
THE MUNICH SECESSION

A R T A N D A R T I S T S I N
T U R N - O F - T H E - C E N T U R Y M U N I C H



M A R I A M A K E L A

The Munich Secession

Art and Artists in
Turn-of-the-Century
Munich

**Maria
Makela**

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4. The Lyric Tradition: The Secession in the 1890s



The art criticism of the 1890s, and subsequent memoirs and histories of the period by contemporaries who witnessed these years, fairly consistently

describe the Secession salons during this period as exceptionally "modern." To be sure, there are frequent qualifications in such accounts, and almost everyone admits that after the turn of the century the association lost its initial vigor, mounting exhibitions that differed from those of the *Genossenschaft* only in size. Yet there was general consensus among contemporaries that at least during the 1890s the Secession

was on the cutting edge, introducing to both the art community and the public the best of what was new in European painting, sculpture, architecture, and design.

But a close look at what the Secession did and did not exhibit in the 1890s reveals some interesting facts about the specific nature of the association's alleged modernity. Not only was it rather different from what we might expect, but its defining characteristics have certain parallels with the work of progressive artists living in Munich after 1900. These subtle but important affinities might best be illustrated by focusing on five secessionists—Max Liebermann, Fritz von Uhde, Leopold von Kalckreuth,



54. Max Liebermann, *The Goosepluckers*, 1871–72

Franz von Stuck, and Richard Riemschmid—whose particular variants of Naturalism and Symbolism represented general tendencies within the Secession. Diverse though these tendencies were, together they defined what might broadly be termed a lyric tradition that ultimately reached its most brilliant expression a decade later in the work of certain early-twentieth-century Munich modernists.

Max Liebermann

Max Liebermann, one of four children of a wealthy Jewish family, was born in Berlin in 1847.¹ His grandfather had emigrated to the Prussian capital in the 1820s, making his fortune there in the manufacture of cotton, and his father and uncle maintained the business. Some indication of the family's continued success was its purchase in 1859 of a house directly beside the Brandenburg Gate on Pariser Platz, one of the most prestigious addresses in Berlin. The front windows of this building overlooked Unter den Linden, where military parades and state ceremonies were held regularly, and where the king and, later, the emperor rode en route to the Tiergarten. That Liebermann, who remained in the family home when his parents died, never used these events as subject matter for his work reflected his distaste for all that was pompous and ostentatious.

This personal and aesthetic aversion to pretension had its roots in the artist's childhood, when, despite the family's great wealth, he was taught to value simplicity, frugality, and hard work. Until her death in 1864, Liebermann's grandmother—a thrifty and energetic woman who, for all her wealth, never shunned physical toil herself—managed the household. Liebermann's father, Louis, was equally industrious, and though he harbored deep affection for his family he was strict and undemonstrative, tolerating few childish whims. He never had a great deal of sympathy for his son's artistic aspirations, and when Max, after completing the *Abitur* with some difficulty, wished to leave Berlin to study art elsewhere, he encountered considerable paternal opposition. Though Liebermann's father ultimately acquiesced, allowing his son to enroll in the Weimar Academy in 1868, he

neither supported Max's chosen career nor acknowledged his son's considerable talent. In fact, the elder Liebermann believed until the day he died that Max would be the *Sorgenkind* of the family, eventually becoming financially dependent on his brothers.

But if Louis Liebermann could not convince his son of the folly of the artist's profession, he nevertheless exercised considerable influence over Max, shaping the painter's attitudes and outlook in important ways. Unlike many artists, for example, Max never rebelled against his bourgeois heritage. Like his father, he valued success, frankly admitting his longing for traditional accolades and honors. To his mind these could best be obtained by hard work, and until his death in 1935 Liebermann adhered to a strict, disciplined schedule, working regular hours and rejecting everything that smacked of the bohemian. His lifestyle was so like that of his businessman-father that Gerhard Hauptmann once impatiently exclaimed: "How is it possible for such a philistine to paint such [beautiful] pictures!"² Perhaps more important, though, the artist inherited something of his father's cool reserve. As Karl Scheffler once noted,

it was easy to approach Max Liebermann, but impossible to get close to him. His house was full of visitors, and he was in touch with many renowned contemporaries, not just artists and literary figures, but also museum directors, collectors, and intellectuals. But though he needed stimulation and discussion, not one of [his acquaintances] could call himself an intimate friend. He was born with a sense of distance, which extended even to his family. . . . Even his love was characterized by reserve.³

The cool detachment that was an essential element of Liebermann's personality was also integral to his art. He first attracted attention with *The Goosepluckers* (fig. 54), a large canvas of women plucking goose feathers. Liebermann painted the work while still a student in Weimar, and he exhibited it in Hamburg in 1872. The picture (before being purchased by a private collector) provoked a flood of hostile criticism from contemporaries who interpreted it as a statement about the exploitation of the lower classes, here plucking feathers for down comforters to warm the affluent. Yet the critical reception of the piece said more

about the state of contemporary art and politics in Germany than it did about the work itself. For these women, though their working conditions are less than ideal, are neither dejected nor downtrodden. To the contrary, Liebermann has portrayed them as wiry, energetic, and strong, perhaps hardened by their years of labor but apparently not embittered by them. We are reminded of the artist's grandmother, the tough matriarch who, even in her wealthy old age, actively participated in doing the family laundry. These pluckers accept their lot matter-of-factly and with dignity, just as Liebermann, without romanticizing or engaging in social commentary, portrayed them. Though his impartiality was not then acknowledged by a public that saw in this work the seeds of social revolution, in retrospect the painting is like Liebermann himself—sympathetic, yet detached.

Twenty years and a world of experience lay between this early picture and those that Liebermann exhibited with the Secession during the 1890s. He took his first trip

to Holland in 1871 and was so impressed by the people, the contemporary art, and the Dutch way of life that he returned almost annually until 1914, drawing much of his subject matter from both the rural communities and the cities of Holland. In 1873 he moved to Paris, where he was taken not with the work of the French Impressionists but with that of Troyon, Daubigny, Corot, and above all Millet. By 1878 he felt ready to return to Germany, and at the urging of Franz von Lenbach he took up residence in Munich, where he remained for six years. It was here that he first made contact with many of the future Munich secessionists, who would later call upon him to secure the cooperation of the Dutch for their first exhibition in 1893. Finally, in 1884, Liebermann settled with his new wife in Berlin, where he was one of the moving forces behind the founding of the Berlin Secession and was its first and arguably most effective president.

Meanwhile, the style of *The Goose-pluckers*—a relatively tightly executed and



55. Max Liebermann, *Recess at the Amsterdam Orphanage*, 1881–82



56. Max Liebermann, *Garden of the Retirement Home for Men in Amsterdam*, 1880

finely detailed canvas of studied contrasts in light and dark—evolved into one characterized by broader brushwork and lighter tonality. He became preoccupied with the look of figures and objects in light and air, increasingly delineating their shapes not with a brush but with a palette knife. By degrees he left behind the smooth, finished surface with which he had begun, opting instead for scumbled passages that only suggest reality. Yet throughout his career Liebermann retained the dispassionate vision and objectivity that characterized his first major work. Indeed, it is this detachment that defines his entire oeuvre, from the pictures of the 1870s and 1880s, whose motifs were taken predominantly from the world of common people, to those around the

turn of the century and later, whose themes were drawn from the lives of the middle and upper classes.

This is above all evident in Liebermann's images of the Amsterdam orphanage for girls (fig. 55) and of the city's retirement home for men (fig. 56), which date from the early 1880s. Even at this time Holland's social policies were quite advanced, providing humane environments for the old and infirm as well as for underage orphans. Liebermann, whose uncle was a representative of the Fortschrittspartei (Progressive Party) and whose father was a city councilman whose duties consisted primarily of caring for the poor and homeless, placed great value on such social policies, believing them to be the basis of a truly just society.



57. Max Liebermann, *Woman with Goats in the Dunes*, 1890

Impressed by these Dutch institutions, the artist painted them and their residents on several occasions. Resting or quietly working in sunny and clean indoor and outdoor environments, the orphans and elderly men who inhabit these paintings seem at first glance supremely content in their sheltered settings. On closer inspection, however, we note both the sad, pensive look of the young girl standing in the right foreground of the orphanage courtyard and the essential isolation of many of the men in the retirement home garden. Scarcely speaking with each other, they are lost in deep, introspective, and apparently lonely thought. Despite the great value that Liebermann placed on such institutions, then, he did not idealize the pensioners' lives, but rendered them with

the impartial eye of one who, by virtue of his own perpetual reserve, always maintained a large measure of objectivity.

This frequently caused problems for the artist. Though the images of the Dutch social institutions won him fame in Paris, they received a lukewarm reception at best in Germany, where the public and critics were accustomed to and appreciated the sentimentality of a Knaus, Defregger, or Grützner. And when in 1891 Liebermann exhibited *Woman with Goats in the Dunes*, 1890 (fig. 57), at the third annual salon of the Munich Genossenschaft, his reputation as the "apostle of ugliness" (as he was frequently called) was secure. Though the work was purchased by the state for the Neue Pinakothek, most critics decried the

lifesize picture of an elderly woman pulling one recalcitrant goat up a gently sloping dune in Holland while a second trots beside her. Contemporaries not only questioned Liebermann's elevation of this work-worn yet still vital and energetic peasant woman to monumental stature; they also criticized her allegedly unflattering pose and attacked the painting's thick, unblended layers of pigment, obviously applied with a palette knife. Liebermann further provoked hostile critics when he exhibited his portrait of Carl Friedrich Petersen, 1891 (fig. 45), at the first Secession exhibition. As we have seen, this painting unleashed a torrent of negative comments from contemporaries appalled that Liebermann would apply his probing vision to such a highly respected city official. Yet just as *The Goosepluckers* was hardly meant as a political statement, the Petersen portrait was not intended as a criticism of Hamburg's mayor. Both pictures sought merely to render unrhethorically aspects of contemporary reality.

Under the influence of the French Impressionists, whose work Liebermann avidly began to collect in the 1890s,⁴ the artist's subdued, grayish palette of the 1870s and 1880s was replaced by brighter, more sun-drenched tones, and his brushwork became more hurried and feathery, rendering subjects as if viewed at a glance by passers-by. This technical shift was accompanied by a thematic one: the Dutch orphans and peasants gradually gave way in the 1890s to equestrians riding on the beach, elegant bourgeois families strolling through zoos (fig. 58), tennis players, and open-air restaurants and beer gardens (fig. 59), until finally images of the middle and upper classes came to dominate the artist's output completely. Liebermann never discussed this stylistic and thematic *volte-face*, but it is notable that it coincided with the rise to prominence in Germany of Julius Langbehn, who, like Liebermann, celebrated both Holland and the peasant as paradigms of virtue in his *Rembrandt as Educator*. Langbehn, however, also called for a mystical regeneration of the German people through membership in a creative, unscientific *Volk*, whose purity, he maintained, was tainted by the Jews in Germany, particularly by assimilated Jews. Liebermann—the Jewish liberal republican—must have been



58. Max Liebermann, *Parrot Way*, 1902

appalled not only that the Dutch peasant themes so dear to his heart had been co-opted and subverted by a reactionary, nationalist anti-Semite, but also that Germans everywhere were responding enthusiastically to the message of *Rembrandt as Educator*.⁵ Rather than adopt aggressive, sententious themes as a counter to the ideology of a Langbehn, however, Liebermann simply gradually abandoned his Dutch peasant subject matter—which must now have seemed tainted to him—and looked to the French Impressionists to provide him with a model of another kind.

"I have never meddled in politics," Liebermann once said of himself. "Politics are an art like any other, and require serious study. . . . I detest dilettantism in politics just as much as in art."⁶ Indeed, Liebermann's paintings and prints expressed a firm social and cultural outlook—one typical of the established, affluent, and liberal Berlin bourgeoisie—but it was never con-



59. Max Liebermann, *The Beer Garden "Oude Vinck,"* 1905

sciously political. Throughout his career the artist consistently avoided sharpening the declamatory edge of his pictures, preferring instead to remain at arm's length from his subjects. Ultimately, it is the calm, unrhetorical character of his work that has endured.

Though Liebermann was unquestionably the most talented exponent of this dispassionate variant of Naturalism, numerous other artists exhibiting with the Secession evolved similar sensibilities. The young Adolf Hölzel (1853–1934), whose abstract drawings of the late 1890s and early 1900s actually presaged Kandinsky's nonobjective art, was living in Dachau in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, painting pictures of the landscape and residents of that rural suburb of Munich. His *Devotions at Home* of 1890–91 (fig. 60), an early work, portrays an elderly woman sitting on a bed while reading a bible. Though the devout faith of this picturesque, work-worn peasant

might have been romanticized, Hölzel presented it with a calm, detached objectivity that precludes both sentimentality and social commentary. Similarly, Wilhelm Trübner (1851–1917), whose "Art Appreciation Today" outlined the major aesthetic premises of the Secession, was painting pictures in the 1890s that are characterized by the same matter-of-fact sobriety found in Liebermann's work of the period. His portrait of Luitpold (fig. 61), for example, is remarkable for its candor. Unlike most paintings of the elderly Regent, which present Luitpold as a vigorous, commanding presence standing in full military regalia, this picture shows him in hunting clothes, smoking a pipe and casually relaxing in a chair. Though Trübner's monarch is perhaps less feeble than Liebermann's Petersen, neither is he the stereotypical robust and energetic ruler of a powerful German state. Indeed, these and numerous other artists who exhibited with the Seces-



60. Adolf Hölzel, *Devotions at Home*, 1890–91



61. Wilhelm Trübner, *Prince Regent Luitpold of Bavaria*

sion consistently rendered their subjects, whether aristocrats or workers, with a straightforward veracity that neither romantically idealized nor overtly politicized them.

