

NEUE SACHLICHKEIT / NEW OBJECTIVITY



NEUE SACHLICHKEIT / NEW OBJECTIVITY

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PAGE 7: Carl Grossberg, Preparatory drawing for *Preparation Room (Textile Factory)*, 1935, colored pencil on white wove paper. Merrill C. Berman Collection

PAGE 8: Willi Baumeister, *Wie wohnen? Die Wohnung* (How Should We Live? The Dwelling). Poster for the exhibition organized by the Deutsche Werkbund at the Weissenhof Siedlung, Stuttgart, 1927, offset lithograph. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson. Digital Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource. © 2025 Willi Baumeister / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

PAGE 10: Rudolf Wacker, *Still-Life with Holly and Kasperl*, 1933, oil on panel. Museum Ortnr, Vienna (Courtesy Kunsthandel Giese & Schweiger, Vienna). Photo: Alexander Mitterer / Print Alliance

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CONTENTS

- 9 Ronald S. Lauder
Preface

- 11 Renée Price
Foreword

HISTORY

- 14 **NEUE SACHLICHKEIT / NEW OBJECTIVITY**
The Avant-Garde and the Mentality of the Weimar Democracy Olaf Peters
- 34 **INTRODUCTION TO “NEW OBJECTIVITY”**
German Painting Since Expressionism Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub
- 36 **ANALYSIS OF A POST-EXPRESSIONIST PAINTING** Franz Roh
- 38 **PLATES**

MANIFESTATIONS

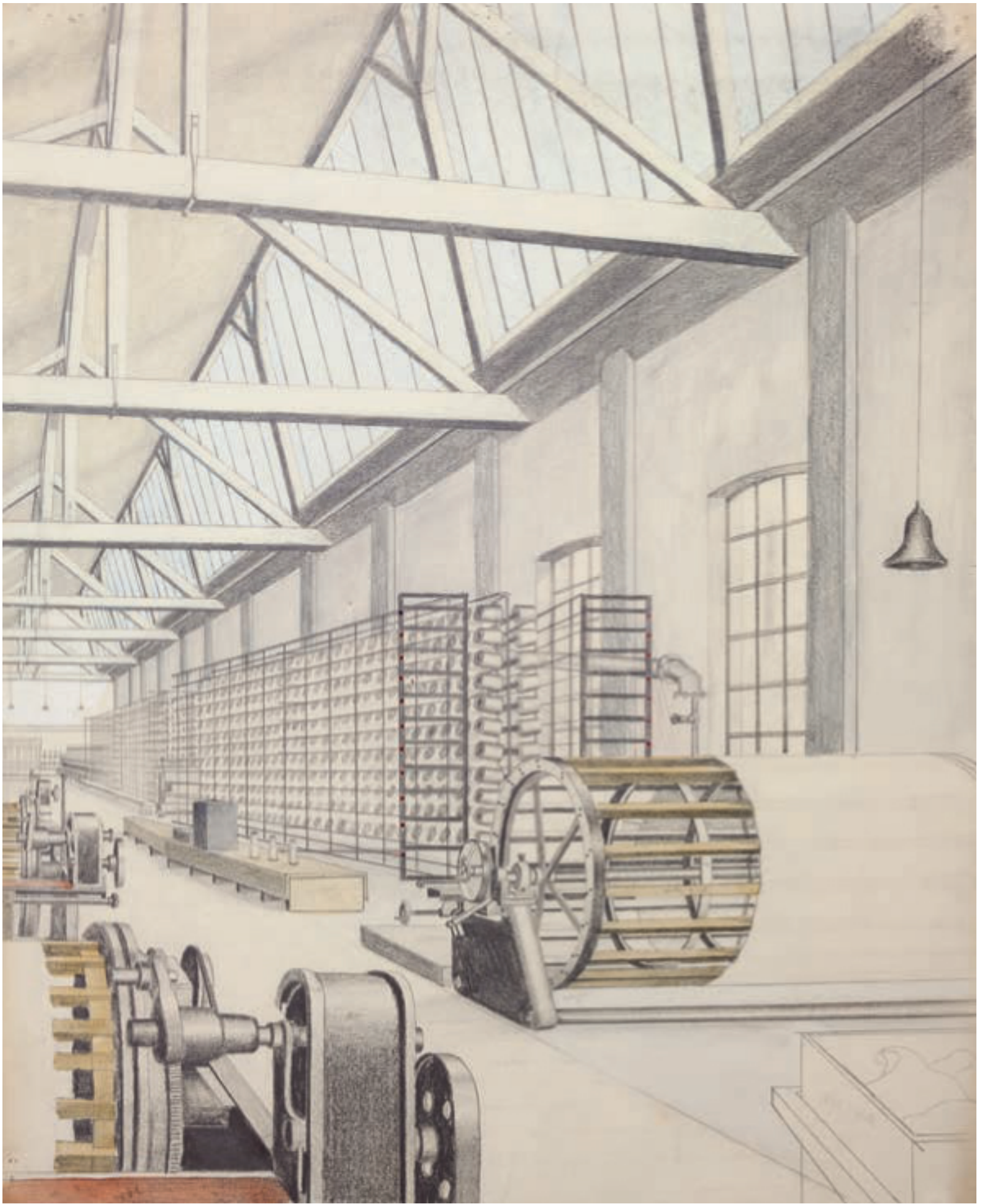
- 72 **AN “ENORMOUS TENSION LYING OVER OUR PRESENT”**
Verist and Neue Sachlichkeit Painting in Dresden Birgit Dalbajewa
- 88 **BACKYARDS OF LIFE**
Hannover and the Reality of Female Painters in the Weimar Republic Carina Plath
- 100 **THE SCULPTURE OF NEUE SACHLICHKEIT** Christian Drobe
- 114 **PLATES**

BEYOND ART

- 162 **OBJECTIVE HOUSING**
On the Difficulties of Furnishing in the Modern Age Regina Bittner
- 174 **NEW OBJECTIVITY AND THE VIENNA CIRCLE** Robert Schnepf
- 188 **PLATES**

MEDIA

- 246 **THE EROTICISM OF PRECISION**
Photography and New Objectivity Rolf Sachsse
- 256 **SUMMER IN THE CITY**
Robert Siodmak’s *People on Sunday* and the Aesthetics of New Objectivity Jürgen Müller
- 276 Checklist
- 286 Selected Bibliography
- 296 Index
- 304 Photograph and Copyright Credits





wie wohnen?

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WOHNUNG
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JULI – SEPT 1927 STUTTGART**

UNION STUTTGART

PREFACE

Since its founding in 2001, Neue Galerie New York has been known as a museum of Austrian and German art. Our focus is on the fifty-year period from 1890 to 1940, when so much important painting, sculpture, drawing, and design was being produced in both countries. But, in truth, the museum is often thought of primarily for its Viennese leanings. The two best-known artists in our collection, Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele, are Austrian, as are the leading designers Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. Our Café Sabarsky is beloved for its *Wienerschnitzel* and superb Viennese coffee imported directly from that city. Perhaps most prominent of all is our extraordinary painting, Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), which has all the rich, sensuous quality of Austrian art from the time it was created, and its history is closely bound up with that of its home country.

