

Galka Scheyer – A Jewish Woman in International Art Business

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Michael Imhof Verlag



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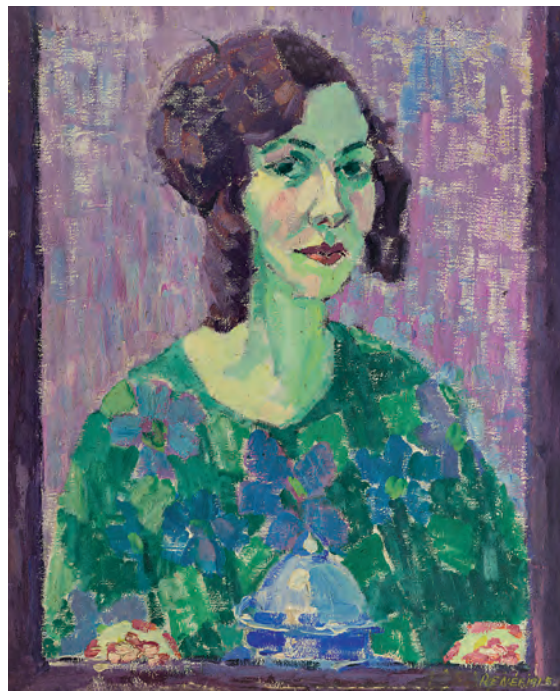
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6 Emmy E. Scheyer, *Brussels, photo as painter in front of atelier window*, 1916 (Courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection Archives, Pasadena, CA).

7 Emmy E. Scheyer (Renée), *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, 1916 (Courtesy of Julia Hammid and the Estate of Tino Hammid).



Third Phase of Her Life

In Brussels she made friends with Jos Albert (1886–1981), a poor painter who became her teacher.³² Several works were created here: A self-portrait signed *Renée* and a small painting titled *In the Nursery* verso and *Brussels 1916* on the front by unknown hand in America, presumably showing Louise Albert, her teachers wife, and their son Émile with a gun, playing as a cowboy or a cavalryman. A similarly structured work portrays Valeska Heynemann, mending stockings. There are also larger paintings: *Lady and Her Mirror Image*, a self portrait as *Lady on Balcony* and a still life, the only work by Scheyer to be deposited in a museum. Emmy Scheyer painted *In the Morning Room* in Brussels. The person in the background is wearing the jersey of Eintracht Braunschweig, a successful soccer team in those days; verso is an unfinished painting *Two Ladies* of unknown identity.

The painting *Snow-Covered Pine-Tree* carries a double signature by “E. Sch.” and “Renée.” Gustav Lehmann had created similar winter subjects. In her apartment, Emmy Scheyer also painted a still life with flowers on a round arched window sill, dome and portico of the Belgian Palace of Justice in the background. The painting *Sunflowers* is neither signed nor dated. Emmy Scheyer’s US relatives have always considered it one of her works. Verso is an unfinished painting of a lady with a hat. The same painter model can be seen in Emmy Scheyer’s painting *Lady in an Easy Chair*. She bears a certain resemblance to ladies and cocottes painted by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in Berlin, but here she opens her coat and blouse in front of the viewer with a seductive gesture.

Last but not least, Emmy Scheyer painted strange portraits with yellow and green faces, and at the studio of sculptor Louis van der Meulen, she created busts made of plaster or clay of Valeska Heynemann and other persons.³³ The *Head of a Girl* originated in 1916 according to Isabel Wünsche.³⁴

In 1921, van der Meulen surprised Emmy with a letter after a long period of silence.³⁵ The reason he thought she could be in the artist’s colony of Laren in Northern Holland was that she had recently stayed there, trying to sell a painting by Vincent van Gogh, property of Marianne Werefkin, Alexej Jawlensky and Bernhard Mayer, a very successful international fur trader. Along with his wife Auguste, he founded a cultural association, inviting Thomas Mann and other important figures to Brussels. He financed a branch of Ovide Decroly’s reform school without further ado. He also supported anarchists with considerable sums of money.³⁶

Another significant acquaintance from Emmy Scheyer’s wealthy background were Paul Bachrach, a successful shoe industrialist and velvet