Fritz von Uhde

If Max Liebermann represented one pole of the Naturalist contingent in the Secession, Fritz von Uhde typified the other. Uhde was born in 1848 in Wolkenburg in Saxony.⁷ His father, president of the Lutheran Church Council of that province, was by all accounts a strict and deeply religious man, who, like Louis Liebermann, tolerated few childish whims. Yet unlike Liebermann's father, Bernhard von Uhde supported his son's interest in art. Not only did he paint himself, but he engaged a drawing instructor for his wife, the daughter of the general director of the royal museums in Dresden, and their children. When Fritz expressed an interest in becoming an artist, he brought his son's drawings to Wilhelm von Kaulbach, who acknowledged the boy's talent. Despite his hopes that Fritz would follow in his footsteps and study law, he thus agreed to let his son enter the Dresden Academy upon completion of the *Abitur*. At the age of eighteen, then, Fritz von Uhde began his formal artistic training with his father's blessing.

As we have seen, his studies were destined to be brief. Uhde, with characteristic impatience, left the academy after only three months to embark on a military career.⁸ Nevertheless, during the subsequent ten years he continued to draw and paint, and quite naturally his subjects were taken mostly from military life. He had a particular fondness for multi-figured battle scenes which, though far too complex for his unschooled talent, won him considerable adulation from his comrades in arms, who were proud to have an artist in their ranks. Perhaps as a result of this encouragement, Uhde opted in 1877 to abandon the military and try his hand again at becoming an artist, ultimately finding a position in Paris in the private painting school of the Hungarian Michael Munkácsy. It was here that his career began in 1878.⁹

Uhde's first success was *The Singer*, 1880 (fig. 62), a competent if conventional studio

piece that portrays Dutch figures in seventeenth-century costume, lounging at a dining table in a neighborhood tavern. The witty anecdotal subject and quotations from Old Master paintings won him favorable notice in the Parisian press, and the work was purchased by a French collector. But Uhde chafed at this manner of representation, longing instead to paint directly in front of his subjects—"from nature," as he put it.¹⁰ Indeed, that the depiction of unposed figures and objects in nonstudio settings was his true métier is apparent in a number of works he painted during and after a study trip to Holland in the summer of 1882. Like Liebermann, who was living in Munich at the time and who encouraged Uhde to learn about *plein air* painting through first-hand experience of Holland's remarkable atmospheric conditions, Uhde was taken with the simplicity and honesty of the rural Dutch communities. Thus, not only did he lighten his palette, loosen his brushwork, and introduce natural light into his pictures as a result of the Holland trip—all of which is evident in *The Playroom*, 1889 (fig. 9), an image of his children at play in their nursery—Uhde also began to focus on the lives of common people. *The Big Sister*, ca. 1885 (fig. 63), for example, shows two young children, whose coarse clothes and shoes identify them as members of a poor, probably rural family, playing in an uncarpeted, unpainted, and almost bare room. Similarly, *The Gleaners*, 1889 (fig. 64), portrays peasant women and children gathering stalks of cut grain, a common scene in nineteenth-century art.

But if Uhde increasingly depicted the lives of the lower classes in the 1880s, he did not politicize these images. The two children in *The Big Sister* are happy and content despite their obvious poverty, and the harvesters in *The Gleaners*, though hard at work, gather the grain on a sunny autumn day that is made to seem quite idyllic. Like their more renowned ancestors in Millet's 1857 painting, these gleaners undoubtedly belonged to the lowest level of peasant society permitted to gather the scant leftovers in the fields after the crops had been harvested. This is not apparent in Uhde's painting, however, for the artist did not juxtapose the impoverished peasants scrounging for bits of grain with large haystacks,



62. Fritz von Uhde, *The Singer*, 1880

nor did he portray the gleaners' economic subservience to the wealthy landowners, whose presence is signified in Millet's painting by the overseer on his horse. Rather, Uhde avoided any reference to the peasants' actual social position, presenting instead a harmonious view of rural life.

Like Liebermann, then, Uhde avoided portraying lower-class experience as wholly negative. Yet if the two artists were similar in this regard, their sensibilities were nevertheless subtly distinct. This is best illustrated by comparing Uhde's *The Gleaners* with a similar composition by Liebermann, *The Potato Harvest*, 1875 (fig. 65). Liebermann also avoided any reference in this painting to the actual social position of these field workers, but it is his interpretation of these workers—specifically, that of the child who is the focal point of the composition—that reveals his rather different orientation. Whereas the boy in Uhde's picture works diligently, apparently perfectly

content to spend his time gathering stalks of grain in the warm autumn sun, the girl in Liebermann's painting pauses in her work to gaze wistfully into the distance. Such a single melancholy note is typical of Liebermann's work, which evenhandedly emphasizes both the positive and the negative in all situations, good and bad alike. By contrast, Uhde's social realism is slightly more optimistic, presenting the poor as if they were not at all displeased with their difficult lot in life. Though he never went as far as Defregger, who completely masked the social and economic reality of nineteenth-century rural life in his saccharine genre pictures, Uhde nevertheless keyed his work to a more upbeat tone than did Liebermann. His subjects may be indigent, but only rarely are they unhappy.

This is also true of the poor rural peasants in Uhde's anachronistic religious paintings. It is difficult to know exactly what triggered the artist's fifteen-year preoccu-



63. Fritz von Uhde, *The Big Sister*, 1885



64. Fritz von Uhde, *The Gleaners*, 1889



65. Max Liebermann, *The Potato Harvest*, 1875



66. Fritz von Uhde, *Grace*, 1885

tion with rendering biblical stories in contemporary terms, but it is possible that the death of his deeply religious father in 1883 played a role. In that year Uhde began the first version of the painting *Suffer Little Children to Come unto Me*, which he completed in 1884 and exhibited five years later at the first annual of the Genossenschaft (fig. 10). In this image of desperate poverty, a group of poorly clothed children, some without shoes, gather around Christ in a sparsely furnished room, while behind adults wait patiently to pay homage to the Savior. Uhde later said that he had been inspired to paint the picture when he witnessed the new students of a local parish school being presented to the pastor for blessing. The biblical passage "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" prob-

ably occurred to him even as he watched the children's hesitant approach toward the seated clergyman in that Bavarian schoolroom, and by substituting Christ for the pastor he effectively transformed what would have been a straightforward genre scene into an anachronistic illustration of the gospel.

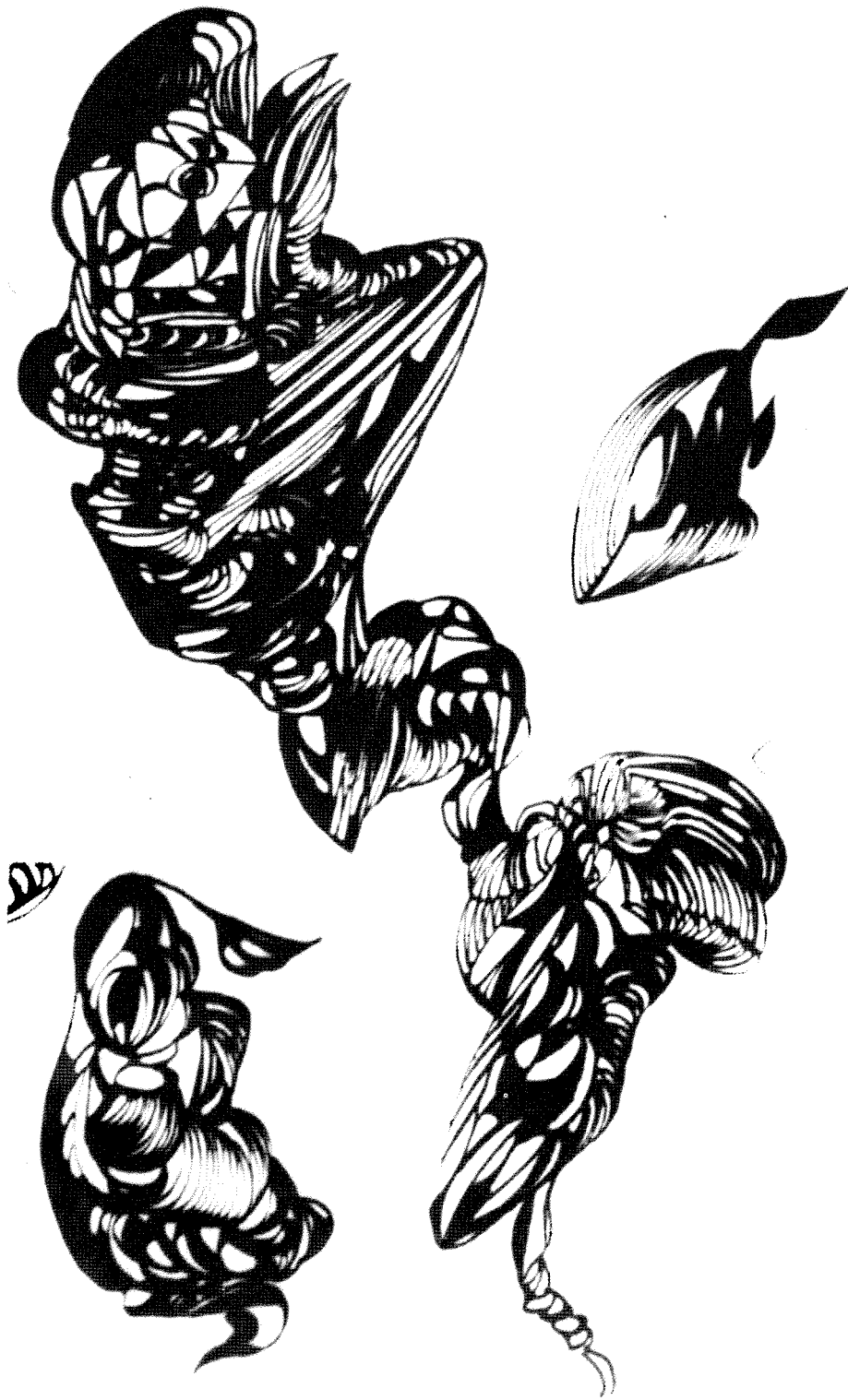
This formulation so impressed the artist that he subsequently cast dozens of biblical stories in contemporary settings. In *Grace* of 1885 (fig. 66), for example, the artist rendered a working-class family about to sit down to dinner. As they recite the traditional Protestant grace, which begins with the words "Komm, Herr Jesus, sei unser Gast" ("Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest"), Christ himself literally walks into their dingy, uncarpeted dining room, blessing them and their meager meal of bread and



67. Adolf Hölzel, *Birches in the Moor*, 1902

soup with his presence. Other pictures portray contemporary Bavarians with Christ at the Sermon on the Mount, at the Last Supper, and at the Nativity. Most are turgid and melodramatic set pieces, but some, like *Difficult Path* of 1890 (fig. 17), are striking successes. Previously titled *The Journey to Bethlehem*, this atmospheric *tour de force* portrays Joseph and the pregnant Mary as contemporary Bavarians, seen from behind as they trudge through fog on a muddy road that critics immediately identified as the main entrance into Dachau.

Located in the moorlands just northwest of Munich, Dachau had a long tradition as a German Barbizon before it became tragically linked to the atrocities of the Third Reich. From the early nineteenth century the village served as a rural retreat for Munich painters fascinated by both the colorful local residents and the marshy topography of the area, whose watery atmosphere frequently enshrouded the town and its streets with gauzy mists. It was in this damp and foggy climate, which softens edges and blurs details, that the secessionists Ludwig Dill (1848–1940) and Adolf



68. Adolf Hölzel, *Black Ornaments on Brown Ground*, ca. 1898



69. Ludwig Dill, *Poplar Forest*, ca. 1900

Hölzel made important strides in the evolution toward an abstract art. Here Hölzel's early Realist style, as represented by *Devotions at Home* (fig. 60), evolved into a more structured and decorative aesthetic. *Birches in the Moor* of 1902 (fig. 67), for example, compresses the mist-shrouded Dachau marshlands into two-dimensional, architectonic friezes of quasi-abstract shapes and patterns. Although he never entirely eliminated subject matter from his paintings, even before the turn of the century Hölzel was making completely abstract drawings (fig. 68) that foreshadowed Kandinsky's nonobjective experiments by more than a decade. Dill, who became the second president of the Secession in 1894, was less daring, but even his brush imparted an abstract rhythm and decorative formal effect to the birches and poplars of the region that were his subjects (fig. 69).¹¹

Uhde too had worked in Dachau regularly since the summer of 1888, using its peculiar climate not as a springboard for formal experimentation like Dill and Hölzel, but as a backdrop for his atmospheric *plein air* pictures. In *Difficult Path*, for example, the damp and fog render more pitiable the predicament of Mary and Joseph the carpenter, forced to leave home and hearth just before the birth of their child. This particular story must have had special significance in Bavaria in 1889, when almost one-third of all Munich woodworkers were unemployed. In the latter half of the year, precisely when Uhde began work on *Difficult Path*, local carpenters staged their first strike since 1873, lobbying for more secure jobs and better working conditions.¹² Uhde can hardly have been unaware of the unrest, and he very probably intended his picture—in which Joseph is clearly identified as a carpenter by the saw slung over his shoulder—as a metaphor for the plight of the Bavarian woodworkers.