However, I am pleased to say that we are just as proud of our commitment to German art of this same period. Over the years, the Neue Galerie has hosted retrospective exhibitions devoted to superb painters such as Otto Dix, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Christian Schad, and our collection contains many important works by these and other major German artists and designers. I have also maintained close ties to Germany through a number of projects, from my interest in the redevelopment of Tegel airport in Berlin to building Jewish schools in that country through my foundation. It should be noted that Germany has become a crucial political ally of the United States, and remains a bastion of artistic creativity.

With the "Neue Sachlichkeit / New Objectivity" exhibition, the Neue Galerie examines one of the most fascinating movements in twentieth-century art. Much of the art that was created in Germany in the 1920s bore the hallmarks of this movement: a crisp, realistic style, often married to a detailed observation of a society in disarray. It is typically animated by a dark, sardonic sense of humor, though some of this art also foretells the horrors that would take place there. This is difficult but vital work, and I have been interested in it almost since I first began looking at and collecting art.

The curator and scholar Olaf Peters has curated a number of important exhibitions for the Neue Galerie. With this show, he gives us the full range of the New Objectivity movement, including a number of major loans from American and European museums. He brings fresh perspectives to the study of this art, and I thank him for his diligent research and tireless efforts. The many lenders have allowed the Neue Galerie to present essential works from their collections, all to show the scope and brilliance of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists. Finally, the Neue Galerie staff, led for nearly a quarter century by Director Renée Price, continues to make me proud by creating exhibitions and catalogues of the highest quality, and in the process shedding light on this art that I have loved for so long.

Ronald S. Lauder
President, Neue Galerie New York



FOREWORD

It is a privilege to continue to share with the Neue Galerie audience the rich, complex, and sometimes demanding world of German art created between the two World Wars. Part of our mission is to present the groundbreaking art of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, encompassing works made a century ago that still speak to us today.

Two recent museum exhibitions in the United States covered this topic extensively. In 2006, "Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s" was presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, focusing on portraiture created during the Weimar Republic. And in 2015, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art organized "New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic, 1919–1933," an exhibition that covered the entire field but did not travel to the East Coast.

A forerunner to this show at the Neue Galerie was "Berlin Metropolis, 1918–1933," an exhibition presented in 2015 that explored architecture, fashion, theater, cinema, photography, collage, and montage. "Neue Sachlichkeit / New Objectivity" may be considered a complementary presentation, shedding new light on the diversity of the movement. We aim to show a different, more complex picture with our exhibitions on this subject, focusing on paintings and drawings, but also including film, photography, design, and sculpture.

Our exhibition honors the groundbreaking efforts of Gustav F. Hartlaub, an outstanding museum director who was active in Mannheim during the short-lived Weimar democracy. One hundred years ago, in 1925, Hartlaub conceived an exhibition and coined the term *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which became synonymous with the modernity of the Weimar era. We wish to banish the myth that Berlin was the only capital for all things modern in Germany, as Dresden and Hannover played key roles as well. The revolution in art that occurred there also took place in architecture, as domestic housing was transformed to reflect broader social changes. In summary, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was not merely an art movement, but a new way of living and thinking, a new mentality that arose during a period of confusion and tension. It is our hope that the exhibition and this catalogue contribute to our understanding of the past, but also that this important development holds relevance for the present as well.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to our lenders, including the Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; Art Institute of Chicago; Frankel Family Trust; Dr. Herbert Giese; Heckscher Museum of Art; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art; Historische Sammlung Bethel, Bielefeld; Kulturhistorisches Museum, Magdeburg; Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg; Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale); Kunstsammlungen Zwickau; Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; LVR-Landesmuseum Bonn; Märkisches Museum Witten; Merrill C. Berman; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Morgan Library & Museum; The Museum of Modern Art; Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Städtische Sammlungen Freital auf Schloss Burgk; and Sprengel Museum Hannover. Their participation is imperative for the realization of such an ambitious project. My highest praise goes to our curator Dr. Olaf Peters, who has conceived numerous insightful exhibitions for the Neue Galerie, including "Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937" in 2014, "Berlin Metropolis: 1918–1933" in 2015, and "Before the Fall: German and Austrian Art of the 1930s" in 2018. He always brings enormous intelligence and scholarship to these projects. We are also appreciative of our ongoing relationship with Bill Loccisano, whose elegant design approach to our catalogues and exhibitions is consistently exceptional. The dedicated staff of our museum has, likewise, been instrumental to the success of this exhibition, including Scott Gutterman, Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer; Janis Staggs, Director of Curatorial and Manager of Publications; Liesbet Van Leemput, Manager of Curatorial and Graphics; Stacey Traunfeld, Chief Registrar; Julie Jung, Associate Registrar; and Garth Swanson, Head Preparator.

And last, but never least, I wish to extend profound thanks to our museum's President, Ronald S. Lauder, whose grand vision we are honored to shepherd, and whose enthusiasm and generosity know no bounds.

Renée Price

Director, Neue Galerie New York



Government troops using tanks against the Spartacus supporters during street fighting in Berlin, March 1919. Photo: Scherl / Süddeutsche Zeitung. Photo / Alamy Stock Photo



HISTORY

■ NEUE SACHLICHKEIT / NEW OBJECTIVITY

■ INTRODUCTION TO “NEW OBJECTIVITY”

■ ANALYSIS OF A POST-EXPRESSIONIST PAINTING

■ PLATES

NEUE SACHLICHKEIT / NEW OBJECTIVITY

THE AVANT-GARDE AND THE MENTALITY OF THE WEIMAR DEMOCRACY

Olaf Peters



When we think of the Weimar Republic today, we immediately envision the paintings, buildings, and design objects of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), a movement spanning from around 1918 until 1933. The art and architecture of this era has since entered our collective visual memory and become visual representatives and symbols of an age that was ready for change, multifaceted, and fascinating [Fig. 1].¹ Our exhibition and the accompanying catalogue seek to present the breadth of this movement, which was not limited to the visual arts but also included the relatively new media of film and photography, radio and cinema, literature and music, architecture and economics, and philosophy and design. This introduction sketches the genesis of the movement, several manifestations and varieties of it, the discourse of art critics and art historians, and its development up to the end of the Weimar Republic using primarily examples from painting and art criticism. The essays on other artistic media (film, photography, and sculpture), interior architecture (Bauhaus and Neues Frankfurt), and philosophy cross genres and disciplines to present the enormous spectrum of the movement, without which it would be impossible to grasp *Neue Sachlichkeit* in its entirety. Exemplary

studies on the important centers Dresden and Hannover offer specific regional case studies. These texts underscore that *Neue Sachlichkeit* was a broad artistic movement and it reflected a transformed intellectual outlook that resulted in an avant-garde manifestation of Germany's nascent democracy.

