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Modern Worlds

Austrian and German Art,
1890-1940

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Zum Buch

Published on the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Neue Galerie New York, this stunning volume celebrates the varied achievements of modern art history in the German-speaking world by examining historical developments in Austria and Germany from 1890 to 1940.

Illustrated throughout with exquisite reproductions of the museum's holdings, this book considers the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche and his writings on the fine arts and examines the founding of the Secessionist artists' organizations in Germany and Austria. Insightful essays trace the emergence of Expressionism and abstraction, as well as the development of such movements as Dada and New Objectivity. Evolutions in architecture and design are appraised through the legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as the establishment of the Darmstadt Artists' Colony and the Wiener Werkstätte. The book also examines the role of the German Werkbund and the founding of the Bauhaus school. Finally, the book briefly addresses the horrific impact of the National Socialists' degenerate art campaign, which resulted in incalculable damage and led to the exile and death of artists and designers of the era. From well-known artists such as Otto Dix, Josef Hoffmann, Vasily Kandinsky, Gustav Klimt, and Egon Schiele, to lesser recognized but equally important figures, including Albert Birkle, Alfred Kubin, Felix Nussbaum, and Dagobert Peche, this book offers an authoritative and kaleidoscopic look at a crucial moment in history and a portrait of radical thought that changed forever the way we experience art in our lives.

Autor

Olaf Peters

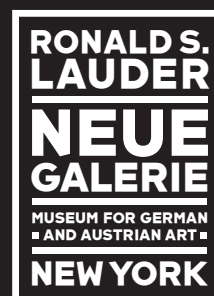
MODERN WORLDS

AUSTRIAN AND GERMAN ART, 1890–1940

Edited by Renée Price

With preface by Ronald S. Lauder, foreword by Renée Price,
and contributions by Olaf Peters and Janis Staggs

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PREFACE

Twenty years ago, the Neue Galerie New York opened its doors for the first time at one of the most difficult hours in the history of New York City. The official opening was November 16, 2001. That was just two months after 9/11. There was still smoke rising in lower Manhattan. The country was nervous and grieving and the normal hustle and bustle of this vibrant city was trying to come back, but there were few tourists. People were afraid.

We decided to go ahead with the scheduled opening of this museum and were amazed with what we saw. Almost immediately there were lines around the block. Reviews in papers like *The New York Times* can often be brutal, but all we read were glowing articles. One called it “the jewel in the crown of the city’s Museum Mile”—the stretch along Fifth Avenue that also includes the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I lost track of the number of people who told me it was the first time since the disaster downtown that they smiled in public. This museum helped put New York back on its feet again.

But the start of the Neue Galerie didn’t really begin 20 years ago. It began in 1968 when I was 24 years old and I met a man named Serge Sabarsky. I was fascinated with German and Austrian Expressionist artists and Serge, a native of Vienna living in New York, was the world’s expert. Have you ever met someone and known instantly that you had met a friend for life? That was how I felt when I met Serge. Our conversation lasted for more than three decades. We talked almost every day about the artists, the paintings, and the lost world of turn-of-the-century Vienna, which was the incubator for this fantastic explosion of talent.

We planned to combine our collections of modern Austrian and German art and design, and to present them in a spectacular museum setting that would evoke Vienna’s elegance and charm. We talked late into many evenings about exactly how we wanted this museum to look and feel. For instance, according to Serge, an excellent café would be essential.

Finding the perfect home for our museum was crucial. The exquisite mansion at 1048 Fifth Avenue turned out to be just right for the Neue Galerie. This 1914 Beaux Arts masterpiece was ideally suited to our collection of early twentieth-century art and design. When Serge and I first walked through it, we could picture where all the pieces in our collection would go: Gustav Klimt paintings in the grand main gallery on the second floor, Egon Schiele works on paper in the drawing cabinet room, Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos furnishings filling the stately halls, German Expressionist art in the third-floor galleries—everything fell into place as though it had been created just for this building. Our first goal of making a proper home for these collections was already underway.

When the Neue Galerie opened, I could see with my own eyes that the dream had come true. Everything we had discussed and sketched and reviewed was there right before me. It was one of the most fantastic feelings in my life. Sadly, I could not share it with Serge, who had

Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait with Horn*,
1938, oil on canvas. Neue Galerie New York
and Private Collection

passed away in 1996, five years before the opening. We had planned it right down to the last detail, along with our founding Director, Renée Price.

We also envisioned groundbreaking exhibitions, and over the past two decades, this has also been realized in brilliant fashion. The curators and designers have shown the world the glory of Austrian and German art and design by providing the work with so many different, fascinating contexts. There have been great monographic shows, not just on the superb Austrians Klimt and Schiele, but on their peers Richard Gerstl and Oskar Kokoschka, as well as their German contemporaries Otto Dix, Vasily Kandinsky, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Swiss artists Ferdinand Hodler and Paul Klee; exhibitions tracing the influence of supreme artists such as Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch on the development of Expressionism; and innovative installations devoted to the designs of Hoffmann and Dagobert Peche. More than 40 exhibitions have filled our galleries over the years, and I have enjoyed and learned something from every one of them.

The Neue Galerie collection has grown a great deal over the past two decades. But our most famous moment came in 2006, when I was fortunate to acquire the historic *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907) by Klimt. This is the *Mona Lisa* of the Neue Galerie and after a tortured route from Nazi theft to a second theft, of sorts, by post-war Austrian officials, this extraordinary work of art now has a permanent home here. I must say that, with its arrival, this one painting completely transformed the museum, and it remains the central work in our collection.

There have been many other major acquisitions, including *Self-Portrait with Horn* (1938) by Max Beckmann, *Berlin Street Scene* (1913–14) by Kirchner, and just this past year, *White Interior* (1905) by Carl Moll. All have enriched our understanding of Austrian and German art, and have made the Neue Galerie the leading museum for this work in the United States.