Uhde never discussed his political sympathies, but it is likely that he supported the contemporary Christian social movement, whose leaders held that the Church must minister to both the spiritual and the physical needs of its congregation. The first notable Protestant preachers in Germany of the social gospel were V. A. Huber, who advanced the idea in the late 1840s of Christian workers' associations or co-operatives as a means of combating poverty, and Johann H. Wichern, who in the 1850s gave practical form to the concept of "inner mission" by instituting a program to build homes for the indigent. This pioneer work was continued by Adolf Stoecker, an Evangelical pastor who lobbied vigorously for the reform of labor conditions and in 1878 founded the Christian Social Workers' Party. Friedrich Naumann, the outstanding Christian social reformer of the next generation, got his start with Stoecker and ultimately went on to found his own political party in 1896, which also emphasized the necessity of reducing the gulf that existed between the working classes and bourgeois society. The Lutheran Church in Saxony, of which Uhde's father was an important functionary, played a particularly distinguished role in Germany in the care of the poor, sick, and orphaned,¹³ and one of Uhde's



70. Fritz von Uhde, *Near the Veranda Door*

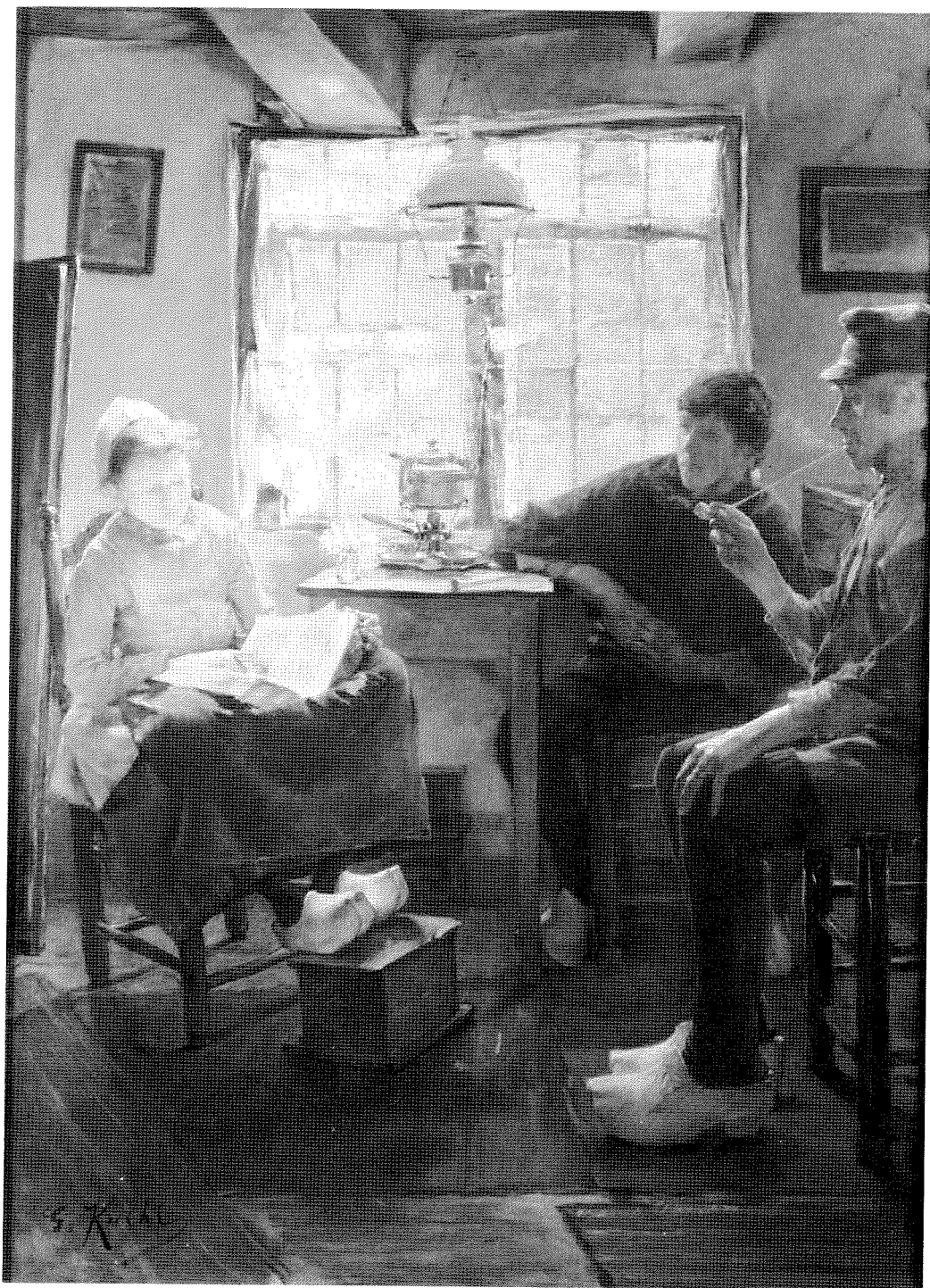


71. Fritz von Uhde, *In the Autumn Sun*

childhood friends and fellow cavalry officers during the Franco-Prussian War, Moritz von Egidy, even went on to found a prominent Christian mission organization that sponsored annual conventions in Berlin to win middle- and upper-class support for working-class causes.¹⁴

But however enlightened, none of these reformers advocated a radical restructuring of society. Stoecker, for example, was the son of a low-ranking government official, and he grew up respecting the traditional order in Prussia. Though there is no doubt that he had a compassionate understanding of the needs of the masses, he most certainly did not intend to eliminate class differences entirely. Quite the reverse: he was deeply mistrustful of socialism, and his reformist efforts were largely motivated by the fear that workers would reject the monarchy and Christianity in favor of the Social Democratic Party if their most basic economic and social needs were not met.

Similarly, Uhde demonstrated considerable sympathy for Germany's working class, but he never advocated in his art social or economic revolution. To the contrary, whether he portrayed the special camaraderie that develops between children forced by poverty to entertain each other without toys, or the close identification with Christ that was the particular prerogative of the destitute, Uhde consistently emphasized the few positive aspects in the lives of the needy while alluding to the rich rewards they would reap in heaven. Ultimately his hand was guided not by the detached objectivity that motivated Liebermann, but by deeply instilled religious doctrines intended not only to comfort the underprivileged with the hope of a better life in the hereafter, but also to counsel patience with the injustices of this life. Not surprisingly, those contemporaries who were aesthetically or politically more radical than Uhde disliked his Pollyanna-ish



72. Gotthard Kuehl, *Sunday Afternoon in Holland*

optimism. Vincent van Gogh, for example, described the Christ in *Suffer Little Children to Come unto Me* as a "Santa Klaus" that did not belong in this otherwise moving rendition of peasant children in a schoolhouse.¹⁵

Even when Uhde abandoned such religious imagery around 1900, focusing his talents almost entirely on subjects drawn from his immediate environment, he invariably cast them in a rosy light. Most frequently he represented the activities of his daughters, who sit quietly, bathed in gentle sunlight, either reading, sewing, or knitting in the house (fig. 70) or out of doors (fig. 71). These unpretentious, introspective images suggest what Uhde might have attained had he concentrated his energy throughout his career on the *plein air* representation of unposed figures and objects in natural settings. More intimate than Liebermann's comparatively dispassionate genre paintings, these pictures of quiet domesticity bespeak in Uhde the sentimentalist that was absent from the temperament of the more detached Liebermann.

Few of the secessionists shared Uhde's interest in religion, but a great many evolved a similarly lyrical variant of Naturalism. Gotthard Kuehl (1850–1915), the artist who was instrumental in organizing the French section of the controversial third Genossenschaft annual, painted unpretentious images of the interiors of churches (fig. 5) and Dutch homes (fig. 72), the prosaism of which is gently modulated by soft, evocative lighting. Such an understated Romanticism also characterized the commonplace subjects of Max von Schmädell (b. 1856), whose *His Everything* (fig. 39) was exhibited at the first Secession salon in Munich. Though the painting merely represents an elderly man observing a young woman scrubbing the sides of a washtub, the patch of light falling from the window above quite literally softens the hard edges of their mundane existence. Likewise, the *plein air* animal painter Heinrich von Zügel (1850–1941) consistently rendered the experience of peasants tending cattle and sheep as a pleasant rural idyll, far removed from a more taxing urban existence (fig. 4). Though none of these artists fell prey to the insipid sentimentality of the *Lederhosen* painters, they nevertheless all shared a

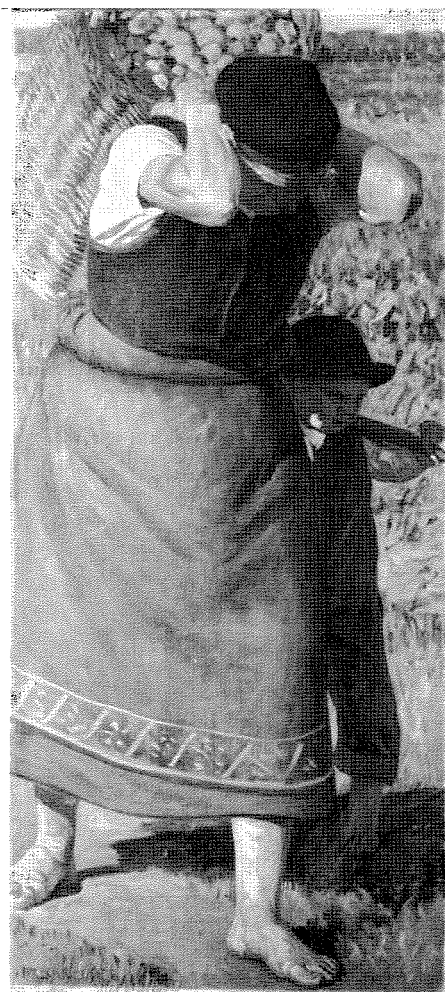
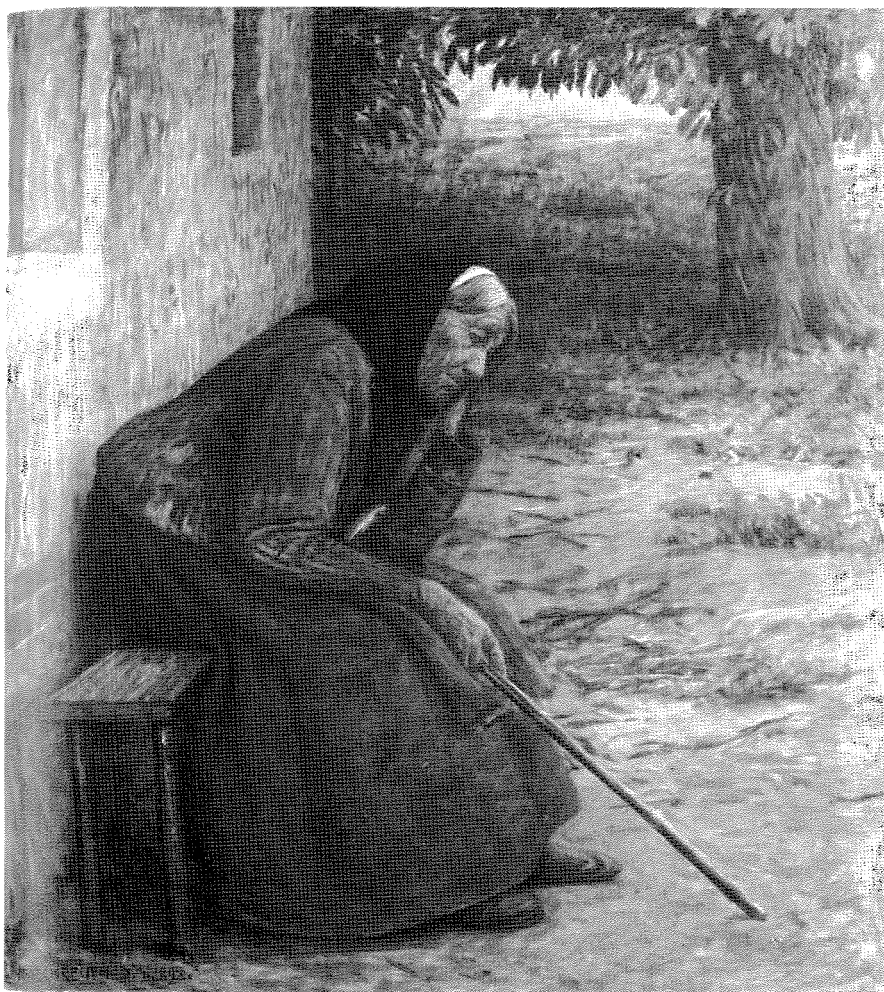


73. Leopold von Kalckreuth, *The Days of Our Years Are Threescore Years and Ten*, 1898

more idealized, Romantic world view than that of the artists around Liebermann, and together they formed an important contingent at the Secession exhibitions.

Leopold von Kalckreuth

With the work of Count Leopold von Kalckreuth (1855–1928) we leave the largely optimistic domain of the German Naturalists and enter the brooding sphere of one of the three major Symbolist contingents in the Secession. Kalckreuth's most famous painting, *The Days of Our Years Are Threescore Years and Ten* of 1898 (fig. 73), provides an apt introduction to this rather different sensibility. The work consists of three individ-



ual pictures representing stages in the life of a poor peasant woman. On the left she is but a young child, gathering stalks of cut grain after a harvest, and on the right she has matured into a barefoot middle-aged mother, carrying a heavy basket of potatoes and followed by her small son. In the center panel she has become an old woman, her face lined with worry and her back bent by decades of physical labor. Gazing sadly at the ground, she absentmindedly traces patterns in the dirt with her cane, apparently waiting for nothing but death. Unlike Uhde, who invariably illustrated uplifting biblical stories, Kalckreuth represented here the tenth verse of Psalm 90, one of the most pessimistic passages in the entire

Bible. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Indeed, there is not a trace of optimism in this overwhelmingly melancholic image, which functions as a timeless, symbolic allegory of the life cycle.