Admittedly, this combination of terms may seem self-contradictory and even oxymoronic, because the concept of the avant-garde is always associated with the idea of a small group of progressives ahead of the mainstream. In this view, the broad masses typically develop similar tendencies with a temporal delay and at best manage to catch up. The painter Vasily Kandinsky expressed that using the image of a triangle that moves upward so that the position of its tip is occupied by the base only after an extended period, while the tip is already to be found somewhere else entirely.² The combination of terms is also problematic because the roots of *Neue Sachlichkeit* originate before 1918–19 and hence precede the founding of the Weimar Republic. The movement later had conservative and even reactionary features that could adopt antidemocratic and even National Socialist forms. Both things should be addressed, but they are not the focus of our exhibition and the related catalogue. Instead our attention is directed toward the liberal potential of a pluralistic movement that initiated social change and reflected on it critically.

CHANGES IN DIRECTION IN THE LATE EMPIRE

The history of *Neue Sachlichkeit* can be said to begin in Munich under the German Empire, and it is linked to the former locus of applied arts and architecture, on the one hand, and the birthplace of the Blauer Reiter (Blue Rider), on the other. Looking at the cultural wealth of that era and the associated leg-

end of the 1920s, the philosopher Helmut Plessner observed:

*For as profound as the shock triggered by World War I and its end was, it would never have been possible to call into action so many talented powers if they had not already been there. The caesura of 1918 did not mark the intellectual pendulum swing and new beginning but rather already had a twenty-year history behind it, and it would have been inconceivable without the relatively quickly acquired wealth of Germany's late industrialism, its labor movement, and its new leisure class.*³

Plessner's view is viable, even if one thinks only of the Deutscher Werkbund (German Werkbund), founded in 1907, and its influence on the Bauhaus, which was founded in Weimar in 1919, and on the Neues Bauen (New Building) of the Weimar Republic in general.⁴

But it was not just that the intellectual and economic preconditions that were already created under the German Empire or that the talents born in the 1890s were forged over the course of the 1910s. In the years prior to World War I, the international artistic avant-garde gained acceptance in Germany. Artists' groups, manifestos, and exhibitions represented a new dawn that was evident above all in the movements Expressionism, Futurism, and Cubism and that culminated in abstraction. The concepts and conflicts of the prewar era led to early changes in direction that only became clearly distinct movements after the war. One should recall, for example the famous controversy of 1912 between the painters Max Beckmann and Franz Marc. Beckmann reacted sensitively to the latest trends in painting. There was a debate between him and Marc of the Blauer Reiter in Munich that revealed the fault lines between Beckmann and the contemporaneous

1. Poster for the "Neue Sachlichkeit" exhibition held at the Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1925. From: *Stationen der Moderne: die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, Berlinische Galerie (Berlin: Nicolai, 1988), 216. Photo: Stadtarchiv Mannheim



2. Alexander Kanoldt, *Still-Life II (The Atelier Table)*, 1924, oil on canvas. Osthaus-Museum, Hagen. From: *Alexander Kanoldt, 1881-1939: Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Lithographien*, Museum für Neue Kunst (Freiburg im Breisgau: Museum für Neue Kunst, 1987), 133. © 2025 Alexander Kanoldt / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

avant-garde.⁵ In the journal *Pan*, Beckmann argued for “objectivity” and polemicized against Expressionism, Fauvism and Primitivism.⁶ The painter took aim especially at an increasingly evident tendency to abandon the figurative image: “What is feeble and overly aesthetic about this so-called new painting is its failure to distinguish between the idea of a wallpaper or poster and that of a ‘picture.’”⁷ Beckmann had to rethink his own position within the artistic field.⁸ Because of the manifestations of the latest European painting in the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne in 1912 and in the 1913 “Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon” (First German Autumn Salon) in Berlin,⁹ and in the face of a fundamental critique of his previous work in that context as “*greisenhaft*” (geriatric)¹⁰ and his personal experiences in World War I in 1914–15, Beckmann underwent a fundamental stylistic transformation,¹¹ which in the early 1920s made him one of the main exponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.¹²

Alexander Kanoldt, who later became famous for his still-lives in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* style [Fig. 2], likewise had a conflict in Munich, and with members of the Blauer Reiter. Like

Kandinsky and Marc, he was a member of the Neue Künstlervereinigung (New Artists' Association) at the time. Looking back in a letter from 1925 he reported to the important art critic Franz Roh:

In this circle in Munich, whose only member from Munich was Franz Marc, who joined later, the mutual inspiration and passionate fighting for personal convictions contributed uncommonly much to clarifying questions of principle: already at the time, the antitheses—here nonrepresentationalism, here objectivity—were colliding so forcefully that the split of the non-representational Blauer Reiter occurred already in 1911.¹³

Both Beckmann and Kanoldt responded negatively to the emerging tendency toward abstraction, but that sharp separation had been foreseen by the protagonists of non-representationalism themselves. Kandinsky wrote programmatically in his essay “Über die Formfrage” (On the Question of Form) in the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter*:

The forms employed for the embodiment [of the spirit], which the spirit has wrested from the reserves of matter, may easily be divided between two poles.

These two poles are:

1. The Great Abstraction

2. The Great Realism

These two poles open up two paths, which lead ultimately to a single goal.

Between these two poles lie many possible combinations of different juxtapositions of the abstract with the real.¹⁴

In this text and in the illustrations of the almanac, the French painter Henri Rousseau appeared as a major proponent of a new representational art or, in Kandinsky's words, "a "Great Realism." It was therefore no coincidence that Rousseau repeatedly played an important role in the 1920s in the discourse on *Neue Sachlichkeit* even though the naive painter and so-called "le Douanier" (customs officer) Rousseau had died in 1910 and thus was already a historical figure for the Blauer Reiter. In 1921, the painter Helmut Kolle said: "So we young people step before the work of the long-since buried man of whom we hear that he was a great painter and seek in him someone who is capable of being our leader, whom we could feel was like a father."¹⁵ Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub did not include Rousseau in the concept for his famous "Neue Sachlichkeit" exhibition in Mannheim in 1925, since he was interested in current developments since World War I. Roh, however, who published his important book *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus* (Post-Expressionism:



Magical Realism) in the same year as that exhibition, treated Rousseau there, and again in a journal article a little later, as a central representative of a view of painting that set itself apart from Expressionism [Fig. 3].¹⁶

3. Cover of Franz Roh's *Nach-Expressionismus* (After Expressionism), 1925 (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925). Archive of the author

Rousseau is so important in our context because he was perceived by nonrepresentational Expressionists as an early exponent of a Great Realism that would be manifested in *Neue Sachlichkeit*. For painters of the 1920s, he could function as a father figure and point of departure. Roh assessed Rousseau as a precursor of post-Expressionist Magical Realism,¹⁷ who influenced two movements that must be considered together more than has been the case thus far: on the one hand, *Neue Sachlichkeit* (with its often distorted, magical realist forms) and, on the other, Surrealism (with its dreamlike visual worlds).¹⁸ For that reason, the famous 1897 painting *The Sleeping Gypsy* [Fig. 4], which Roh analyzed in his book under the title *Sleeping Woman*, is the only work that he describes in detail. It functions as an incunabulum that was singled out as contemporaneous.