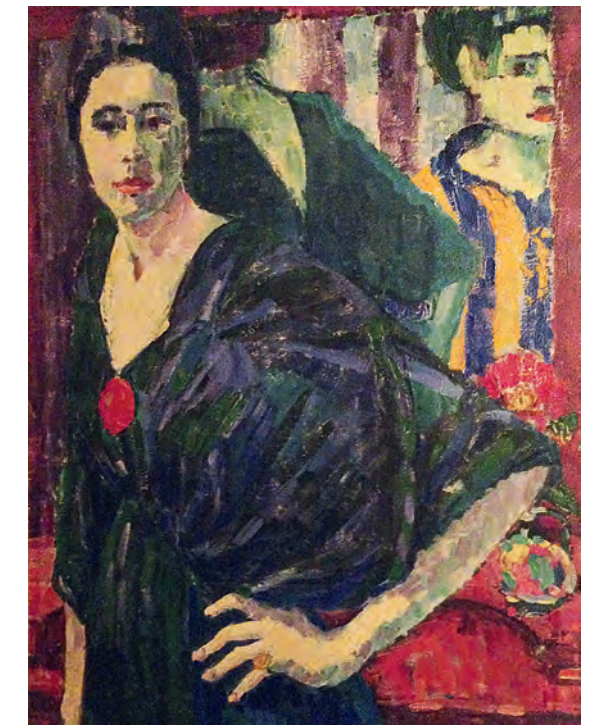
and silk trader, and his wife Elvira Bachrach, born in Elberfeld (now a suburb of Wuppertal). Elvira was a former classmate of Else Schüler, later Else Lasker-Schüler.³⁷ The Bachrach couple had a daughter named Charlotte, then aged fifteen. She had studied free dance under Alexander Sacharoff in Lausanne (Switzerland) since 1915. In her unpublished memoirs, she wrote that she became acquainted with Alexej Jawlensky via Sacharoff who had recommended to her father that he should collect works by Jawlensky.³⁸ Indeed, Paul Bachrach became a great sponsor of this painter. He also bought at least three works by Emmy Scheyer, of which only the titles still exist.³⁹

In April 1916, Emmy Scheyer celebrated her twenty-seventh birthday in Braunschweig and presumably visited an exhibition in memory of