There is little doubt that Kalckreuth's childhood predisposed the artist to this rather somber world view.¹⁶ His father, Count Stanislaus von Kalckreuth, was a talented landscape painter whose pictures of the Alps rank among the best of the Düsseldorf Romantic school. Yet he was also a morose man subject to deep depressions that profoundly affected the tenor of the Kalck-



74. Leopold von Kalckreuth, *Summer*, 1890

reuth household. According to one of his grandchildren, Stanislaus was "from birth sickly, pessimistic, and at odds with himself, demanding from life a cure [for his ill will] as his unconditional right."¹⁷ He fought continually with his colleagues at the art school that he directed in Weimar, bringing the battles home with him and rehashing them in detail over dinner. Years later the Kalckreuth family was still so joyless that when Leopold, who had been sent away for part of his schooling, arrived home after completion of the *Abitur*, one of his sisters felt it advisable to take him aside even before he entered the house and warn him that he still must try his hardest to "overlook the darker moments [of family life], for example when Papa gets too involved in your own affairs, or when you hear things about the [art] school that infuriate you."¹⁸

It would be difficult to exaggerate the effect that this apparently dismal childhood had on Kalckreuth, who as a mature artist almost always introduced a melancholic

note of brooding into even the most pleasant of subjects. Kalckreuth knew as a boy that he wanted to become a painter, and he chafed at his parents' insistence that he first complete the *Abitur*. He entered the Weimar Academy just months after passing his exams, remaining there from 1875 through 1878. After one year in the military, Kalckreuth went in 1879 to Munich, where he worked independently for six years. There he met and became friends with Max Liebermann, who later would disapprove of the Symbolist inflection that came to characterize his work. It was during this time that Kalckreuth, like so many other secessionists, both discovered Holland as an artistic source and became a *plein air* painter, working outdoors in order to capture the effects of light and air on his subjects. By 1885 he was so proficient at his craft that he was recalled to Weimar to serve as instructor at the *Kunstschule*.

Among Kalckreuth's first successes was his 1889 *Summer* (fig. 74), in which a female harvester in the last stages of pregnancy walks by a wheat field that itself is ripe with grain. Superficially it is a pleasant allegory of fertility that emphasizes the intimate connection between simple, earthy peasants and the land from which they make their living. On a deeper level, however, the image has somber, if not sinister, overtones. Despite the sunny autumn weather, the woman is obviously exceedingly weary, traversing the homeward path only with considerable difficulty. In addition, she carries a scythe in her hand, a reference not only to the harvesting work from which she is returning, but also to the figurative death of both the grain and, ultimately, herself and her unborn child. To be sure, Kalckreuth's pictures were not always so mournful. *On Sunday Afternoon*, 1893 (fig. 75), which the artist exhibited at the first Secession exhibition in Berlin, captures the contented, contemplative mood of a rural couple strolling in fertile cornfields on a Sunday afternoon. Nevertheless, the sentiment of this picture is atypical in Kalckreuth's oeuvre, which for the most part is tinged with melancholy. Even *The Rainbow*, 1896 (fig. 76), evokes a poignant sadness, a subconscious yearning for unnameable feelings and sensations that, in *Storm Clouds*, 1899 (fig. 77), becomes so over-



75. Leopold von Kalckreuth, *On Sunday Afternoon*, 1893

whelming that it blinds the man returning home from the fields on horseback to the danger of the threatening storm clouds gathering above him. Lost in somber thought, he rides slowly onward, a symbol of the disconsolateness of the human condition.

As is evident in all these images, Kalckreuth worked in an essentially Realist style, but he consistently downplayed detail in favor of generalized shapes that he arranged within a geometric compositional structure of verticals and horizontals. The resulting formal, abstracted quality evokes a timelessness most appropriate to expressing universal themes, feelings, and sensations. Indeed, Kalckreuth's style and his fondness for moody, evocatively lit landscapes elevate his subjects from the sphere of specific experience to a more general realm of universalities. As one of the first German artists of the late nineteenth century to employ a Realist style in the evocation of Symbolist sentiment, Kalckreuth was an important figure in the evolution of German Neo-Romanticism, his position can-

onized in 1902 when the Vienna Secession gave him a retrospective exhibition.

The melancholic tone of Kalckreuth's Symbolism, as well its timeless character, typifies the work of other very different artists exhibiting with the Munich Secession in the 1890s. The meticulously rendered and rigorously structured landscapes (fig. 78) of Karl Haider (1846–1912), for example, are less specific representations of the upper Bavarian countryside than generalized, evocative mood paintings with brooding overtones. Similarly, the Berlin artist Walter Leistikow (1865–1908), who participated annually in the Secession salons with works like *Schlachtensee* (fig. 79), evoked a kind of mournful poignancy in his calm landscapes of the lakes and parks in and around Berlin. Seemingly far removed from the hubbub of the city, these tranquil bits of nature appear frozen in time, their life becalmed by some preternatural unseen force. Likewise, Ludwig Dill, the Secession's second president, and his friend and colleague Adolf Hölzel captured above all the



76. Leopold von Kalckreuth, *The Rainbow*, 1896

erie quiet of the misty moorland around Dachau in their tonal, stylized paintings of birches and poplars growing in isolated, swampy bogs (figs. 67, 69).

Franz von Stuck

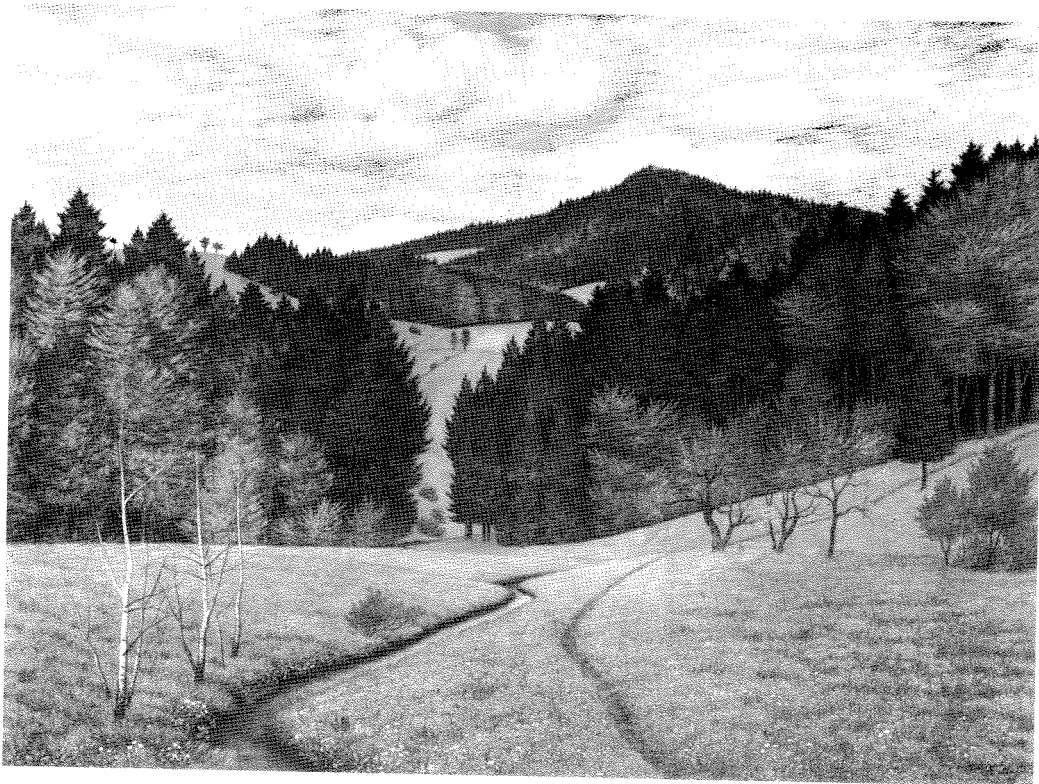
If the brooding work of Leopold von Kalckreuth represents one variant of the Symbolist aesthetic within the Secession, the sensual subjects of Franz von Stuck typify another. Born in 1863 in Tettenweis, a small village in lower Bavaria, Stuck demonstrated considerable talent as a child, acquiring a reputation in the village for his drawings and caricatures of the local townspeople.¹⁹ However, his father was a miller with little artistic inclination, and he expected his son to carry on the family trade. It was only at his mother's insistence that the aspiring artist was allowed to con-

tinue school after completing his elementary education, and, significantly, he attended not a *Gymnasium* but the local trade school in Passau. Ultimately Stuck's father accepted his son's reluctance to run the family business, but he was adamant that at the very least Franz would become a competent craftsman. Accordingly, Stuck went to the Kunstgewerbeschule in Munich, where he remained from 1878 through 1881, learning primarily the principles and techniques of design and architectural drawing. This early exposure to the applied arts undoubtedly sparked Stuck's later interest in designing his own frames for his paintings as well as his home on Prinzregentenstrasse, and it was also probably one of the main reasons why the Secession, in which Stuck was a dominant force, initially supported the decorative arts movement at the end of the 1890s.

In 1881 Stuck entered the Academy of the Fine Arts in Munich, where he remained until 1885, studying under both Wilhelm Lindenschmit and Ludwig Löfftz. Though he apparently attended classes only sporadically, this was nevertheless a decisive period in his career, for it exposed him to the fine arts for the first time. The extensive training he had received at the Kunstgewerbeschule, however, served him well, for he supported himself both by designing decorative and applied art objects and by providing the Viennese publishing firm of Gerlach and Schenk with designs for various projects, including vignettes for menus and invitations as well as drawings for a series of zincographs the company published between 1882 and 1884.²⁰ These prints, collectively entitled "Allegorien und Embleme," were designed by numerous German and Austrian artists, including Nikolaus Gysis, Max Klinger, and the young Gustav Klimt. *The Hunt*, 1883 (fig.



77. Leopold von Kalckreuth, *Storm Clouds*, 1899



78. Karl Haider, *Haushamer Spring Landscape*, 1896

80), one of Stuck's earliest surviving designs for this series, already contains the seeds of his mature work. The model for the image was Rudolf Henneberg's 1868 *The Hunt for Good Fortune* (*Die Jagd nach dem Glück*), now in the Nationalgalerie in East Berlin, in which a Junker on horseback pursues the elusive Fortuna, goddess of luck. Stuck, however, replaced Henneberg's Junker with a horned skeleton wielding a long whip and accompanied by a variety of vicious creatures, while simultaneously supplanting the fleeing Fortuna with a reclining nude poised precariously under the hoofs of Death's rearing steed. In thereby alluding to the rich tradition of the recumbent Venus, the goddess of love, Stuck converted an essentially pleasant tale about the pursuit of fortune into a diabolical allegory of love's demise.

Such sinister and erotic alterations of traditional iconography were common in Stuck's work, as is evident in his first major

success, *The Guardian of Paradise*, 1889 (fig. 12). The artist exhibited this picture at the first Genossenschaft annual in 1889, winning both a small gold medal and 60,000 DM at the remarkably young age of twenty-six. The "guardian," of course, is the lone figure in the composition. Endowed with powerful wings, this angel protects the background "paradise" of high-keyed color and starburst shapes with a flaming staff. But despite his traditional attributes, the androgynous male figure represented here is no more angelic than the *femme fatale* Stuck would later favor. Wearing a gauzy gown that exposes his shoulders and reveals the shadowy outline of his legs, he stands with one hand resting provocatively on his hip, his pouty, ruby-red lips and dark, heavy-lidded eyes not warning us from but inviting us to enter his sensual paradise.

Innocence of 1889 (fig. 81) similarly conflates the erotic and the religious. The critic Hans Eduard von Berlepsch wrote about the



79. Walter Leistikow, *Schlachtensee*



80. Franz von Stuck, *The Hunt*, 1883

picture when it was exhibited with *The Guardian* at the first annual, and identified the figure as the young Joseph.²¹ Significantly, though, Stuck cast both Joseph and the lily, traditional symbol of purity, in wholly new roles in this painting. Firmly grasping with his left hand the bottom of the lily stem, which intersects his body at the level of his genitals, Stuck's Joseph fondles with his right hand the top of the shaft, just below the bursting shapes of the white petals. Lips parted, eyes slightly glazed, this boy seems not the chaste Joseph of biblical fame, but an adolescent youth just discovering his own sexuality.

Sin, 1893 (fig. 49), which was shown at the first Secession salon in Munich, expresses the suggestive sensuality of *The Guardian* and *Innocence* far more directly. Under the influence of the Glasgow Boys, who exhibited regularly in Munich from 1890, Stuck rejected the sun-filled palette he had initially favored for deeper, sonorous colors more appropriate to conveying both the sinister and the sexual. Here, shrouded in inky darkness, robe parted to expose glowing breasts and midriff, a sexy tempt-



81. Franz von Stuck, *Innocence*, 1889

ress wordlessly invites us with a seductive glance to submit to her charms. As if to preclude any doubt about his vamp's inherently evil nature, Stuck draped an orange-eyed snake around her shoulders and



82. Bruno Piglhein, *The Blind Woman*, 1889

inscribed the title of the painting on his handmade gilded frame. Certainly no innocent Eve tricked by the serpent into betraying God, this mother of mankind is salacious and diabolical, in full sympathy with the Satan who caused the fall of man.