Everywhere I travel, I hear about how much people adore the Neue Galerie. Many of them tell me it is their favorite museum. They tell me about their affection for our stellar Book Store and Design Shop, and everyone comments on the fabulous Café Sabarsky.

I mentioned earlier that the Neue Galerie was called the jewel in the crown of New York museums. It is also, after my family, one of the achievements that has brought me the most pride. It brings me great comfort to know that, long after I am gone, people not yet born will be standing in line to come in, sample the *Sachertorte* in Café Sabarsky, and gain a glimpse of one of the most magnificent periods of creativity in the long story of humankind. The Neue Galerie accomplishes all this, and so much more.

RONALD S. LAUDER

President, Neue Galerie New York

FOREWORD

Celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Neue Galerie New York brings me great pride. The museum has become a beloved place, earning praise from visitors, critics, and colleagues in equal measure. I love to learn of the impact of our wonderful jewel-box institution—how people fondly remember their time spent visiting our superb collection of Austrian and German art and design, especially the golden *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907) by Gustav Klimt; our well-appointed Book Store and Design Shop, full of finely made and carefully selected objects; and of course, our beloved Café Sabarsky, with its authentic Viennese coffee and our *Apfelstrudel served mit Schlag*.

But it bears remembering that the success of the Neue Galerie was hardly assured. In fact, our founder, Ronald S. Lauder, and I had no clear sense that there was a willing public for the program we wished to present. It is true that, since at least the 1970s, interest in artists such as Klimt and Egon Schiele was growing in the United States. Still, Austrian and German art had long been considered outside of the mainstream of significant twentieth-century painting and sculpture; in fact, the Neue Galerie was founded in part to redress this state of affairs and give the work its proper due. So we were far from certain how the museum would be received, and whether we would find an audience immediately, over time, or at all.

We need not have worried. Starting with our opening day of November 16, 2001, the Neue Galerie drew a sizable and steadily increasing number of visitors. In addition to lining up to see the powerful works of Klimt and Schiele, they came to see the art of their Viennese contemporaries such as Richard Gerstl and Oskar Kokoschka; to take in the designs of the Austrian decorative artists such as Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser; to experience the power of the German Expressionists such as Max Beckmann, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists Otto Dix and Christian Schad; and to appreciate the leading figures of the Bauhaus, such as Marcel Breuer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Our visitors also came to learn about lesser-known figures, including the Austrian designer Dagobert Peche and the artist and illustrator Alfred Kubin. Although our field of inquiry was limited mostly to a fifty-year period, 1890 to 1940, this time and place were so rich and varied that our audience has never tired of what we have been so fortunate to present. In the process, the Neue Galerie has earned a reputation for exhibitions, publications, and other programs such as lectures, chamber music, and cabaret of the highest quality.

There are so many contributors to acknowledge for our success. These include architect and friend, Annabelle Selldorf, who mastered the renovation of our historic mansion; the guest curators who have painstakingly assembled our exhibitions, including Vivian Endicott Barnett, Monika Faber, Reinhold Heller, Pamela Kort, Jill Lloyd, Tobias Natter, Olaf Peters, Elizabeth Szancer, and Christian Witt-Döring; art installer Tom Zoufaly; the exhibition designers who have given these shows their fascinating settings, including Peter de Kimpe, Bill Loccisano and Richard Pandiscio, Federico de Vera, and John Vinci; the catalogue designers who have beautifully memorialized our scholarly

Carl Moll, *White Interior*, 1905, oil on canvas.
Private Collection

endeavors, including Judy Hudson, Bill Loccisano, and Richard Pandiscio; the trustees who have guided our endeavors, including Matti Bunzl, Ernst Ploil, and Stella Rollig; all of the staff who have given their tireless dedication to the museum, and especially Scott Gutterman, Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer, Janis Staggs, Director of Curatorial and Manager of Publications, Allison Needle, Chief Registrar and Director of Exhibitions, Fernando Eguchi, Chief Preparator and Exhibition Designer, Julie Jung, Associate Registrar, Liesbet Van Leemput, Manager of Curatorial, and Erik Freer, Design Director; the lenders who have made our extraordinary exhibitions possible; and our loyal members, in particular the members of the President's Circle, who have provided steadfast support over the past 20 years.

Most of all, we wish to thank our President and Co-Founder, Ronald S. Lauder. His vision and generosity have made the Neue Galerie into a spectacular museum, one that has forever altered and expanded the view of Austrian and German art, making its glories available to a worldwide audience. In the same spirit, we thank his friend and my mentor, the late Serge Sabarsky, who was instrumental in transforming a lifelong passion for Austrian and German art into a home for some of its greatest works. Twenty years is a long time, but it is also just a beginning. Looking ahead, I am confident in saying that we have more to share and we look forward to taking this great museum into its next decade, so that future generations may appreciate the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is the Neue Galerie New York.

RENÉE PRICE

Director, Neue Galerie New York

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We also acknowledge those individuals who prefer to remain anonymous.

INTRODUCTION

This book can be traced back to seminars and courses, to lectures and essays, to catalogues and exhibitions. Several of the subjects were realized as exhibition projects in recent years at Ronald S. Lauder's Neue Galerie New York. From the very beginning I was fortunate to participate in the history of the Neue Galerie, initially in the form of contributing essays for the museum's inaugural catalogue, *New Worlds: German and Austrian Art, 1890–1940*, which has become a standard reference work and is now unfortunately out of print. As part of my curatorial activity and as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Neue Galerie, I had the idea to present a concise survey of Austrian and German art in the form of a publication that could serve as an overview to the numerous friends and visitors to the Neue Galerie. The desire for such a book was confirmed in discussions among the committed friends and supporters of the museum, to whom I am grateful for intense exchanges.

