

CURRENT OPINION

October, 1919

REVOLUTION REFLECTED IN THE "NEW" ART OF GERMANY Art as a Weapon for the Destruction of the Old Order



ANDANTE

This statue, by Oswald Herzog, is one of the best examples of the new "expressionist" art of young Germany.

ART and artists have not remained untouched by the revolution in Germany. Art has influenced the revolution, more perhaps than the revolution has influenced art; for pacifistic and insurrectionist canvases grew to maturity in the quiet of many a studio in the days before November. The revolution has merely brought these to light. In the Spring exhibition of the Berlin Secession, for instance, a number of such pictures were exhibited. There was a colossal painting by Hans Richter bearing the title "Peace," showing two grotesque figures of Russian soldiers leading a third, in a white blouse, past a group of tall Greek crosses marking the graves of the fallen. In the background are masses of people struggling toward the height, with flags of all colors. A city in the distance and a background of fiery hues gives the whole thing a weird, mysterious tone. A mural painting, by Magnus Zeller, entitled "Collapse," shows horrible creatures on horseback riding through a fearful cubistic chaos. The foremost horse is rearing itself on its hind legs, the nude rider sits bolt-upright as tho petrified, while weird types of the "old order" tumble about in prostrating attitudes. It is difficult to tell whether the rider is

Figure by
Ernst Barlach



militarism or Spartacus, but there is no doubt that the whole is a fair picture of Germany a few months ago. Still another picture of large proportions is called "Liberty" and shows a giant youth clothed in a swirling drape, with a torch and olive branch in either hand, striding across factories and houses issuing dense clouds of smoke. So writes Cesar Searchinger, a correspondent of the *N. Y. Evening Post*.

Everywhere throughout the exhibition the revolutionary note is present, in the water-colors of Wilhelm Kohlhoff; in the drawings of Bruno Krauskopf, and the same artist's extraordinary picture, "Revolutionary Victims"; in the street fantasies of Claus Richter; and in the impressions of popular assemblies by Magnus Zeller.

But these "secessionists" by no means represent the youngest generation of German painters. "Secession" is so well established in Berlin that in advanced circles it is regarded as "bourgeois." The real radicals who claim to represent the revolution are the members of the so-called "November group," whose creations defy all description.

Between these two opposing camps, or rather aside from both, stands the group of artists banded together under the general name "Der Sturm." In spite of its name it claims to owe nothing to the revolution or the war. A statement of Herwarth Walden, the director of its exhibitions and the editor of its monthly journal, explains that "Sturm" regards art as cosmic experience, which has nothing to do with the world of facts. However, the artists of this group, belonging to the younger generation, for the most part fought in the war, and several of them were killed. Two of them, August Macke, post-impressionist, and Franz Marc, expressionistic painter of animal forms, were among the most promising figures of the young generation.

The "Sturm" group before the war comprised futurists, cubists, post-impressionists and the first "expressionists." Now expressionism is the only flag under which it sails and its great idols are Marc Chagall and Kandinsky, whose last style, entirely non-objective, is the point of departure for the rising generation. The most remarkable figures of this generation are Rudolf Bauer and Georg Muche, both painters of coloristic abstractions, the former in complicated, detailed construction, the latter in simple, often geometrical forms. Equally remarkable in the



"The Last Thing"

Woodcut by
Kathe Kallwitz

1924



PEACE

This is a colossal canvas by Hans Richter which attracted much attention at the Spring "Secession" in Berlin.

plastic art is William Wauer, evidently a disciple of Archipenko, but preferring flat planes and sharp angular formations. He is already widely known for his portrait busts in which he achieved a resemblance to the originals in spite of a very free translation of the natural forms. His "Skater" has become famous. Another sculptor of this school is Oswald Herzog, who models "expressionistic" figures that have a remarkably rhythmic effect. The adjective "lyric" in his case does not appear affected.

If the Revolution has found comparatively little expression in artistic production, it is nevertheless certain to reform art life, art education and the relation of art to the people. Immediately after the revolution there were formed both in Munich and Berlin, "workers' councils for art," to which well-known artists of the new school were elected. The Berlin council issued a manifesto which began:

"Art and the people must form one whole. Art shall no longer be the luxury of the few, but the happiness and life of the masses. The gathering of all the arts under the wings of a great constructive art (*Baukunst*—literally architecture, but the term is probably too narrow) is our aim. Henceforth the artist is the molder of popular feeling and responsible for the visible symbols of the new State. He alone must determine the forms—from statue to coin and postage stamp."

The Munich council enunciated a similar creed:

"The Republic, through the collapse of the old system, has inherited a number of important and constructive duties in the domain of art. The aim of the cultivation of art must be to recognize the fact that art is not a luxury nor an exceptional circumstance, but that it must penetrate the people's daily life; that it shall not be for the few but within reach



A REVOLUTIONARY CORNER OF THE BERLIN "SECESSION"
Magnus Zeller's "Collapse" seems appropriately named, as it is a somewhat cubistic rendition of the revolution.

THE "NEW" ART OF GERMANY

of all; and that its highest achievements, those which may be justified in being called its blessings, are the property of the community."

How far these idealistic programs will eventually be realized remains to be seen. All that is now certain is that a great deal of preliminary organizing and talking has been going on, till now both public and government have been roused to a recognition of the new art democracy. The Berlin council has been particularly active. Through its president, Walter Gropius, it has delivered the following demands:

I. People's houses for the transmission of all the arts to the people. A permanent experimental territory for the trying-out and perfection of new architectural effects.

II. Conversion of privileged art exhibitions into free ones.

III. Liberation of all instruction in architecture, sculpture, painting and craftsmanship from the tutelage of the state.

IV. Reform of the museums into live, educational centers for the people. Proper employment of state funds for the purchase of old and new works.

The third of these demands ought to be especially interesting to the agitators for the state support of art education. Germany has been under the ban of state management for generations, and now that it has become a democracy it wants to be rid of all such "tutelage."

As its most important immediate task the council secured the cooperation of the artists, art workers and critics living in Berlin in the working out of a "utopian building project which shall comprise architectural, sculptural and graphic designs in equal degree." This project has now been completed and on its basis an institution has been founded in Weimar which is said to



"The Mothers"

Woodcut by Kathe Kallwitz

1922 - 1923

(image added)