72</sup> *Worpswede*, p.51.

<sup>73</sup> *Worpswede*, pp. 1-4, 17-18.

answer for another those questions and feelings that have a life of their own deep within them -- for even the best err in words when they try to make them convey what is most ungraspable, almost inexpressible. Nevertheless, I believe that you will not have to remain without answers if you hold to things like those from the observation of which at this moment I am drawing renewed strength. If you hold fast to nature, to what is simple in her, to the small things that almost no one sees and that can unexpectedly become big and immeasurable, if you have this love for what is humble and if you seek in complete simplicity, as one who serves, to win the trust of the seemingly poor and insignificant, then everything will become lighter for you, more coherent, and somehow less alien and hostile, not perhaps to your intellect, which lags behind in perplexed amazement, but in your innermost consciousness, wakefulness, and knowledge.<sup>74</sup>

Another, more critical way of describing what Rilke praises as the “childlike,” non-reflective vision of the Worpswede artists might justifiably be as a deliberate attempt to disregard the historical reality of life on the Teufelsmoor in favor of an essentialized and mythicized (and, in the end, mystified) eternal nature. As

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<sup>74</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (St. Gallen: Tschudy-Verlag, 1950), pp. 25-26. For a similar – though critical, Marxist-inspired – modern account of the early Worpsweders’ relation to the landscape that was their principal subject, see Kai Artinger, “Die erste Generation der Worpsweder Maler und der Nationalsozialismus,” in Arn Strohmeyer, Kai Artinger, Ferdinand Krogmann, *Landschaft, Licht und niederdeutscher Mythos. Die Worpsweder Kunst und der Nationalsozialismus* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2000), pp. 111-68. Commenting on Modersohn’s landscapes, Artinger writes: “Das Leben im Teufelsmoor ordnet sich den klimatischen Bedingungen, den Jahreszeiten unter, es ist organischer Bestandteil des ewigen Naturkreislaufs...Modersohns Landschaften gerieren sich als zeitlos, ewig. Sein ‘Dorf’ ist den historischen Prozessen enthoben, es bleibt stehen.” His human figures are seen as “Teil der Natur” and the peasants’ houses “schmiegen sich den Boden an, verschmelzen gar mit ihm zu einer Einheit.” (p. 129)

presented in the work of Mackensen or Modersohn, Kai Artinger writes, “the order of life on the Teufelsmoor is subject to climatic conditions and the seasons; it constitutes an organic part of the eternal course of nature...Modersohn’s landscapes present themselves as timeless and eternal. Historical processes do not affect his ‘village’; it is stationary.” Hence these landscapes convey no interest in humans as laboring *in* nature. Human figures are always seen as “part of nature” -- in contrast, it might be added, with those in a realist painting such as Courbet’s “The Stonebreakers” (1849, destroyed in the bombing of Dresden).<sup>75</sup> Similarly, “the peasant cottages nestle close to the soil and form an inseparable unity with it. Human settlements seem to have grown organically, like natural formations...The landscape is enjoyed only as a result of the blanking out of the sphere of labor and production.”<sup>76</sup> Worpswede, from this more critical point of view, represents not the discovery of a deeper, more enduring reality than that created by the rapid social and economic development of Wilhelminian Germany but flight from and denial of that social and economic reality.

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Gill Perry’s pertinent comment that, in contrast to Courbet’s “unsentimental portrayal of rural life” in his *Burial at Ornans*, to which Mackensen’s *Prayers in the Moor* bears a superficial resemblance, the Worpswede artists’s work presents a mythicized image of its subject. “Although Mackensen does not idealize the specific physical features of his peasant subjects, the relatively ordered composition and the use of aerial perspective give the assembled group a dignity which contrasts with Courbet’s crowded line-up of figures. Mackensen’s work could be taken to idealize the simple stoicism of this Protestant community, in which religious sentiments are conveyed in a simple, natural context: the service is taking place in the humblest of surroundings – nature. He also depicts the group in local dress, thus emphasizing the community’s historic roots and traditions, associating such ‘primitive’ cultural roots with religious piety through the theme of the painting. Mackensen’s image can thus be read in relation to Volkish ideology which identified the land – quite literally the German countryside and its indigenous people – as the only link between a new German ‘spirit’ and its past.” (“Primitivism and the ‘Modern’” [as in fn 65 above], p. 39)

<sup>76</sup> Artinger, “Die erste Generation der Worpsweder Maler...” p. 129. Rilke, as is well known, later turned out to be an admirer of Mussolini’s fascist regime in Italy. (See his letter to Duchessess Aurelia Gallarati-Scotti, 5 January 1926 (*Briefe zur Politik*, ed. Joachim W. Störck (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992, pp. 462-63)



Like Langbehn himself, the Worpswede artists appear to have struck a chord in a fairly broad public. In 1894, the five founding members of the colony (Mackensen, Modersohn, Am Ende, Overbeck, and Vogeler) together with Carl Vinnen, formally set up the “Künstlervereinigung Worpswede” (Worpswede Artists’ Association) and in the winter of 1894-95 the group (without Vinnen) mounted an exhibition of 31 paintings and 32 etchings at the Bremen Kunsthalle. Though only moderately successful with the solid citizens of Bremen, whose tastes ran to conventional history and picturesque landscape painting, this exhibition led to the group’s receiving an invitation to participate in the Annual Exhibition of Art Works of All Nations in the Glaspalast in Munich. Here, in the spring of 1895, the Worpswede artists were the sensation of the show, as the Scottish followers of Bastien-Lepage, the so-called “Glasgow Boys” -- with whom the Worpsweders were compared -- had been a few years earlier in 1890. Mackensen’s monumental painting of an open-air religious service in the Teufelsmoor, “Gottesdienst im Moor” (Fig. 9) was awarded the Gold Medal First Class of the Munich “Künstlergenossenschaft.” (Somewhat reminiscent of James Guthrie’s “Highland Funeral” of 1882 in the municipal gallery in Glasgow (Fig. 10), it is now in the Historical Museum in Hanover.) Overbeck also won a gold medal, while Modersohn’s “Sturm im Teufelsmoor” (Fig. 11) was acquired by the Munich Pinakothek.

“On the European rather than merely the German scale,” one scholar has written, the Worpsweders “were provincial latecomers, fighting battles won by French painters a generation or more earlier.[. . .] From the perspective of Paris, Worpswede, if noticed, would have seemed [. . .] passé from the moment of its

birth. In Germany in 1895, though, they were newly famous, and fame brought with it a market for their work.”<sup>77</sup> Invitations to participate in exhibitions came to the group from all over Germany and many prizes were won: Mackensen carried off gold medals at Berlin in 1896, Dresden in 1897, and Vienna in 1898, Overbeck at Munich in 1897. The Worpswede artists also took part in the first Berlin Secession in 1898. That same year Vogeler had his first one-man show in Dresden, which -- he recalled in his *Memoirs* -- was a success, one of his paintings having been acquired by the Dresden Gallery (*Werden*, p. 52). He was the subject of a substantial article in the widely read magazine *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* in April 1899 (pp. 293-309) and a special issue of the magazine consisting of a long essay on him by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, with illustrations by Vogeler himself, appeared in April 1902; in 1905, on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition of his work in Oldenburg, he was awarded the Great Gold Medal for Art and Science and this no doubt led to his being the subject of further articles in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (vol. 17, pp. 56-68) and in *Dekorative Kunst*, a journal founded in 1887 by the influential art critic Julius Meier-Graefe (vol. 13, February, 1905). A number of fairly popular books on Worpswede and its artists appeared in quick succession: by the well known critic Richard Muther in the series “Die Kunst” in 1901; by Paul Warncke in 1902; by Rilke in 1903 (in Velhagen & Klasing’s widely subscribed series of “Künstlermonographien,” the general editor of which was the art historian H. Knackfuss); by Hans Bethge, who was also the author of the text of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*, in 1904. (Figs. 12-16) Students began to be attracted to Worpswede in those years, and other artists, as well as writers and some musicians, also moved in. In 1898 Vogeler met Rilke during a visit to

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<sup>77</sup> Torgensen, *Dear Friend* [as in fn. 36 above], p. 39.

Florence, struck up a friendship with him, and by the end of the year Rilke was paying the first of many visits to Worpswede as Vogeler's guest. In 1901, the same year that saw the marriage of Paula Becker to Otto Modersohn and of Heinrich Vogeler to Martha Schröder, Rilke married Paula Becker's close friend, the sculptress Clara Westhoff, and found a house in nearby Westerwede where he lived with her until they left for Paris the following year. Another visitor in those years was the playwright Gerhard Hauptmann and, with greater regularity, his brother Carl, less well known outside Germany but a considerable figure on the literary scene in his time. Carl Hauptmann entertained a special friendship with Otto and Paula Modersohn and with Heinrich and Martha Vogeler. Worpswede continues to exist as a lively artists' colony to this day, but the decade from 1895 until 1905 was without doubt its heyday.

Certain features of Worpswede's original artistic impulse persisted through a number of stylistic transmutations provoked by new outside influences, such as those of "Die Brücke" and "Der Blaue Reiter," Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Expressionism. In the correspondence of the gifted and original Wilhelm Morgner, for instance, who studied with Georg Tappert at Worpswede in the years 1906-1910 and who was killed at the age of 25 in the First World War, the nativist element is not especially emphasized. But the emphasis on "Life", on the elemental forces animating the artist and the universe alike, reaches mystical heights that alarmed even Tappert, who considered Morgner his most talented student and who went to some trouble to establish a catalogue of his work after his death. The paintings, strongly influenced by Van Gogh, but tending more and more to a kind of explosive abstraction, were intended to express the cosmic

spirit in him that Morgner believed united him as an artist to the universe. (Figs. 17, 18)<sup>78</sup> As late as 1936, the successful sculptor, architect and designer Bernhard Hoetger, who had moved to Worpswede in 1914 and become closely associated with the colony, could write from Thun in Switzerland, where he was then living, that he was taking up oil painting again, but that “my painting will naturally not be about reproducing accidental appearances or about particular combinations of Swiss mountains, trees, houses, and cows. It will be about color harmonies that capture the spiritual character of the landscape, its glory and grandeur, and the living forces that sustain it.”<sup>79</sup>

Within a general framework that in the last years of the nineteenth century seems to have anticipated in some measure the influential 1911 thesis of Wilhelm Worringer about the aspiration of Gothic or Nordic art to “spiritual expressiveness,” “a world above the actual, above the sensuous,”<sup>80</sup> there were, nevertheless, differences of temperament and outlook, as well as personal tensions and rivalries, which became magnified over the years and led in a relatively short time to the break-up of the original Worpswede community and – especially in the aftermath of the First World War – to deep antipathies among certain of its members.

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<sup>78</sup> See Morgner’s extraordinary letters to Tappert in *Wilhelm Morgner, Briefe und Zeichnungen*, ed. Christine Knupp-Uhlenhaut (Soest: Westfälische Verlagsbuchhandlung Mocker & Jahn, 1984)

<sup>79</sup> Letter to Bruce Lockwood, October 26, 1936 in Maria Anczykowski, ed., *Bernhard Hoetger: Skulptur, Malerei, Design, Architektur* (Bremen: H.M. Hauschild, 1998), p. 488.

<sup>80</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, ed. Herbert Read (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1927), pp. 65, 73. (Orig. German *Formprobleme der Gothik*, 1911.)

Of the founders, Mackensen was probably the most nativist. His goal in settling in Worpswede was to create an art that would express the deepest spirit of the German people by avoiding the two influences that he believed had alienated art from it: that of the art academies and that of the modern international art market, with its prominent Jewish dealers and gallery owners. The German artist, Langbehn had declared, had to steer a course “between the professor and the Jew, like Dürer’s knight between Death and the Devil.” Much of Mackensen’s work at Worpswede (*Der Säugling* [1892], *Gottesdienst im Moor* [1895]) does appear to be a “programmatic” response to Langbehn’s call for a *völkisch* – anti-academic and anti-cosmopolitan -- art.<sup>81</sup> It is not surprising that Mackensen invariably occupied a position on the extreme right of the political spectrum. In the years following the end of the First World War he was active in the “Stahlhelm,” a rightwing veterans’ organization. In those same years he proved to be a vociferous and malevolent antagonist of his fellow-Worpsweder Vogeler, who had been converted by his wartime experiences to pacifism and socialism as well as to expressionism in art.<sup>82</sup> In the year the National Socialists came to power he founded a “Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur” [“Action League for German Culture”] in Worpswede, which he invited all who “support the cultural goals of the new National Socialist Germany and its Leader, People’s Chancellor Adolf Hitler” to join, and of which he himself served as President. In the same year (1933) he was selected to head up a Nordic Art Academy (*Nordische*

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<sup>81</sup> Hans-Christian Kirsch, *Worpswede. Die Geschichte einer deutschen Künstlerkolonie* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 1987), pp. 41-42.

<sup>82</sup> On Mackensen’s keen support of the National Socialist regime and its cultural goals, see Kirsch, *Worpswede*, pp. 208-10. Also ch.10: “Die wilden zwanziger Jahre: Mackensen contra Vogeler” (pp. 175-204);

*Kunsthochschule*) which opened its doors the following year in Bremen; and during the entire period of National Socialism, he placed his art willingly at the service of the new regime. Though his own mentally impaired daughter had had to be rescued from the clutches of an incompetent surgeon, whose administration of the government's sterilization program had resulted in a number of deaths in the Bremen area, Mackensen submitted a "family-values" canvas entitled "Three Generations" to a competition organized in 1938 by the Reichskulturkammer on the theme of "the healthy family."<sup>83</sup>

Of the early Worpswede Hans am Ende stood closest to Mackensen. But Otto Modersohn, as already suggested, was no less influenced by or enthusiastic about Langbehn. Thanks to *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, he noted in his diary, he had developed a new "wunderbares Kunstideal," the ten points of which correspond closely to the program outlined by Langbehn in the first chapter of his book.<sup>84</sup> Langbehn's emphasis on the importance of artistic independence, of not conforming to either academic convention or prevailing fashion fed, however, not only into Modersohn's rejection of academicism and fashions set by others but into a desire to affirm his independence of Mackensen, who, he felt, was too eager to impose his authority on the other members of the colony and to set himself up as a model and leader. When Modersohn declared, evoking three painters he particularly admired, that he intended, as an artist, to be "completely free, independent, original -- not Rembrandtish, not Böcklin, not Millet,"<sup>85</sup> he

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<sup>83</sup> Artinger, "Die erste Generation der Worpsweder," pp. 162-63; on the collapse of the Third Reich, Mackensen destroyed this painting.

<sup>84</sup> Artinger, "Die erste Generation der Worpsweder," pp. 119-20.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted by Kirsch, *Worpswede*, p. 43.

was echoing Langbehn's advice that painters should not imitate Rembrandt but recapture his independence of spirit. He also meant that he intended to retain his independence within the Worpswede group: to be Modersohn and not a copy of Mackensen.<sup>86</sup>

There had been rivalry between the two old friends -- the one somewhat withdrawn, but intense and stubbornly independent, the other eager to proselytize and wield authority -- virtually from the start. Competitiveness over the price that the work of each could command in the marketplace as well as over the honors and awards received at art exhibitions did nothing to mitigate that rivalry. As early as 1895 -- within a few years of the founding of the Worpswede colony -- Modersohn was already judging Mackensen negatively and distinguishing himself from him. "Mackensen," he wrote in his diary (for 16.2.1895), "stands for an art that was new sixteen years ago, simple naturalism. All over the world such paintings [as his] were being produced, only with greater technical skill than he possessed."<sup>87</sup> Irked and threatened by what, by all

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<sup>86</sup> Modersohn was anxiously jealous of his independence and tried to protect himself from external influences. He once told Carl Hauptmann that he had no desire to follow "Fräulein Becker und Westhoff" to Paris, where both were apparently enthusiastic about the art shows they had attended, since he had a number of plans for paintings of his own and feared that these plans might be compromised by his viewing the work of others. One of the advantages of Worpswede was that, because of its rural remoteness, it was untouched by the latest modern tendencies. Its artists could thus follow their own inner bent and avoid being caught up in external imitation of others. "Ich glaube die modernen Maler sehen überhaupt viel zu viel, das befördert die Äusserlichkeit...Das ist ja schliesslich der Werth und Reiz unseres Lebens in der ländlichen Stille, dass nicht alle moderne Strömungen uns in ihre Bahnen ziehen...Nein, ich will hier bleiben, ich will immer innerlicher werden, das was mich bewegt in meiner Weise sagen, mögen andere anderes thun, das geht mich nichts an. Wirklich Freude, wirklichen Gewinn hat man nur von solchen Gefühlen, die aus der eigenen Brust kommen." (*Carl Hauptmann und seine Worpsweder Künstlerfreunde. Briefe und Tagebuchblätter*, ed Elfriede Berger [Berlin: Verlag Karl Robert Schütze, 2003], 2. vols., vol. 1, p. 40, Modersohn to Hauptmann, 20 May 1900.)

<sup>87</sup> Quoted by Kirsch, *Worpswede*, p. 59.

accounts, he perceived as Mackensen's attempts to establish his leadership of the group, he reacted coolly to a proposal by Carl Vinnen to tighten the organization of the "Künstler-Verein Worpswede," of which he himself had been one of the founders. Vinnen wanted the Association to be strengthened so that it could act more effectively on behalf of its members. "An identification of each individual [artist] with the Whole, an energetic championing of each by all is necessary," Vinnen claimed. No doubt fearful that a tighter organizational structure would play into Mackensen's leadership ambitions, Modersohn responded with a reference to Langbehn's opposition to centralization in the arts and by quoting a remark of Frederick the Great's that Langbehn had cited in *Rembrandt als Erzieher* -- "Jeder soll nach seiner Fassung selig werden" ["Everyone has to find contentment in his own way"]<sup>88</sup> – and withdrew from the Association. Am Ende and Mackenson sided with Vinnen, Vogeler and Overbeck with Modersohn. "To me, that is the best thing that has been said in favor of the free development of art at Worpswede," Vogeler observed of Modersohn's quotation from Frederick, "dissolution of the Association and complete freedom for each individual." "Each of us can work on the construction of his world," he went on, consciously or unconsciously alluding in his turn to Langbehn, "only if he stands on his own two feet and aims to realize exclusively that for which he himself can take full responsibility. Too close an association will become a straitjacket and is bound

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<sup>88</sup> Langbehn: "In der Kunst, wo Individualität alles ist, ist Zentralisation nichts oder vielmehr sie ist schlimmer als nichts; sie ist der Untergang." (*Rembrandt als Erzieher*, Autorisierte Neuauflage, geordnet und gesichtet nach Weisungen des Verfassers [Leipzig: C.S. Hirschfeld, 1922], p.90) Frederick the Great's aphorism in *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1943 ed.), p.186.



sooner or later to destroy the peace among us.”<sup>89</sup> Modersohn’s withdrawal led to the disbanding of the Association in August 1899.