8 Emmy E. Scheyer (Renée), *Still Life*, oil on canvas, 1915 (Courtesy of the Museum of Art, Bern).



9 Emmy E. Scheyer (Renée), *In the Morning Room*, oil on canvas, 1915 (Private collection, London).

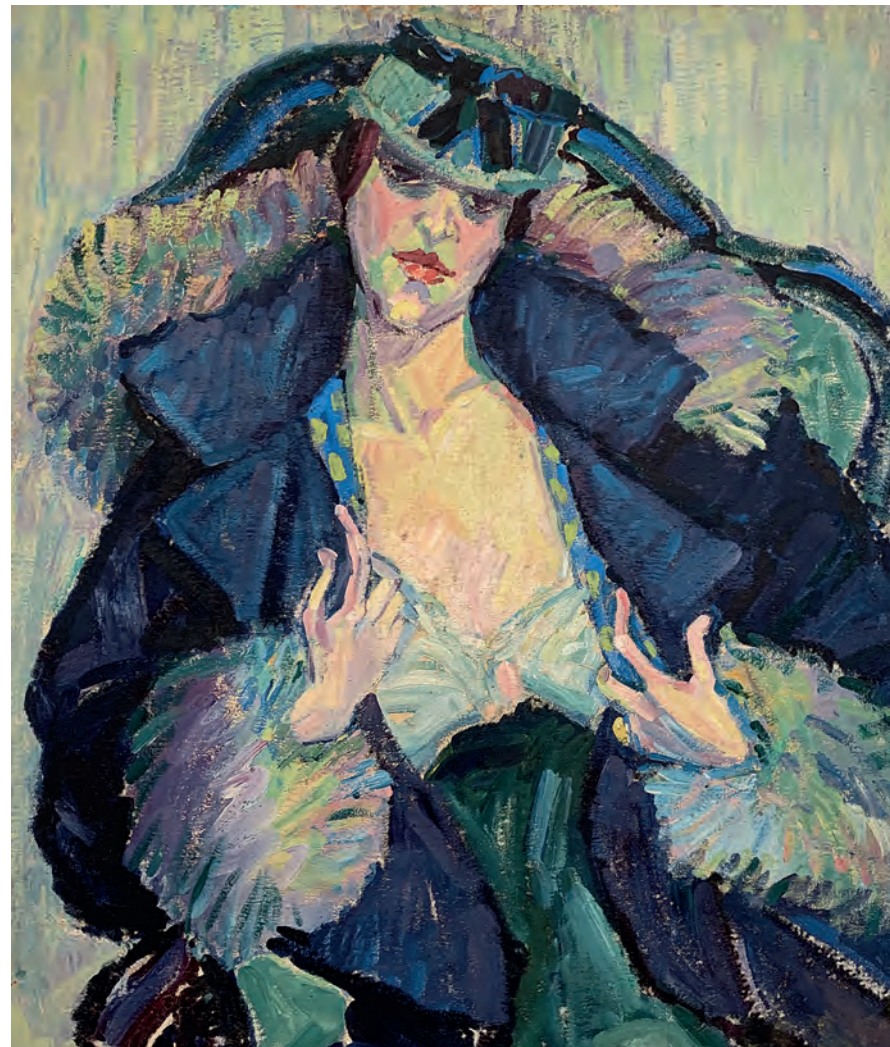


Gustav Lehmann, Albert Hamburger and Günter Brakebusch. On that occasion, many of their works were sold to well-known Brunswick citizens. Marianne Kanter wrote an enthusiastic review.⁴⁰ She and her husband Hugo Kanter were collectors of classical modern art – Toulouse-Lautrec for example.⁴¹ It is quite possible, though not proven that the Kanter family belonged to Emmy Scheyer's social background.

During her stay in Braunschweig, Emmy could have visited an exhibition of the Berlin gallery Der

Sturm in the Ducal Museum, which had merely provided the location without any conceptual involvement. Herwarth Walden held a speech. He presented works by Albert Bloch (an American painter, member of the group Der Blaue Reiter), Heinrich Campendonk, Franz Marc, Paul Klee and others.⁴²

Five days after her birthday, Emmy Scheyer traveled back to Brussels and – according to Lette Valeska's biography draft – gave up her flat, saying that she wanted to go to Switzerland where



10 Emmy E. Scheyer
(Renée), *Lady in Easy
Chair*, oil on canvas, 1916
(Private collection, Braun-
schweig).

many leading artists lived due to the war.⁴³ In Lausanne at Lake Geneva, a small exhibition of works by Russian and Polish artists was held between October 20 and November 5, 1916.⁴⁴ There are grounds for my assumption that Paul Bachrach recommended Emmy Scheyer to visit the show. Shortly thereafter, she met Jawlensky, Helene Nesnakomoff and her son Andrej in their exile Saint Prex near Lausanne, most probably also Marianne Werefkin.⁴⁵

In Basel or Zurich she met gallery owner Han Coray and/or Edwin Wolfensberger, the director of the art salon Wolfsberg, which presented works by Jawlensky. Emmy Scheyer succeeded in winning collectors who bought several paintings by Jawlensky.⁴⁶

The Galerie Dada organized exhibitions of the gallery Der Sturm and displayed works by Werefkin, Jawlensky, Kandinsky, Feininger, Klee, Albert Bloch and many others, in addition to children's drawings from the collection of painter Arthur Segal. It has been hinted that Werefkin and Jawlensky participated in Dada soirées – possibly Emmy Scheyer was among the guests.⁴⁷ Jawlensky was very creative during those months, portraying Emmy Scheyer or being inspired by her countenance. In the autumn of 1917, Jawlensky found a new domicile in Zurich.⁴⁸ Thanks to this connection, Emmy Scheyer became acquainted with Alexander Sacharoff's partner Clotilde von Derp.

In November, 1917, Emmy Scheyer moved to Zurich, sharing the same guest house as Charlotte Bachrach.⁴⁹ From here she sent a letter to Paul Jonas Meier, the director of the Ducal Museum in Braunschweig, asking him for approval to exhibit her works (paintings and sculptures). The names of her sponsors Gustav Lehmann, Ottilie Wit-

ting and Karl Hildebrandt are given as reference. Although Emmy Scheyer received a positive answer, the show did not take place.⁵⁰

The Fourth Phase in Her Life

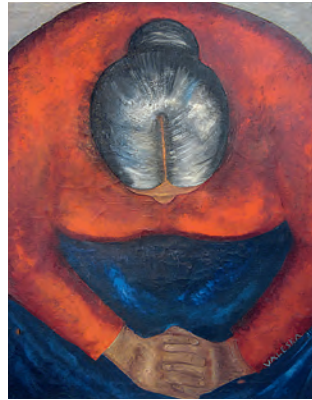
started early in 1918, when Jawlensky expressed his thanks to Paul Bachrach for the opportunity to make Emmy's acquaintance.⁵¹ He then settled in Ascona (Swiss canton Tessin) with his family.⁵² Emmy Scheyer followed them.⁵³

Her social background changed once again, but now in a very radical way. It can be proven that she contacted the following persons:

- a. Karl Vester, the estate manager of Monte Verità;
- b. Peter Groß, a son of Otto Groß, the psychiatrist surrounded by scandal;



11 Emmy Scheyer, Ascona, in profile, looking towards the
right, photo: ca. 1918. (Courtesy of the Norton Simon
Museum, Pasadena, California).