An astounding three-fourths of Stuck's paintings involve the erotic.²² But if Stuck was unusually preoccupied with the libido, he was just one of many turn-of-the-century European artists who began to express visually their pent-up frustrations with the repressions of a "civilized" society. From Fernand Khnopff to Paul Gauguin, and from Jan Toorop to Ferdinand Hodler, avant-garde painters everywhere depicted either simpler, more "primitive" cultures or distant, mythical climes where the expression of elemental feelings and emotions like sexual need and desire was not taboo. This trend seems to have been particularly prevalent among the Munich secessionists. Some, like Arthur Langhammer, merely invested mundane subjects with sensual undertones. It is the barren fields in his *Peasant Girls from Dachau*, ca. 1900 (fig. 83), for example, that lead us to believe that

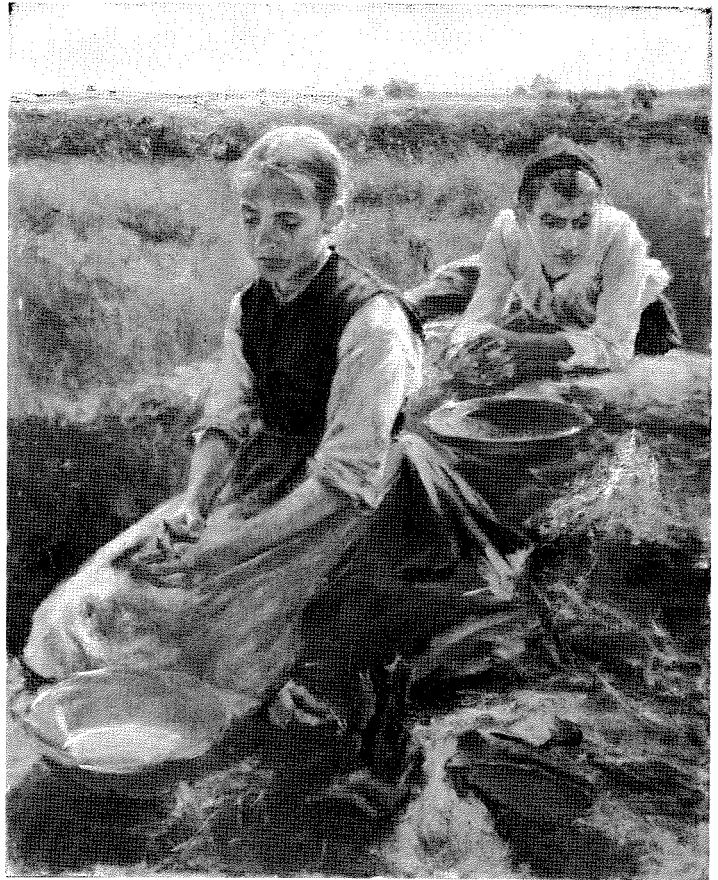
these pubescent teenagers are preoccupied not with thoughts of a better life but with adolescent dreams of erotic fulfillment. Bruno Piglhein, who served as the first president of the Secession until his death in 1894, occasionally cast his subjects in a similar light. His 1889 oil sketch *The Blind Woman* (fig. 82), for instance, is, despite its academic subject, charged with voluptuous undercurrents. On one level, of course, the woman's heavenward gaze can be read merely as a plea for divine guidance. But more subtly the pose conveys an air of tense expectancy, as if at this very moment this vulnerable woman is having a premonition of what might befall her as she makes her way alone through the isolated meadow. More overtly sensual is Max Klinger's *The Blue Hour*, 1890 (fig. 37), which was exhibited first at the Genossenschaft's third annual and then at the Secession's first exhibition in Berlin. Its pervasive blue tonality sets the stage for the languid, eroticized mood of the three adolescents lounging nude by the water at dusk. In the works of the secessionists Paul Hoecker, Ludwig Herterich, and Albert von Keller, even

religious figures like nuns and saints were cast in a sensual light. Indeed, although Stuck was probably the most obsessive about giving visual expression to the libido, he was just one of many secessionists who time and again turned to the erotic as a source of inspiration in the late 1880s and, particularly, the 1890s.

The reasons for this were many and diverse, but among them was the strength of the Catholic Church in Bavaria and of its political arm in Parliament, the Center Party, which together created a puritanical climate in Munich of the 1890s against which artists and writers alike reacted. As we know, the events of 1886 strengthened the Bavarian Center Party considerably. When the prestige of the crown and confidence in the liberal cabinet were both severely shaken by the scandal of King Ludwig II's death, the clerics who dominated Parliament were able to exert greater influence on a range of political and cultural issues. As well as lobbying to intensify those paragraphs of the Criminal Code dealing with *lèse-majesté*, incitement, and so-called 'gross mischiefs', they also advocated strengthening the passages on blasphemy and the distribution of obscene material. The Bavarian government did little to resist such efforts and between 1889 and 1900 supported a series of repressive proposals.

The most notorious of these was the Lex Heinze, so named because it was drafted in response to the murder of a Berlin night-watchman by a criminal and pimp named Heinze.²³ Initially the law was aimed at urban vice, but it was gradually broadened—primarily under the influence of the Bavarian Center Party, whose reformers claimed that Germany was in a state of moral decline and put the blame squarely on the weakening of religion and the devastating effect of pornography—to include a very flexible extension of the ruling on obscenity. Artists who publicly displayed pictures that, "without being obscene, tend to cause annoyance by grossly offending feelings of modesty and morality" would run the risk of six months' imprisonment or steep fines. Playwrights were also targeted, and a similar clause was thus inserted for theatrical productions.

Fortunately, by the time the Lex Heinze went into effect in June 1900, such ominous



83. Arthur Langhammer, *Peasant Girls from Dachau*, ca. 1900

passages had been deleted from the law. But the Center Party continued to lobby for increased control over the arts, and it had particular success in censoring playwrights who overstepped the bounds of Catholic religious and sexual propriety.²⁴ Frank Wedekind, for example, completed his drama about adolescence and sexuality, *Frühlings Erwachen: Eine Kindertragödie* (*Spring Awakening: A Children's Tragedy*), in 1891, but Catholic authorities prevented the staging of the play in Bavaria until 1908, when a heavily censored version was finally cleared for performance. In August 1891 the playwright and journalist Hanns von Gumpenberg was sentenced to two months of fortress arrest for having publicly recited a poem by Karl Henckell which was interpreted as a libel of the emperor. Oscar Panizza was even more unfortunate. In 1894 he published *Das Liebeskonzil* (*The Council of Love*), a vicious satire on the

Holy Family and the papal court of Alexander VI in which God, Christ, Mary, and their emissaries on earth are all portrayed as weak, morally corrupt, and sexually depraved. Panizza was brought to trial on charges of blasphemy and in 1895 condemned to a year in jail.

To be sure, conditions in Bavaria were no worse than anywhere else in Germany at the time, and may even have been better. Notably, there was a rule in Bavaria and certain other states, but not in Prussia or Saxony, that offenses committed by means of the press had to be tried by jury.²⁵ This was a crucial safeguard, for the system made convictions much harder to obtain than in Dresden or Berlin, where press offenses were dealt with by tribunals of professional judges. Moreover, painters and sculptors were generally more immune to the kinds of censorship to which writers and dramatists were increasingly subjected in the 1890s.²⁶ Nevertheless, the atmosphere in Munich at the turn of the century was considerably more repressive than in the previous decades, when the liberal administration had usually managed to defend artistic freedom against attack from the Catholic Church and the Center Party. The change was keenly felt by everyone involved with the arts.

It is within this context that the increased incidence of eroticism in Munich painting of the 1890s assumes new implications. Either as a subconscious response to the Center's repressive policies or as a conscious nose-thumbing at prudish politicians, freethinking Munich artists of many different aesthetic persuasions introduced sexual motifs into their work. It was probably not mere coincidence, in fact, that many of Stuck's pictures conflated sensual and religious imagery, as did the Symbolist paintings of Paul Hoecker, Albert von Keller, and Gabriel Max. Indeed, like Panizza's *Council of Love*, Stuck's *Guardian of Paradise* and *Innocence* were very possibly intended as deliberate provocations of the clerical moralists who were exerting increasing influence over Munich's cultural life at the turn of the century.

Stuck—by all accounts a taciturn man who rarely discussed himself or his art—never openly declared his work a rebuttal of Catholic doctrine and policy, but his style

and choice of subjects incurred the clerics' public wrath on at least one occasion.²⁷ Moreover, another very important aspect of Stuck's output suggests that the artist's political and social sympathies were almost certainly directed against resurgent political Catholicism. Throughout his entire career Stuck maintained a lively interest in classical culture, which had been the strongest challenge to Catholic faith and values in Bavaria ever since the early 1800s. Indeed, nineteenth-century Bavarian monarchs consciously used classicism in their efforts to weaken the power of the clerics and nobility and to mold an educated and politically loyal middle class that would serve not the Church but the state.²⁸ Stuck's fascination with Antiquity and its anticlerical spirit of secular rationalism was first evident in the mythological subjects he chose for his early designs for Gerlach and Schenk, and it manifested itself throughout the artist's career. His 1893 poster for the first Secession exhibition (fig. 84), for example, features the helmeted Athena, Greek goddess of war. Centered within an octagon that alluded to the shape of the central hall and cupola of the Secession Gallery on Prinzregentenstrasse, her profiled visage personified the association's combative stance and avant-garde status, and was thus also used on the Secession's letterhead. In 1897 he frontalized the goddess for the poster of the first joint exhibition of the Secession and the Genossenschaft (fig. 85), a formulation that so impressed the young Gustav Klimt that he adopted it for his renowned painting *Pallas Athena* of 1898.²⁹ Stuck also used the poster as the basis of his own *Pallas Athena* of 1898 (fig. 86), which portrays the deity *en face*, wearing a helmet and the aegis on which the Gorgon's head is displayed.

However, Stuck was interested not just in the thematic heritage of Antiquity, but also in its formal characteristics. He claimed as his own the rectilinearity of the Archaic Period vase paintings in the Glyptothek, just as he appropriated the spatial ambiguity of the frieze fragments, on which three-dimensional sculptural figures are placed against resolutely flat, two-dimensional backgrounds. Indeed, dichotomy is the formal key to all of Stuck's most successful images, which, like ancient pottery and



84. Franz von Stuck, Poster for the First Secession Salon of 1893



85. Franz von Stuck, Poster for the Seventh International Exhibition of 1897



86. Franz von Stuck, *Pallas Athena*, 1898

sculpture, tend to be organized around sharp contrasts of line, form, and color. The horizontal is set against the vertical, the sculptural is paired with the two-dimensional, and light is juxtaposed to dark. The

overall effect is highly decorative, and it was this that led the younger generation in Munich to adopt Stuck as a father figure who would point the way to an abstract-tending art in which form and color might play a greater role than subject in conveying psychological and emotive meaning. Not surprisingly, Kandinsky, who arrived in Munich in 1896, chose Stuck as his second teacher, working almost an entire year to improve his skills so that he might be accepted into Stuck's class. When he was finally admitted after one rejection, Kandinsky was advised to abandon color and work exclusively in black and white in order to learn the secrets of form. Stuck thereby effectively launched Kandinsky on his lifelong study of positive and negative space that proved so important in the evolution of modern art.³⁰

Stuck's interest in Antiquity came to its fullest fruition in the home he designed for himself in 1897 and 1898. He modeled much of the interior after Pompeiian villas, using mosaics and fourth-style wall painting to create a Roman ambience, while on the

exterior Doric columns, sculptural friezes of battling gods, and plaster casts of Greek statues set a Neoclassical tone. In the 1890s Stuck had begun to make sculpture himself, and he installed his most important three-dimensional work—a monumental spear-throwing Amazon riding saddleless on the back of a spirited horse—on the grounds of the villa, and displayed a smaller version of the work (fig. 87) inside. Indeed, in addition to drafting the architectural plans himself, Stuck also designed all the villa's other ornament, from the furniture down to lighting fixtures. The Stuck villa still stands, an impressive if somewhat eccentric monument to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* aesthetic that swept Europe around the turn of the century.

Unfortunately, Stuck's output after 1900 was merely a hollow paraphrase of his powerful early statements, though this did not damage his remarkable career. Already in 1893 he was awarded the title of Royal Bavarian Professor, and in 1895, at the unusually young age of thirty-two, he replaced his erstwhile teacher Wilhelm Lindenschmit at the Munich Academy. By 1897 he was wealthy enough to build his electrically lit villa just down the block from the Secession Gallery, on Prinzregentenstrasse, one of the most exclusive streets in Munich. In 1905 Stuck was ennobled, and by 1914 the son of a humble miller was counted among Bavaria's millionaires.³¹ Indeed, there is no doubt that the artist's preoccupation with erotica was shared by a good many turn-of-the-century Germans, who made Stuck's fortune with their patronage.