Modersohn’s assertion of independence was expressed verbally in other ways too. Unlike Mackensen, he acknowledged that he had learned much from the French. In addition, he professed admiration for Max Liebermann, the leading German representative of Impressionism and tried to make an ally of him.<sup>90</sup> (Liebermann’s reputation as the foremost German Impressionist painter, together with the fact that he was Jewish and that his principal patron was the influential Jewish art dealer, Paul Cassirer, cannot have endeared him to Mackensen.) Liebermann’s understanding of art was after all not very different from his own, Modersohn declared. For Liebermann also, Impressionist as he was, painting “nature” meant painting the object *and* the subject: “Every one of his brushstrokes is both himself and nature and he could well say of himself with more justification than anyone else: ‘When I paint nature, I also paint the soul.’”<sup>91</sup> In addition, in contrast to Mackensen – and possibly as a further declaration of independence -- Modersohn rejected the nationalistic position adopted by Vinnen in his notorious *Protest deutscher Künstler*, which the avant-garde but also, on the whole, anti-liberal and “anti-modern” house of Eugen Diederichs published in 1911, whereas Mackensen enthusiastically supported it. Initially provoked by

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<sup>89</sup> Kirsch, *Worpswede*, p. 73; cf. Langbehn (1922 ed.) p. 88: “Künstler ist nur, wer geistig auf eigenen Füßen steht.” In 1897, Vogeler had already “baffled” Paula Becker’s father “by declaring that he never read anything, he wanted to concentrate on himself, within himself, so that he would not be led astray.” There was a lack of “fellowship” among the artists, Becker found, so that they all “seem to be more or less eccentrics in the world of art.” (Paula Modersohn-Becker, *The Letters and Journals*, ed. Gunter Busch and Liselotte von Reinken, trans. Arthur S. Wensinger and Carole Clew Hoey [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990], p. 66, letter from Carl Woldemar Becker to Paula Becker, 11 January 1897)

<sup>90</sup> In 1910 Modersohn went to Berlin to establish contact with Liebermann.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted by Kirsch, *Worpswede*, p. 140.

indignation at Director Gustav Pauli's purchase of Van Gogh's *Field with Poppies* for the Bremen Kunsthalle at a price no German artist allegedly could dream of commanding, Vinnen's *Protest* was widely viewed as in effect an attack on Liebermann's friend Paul Cassirer, the cultivated Jewish owner of a gallery that specialized in contemporary art and particularly in contemporary French art, and on the Berlin art dealers in general, among whom Jews were prominent. Vinnen accused them, in an all too familiar version of "Jewish conspiracy," of colluding with their Paris counterparts to drive up the prices of French paintings in Berlin. He also attacked art critics, such as Julius Meier-Graefe, for promoting French painting through their writings and thus talking up the price people were willing to pay for it -- all to the detriment of German painters. Even a throwaway sketch from the studio of a Monet, a Sisley or a Pissarro fetched thousands of marks on the Berlin market, Vinnen complained -- far more than any German artist could hope to obtain.<sup>92</sup> Besides -- an echo of Langbehn is distinctly audible here -- the

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<sup>92</sup> Criticism of the international (read: Jewish-run) art market and of the allegedly condescending attitude of dealers and critics to German art was a constant refrain among German artists in the first half of the twentieth century. Even Ernst Kirchner occasionally uttered derogatory remarks about the "Berlin Jews." On one occasion, he complained that what by common consent had been regarded as the essential contribution of German art was being ascribed to "a Norwegian [Munch] who had received his education in Paris and was indebted to Gauguin and Vallotton." (Von Beyme, *Das Zeitalter der Avantgarde*, p. 727) Rudolf Schlichter, who subsequently withdrew his support for National Socialism, at first hailed the "National Revolution" for diminishing the influence of Jewish gallery-owners. "Things have at last been cleared up in the way we have long desired," he wrote to a friend. "From now on the impudent daubers will crawl back into their holes. Belonging to the stable of some all-Jewish art merchant is now no longer, thank God, necessary as a legitimation of talent." (Von Beyme, p. 739) In an attempt to clear himself of charges in the Nazi magazine *Schwarzes Korps* -- charges that he was not a genuine National Socialist (he had joined the NSDAP in 1934), that he had been close to Jewish circles and been praised by Jewish critics, that he had created works for various left-wing groups, including a memorial to the fallen workers of the 1919 November Revolution (originally in the Waller Cemetery in Bremen, destroyed by the Nazis) and had contributed to the decadence of modern art, notably through his work in the Böttchersstrasse in Bremen, which the Führer had expressly condemned as incompatible with National Socialism in his 1936 Kulturtag speech at Nuremberg, that he changed his style opportunistically -- the former Worpswede sculptor Bernhard Hoetger produced evidence that he had suffered at the hands of the Berlin Jewish art dealers and in 1924 had written his patron, the Bremen coffee magnate Ludwig Roselius, that freeing the art market from Jewish influence must be raised to the status of a primary goal. (See Anczykowski, pp. 498-500). Vogeler appears to have been immune to even the more indirect forms of anti-semitism. One of

influence of French Impressionism was ruinous for German art; it was setting it on the wrong path, seducing it into substituting “reflection” and calculation for naïve and spontaneous creation, and undermining the innate tendency of German art toward an imaginative probing of the inner spirit of things rather than the representation of their superficial appearances. “When the goal of foreign influence is a fundamental restructuring, it is the culture of our people that is endangered,” he warned. “Only artists of its own flesh and blood can lead a people to its highest achievement.” (“Wo fremde Einflüsse...von Grund aus umgestalten wollen, da liegt eine grosse Gefahr für unser Volkstum vor.” “Zur Höhe wird ein Volk nur gebracht durch Künstler seines Fleisches und Blutes.”)

Partly misled perhaps by the seeming even-handedness of Vinnen’s acknowledgment of the debt many great nineteenth-century German artists such as Leibl, Thoma, Klinger, and Böcklin owed to the French and of the fact that he himself “went to Paris to learn,” by his professed respect for the “classics” of French Impressionism, as distinct from the work of the younger generation represented by Van Gogh, and by his ostensible desire not to be associated with the chauvinist ravings of extreme German nationalists (“den Deutschtümeleien des ‘sentimentalen Werdanditums’” in Bremen Museum Director Gustav Pauli’s summary of Vinnen’s position<sup>93</sup>), several members of the Berlin Secession,

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his patrons was a Jewish Dr. Loehnberg, for whom he designed the Haus im Stryck and who was an eager collector of his work. Jewish writers and artists (Karl Jacob Hirsch, Friedrich Wolf) were deeply attached to him and Martin Buber sent his son Raphael to Vogeler’s Barkenhoff progressive school.

<sup>93</sup> *Im Kampf um die Kunst: Die Antwort auf den “Protest deutscher Künstler,”* (Munich. R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1911), p. 1.

including left-leaning, “progressive” figures like Käthe Kollwitz<sup>94</sup> and Thomas Theodor Heine, the brilliant caricaturist of the magazine *Simplicissimus* (who also happens to have been Jewish and to have benefited from Paul Cassirer’s patronage), signed the *Protest*, along with some twenty museum directors and conservative art historians like Albert Dresdner. Mackensen signed, as did Hans am Ende. But neither Modersohn nor Vogeler did. On the contrary, Modersohn joined Gustav Pauli and an impressive number of other German artists,<sup>95</sup> museum directors,<sup>96</sup> writers, art critics, and art historians<sup>97</sup> in contributing to a spirited, witty, and well-argued 182-page reply, edited by Vogeler’s friend and patron, Alfred Walter Heymel, the adopted son and heir of a wealthy Bremen merchant, to Vinnen’s confused and, as was quickly and easily demonstrated, factually ill-informed pamphlet. This reply, *Im Kampf um die Kunst: Die Antwort auf den “Protest deutscher Künstler, mit Beiträgen deutscher Künstler, Galerieleiter, Sammler und Schriftsteller*, “was put out before the end of the year (1911) by the Piper Verlag in Munich, the publisher not only of noted art

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<sup>94</sup> Kollwitz regretted her action shortly afterwards in a letter to her son. See Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession. Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 188).

<sup>95</sup> Among them Max Beckmann, Lovis Corinth, Vassily Kandinsky, Gustav Klimt, Georg Kolbe, Max Liebermann, August Macke, Franz Marc, Max Pechstein, Max Slevogt, and the Belgian Henry Van de Velde. It seems likely that what they all objected to, apart from the weakness of Vinnen’s argument, was his politicizing of art and his attack on Cassirer, not the content of his particular artistic judgments or at least his right to make them. Slevogt, for instance, also considered Van Gogh a baleful influence on art and resented the celebrity the Dutchman had come to enjoy – thanks in part to Paul Cassirer. See Konrad Feilchenfeldt, “Briefe von Paul Cassirer und seinem Team” (Paul Cassirer to Max Slevogt, 2 September 1914), in Rahel E. Feilchenfeldt and Thomas Raff, eds., *Ein Fest der Künste – Paul Cassirer* (Munich: H.C. Beck, 2006), pp. 363-81.

<sup>96</sup> These included, besides Pauli, the directors of the Städelches Institut in Frankfurt, the Hamburg Kunsthalle, and the Wallraf-Richartz Museum.

<sup>97</sup> Among them Carl Gebhardt, Otto Grautoff, Harry Graf Kessler, Wilhelm Worringer, and even rightwingers like Wilhelm Schäfer and Moeller van den Bruck, the inspirer of the so-called “konservative Revolution.”

historians and critics such as Meier-Graefe, Konrad Fiedler, Karl Scheffler, and Wilhelm Worringer, but of the important Blue Rider Almanach, edited by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, which appeared the following year (1912) and contained reproductions of works by Picasso, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, among others. “Just as I rejoiced in the Bremen Kunsthalle’s acquisition of Van Gogh’s *Field with Poppies*,” Modersohn wrote, “inasmuch as it is one of the most stimulating paintings by any modern artist, I will rejoice in every good picture of foreign origin that finds a home on German soil, because it will inevitably have a productive influence on any vigorously developing German art...Critical writing that makes such works more understandable to the people fulfils a high mission. Nationality has absolutely no role to play in art; quality is all that counts. As the creation of a people with a special talent for the plastic arts, French art justly enjoys its leadership position. We Germans have much to learn from it. In fact, if the quality of the art produced by us has risen lately, we owe that improvement in large measure to our growing familiarity with good French art.”<sup>98</sup> Respect for French art and the assertion that “nationality has absolutely no role to play in art” did not, it should be noted, necessarily imply a complete renunciation of Langbehn’s principles. Nationality might have no role to play in responding to works of art or judging their quality, but national spirit might well still have an essential role to play in their production.

Along with the rivalry between Mackensen and Modersohn, Vogeler’s presence did nothing to enhance the unity of the colony. To be sure, he too was not untouched by a certain nativism. Together with Hans am Ende and Modersohn

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<sup>98</sup> *Im Kampf um die Kunst: Die Antwort auf den “Protest deutscher Künstler,”* p. 62.

(though not, curiously enough, Mackensen) he had signed -- as late as 1908 -- the appeal to German artists of the nationalist *Verdandi-Bund zur Förderung jungdeutscher Kunst*, the aim of which was, “ohne einem wohlfeilen ‘Kunstpatriotismus,’ einer engherzigen oder einer aus den Grenzen des...Verständigen hinausweisenden Deutschtümelei zu verfallen” (“without succumbing to a vulgar cultural jingoism or...an excessive craziness for everything Germanic”), to recover for art its “natürliche seelische Grundlagen” (“natural spiritual foundations”) and thus to create “große, heilige, deutsche Kunst” -- “deutsche, bewußt deutsche Kunst” (“great, holy German art” – “German, purposefully German art”), that “wie ein gewaltiger, starker Stamm...seine Wurzeln tief und breit in das Volkstum sendet” (“sinks roots, deeply and broadly, like a strong, powerful stock, in our native people”).<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, Vogeler’s artistic outlook and practice diverged considerably from that of the others. Though it had been paintings by Millet and Courbet that, according to his own later account in his autobiography, had not only inspired him, on his trip to Paris in April 1894, with the desire to produce his own art but indicated to him the direction and goals of that art (*Werden*, p. 27), he was not in fact primarily a landscape painter like Modersohn, Vinnen, Am Ende, and Overbeck, nor, on the whole, did he choose his subjects in the local population. He did paint some landscapes – typical Worpswede scenes of birches, moorland, and slow moving rivers or drainage canals (Figs. 19-21) -- but most of his subjects were borrowed from fairytale and legend. Into these he sometimes wove

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<sup>99</sup> From the “Aufruf” reproduced in Janos Frecot, “Der Werdandibund,” in Burkhard Bergius, Janos Frecot and Dieter Radicke, eds., *Architektur, Stadt und Politik*, Festschrift for Julius Posener on his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday (Gießen: Anabas Verlag, 1979; Werkbund Archiv Jahrbuch 4), pp. 37-46, on pp. 40-43.

references to contemporary scenes and individuals – above all the idealized figure of the young Martha Schröder– but this was probably done less to reveal a mythic, essential dimension of transient everyday reality, as with the other founders of the Worpswede art colony, than to transport reality into a timeless world of fantasy, imagination, and beauty (Figs. 22-28) or to evoke the longing for such a world. (Figs. 29-34) In the same way, when he painted the idyllic Empire-style house and garden he had created out of an old farmhouse in Worpswede and its reigning muse, his adored Martha, whom he likewise sometimes dressed for her portraits in Empire or Biedermeier style, he made his escape from contemporary reality not, like the others by discovering an “eternal” and “essential” reality in a mythicized nature but by creating a meticulously ordered world of fantasy and beauty in which reality has been made subject to the artist’s transforming imagination. (Figs 34) His own often discreetly dandified self-presentation in Biedermeier costume (or, humorously, in that of a British colonial tea-farmer in Ceylon or in a Scottish bonnet) was part of the same strategy of combating reality by transforming it into decorative art.<sup>100</sup> (Figs 35-38) Vogeler may have been especially attracted to Biedermeier because, as an artist in the midst of much vulgar pomp and ostentation, he was instinctively drawn to its modest, unpretentious stylishness and orderliness.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Dandyism as a rejection of the ugliness, messiness, and seeming arbitrariness of historical reality already informs Arthur Gobineau’s tale “Akrivie Phrangopoulos” (as it probably also informs his racial theories). The scene of the action is an island (Naxos) that is presented to the reader at the outset as a polished jewel set in the shimmering sea; its inhabitants do not share the history to which all others are subject, but live in a history of their own; in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century their world is still that of the early years of the century. They do not know, for instance, that Wellington is dead, and they continue to dress in the English style of his time.

<sup>101</sup> On Vogeler’s relation to Biedermeier, see Thomas Heyden, “‘Ein unendlich fernes Ahnherrnbild’. Heinrich Vogeler und das Neubiedermeier,” in *Heinrich Vogeler und der Jugendstil*, ed. Cornelia

From the start his work was visibly more decorative and more closely related to the international *Jugendstil* or Art Nouveau movement than that of the others. In particular, he had been far more influenced than any of the other Worpswedes by William Morris, Burne-Jones, and the English Arts and Crafts movement, and especially by the brilliantly talented Aubrey Beardsley. According to Rilke, Beardsley's work had been a "revelation" to Vogeler, while Otto Modersohn noted in his diary that Beardsley's books lay around Vogeler's quarters and were the young artist's "daily nourishment."<sup>102</sup> (Figs. 39-43) On Beardsley's death in 1898, the leading English magazine *The Studio*, named Vogeler as the artist most likely to take his place.<sup>103</sup> Most of Vogeler's early work, with its strong linearity, does in fact seem closer to that of English and Scottish illustrators like the Macdonald sisters, Jessie King – whose work was featured in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* in 1906 -- or W.B. Macdougall than to that of Mackensen or Am Ende. (Figs. 44-46) (This did not prevent the popular contemporary poet-critic Richard Schaukal from asserting in language unfortunately typical of the time that "Vogelers Kunst ist deutsch, rassenhaft, national deutsch, sie hat das eminent Deutsche: deutsche Romantik."<sup>104</sup>) Vogeler would probably have subscribed willingly to a *bon mot* of Otto Julius Bierbaum, for whose own books he produced

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Baumann and Vera Losse (Cologne: DuMont, 1997; Exhibition Catalogue, Barkenkoff-Stiftung, Worpswede, Dec. 1997-May, 1998), pp. 112-121.

<sup>102</sup> Rilke, Rainer-Maria, "Heinrich Vogeler-Worpswede," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, April 1902 (Special number), 10:300-330, at p. 320; Modersohn's unpublished diary quoted in Theo Neteler, *Heinrich Vogeler Buchgestalter und Buchillustrator. Mit einer Bibliographie* (Fischerhude: Galerie-Verlag, 1991), p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> Eric Torgensen, *Dear Friend*, p. 38.

<sup>104</sup> "Heinrich Vogeler-Worpswede als Buch-Illustrator," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (1906-1907), 19, 399-420.



decorative designs, to whose influential magazine *Pan* he contributed, and with whom he was also associated in 1899 in the launching of the magazine *Die Insel* and the founding of the great publishing house of the same name. “I am very much in favor of artificial paradises,” Bierbaum declared, “since there are no natural ones. In the end all art is an effort to substitute a paradise created by the grace of art for the paradise lost by divine disgrace.”<sup>105</sup> Retaining a non-realist, decorative, and Utopian dimension in art, while at the same time reconnecting it with everyday life was the often contradictory goal that Vogeler pursued – in the spirit of Morris -- in different, even quite drastically divergent ways throughout his life.

Consistently with this goal he was deeply engaged in the 1890s and early 1900s, the heyday of *Jugendstil*, in book design and illustration, for which he was much in demand (Figs. 47-76) and in which he enjoyed a stellar reputation,<sup>106</sup> as well as in interior design and in the design of everyday objects such as furniture and cutlery. In 1899, for instance, he was hired by the wealthy amateur and man of letters Alfred Walter Heymel – the founding publisher of *Die Insel*, a new, forward-looking internationally oriented periodical devoted to literature and the arts – to help design an apartment for him in Munich. (This was the time of similar total design projects by Arthur Mackmurdo, the pioneer in the field, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Henry Van de Velde, Josef Hoffmann, and, somewhat later, Frank

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<sup>105</sup> Cit. Kirsch, *Worpswede*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>106</sup> A 1904 exhibition and publication entitled *Vogeler Zierat* (Vogeler Decoration) elicited the following in a review in the journal *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde*: “Vogeler Zierat’ is an artistic phenomenon of epoch-making significance, which can in no way be fitted into any existing scheme. Vogeler is an artist of great originality and imagination. He loses none of his individuality even when he allows himself to allude to forms that already exist and are in harmony with his own being.” (X, 1906-07, no. 1, p. 79.). See also the tribute in *Dekorative Kunst* (Fig. 15 below).

Lloyd Wright). In 1904 he began work on a commission to redesign completely the *Güldenammer* in the Bremen Town Hall. His achievement there is still regarded as one of the masterworks of *Jugendstil* in Germany.<sup>107</sup> (Fig. 77) Two years later, he helped his brother Franz (killed in the First World War) and sister-in-law Philine set up a “Kunst und Gewerbehaus” [Art and Crafts Gallery] in Worpswede, and two years after that went into partnership with Franz in a project to produce well designed furniture commercially – the “Worpsweder Werkstätte Franz Vogeler.” That same year (1906) his design for a “Room for a Young Woman” was put on show at the 3<sup>rd</sup> German Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Dresden. Vogeler’s activities in these areas helped to make Worpswede a household name in Germany – he both exploited and contributed to this celebrity by attaching Worpswede to his own name and signing himself “Heinrich Vogeler Worpswede” – but they also played a part in changing the character of the original settlement. From a retreat or refuge from the modern world, Worpswede became a supplier of fashionable design objects for it as well as something of a tourist attraction for the urban middle classes. In 1910 a special narrow-gauge rail link was opened – the *Kleinbahn Osterholz-Worpswede-Bremervörde* – to facilitate access. The timetable carried an announcement that the Worpswede station and its restaurant had been built by the Worpsweder Werkstätte Franz Vogeler after designs by “Heinrich Vogeler Worpswede.” (Fig. 78)

These developments were not to the taste of everyone. Though the two men got on quite well personally and seem to have felt closer to each other than to the

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<sup>107</sup> See Museum Director Gustav Pauli’s laudatory review of this work in *Dekorative Kunst*, vol. 14, May 1906, pp 339-43.

other founding members of the colony -- both admired and befriended Ubbelohde, for instance, in face of Mackensen's unremitting hostility to the "Bavarian" and both refused to sign Vinnen's notorious *Protest* -- Modersohn sensed that Vogeler's practice of art was not the same as that of the other Worpswedes.<sup>108</sup> On one occasion, commenting negatively on a new painting by the younger man, he noted that he was "no Worpsweder."<sup>109</sup> By the early years of the twentieth century, resentful of the failure of the others -- including, according to him, Vogeler -- to show sufficient interest in the work of his new wife, Paula Becker, whom (not without reason) he considered a more gifted artist than any of them, and disdainful of the good-looking, engaging and rather dandified Vogeler's popularity and success, he began to be increasingly critical both of Vogeler's personal style (his "ridiculous, *recherché* way of dressing and his excessively ornamented writing" ["die alberne gesuchte Tracht, die gezierte Schrift"]) and of what he described as the contrived and highly stylized character of the younger man's art, its lack of naivety, its "insincerity" and "superficiality."<sup>110</sup> Vogeler, to

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<sup>108</sup> Comparing the way of life and views on art of the different Worpswedes, Modersohn noted in his journal (April 9 1902) that "in our opinions on art, in our taste, Paula and I are an excellent match. Both of us love the naïve, the unusual." Mackensen, Am Ende, Vinnen, and Overbeck are different. At Overbeck's place, in particular, "everything is so urbane, inside and out. Only Vogeler and we are different." At the same time he adds: "And even then, Vogeler is more stylish and refined: we are more naïve, more intimate, a bit more odd." (Quoted in Paula Modersohn-Becker, *The Letters and Journals*, p. 276) On Ubbelohde, see *Werden*, p. 35.