2 *Talmudic Student.*3 *Still Waiting, 1945.*4 *Red Head.*5 *The Couple, 1954.*6 *Despair 1, 1954.*7 *Red Dress, unfinished.*8 *Exodus.*9 *In Church, Adoration, 1954.*

Lette Valeska – Her Life Story 1885–1985⁶

Lette Valeska was born in Braunschweig in 1885 as Valeska Heinemann. Her parents were Jewish businessman Berthold Heinemann/Heynemann (1852–1930) and his wife Fanny (née Kunstmann, 1854–1942) who lived in Braunschweig.⁷ The family ran a successful branch of a large department store chain.⁸

Valeska was one of four siblings.⁹ She received a conventional “Höhere Töchter”-Ausbildung in the spirit of the time, attending the Höhere Töchterschule (today Gymnasium Kleine Burg) in Braunschweig from 1891 to 1901.

She received additional lessons in French, English, and Italian from private tutors. She had many female friends, among them Emmy Scheyer (Galka Scheyer's childhood name) who was four years younger. Valeska started photographing at the age

of 12. As a young adult she stayed for two years in Berlin and studied at the Berliner Lette-Verein for women¹⁰ which also had a training facility for photography. It is this organization which inspired her later to take her professional name of Lette Valeska. Between 1911 and 1915 she worked as a secretary for foreign languages for a technical newspaper in Brussels. In 1915/16, she studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Brussels along with Galka Scheyer.

After her time being educated abroad, she returned to Braunschweig. In 1920, she married the businessman Ernst Heymann who owned a pharmaceutical chemical company in Frankfurt.

Their daughter Hella was born in 1921. The family lived comfortably in a suburb close to Frankfurt.¹¹ In 1932, they moved to Paris where Ernst Heymann opened a branch of his business.

10 Valeska and her brothers Walter and Ludwig Heinemann, Braunschweig, 1880s.

11 Lette Valeska, then Valeska Heinemann, 1901.



Lette Valeska – The Artist

When Valeska came to Los Angeles she was urged by her childhood friend Galka Scheyer to take up painting. Valeska was still in a state of mental travail over starting a new life in another country and separating from her husband. Galka assured her that she would find peace of mind through painting. Valeska recalls that she resisted, saying: “But I’ve never had a brush in my hands,” Galka replied: “You don’t know how lucky you are.”¹⁷

In her 1947 memoirs, Valeska writes:

Then I came to LA to a friend of my youth, Galka Scheyer. The inspiration of this woman has changed my whole life. I started to paint, to be refreshed in art, in nonmaterial things and new doors in life opened up for me and I can say that my life has never been richer and more beautiful than it is now.¹⁸



18 Ingrid Bergmann, photographed by Lette Valeska, 1940s.



19 Our Synagogue, 1940.

In a later interview, Lette Valeska said:

Galka Scheyer had the power of bringing something out of you. On her deathbed she urged me not to go to an academy because it would take away my originality.¹⁹

Her earliest paintings took their subjects from her childhood in Braunschweig as well as family relationships. These images are still very simple, in a charming folk-art style, before her style matured.

An early painting is Valeska’s recollection of the interior of the Braunschweig Synagogue (Fig. 19) which was destroyed during the November Pogrom in 1938 and demolished in 1940.²⁰



20 Valeska at the easel working on *Our Synagogue* while her daughter is looking at the camera, in Galka Scheyer’s studio, 1940s.

21 *Family History*, 1940s.



study at the École des Beaux-Arts (Fig. 2) in 1912 was a conservative choice as many young students favored private academies like the Académie Julian, the Académie Colarossi or, from 1908 on, the Académie Matisse. It remains unclear how exactly Scheyer – who does not mention the name of a teacher in whose studio she trained – studied at the École des Beaux-Arts as her name cannot be found in the school's enrollment records.⁴ It appears most likely that Scheyer attended the school's classes only occasionally, possibly as a guest student, whose names were not always reliably recorded in the school's administrative records.

A similar situation presents itself for the Conservatoire de Paris at which Scheyer, according to the curriculum vitae she wrote for the Guggenheim Foundation, studied piano and was supported with a fellowship.⁵ The name Emmy Scheyer that she used at that time does not appear in the enrollment lists (Fig. 3). Like at the École des Beaux-Arts it was, however, possible to attend classes at the Conservatoire as a guest student. It can therefore be assumed that Scheyer, as probably also at the École des Beaux-Arts, was not a regular student, but only attended classes on an irregular basis.