87. Franz von Stuck, *Riding Amazon*, 1897



88. Richard Riemerschmid, *In the Open*, 1895

Richard Riemerschmid

Like Franz von Stuck, Richard Riemerschmid reacted to the sociopolitical climate of Munich in the 1890s, but his visual response, which typified a third variant of Symbolism at the Secession exhibitions, was quite different.³² Born in 1868 in Munich, Riemerschmid was encouraged to pursue his interest in art by his maternal uncle, Victor Weishaupt, a *plein air* Impressionist painter who would later involve his nephew in the founding of the Secession. Riemerschmid studied painting at the Munich Academy from 1888 to 1890, and his earliest surviving pictures, which date from the early 1890s, are Naturalist landscapes executed in and around Munich. Like so many other



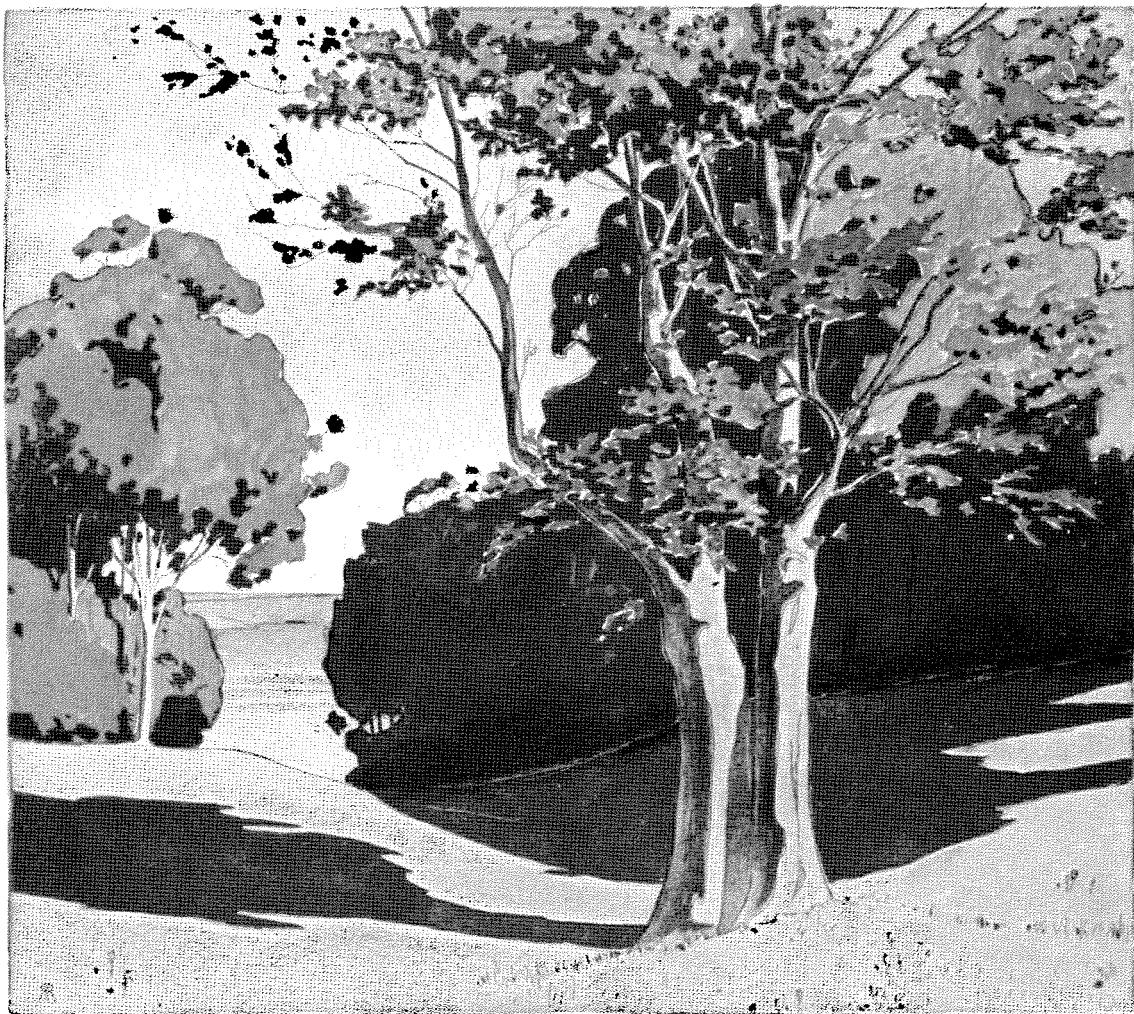
89. Richard Riemerschmid, *In Arcadia*, 1897

artists at the turn of the century, however, he soon rejected the premises of Naturalism, and around 1893 he began to explore compositional motifs and inflections of mood wholly alien to works by artists like Liebermann. The space of *In the Open* (fig. 88) of 1895, for example, is so steeply uptilted that only a narrow strip of sky peeks over the flowering field, whose untouched purity, signified by the blooming wildflowers and the unregulated course of the brook, is contemplated by the young woman standing in the foreground of the picture. In isolated meditation, she gazes at the spring meadow within which she is embedded.

Over the next several years Riemerschmid focused his work on man's relationship to an unspoiled, pristine nature. *In Arcadia* of 1897 (fig. 89) replaces the proper young middle-class woman of *In the Open* with a tiny nude mother and child, who run

toward us, laughing, through a flowering meadow. Similarly, one of the designs Riemerschmid executed for *Jugend*, the art nouveau journal founded by Georg Hirth in 1896, portrays a recumbent nude holding a bouquet of flowers she has picked from the field in which she now lies (fig. 90). The esteem in which Riemerschmid held nature is evident in each of these compositions, but one painting above all, completed in 1896, made this explicit. (It was destroyed during World War II, but several preliminary studies (fig. 92) as well as a slightly different second version of 1900 (fig. 91) still exist.³³) Titled "*And the Lord God Planted a Garden in Eden.*" *Genesis 2:8*, the first version of the picture represented in triptych format an Arcadian landscape flanked on one side by the nude figure of a man and on the other by a woman, both of whom gaze with reverence toward the center of the composi-

JUGEND



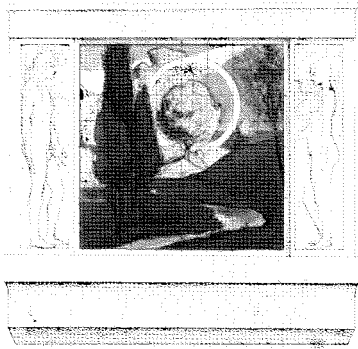
90. Richard Riemerschmid, Title page
to *Jugend*, 19 June 1897



91. Richard Riemerschmid, "And the Lord God Planted a Garden in Eden." *Genesis 2:8*, 1900

tion, occupied by an apple tree encircled with a thin golden nimbus. By thus substituting nature for Christ within a format traditionally reserved for religious imagery, Riemerschmid defined his work as a kind of profane altar painting, in which nature, not God, was holy. Though he did away with both the triptych frame and the nudes in the 1900 rendition, Riemerschmid's essential message of the sanctity of nature was

still unambiguously conveyed through the haloed tree of life. Such a radical statement was bound to cause considerable controversy, and after the first version was exhibited at the 1896 Secession salon and acquired in 1897 by the Dresdener Gemäldegalerie, conservatives in the Saxon Parliament attacked the museum for its purchase of this allegedly blasphemous deification of nature.



92. Richard Riemerschmid, Study for "And the Lord God Planted a Garden in Eden." Genesis 2:8, 1896

But if Riemerschmid was one of the most talented German painters to emphasize the importance of nature in his work, he was by no means the only one. To the contrary, a

number of other turn-of-the-century artists, many of them secessionists, also re-created serene pastorals on canvas. The Berlin painter Ludwig von Hofmann, for example, participated annually in the Munich Secession salons with works such as *Spring Dance* (fig. 93), a Redon-like image of nudes floating within a luxuriant surface of colored textures that have no beginning, middle, or end. Though Otto Eckmann's *Spring* (fig. 48), which was exhibited at the first Secession exhibition in 1893, and *Grand Duchess Caroline von Sachsen-Weimar*, ca. 1903 (fig. 94), by the secessionist Hans Olde are both rooted more firmly in the real world, the youthful women who are the subjects of these paintings are nevertheless entranced, hieratic presences, gliding dreamily through their Arcadian settings. Similarly, in Olde's pointillist *Sleigh Ride*, ca. 1893 (fig. 95), a sleigh cuts quietly



93. Ludwig von Hofmann, *Spring Dance*



94. Hans Olde, *Grand Duchess Caroline von Sachsen-Weimar*, ca. 1903

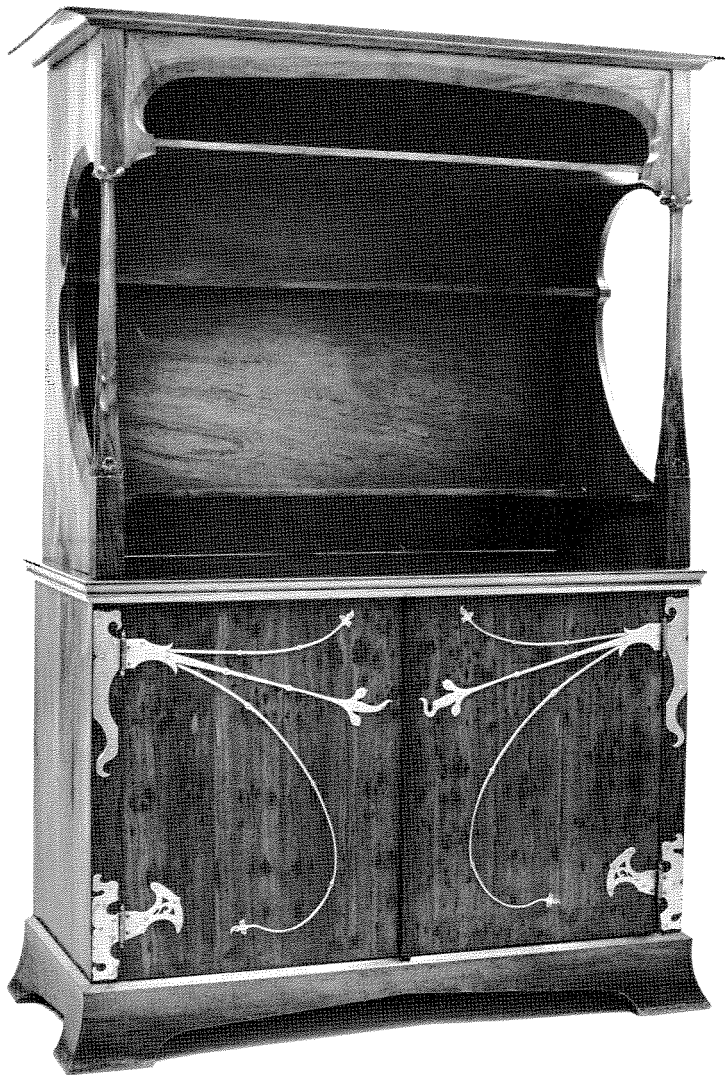


95. Hans Olde, *Sleigh Ride*, ca. 1893

through the snow of a landscape hermetically sealed from a world troubled by industry, poverty, and ugliness.

In 1895 Riemerschmid undertook a project that initially seemed to be, but actually was not, a departure from his interest in creating bucolic pastorals. That year he married the actress Ida Hofmann, and, after searching in vain to find suitable furniture for their new apartment, he designed it himself. Most of the pieces were fussy and overly dependent on the Gothic furniture in the Bavarian National Museum that he used as models, but by 1897, when Riemerschmid made his first public appearance as an applied artist, he had radically simpli-

fied his designs. That year he exhibited in Munich an elegant buffet (fig. 96), whose only ornament is a bit of decorative metalwork on the doors and some carving on the columns. Henceforth Riemerschmid worked increasingly with the decorative arts, designing single pieces as well as entire ensembles for patrons and exhibitions. In 1898, for example, the painter W. Otto in Bremen commissioned Riemerschmid to design a set of living room furniture, the overall simplicity and restraint of which are conveyed by the small table and two armchairs (fig. 97) that were part of a corner group in the ensemble. Another important commission came in 1898–99, when the



96. Richard Riemerschmid, Buffet, 1897

piano firm J. Mayer & Co. engaged Riemerschmid to create a music room for one of its pianos. The result was displayed at the 1899 Deutsche Kunst-Ausstellung (German Art Exhibition) in Dresden, in a room that included a cabinet and music stands, as well as chairs for the musicians (fig. 98). These rank among the most beautiful and well-crafted objects of the period, uniting elegance with function in a design that allowed the musicians to sit and play comfortably (fig. 99). The remarkable doorway to his "Zimmer eines Kunstfreundes" (Room for an Art-Lover) (fig. 100), which he created for the 1900 World's Fair in Paris,

firmly established Riemerschmid's international reputation as a designer, and he henceforth abandoned painting altogether to work exclusively in that field and in architecture.

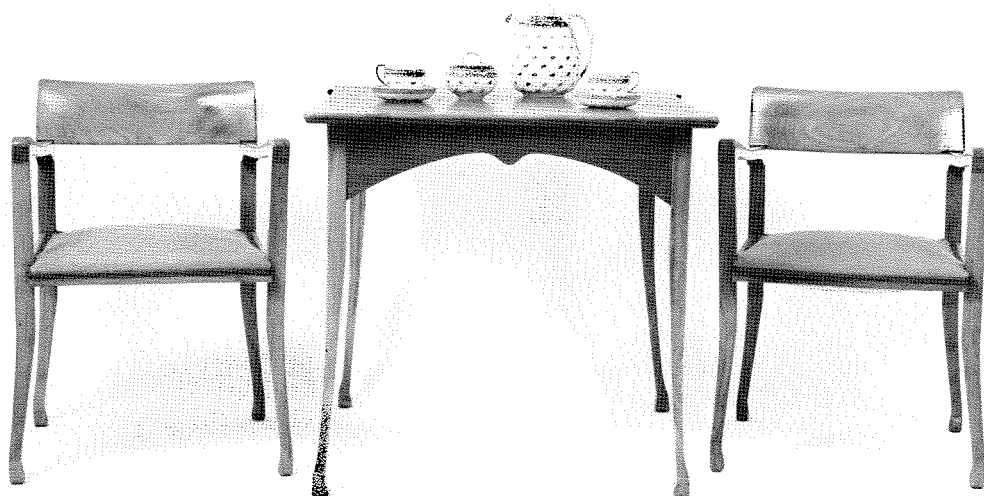
Of course, Riemerschmid was not alone in embracing the applied arts. At first hesitantly and then with increasing conviction and assuredness, German painters, sculptors, and architects like Otto Eckmann, Bernhard Pankok, Hermann Obrist, August Endell, and Bruno Paul expanded their horizons in the mid- to late 1890s by designing objects. Usually they had neither the training nor the desire to execute the pieces themselves, so they gave their drawings to craftsmen who transformed them into finished products. Nothing was deemed too small or unworthy of consideration, and furniture, wall hangings, floor coverings, eating utensils, light fixtures, wallpaper, and even clothing now commanded the attention of artists previously concerned with only the "fine" arts. Initially the artists lavished their attentions on the middle and upper classes, but by the turn of the century the more socially minded among them were also designing well-made yet affordable objects for workers. In 1900, for example, when Riemerschmid exhibited his lavish "Room for an Art-Lover" at the World's Fair in Paris (fig. 100), he also won a competition sponsored by the König-Ludwig-Preisstiftung in Nürnberg for a set of living room furniture to be produced for under 350 DM.³⁴ Indeed, Riemerschmid later made the needs of the working class a central concern of his production: between 1907 and 1913 he designed the community of Hellerau near Dresden, where workers employed by the Deutsche Werkstätten were provided homes in a garden city that is still considered exemplary of its type.