<sup>109</sup> Cit. Petzet, *Von Worpswede nach Moskau*, p. 28; Karl-Robert Schütze, "Heinrich Vogeler: das erste Jahrzehnt in Worpswede," in *Worpswede. Eine deutsche Künstlerkolonie um 1900* (Fischerhude: Galerie-Verlag, 1986), p. 99.

<sup>110</sup> Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Von Worpswede nach Moskau* p. 29. See also Modersohn's Journal, cited in Modersohn-Becker, *The Letters and Journals*, p. 273 (March 11, 1902): "HV lacks all naïveté; he underlines everything, sky, clothing, grass, flowers, everything is filled with intention; everything is in quotation marks"; p. 281 (June 28, 1902): "Superficiality...characterizes HV and his wife." Vogeler is "coquettish, affected as a human being and as an artist." (Quoted in Torgensen, *Dear Friend*, p. 37) In fact, Vogeler made no secret of his admiration for Paula Modersohn-Becker. He organized an exhibition of her early sketches in the Worpsweder Kunsthalle and later reproached himself with having inadvertently damaged her reputation through this premature move. In his memoirs he claims that from the very beginning, even in her earliest, still somewhat clumsy efforts, he recognized a striving toward

him, was an example of the artist corrupted by “every possible external influence.” “I liked his early work,” he told Carl Hauptmann, “even if it was still technically imperfect. But now he has been completely drawn in by the editors of the *Insel*, for instance, and I do not think that is good. I believe he no longer has any eyes or any feeling for what is appealing in the indigenous and local; he constantly paints his little Empire style house and his Martha in her Empire style costumes.”<sup>111</sup> A couple of years later, reproaching himself with having wanted to express “Geist” [spirit] and “Phantasie” [imagination] but having temporarily forgotten that “Geist” can be portrayed only “in and through the body, only by being incarnated in body,” he noted in his diary that “spirit without body fades like a dream” and that that is the trouble with Vogeler’s work. “Body – that is what is missing from Vogeler’s work,” he wrote.<sup>112</sup> Carl Hauptmann was too loyal to Vogeler to concur completely in Modersohn’s disparagement of their mutual friend, but he too sensed not only the differences separating all the Worpswede artists, but the even greater difference that separated Vogeler from the others. “Vogeler,” he had conceded in an early letter to Modersohn, “is a dreamer who dreams his own dreams and he will soar all too often above the mother earth of Worpswede into the blue heavens. His is a rich, refined, lyrical nature... too subjective and too enclosed within his inner world of feeling to be the heart and mouthpiece of an entire broad landscape. But in poetic creation he will become

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“grosse Form.” (Werden, 78) Otto Modersohn himself acknowledged in a letter to Carl Hauptmann (7 May 1906) that Vogeler had expressed interest in acquiring work by Paula. (*Carl Hauptmann und seine Worpsweder Künstlerfreunde* [as in fn. 80 above], vol. 1, p. 196)

<sup>111</sup> *Carl Hauptmann und seine Worpsweder Künstlerfreunde*, vol. 1, p. 40, Otto Modersohn to Carl Hauptmann, 20 May 1900.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 327, from Modersohn’s diary, 28 June 1902.

ever greater and we can expect the most beautiful things from him.”<sup>113</sup> To his diary he confided that while Vogeler’s work, like Modersohn’s, has a strong, unified character, it is “only lyrical, songlike. [Vogeler] does not make studies from nature. Hence form with him is never opened up by something new and great that the hand of nature has grown within him. With him nothing develops out of the natural environment to enter the picture. The poem remains [impregnable]. Modersohn, in contrast, studies and works and elaborates from nature great, ever new, ever more comprehensive values [*Liebeswerthe*] for himself.”<sup>114</sup>

Paula Modersohn-Becker herself, though she was to grow deeply fond of Vogeler, came to respect him as an artist, and may even have learned from his emphasis on linearity, was struck by how different in form and spirit the works by him that she saw at the Bremen exhibition of 1894-95 were from those of Mackensen and Modersohn: “He paints the craziest things. He paints all of nature in a very stylized, Pre-Raphaelite way. In these modern times, all one can do is shake one’s head at such funny things.”<sup>115</sup> If Mackensen and Modersohn presented themselves as rough-hewn sons of the earth, Vogeler was unmistakably what the English of the time termed an “Aesthete,” with his high Biedermeier-style “Vatermörder” collars, fastened with an elegant cameo, and his silk waistcoats.<sup>116</sup> Vogeler, on his side, found the others narrow, exclusive, and self-centered, excessively focussed on their own environment, indifferent to the world beyond

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 19, Carl Hauptmann to Otto Modersohn, 19 September 1899.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 313, from Carl Hauptmann’s diary, 6 October 1900.

<sup>115</sup> To Kurt Becker, from Bremen, April 17, 1895, *The Letters and Journals*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>116</sup> See Rilke, *Tagebücher der Frühzeit*, ed. Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1942, new ed. 1973), p. 202.

Worpswede. “Dear Fräulein Becker,” he wrote to Paula Becker from Worpswede in April 1900 (just before her marriage to Modersohn), “believe me, it’s simply demoralizing here. The way people think here in general is not even human, everyone is separately turning into an eccentric. Their horizons are shrinking and they sit on their own sofas and anxiously protect their small-minded feelings. Moreover, everything has become disconsolate here. Worpswede is turning into a colony of separate houses. The Overbecks are the same as always and never share any of their secret, spiritual possessions. Am Ende skulks around, grumbling and saying hello in a gloomy way – and he’s my neighbor. Modersohn is very nice but completely blind to the terrible condition of his poor wife...Maybe I’ll soon have to tie up my little bundle and trek to a distant valley where there are no people, for you’re probably already thinking from reading the above: just take a look at him, it’s gotten to him too, all that stuff about demoralization.”<sup>117</sup>

Only two years later, in 1902, Modersohn was already complaining to Carl Hauptmann that the community of values and aspirations of the original Worpsweders had eroded drastically. “Of genuine artistic effort less and less is to be heard or seen. This one runs after this fashion, that one after that. Vogeler moves in the direction of the ever more contrived and is becoming more and more of a mannerist. It is a pity; the old tradition, the foundation and cornerstone of Worpswede – i.e. turning away from everything external and seeking salvation in truth, simplicity and nature – is more and more neglected. The unnatural, the contrived, the external, the petty, the fashionable pervade everything. Unless that

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<sup>117</sup> Paula Modersohn-Becker, *The Letters and Journals*, p. 176, Heinrich Vogeler to Paula Becker.

can be changed, Worpswede will have lost all meaning [. . .], as I often predicted would happen.”<sup>118</sup>

By the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the rivalries, tensions, and disagreements among the founding members did in fact lead to the disintegration of the original colony. Whether for personal reasons or because of strains in the community, Overbeck left in 1905 and returned to Bremen. In 1909 he died of a heart attack. In 1907, immediately after Paula Modersohn died giving birth to her first child, Otto Modersohn left Worpswede and took a house in the village of Fischerhude, several miles away. Around 1909 Vogeler’s marriage to Martha Schröder, which he appears to have seen as the core of a larger Utopian community shut off from the grasping, materialist world of Wilhelminian Germany and dedicated to art, literature, music, and the cultivation of the finer feelings, and which had indeed served in some measure as a focal point for the entire colony, had started to go sour; his art itself was perceived as stagnating; he was receiving fewer and fewer commissions; and in 1914 he volunteered for military service in large measure, it seems, to extricate himself from an emotional and artistic impasse.<sup>119</sup> When he returned after the war, it was to a totally new

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<sup>118</sup> *Carl Hauptmann und seine Worpsweder Künstlerfreunde*, vol. 1, p. 121, Otto Modersohn to Carl Hauptmann, 1 August, 1902. See also the editors’ comments in Paula Modersohn-Becker, *The Letters and Journals*, p. 148.

<sup>119</sup> It should be noted, however, that many young artists, some of them arguably more radically innovative and aggressively anti-establishment than Vogeler was in 1914, volunteered to serve; among them Max Beckmann, the friends August Macke and Franz Marc (both of whom were killed in combat), Ludwig Kirchner, Max Slevogt, Oskar Kokoschka, and Georg Grosz. (Annegret Jürgen-Kirchhoff, *Schreckenbilder: Krieg und Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert* [Berlin:Reimer, 1993], pp. 30-31) Their support of the war, unlike that of more established figures like Max Liebermann, may not have been simply patriotic. Possibly, they hoped that the war would finally put an end to the traditional order that they had been combating in their art since the middle of the first decade of the century.

life, and he himself was in many ways, though perhaps not in his innermost being, a changed man.



#### 4. Vogeler at Worpswede, 1893-1914.

Vogeler was well received at Worpswede when he arrived there in the summer of 1893. Mackensen, he himself relates, took a great interest in his welfare and his further development as an artist (*Werden*, p. 30): “From the master, I learned how to observe nature attentively, soberly and naturalistically and how to soften contours and surfaces through the play of color.” (*Werden*, p. 33) Nevertheless, he was left unmoved, he later claimed, by Mackensen’s monumental “Die Missionspredigt,” which the five founding artists had trooped out to view at the village church within a few days of his arrival. “To me, a rank beginner, the finished details of the picture demonstrated great technical skill, but I could not quite understand why the arrangement of the figures left me so cold.” (*Werden*, p.30)<sup>120</sup> Modersohn’s work, in contrast, made a deep impression on him when, along with the others, he visited the “red-bearded Westphalian’s studio” in “a bright former schoolroom.” He was much stimulated, he recalled many years later in his Memoirs, “by the way Modersohn was able to capture the peculiar quality of this land: the brownish red autumnal mood of the moor,...the emerald green springtime in the meadows decked with flowers, the white trunks of the birch trees in the moor... And above all, the varied aspects of the atmosphere [*Lüfte*] – white clouds billowing over the land in summer, gray autumn storms whipping the trees in fall, and the unique power of the color peculiar to the moor landscape when nature, and especially the atmosphere [*Luft*] is reflected in the dark mirror of the peat ditches and bogs. “(*Werden*, 30) (Fig. 79)

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<sup>120</sup> It may be that Vogeler’s memory of his response was affected by the bitter political hostility that later divided him from Mackensen, a racist and a fervent Nazi, but this is unlikely. On the whole Vogeler remained fair-minded in his artistic judgments.

Very soon after his arrival, on seeing the sketchbook in which Vogeler had drawn not only scenes from nature observed during his walks over the moors but “imaginary compositions” on themes borrowed from folk and fairy-tales, Hans am Ende urged him to make etchings from them. “You must etch all this with a needle on to copper,” he said. “I will show you how it is done.” He brought plates and etching needles, Vogeler recounts, and “I learned from this older, more experienced friend how to prepare the plates and the technique of etching.” (*Werden*, p. 33)

While he did produce a number of paintings in his early years at Worpswede, Vogeler produced many more etchings. It was with the latter (“Minnetraum,” 1894; “Verkündigung,” 1895; “Frühling,” “Liebe,” “Tod und Alte,” 1896; “Im Mai,” “Im Frühling,” “Dornröschen,” 1897; “Die Sieben Schwäne,” 1898) that he first made a name for himself and was represented at the collective exhibitions featuring the Worpswede artists in the later 1890s. (Figs. 80-82) Several of his early etchings were included in a portfolio entitled “Vom Weyerberg,” which was published in Bremen in 1895, and in 1899 a portfolio of ten etchings – entitled *Der Frühling* – was put out to some acclaim by the new publishing house of “Die Insel” in Munich, in 25 signed and 175 unsigned copies, all on deluxe handmade papers but all unnumbered. (To many artists at the time, the reproducible graphic arts represented a way to reach a broader, younger, and less moneyed audience than could be reached by oil paintings, and the striking revival of the woodcut, for instance is probably attributable in part at least to this consideration. While the signed copies ensured the artist’s income, numbering them would have meant

reintroducing the commercial, scarcity value it was hoped the graphic arts might make less prominent.) In the case of *Der Frühling*, Vogeler was responsible for every aspect of the work, including the cover design, the lettering, and the title page. (Figs. 83-87)

Both the characteristic linearity and some of the major themes and motifs of his art prior to the First World War are already visible in these early etchings: flowers and grasses viewed from close up and transformed into decorative designs; scenes, from traditional fairy-tales and medieval legends, of lovers separated by magical spells or by the defensive armor worn by the men or by an imminent farewell; isolated figures, their heads turned away from the viewer and from their surroundings, lost in thought, looking upwards or outwards, away from the viewer, forming an aesthetic unity with the landscape the artist has placed them in but identifiable by their clothing as outsiders to that landscape, rather than local peasants forming part of it; most prominently perhaps, set against a background of characteristic Worpswede scenes -- heath, pond, the inevitable cluster of birch trees -- the figures of women in various moods: singing, dreaming, waiting, weeping. Though the settings are recognizably those of Worpswede and the Teufelmoor, as the cultural historian Heinrich Petzet observes, this is no "Heimatkunst."<sup>121</sup> Vogeler has not attempted to capture the essence of a particular locality in these works but to arouse in the viewer a romantic, predominantly melancholic or reflective mood of isolation and longing. To this end he draws equally on landscape, legend, and the human figure.

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<sup>121</sup> Petzet, *Von Worpswede nach Moskau*, p. 46.

So far from being an image of the natural world of everyday experience or an attempt to capture the inner, essential reality of that world, the world of these etchings, as of most of the early paintings (some of them based on the etchings), is one of Vogeler's imagining and desire. In his 1903 monograph on Worpswede, Rilke highlighted this fundamental feature of his friend's work. He was probably the most widely traveled of the Worpswede artists, the one who had visited the most museums and private collections, Rilke wrote. Already in his diary, noting Vogeler's talent for rapid, sharp description, he had described how Vogeler, on the walks they took together, would "tell him about everything: about Bruges and Naples, Paris and Munich, Düsseldorf and Amsterdam." About people and landscapes. "He could speak of fleeting encounters and enduring friendships, of eccentric people he had met,[...] of very beautiful women and willful young girls. Of landscapes at dusk, of strange days on unknown islands, to which he crossed with beautiful women on boats laden with flowers,...of old men, who have spent time in America and in their trembling voices sing Negro songs that their blond-haired grandchildren and their strapping sons do not understand..."<sup>122</sup> As already suggested, this internationalism, this embrace of a world extending well beyond the natural environment of Worpswede is one of the features that distinguished Vogeler from the nativist Worpswede artists and it was to be emphasized again by the Bremen Museum Director Gustav Pauli in a 1906 appraisal in the journal *Dekorative Kunst* of Vogeler's reconstruction of the Guldengkammer in Bremen Town Hall. "Heinrich Vogeler has created his own special style – in which he not only makes his art works but also lives. It is a style such as can be developed only in isolation from a local environment and in the hands of an artist who has seen

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<sup>122</sup> *Tagebücher*, p. 206 (7.IX.1900).

and had a taste of much. What has not been brought together here? The near and distant past, yesterday and today; antiquity, the Renaissance, a little of the Rococo, Empire style, Biedermeier sobriety, Italy, France, England, Germany, Bremen and Worpswede. Many different forms and fragments of forms have been blended together in the artist's imagination and have given life to new forms that are his alone."<sup>123</sup>

Yet in the chapter on Vogeler of his Worpswede book, Rilke emphasizes that the artist traveled "less in order to appropriate the new and foreign than to stand fast against them, draw the boundaries of his own personality, and establish the point at which what was particular to him stopped and the Other began....Under the influence of alien things he recognized what was peculiarly his own and if there is anything surprising about this development," Rilke notes, "it is that Vogeler had already begun to close himself off at such an early stage, a stage at which other young people are just beginning to open up and abandon themselves, rather indiscriminately, to whatever happens to come their way." In an anticipation of what was to develop in later years into a criticism of Vogeler's art, Rilke observes that "there is a certain maturity but also a certain limitation in this precocious closing of doors, as if this man were modeling himself on an old aristocratic manor house [*Edelhof*] nestled in a valley behind white walls and dark moats or

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<sup>123</sup> *Dekorative Kunst*, 14 (May 1906): 337-43, on p. 338. ("Heinrich Vogeler hat sich seinen ganz besonderen Stil gebildet, in dem er nicht nur arbeitet, sondern auch lebt, einen Stil, wie er nur in ländlicher Abgeschlossenheit erwachsen kann unter den Händen eines Künstlers, der vieles gesehen und gekostet hat. Was ist hier nicht zusammengekommen? Ferne und fernste Vergangenheit, gestern und heute; Antike, Renaissance, ein klein wenig Rokoko, Empire, Biedermeiernüchternheit, Italien, Frankreich, England, Deutschland, Bremen und Worpswede. Vielerlei Formen und die Bruchstücke von Formen sind in der Phantasie des Künstlers zusammen- geschmolzen und haben neuen Formen das Leben gegeben, die ihm allein gehören.")

ditches [*Gräben*] on which he had looked out meditatively as a boy. The aim...was for him to surround himself as soon as possible with walls and moats. The intended goal was not the expansion of the self outward from a fixed central point, but rather defining the periphery of a circle, which it was apparently to become this individual's peculiar task to fill with ever richer content."<sup>124</sup>

Ultimately, says Rilke, "the viewer confronted with a work by Vogeler thinks not so much of art as of life – a life that is trying to come into existence." While there are many alienated people, he goes on, who are in deep inner contradiction with the world around them, most of them are simply discontented loners whose oddness one need not take seriously. "The question is whether a protest has the power to impose itself as a reality in opposition to the other, generally accepted reality, to get itself acknowledged as a counterweight to that other reality and indeed, as far as possible, to be perceived as, in its highest moments, more convincing than that other reality." "The world is full of such protests," Rilke concedes. But a few have succeeded in being taken seriously. "The monastic life...was a protest that had no reference to [everyday reality] but was grounded in another, a second reality. What we have here is a life that has surrounded itself with walls and renounced all ambition to extend beyond its own boundaries. An inward directed life. And yet that life does not entail impoverishment. [On the contrary], in times of shipwreck it appears as the only refuge of wealth, the repository, in a small timeless frame, of everything people spend their days striving and struggling for in the outside world."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1903; Künstlermonographien, LXIV), pp. 104-105.

<sup>125</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede*, p. 106.

As he had already done the year before in a major essay on Vogeler, illustrated by the artist himself (Figs. 88-89), in the journal *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*,<sup>126</sup> Rilke thus underlines the critical and Utopian dimension of Vogeler's seemingly backward-looking, fairy-tale-like art: "You cannot speak of this art without thinking of the life from which it seems to flow as a necessary consequence. Like the art of the medieval monks, it arises from a narrow and lovingly tended world... to reach toward the vastness and eternity of the heavens... Heinrich Vogeler's art is first and foremost a prediction of reality, his reality. All the tales in his large old sketchbook begin [not with the words 'Once upon a time'] but with the words: 'There will come a time... [Es wird einmal sein]...' Drawings and etchings tell in soft, whispering tones of future things. And later, mature and full of gratitude, he celebrates -- in his paintings -- the fulfilled dreams of his life. That is the essential content of his art."<sup>127</sup>

In some important respects, this impulse in Vogeler's art may not in fact have been fundamentally different from the impulse behind the art of the other Worpswede, however divergent the two may have seemed to some contemporaries. Perhaps it is better seen as a variant of it. Like the multiple alternative lifestyles promoted by the *Lebensreform* movement of the time –

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<sup>126</sup> *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, X (April-September, 1902), pp. 299-330: "If the bent of our time is to create a union of art and life (a synthesis that may perhaps some day, in a very distant future, be brought about on a full scale), it is also characteristic that, among many *poseurs*, our time fails to discern the one upright and genuine artist who embraces life and art together on a somewhat less than lifesize scale, as in an image of it, daily, continuously, and spontaneously, without consciously and deliberately intending to; that it fails to see Heinrich Vogeler, who would undoubtedly present the time with a realization of such a union, if the time were mature enough to recognize it." (p. 304)

<sup>127</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede*, pp. 106-107. Hermynia zur Mühlen, known as "die rote Gräfin" [the red countess], may have had Rilke's words in mind when she entitled a volume of "proletarian" children's tales, illustrated by Vogeler and published by the Communist Verlag der Jugendinternationale in 1930, *Es war einmal...und es wird sein*.

vegetarianism, *Körperkultur*, nudism, would-be self-sufficient market gardening communities such as Eden (founded in 1893 in Oranienburg, about 12 miles north of Berlin) – Vogeler's *Märchenwelt* and the Worpsweder's mythologized vision of rural life and of *Heimat*, appealed to a certain public because each in its own way implied a critique and rejection of the modern liberal, capitalist, industrial, social and economic order while at the same time shrinking from any radical or aggressive posture and proposing instead essentially private, imaginary, ultimately escapist solutions.