The present volume is being published on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the Neue Galerie. *Modern Worlds: Austrian and German Art, 1890–1940* thus supplements the first catalogue without wishing to or being able to replace it. That is also true of the numerous substantial catalogues of the Neue Galerie where groundbreaking research has been published. My texts in this volume are intended rather to accompany them and offer a larger framework. This book was conceived to perform an orientational function, especially since there are almost no survey works on this central area in the evolution of art.

The catalogue is divided into three larger sections that range from around 1890 to 1914 (the later imperial era in Austria and Germany until the outbreak of World War I), from 1905 to 1920 (the Expressionist decade, World War I, and the new beginnings after defeat), and finally from 1920 to around 1940 (*Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity] as the signature of an epoch, the rise of National Socialism, to the outbreak of World War II). In the process we precede roughly chronologically but also according to complexes of problems. For example, the inner connection between individual aspects that sometimes existed should become evident. A complete account is impossible; it was necessary to make a selection, with an eye to the holdings of the collection, and one hopes that it will seem plausible. Assessments were made and are—despite assertions to the contrary—a fundamental part of any preoccupation with phenomena from culture and the humanities. Without selection and evaluation there is no account and no insight.

To Renée Price and Ronald S. Lauder I am very grateful for the generous faith they have repeatedly shown in me and for the honor of being able to contribute to this volume on the occasion of the Neue Galerie's anniversary. Janis Staggs and Scott Gutterman have always generously supported me. Janis also graciously wrote two wonderful, substantial supplements to my chapters. Steven Lindberg not only once again skillfully translated my essays but also eliminated some imprecisions and several errors. I am grateful to Elisa Tamaschke and Helge Rosenkranz for reading several chapters and for their suggestions. With their help, their thoughtful interest, and committed professionalism, all of the staff of the Neue Galerie always made my stays in New York special, pleasant experiences. I remain very grateful for those privileges and support. I would like to dedicate the text that follows to them collectively because they have realized and enriched on a daily basis the ideas of a passionate collector and philanthropist and a brilliant director. The magnetism of Neue Galerie as a very special place for Austrian and German modernism represents an outstanding service to all of us!

**FROM NIETZSCHE
TO REFORM**

OLAF PETERS

Antiquity and Historicism

But the final episode occurred the day when Davide Fino saw the professor on the Via Po, between two municipal policemen and followed by a crowd of cackling people. Friedrich Nietzsche had, a few minutes earlier, thrown his arms around a horse pulling a carriage and would not let go. He had seen the coachman beating the quadruped and felt such terrible pain that he felt obliged to demonstrate his affection for the animal. After they took the professor in, the Finos sought the assistance of an alienist, Dr. Turina.¹

That was how Ugo Pavia reported on Friedrich Nietzsche's breakdown in the northern Italian metropolis of Turin on Thursday, December 27, 1888. Immediately before that, Nietzsche had composed the first of his "Dionysos-Dithyramben" (Dionysian Dithyrambs) and given them titles such as "Ruhm und Ewigkeit" (Fame and Eternity), "Zwischen Raubvögeln" (Between Birds of Prey), and "Das Feuerzeichen" (The Fire Sign). In drafts of letters to philosophers (Georg Brandes) and the emperor (Wilhelm II), he wanted to recognize only a highly differentiated ranking among individual people who overcome and leave behind all boundaries between races, nations, and classes. The philosopher seemed to think that receiving one of his books would be the greatest honor for the German emperor. And he couched his own thoughts in the sentence: "I am not a human being at all; I am dynamite."² The philosopher [Fig. 2], who lived for more than a decade in madness until his death in 1900, thus anticipated his later influence, for Nietzsche was indeed an intellectual catalyst. He both perplexed and intrigued his contemporaries and remains fascinating today. After his very first publication, the philologist Hermann Usener, who taught in Bonn, declared Nietzsche dead to scholarship;³ for others, that book and subsequent ones served as an impetus. The writer August Strindberg had enthusiastically sent Nietzsche his tragedy *Fadren* (The Father) in French translation in November 1888, which is anecdotal evidence that the philosopher was noticed in Europe already during his lifetime.

But what did Nietzsche stand for? I start by emphasizing two aspects of his thinking that repeatedly offered points of contact for later artists: the Brücke (Bridge) Expressionists and Edvard Munch, the reformist artists of *Jugendstil/Art Nouveau* and of the Bauhaus (such as Henry van de Velde, Peter Behrens, and Walter Gropius), and the artists of the Weimar Republic (as different as Otto Dix and Georg Kolbe): first, the reevaluation of antiquity in connection with the formulation of a metaphysics of art and, second the critique of contemporaneous historicism.

1

Albrecht Dürer, *Knight, Death, and the Devil*, 1513, engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1943

was an “archaic anticlassicism,” which focused on preclassical, archaic Greece rather than late antiquity. Major preoccupations included the barbarian, pagan, cultic, and ecstatic. Notable successors to Nietzsche included writers Stefan George (*Algabal*, 1892), Hugo von Hofmannsthal (*Elektra*, 1904; *Ödipus und die Sphinx*, 1906), and Gerhart Hauptmann (*Griechischer Frühling* [Greek Spring], 1908).