4. Henri Rousseau, *The Sleeping Gypsy*, 1897, oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim. Digital Image: © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

REACTIONS TO THE WAR

Defeat, revolution, civil war, hyperinflation—these are the key terms to describe the situation in Germany immediately after World War I.¹⁹ The talk of the end or even death of Expressionism and the question of a new naturalism illustrate an artistic turning point that amounted to a paradigm shift. Admittedly, the new often began under the regime of the old, nor should it be ignored that it was asserted that Expressionism continued to exist. For example, the conservative critic Paul Fechter denied in 1923 that Expressionism was dead; even Hartlaub still questioned the idea in the introduction to his 1925 catalogue on *Neue Sachlichkeit*.²⁰ But these were obeisances or rearguard actions. The Weimar Bauhaus can serve here as an internationally famous symbol of these changes. Gothic and expressive, striving for the new building for art and society, it appeared in the public sphere in 1919 in Weimar, the place where the first German democracy was conceived. In 1923, the director of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, proclaimed a new unity of art and technology and turned to *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which the widely regarded exhibition in Mannheim in 1925 made a catchword. It was always understood ambiguously and was inherently and fundamentally duplicitous. A distinction was made between a left and a right wing, called Verism and Classicism, respectively. Let us consider first the left wing of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, to Beckmann, Verism, and his critical reflection as a central reaction to World War I.

In 1919, before he was the director of the museum in Mannheim, Hartlaub published his important book *Kunst und Religion* (Art and Religion), which revolved around the question of the possibility of a new religious art. There had been an exhibition on the theme at the Kunsthalle Mannheim.²¹ The attempt to address the shock of military defeat and

the crisis of a new political beginning by turning to religion was all too understandable. Beckmann and Emil Nolde had paved the way for Hartlaub. In the coming years, Beckmann would even become a key figure for him. Hartlaub connected all of Beckmann's new production to his wartime experiences and a new "gnostic-religious" attitude.²² For Hartlaub, Beckmann had a "deeply pessimistic objectivity,"²³ with which he was able to redeem himself. The artist himself spoke at the time in a confessional way about a transcendental objectivity and about the desire to build a new church with his paintings for a deeply disturbed and disappointed humanity [Fig. 5]. With these works and the related graphic art of years from 1917 to 1919, Beckmann became one of the leading Verists.²⁴ The art historian Carl Einstein confirmed this in retrospect when he wrote in the section on Beckmann in his history of twentieth-century art in 1926: "The war came, and several painters finally discerned the physiognomy of the age; it had been completely exposed [...]. They were gripped and through observation resisted a shock that always remained less significant than the occasion for it. Gradually, form grew out of stimulation. [...] Only defense: ascertain ad nauseum [...]."²⁵

Dresden museum director Paul Ferdinand Schmidt titled a text in the journal *Das Kunstblatt* in 1924 "Die deutschen Veristen" (The German Verists).²⁶ He emphasized above all George Grosz (whom he called a "satirist"); Otto Dix (whom he strongly advocated); and Otto Griebel, Rudolf Schlichter, and Georg Scholz, (whom he called "Objectivists")—as revolutionaries of form and content. The revolution—which Schmidt saw as a European one—had been triggered by World War I. Now the avant-garde currents were transformed. Schmidt emphasized Cubism as the



5. Max Beckmann, *The Night*, 1918–19, oil on canvas. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Photo: bpk Bildagentur / Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf / Photo: Walter Klein / Art Resource, NY. © 2025 Max Beckmann / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

point of departure, though he saw faceted painting sometimes transforming into “constructive planar forms” or Fernand Léger in Paris realizing a neo-Gothic, vertical art with a new monumentality. At the same time, Schmidt emphasized the new, strictly structured, “Neoclassical paintings of Derain,” and hence a feature of the contemporaneous art that was perceived as international, which Hartlaub identified as the right wing of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Schmidt's characterization of Verist painting deserves attention because it reveals a closeness between the discourse of art criticism and the experience of the World War. With regard to works by Dix, Griebel, and Schlichter, he spoke of a “insistent precision in the forma-

tion of details,” of “cold passion,” and of “dead clarity.” The reference to the machine, with an inherent precision that given its logic can intensify into dread, also points to the experience of the war, which was marked by such phenomena and consequences: cold precision and grotesque killing. He did not address the war itself, but Schmidt impressively cited concepts and turns of phrase that described a distanced hardness that was intended to encompass the mentality of the artists of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In one paragraph of the text, the author brought together menace, nudity, ruthless reality, helpless embitterment, pitilessness, godlessness, and the harsh light of a searchlight to illustrate in urgent language the final break with the prewar world and to characterize the new pictorial aesthetic.²⁷

The critic did, however, find hope behind the new art, and he summed it up in an image of the (post)war: "One cannot lose oneself so boundlessly in things without love, though it may remain hidden beneath the loathing for the present, but it is nonetheless strong enough—one day when the rubble has been cleared—to begin building a new world out of the truth."²⁸

The catastrophe of the war demanded a pitiless and undaunted eye. At the same time, the latter perhaps concealed a love that could dedicate itself first to clearing rubble and then to rebuilding. Using Dix as an example, Schmidt briefly sketched the development, still just beginning, from Dadaism to the Verism of *Die Kriegskrüppel* (The War Cripples), which was shown in 1920 at the "Erste Internationale Dada-Messe" (First International Dada Fair) in Berlin and had been acquired by Schmidt himself for the Stadtmuseum Dresden. The line dividing Dada and Verism was still fluid for contemporaries and—if one thinks of the "Dada-Messe" in Berlin, in which Dix, Grosz, Schlichter, and Scholz participated—could indeed not be drawn clearly at all.²⁹ In 1923–24, Dix outdid his own Dadaist works with the large-format painting *Schützengraben* (The Trench) and the *Der Krieg* (War) portfolio of fifty sheets, which represent a high point and temporary end point of the efforts of the artists of Verism/*Neue Sachlichkeit* to come to terms with World War I. Not until nationalist agitation and propaganda began to surge again in the late 1920s were these themes taken up again in painting and film.