At the core of Vogeler's art, in short, as Rilke interpreted it in 1903, was an attempt to create an alternative universe to that of everyday life. This art was intended not simply to stand in opposition to life, but to constitute in itself another life, one in which the disjunction of art and life that was felt to characterize the world of every day no longer obtained. Rilke's monastic metaphor seems apt in as much as the monastery is a real world in itself within the world, one within whose walls the separation of the sacred and the profane that characterizes the everyday world does not obtain. At the same time, however, that other life is and must be lived entirely within the walls that exclude and protect it from what lies beyond them. There is probably a close connection between this form of utopianism and the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which inspired so many Jugendstil artists and writers: Vogeler in his poetic volume *Dir*, of which he was both the author and the designer and illustrator; Rudolph Alexander Schröder in the Munich apartment he designed for Alfred Walter Heymel, with the help of Vogeler and the architect Paul Ludwig Troost (still a champion, with Behrens and Gropius, of simplicity and severity in contrast to the



pompousness of late Wilhelminian architecture and not yet Hitler's architect); Charles Rennie Mackintosh in his Hill House, overlooking the Clyde near Glasgow, for the publisher Blackie, in which everything from the cutlery to the building itself constitutes a unified design.

Besides being a repudiation of the modern world in general, the closed-off, dandified, contrived aspect of Vogeler's art and life at this time, to which Rilke draws attention, may well have reflected a more or less permanent psychological condition of Vogeler the individual, a certain uneasiness with the real world, a difficulty in connecting with it, and a strong desire to construct an alternative world on his own terms. By his own account, the artist was frequently not at ease with himself or others. He appears to have been shy and moody. At large festive gatherings he was often withdrawn and inhibited, he himself relates in his recollections. On one occasion, when the Becker family, with whom he was on friendly terms, threw a big party to mark the homecoming of their daughter Paula, he stood alone in the midst of the boisterous festivities, "feeling empty, talking to no one and looking out, constrained, on the wonderful scene of youthful jollity, energy, and active participation in the little communal celebration." (*Werden*, p. 66) Why, he himself wonders, did he not take hold of Paula's pretty cousin, when she made a move toward him, and lead her to the dancefloor? After all, "I was a good dancer." In smaller, intimate groups, in contrast, he was lively and entertaining: he played the guitar, sang, recited verse, told stories. Rilke, in his diaries, evokes both sides of his friend's character – the somewhat stiff, buttoned-up, dandified figure in his deliberately *recherché* Biedermeier-style dress, and the free-spirited, merry, dusty prankster, on a

bicycle trip through Schleswig-Holstein to the North Sea Danish island of Romo, with Clara Westhoff and Marie Bock, playing the guitar and dancing barefoot on the deck of the ferry.<sup>128</sup> Many years later, when the artist, a committed Communist living in Moscow, was in his sixties, he was described by a friend, the poet Erich Weinert, in terms quite similar to those in which Rilke had described the young Jugendstil artist. By nature taciturn and withdrawn into his shell, Weinert wrote in the introductory essay to his posthumous edition of Vogeler's memoirs, he could become lively and animated when he was encouraged to create his own universe of memories.<sup>129</sup>

Rilke's 1903 reading of Vogeler both helps to explain and receives support from the recurrent motif of the island in the imagination of the youthful artist. In the very opening paragraphs of his autobiography Vogeler recalls how one day, when a breach in the dyke of the Wümme river had caused extensive flooding, their father shouted to him and his two brothers Franz and Eduard to look out the window of their house. "An astounding view lay before us," Vogeler recounts.

The flood waters had come up as far as the ancient Hansa city. Where just yesterday the view had been of fields, meadows and the city park ["Bürgerpark"], water now stretched as far as the horizon. I was overcome by the power and grandeur of the new landscape. 'The sea is here,' I cried out joyfully. The trees in the city park could no longer be seen growing out of the ground; instead their tops were mirrored in the

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<sup>128</sup> Rilke, *Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit*, pp. 207-209.

<sup>129</sup> "Seiner Natur nach war er nicht gesprächig. Wenn man ihn aber anzuregen verstand, so konnte er lebhaft und lange aus seinen Lebenserinnerungen erzählen." (Heinrich Vogeler, *Erinnerungen*, ed. Erich Weinert [Berlin Rütten & Loening, 1952], p. 14) It was Weinert and some other close friends of the artist who encouraged him to commit his recollections to paper.

water. The house of the wealthy peasant Klatte could only be reached by rowboat. In its swanky city garb it was completely cut off by the vast sea of water. At that moment the March sun broke through the clouds and spread a golden light over a narrow strip of land visible in the far distance. It lay there like a golden fish on a shining silver platter. I climbed up on the iron frame of the skylight and pointed to the gleaming island. 'We have to build a sailboat,' I cried out to my brothers, 'and discover the island.' (*Werden*, p. 9)

The island motif (as well as the idea of a thoroughly transformed reality) is found again and again in Vogeler's work, directly in paintings of the island in the pond at the artist's Barkenhoff property in Worpswede (1914-1923) and in the "Isle of the Blessed" (1918), now in Katherine Dreier's Société Anonyme Bequest at Yale,<sup>130</sup> but also indirectly, in many paintings and drawings of the Barkenhoff house itself in its carefully designed and lovingly tended garden, and not least in the monumental (175x310 cms) 1905 painting (Noltenius, no. 59), now in the Grosse Kunstschau in Worpswede, of the select Barkenhoff community of literary and

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<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, in the Noltenius catalogue raisonné (Rena Noltenius, *Heinrich Vogeler 1872-1942: Die Gemälde. Ein Werkkatalog* [Weimar: VDG, 2000]) portraits of Curt Stürmer and Martha Vogeler on a slight elevation overlooking the pond and the island (nos. 122 [1910] and 142 [1913]); Martha seated on the grass on the little island (no. 141 [1913]), and nos. 188 and 189 (both 1914) and 254 and 256 (both 1923), which simply represent the island as landscape. The Barkenhoff house and/or garden are the subject matter of many paintings ("My house has so much charm for me," Vogeler wrote in the summer of 1900, "that I could spend my entire life painting it" [Petzet, p. 63]): nos. 39 ("Maimorgen" [1901]), 48 ("Herbstgarten" [1903]), 49 ("Der Barkenhoff" [1904]), 50 ("Mein Garten" [1904]), 63 ("Weisser Phlox" [1906]), 64 ("Diele aus meinem Haus" [1906]), 70 ("Vorfrühling" [1907]), 71 ("Flora" [1907]), 87 ("Juni-Abend" [1909]), 108 ("Barkenhoff im Schnee" [1910]), 125 (Weidenbäume im Park" [1912]), 148 ("Mein Garten" [1913]), 149 ("Sommergarten" [1913]) 183 ("Barkenhoff mit Birnbaum" [1914]), 252 ("Barkenhoff in der Sonne" [1923]). No. 253 ("Arbeiterkinderheim Barkenhoff" [1923]) introduces a number of paintings and drawings of the Barkenhoff in its new guise, as a school and children's home. The celebrated frescos, destroyed by the Nazis, date from this period. But what the Barkenhoff represents is no longer an ideal community of "beautiful souls" in an idyllic, romantically conceived retreat harking back to pre-modern Biedermeier times, but a model of a new, progressive, socialist society. The significance of the island motif in Vogeler's imagination was recognized by Berndt Stendzig...

artistic residents, guests, and friends against the background of the house and the garden. (Figs. 90-94) It is likewise not surprising that “Die Insel” was the name given by the elegant young Alfred Walter Heymel, who as the adopted son of a wealthy Bremen merchant had inherited an immense fortune, to the publishing venture -- a forward-looking, internationally oriented periodical devoted to literature and the arts -- that he launched in Munich in 1899 in collaboration with his cousin and close friend, the patrician Bremen poet, critic, and interior designer Rudolf Alexander Schröder and the writer Otto Julius Bierbaum. To the young Vogeler, whom the two friends invited to be artistic director of the venture, Heymel explained that the name “Die Insel” had been chosen, because the new publishing house “soll eine Insel werden, ein Rettungseiland für unsere besten junge Kräfte aus der Literatur, eine Manifestation gegen Unkultur und gegen vulgarisierte Tradition” (“should become an island refuge for our best young forces in literature, a demonstration against barbarism and vulgarized tradition”).(*Werden*, p. 45)

The Barkenhoff was the center of Vogeler’s life for thirty years, from October 1895, when he purchased the original thatched peasant house and its four acres of land on the eastern slope of the Weyerberg, just outside the village of Worpswede, with money inherited from his father’s estate (Carl Eduard Vogeler’s business was sold on his death in November 1894), until 1924, when he finally ceded it to a socialist organization, the German section of “Rote Hilfe” (“Red Aid” or “Class War Prisoners’ Aid”). In the course of time he transformed the simple peasant dwelling successively into a legendary island of art and beauty at the heart of the Worpswede artists’ colony, an agricultural commune and safe haven

for discharged soldiers or deserters and left-wing refugees, and an experimental school and camp for the children of persecuted, imprisoned or executed socialist revolutionaries.

In the first two decades of its existence, the Barkenhoff – Low German for “Birkenhof,” it got its name in 1896 from a grove of birch trees that Vogeler planted where the property abutted on the main road -- was above all a refined community of artists, writers, musicians, and friends. Vogeler redesigned, rebuilt, and extended the house in various stages between 1895 and 1908. He also designed and lavished attention on the garden and grounds for which in 1907 he succeeded in acquiring ten more acres. Rilke composed the motto that was inscribed over the entrance.<sup>131</sup> “If you come to Worpswede now,” Vogeler wrote to the poet and music critic Hans Bethge in the summer of 1900, “instead of the old thatch-roofed cottage you will find a comfortable house that has the appearance of dating from the earlier time of our great-grandmothers. Sturdy Empire-style urns stand on the outside walls. A broad flight of stairs, with clipped, round-shaped laurel bushes on either side, leads down to the flower garden...At this moment everything is overgrown with roses, as if they were dropping down from the walls on to the lawn. The lilacs are in bloom, forming what look like gigantic round mounds of flowers...You really must see such a German June. It is an orgy of green bedecked with flowers and of joyful birdsongs filling the air.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Licht ist sein Loos / ist der Herr nur das Herz und die Hand / des Bau's mit den Linden im Land / wird auch sein Haus / schattig und groß* (Light is its destiny / though the lord be only the heart and hand / of the cultivated garden with the linden trees in the midst of the land / his house will also be / shaded and great)

<sup>132</sup> Petzet, *Heinrich Vogeler: Von Worpswede nach Moskau*, p. 30.

In the words of one of the best German writers on Vogeler and his work, “The guiding idea behind the purchase, rebuilding and extension of the Barkenhoff, the laying out of the garden, and the rounding out of the property to fourteen acres was the creation of an ‘Island of Beauty’ closed off from the external world and completely and artistically restructured internally. That ‘Island of Beauty’ was to be both the expression of the proprietor’s personality and the kind of living space appropriate to it. No excessive ornamentation or show, and a mixing of styles with an emphasis on Empire, Biedermeier, and the native local style.”<sup>133</sup> It is no wonder that the Barkenhoff house and garden were among the most frequently occurring themes of Vogeler’s painting. “My house has so much charm for me,” he declared in that same summer of 1900, “that I could spend my entire life painting it.”<sup>134</sup>

The permanent residents of this “island of beauty” in the first decade of the twentieth century were Vogeler, his wife Martha Schröder, and their three daughters – Marie-Luise, known as Mieke (born 1901), Bettina (born 1903), and Martha (born 1905). At the end of the decade they were joined by the left-wing student and poet, Alfred Bäumer, and a new chapter in the story of the Barkenhoff and the fortunes of Vogeler was opened as Bäumer became Martha’s lover.

The Barkenhoff’s visitors and guests in the late 1890s and early 1900s included some of the most prominent writers, poets, artists, musicians, and publishers of

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<sup>133</sup> Berndt Stendzig, *Worpswede Moskau: Das Werk von Heinrich Vogeler*, Exhibition Catalogue, Worpswede, 29.7.- 8.11.1989 (Worpsweder Verlag, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> Petzet. p. 63; see also fn. 119..

the fin-de-siècle: Rilke and his future wife, the sculptress Clara Westhoff; the already celebrated playwright Gerhart Hauptmann, as well as his then equally well known brother Carl, to whom “‘das liebe Worpswede’ in its isolation and its striving was...like a solid rock amid the whirlpool of so much contrived big-city art”<sup>135</sup>; the poets Richard Dehmel, René Schickele, Otto Julius Bierbaum, and Hans Bethge, author of the text Mahler set to music as “Das Lied von der Erde”; the avant-garde, subsequently more and more unambiguously rightwing publisher Eugen Diederichs, who never failed, Vogeler later recalled gratefully, to send him complimentary copies of whatever books he published that were illustrated with woodcuts or reproductions of copper engravings (Werden, 82); the brilliant stage director Max Reinhardt; the wealthy art and literature patrons – also authors in their own right -- Alfred Heymel and Rudolf Alexander Schröder.

Vogeler’s artistic style was often described as “musikalisch” and music, not surprisingly, was richly represented at the Barkenhoff. In Dresden in 1898 Vogeler had struck up a friendship with the virtuoso pianist and former violinist Egon Petri, one of the star students of the then world-renowned composer and pianist Ferruccio Busoni, and in the first decade of the twentieth century Petri was a frequent visitor to the Barkenhoff, where he played for Vogeler and his friends.<sup>136</sup> Through him, Vogeler was introduced to the master himself, receiving a

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<sup>135</sup> Letter to Otto Modersohn, 21 February 1903, quoted in Heinrich Minden, *Carl Hauptmann und das Theater* (Kastellaun: A. Henn Verlag, 1976), p. 142. See C. Hauptmann, *Leben mit Freunden*, letters, ed. W.-E. Peuckert (Berlin-Grünwald: Horen-Verlag, 1928).

<sup>136</sup> See Ferruccio Busoni, *Briefe an Henri, Katharina und Egon Petri*, ed. Martina Weindel (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel/Verlag der Heinrichshofen-Bücher, 1979). Busoni’s letters to Egon Petri are addressed to him at Worpswede in May 1902, August through October 1903, June and July 1905. Other students of Busoni (Hermann Draber, Louis Gruenberg) also visited Worpswede.

commission to adapt one of the fastidious composer's own drawings (Busoni was a talented draughtsman) for the published score of his piano Concerto, op. 39.<sup>137</sup> Later, visiting a client in Lodz, Poland, Vogeler and Martha made a special trip to Warsaw to hear Petri give a Chopin recital that aroused the Polish audience to a frenzy of applause. In his later years in the United States Petri was the teacher of Earl Wild, thus ensuring continuation of a direct line of virtuoso pianists originating with Liszt himself.

Vogeler first met Georg Kulenkampff when he was commissioned by the latter's father, a prominent Bremen lawyer, to design interior furnishings for his newly built residence in the city. Kulenkampff, destined to become one of the greatest violinists of the first half of the twentieth century (he was a teacher of Yehudi Menuhin), was still a boy of fourteen at the time and would visit the Barkenhoff with his parents. "I can never forget the impression made on me by this young person, as he took up his violin in the great hall of the house and, in his short pants, played a Beethoven sonata," Vogeler wrote many years later. "The movements of this lanky, gangling young fiddler were music itself." (Werden 63). The Jewish-American pianist and composer Louis Gruenberg, who had been brought to the United States from Eastern Europe at the age of three by his immigrant parents and had studied, like Petri, with Busoni, was yet another guest at the Barkenhoff. Along with a couple of friendly caricatures, Vogeler painted his portrait at least twice, in 1913 and again in 1920, and Gruenberg in turn sent

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<sup>137</sup> In his letters to Petri Busoni frequently sent greetings to Vogeler (*Briefe an Henri, Katharina und Egon Petri*, pp. 71, 72, 75, 107). On the illustration for the Piano Concerto, see *ibid.*, p. 325, note 17 and *Letters to his Wife*, trans. Rosamond Ley (London: Edward Arnold, 1938), p. 58, letter of 21-22 July 1902; also Della Conling, *Ferruccio Busoni: "A Musical Ishmael"* (Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, 2005), p. 91. On Busoni's interest in the design of his published scores, see H.H. Stuckenschmidt, *Ferruccio Busoni. Chronicle of a European*, trans. Sandra Morris (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970; orig. German, Zurich 1967), pp. 162-63.



Vogeler a photograph of himself, dated “May, 1921” and inscribed to his dear “Mining.” (Figs. 95-97) On his return to the United States in the early 1920s Gruenberg, now barely remembered in his adopted land, became one of the first composers to integrate jazz rhythms into “classical” music and to write an opera based on a work of modern American literature. His *The Emperor Jones* received its first performance, to critical acclaim, at the Metropolitan Opera House on January 7, 1933, with the legendary baritone Lawrence Tibbett in the title role. “The premiere of *The Emperor Jones*,” the avant-garde Canadian theater director Herman Voaden wrote in the *Toronto Globe*, “was memorable for the thrilling interpretation given to the title role by Lawrence Tibbett and for the music, the finest music written for any American opera to date.”<sup>138</sup>

Life at the Barkenhoff inspired yet another visitor – Paul Scheinflug, the now virtually forgotten conductor of the Bremen Philharmonic (from 1898 until 1910) and champion of the music of Richard Strauss -- to compose a Lieder cycle, entitled *Worpswede*, for voice, violin, English horn, and piano (1904, op. 5).<sup>139</sup> Many evenings at the Barkenhoff were devoted to Lieder recitals by Paula Becker’s sister Millie. Schubert was the favored composer at these. It is in no way surprising that the entire right-hand section of Vogeler’s 1905 celebration of the Barkenhoff and its habitués – the large, prizewinning painting entitled *Sommerabend auf dem Barkenhoff* or *Sommerabend-Konzert*, featuring the

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<sup>138</sup> *Toronto Globe*, February 4, 1933, p. 5. A student of Busoni, Gruenberg served as Caruso’s accompanist on a concert tour and, in addition to Vogeler’s caricature sketch of him, there is a charming caricature of him by the great tenor himself. Gruenberg was active in the U.S. and European musical scene in the 1920s and 30s. See on him <http://www.musicassociatesofamerica.com/madamina/1981/gruenberg.html>

<sup>139</sup> On visitors to Barkenhoff, see Petzet, p. 69.

painter Paula Modersohn-Becker, Agnes Wulf (a friend of Vogeler's wife Martha), Modersohn-Becker's closest friend, the sculptress Clara Rilke-Westhoff, the painter Otto Modersohn, and, in the center, Martha herself – is occupied by a trio of music-makers: Martha's brother Martin playing the flute, Heinrich himself (half hidden) playing the cello, and Heinrich's brother Franz playing the violin. (Fig. 94)

On Sunday evenings members of the Worpswede colony would gather, along with Vogeler's distinguished visitors, in the so-called "White Drawing Room" ("Weisser Saal") of the Barkenhoff, for concerts, poetry recitals, conversation about art and music, and dancing. These Sunday evenings were the subject of many reports and commentaries in the letters and diaries of the participants. "We sit in the music room," Rilke noted in his diary for September 4, 1900. "You know the room: white, white doors, with vases painted above them from which, on both sides, chains of roses fall gently to the ground. Old engravings, rococo style garden scenes, elegant portraits, J.J. Rousseau's tomb. Empire style chairs, an armchair, just right for the blond-haired sister. Richard Strauss, Robert Franz, Schubert are played...Later, since I have been asked, I read a few pieces from my work. [...] Later still, Dr. Hauptmann [i.e. Carl Hauptmann] read. He read proverbs, aphorisms, and some verse. [...] Around midnight (the candles on the piano had burned quite low) the conversation turned into a rapid dialogue between Hauptmann and me. I had shown some pictures and icons..."<sup>140</sup>

Rilke's misgivings about the closed and contrived world created by Vogeler, already detectable in his essay on the artist and in his early diary entries, along,

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<sup>140</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit*, ed. Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1973), pp. 198-200 (4.IX.1900).

perhaps, with Vogeler's disapproval of some aspects of the poet's behavior, led ultimately to a cooling of the friendship of the two men (though Rilke later denied it) and to the poet's increasingly severe judgment of Vogeler's art.<sup>141</sup> In the last days of 1911, Vogeler, already running somewhat low on new contracts, contacted Rilke's publisher and friend, Anton Kippenberg, about taking up a project that he and Rilke had discussed during the poet's years of close association with Worpswede, namely a collection of Rilke's poems, a *Marien-Leben*, to be illustrated by Vogeler, on the subject of the Mother of Christ. (Vogeler had already illustrated one of the poems he thought of including in the proposed book -- "Die heiligen drei Könige" -- when it was first published in Volume 1 of the newly launched review "Die Insel" in 1900.) Kippenberg, who had taken over as Director of the Insel-Verlag in 1905, aware perhaps of a falling-off in the popularity of Vogeler's work, was not enthusiastic, and sought Rilke's opinion.