While in Basel, Nietzsche—both a philologist and a philosopher—promoted the “duality” of the Apollonian and Dionysian. He associated Apollo, the god of the Muses, with form, the illustrative, painting, and sculpture, but also dream and illusion. With Dionysus, the god of wine, he associated the flowing-formless, the nonpictorial, music, and intoxication and horror. These two forces of nature and of human art—Nietzsche assigned them this double role—had, in his view, been in constant struggle, mutually stimulating and heightening each other, until a kind of artistic synthesis resulted in Greek tragedy, which he said had united these two principles or forces: “Two different tendencies run parallel to each other, for the most part openly at variance; and they continually incite each other to new and more powerful births, which perpetuate an antagonism, only superficially reconciled by the common term ‘art’; till eventually, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic ‘will,’ they appear coupled with each other, and through this coupling ultimately generate an equally Dionysian and Apollonian form of art—Attic tragedy.”⁷

Heavily dependent on Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy and *magnum opus*, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (translated as *The World as Will and Representation*), Nietzsche likewise felt compelled to make a metaphysical statement and assumed that the Dionysian represented a kind of primal ground of all beings and “that the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision, the pleasurable illusion, for its continuous redemption.”⁸ The illusion of art—the work of art—represents a redemptive vision and makes it possible for the individual to “sit quietly in his tossing bark, amid the waves,” while examining the artistic idea.⁹

Like Winckelmann, Nietzsche used a metaphor of the sea, but now the relationship is reversed; he no longer assumes a profound calm under the stormy surface but rather posits that art can offer deliverance from suffering by providing a foundation. Elsewhere, this is supplemented by a succinct formulation: “for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*.”¹⁰ In Nietzsche’s view, the artist is in a privileged position, for as the creator of art, he “coalesces” with the “primordial artist of the world.” In the process, he could experience, recognize, and understand art’s eternal essence by participating in its conditions: “for in this state he is, in a marvelous manner, like the weird image of the fairy tale which can turn its eyes at will and behold itself; he is at once subject and object, at once poet, actor, and spectator.”¹¹

In these passages, Nietzsche offers other insights, for example, that “the subject, the willing individual that furthers his own egoistic ends, can be conceived of only as the antagonist, not as the origin of art.”¹² With such statements, he was rebelling against a bourgeois-representative and passive-receptive notion of art, which he countered by proposing the role of the artist as a creative individual. Nietzsche sharply opposed giving art a role linked to morality and education, as

culture as the progenitor for opera, he was transporting the subject of his study to the present while simultaneously claiming it as a rebirth, a repetition of the past. Heinz Brüggemann pointed to the temporary figure of this assumption: "That is no longer teleological, conceived in the contrast of origin and goal, but in the figure of the circle, or rebirth or return."¹⁵ Nietzsche diametrically opposed modern opera and "German music" from Johann Sebastian Bach by way of Ludwig van Beethoven to Wagner, which for him had its pendant in the German philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Schopenhauer. Nietzsche made a pathos-laden analogy between Schopenhauer, the contemporaneous antagonist of the incomparably more popular Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the figure in Albrecht Dürer's famous etching *Knight, Death, and the Devil*: "The armored knight with the iron, hard look, who knows how to pursue his terrible path, undeterred by his gruesome companions, and yet without hope, alone with his horse and dog [Fig. 1]. Our Schopenhauer was such a Dürer knight; he lacked all hope, but he desired truth. He has no peers."¹⁶

It is striking how Nietzsche unites antiquity and the present, since for him it was fundamentally about a "rebirth of Hellenic antiquity" and a "rebirth of tragedy" in the near future from his perspective. In a fulminant passage at the end of section 20, Nietzsche swept aside a storm wind—"everything that is decayed, broken, and withered"—and then conjures up a visionary image:

Tragedy is seated amid this excess of life, suffering, and pleasure, in sublime ecstasy, listening to a distant melancholy song that tells of the mothers of being whose names are: Delusion, Will, Woe.

Yes, my friends, believe with me in Dionysian life and the rebirth of tragedy.¹⁷

For the philosopher, this rebirth was happening in his own time in Wagner's work, whose third act of *Tristan und Isolde* he enthusiastically described.

Nietzsche embraced core concerns that, in different variants, would shape the decades after him: the diminution of morality and education in favor of art; the development of the aesthetic listener/viewer and the rejection of the unoriginal critic; and a kind of "remythologizing" of the civilizing modern era: "But without myth every culture loses the healthy natural power of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies a whole cultural movement."¹⁸ A few months after the victory over France and the founding of the German Empire in 1871, Nietzsche wrote of a "German character," of the "elimination of everything Romantic" and of Germans who "hesitantly look around for a leader [*Führer*]."¹⁹ Nietzsche, who was a decided anti-nationalist and opponent of anti-Semitism, was not picturing a "Führer" like Adolf Hitler, yet others tried to employ and even programmatically implement his words as slogans to promote their fascist ideology.

A second text by Nietzsche should be cited briefly here to clarify the conception and development of the modern era in the German Empire. From 1873 to 1876, Nietzsche published four "Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen" (*Unfashionable Observations*), three of which treated single figures: David Strauss, Schopenhauer, and Wagner. The famous second "*Unfashionable Observation*" addressed the relation of history and life in general terms. Nietzsche explained his

position: "We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life: for it is possible to value the study of history to such an extent that life becomes stunted and degenerate."²⁰ The concept of and meaning of life point to a reevaluation that makes an important contribution to the emerging *Lebensphilosophie* (life philosophy) and connects it to the artistic, antihistoricist reform efforts that are united under the collective label "*Jugendstil/Art Nouveau*."