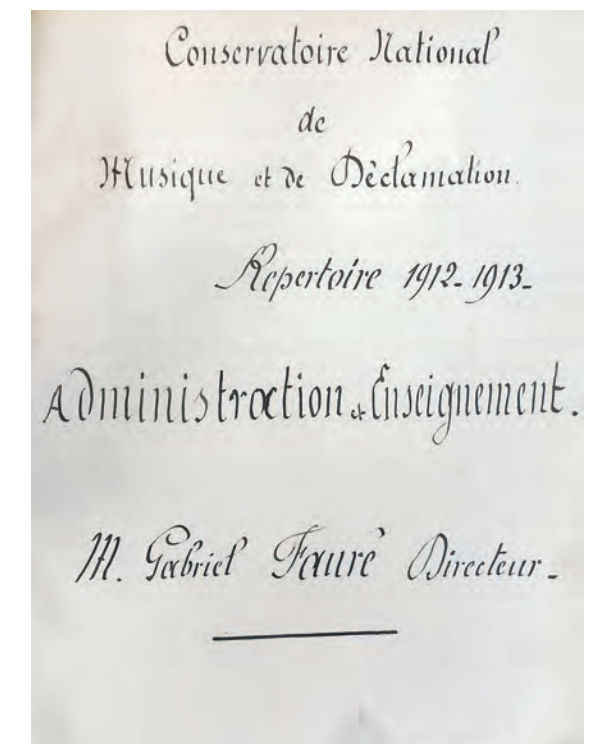
1 Emmy E. Scheyer (Renée), *Flower Field*, 1911, oil on canvas (Private collection).



2 Historical postcard showing the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, ca. 1900 (Photo: private).

3 (below) Annual table of students of the Conservatoire de Paris, Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, AJ/37/181 (Photo: private).

Another qualification that Scheyer stated in her fellowship application was her language study at the Alliance française. Although enrollment lists of the renowned language school have not survived for the period of her stay in France, two diplomas Scheyer obtained still exist.⁶ One diploma attests Scheyer's basic knowledge of French and the other her advanced language skills including the approval to teach French (Fig. 4). A closer look reveals that the diplomas were not issued at the language school's main location at Boulevard Raspail in Paris, as might have been expected. Instead, Saint-Valéry-en-Caux – a small coastal town in Normandy, about 180 km northwest of Paris – is mentioned as site of the language courses. The possibility that Scheyer continuously studied French at the Alliance française in Saint-Valéry-en-Caux during her two-year stay in Paris cannot only be excluded because of the long distance between the two places, but also because the diplomas clearly indicate that they were issued for



ages would be realized.⁹ The resulting plans for a new Oakland Art Gallery building were well ahead of their time and not realized until much later. Scheyer's ideas for the new museum as well as her participation in the presentations of the Hales department stores in 1928 confirm her status as an early promoter of cooperative relationships between art and commerce and new forms of arts underwriting.

When Scheyer returned to Germany in 1928, she traveled as the European representative of the Oakland Art Gallery and correspondent for the *San Francisco Examiner*.¹⁰ In her function as art director of the Anna Head School in Berkeley, she attended the VI. International Congress for Drawing, Art Education, and the Applied Arts in Prague, where she delivered the paper "Free, Imaginative and Creative Work," in which she outlined her pedagogical approach to children's art.¹¹

Although Scheyer worked tirelessly for the acceptance of the art of the Blue Four and other German artists, she was also receptive to the work of American artists and was often able to support the enterprising modernists among them by including their works in the annual exhibitions of the Oakland Art Gallery and elsewhere.¹² She exhibited works by Dixon and Stackpole during the Week of the San Francisco Artists in 1926 and forcefully defended the work of Forest Brissey and Hagedorn in the morality dispute that arose in the Fifth Annual Exhibition of 1927. Through her personal acquaintance with Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston, she also influenced the development of photography in the Bay Area. The lively debates she had with Weston during her stays in Carmel in 1929 and 1930 suggest the influence of Scheyer's activities on the transition from pictorialism to straight photography and the emergence of Group f/64.¹³ Her interest in the development of modern photography by Cun-

⁴ Newspaper article "Prophetess of 'The Blue Four': Mme. Scheyer, The Blue Four and Their Art," The San Francisco Examiner, November 1, 1925.



5 Scheyer with her Balinese sculptures in the garden of the Schindler House, Hollywood, ca. 1931–32.

ningham, Brett and Edward Weston is reflected in her collection.