Rilke was not enthusiastic either. It was a "very old project," he wrote back to Kippenberg, one that he had, "to be frank, thought of as having been long since abandoned, all the more so as for years now I have lost my feeling for [Vogeler's] artworks." Still, he wrote, as that fact had not destroyed the basis on which his friendship with Vogeler rested, and since the latter had come forward with the proposal, he felt he had to give it serious consideration. He went on to discuss the poems that Vogeler might have had in mind for the planned volume. He asked Kippenberg to forward to him the two ("Rast auf der Flucht" and "Verkündigung") that Vogeler had found in manuscript among his papers and had included with his

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<sup>141</sup> Rilke's absence from the *Sommerabend* painting has often been commented on and is usually interpreted to mean that a cooling-off of the friendship of the poet and the artist had already begun.

proposal, since he, Rilke, had only the vaguest recollection of them. (Fig. 98) But Vogeler himself should indicate which poems he was thinking of when he suggested a collection of ten. "They must be poems that were published long ago. Probably he has in mind 'Verkündigung' and 'Die heiligen drei Könige' from the *Buch der Bilder*," since they are similar in tone and style to the two poems he found in his papers. On the other hand, the poems on the subject of Mary in the volumes *Mädchenlieder* and *Stundenbuch* would not work. So he himself -- Rilke -- can see only four poems for the proposed volume, i.e. the two sent by Vogeler and the two from the *Buch der Bilder*, and these four hardly make up the volume on a "Life of Mary" that had originally been planned. Such a volume would also have to include a Nativity, a Visitation, a Mary with Child, a Pietà, and a Death and Assumption -- and Vogeler could not have found any poems by Rilke on those themes. Rilke would perhaps write to Vogeler himself, but suggested that Kippenberg reply right away to the effect that while Rilke was interested in the proposal, he wanted to know which poems Vogeler had in mind.

Rilke went on to explain that his reservations also concerned the illustrations. "Perhaps Vogeler's art was never more than it is now," he wrote. "But we always responded to it on the tacit assumption that it would become something more. Because of that, it now strikes us, in its stagnation, as not up to scratch. Between ourselves, I too think it is perfectly possible that his planned *Marienleben* [. . .] will turn out to be something not good enough." If that proves to be the case, Kippenberg should diplomatically suggest that Vogeler work more on his

illustrations or substitute others; he on his side will then add his voice to Kippenberg's.<sup>142</sup>

The *Marien-Leben* did come out at the end of the same year as Rilke's reply to Kippenberg (1912) – but without Vogeler's projected illustrations. No doubt to compensate for this omission, Rilke included a generous tribute to Vogeler on the title page: "With thanks to Heinrich Vogeler for his early and renewed instigation of these poems."<sup>143</sup> Rilke's and Kippenberg's unwillingness to make use of the illustrations was symptomatic, however.<sup>144</sup> Vogeler's star, along with that of *Jugendstil* in general, was on the wane. In the years just prior to the outbreak of WWI, his art does show some signs of the striking use of color, dynamic formal innovations, and bold painterly techniques adopted, partly in response to their acquaintance with the work of Edvard Munch, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, André Derain and Robert Delaunay, by the first generation of German Expressionists. Most of these, such as the painters of the *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter* schools -- Heckel, Kirchner, Macke, Marc -- were no more than a decade or so younger than Vogeler. (Kandinsky was actually half a decade older, Christian Rohlfs older still.) But their work, which had come to occupy the centre of the artistic scene in Berlin, Munich, and Dresden, is vastly different from his in style and feeling and by 1908 or 1909 Vogeler could no longer be seen as standing in the forefront of the art of his day. (Figs. 99-104) There is no development of

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<sup>142</sup> Rilke to Anton Kippenberg, Duino, Dreikönigstag [Epiphany -- January 6], 1912, in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe an seinen Verleger, 190- bis 1926* (Paderborn: Salzwasser; reprint of 1941 Insel-Verlag ed.), pp. 124-25. On contemporary expectations of further development in Vogeler's artwork, see

<sup>143</sup> "Heinrich Vogeler dankbar für alten und neuen Anlass zu diesen Versen."

<sup>144</sup> Even today, the *Marien-Leben* is "by common consent not one of Rilke's major works, a view evidently shared by Rilke himself." (Elizabeth Boa, "Rilke's 'Marien-Leben'," *The Modern Language Review*, 79, [1984], pp. 846-858, on p. 846)

Vogeler's art comparable to that of Christian Rohlf's or August Macke, for instance, between the earlier and later years of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Figs. 105-110) Tellingly, he was dropped from the 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1920) of Hermann Struck's popular *Die Kunst des Radierens* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1909).<sup>145</sup>

In addition, there were few new commissions for book illustrations. Vogeler's most recent contract with the Insel-Verlag had been in 1908 and a later proposal, made to the firm on July 16, 1913, to publish a little volume of poems by the writer Hertha Koenig with seven illustrations by him – the kind of work he had been much sought after to produce in the first decade of the century -- was promptly turned down the very next day, even though Vogeler had noted that his own fee for the illustrations would be paid by the author.<sup>146</sup>

On top of these setbacks, the idyllic marriage to Martha was in trouble. Vogeler himself describes how she responded, on the eve of the First World War, with the German armies already invading Belgium, to his question "What will happen now?" "'I know one thing,' came harshly from her lips, 'whatever happens, I will never live with you again. Never, never. You have no time for life; you are a martyr to your art and you feel good in that role.'" (*Werden*, p. 158) Vogeler must have felt desperate for in 1914, the dandy and aesthete volunteered to fight in the Kaiser's armies. He was posted to the Eastern front, serving for a time under

<sup>145</sup> Inka Bertz, "Hermann Strucks Erfolgsbuch *Die Kunst des Radierens* und sein Einfluss auf die Künstler im Paul Cassier Verlag," in Rachel E. Feilchenfeldt and Thomas Raff, *Ein Fest der Künste, Paul Cassirer -- Der Kunständler als Verleger*, p. 130.

<sup>146</sup> See Theo Neteler, ed., Hertha Koenig, *Neue Gedichte, mit Zeichnungen von Heinrich Vogeler. Rekonstruktion eines Buchprojektes von 1913* (Bielefeld: Pendragon Verlag, 2007), Introduction. To add insult to injury, Koenig's *Sonette*, containing some of the poems in the volume proposed by Vogeler, did appear, without any illustrations by him, with the Insel-Verlag in 1917, thanks in part to strong support for the poems from Rilke.

Harry Graf Kessler. When he had an opportunity, he continued to exercise his artistic skills, but no longer in designing worlds of fantasy or witty caricatures -- nor, however, for the most part, in the manner of the now dominant generation of Expressionist artists.<sup>147</sup> Rather in a straightforward realistic, style documenting the scenes around him on the Eastern front. (Figs. 111-113)

Finally, in January 1918, as peace negotiations between the Central Powers and the new Soviet regime in Russia were under way, with the Germans imposing harsh conditions, including the sacrifice by Russia of Poland, the Baltic provinces and the Ukraine, the break came for the former aesthete traumatized by the horrors of the war. Vogeler later evoked that time in his memoir. "It can't go on like this. Life no longer has any meaning. There has to be a turning away from the past. The way things are now, there can be no building up of anything, no prospect of a better future." (*Werden*, p. 203) The sometime member of the Worpswede artists' association gave expression to his passionate anti-war and anti-establishment feelings in a letter mailed to the Kaiser and to Ludendorff, the Quarter-Master General and effective co-Commander-in-Chief with Hindenberg of the Kaiser's armies. The letter was duplicated on a hectographic copier and illegally distributed in the last months of the war as a "Letter to the Kaiser from a non-commissioned officer." It took the form of a fable in which God appears on the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin on December 24, 1917 as a wretched old man distributing leaflets that call for peace on earth, and evoking the Ten Commandments; he is arrested by the police and executed as a traitor. To the

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<sup>147</sup> Though the most striking of these, in Otto Dix's collection entitled *Der Krieg*, were created after the war, in 1923-24, Dix also produced some horrifying images during the War.

surprise of the bloodthirsty generals who promise peace and order but aim to do so only by bringing the people to their knees at sword point, the old man, whom everyone believed dead, reappears. He briefly thinks he has been recognized, and points again to the Ten Commandments. In fact, however, the generals and rulers invoke God's name in their telegrams, dispatches, and proclamations only to give these an air of dignity and legitimacy; they do not recognize the figure pointing to the Commandments. The letter concluded with an appeal to the Kaiser to become a prince of peace and place himself in the service of truth and humanity instead of violence, lies, and illusions.<sup>148</sup> For his pains, Vogeler was discharged from the army and interned, as a "neuropath," in an insane asylum, a move that allowed the authorities to avoid the publicity and potential embarrassment of a court-martial. With the War finally coming to a close amid social turmoil in Germany, the little text was printed by the Bremen revolutionaries of November 1918 as a flyer with the title "Das Märchen vom lieben Gott: Brief eines Unteroffiziers an den Kaiser im Januar 1918, als Protest gegen den Frieden von Brest-Litowsk" ("The Tale of the Good Lord: A Letter from a Non-commissioned Officer to the Kaiser in January 1918, in Protest against the Peace of Brest-Litovsk" [Bremen: Druck Arbeiterpolitik, 1919]).<sup>149</sup>

For his part, Vogeler was no sooner released from the asylum than he joined the anarcho-socialist revolutionaries of the short-lived Bremen *Räterepublik* (Soviet

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<sup>148</sup> See Appendix for an English translation of the text of the letter.

<sup>149</sup> See Vogeler's account and transcription of the letter in *Werden*, pp. 203-204. See also S. D. Gallwitz, *Dreißig Jahre Woppswede: Künstler, Geist, Werden* (Bremen: Angelsachsen Verlag, 1922), pp. 33-34.



Republic), turned his beautiful Barkenhoff into a refuge for returning or deserting soldiers, a commune, and a progressive school for the children of persecuted or murdered socialists, before finally handing it over, in 1924, to the *Rote Hilfe*, a Communist aid society. In 1925, he joined the KPD, the German Communist Party, despite misgivings caused by his pacifism, and the following year obtained a divorce from Martha, and married Sonja Marchlewska, the daughter of an associate of Lenin. Though he was expelled from the KPD in 1929 for having advocated collaboration with the SPD, the German Socialist Party, he made frequent trips to Moscow from 1923 on, as a visiting art teacher, before finally, in 1931, emigrating definitively to the U.S.S.R. where he died in tragic circumstances in 1942, having been removed, along with many other native Germans resident in Moscow, as the German armies approached the Soviet capital, to remote Kazakhstan.<sup>150</sup>

Despite a considerable degree of continuity in his handsome portrait painting into which he was able to incorporate, without overwhelming it, some of the bolder color and design features of the neo-impressionists (Figs. 114-131), much of Vogeler's art also underwent a drastic transformation. The idyllic, often humorous, fairy-tale style of his heyday with its reminiscences of Morris and Beardsley, was abandoned in the face of wartime horror and suffering. By 1915-1916 Vogeler was drawing close to Expressionism (Figs. 132-140). But his increasing commitment to the positive vision of a new Communist society led him to abandon Expressionism in turn in favor of an earnest attempt, now widely

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<sup>150</sup> See footnote 5 above.

deemed a failure,<sup>151</sup> to forge a new style appropriate to a new age. His so-called *Komplexbilder* were large poster-like assemblages of distinct, ideologically related scenes in designs that may have been partly influenced by Russian constructivism (Malevich, Popova, Stepanova), Soviet poster art, the murals of Diego Rivera (who had visited him in his Barkenhoff commune in the 1920s), and contemporary avant-garde German artists, such as George Grosz (notably “Deutschland: ein Wintermärchen” of 1918) and Hannah Höch (“Cut with the Kitchen Knife” of 1919-20), and that were intended to address, speak for, and celebrate the peasants and workers of the new society being built around him. (Figs. 141-146)

He also did not disdain to place his art at the service of the Soviet Union in the form of straightforward records of citizens at work and in the form of anti-Nazi propaganda pamphlets and cartoons. (Figs. 147-153) But it would probably be true enough to say that, in contrast to his *Jugendstil* work, he never found his own distinctive manner in the new forms. What remained of Worpswede and the Barkenhoff was the Utopianism that, in a different time and in a different mode, had once inspired him there too.

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<sup>151</sup> See especially the very negative judgment of Petzet, op. cit., pp. 156-58



Fig. 1. The Artist's Children. 1914. Yale University Art Gallery



Fig. 2 (left).  
*Dir*, title-  
page. 1899.



Fig. 3. Page from *Dir*. 1899.

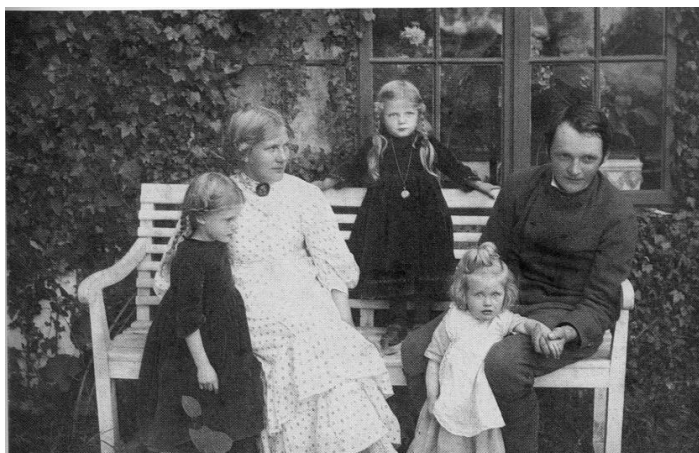


Fig. 4. Heinrich Vogeler with Martha and their three daughters, Worpswede. 1907.



Fig. 5. Hans Am Ende, Barque on the river Hamme.



Fig. 6. Otto Modersohn, Die alte Dreebeen. 1902.





Fig. 7. Fritz Mackensen. Moorfrau. c. 1910



Fig. 8. Otto Modersohn. Moormädchen neben einem Birkenstamm. 1904.



Fig. 9. Fritz Mackensen, Gottesdienst im Freien. 1895.



Fig. 10. James Guthrie, A Highland Funeral. 1882



Fig. 11. Otto Modersohn. Sturm im Teufelsmoor. 1896.

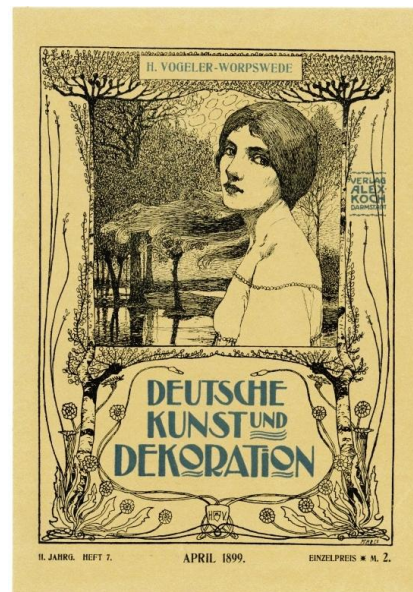


Fig. 12 (left).  
*Deutsche  
Kunst und  
Dekoration*,  
April 1899.



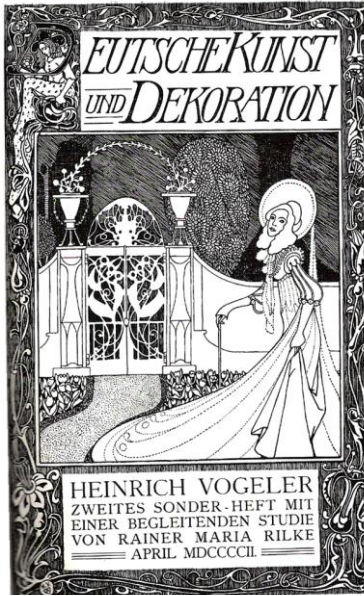


Fig. 13. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, Special number, April 1902.



Fig. 14. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. V, no. 7, April 1902.



Fig. 15. *Dekorative Kunst*, XIII, Feb. 1905.

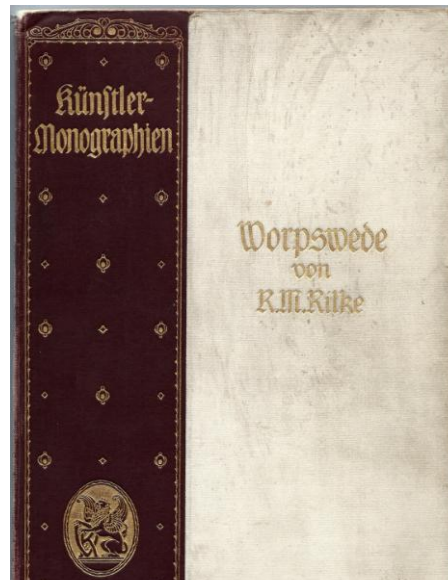


Fig. 16. Rilke's 1903 Worpswede book, the final chapter devoted to Vogeler.



Fig. 17. Wilhelm Morgner, "Feldweg" (left), 1912.

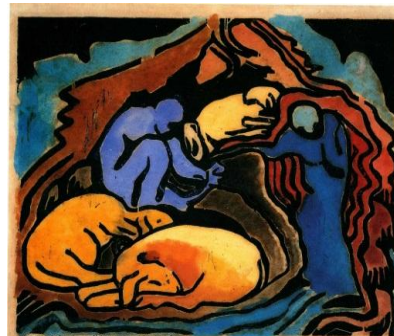


Fig. 18. Wilhelm Morgner, "Holzarbeiter Familie" (right), 1912.





Fig. 19. Heukähne auf der Hamme. c. 1895.



Fig. 20. Abendsonne im Moor. c. 1898.

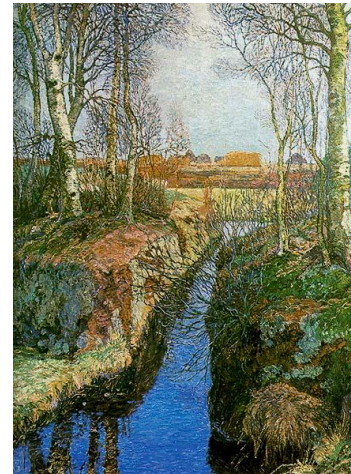


Fig. 21. Moorgraben. 1913.



Fig. 22. Minnetraum. 1894.



Fig. 23. Die Schlangenbraut. 1894.

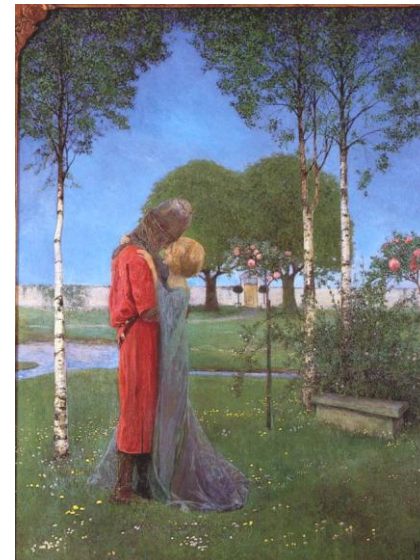


Fig. 24. Heimkehr. 1898.



Fig. 25 (left). Am Heiderand. 1900.

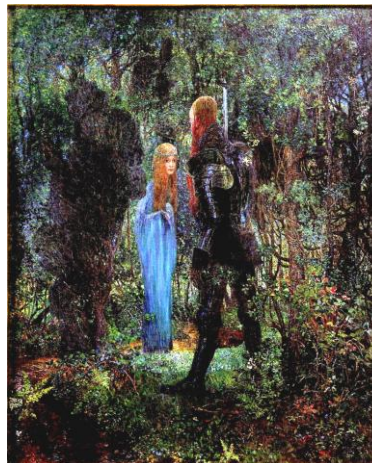


Fig. 26 (right). Melusinen-Märchen. 1901



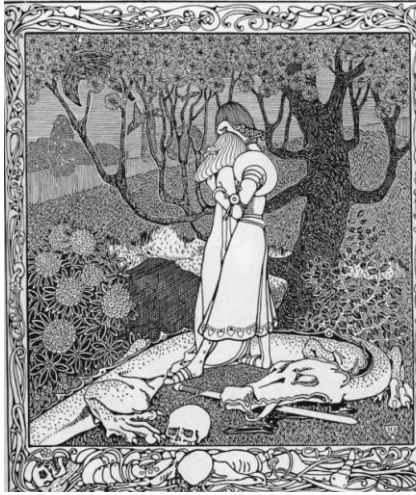


Fig. 27. Der Drachentöter. 1902.



