

A GERMAN VIEW OF WAR AND ART

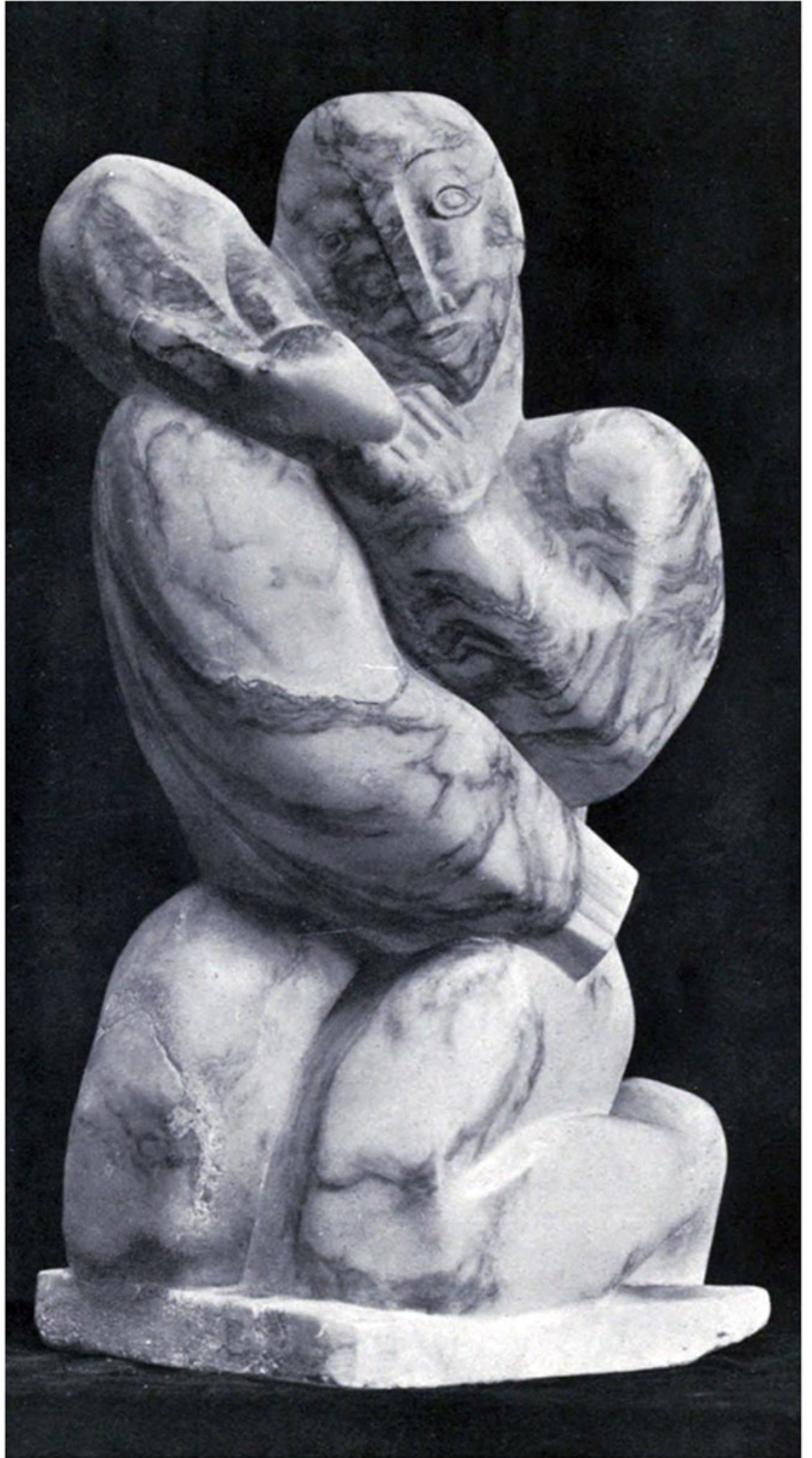
GERMANY HAS EXALTED WAR from so many angles that one might expect German writers to see only benefits accruing to art from the martial spirit. But it was Proudhon, a Frenchman, who said that war exerts a favorable influence on art, and even added with a flash of French wit that if war had not previously existed art would have to invent it. A German of to-day, Hermann Fernau, takes up the *mot* of Proudhon and tries to prove the falseness of the philosophy it implies. Herr Fernau is a native of Breslau, where he lived up to the age of twenty-one. He was staying in Paris when the war broke out, and at that time found a refuge in Switzerland, where he is now residing. He is the author of a book lately published under the title "Because I am a German," in which he examines the earlier work, "J'Accuse," together with the German answers to it; and as a conclusion demands that "every loyal friend of peace must, as a matter of principle, participate in the bringing to trial of the instigator of the war." It is from the peace-magazine, *Friedenswarte*, that Herr Fernau's article is quoted in a leading French review. According to Mr. Fernau, Proudhon is right in saying that the first manifestations of the art-impulse in humanity are associated with the early wars which inspired them. But, he adds, "when Proudhon pretends that the centuries of war are also those of the *chefs-d'aure* of art, and that vanquished peoples, like slaves, have no art, his conclusion is pure sophism."