Nietzsche studied different modes of historical writing and distinguished between monumental, antiquarian, and critical history. He said that all of them served life. His critique concerned an excess of history, historical meaning, and memory. According to Nietzsche, one could live happily with almost no memory at all, but one could not live without forgetting. Forgetting is necessary; not everything is worth remembering, and one has to decide what is worth keeping as a memory. Forgetting makes action possible; regurgitating memory, by contrast, hampers, and can "become the grave digger of the present." Mere cultivatedness is contrasted with true cultivation. Nietzsche wanted to encourage the "*shaping power*" that could fall to a person and to an entire culture: "I mean that power to develop its own singular character out of itself, to shape and assimilate what is past and alien, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken forms out of itself alone."²¹ But he did not necessarily contrast the historical human with the ideal of the ahistorical human being. Instead he spoke of suprahistorical human beings who radiate composure, who no longer take history all too seriously, and who live as if history was fulfilled in every moment. It is ahistorical "to be able to *forget* and to enclose oneself in a limited *horizon*"; suprahistorical is an artistic or religious gaze that turns away constant becoming and instead turns to the "eternal and stable in meaning" of existence.²² It contrasts an aversion to science, which Nietzsche viewed as dangerous, since it "catapult[s] the human being into an infinite, unlimited light-wave sea of known becoming." The philosopher derived from that the necessity to limit, to oversee science, which is rich with knowledge but hostile to life: "a *hygiene of life* occupies a place close by the side of science."²³ In the heyday of materialism and positivism during the second half of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche recognized that technocratic, instrumental reason indebted to mere feasibility and the ability to know had to be contained.

For all the topicality of these reflections, another aspect of Nietzsche's book should be emphasized, which will lead us back to the realm of art. Nietzsche offered a fundamental critique of historicism. For our purpose, we do not need to consider the historical concepts of historicism as much as the art historical phenomenon of modernism since 1800 that was called historicism. It was a time in which past styles were employed simultaneously and regarded as options of equal validity. This anticipated issues of postmodernism. As early as the first half of the nineteenth century, the Prussian architect and painter Karl Friedrich Schinkel proposed different architectural styles for a church and painted both Classical and Romantic paintings.

The buildings on Vienna's Ringstrasse are emblematic of the stylistic heterogeneity that represents a paradigm of historicism in architecture found in the second half of the nineteenth century [Fig. 5]. In principle, it concerns the relationship of officially recognized and supported high culture, and a "subculture" or avant-garde that aims to break free while sometimes even

1872 and 1888. Stylistic pluralism and legitimation of authority formed a reciprocal relationship informed by an awareness of the principal historicity of all human culture. The historian Arno Mayer summarized it succinctly: “Ringstrasse was—to say nothing of it being the most extreme example of architectonic-visual possibilities of expression one could imagine—the microscopically precise mirror image of the bourgeois passion for historical references, which constantly helped the old order, of which it was an integrated tool, to provide constant legitimation.”²⁴

Admittedly, the unresolved conflict between historical awareness and timelessness continued to smolder in the background. Styles and norms could scarcely be legitimized as ageless, yet they were intended to represent universal values. There was, moreover, a conflict between past, present, and future, which was revealed in rapidly evolving technological advances, for example. In some cases, great engineering achievements of modern architecture were clad in historicist styles—modern shopping arcades and train stations featured halls decorated in historicist styles. Pioneering and emphatically technical-looking buildings were constructed for World’s Fairs, which welcomed millions of visitors, such as the Crystal Palace in London in 1851 and the Eiffel Tower in Paris in 1889. The latter, because of its monumental appearance in the center of the city, was allowed to remain, but the now destroyed Crystal Palace was moved at the end of the exhibition. Other buildings, such as temporary industrial palaces, were removed entirely.

These high points of modernity in the second half of the nineteenth century illustrate the tensions and crises of the time and of historicism: modernity and the awareness of modernity were indisputable and were manifested in technical progress, but what could generally be called progress pointed just as undeniably to the historicity of its own position. It had to be recognized as simply a transitional stage that would soon pass. Should one remain in place and look back while doing so? Should one slow, if not stop, development? Or should it be forced? Technological progress was enthusiastically greeted. Simultaneously, functional buildings that adopted technological advances were camouflaged in historicism, pointing to an ambivalent effort to integrate the new into the existing while stabilizing an organically developed identity rather than calling it into question. In this way, the new is not undermined nor was it pointedly championed:

Historical art is the attempt to interpret normatively the reality of life as a whole, to bring a reintegrating plan for the world into a present day in which politics, economics, and ethics have disintegrated into competing partial systems. Such wholeness was—in comparison to an era that revealed, in [Leopold von] Ranke’s words, ‘physiognomy of rifts’—only possible by recourse to the prerevolutionary, old European order, through its mimesis in the work of art. Historicism appears to be the attempt, out of the experience of the revolutionary era, to bring the prerevolutionary, old European model of interpreting the world into the present. The history of historicism brought to light the aporetic character of this effort.²⁵

Nietzsche countered the pluralistic stylistic phenomena of his time that had recourse to antiquity with the view of a unified culture as a task to be accomplished. “The culture of a people that is the antithesis of that barbarism was once termed—and in my opinion, rightfully so—the

unity of artistic style that manifests itself throughout all the vital self-expressions of a people."²⁶ The fixation on content—Nietzsche was alluding to the German self-image as a nation of poets and thinkers and to a cult of interiority—is said to have been supplemented by a new sense of form. The antithesis of form and content is said to have been eliminated in the process. Even the masking of content—what Nietzsche called a "*decoration of life*"²⁷—would have to be ended by a borrowed form that one did not create oneself but merely copied. The "plastic powers" that Nietzsche called for must develop as a "*fullest exertion of the vigor of the present*," which would then have the ability to interpret the past. It is from the standpoint of the present and based upon the interests of the present that decide the relevance of the past. The present and life function as judges of history, which should not be granted validity per se.