Different as this widespread interest in the decorative arts may seem from the contemporaneous enthusiasm for an unspoiled, pristine nature, as reflected in the paintings of Riemerschmid and others, each had its origins in the frustration that many turn-of-the-century Germans felt with modern urban life.³⁵ Indeed, modernity had hit Germany with particular force. The years between unification and World War I saw the country quickly evolve from a basically rural nation into an urban one. Whereas

only 36.1 percent of the population lived in communities of over two thousand persons in 1871, by 1910 that figure had risen to 60 percent. The growth of the *Grossstädte*, defined in Germany at the time as cities numbering one hundred thousand persons or more, was especially striking. In 1871 there were only eight such cities, whereas in 1910 there were forty-eight.³⁶ Accompanying these rapid demographic changes were severe urban housing shortages and sharp increases in crime and vice. In Berlin alone about three thousand registered prostitutes were outnumbered by an approximated forty to fifty thousand illicit ones, who attracted business from all over North and Central Germany. Apart from questions of public order, this made venereal disease a major social problem. According to one estimate, in 1900 the number of recorded cases treated in German hospitals was exceeded only by those of tuberculosis.³⁷

Even Munich—which in comparison to Berlin or the cities of the Ruhr remained largely unindustrialized—was beginning to look like an urban metropolis. Between

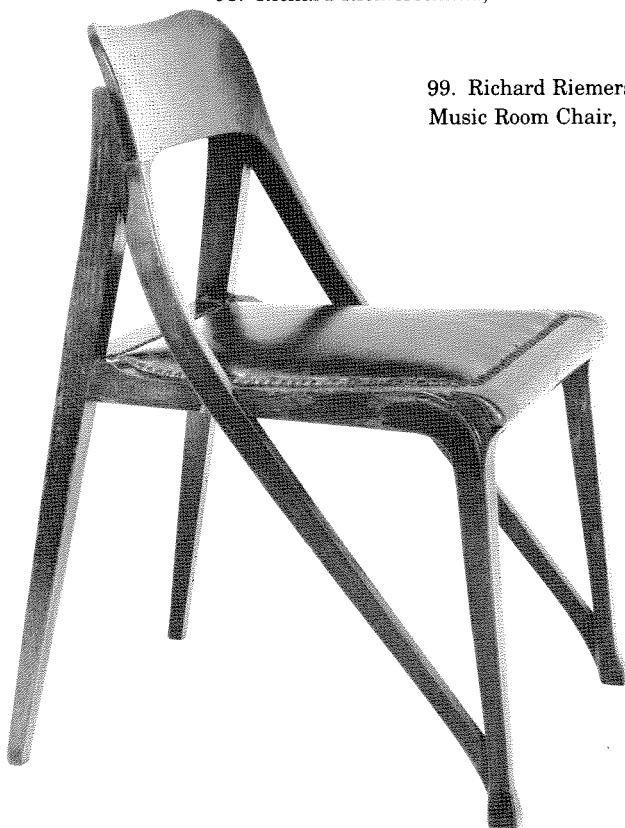
1868, when Riemerschmid was born, and 1896, when he completed his *Eden* picture, its population increased by more than two and a half times, from 154,000 to 415,500.³⁸ Most of this growth occurred in the 1880s and 1890s, when breweries, publishing houses, and the transportation and service industries expanded considerably, drawing the rural unemployed into the city as never before.³⁹ This growth was not only accompanied by the same social problems that vexed other cities but was also attended by a widening of the gap between the classes. As financiers and industrialists elsewhere in Germany had done in the 1860s and later, the upwardly mobile of Munich now adopted a more pretentious, indulgent lifestyle that clearly set them apart from the workers. As contemporaries noted, by the time Luitpold assumed the throne of Bavaria as Regent, the egalitarian atmosphere that had characterized Munich under Ludwig II was a thing of the past, and the contrasts between the rich and the poor, between the educated and the uneducated, became increasingly glaring as the century drew to a close.⁴⁰



97. Richard Riemerschmid, Table and Two Armchairs, 1898



98. Richard Riemerschmid, Music Room at the Deutsche Kunst-Ausstellung, Dresden, 1899



99. Richard Riemerschmid,
Music Room Chair, 1898-99

Responses to these changes were many and varied. Some contemporaries tried to implement change through political action. Riemerschmid, for example, joined Friedrich Naumann's National Social Association, a short-lived political party founded in 1896 and dedicated to reducing the gulf between the working classes and bourgeois society.⁴¹ But by far the most common reaction was a kind of escapist, Neo-Romantic agrarianism that advocated leaving the city behind and returning to the land. Julius Langbehn's 1890 *Rembrandt as Educator*, for instance, was in part based on the notion that the best, the truly authentic German was the peasant, whose virtues and virility could inspire a moral reform of Germany that would restore the proper, nonmaterialistic view of life to the nation.⁴² And, indeed, some took Langbehn's advice to heart, actually founding agrarian settlements free of capitalist entanglements. The colony of Eden, established in 1893, was one of the first. Land was common property here, and the inhabitants contributed a part

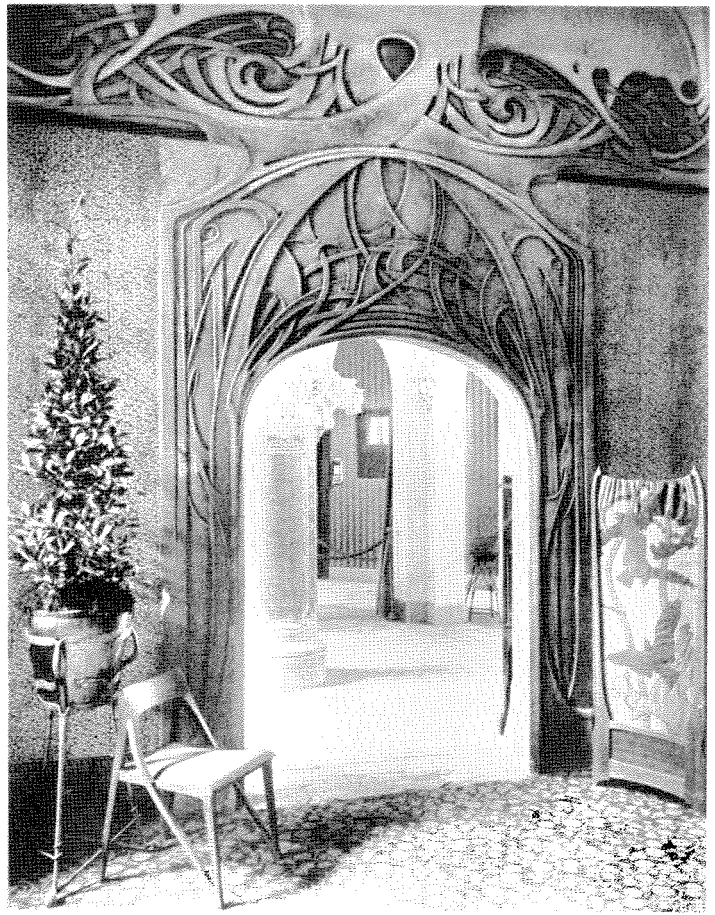
of their labor for the benefit of the whole community. Other Germans remained in the city, but sought regular spiritual renewal in the country. Members of the *Wandervögel*, the institutional affiliation of the German Youth Movement founded in 1901, quite literally fled the cities and suburbs during the hours they spent together in order to pursue fellowship in more "natural" settings.⁴³ Finally, the reformist *Gartenstadtbewegung* or Garden City Movement picked up steam shortly after 1900. A kind of synthesis of town and country in which single-family homes would be set amid greenery, the true garden city was completely self-sufficient, with a harmonious balance between small industry and agriculture.⁴⁴

In the absence of comprehensive studies it is difficult to judge how many artists at the turn of the century embraced the underlying nationalism that pervaded many of these *völkisch* responses to the city. But there is no doubt that the same anti-urban sentiment that prompted German youth to flee the city for outings in the country and that led to the establishment of rural communes like Eden also induced artists to create on canvas serene utopian environments seemingly untouched by the evils of modern life. The designers were likewise motivated by an antipathy to the disagreeable aspects of modernity, and looked to the decorative arts as a possible means of rejuvenation. If only mankind could be surrounded with beautiful, well-crafted objects, artists reasoned, the ugliness and misery of modern life might be diminished. As Hermann Obrist, one of the most convincing apologists and theorists of the movement, wrote in 1901, the true mission of the decorative arts is to

anticipate how we are to refashion our dismal bourgeois reality in such a noble way that life in the future will be less toilsome than now.

Let us unite, O nation—citizens, sovereigns, critics, cities, scholars, women, and visual artists of all kinds—to fulfill this mission together.

As yet we are scattered like the spread fingers of a hand, each of which is powerless on its own. If we clench them into a fist, they could become a hammer that would smash the very prosaism of life.⁴⁵



100. Richard Riemerschmid, Doorway to the Room for an Art-Lover at the Paris World's Fair, 1900

Not surprisingly, just as the Neo-Romantic painters took their subject matter from the country, so too did designers like Riemerschmid draw their formal vocabulary from nature. The appliqué ironwork on Riemerschmid's 1897 buffet (fig. 96), for example, meticulously renders the parts of a flowering plant, down to the nodes on the stem from which new buds will soon appear. The diagonal support of his music room chair (fig. 99) is more suggestive, recalling the sweeping curves of growing plants, yet not depicting them literally. But whether literal transcriptions or suggestive descriptions, all these objects share an undulating, seemingly organic flowing line, whose rootedness in nature might rejuvenate a people weary of modern city life, and reinvest them with the energy and enthusiasm of youth. Accordingly, the style was christened



101. Henry van de Velde, Study at the 1899 Secession Salon

"Jugendstil" after Georg Hirth's art nouveau journal, for which Riemerschmid and many of his colleagues supplied designs.

At least initially the Secession played an important role in the dissemination of both Jugendstil and the reformist ideals of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* movement. In 1896 it mounted a retrospective of Walter Crane, the English craftsman and apostle of William Morris, which was the first in a series of Secession shows that devoted space to the work of decorative artists. That winter, for example, the Secession put together a large exhibition of posters from around the world, and the following year supported the inclusion of the decorative arts in the seventh international exhibition in the Glaspalast—the first joint showing of the Genossenschaft and the Secession since the split in 1892. Only two of the seventy-five rooms in the

Glaspalast were devoted to contemporary "Kleinkunst," but they were the main attraction of the exhibition, entrancing both the general public and the critics, who proclaimed the birth of a new national style.⁴⁶ Arranged by Martin Dülfer and Theodor Fischer, the rooms featured embroideries by Hermann Obrist, woven wall hangings by Otto Eckmann, stained-glass windows by Carl Ule, vases by Emile Gallé and by the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company, rugs by Georges Lemmen, and furniture by Hans Eduard von Berlepsch, Bernhard Pankok, and Richard Riemerschmid, who made his first public appearance as a designer with his 1897 buffet (fig. 96).

In 1898 the Secession continued to sponsor the decorative arts, exhibiting at its summer salon illustrations made for *Jugend* and objects mostly by foreign

designers, including Emile Gallé, Paul Maurice Du Bois, Henry Nocq, V. Vallgren, Philippe Wolfers, and the Tiffany Company of New York. In the winter the association mounted its second show of posters and prints, with works by Beardsley, Mucha, Signac, Steinlen, Vuillard, and Felicien Rops.

But unquestionably the most spectacular exhibition came in the summer of 1899, when the Secession allowed the Ausschuss für Kunst im Handwerk (Committee for Art in Craft)—a Munich group devoted to mounting shows of the decorative arts within larger exhibitions of the “fine” arts—to put together a series of ensembles for its summer salon.⁴⁷ Henry van de Velde exhibited his furniture for the first time in Munich, showing a fully outfitted study (fig. 101), the centerpiece of which was an impressive oak desk whose sweeping Jugendstil curves were widely praised in the press. Fritz Erler designed a parlor (fig. 102), connected to a bedroom by Franz Mayr, while Bernhard Pankok created an entrance hall and Bruno Paul a dining room. Each was filled with furniture and objects executed by members of the Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk (United Workshops for Art in Craft), a limited liability company for the decorative arts founded in Munich in 1898 to facilitate links between artist-designers, executant-craftsmen, and the buying public.⁴⁸ Scotland was also represented at the exhibition by the Macdonald sisters and Mackintosh, as was France by Charpentier and Lalique, Russia by Fabergé, and the United States by Tiffany. A veritable feast of German and foreign decorative arts, the exhibition featured objects as diverse as electric, gas, and petroleum lamps, iridescent glass vases, jewelry, embroidered tablecloths, clocks, and framed mirrors.⁴⁹

In the last years of the century, then, the Secession salons were an important outlet for the work of Riemerschmid and his German and foreign colleagues. To be sure, these shows were not the only Munich venue for the new arts and crafts movement, for the Genossenschaft also exhibited works by the young modernist designers. But the impact of Jugendstil was typically diluted in the Glaspalast, where works were also displayed by older, more traditional



102. Fritz Erler, Parlor at the 1899 Secession Salon

artists whose historicism was anathema to designers like Riemerschmid, Obrist, Pankok, and Eckmann.⁵⁰ By contrast the Secession presented in the late 1890s an undiluted version of the modern decorative arts, whose organic formal vocabulary and reformist ideals were to prove tremendously influential for the next generation of artists just coming of age in the Bavarian capital.