Fig. 28. Melusine. 1913.



Fig. 29. Frühling. 1897.



Fig. 30. Bookplate. 1905.



Fig. 31. Sehnsucht. 1908.

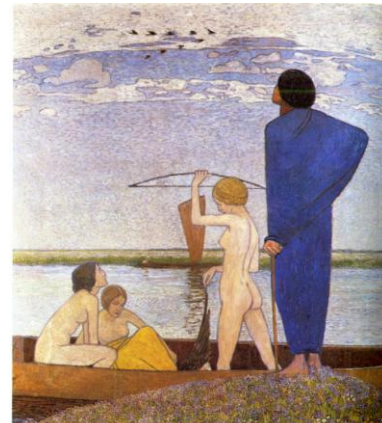


Fig. 32. Träume. 1911.



Fig. 33. Träume, 1912

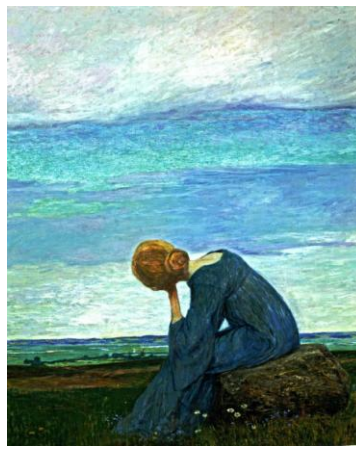


Fig. 34. Sehnsucht. 1900.

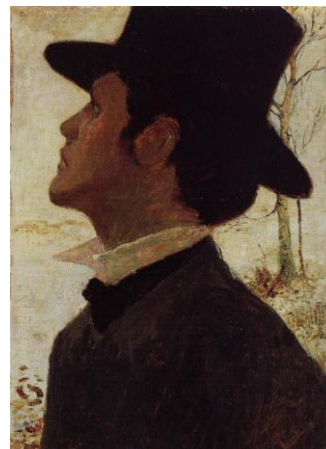


Fig. 35. Self-portrait. c. 1900.





Fig. 36. Photographic Portrait of Heinrich Vogeler, 1900.

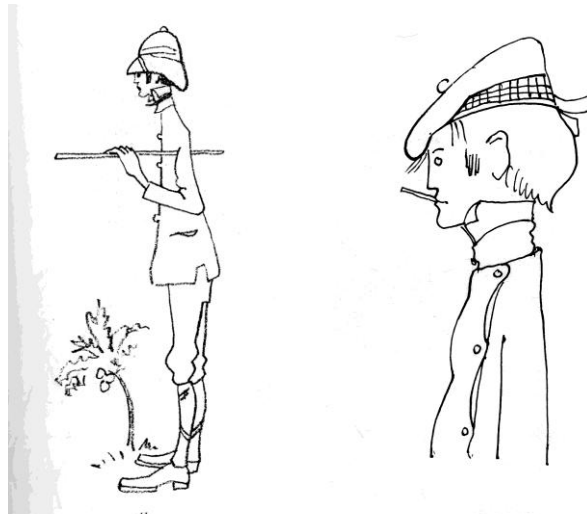


Fig. 37. Self-portrait as traveller in Ceylon. 1906.

Fig. 38. Self-portrait with Scottish cap. 1909.



Fig. 39. Die Wunderblume. 1902.



*Drache. Bernhard Hoetger in Färbung gezeichnet von Heinrich Vogeler Worpswede. 1912.*

Fig. 40. Drache. 1912.





Fig. 41 (above left). Leda.



Fig. 42 (above right), Europa.



Fig. 43 (right). Sonnenaufgang.

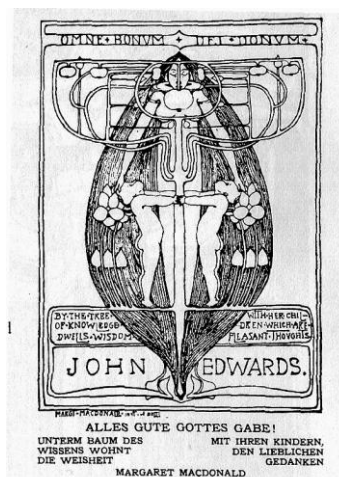


Fig. 44. Frances Macdonald. Bookplate. 1896.



Fig. 45. William Brown Macdougall. "Hagen and the Mermaids," from Margaret Armour, *The Fall of the Nibelungs*, p.170. 1897



Fig. 46. Jessie King in William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and other poems*, 1904.



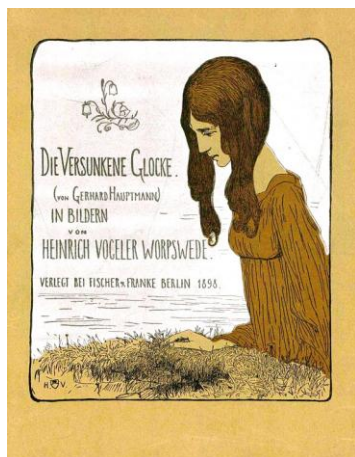


Fig. 47. Gerhard Hauptmann, *Die Versunkene Glocke*, 1898.



Fig. 48. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Kaiser und die Hexe*. Title page. 1900

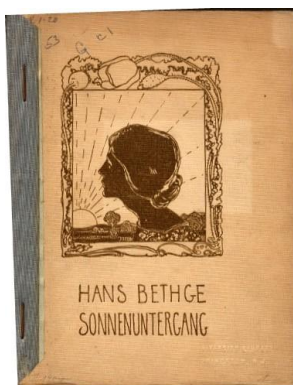


Fig. 49. Hans Bethge, *Sonnenuntergang*. 1900.

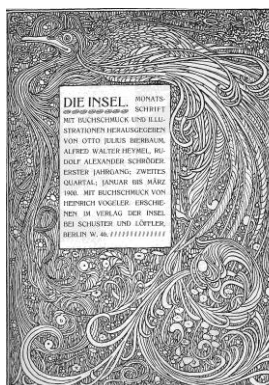


Fig. 50. *Die Insel*. Inside title page. 1900.

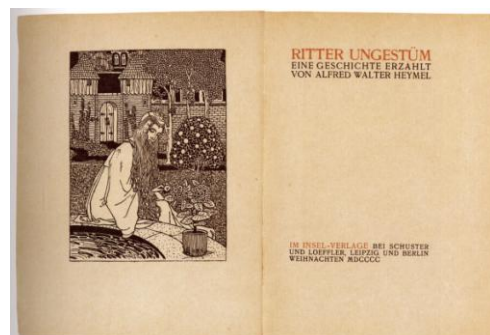


Fig. 51. Alfred Walter Heymel, *Ritter Ungestüm*. 1900

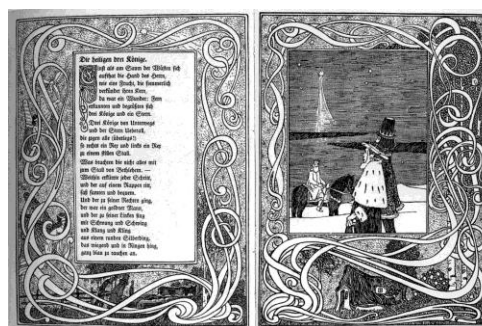


Fig. 52(above). R.M. Rilke, "Die Heiligen Drei Könige" in *Die Insel*, Jan-March, 1900.

Fig. 53 (right). Hugo Salus, *Ehefrühling*, 1900.p. 53 (reduced).

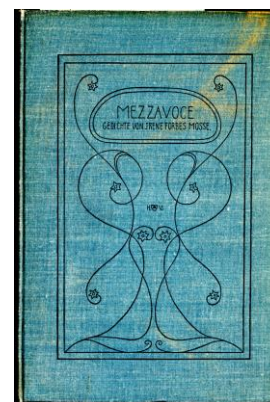


Fig. 54. Irene Forbes-Mosse, *Mezzavoce*. 1901. Cover.





Fi. 55. Forbes-Mosse, *Mezzavoce*, 2<sup>nd</sup> title-page. 1901.



Fig. 56. Ricarda Huch, *Aus der Triumphgasse*. 1901 [1905].



Fig. 57. Brentano & Tieck, *Romantische Märchen*. 1902.

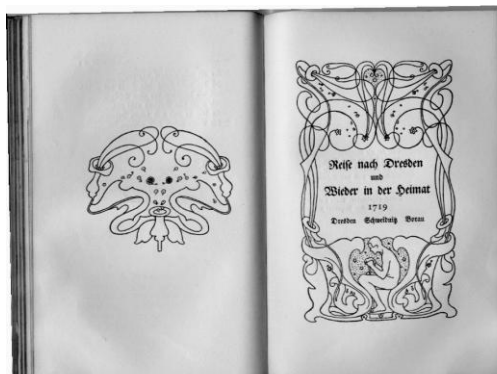


Fig. 58. *Strophen Christian Günther's*. 1902, pp. 72-73.

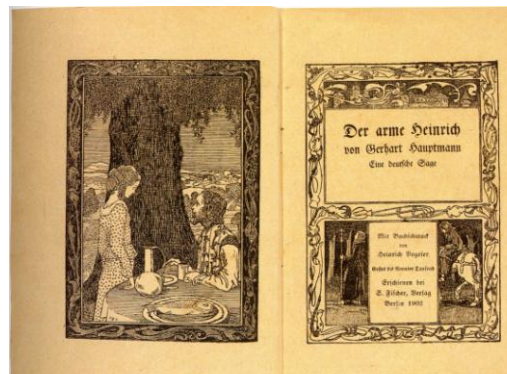


Fig. 59. Gerhard Hauptmann, *Der arme Heinrich*. 1902.

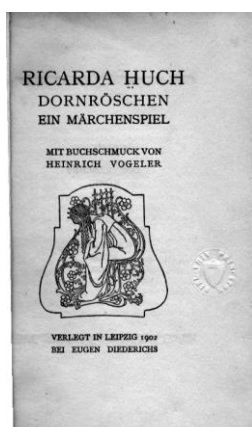


Fig. 60. Ricarda Huch, *Dornröschen*. 1922.

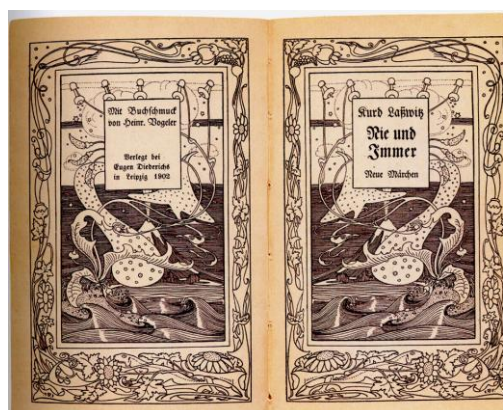


Fig. 61. Kurt Lasswitz, *Nie und Nimmer*. 1902

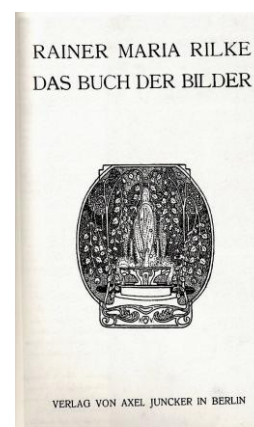


Fig. 62. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Das Buch der Bilder*. 1902.





Fig. 63. Ricarda Huch, *Vita somnium brevis*. 1903.

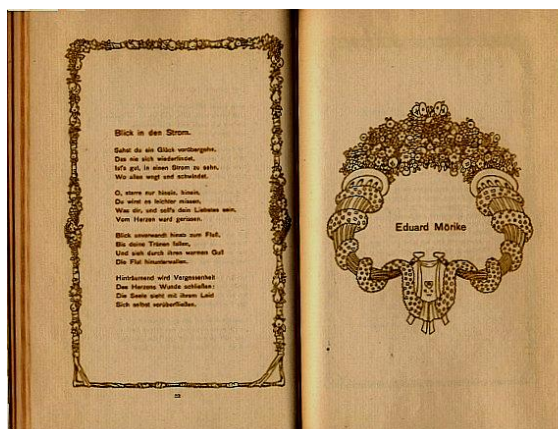


Fig. 64. Gustav Falk, *Das Büchlein Immergrün. Eine Auswahl deutscher Lyrik für junge Mädchen*. 1905

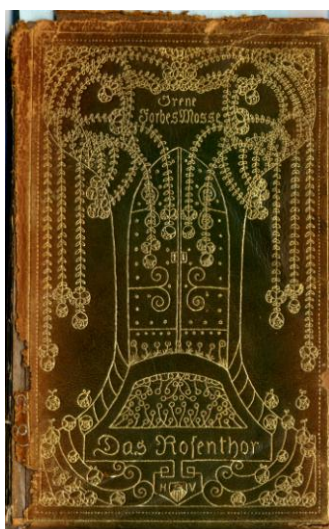


Fig. 65. Forbes-Mosse, *Das Rosenthor*. 1905. Cover

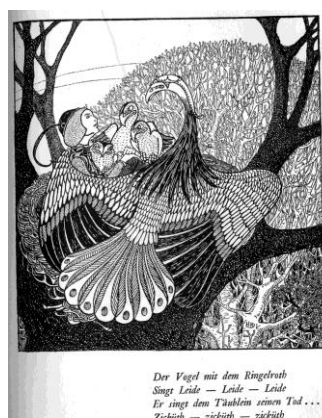


Fig. 66. Forbes-Mosse, *Peregrina*. 1905. P. 61.



Fig. 67. Forbes-Mosse. *Peregrinas Sommerabende*. 1905

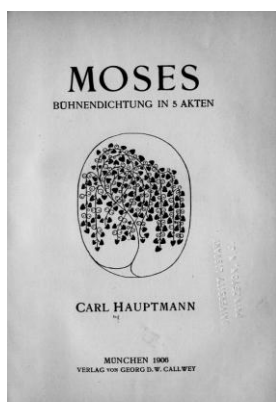


Fig. 68. Carl Hauptmann, *Moses*. 1906.

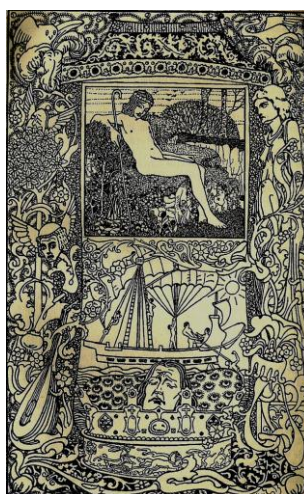


Fig. 69. Oscar Wilde, *Granatapfelhaus*. In *Insel-Almanach*. 1906, p.31.

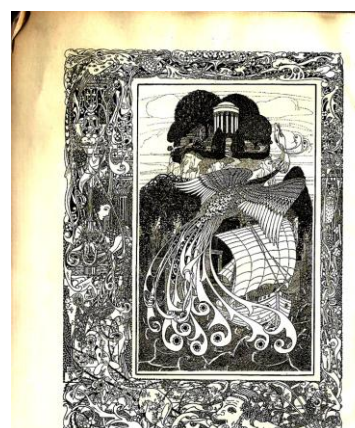


Fig. 70. *Insel-Almanach auf das Jahr 1906*. Inside left title-page.





Fig. 71. Clemens Brentano's *Frühlingskranz*. 1907. Title-page.

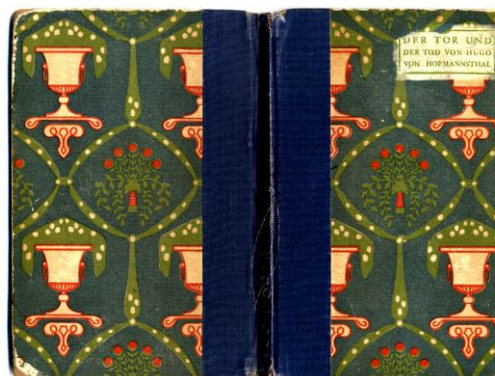


Fig. 72. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Tor und der Tod*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Insel-Verlag. 1909. Covers.



Fig. 73. Oscar Wilde, *Erzählungen und Märchen*. 1910. Illustration.

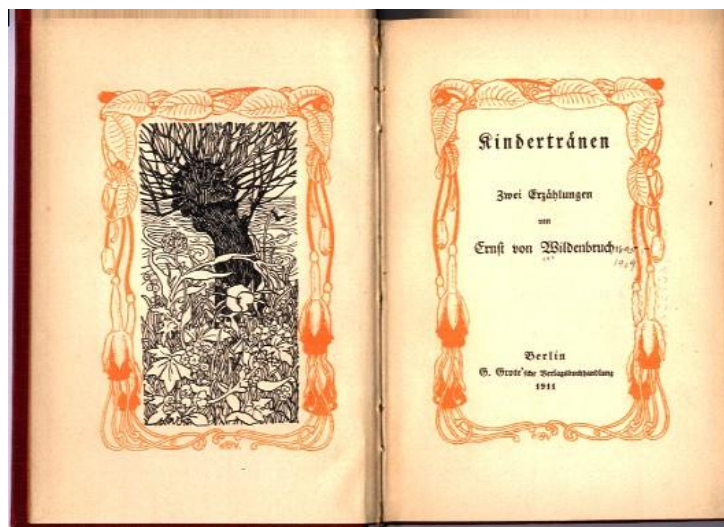


Fig. 74. Ernst von Wildenbruch, *Kindertränen*. 1911.

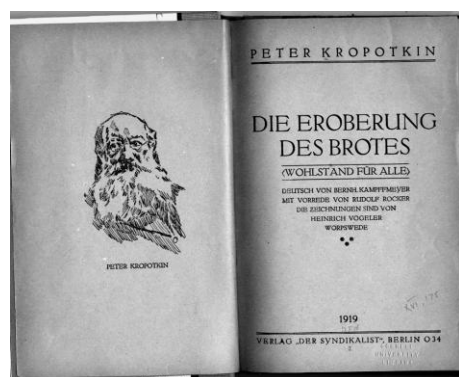


Fig. 75. Pyotr Kropotkin, *Die Eroberung des Brotes*. 1919.

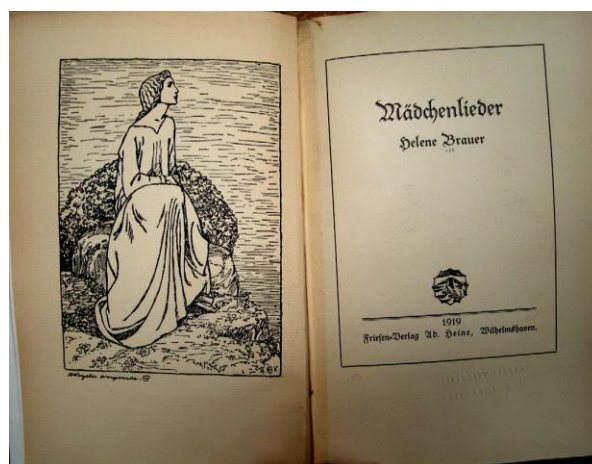


Fig. 76. Helen Brauer, *Mädchenlieder*. 1919.





Fig. 77. Güldenammer, Bremen Town Hall.  
*Dekorative Kunst*, XIV, May 1906, p. 339



Fig. 78. Worpsswede Railway Station, Summer  
Waiting Room, 1910..



Fig. 79. Otto Modersohn, *Wolkenberge*, 1890.



Fig. 80. *Die sieben Schwäne*. 1898

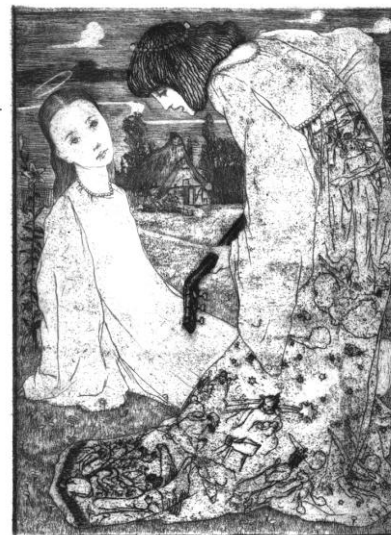
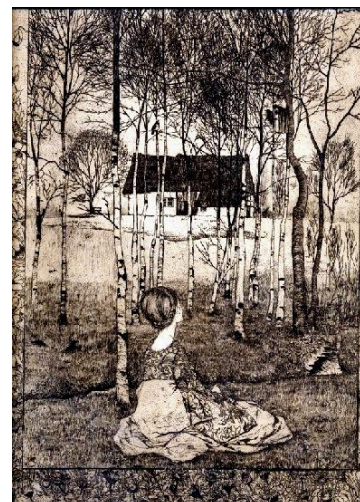


Fig. 81. *Verkündigung*. 1895.