Dominant positivism, according to Nietzsche, had to be overcome by a future-oriented vitalism. The restorative and leveling trends of the present have to be countered with a vision of the future. To that end: "From a past that was posited as normative—pagan-aristocratic antiquity—the Christian, bourgeois modern era of the present is interpreted, attacked, and rejected."²⁸

In that context, Nietzsche believed in evaluating categories of ranking and did not shy from postulating: "No, the *goal of humankind* cannot possibly be found in its end stage, but only *in its highest specimens*."²⁹ He thus opposed a teleological understanding of history that constructed contemporaneous socialism on the unacknowledged foundation of a Christian understanding of time. For Nietzsche, the meaning of history was already fulfilled in the present, and he did not attempt to justify this across the board or even declare it to be rational, as Hegel had done. Nietzsche returned again to Hegel's antagonist, Schopenhauer, and addressed artists and writers, too, in concise formulations that scorned the new masses:

This will be the day when we wisely avoid all constructions of the world process or even of the history of humanity, a time in which we will no longer pay attention to the masses, but once again only to individuals, who form a kind of bridge over the turbulent stream of becoming. Individuals do not further a process, rather they live timelessly and simultaneously [. . .]. One giant calls to another across the desolate expanses of time, and this lofty dialogue between spirits continues, undisturbed by the wanton, noisy chattering of the dwarfs that crawl about beneath them. The task of history is to be their mediator and thereby continually to incite and lend strength to the production of greatness.³⁰

In his later writings, Nietzsche sometimes revised these ideas in order to become the thinker of the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous and "of the juxtaposition of differentiated spheres of values on equal footing."³¹

One of the more curious episodes in German intellectual history was August Julius Langbehn's attempt to administer to the mentally ill Nietzsche. In late October 1889, he contacted Nietzsche's mother, who was caring for the invalid, and proposed, among other things, that they take long walks. Then he tried to convince her to legally declare Nietzsche incapacitated, and the

costume under which their hatred of all the great and powerful people of their age masquerades as satiated admiration for the great and powerful people of past ages, the costume in which they surreptitiously turn the actual meaning of the monumental view of history into its opposite; whether they are clearly aware of it or not, they act as though their motto were 'Let the dead bury the living.'³⁸

Rembrandt's greatness did not really mean anything to Langbehn either, but his case was somewhat different. He used the Dutch painter only as a cipher that enabled him to extol the German character: on art, science, politics, education, and humanity—these are the sections of his book. He saw a rapid decline in his own day, sensing a democratizing, leveling, and atomizing spirit. Instead, according to Langbehn, the driving grounding and primal force of all Germanness needed to gain recognition again: namely, individualism. He was thereby appealing to a key concept of the period, which could as easily be recognized as a sign of modernity as instrumentalized against modernity. Rembrandt could be elevated to a symbolic figure because, in the author's view, he was the most German of all German artists, who had always followed only his own calling. In 1890, the cornerstone was laid for a *völkisch* (racist-populist) view of art, which could lead to sentences such as: "On the peasantry, that is, on the people in the best and simplest sense, the new German art life will have to be founded."³⁹ With this and other similar statements, the book became the "initial publication of the *Heimatkunst* [regionalism] movement."⁴⁰

The name Rembrandt functioned here only as a label, for, as he admitted as early as 1892, Langbehn did not have any great aesthetic penchant for the artist himself. But Rembrandt had become popular again in that period, and leading art historians, like Von Bode in Berlin, had begun to write about him in the 1880s. But Langbehn was not interested in documenting the genius's achievements in painting; rather, he was imagining a new age of art. Rembrandt, whom he characterized as having no program, could be contrasted as a figure to the image of Raphael conveyed by the academy. Rembrandt could be used to reject the academic and dry, and at the same time he could serve as a figure of national integration, who represented, in his personality and his work, an alternative image to the modern trends to making distinctions. Unlike Nietzsche, Langbehn—whose title *Rembrandt as Educator* clearly alluded to Nietzsche's third "*Unfashionable Observation*": "*Schopenhauer as Educator*"—had a pronounced anti-Semitic tendency, distinguishing between good and bad Jews or cementing differences in stature in social hierarchy: "Justice does not consist of everyone being made equal to the other but in correctly recognizing his value and that of others and conducting oneself accordingly."⁴¹ But many Germans saw Langbehn in connection with Nietzsche as an admonisher and educator. Indeed, both authors tried to generate a "new style" from their cultural criticism. Langbehn's book was "the most popular and widespread . . . at the beginning of a development that all but thirsts after such cultural manifestos."⁴² Even after the founding of the German Werkbund in 1907 and the debates that followed, these desires played a central role.