The Lyric Tradition

As I have suggested, the work of Liebermann, Uhde, Kalckreuth, Stuck, and Riemerschmid represented the major aesthetic trends of the Secession exhibitions in the 1890s—exhibitions that were consistently identified by contemporaries as especially “modern.” Yet to note simply that the work of Naturalists like Liebermann and Uhde dominated the shows in the first half

of the decade and that the work of Symbolists and Jugendstil designers like Kalckreuth, Stuck, and Riemerschmid reigned in the second half does little to characterize the particular nature of the Secession's modernity, which was notably different from that of much other early modern European art. Simply stated, the Secession salons of the 1890s adumbrated a variant of modernism that generally eschewed direct expression of intense emotive content in favor of a more evocative and filtered nature lyricism.

This is evident above all in the subject matter of the Munich secessionists. Whereas many French Naturalists, Realists, and Impressionists of the 1880s and 1890s were concerned with the representation of contemporary urban life, the German Naturalists of the Munich Secession focused almost exclusively on rural themes. Even when they drew their subjects from the city, as Max Liebermann did in his paintings of the Amsterdam orphanage and retirement home, or Gotthard Kuehl in his pictures of churches in Hamburg, the Germans tended to avoid themes that were obviously urban in character. In itself, this is not surprising, as Munich—the city that shaped the sensibilities of most of these artists—was far more provincial than cosmopolitan Paris, remaining more a large village than a metropolitan center well into the twentieth century. Indeed, that a large number of the German Naturalists gravitated not to Paris but to Holland for their foreign study trips indicates that they simply felt most comfortable living in and drawing their subjects from rustic environments. Significantly, however, the Naturalists of the Munich Secession never developed a rural equivalent to Raffaelli's urban vagabonds, Manet's ragpickers, or Degas' absinthe drinkers and laundresses. Almost invariably they shied away from the harsher realities of contemporary life in the country, preferring instead, like Liebermann, to present evenhandedly both the good and the bad or, like Uhde, to emphasize optimistically the positive over the negative.

Similarly, the themes preferred by the Symbolists exhibiting with the Munich Secession were almost always drawn from rural environments. Nor is this particularly surprising, as Symbolists all over Europe

rejected the subject matter of the city in favor of non-urban themes more appropriate to the expression of subjective, interiorized experience. Yet what is striking about the Symbolists exhibiting with the Munich Secession is that they, like the Naturalists, tended to avoid the expression of anguish in their work, preferring instead to evoke less powerful emotions through an understated nature lyricism. Even the brooding character of Kalckreuth's art, which was more somber than that of almost any other Symbolist showing with the Secession, cannot compare to the tortured psychological tensions in the paintings of Munch, Hodler, and Ensor.

The secessionists' apparent aversion to modern-life themes and gripping emotive content, as well as their preference for subject matter rooted in nature and defined in a lyrical, evocative manner, was also reflected in the foreign art chosen for the Secession salons of the 1890s. It was not Munch but the mood painters Albert Edelfelt, Richard Bergh, Peter Ilsted, Bruno Liljefors, Gerhard Munthe, Eilif Peterssen, and Anders Zorn who represented Scandinavia at the Secession exhibitions.⁵¹ Similarly, Albert Welti and Arnold Böcklin were enlisted from Switzerland, while Hodler was ignored.⁵² And while the work of the evocative Belgian Symbolists Fernand Khnopff, Xavier Mellery, and Jean Delville was exhibited at the Secession salons during the 1890s, that of James Ensor, Vincent van Gogh, and Jan Toorop, which was more intense and directly expressive, was not. In its place were the pictures of the Naturalists of the Hague School, including George Hendrik Breitner, Paul Gabriel, Josef Israels, the Maris brothers, Hendrik Willem Mesdag, and Johannes Weissenbruch. Italy was represented by the Symbolist evocations of Giovanni Segantini, and from France came Edmond Aman-Jean, Paul Albert Besnard, Jacques-Emile Blanche, Eugène Carrière, Charles Cottet, Henri Gervex, Paul Helleu, Léon Lhermitte, Henry Martin, and Ary Renan. Significantly, when the Impressionists exhibited at all with the Secession they showed mostly landscapes,⁵³ and the French Post-Impressionists Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Seurat did not participate at all in the Secession salons.

That the Munich Secession failed to exhibit works by those artists of the 1890s who today dominate our canon has led many to question the importance of this exhibition society. Indeed, even some contemporaries felt frustration with the association's aesthetic program of the 1890s. The painter and illustrator Hermann Schlittgen, for example, tried in the mid-1890s to bring to Munich the work of Gauguin, who was anxious to exhibit in the Bavarian capital, but he could not convince anyone, including the Secession, to sponsor this important artist. "A profound interest in modern art existed really only in North Germany," Schlittgen later complained, noting that in Munich even the progressive segments of the art community were "too bound to tradition, more conservative, and somewhat suspicious of the modern."⁵⁴ It was precisely this, in fact, that led Schlittgen and nine other artists to resign from the Secession in early 1894 to form the *Freie Vereinigung* (Free Association). The goal of this society, like that of the Secession, was to sponsor small exhibitions of international art, but from the outset its members wanted the shows to be more radical than those of the Secession. With no wealthy or influential benefactors like Georg Hirth, however, the *Freie Vereinigung* disintegrated after mounting only one small show in Berlin, and very soon most of its founders were back exhibiting with the Secession.⁵⁵

But despite the Secession's indifference to many of the European artists who are today considered the masters of the 1890s, the association and its exhibitions nevertheless deserve consideration, for they shed light on the work of several seminal twentieth-century modernists who began their careers in Munich at the turn of the century. Wassily Kandinsky, having turned his back on a promising career as a university law professor, arrived in Munich from Russia in 1896 at the relatively mature age of thirty, determined to become an artist. He first enrolled in the private painting school of Anton Azbè, a Yugoslav whose atelier was among the most popular in Munich, and by 1900 he had gained admittance to Franz von Stuck's prestigious class at the Munich Academy. That same year the Swiss student Paul Klee was also admitted to Stuck's course, having spent the previous two years

in Munich learning the basics of draftsmanship in another local atelier, that of Heinrich Knirr. Franz Marc, son of a Munich landscape and genre painter, entered the academy in 1900 as well, attending the classes of Gabriel Hackl and Wilhelm Diez.

These artists received their formal training from their teachers at the academy, but the Munich Secession, together with the local museums and Munich journals like *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus*, was also an important component of their education. Indeed, each of these future innovators regularly attended the Secession salons of the late 1890s, which apparently impressed them all. Kandinsky wrote of the "brilliant debut" and energy of the early Secession, which he praised particularly for its support of foreign artists.⁵⁶ Klee was even more appreciative, filling his letters home to Switzerland with accounts of the association's salons. "I'm visiting the exhibition frequently," he wrote his parents in June 1899. "The Secession is especially grand this time. Herterich, Uhde, Zorn . . . as painters and Stuck and Hildebrand as sculptors [are] simply knockouts. It's not been as impressive in the Glaspalast for ages." Indeed, this particular exhibition—which Klee described with youthful enthusiasm in another letter home as "more magnificent than ever"—seems to have set the standard for him. When he came upon one picture that that he liked in the competing *Genossenschaft* salon, Klee noted tellingly that it was "worthy of the Secession."⁵⁷ Not surprisingly, both Kandinsky and Klee repeatedly submitted work to the Secession exhibitions, and the acceptance of a suite of Klee's etchings in 1906 was a source of great satisfaction and inspiration to the young artist.⁵⁸

Each of these artists would later reject the Secession as provincial, but the parallels between their mature work and that exhibited at the Secession exhibitions in the 1890s are nonetheless striking. On the most superficial level, the increasing emphasis on pure line and form in the works that dominated the shows in the latter half of the decade foreshadowed Kandinsky's breakthrough to abstraction just before the war. Indeed, in at least one instance the Secession introduced Kandinsky to an important



103. Akseli Gallen-Kallela, *Defense of the Sampo*, 1896

contact. In May and June of 1898 it featured a show of Russian and Finnish Symbolist painting put together by Sergei Diaghilev, who, before turning to ballet in 1909, organized art exhibitions and produced and edited Russia's avant-garde journal *Mir Iskusstva* (*World of Art*). Among the most interesting participants—among whom were the Russians Mikhail Vrubel,

Isaak Levitan, Valentin Serov, Alexandre Benois, Lev Bakst, and Konstantin Somov—was the Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, whose 1896 *Defense of the Sampo* (fig. 103) was a resounding success. Its curious mixture of archaic stylization and realism impressed many visitors to the exhibition, one of whom was undoubtedly Kandinsky, who subsequently featured Gallen-Kallela



104. Wassily Kandinsky, *Study for Composition II*, 1909–10

with thirty-six works in the fourth Phalanx exhibition of 1902.⁵⁹

Similarly, the utopian ideals of Munich's arts and crafts movement, as represented at the Secession salons in the final years of the decade, unquestionably had considerable impact on this young Russian artist, whose work and theoretical writings were informed by the belief that art possessed a redemptive power that might reform contemporary life.⁶⁰ Indeed, the principal message of the *Blaue Reiter* almanac—that remarkable chronicle conceived by Kandinsky and Marc in 1911 and published by Piper Verlag in 1912—avowed the power of art to rejuvenate a mankind weary of the materialism of modern urban life and to initiate a new spiritual epoch. Combining illustrations of paintings, graphics, and sculpture—many of which alluded to healing and salvation—with essays on music, art, and theatre, the book itself, like the ensembles of Riemerschmid and his colleagues at the Secession exhibitions, was intended as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* whose syn-

thesis of the arts would ultimately ennoble mankind.⁶¹

Less obvious, perhaps, are the subtle affinities between the essentially nature-oriented, lyrical, and generally optimistic sensibility of the work exhibited at the Secession salons and that produced by Kandinsky, Marc, and others of the Blaue Reiter group. From the outset Kandinsky,



105. Franz Marc, *White Bull*, 1911



106. Paul Klee, *Screen with Aare River Landscape Scenes*, 1900

for example, used medieval towns or unspoiled, pristine landscapes as the basis of his images of Russian fairy tales, and later, from about 1908 on, he employed landscapes as the setting for his omnipresent horse and rider motif (fig. 104), symbolic of mankind's salvation from materialism. Even his radically abstract paintings of 1912–13 have an organic character about

them. Though they are virtually devoid of identifiable objects, their sweeping curves and overlapping shapes nevertheless suggest a variety of landscape forms, from gently undulating hills and craggy mountains to subaqueous seascapes. Nature played a similarly important role in the work of Marc, whose paintings and prints were dominated by images of animals in



bucolic settings (fig. 105) not unlike Richard Riemerschmid's earlier pastoral Arcadias (fig. 90). At least until about 1912—when a new note of anxiety enters the compositions of both Kandinsky and Marc—the work of these artists is generally upbeat, its glowing colors and undulating lines conveying either joyful exuberance or quiet serenity.

Nature was of the utmost importance for Klee as well. Initially he intended to become a landscape painter, and a series of decorative panels dating from 1900, originally assembled as a screen and here reproduced in their original order (fig. 106), demonstrate his enthusiasm for the work of Neo-Romantic secessionists like Adolf Hölzel, Ludwig Dill, and Walter Leistikow

(figs. 67, 69, 79). Klee, however, found painting difficult in his formative years and was continually dissatisfied with his efforts on canvas. When he returned from Munich to Bern in 1901 he thus abandoned the decorative style adumbrated in the 1900 screen for biting caricatures that he executed as etchings.⁶² It was not until his trip to Tunisia in 1914 that Klee transcended the cynicism of his early work and rediscovered painting and color, which made a joyful, sun-drenched appearance in his images of the African landscape and thereafter remained an important component of his mature style.

The work of these early Munich modernists is invariably more filtered than the paintings and graphics of the Expressionists in the north, which are generally characterized by an intensity and expressive directness foreign to their South German counterparts. This was a distinction keenly felt by the artists themselves. Kandinsky, in fact, rejected the Brücke artists' spontaneity and undiluted self-expression. "Such things have to be exhibited," he said in a discussion about whether to include illustrations of their work in the *Blaue Reiter* almanac, "but in my eyes it is not right to immortalize them in a documentation of today's art (which our book is to

be) as a somewhat crucial and directing force."⁶³

Is there not a certain symmetry between Kandinsky's aloofness toward the raw power of the art of Kirchner, Heckel, Pechstein, and Mueller and the Munich Secession's obvious uneasiness with the immediacy of works by artists like Ensor, Munch, van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec? Was not the nature lyricism that dominated the Secession salons of the 1890s also an important element in the work of the early-twentieth-century Munich modernists? Indeed, rather than condemn the Munich Secession to historical obscurity for its indifference toward many of those early modern artists who are now considered seminal, it is more fruitful to consider the association and its exhibitions within the context of artistic developments in Munich. Simply stated, the secessionist preference for evocation as opposed to unmediated expression, and for rural subject matter as opposed to urban modern-life themes, was not simply a provincial refusal to embrace the most challenging stylistic and thematic aspects of a nascent modern art, but part of a tradition that would reach its most brilliant expression ten to fifteen years later in the nature-oriented lyricism of Kandinsky, Marc, Klee, and their colleagues.