Proceeding:

"No one could pretend, for example, that the brilliant victories of Napoleon gave an impulse to French art; while Germany, vanquished, produced masters who owed nothing to military campaigns. The dazzling period of German literary and artistic creation was precisely that of Herder, Klopstock, Wieland, Goethe, Schiller, Mozart, Beethoven, Rauch, Overbeck, Cornelius, Winckelmann, and corresponds to the defeats of Valmy and Jena.

"The battles of Leipzig and of the Belle-Alliance were not an epoch of artistic uplift for Germany. If it were true that vanquished peoples are poor in art, the France of 1813 and 1814 would not have produced artists and intellectuals of renown, while Prussia, Austria, and Russia would be illustrious in this respect. But it was just the contrary that took place. The generation which shone in 1830-40 was entering its youth at the time of Waterloo. Victor Hugo, Georges Sand, Balzac, Lamartine, Musset, Dumas, Chopin, Ingres, Delacroix, Courbet appeared when Germany could not confront them with a single rival in painting or in music.

"After 1870-71 the same thing was demonstrated. The defeat of France in no way paralyzed the artistic activity of



BOY WITH A CONY.

From a stone figure by Gaudier-Brzeska. Ezra Pound wrote before the sculptor's death: "If the Germans succeed in damaging Gaudier-Brzeska, they will have done more harm to art than they have by the destruction of Reims Cathedral, for a building once made and recorded can, with some care, be remade, but the uncreated forms of a man of genius can not be set forth by another."

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the French nation. Maupassant, Anatole France, Zola, Degas, Pissaro, Millet, Manet, Monet, Cézanne, Rodin, illustrious names, are the sons of the vanquished. Germany, it is true, had in the same period some artists of worth, such as Brawn and Lang, in military painting, but she did not excel in the domain of art, as would have been expected according to the theory of Proudhon."

The writer goes on to the consideration of conditions of to-day, observing that the contemporary opinion agrees that scarcely any poets, painters, or musicians have risen above mediocrity or given evidence of lofty thought. Where has one seen a veritable master arise, in Europe, during the past two years? he inquires, continuing:

"Do we possess a single *chef-d'œuvre* which is a direct issue of the great war? To speak of Germany alone, the Hauptmanns, Sudermanns, Dehmels, Falkes, etc., have written a few poems . . . which can not be compared sincerely to those which gave them their celebrity. A flagrant proof of this is at hand in a poetic anthology recently published in which have collaborated the two Hauptmanns, Gustave Falke, Ludwig Thomas, Eulenberg, Flaischlein, Hart, Holz, etc.; they have been mere patriots, not artists in the exact sense of the term.

"The war has limited their horizon—once they were bearers of the torch of the ideal, here they reveal themselves but *coryphées* of Pan-Germanism.

"But, it may be replied, if the war is not inspiring the poets and artists at present, yet we will see them at work anew when it ceases. It is true that a Goethe found the subject of a 'Hermann und Dorothea' in war; a Stendhal, a Vigny, a Maupassant have taken therefrom the themes of their romances, but these are exceptions, and it can not be denied that the trenches of to-day do not present the loftiest romantic or poetic epics.

"The artist can, assuredly, find in this war motives for creative work, can feel the action of the ideas to which it gives birth, the union of the forces of a country before a

common danger, the renunciation of personal interest for the general good, the raptness of the soul in devotion and sacrifice; but these sentiments do not dominate contemporaneous art."

The very tendency to accentuate the national or chauvinistic element, thinks this critic, places a composition in the category of the second rate, and he draws the conclusion that modern war is not helpful, but rather inimical, to art. The writer's concluding paragraph to the book mentioned above is:

"In the name of the millions who have already fallen in this gigantic war, in the name of the millions perchance yet to fall, in the name of the public peace and security of Europe, in the name of the culture and civilization of our earth, in the name of the inviolable, unwritten, and eternal right of the nations, I demand this trial and this punishment, and I demand them JUST BECAUSE I AM A GERMAN."