Furthermore, Scheyer was open to the cultural influences and local traditions of the West Coast, which were shaped as much by Indian and Hispanic art and the Asian cultures of the Pacific Rim as they were by the East Coast and European modernism. Her lively interest in Chinese theater in San Francisco, the works of the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico, and in Mexican mural painting as well as in Hawaiian folk art and Balinese art stemmed from her expressionist grounding and her belief in the creative power of non-Western art. She saw in these art forms an important source of inspiration for contemporary Western art (Fig. 5).

Scheyer was not only active in the Bay Area, but also in Los Angeles. In fall 1926, she opened a

Blue Four exhibition at the Los Angeles Museum that was later also shown at the University of California, Los Angeles. As in San Francisco, she quickly established contacts with museum workers, art teachers, and artists such as Ben Berlin, Boris Deutsch, and Peter Krasnow. In February 1927, she participated in a wild party at Krasnow's studio,¹⁴ and the summer months of 1927 she spent at the house of the architect Rudolph Schindler on Kings Road in Hollywood. The intensity of her appearance and her performances is captured in the drawings *Mme Moderne Kunst* (1925) by Maynard Dixon and *Recalling Happy Memories* (1927–29) by Peter Krasnow¹⁵ (Fig. 6).

From fall 1929 to early summer 1930, Scheyer constantly traveled back and forth between the Bay Area and Los Angeles, and in December

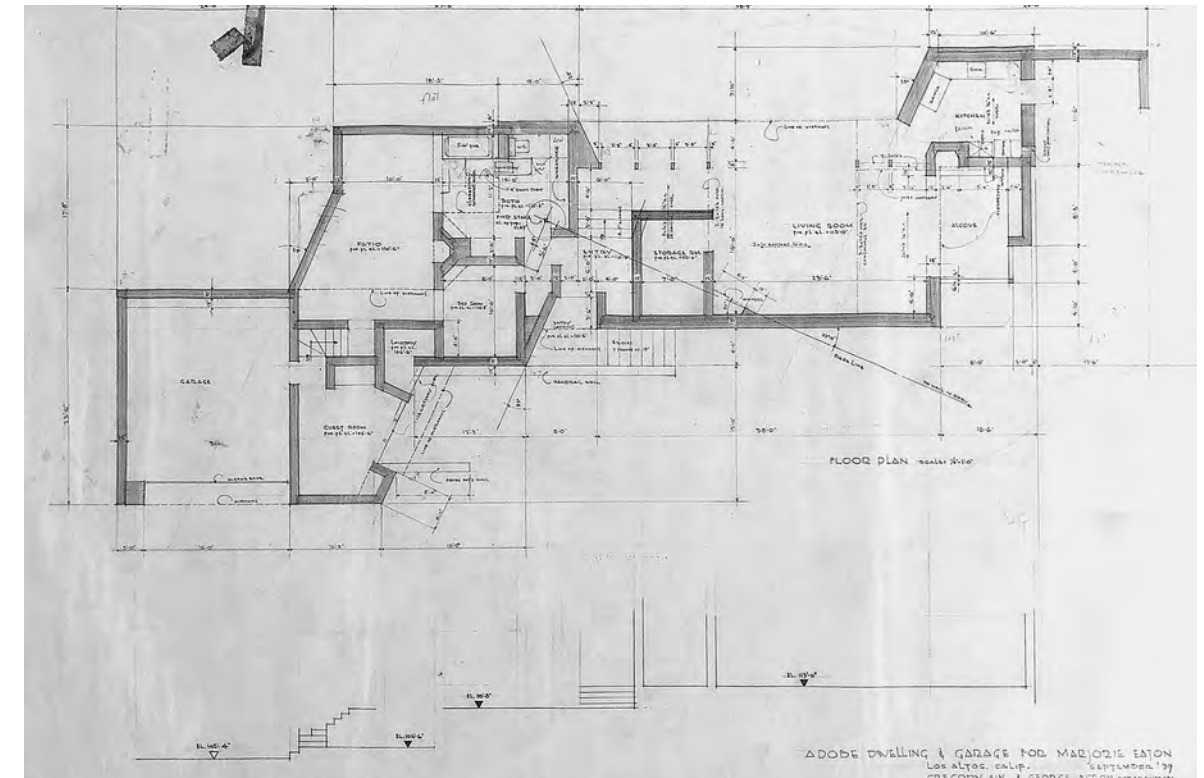
Yet, this consideration of architecture from the only point of view of form ignores both its spatial condition and the needs of the user, which are downgraded in favor of image. Moreover, this criticism overlooks the interweaving of the building with its surroundings, which Ain's perspectives already showed – his drawings were indeed based on the idea that the rapid growth of vegetation made a complete vision of the house impossible, and only fragments of it could be glimpsed through the eucalyptuses.