The Verist Georg Scholz in Karlsruhe also participated in the "Dada-Messe" in Berlin and produced a significant number of outstanding paintings during the first half of the 1920s. The art critic acknowledged that with these words: "The uniting of stunning confi-

dence in reproducing inanimate objects such as machines, rooms, village streets with a gargantuan immoderation in the human grotesque is surely among the most powerful qualities that German art has achieved since its great renewal"³⁰ [Fig. 6]. In 1923, the first long article on Scholz, written by Hans Curjel, was published in *Das Kunstblatt*.³¹ The author presented the evolution of the new naturalism as having two motivations: first, and initially as an immanent consequence of a formal development that was constitutive of the so-called classical right wing of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In parallel with this, there was an artistic reaction to the current political conditions, and here Scholz came into play, but Curjel credited him with an artistic development: "The experience of the present resulted in the sharp turn to representational painting around 1920. The polemical elements dominate; unrelenting war is declared against all complacency, all stubbornness, all heartfelt, philistine sentimentality, all jam-packed sexuality, all capitalist rawness, all patriotic stupidity, and they will be fought with brutal openness."³² The critic regarded paintings such as *Der Deutsche Kriegerverein* (The German Soldiers' Association) as contemporary pictorial sermons that brought the "plague boils" to light "that the citizen hesitates to cut out."³³ In Scholz's work, however, there were only a very few paintings in the period immediately after the war that pointed to a nostalgic militarism that seemed outdated and anachronistic. And in the case of a verist like Scholz, art critics rarely addressed the past war openly, even though it was present as a profound turning point. By contrast, a major work such as *Von kommenden Dingen* (Of Things to Come), whose title alludes to a book by Walter Rathenau, the middle one in the group of three business leaders and politicians, has a timeless relevance that is still valid today concerning the distribution of control and power [see Cat. no. 27].

BETWEEN A STYLE OF THE EPOCH AND A SHIFT IN MENTALITY

Dix's *The Trench* could not be shown in the famous "Neue Sachlichkeit" exhibition in Mannheim because its Verism seemed too provocative.³⁴ Dadaist works played hardly any role; by contrast, early paintings by Beckmann and Grosz that had more Gothic-expressive or Cubo-Futurist qualities were integrated into the exhibition. This may seem surprising today, and disturb partisans of terminological sophistry; at the time, people felt free to juggle art-critical terms. Consequently, "*Neue Sachlichkeit*" must be seen as a term of reconciliation that subsumes numerous phenomena. The terms "Post-Expressionism," "realism," and "objectivity," "representationalism," and "naturalism," which were often used as synonyms, sought to emphasize a common trend. Essentially it was about grappling with reality in representational images. It was a reaction both to the tendencies toward abstraction of avant-garde movements, to the experience of war and defeat, and to the challenges painting faced from photography and film and integrating them into new pictorial concepts.

Paul Westheim's important journal *Das Kunstblatt* played a crucial role in shaping this phenomenon when it documented the results of a detailed questionnaire in 1922.³⁵ "Movement triggers countermovement, art history teaches us." The editor included that sentence in his brief introductory text, only to point to the effort to devise a term (a new catchword is sought, comparable to "Expressionism") and the aspect diagnosis of the era ("end of Expressionism").³⁶ It would be a task all its own to evaluate the many different positions taken, and it has yet to be done adequately. There were answers from, among others, Alexander Archipenko, Rudolf Belling, Alfred Döblin, George Gross (i.e., Grosz), Hartlaub, Karl Hofer, Vasily Kandinsky, Ernst Ludwig



Kirchner, Ludwig Meidner, Wilhelm Pinder, Edwin Redslob, Alois J. Schardt, and Wilhelm Uhde—some of the most important artists, art functionaries, and art historians of the time [Fig. 7].

I refer here only to Kandinsky's reply, because, first, it repeats the differentiation between Great Abstraction and Great Realism in the *Blauer Reiter* almanac that was mentioned at the beginning of this text, but now clarifying and polemically escalating what seems remarkable. Kandinsky offered as reasons for Westheim's survey:

6. Georg Scholz, *Small Town by Day*, 1922–23, oil on board. The Art Institute of Chicago. Through prior gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection. Photo credit: The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY

7. Questionnaire prepared by Paul Westheim and published in *Das Kunstblatt*, June 12, 1922. From: Karoline Hille, *Spuren der Moderne: Die Mannheimer Kunsthalle von 1918 bis 1933*, Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 95.



1. *The tensile strength, the rapid, somewhat febrile development of abstract art; and*
2. *as a result, the one-sided despondency, the involuntary desire of the weaker elements to draw breath in the realms of accustomed, long-since tried and tested forms.*³⁷

Kandinsky saw abstraction (in the sense of nonrepresentationalism) as the royal road, and he interpreted contemporaneous naturalism as a symptom of weakness, as catching breath in the face of a forced revolutionary development in art in the direction of abstraction. In the end, he even subordinated objectivity to abstraction—which he would not have done in this way in the *Blauer Reiter* almanac in 1912—when he summarized: “But it should not be forgotten that opposite paths lead today to *one* single goal. And the coming realism, toward which the naturalism referred to in the question is perhaps a step, is destined

ultimately to make plain the way of abstract art.”³⁸ This position explains the sharp contrast, which continues to be made even today, between figuration and abstraction, representationalism and nonrepresentationalism.

Hartlaub already offered at the time an overlooked path to considering representationalism (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) and nonrepresentationalism (Constructivism) together in a way different than Kandinsky's. We take up this broadening perspective again by integrating important examples from the Bauhaus and the Cologne Progressives. Following Hartlaub, however, one could go even further, since his concept of objectivity united representationalism and nonrepresentationalism and tended to eliminate Kandinsky's distinction: “The exhibition is not intended to provide a *cross-section* of all the artistic endeavors of the post-expressionists. It leaves aside the art of abstract, constructivist tendencies; these efforts, in which the new will to objectivity is proclaimed in a completely different way, are to be reserved for a separate exhibition.”³⁹ In his revised introduction for the Chemnitz venue of the traveling show from Mannheim, for which the exhibits had to be modified, it states even more clearly that the presentation is only an excerpt: “nonrepresentational, ‘abstract’ design, which corresponds to a change in attitude resulting from an appreciation of technical, functional, constructive forms, was left out entirely and should be reserved for a special presentation—at least in Mannheim.”⁴⁰ Hartlaub was synthesizing not only Verism and Classicism under the concept of *Neue Sachlichkeit* but also objectivity and nonobjectivity. Even today, this idea's potential has not been recognized. In Hartlaub's case, the Mannheim exhibitions “Neue Sachlichkeit” (1925) and “Wege und Richtungen abstrakten Malerei in Europa” (Ways and Directions of Abstract Painting in Europe) (1927) must be considered together as complementary

phenomena with a common vanishing point in objectivity as a sign of the epoch.⁴¹

This focused perspective on Hartlaub's epochal exhibition and the planning for it—which was initiated in part by Westheim's questionnaire on the new naturalism—provides additional clarity on the historical discussion:

It is important to me to present in autumn a medium-sized exhibition of paintings and graphic art that could be titled "The New Objectivity." My goal is to bring together representative works by the artists who in the last ten years have been neither Impressionistically dissipated nor Expressionistically abstract, neither purely sensual and external nor purely constructive and internal. I would like to show those artists who have remained avowedly faithful or become faithful again to positive, tangible reality. [...] It will consider both the "right" wing (Neoclassicists, if you will), such as certain works by Picasso, Kay H. Nebel, etc., and the left 'Verist' wing, among whom one could number Beckmann, Grosz, Dix, Drexel, Scholz, etc.⁴²

It becomes clear that Hartlaub was attempting to emphasize a constant or regained fidelity to reality. This identifies the process that several artists did in fact go through when they followed Late Impressionist, Expressionist, and in some cases nonrepresentational tendencies before World War I but then returned to outward reality. It is important here that it not have happened in a "purely sensual and external" way. Impressionism and Naturalism—in the sense of mere reproduction of a retinal impression or a supposedly objective reality—are thereby opposed. Hartlaub suggests indirectly that *Neue Sachlichkeit* can be understood as simply an engagement with reality and its deliberate reshaping as a pictorial object.

That is why the purely constructive and internal picture can be rejected as a subject of his exhibition because it enters the realm of a purely inner reality without connection to the outside world. What remains after these demarcations is difficult to unite under one concept. Hartlaub was always aware of that.

The two-wing division of representational objectivity that Hartlaub's highly differentiated thinking expressed later caused a certain confusion because the politicized art historians and literary scholars of the 1960s and 1970s in particular tended to contrast the alleged reactionaries of *Neue Sachlichkeit* to revolutionary Verism. But they were only confusing themselves by making the overarching term *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which united both wings, the opposite of just one of them, namely, the so-called left wing. As a result, the phenomenon of the Classical right wing is now either taken to represent the umbrella term or expanded to include the European phenomenon of Classicism (including Giorgio de Chirico, Pablo Picasso, et al.). The subtle yet difficult efforts to do justice to a complex, multilayered, and also plural artistic reality were countered by ideologically tinged simplifications: for example, Helmut Lethen, who initially spoke of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as "white socialism," and later adopted the simplifying stylization of the so-called "cold persona," or Benjamin Buchloh, who claimed to be able to decode "ciphers of regression."⁴³

In this project we aspire to counter the inappropriateness of such simplifications by including a pluralism of New Objectivity. We can take up the thread of the remarkable yet underappreciated exhibition in East Berlin in 1974, which under the terms of its title, "Realismus und Sachlichkeit" (Realism and Objectivity), brought together the phenomena of Berlin Dada, photomontage, Verism, *Neue*

Sachlichkeit/Magic Realism, proletarian-revolutionary art, and political Constructivism.⁴⁴ By juxtaposing *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Verism, it was not adopting the aforementioned function of the term "*Neue Sachlichkeit*" as an overarching, unifying term but rather differentiated six fields in the period from around 1918–19 to 1933 that are better suited for the new engagement with reality that distinguished itself from Expressionism.⁴⁵ The relatively large number of currents presented is also a sensible response to Roh's contemporaneous, naturally limited perspective in his 1925 book *Nach-Expressionismus*, in which he differentiated between seven international movements, though of course being unable to anticipate the developments from 1925 to 1933. In its day, his book remained a necessary supplement to Hartlaub's exhibition in Mannheim; from our perspective, however, both positions need to be broadened, because they represent the beginning of a debate and definition.⁴⁶

CHARACTERIZATION OF FORMS

In his introduction to the catalogue of the Mannheim exhibition, Hartlaub stressed the following points, briefly summarized here: He aimed to introduce a new phenomenon but not to dismiss Expressionism. Furthermore, he considered that the coining of a term and the exhibition of a historical construction amounted to reducing and narrowing the diversity of the development to a catchword, two wings, and a national perspective. As we have seen, however, he identified within the concept of objectivity a representational direction and nonrepresentational one, and recognized a strong "constructive quality" even in the former. For Hartlaub, the painting of *Neue Sachlichkeit* was never a naturalistic copying of reality but always a considered pictorial construction and reflection. Terms such as

"technical execution," "craft," and "truth" were very important for Hartlaub, and they led in two directions: first, to the fact that the painters of *Neue Sachlichkeit* often had an academic educational background and in some cases had perfectly mastered their métier and, second, their desire to compensate for or reflect on the current crisis of reality and values through their art. With the two wings (Verism and Classicism) in mind, therefore, the text reads: "Just now—ourselves wholly under the influence of extremely dramatic transformations and variations in our lives and values—we see the distinctions more clearly: the timely, coldly verificational bent of a few, and the emphasis on that which is objective and the technical attention to detail on the part of all of them." At the end of the text Hartlaub even addressed the state of a catastrophe in which artists who are so different have nevertheless begun to "ponder what is most immediate, certain, and durable: truth and craft."⁴⁷ This makes it only too clear that art, history, and society are interrelated, which suggests a possible iconology of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

In his book *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus*, Roh attempted a dichotomous juxtaposition of Expressionism and Post-Expressionism, and as a student of the famous art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, he based it on the latter's principles of 1915, making it correspondingly schematic.⁴⁸ Roh contrasted (as Expressionism/Post-Expressionism):

arousing / engrossing
dynamic / static
loud / quiet
summary / sustained
monumental / miniature
thick coloration / thin layer of color
like uncut stone / like polished metal
work process preserved / work process effaced

*leaving traces / pure objectivation
working against edges of image /
fixed within edges of image.*⁴⁹

The pioneer Wieland Schmied took up this preliminary work in the late 1960s when he published his long-since standard work on the subject. He wrote:

The art of Neue Sachlichkeit has the following characteristics:

1. a new and intentional fidelity to the outlines of objects, which contrasts in particular with the mobile, expansive, generalizing manner of the Expressionists;

2. visual sobriety and acuity, an unsentimental, largely emotionless way of seeing;

3. concentration on everyday things, on banal, insignificant and unpretentious subjects, betraying no aversion from what is "ugly";

4. isolation of the object from any contextual relationship, thus calling its identity into question;

5. static pictorial structure, often suggesting a positively airless, glassy space, and a general preference for the static over the dynamic;

6. manifest construction of a picture out of heterogeneous details which form no organic whole (the collage-like assemblage of "particles of experience" suggests no experiential connection, is confirmed by no unified perspective, and is illuminated by no single light source);

7. eradication of the traces of the process of painting, and elimination of all gestural

elements which might betray the hand of the individual painter;

*8. finally, a new mental relationship with the world of objects.*⁵⁰

Nevertheless, such idealized efforts to define the term have their limits given the multiplicity of artistic positions.