Fig. 82 (left).  
*Liebe*. 1896.



Fig. 83 (right).  
*Frühling*. 1896





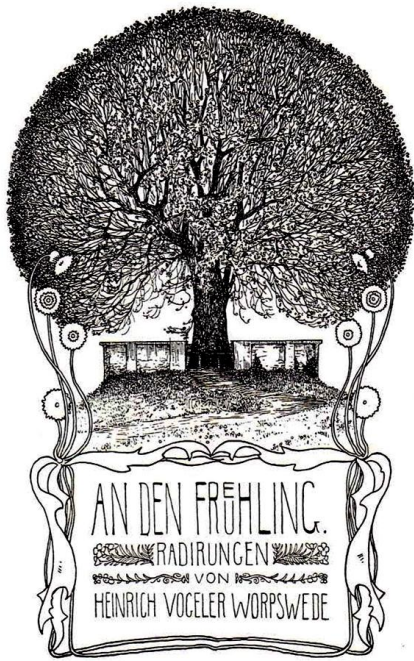


Fig. 84. *An den Frühling*, title page. 1899.



Fig. 85. *An den Frühling*, "Die Froschbraut."

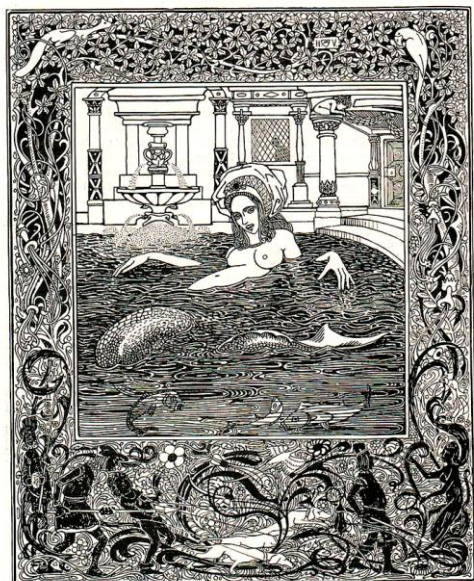


Fig. 86. *An den Frühling*, "Um Mittag" (Barkenhoff)



Fig. 87. *An den Frühling*, "Die Lerche"

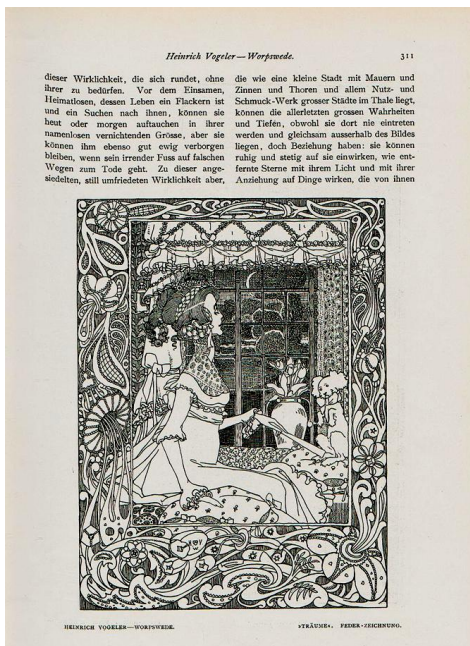




HEINRICH VOGELER.

»MELUSINEN-MÄRCHEN«. FEDER-GRÖßUNG.

Fig. 88. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, special H. Vogeler Issue, April 1902, p. 306. . Melusine.



HEINRICH VOGELER—WORTWENDE.

»WORTWENDE«. FEDER-GRÖßUNG.

Fig. 89. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, special H. Vogeler issue, April 1902, p. 311.



Fig. 90 (upper). *Frühling*. (Martha on the Barkenhoff island), 1913.



Fig. 91 (lower). *Sonnige Insel*. 1914.

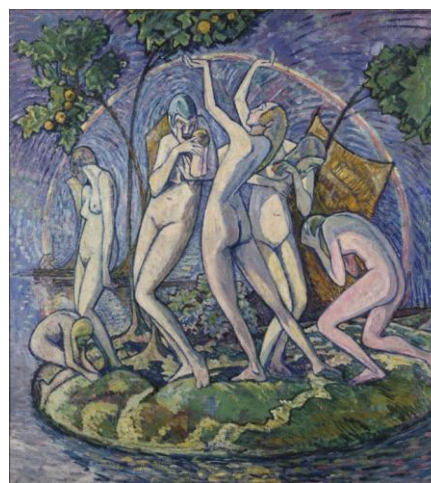


Fig. 92. *Island of Peace*, 1918-19.



Fig. 93. (left) *Island at the Barkenhoff*. 1923.



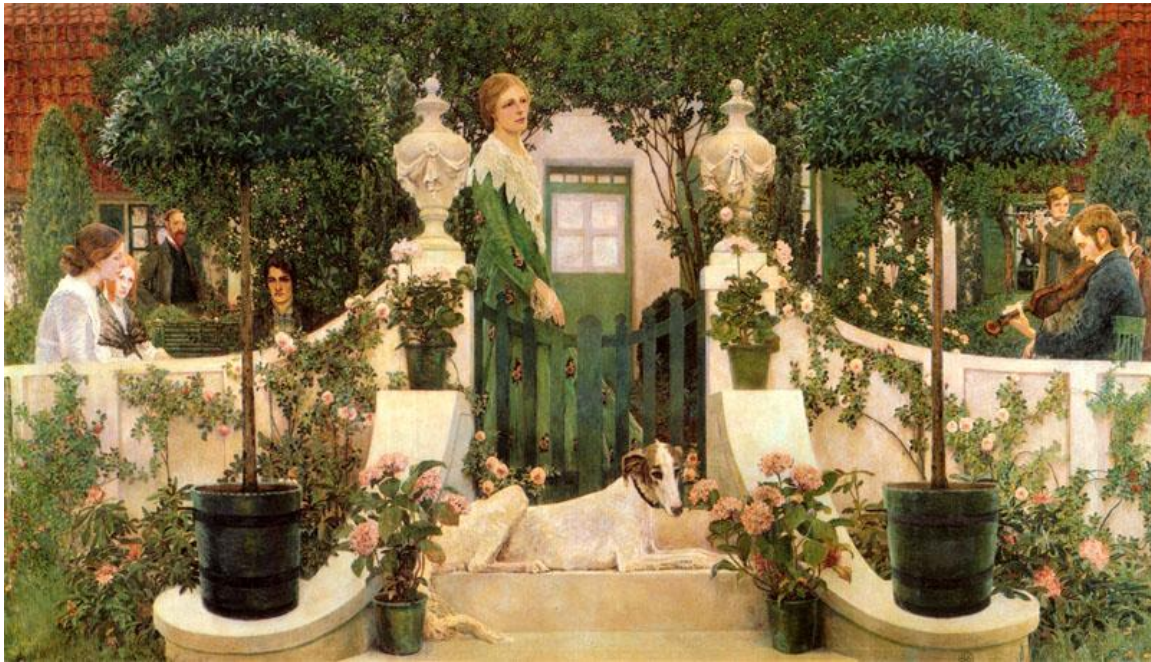


Fig. 94. Sommerabend. 1905.

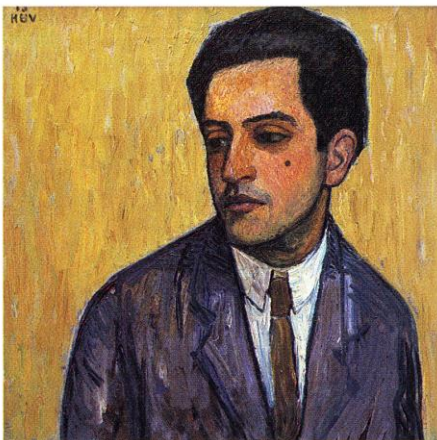


Fig. 95. Portrait of American pianist and composer L. T. Gruenberg. 1913.

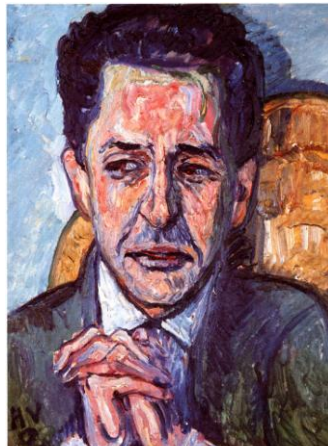


Fig. 96. Portrait of L.T. Gruenberg. 1920.



Fig. 97. Photo of Gruenberg, inscribed "To Mining." 1921.



Fig. 98 (right). Sketches for proposed *Marienleben* by Rilke. 1912.







Fig. 99. Vogeler, "Frühling." 1909



Fig. 100. Vassilii Kandinsky, "Romantische Landschaft." 1909.



Above left. Fig. 101. Vogeler, "Melusine." 1910.



Above right. Fig. 102. Franz Marc, "Katze unterm Baum." 1910.

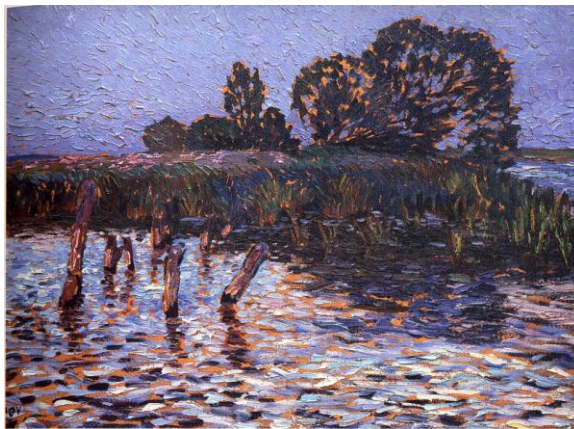


Fig. 103. Vogeler, "An der Hamme." 1911.



Fig. 104. Gabriele Münter, "Reiflandschaft." 1911.



Figs. 105 (left).  
Christian Rohlf, "Der wilde Graben neben der Chaussee." 1888.

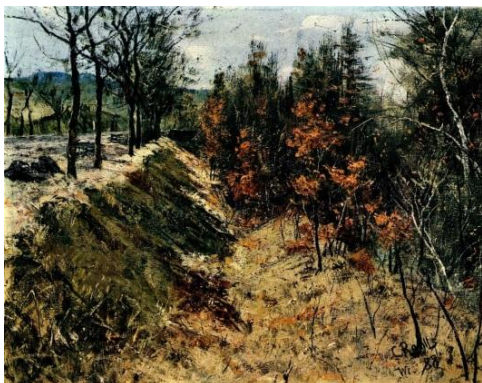


Fig. 106 (right).  
Christian Rohlf.  
"Der blaue Berg." 1912.



Fig 107 (left)  
Franz Marc.  
"Indersdorf ." 1904.



Fig. 108 (right).  
Franz Marc,  
"Das arme Land Tirol." 1913.



Fig. 109 (left).  
August Macke,  
"Angler am Rhein." 1907.



Fig. 110 (right).  
August Macke,  
"Paar im Wald." 1912.



Fig. 111 (left). Willy Jaeckel, "Sterbender Soldat im Schützengraben." 1915



Fig. 112 (center).  
Vogeler. "Meine Quartiersleute in Dolina," 1916.



Fig. 113 (right).  
Vogeler, "Juden-  
gräber als russische  
Schutzstellungen  
ausgehoben in  
Luck." 1916





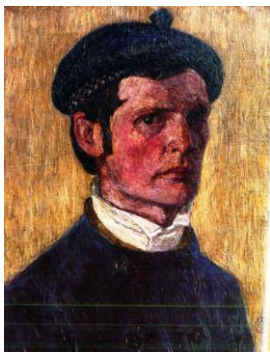


Fig. 114. Self-portrait with Scottish bonnet.. 1909.



Fig. 115. Martha Schröder. 1910.

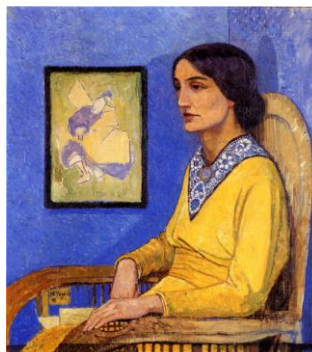


Fig. 116. Asta Lange, 1911.



Fig. 117. The artist's mother. 1912.

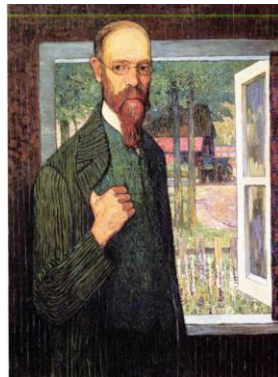


Fig. 118. Otto Modersohn. 1912.

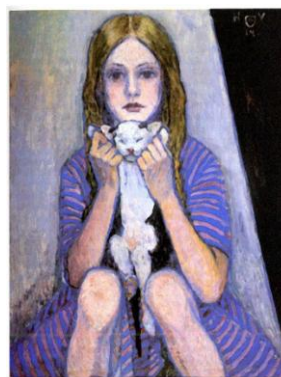


Fig. 119. Child with Cat (Daughter Martha). 1914.



Fig. 120. "Die Kranke." 1916.



Fig. 121. Taka-Taka, the dancer, 1918.

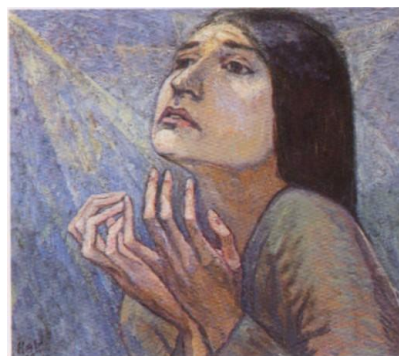


Fig. 122. Charlotte Bara, the dancer. 1918.



Fig. 123. Ilse Hahn-Störmer. 1918.



Fig. 124. Die Rote Marie. 1919.



Fig. 125. Die Rote Marie. 1923.





Fig. 126. Study for Hamburg Dockworker. 1927

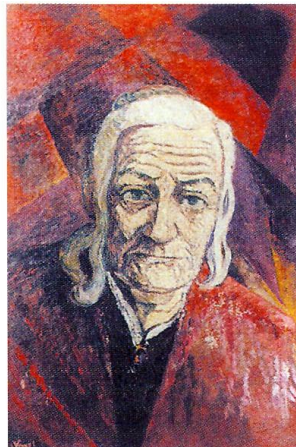


Fig. 127. Clara Zetkin, 1933.



Fig. 128. Nicolai Ostrovski. 1936.

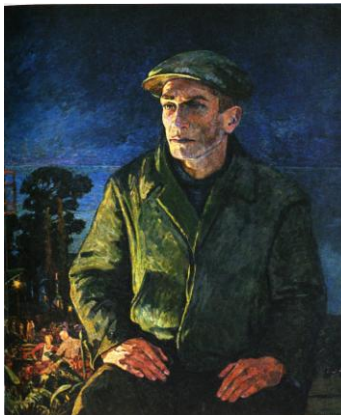


Fig. 129. German Stakhanovite worker at Soviet health resort in Sochi. 1936.



Fig. 130. Lotte Loebinger, German-Jewish emigre actress. Moscow. 1938.

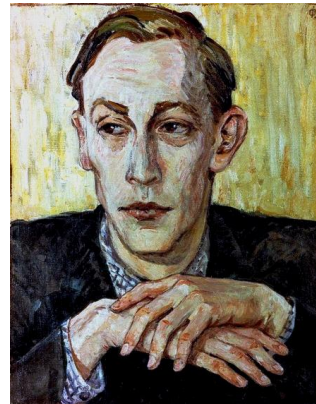


Fig. 131. Heinrich Greif, emigre German actor. Moscow. 1938

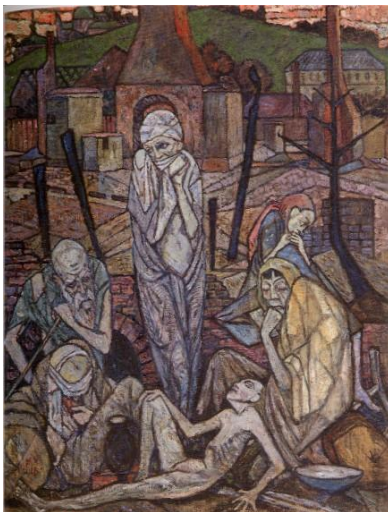


Fig. 132. Das Elend des Kriegs. 1916.



Fig. 133. Die Sieben Schalen des Zorns. 1918.

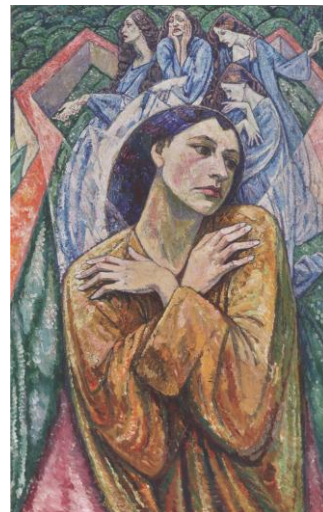


Fig. 134. Die Leiden der Frau im Krieg. 1919.





Fig. 135. Die Kriegsfurie. 1919.

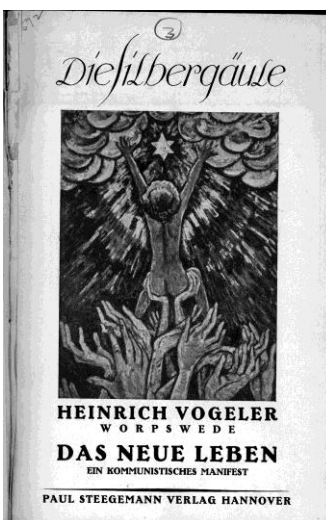


Fig. 136. Pamphlet: "Das neue Leben." 1919.

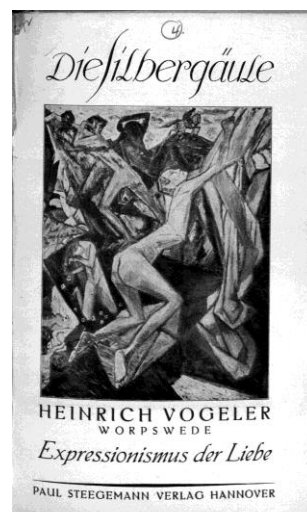


Fig. 137. Pamphlet: "Expressionismus der Liebe." 1919.

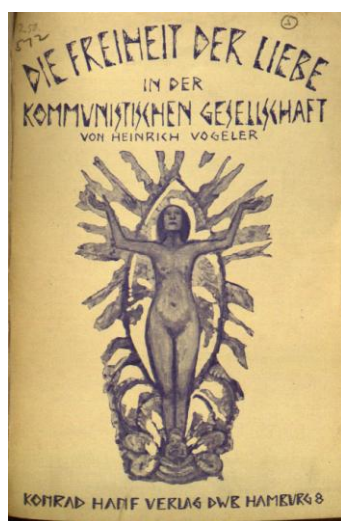


Fig. 138. Pamphlet: "Die Freiheit der Liebe in der kommunistischen Gesellschaft." 1919.



Fig. 139. Eine Vision. Buddha. 1922.



Fig. 140. Geburt des neuen Menschen. 1923.

Fig. 141 (left).  
Internationale Rote Hilfe.  
1924.

Fig. 142 (right).  
Kulturarbeit der  
Studenten im Sommer,  
1924.







Fig. 143. Karelien und Murmansk. 1926.



Fig. 144. Baku. 1927.



Fig. 145. Zentralasien. 1927.