During the construction work, Marjorie Eaton's frequent visits to Scheyer's house and meetings with Ain planted seeds for her 1939 commission to the fledgling architect to design a new home and art space for her in Palo Alto. Eaton's family owned the historic complex of Juana Briones de Miranda Ranch, to which she wanted to add her own place. Eaton discussed with Ain her desire to build in adobe brick, both as it was a relatively inexpensive material and also reminded her of much happier times living and painting in Taos. She must have heard directly from Ain as well of his boyhood experience building with adobe while living with his family at the ill-fated socialist colony of Llano del Rio in the Mojave Desert.

Eaton's one-floor house was organized on a gentle slope and its directions aligned with the pre-existing planting of almond trees. In the mid-1950s, Ain added a small outdoor amphitheater adjoining the rear patio, which served both as a rehearsal area for the artist – who was by then transitioning to an acting career – and a performance space for entertaining her guests. More than 5,000 adobe bricks were made on site for the house's walls. One of Ain's most significant contributions was his modern interpretation of an old building technique, of which Edith Cox Eaton's ranch provided interesting historical examples. In her Mesa Alta property, he found an unusual but effective case of traditional reinforced adobe construction consisting of a mixed system of mud bricks and redwood panels. Ain combined adobe walls with embedded wooden supports, which he secured with horizontal metal bars every 4 courses. This technique improved the already good natural insulation of adobe and solved its two most important drawbacks: the erosion of its surface and poor structural response to earthquake-induced forces.

The existing photos of Galka Scheyer's visits to Marjorie Eaton's construction site show her fasci-

9 Galka Scheyer in the second floor apartment added by Gregory Ain, photos by Lette Valeska, ca. 1938 (Courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA).



10 Gregory Ain, Marjorie Eaton House in Palo Alto, floor plan, September 1939 (Courtesy of the ADC/UCSB).

11 Galka Scheyer (in foreground) and Marjorie Eaton's visit to Eaton construction site, ca. 1940 (Courtesy of Susan Kirk).



status in the city was complicated and closer to that of a cause célèbre. Yes, he was hailed as a great artist whose example might reinvigorate the state of painting in California, but in San Francisco, Rivera became the figurehead of several controversies. First, there was intense indignation because two important mural commissions had not been awarded to local artists.³ The second objection was problematic because it was widespread among the citizenry: how could the commission to decorate the Pacific Stock Exchange Tower, an institutional symbol of America's financial might, have been awarded to an avowed communist? Perhaps this collaboration with Scheyer offered Rivera an opportunity for positive publicity, at the very least within the arts community? And, Rivera's genuine support for the Blue Four artists and their brand of modernism hopefully softened a public that remained skeptical of their worth. Importantly, it did not preclude Rivera, Kahlo, and Scheyer from becoming friends, an alliance that sparked Scheyer's desire to organize an exhibition of the Blue Four in Mexico City in No-

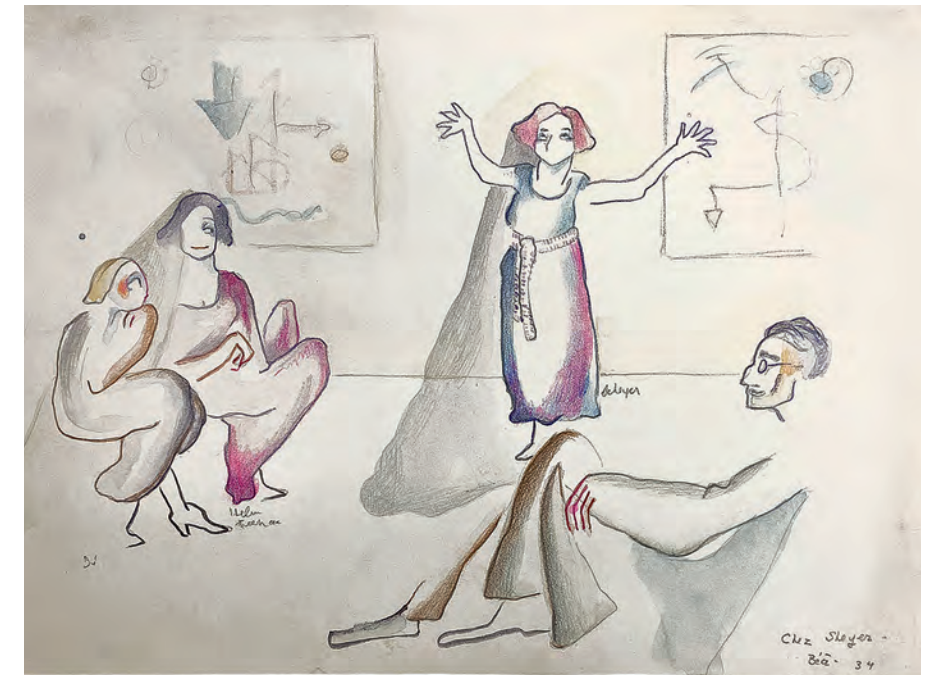
vember 1931. During her extended, two-month stay in Mexico, at the home of Kahlo and Rivera, Scheyer was introduced to Mexican modernism, examples of which she would add to her personal collection.