Translated from the German by Steven Lindberg

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Chronik in Bildern und Texten*, im Auftrag der Stiftung Weimarer Klassik comp. Raymond J. Benders and Stephan Oettermann with Hauke Reich and Sibylle Spiegel (Munich: Hanser, 2000), 725–26.
- 2 Friedrich Nietzsche to Helen Zimmern, around December 17, 1888, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe* (hereafter KSB), ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 8 vols. (Munich: dtv; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), no. 1197, 536–37, esp. 537.
- 3 Usener had declared this publicly to his students in 1872. See Henning Ottmann, ed., *Nietzsche Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, Sonderausgabe (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2011), 428.
- 4 Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), 33.
- 5 Ibid., 69.
- 6 Manfred Landfester, "Nietzsches *Geburt der Tragödie*: Antihistorismus und Antiklassizismus zwischen Wissenschaft, Kunst und Philosophie," in Achim Aurenhammer and Thomas Pittrof, eds., "*Mehr Dionysos als Apoll*": *Antiklassizistische Antike-Rezeption um 1900* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), 89–111.
- 7 Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968), 15–144, esp. 33.
- 8 Ibid., 45.
- 9 Cf. *ibid.*, 45–46, esp. 46.
- 10 Ibid., 52.
- 11 Ibid., cf. also *ibid.*, 104–5.
- 12 Ibid., 52.
- 13 Ibid., 86.
- 14 Cf. *ibid.*, 94.
- 15 Heinz Brüggemann, *Modernität im Widerstreit: Zwischen Pluralismus und Homogenität; Eine Theorie-, Kultur- und Literaturgeschichte (18.–20. Jahrhundert)* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2015), 252.
- 16 Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy" (see note 7), 123.
- 17 Ibid., 123–24. See also "*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*": *Nietzsche und die Erinnerung in der Moderne*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996).
- 18 Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy" (see note 7), 135.
- 19 Ibid., 139.
- 20 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 83–167, esp. 59.
- 21 Ibid., 89.
- 22 Ibid., 163.
- 23 Ibid., 164.
- 24 Arno Mayer, *Adelsmacht und Bürgertum: Die Krise der europäischen Gesellschaft, 1848–1914* (Munich: dtv, 1988), 194. See also Carl E. Schorske, "The Ringstrasse, Its Critics, and the Birth of Urban Modernism," chap. 2 of *idem*, *Vienna Fin-de-Siècle: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 24–115.
- 25 Wolfgang Hardtwig, "Traditionsbruch und Erinnerung: Zur Entstehung des Historismusbegriffs," in Michael Brix and Monika Steinhauser, eds., "*Geschichte allein ist zeitgemäss*": *Historismus in Deutschland* (Lahn-Giessen: Anabas, 1978), 17–27, esp. 25.
- 26 Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" (see note 19), 111.
- 27 Ibid., 157.
- 28 Brüggemann, *Modernität im Widerstreit* (see note 15), 256–57.
- 29 Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" (see note 19), 111.
- 30 Ibid., 151.
- 31 Cf. Brüggemann, *Modernität im Widerstreit* (see note 15), 267–83, esp. 268.
- 32 Friedrich Nietzsche (see note 1), 749.
- 33 Peter-Ulrich Hein, "Ästhetische Leitbilder der Jugendbewegung und die Vergesellschaftung der Kunst," in *Die Lebensreform: Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900*, ed. Kai Buchholz et al., 2 vols., exh. cat. Institut Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt (Darmstadt: Häusser, 2001), 1:211–14, esp. 212.
- 34 Cf. Jochen Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik, 1750–1945*, 2 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 2:169–93, esp. 189–92.
- 35 Cf. Johannes Stückelberger, *Rembrandt und die Moderne: Der Dialog mit Rembrandt in der deutschen Kunst um 1900* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1996), 19.
- 36 Peter Philipp Riedl, *Epochenbilder – Künstlertypologien. Beiträge zu Traditionsentwürfen in Literatur und Wissenschaft 1860 bis 1930* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2005), 628.
- 37 Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" (see note 20), 101.
- 38 Ibid., 101–2.
- 39 [Julius Langbehn], *Rembrandt als Erzieher: Von einem Deutschen* (Leipzig: E.L. Hirschfeld, 1890), 195.
- 40 Anke Kepler, "Heimatkunst, Bauerntum, Scholle, Blut und Boden," in *Die Lebensreform* (see note 33), 1:299–301, esp. 301.
- 41 Bernd Behrendt: Julius August Langbehn, der "Rembrandtdeutsche," in: *Handbuch zur "Völkischen Bewegung," 1871–1918*, ed. Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz und Justus H. Ulbricht (Munich: K. G. Saur 1999), 94–113, esp. 103.
- 42 Werner Oechslin, "Politisches, allzu Politisches . . . : 'Nietzschelinge,' der 'Wille zur Kunst' und der Deutsche Werkbund vor 1914," in *idem*, *Moderne entwerfen: Architektur und Kulturgeschichte* (Cologne: DuMont, 1999), 117–71, esp. 145.

OLAF PETERS

Degeneration and Empire

Friedrich Nietzsche had exposed potential detriments to life beginning in his early work. An excess of history would lead to its stunting and degeneration. Purely goal-oriented science—including history—should therefore be paralleled with a “theory of health” as a corrective. At the same time, life and its “health” were continually challenged by expanded knowledge and progress in medicine and science. In some cases, these developments and the scientific and medical discourses associated with them were projected onto cultural life. The problematic concept of degeneration belongs to that context. It was popularized after 1890, with a crucial contribution by Max Nordau [Fig. 2]. Nordau, born Simcha Südfeld, was the son of a rabbi in Pest (Budapest). By the age of seventeen, he had adopted the pseudonym Max Nordau, which both concealed his identity and created its opposite. He wanted to come across as a German author while pointedly distancing himself from his Jewish background and the Magyar majority population of Hungary.

In 1892–93, Nordau published *Entartung (Degeneration)*, which was quickly reprinted several times. The bestselling book was soon translated into several European languages. Its author was not the first to apply the concept of “degeneration” to art. His approach echoed several earlier works. In this context, those of physician Cesare Lombroso of Turin deserve emphasis. Nordau, a trained physician and student of the famous Parisian neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, diagnosed degeneration as a mental illness. Some struggled to adapt to the rapid changes inherent in modern civilization and developed an illness as a result. Nordau’s diagnosis combined a critique of modernity, of civilization, and especially of the metropolis with a vague romantic notion of an idealized agricultural past: “Nature demonstrates to man that he cannot live without farmland, that he needs the fields just like the fish needs water; man sees that he perishes when he tears himself from the soil, that only the farmer reproduces himself uninterrupted, remains healthy and strong, while the city dries up the marrow of those who live there, makes them ill and infertile.”¹ Nordau concludes, “The city dweller represents a human type that is fated to perish.”² Nordau operated with value judgments and qualified the norm as healthy and the deviant as sick. In that sense, too, Nordau had a prominent precursor, since Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who favored Classicism, likened Romanticism to a sickness. Nordau regarded modern art, which had its roots in Romanticism, as almost exclusively degenerate. This medical diagnosis naturally required therapy.