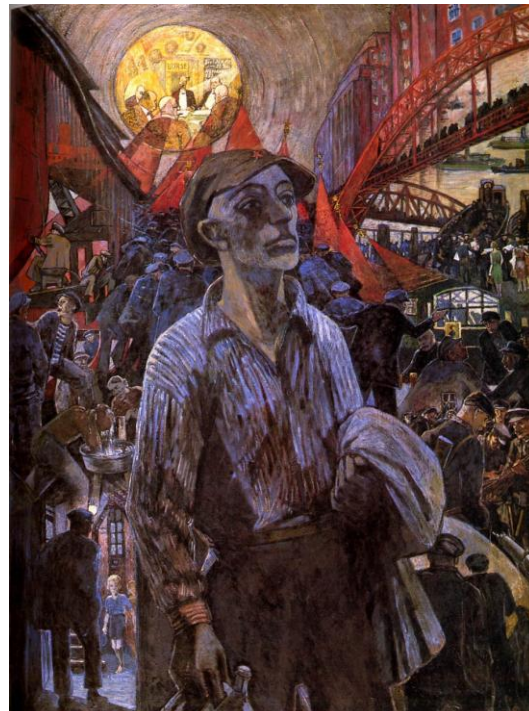


Fig. 146. Hamburger Werfarbeiter. 1928.



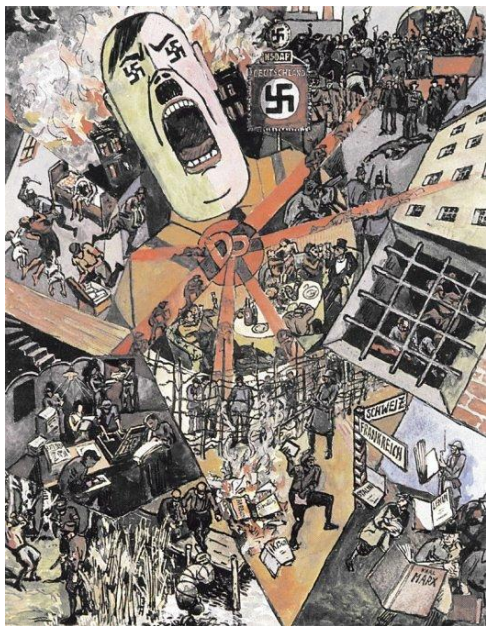


Fig. 147. *Das Dritte Reich*. 1934.



Fig. 148.  
Hitler als  
blutiger  
Sämann.  
1941



Fig.  
149.

Das Kapital fand einen neuen  
Scherger.  
Das Hakenkreuz steht über Kno-  
chen-Bergen.

Fig.  
152.



Die Dummheit sieht man durch die  
Strassen loben.  
Auch auf die Juden wird die Schuld  
geschoben.



Fig.  
150.

Es ist alltäglich, dass ein Mord  
geschleht:  
Man schweigt aus Angst, wenn man  
den Mörder sieht.

Figs. 149-152. Cartoons for book *Das Dritte Reich* with verses by Johannes R. Becker (Moscow, 1934).

Fig. 153.  
Sketch for a  
leaflet to be  
dropped in  
German  
battle lines.  
1941.



Fig.  
151.



Proleten quält zu Tod der Folter-  
knecht.  
Das nennt sich Kampf für Freiheit  
und für Recht.



## **Appendix. Vogeler's "Letter to the Kaiser" of January, 1918.**

As the year 1917 came to an end the strangest things in heaven and among men were to be seen all over Germany. Striking, however, was the fact that in the late afternoon of December 24<sup>th</sup> God himself was seen by many people on the Potsdamer Platz. A sad old man was handing out leaflets, at the top of which stood: **Peace** on Earth and Joy to all men; and below that, in specially engraved lettering, the Ten Commandments. The man was seized by the forces of order, charged with treason, brought before a firing squad, and shot by order of the Supreme Command. A few people who had accepted the leaflets and defended the old man's words were locked away in an insane asylum.

God was dead.

A few days later, our great army commanders-in-chief came to Berlin with the firm intention of freeing the world from misery and bloodshed. And so they met with the delegates to the peace conference. They all agreed to force the world, sword in hand, to kneel before them and raised themselves into idols, dripping with blood, from whose mighty hands mankind was to receive its laws. Suddenly they saw the old man from the Potsdamer Platz, whom they believed to be dead, standing among them and pointing silently to his ten commandments. But no one wanted to recognize this poor, shabby apparition. He then revealed himself and was on the verge of rejoicing in his triumph, for he believed in humanity. The Kaiser and his military commanders invoked his name in their telegrams, the soldiers wore it on their bellies, the chaplains had used it to sanctify the most grievous crimes of humanity. But God saw that no one wanted to know him, that all that had been retained of him was a pompous form, a uniform, out of which the golden calf stared and ruled the world.

So God left the peace gathering and made place for the medal-bedecked idols, for God does not seek to conquer. God is.

The idols, however, led the people into deeper and deeper misery and in addition brought about hatred, bitterness, destruction and death and as they had nothing more than tinny stars and crosses to offer, they gave away the possessions they had stolen from their peoples. Then God approached those who had collapsed under the weight of suffering, of hatred and lies: There is a God above all your idols, above your oaths to the flag, there are my eternal laws. Above your hatred, there is love.

Thereupon the cripples returned their gray uniforms stinking of blood, their medals, and their ribbons to the god of Mammon, went among the people and desecrated and destroyed the instruments of murder. But God went to the Kaiser. You are lord of false appearances. Become lord of light, by serving truth and exposing lies. Remove boundaries and frontiers, be a leader of humanity. Acknowledge the vanity of your actions. Be a prince of peace, choose deeds instead of words, humility instead of the victor's arrogance, truth instead of lies, creation instead of destruction. On your knees, Kaiser, before God's love, be a saviour, and have the strength to serve!

## List of Illustrations<sup>152</sup>

Fig. 1. Vogeler, "The artist's children." Oil on composition board. 1914. Yale University Art Gallery.

Fig. 2. Vogeler, title-page of his collection of poems entitled *Dir*. 1899.

Fig. 3. Vogeler, page from *Dir*.

Fig. 4. Photograph of Heinrich Vogeler, Martha Schröder (his first wife) and their daughters Bettina, Marie-Luise, and Martha. 1907. Worpsweder Archiv, Haus im Schluh.

Fig. 5. Hans am Ende, "Barque on the river Hamme." Oil on canvas. 1900. Worpsweder Kunsthalle.

Fig. 6. Otto Modersohn, "Die alte Dreebeen." Oil on board. 1902. Private collection.

Fig. 7. Fritz Mackensen, "Moorfrau." Oil on canvas. 1910. Private collection

Fig. 8. Otto Modersohn, "Moormädchen neben einem Birkenstamm." Oil on board. 1904. Private collection

Fig. 9. Fritz Mackensen, "Gottesdienst im Freien." Oil on canvas. 1895. Hannover, Historisches Museum am hohen Ufer.

Fig. 10. James Guthrie, "A Highland Funeral." Oil on canvas. 1882. Glasgow Museums.

Fig. 11. Otto Modersohn, "Sturm im Teufelsmoor." Oil on canvas. 1896. Formerly Breslau Museum. Lost after WWII..

Fig. 12. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, April 1899. Cover page.

Fig. 13. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, Special number devoted to Vogeler, April 1902. Cover page.

Fig. 14. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. V, no. 7, April 1902. Cover page.

Fig. 15. *Dekorative Kunst*, vol. XIII, February 1905. First page of article on Vogeler.

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<sup>152</sup> References in parentheses are to the invaluable catalogue of paintings by Rena Nolténus, *Heinrich Vogeler 1872-1942. Die Gemälde. Ein Werkkatalog* (Weimar: VDG, 2000) and to Hans-Hermann Rief, *Heinrich Vogeler. Das graphische Werk* (Bremen: J.H. Schmalfeldt, 1974).

Fig. 16. Rainer-Maria Rilke, *Worpswede* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen und Klasing, 1905), Künstler-Monographien , LXIV. Outside cover.

Fig. 17. Wilhelm Morgner, "Feldweg." Oil on board. 1912. Bochum, Kunstmuseum.

Fig. 18. Wilhelm Morgner, "Holzarbeiter Familie." Colored woodcut. 1912. Private collection.

Fig. 19. Vogeler, "Heukähne auf der Hamme." Oil on canvas. c. 1891. Worpswede, Sammlung Bernhard Kaufmann. (Noltenius, 15)

Fig. 20. Vogeler, "Abendsonne im Moor." c. 1898. Medium and location unknown. (Noltenius, 21)

Fig. 21. Vogeler, "Moorgraben." Oil on canvas. 1913. (Noltenius, 153)

Fig. 22. Vogeler, "Minnetraum." Etching. 1894. Private collection.

Fig. 23. Vogeler, "Schlangenbraut." Etching. 1894. Private collection.

Fig. 24. Vogeler, "Heimkehr." Oil on canvas. 1898. Private collection. (Noltenius, 25)

Fig. 25. Vogeler, "Am Heiderand." Oil on canvas. 1900. Private collection. (Noltenius, 33)

Fig. 26. Vogeler, "Melusinenmärchen." Oil on canvas. 1901. Private collection. (Noltenius, 36)

Fig. 27. Vogeler, "Der Drachentöter." Ink drawing, used as illustration in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, special number devoted to Vogeler, April 1902.

Fig. 28. Vogeler, "Melusine." Pencil, pen, and black ink. 1913.

Fig. 29. Vogeler, "Frühling." Oil on canvas. 1897. Worpswede, Haus im Schluch. (Noltenius, 18)

Fig. 30. Vogeler, Bookplate. Ex libris Georg Kühne. 1912. Yale University Art Gallery.

Fig. 31. Vogeler, "Sehnsucht." Oil on canvas. 1908. Private collection.

Fig. 32. Vogeler, "Träume." Oil on canvas. 1911. Dresden, Gemäldegalerie. (Noltenius, 123).

Fig. 33. Vogeler, "Träume" or "Erwartung." Oil on canvas. 1912. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum. (Noltenius, 129).

Fig. 34. Vogeler, "Sehnsucht." Oil on canvas. c. 1900. Private collection. (Noltenius, 32)

Fig. 35. Vogeler, Self-portrait. Oil on board. C. 1900. Bremerhaven, Kunstverein. (Noltenius, 31)

Figs. 36. Photographic portrait of Vogeler. c. 1900. Worpsweder Archiv, Haus im Schluh.

Figs. 37 - 38. Vogeler, caricatural self-portraits. Etchings. 1906 (as traveler in Ceylon), 1909 (in Scottish bonnet).

Fig. 39. Vogeler, "Die Wunderblume." Illustration in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, special number devoted to Vogeler, April 1902.

Fig. 40. Vogeler, "Drache." Etching. 1912.

Fig. 41. Vogeler, "Leda." Line etching. (Rief, 57)

Fig. 42. Vogeler, "Europa." Line etching. (Rief, 56)

Fig. 43. Vogeler, "Sonnenaufgang." Line etching. (Rief, 59)

Fig. 44. Frances MacDonald. Bookplate. 1896.

Fig. 45. William Brown Macdougall. "Hagen and the Mermaids," from Margaret Armour, *The Fall of the Nibelungs* (London, J.M. Dent & Co., 1897), p.170. 1897.

Fig. 46. Jessie King, illustration in William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and other poems* (London : De La More Press, 1904).

Figs. 47-76. A sampling of book covers, title-pages, and illustrations by Vogeler (1898-1919) for works by Hans Bethge, Helen Brauer, Clemens Brentano, Gustav Falk, Irene Forbes-Mosse, Christian Günther, Carl Hauptmann, Gerhard Hauptmann, Alfred Walter Heymel, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Ricarda Huch, Pyotr Kropotkin, Kurt Lasswitz, Rainer-Maria Rilke, Hugo Salus, Oscar Wilde, Ernst von Wildenbruch, and for the *Insel* magazine.

Fig. 77. Vogeler, Redecoration of Güldenkammer in Bremen Town Hall, 1906.

Fig. 78. Waiting room at the Worpswede Railway Station, designed by Vogeler, 1910.

Fig. 79. Otto Modersohn, "Wolkenberge." Oil on board. 1890. Private collection.

Fig. 80. Vogeler, "Die sieben Schwäne." Etching.

Figs. 84-87. Vogeler, etchings from the collection *An den Frühling*, 1899.

Figs. 88-89, Vogeler, etchings illustrating Rainer-Maria Rilke's essay in the special Heinrich Vogeler number of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, April, 1902.

Fig. 90. Vogeler, "Frühling." Oil on canvas. 1913. Oldenburg, Landesmuseum. (Noltenius, 142)

Fig. 91. Vogeler, "Barkenhoff Garten mit Teich" or "Sonnige Insel." Oil on board. 1914. Private Collection. (Noltenius, 188)

Fig. 92. Vogeler, "Island of Peace." Oil on canvas. 1918-19. Yale University Art Gallery. (Noltenius, 215)

Fig. 93. Vogeler, "Insel im Teich des Barkenhoff-Gartens." Oil on board. 1923. Private collection. (Noltenius, 254)

Fig. 94. Vogeler, "Sommerabend." Oil on canvas. 1905. Worpswede, Museum Grosse Kunstschau. (Noltenius, 59)

Fig. 95. Vogeler, Portrait of the musician Louis T. Gruenberg. Oil on canvas. 1913. Private collection (Noltenius, 144)

Fig. 96. Vogeler, Portrait of Louis T. Gruenberg. Oil on wood. 1920. Worpswede, Haus im Schluh. (Noltenius, 236)

Fig. 97. Photo of Louis Gruenberg, inscribed "To Mining." 1921.

Fig. 98. Vogeler, Sketches for proposed *Marienleben* by Rilke, 1912.

Fig. 99. Vogeler, "Frühling." Oil on canvas. 1909. Private Collection. (Noltenius, 90)

Fig. 100. Vassilii Kandinsky, "Romantische Landschaft." Oil on canvas. 1909. Munich, Lehnbachhaus.

Fig. 101. Vogeler, "Melusine." Oil on canvas. 1910. Worpswede, Barkenhoff.

Fig. 102. Franz Marc, "Katze unterm Baum." Oil on canvas. 1910. Hanover, Sprengel Museum.

Fig. 103. Vogeler, "An der Hamme." Oil on board. 1911. Worpswede, Haus im Schluh. (Noltenius, 117)

Fig. 104. Gabriele Munter, "Reiflandschaft." Oil on canvas. 1911. Wuppertal, Von der Heydt Museum

Fig. 105. Christian Rohlfs, "Der wilde Graben neben der Chaussee. Oil on canvas. 1888. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen.

Fig. 106. Christian Rohlfs, "Der blaue Berg." Oil on canvas. 1906. Düsseldorf. Kunstmuseum.

Fig. 107. Franz Marc, "Indersdorf." Oil on canvas. 1904. Munich, Lehnbachhaus.

Fig. 108. Franz Marc, "Das arme Land Tirol." Oil on canvas. 1913. New York, Guggenheim Museum.

Fig. 109. August Macke, "Angler am Rhein." Oil on board. 1907. Munich, Lehnbachhaus.

Fig. 110. August Macke, "Paar im Wald." Oil on canvas. 1912. Private Collection.

Fig. 111. Willy Jaeckel, "Sterbender Soldat im Schützengraben." From his collection *Memento Mori*, 1915.

Fig. 112. Vogeler, "Meine Quartiersleute in Dolina." From his *Aus dem Osten: 60 Kriegszeichnungen aus dem Kriegsgebiet Karpathien, Galizien-Polen, Russland* (Berlin-Charlottenburg: Nationaler Verlag, 1916).

Fig. 113 Vogeler, "Judengräber als russische Schutzstellungen ausgehoben in Luck." As fig. 112.

Fig. 114. Vogeler, Self-portrait wearing Scottish bonnet. Oil on canvas, 1909. Worpswede, Sammlung Bernhard Kaufmann. (Noltenius, 96)

Fig. 115. Vogeler, Portrait of Martha Schröder. Oil on canvas, 1910. Worpswede, Barkenhoff Stiftung. (Noltenius, 115)

Fig. 116. Vogeler, Portrait of the actress Asta Lange. Oil on canvas. 1911. Private collection (Noltenius, 124)

Fig. 117. Vogeler, Portrait of the artist's mother. Oil on canvas. 1912. Worpswede, Barkenhoff-Stiftung. (Noltenius, 136)

Fig. 118. Vogeler, Portrait of the painter Otto Modersohn. Oil on canvas. 1912. Münster, Landesmuseum. (Noltenius, 134)

Fig. 119. Vogeler, "Kind und Katze" (portrait of daughter Martha). Oil on board. Private collection. (Noltenius, 172)

Fig. 120. Vogeler, "Die Kranke" (Martha Schröder). Oil on board. 1918. Yale University Art Gallery. (Noltenius, 203)

Fig. 121. Vogeler, portrait of the dancer Taka-Taka. Oil on board. 1918. Private Collection. (Noltenius, 218)

Fig. 122. Vogeler, portrait of the dancer Charlotte Bara. Oil on canvas. 1918. Worpswede, Haus im Schluh. (Noltenius, 217)

Fig. 123. Vogeler, portrait of the painter Ilse Hahn-Störmer. Oil on canvas. 1918. Worpswede, Kunsthalle Friedrich Netzel. (Noltenius, 225)

Fig. 124. Vogeler, "Die rote Marie." Oil on board. 1919. Worpswede, Grosse Kunstschau. (Noltenius, 233)

Fig. 125. Vogeler, "Die rote Marie." Oil on canvas. 1923. Private collection. (Noltenius, 250)

Fig. 126. Vogeler, Study for "Hamburger Werftarbeiter." Oil on board. 1927. Bremen, Kunsthalle. (Noltenius, 282)

Fig. 127. Vogeler, portrait of the socialist leader Clara Zetkin. Oil on plywood. 1933. Private collection. (Noltenius, 290)

Fig. 128. Vogeler, portrait of Soviet writer Nikolai Ostrovski (copy). Oil on canvas. 1936. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 304A) Original in Nikolai Ostrovski State Museum, Moscow. (Noltenius, 304)

Fig. 129. Vogeler, portrait of German Stakhanovite worker at Soviet health resort in Sochi. Oil on wood. 1936. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 305)

Fig. 130. Vogeler, "Frau im Lehnstuhl" (portrait of emigree German-Jewish actress Lotte Loebinger). Oil on canvas. 1938. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 313)

Fig. 131. Vogeler, portrait of emigree actor Heinrich Greif. Oil on canvas. 1938. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 314)

Fig. 132. Vogeler, "Das Elend des Krieges." Oil on canvas. 1916. Worpswede, Grosse Kunstschau. (Noltenius, 205)

Fig. 133. Vogeler, "Die sieben Schalen des Zorns." Etching. 1918. Preparatory sketch for the first (1920) of the frescoes decorating the Barkenhoff after its transformation into a commune and progressive school. (Rief, 50)

Fig. 134. Vogeler, "Die Leiden der Frau im Kriege." Oil on canvas. 1918. Worpswede, Grosse Kunstschau. (Noltenius, 211)

Fig. 135. Vogeler, "Die Kriegsfurie." Oil on board. 1919. Worpswede, Haus im Schluh.

Fig. 136. Vogeler, cover page of his pamphlet *Das neue Leben* (Hannover: Paul Steegemann Verlag, 1919).

Fig. 137. Vogeler, cover page of his pamphlet *Expressionismus der Liebe* (Hannover: Paul Steegemann Verlag, 1919).

Fig. 138. Vogeler, cover page of his pamphlet *Die Freiheit der Liebe in der kommunistischen Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Konrad Hanf, 1919).

Fig. 139. Vogeler, "Eine Vision: Buddha." Oil on board. 1922. Yale University Art Gallery. (Noltenius, 246)

Fig. 140. Vogeler, "Rote Hilfe und Dawes Deutschland." Oil on canvas. 1924. Moscow, Central Museum of the Revolution. (Noltenius, 270)

Fig. 141. Vogeler, "Kulturarbeit der Studenten im Sommer." Oil on canvas. 1924. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 269)

Fig. 142. Vogeler, "Karelien und Murmansk." Oil on canvas. 1926. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 278)

Fig. 143. Vogeler, "Baku." Oil on canvas. 1927. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 281)

Fig. 144. Vogeler, "Der Aufbau der zentralasiatischen Sowjetrepublik." Oil on canvas. 1927. Berlin, Nationalgalerie. (Noltenius, 280)

Fig. 145. Vogeler, "Hamburger Werfarbeiter." Oil on canvas. 1928. St. Petersburg, Ermitage. (Noltenius, 283)

Fig. 146. Vogeler, "Das Dritte Reich." Gouache. 1934. Moscow, Pushkin Museum. (Not listed in Noltenius)

Fig. 147. Vogeler, "Hitler als blutiger Sämann." Water color. 1941. (Not listed in Noltenius)

Figs. 148-152. Vogeler, cartoons for book *Das Dritte Reich* with verses by Johannes R. Becker (Moscow, 1934).

Fig. 153. Vogeler, propaganda leaflet for dropping on German army lines, 1941.