Beatrice Wood's relationship with Scheyer affords a more intimate, nuanced understanding of our subject. Affectionately known as the "Mama of Dada," Wood involved herself early on in the American avant-garde movement and affiliated closely with such New York Dada artists as Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. Thanks to her friendship with Duchamp, whom she met in September 1916, Wood gained the confidence to pursue her dream of becoming a visual artist. Importantly, Duchamp introduced Wood to Walter and Louise Arensberg, who count among the first serious collectors of modern art in America. Their collection was notable for the scope of material they acquired from Duchamp, and for the stellar assemblage of French modernist work and pre-Columbian sculpture.⁴ In 1927, when the Arens-



4 Beatrice Wood (American, 1893–1998) *Evening at Arensbergs, 1930, Philadelphia* (Courtesy of Museum of Art: Gift of the artist, 1978, 1978-98-6 © Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts/Happy Valley Foundation).

5 Beatrice Wood (American, 1893–1998) *Chez Scheyer, 1934* (Courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the artist, 1978, 1978-98-5 © Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts/Happy Valley Foundation).



bergs moved permanently to Los Angeles, their home became a social and cultural hub, much as it had been in New York. Wood moved to Los Angeles in 1928. Once settled, she renewed her acquaintance with the Arensbergs and joined the vibrant circle of artists and art lovers who frequented their salons. Occasionally, she recorded the events in the form of evocative pictorial diaries (Fig. 4). Scheyer, too, was a frequent guest at the Arensbergs' Hollywood home for a period of time. She played a pivotal role in arousing in them a passion for the Blue Four. From 1930 forward, they acquired some twenty-seven artworks with her help. In doing so, they developed the most significant collection of Paul Klee on the West Coast. This legendary home is where Scheyer and Wood met.

Wood's first impression of Scheyer was negative:

When I met Galka Scheyer I wanted to run, for she impressed me as the rudest person I had ever met. Short, with a large head of dyed henna hair

and Semitic features, the unconventional beauty of her face escaped me. Her voice was strident and her manner so intense it was abrasive. Yet, she was so alive in a room, and scintillating, that no one else counted. I went home and scolded myself for so readily disliking this woman.⁵

On her next social occasion in Scheyer's company, Wood observed that she

saw through her rudeness and perceived a person of enormous tolerance and dignity. Galka was like a gourd, rough on the outside, but full of rare delicacy within.⁶

The two became allies in art and spent much time together, as evidenced by Wood's drawing of Scheyer holding court with guests at her Blue Heights Drive home in Los Angeles (Fig. 5).

At this key moment of expansion in Los Angeles's cultural history, during the 1930s, Wood lamented that Scheyer was frequently not invited



6 Installation photograph: Alexei Jawlensky, Stendahl Gallery, Los Angeles, 1940.

to important affairs where the agendas focused on creating a blueprint for the arts in the city. Bravely, and with good intentions, Wood decided to take up the matter directly with her friend in conversation:

It was at this time when all the museums in Los Angeles were beginning to talk, were beginning to come of age... Walter (A) was at many of the meetings, Galka was not. I said "Look Galka, if you didn't shriek, maybe they would invite you." She answered: "But I will shriek, I'm more intelligent than they are. Why shouldn't I shriek? What does it matter if I shriek?"⁷

Eventually, even Louise Arensberg couldn't sustain her shrill manner, and she severed Scheyer's attendance at their salons.⁸ Wood's recollections

of her longtime friend are among the most empathetic and knowing in Scheyer's California network. They remained close friends until Scheyer's death in 1945.

Scheyer's stubborn independence caused sparks with museum professionals and gallerists alike. Marjorie Eaton, an artist whom Scheyer had befriended in San Francisco, and who had advised her with regard to acquiring work by Jawlensky and Klee, provided a vivid description of a run-in with Lloyd LaPage Rollins, director of the Legion of Honor and the de Young Museums in San Francisco, regarding an installation of Blue Four material:

Galka was in the process of hanging the paintings with the museum attendants and she was