Two years after Hartlaub's and Roh's crucial contributions, other important positions were put forward that are far less well known today and deserve to be discussed again. I will refer to them here: Emil Utitz published the essay "Der neue Realismus" (The New Realism) in the renowned journal *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (Magazine for Aesthetics and General Art Studies) in 1927; it was connected to a publication he was preparing at the time: *Die Überwindung des Expressionismus* (The Overcoming of Expressionism) [Fig. 8]. Taking up the ideas of the influential Berlin philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel, Utitz identified tiredness, resignation, and a loss of values as the causes of the new realism.⁵¹ He expressed it in drastic words: "For the danger of the breakdown of complete reality has become immediately acute. And the intellectual-spiritual reality is atomizing; only the crudely material stands behind its crushed chaos as the only, final foothold."⁵² In parentheses: "This assessment was shared at the time by Max Horkheimer, the cofounder of Critical Philosophy."⁵³

Utitz made the efforts of Expressionism and Cubism to find a formal solution responsible for this and clearly saw the legacy of Expressionism impacting Verism when he wrote: "Certainly, in the works of the likes of George Grosz, Dix, and Scholz a fanatic hate leaps out at us that seems almost tame compared to most of the recent past. [...] It is a



8. Cover of Emil Utitz's *Die Überwindung des Expressionismus* (The Overcoming of Expressionism), (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1927). Archive of the author

flashing, cold hate, cutting like winter frost. It is an anti-Romantic hate, although Romanticism lies to it over its shoulder, for the fear of it guides the stylus. This hate attacks the 'false' Romanticism of the civilizing."⁵⁴ Utitz acknowledged here the radicalness of Verism, which was in the process of decline, and he recognized Verism's dependence on older art such as that of Romanticism (see Dix's *The Trench* of 1923 and the two portraits of his parents of 1921 and 1924, respectively). Moreover, he ventured a sweeping gaze at extra-artistic problems such as the existential housing question, for which he had faith in technical solutions.⁵⁵

The aspect of establishing values that Utitz expected and demanded is also crucial. It is connected to Roh's definition of Magic Realism, whom Utitz mentioned appreciatively in his text.⁵⁶ Roh had observed: "With the word 'magic,' as opposed to 'mystic,' I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world but rather hides and palpitates behind it."⁵⁷ Utitz tried to find a balanced solution: "Complete reality—or that which we strive for today as the complete reality—can neither be rational reality emptied of values nor one that affirms absolute values but beyond their limits. Where the absolute somehow negates only the given. What we need as an acceptable reality can be expressed very simply and naively: an existence that is itself filled with values, the miraculous within it, not the denial of the miracle, and only that this world not be far away."⁵⁸ Utitz replaced the concept of the mystery with that of the miracle and situated his realism between positivism/rationalism and idealism, though his emphasis on both "being" and the concept of deciding was surely indebted to contemporaneous discussions of Martin Heidegger's recently published *Sein und Zeit* (translated as *Being and Time*).⁵⁹

QUESTIONING REALITY

Of even greater importance for any attempt to define the painting of *Neue Sachlichkeit* between the wars is Alfred Neumeier's essay titled "Zur Raumpsychoologie der 'Neuen Sachlichkeit'" (On the Spatial Psychology of "New Objectivity").⁶⁰ Like every ism and catchword, "*Neue Sachlichkeit*" was, in Neumeier's view, a "promotional word" and a "fictive name for a style."⁶¹ He recognized that the artists had been grouped under that term less because of a shared aesthetic structure than for a related attitude. For that reason, however, the art historian saw the danger of artistic fashion of a stylized manner that had perhaps always existed but now was all the more real under the transformed social and economic conditions of the 1920s. He anticipated the state of a democratic, capitalist mass society and its influence on art and culture.

The problem later arose reflexively in the work of Beckmann, who has repeatedly been distanced from *Neue Sachlichkeit*—largely without reason, it must be said, for his work of the first half of the 1920s. On March 12, 1926, Beckmann wrote to his friend the art critic Wilhelm Hausenstein, who in 1924 had contributed to the large Beckmann monograph published by Piper.⁶² He expressed his disappointment over Roh's *Nach-Expressionismus*, which after Hartlaub's exhibition in Mannheim was the second crucial manifestation of the new art.⁶³ Beckmann took a sweeping swipe at the book, lamenting the loss of an "essential feeling for space and form" in favor of unartistic closeness to literature or photography. Nevertheless, he insisted: "My impetus was to open up representationalism for debate again in a new art form."⁶⁴ Beckmann's annoyance was understandable because Roh treated him as of only secondary importance in his key publication. At the same time, Beckmann's career was in an important and critical phase; he

had in Dix, after all, a competitor who seemed superior or rather more successful, at his side. Consequently, in a letter to the art dealer I. B. Neumann, who had emigrated to New York, Beckmann wrote that the latter's "representative" Karl Nierendorf was excluding him "almost completely and Dixing away energetically."⁶⁵

Beckmann's distancing himself from *Neue Sachlichkeit* was thus motivated by his attentive observation of the art scene, his aversion to being an "also-ran," his self-stylization as a solitary artist, but also his individual view of art: "My form is constantly evolving toward greatest simplicity and clarity. I am completely clear and aware that I am currently standing at the outer end of the evolution of painting and will (probably) always stand there."⁶⁶ Starting from this position, he continued to refine his latest approaches and sought competition with the leading painters in Paris in order to escape the currents of fashion and extend his style.⁶⁷ I refer to Beckmann's letter at this point because it responds precisely to the danger that Neumeyer specifically identified in his essay of 1927–28. At the same time, Neumeyer himself emphasized the brilliant essay on Beckmann's painting *Der Traum* (The Dream) (1921) that Wilhelm Fraenger published in 1924 as a masterly analysis of a painting of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, of Post-Expressionism.⁶⁸ He thus unequivocally situated Beckmann's art within *Neue Sachlichkeit*, since he was depicting "the mechanistically interpreted objectivity of the existing outside world."⁶⁹

Neumeyer's essay is so essential from our perspective because it focuses on analyzing the art and does not overly hastily give over to describing and retelling the attendant circumstances, contexts, and historical phenomena; today's viewers of art could learn from that. The problem of space, which was of central importance to Beckmann, received more

attention thanks to Neumeyer. He observed of Expressionism: "Expressionism has created its pictorial forms through exaggeration and through negating space."⁷⁰ *Neue Sachlichkeit* approached the object seen first by isolating it: retreating from the atmospheric, doing away with assessment, escaping from the temporal, and avoiding randomness are specifically mentioned by Neumeyer.⁷¹ He recognized the resulting dimension of the uncanny and terrifying, which today we have to reconstruct through the analysis of contemporary art criticism because it has become alien to us and can only be understood after long insight. In the end, however, it becomes possible again, and for that reason, it should be valued more, because it spares *Neue Sachlichkeit* the risk of trivialization—which not least its ideological opponents liked to employ as a strategy—and instead emphasizes its fundamental aesthetic ambiguity as the source of its quality.