In the German-speaking world, Wilhelm Schallmayer had written about degeneration (*Entartung*) before Nordau, publishing his *Über die drohende körperliche Entartung der*

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Gustav Klimt, *Medicine* (detail), 1900–07, oil on canvas. Ceiling painting created for the Great Hall of the University of Vienna. Destroyed by fire in 1945. Photo: Art Resource, NY

Nordau imagined a dramatic result as the consequence of this evolutionary process for art. In his view, art would cease to exist, since those who support it would have to make room for an increasingly rational humanity for whom art would no longer be a relevant form of expression. For Nordau, art would become an atavism, and only women and children—the more intensely emotional members of the population—would still pursue it. He favored science over art, which he judged to be an irrational symptom of psychological illness. It had to yield to the advancing process of rationalization.⁷ For that reason, Nordau's key concept of "degeneration" set the tone for the despisers of modernity whereas Nietzsche argued against science and supported "instinct and powerful illusions" as the guiding elements of life.⁸

With his sketch, Nordau articulated his fundamental unease with aesthetic modernism, which became increasingly self-reflective in its artistic methods and strategies. This led to the general public's disdain, as the masses were unable and unwilling to pursue the accelerated aesthetic development and the associated discourses. But Nordau's unease evolved into a prospective program for action: "Degenerate art" had to be battled rigorously. Nordau equated the modern artist with a criminal: "It never occurs to us to permit the criminal by organic disposition to 'expand' his individuality in crime, and just as little can it be expected of us to permit the degenerate artist to expand his individuality in immoral works of art. The artist who complacently represents what is reprehensible, vicious, criminal, approves of it, perhaps glorifies it, differs not in kind, but only in degree, from the criminal who actually commits it."⁹

In addition to the issue of moral-spiritual degeneration, there was another issue, which, superficially connected to the first and had fatal consequences, despite his effort to put it in context: the supposed proof of degeneration in the form of physical stigmas and physiognomic features as lasting changes. Significantly, Nordau spoke of stigmata as enduring changes and did not use the term "symptom," which refers to a temporary change caused by disease: "Degeneracy betrays itself among men in certain physical characteristics, which are denominated 'stigmata' or landmarks—an unfortunate term derived from a false idea, as if degeneracy were necessarily the consequence of a fault, and the indication of a punishment. Such stigmata consist of deformities, multiple and stunted growths in the first line of asymmetry, the unequal development of the two halves of the face and cranium; then imperfection in the development of the external ear [. . .] further, squint-eyes, harelips [. . .], etc."¹⁰ Nordau extended physical degeneration to include mental degeneration and postulated that the mental faculties of the degenerate are "stunted, others morbidly exaggerated." "That which nearly all degenerates lack is the sense of morality and of right and wrong."¹¹

The National Socialists propagated precisely this argument from the late 1920s onward, though without identifying the self-"Germanizing" Jew Nordau as the source of these ideas. They combined art, morals, politics, and eugenics in their propaganda in order to mobilize the existing resentment of an avant-garde that had become incomprehensible and to defame the modern artist as either a morally depraved, perverted subject or as a racially inferior alien. However, the foundations of this intensification were already established in the late nineteenth century by

Nordau and Nietzsche. They were merely simplified to serve as instructions for action. Nordau had suggested as a therapy: "Such is the treatment of the disease of the age which I hold to be efficacious: Characterization of the leading degenerates as mentally diseased; unmasking and stigmatizing of their imitators as enemies to society; cautioning the public against the lies of these parasites."¹² But for him the difference between illness and health was still "not one of kind, but of quantity."¹³

For Nordau, Nietzsche was a madman, suffering from "ego mania," and a sadist. He saw the latter trait as manifest in Nietzsche's philosophemes of master morality and of cruel hardness. In his polemic attempt to come to terms with Wagner, Nietzsche had addressed decadence, which he regarded as a symptom of his time. In the process, he broadly identified cultural phenomena—alcoholism and the emancipation of women, democracy and nihilism, among other things—with biological phenomena. In our context, Nietzsche was significant insofar as he established a connection between aesthetic decadence and biological degeneration. He was not original in that respect, when he took up the thesis that "civilization brings with it the physiological decline of a race."¹⁴ But it was precisely the "ascetic ideal" as advocated by Christianity that was so fateful in Nietzsche's view: "I know of hardly anything else that has had so destructive an effect upon the *health* and racial strength of Europeans as this ideal; one may without any exaggeration call it *the true calamity* in the history of European health."¹⁵

Nietzsche was also significant with regard to degeneration and decadence in what could be termed a philosophical precursor to eugenics. His thinking and language could encourage inhuman policies if they were taken literally and implemented. For example, in a statement from the autumn of 1880: "Causing the lamentable, deformed, degenerate to die off must be the trend! Not maintaining them at any cost! As nice as the attitude of mercy toward our unworthy and helping the bad and the weak may be, on the whole it is an exception, and humanity as a whole would become vulgar in the process."¹⁶ Nietzsche advocated regulation of sexuality, a restriction on marriage, and targeted prostitution with the goal of strict selection in reproduction that would prevent the breeding of the sick and criminals. "Go through the streets of its large cities and ask yourselves whether this people should reproduce!"¹⁷ As part of his elite philosophical project, he argued for a sexual policy designed to counter degenerative tendencies; its goal was to improve the race, and it crossed the line of human breeding.

Against the backdrop of this philosophical discourse, with its medical implications and criticism of contemporary culture arose two great scandals of art history: Gustav Klimt's infamous *Faculty Paintings* for the Universität Wien (University of Vienna) and the Munch Affair in Berlin prior to 1900 which occurred as a result of the official art policy of the Wilhelmine empire. Both can serve to illustrate the inner contradictions and conflicts of the time.

In Vienna, Klimt, a successful graduate of the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts) at the Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie (Austrian Museum of Art and Industry), made his name as an artist in the context of the historicism of Vienna's Ringstrasse. He shared