Neumeyer compared the effect to bad photographs and continued:

*Body and face—as if under a hypnotic effect of the lens—have become paralyzed. The special quality of this paralysis—namely, its motionlessness in time—is, however, that a certain moment in time is made to freeze, so that the moment in time appears to have been bottled up to some degree. But because our mental awareness suspects absolute calm in the absolutely moving, such a moment can trigger in us feelings of dread to which an outer layer of awareness can only react by smiling.*⁷²

The art critic reaches other incisive conclusions, for example, the statement that once again dispels any accusation of merely depicting nature: "The materiality of the new painting, which corresponds to objectivity in the painter, thus requires a threefold abstraction:

the conscious abstraction of the atmospheric, the unconscious abstraction of the transitory, and the fictive abstraction of valuation."⁷³

Because Neumeyer [Fig. 9], like Roh, was looking at international developments in art, he distinguished two forms of spatial representation: one in which the objects themselves form the space and another in which the objects are depicted in space. Accordingly, he categorizes those of his time as "Romance Constructivism" and "Germanic Naturalism," which gave him the opportunity to mention, first, Picasso and the Italian *valori plastici* and, second, old art (e.g., the Master of Flémalle and his influence on Beckmann). These things, too, should be examined in greater detail.

In conclusion, he mentioned two central aspects that bring different dimensions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* into focus. There is, first, the epistemological, mental, and then also social dimension: "The general impression of walking through an exhibition of contemporary art is a feeling that cannot be explained at first of standing opposite a meticulously rendered reality that nevertheless has no inherent character of reality at all."⁷⁴ The dubiousness of being, of reality, of order is summed up here better than almost anywhere else, namely, as a feeling of perplexity and unease provoked by the pictorial inventions of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The forced effort to appropriate reality suddenly becomes a sense of the loss of reality. The painting of *Neue Sachlichkeit* is therefore the exact opposite of an affirmative, uncritical epiphenomenon of economic stabilization—for design and product photography, the situation was sometimes different.

There is also Neumeyer's great awareness of the constructive character of the paintings of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which touches on their aesthetic dimension: "But the insight that the works

of *Neue Sachlichkeit* are based on a construction from different distances of viewing leads deep into the inner structure of the composition. For example, in Schrimpf's painting the individual parts are recorded in microscopic closeup only to be offered reassembled from a normal distance. The impression on the viewer remains confusing because it results in a hyperclarity that is not justified in the painting itself."⁷⁵ These extensive quotations are intended to demonstrate the high level on which the art critics of the Weimar Republic were willing to discuss the phenomenon. And, in the view of critics of the time, the oft-disparaged conservative and Classical right wing of *Neue Sachlichkeit* especially sometimes found original, innovative, and surprising pictorial solutions. Neumeyer also provided arguments for Rousseau's aforementioned role as a model and included two illustrations while at the same time disarming the stereotypical accusation of a new, supposedly regressive Biedermeier quality.⁷⁶

RELEVANCE IN CRISIS

There are immanent artistic developments that must be reconstructed and understood. The immanent developments of art in the case of *Neue Sachlichkeit* do, of course, also depend in some cases on the historical and economic development in the Weimar Republic, but they cannot be attributed entirely to them. Elsewhere I have tried to interpret the movement with the much-discussed phenomenon of value relativism as a consequence of historical thinking, as a phenomenon of the theory of history, and as the experiences of defeat in World War I and revolutions (in Russia and in Germany). I examined both the discourse of art criticism (using the examples of Hartlaub and Roh in 1925) and at the aesthetics of the pictorial solutions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (see Neumeyer in 1927).⁷⁷ Approaches trying to correlate *Neue Sachlichkeit* with Germany's economic recovery have been more common. When the Verist

wing gradually weakened in the mid-1920s, it was related to the political and economic stabilization of the Weimar Republic. It was also connected to changes in artistic practices, such as Dadaist collage techniques becoming less relevant and being abandoned, the beginnings of reflections critical of media and specific to media, and with leading representatives of Verism receiving professorships and focusing their artistic production more on their teaching. Dix and Scholz began to teach in the mid-1920s. Another important factor was engaging with recent French art and older German art: Braque, Léger and, Picasso, on the one hand (Beckmann and Grosz) and Romanticism and early German painting (Dix but also Carl Grossberg, Kanoldt, Franz Radziwill, Georg Schrimpf, et al.).

There are only a few programmatic statements by the artists of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Unlike the representatives of the historical avant-gardes, which formed rather small groups and then loudly propagated their isms, *Neue Sachlichkeit* was an artistic movement that seized an entire country. It was a mass phenomenon and could therefore be identified with democracy as a form of government and capitalism as a form of economics and thus equated with the supposed "Weimar system." Whereas groups of Expressionist artists were associated with specific cities such as Dresden (Die Brücke) and Munich (Der Blaue Reiter), *Neue Sachlichkeit* can be identified in painting, photography, design, and architecture in Berlin and Dresden, in Hannover and Cologne, in Karlsruhe and Mannheim, in Celle and Dessau, and in Magdeburg and Stuttgart. The decade of *Neue Sachlichkeit* had a broad influence on the inter-war period throughout Europe and beyond.⁷⁸ For that reason, *Neue Sachlichkeit* is described here as the avant-garde of the emergent mass democracy, which is not intended to suggest harmony, since risks and tensions can also



9. Alfred Neumeyer and Lyonel Feininger, 1940s–1950s. Harvard Art Museums / Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of T. Lux Feininger. Photo © President and Fellows of Harvard College, BRLF.1011.168

be observed. During the crisis, individual representatives sometimes distanced themselves from their achievements.⁷⁹ During the phase of stabilization of the 1920s, however, *Neue Sachlichkeit* stood for democracy (rational republicanism), emancipation (modern woman), progress (modern architecture and living), and mass consumption (design, film, photography) and the New Vision (magazines and advertising). That attracted hate from the left and the right.

Neumeyer had connected his lucid aesthetic analysis with a crisis in the perception and interpretation of reality and at the same time put it in historical perspective:

If today the individual object that is yearned for with an urgency like that of the age around 1800–30 cannot find its reference points in space, or when they are deliberately disturbed, the faith in the reality of this objective world has clearly been shaken. The paradoxical situation has arrived that painting devotes itself to a cult of the object without possessing a reality, an awareness of reality.⁸⁰

These sentences formulated a hundred years ago sound temptingly relevant to our present. The decades after the French Revolution,