CHAPTER 1

Marianne Werefkin: Clemens Weiler’s Legacy

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Abstract

Russian-born artist Marianne Werefkin was long recognized solely for her roles as socialite and arts patron, her artistic salon in Munich, and as Alexei Jawlensky’s benefactor. This introductory essay recounts the author’s long path to a restoration of Werefkin’s reputation as a modernist artist and active member of the Blaue Reiter. Despite many obstacles, institutional and otherwise, Fäthke, with the support of Clemens Weiler, succeeded in organizing a Werefkin travel exhibition in 1980 and published the first comprehensive volume on her work in 1988.

This acquaintance [with Werefkin] would change my life. I became a friend of hers, of this clever woman gifted with genius.1

ALEXEI JAWLENSKY in his memoirs, 1936/41

I heard the name Marianne Werefkin for the first time in 1969, from Clemens Weiler (1909–1982),2 the director of the Museum Wiesbaden and the first biographer of Alexei Jawlensky (1864/65–1941).3 During my semester break that year, I took a job at the picture gallery of the museum, which was still run by the city at the time. I was studying art history, archaeology, and prehistory at the University of Mainz. Weiler presented Werefkin to me as an artist who had substantially influenced the group Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider), and he

2 K. Fischer, “Jawlensky aus dem Nichts. Museum. Einstiger Direktor Weiler wäre dieses Jahr 100 geworden / Erinnerungen der Tochter” (Jawlensky from nothing. Museum. Former director Weiler would have been 100 this year / memories of his daughter), Wiesbadener Kurier (Wiesbaden Messenger), October 2, 2009, 18.
Marianne Werefkin tried to get me interested in Werefkin as a subject for my doctoral dissertation. I reacted by expressing a biased opinion about women’s art, of the kind that generally prevailed in art history departments back then: occupying myself with Angelika Kauffmann, Paula Modersohn-Becker, or Käthe Kollwitz might perhaps have been conceivable, but a Russian woman who was unknown in Germany—out of the question! And on top of that, as I made clear to Weiler, I was greatly enjoying my work of stylistic analysis on the master of the Klosterneuburg Altar, the goldsmith Nicholas of Verdun, and I was already far along with it.

Weiler’s publications on Werefkin were the only things readily available in the museum’s library. Of her paintings in the Museum Wiesbaden, I was impressed by the Schindelfabrik (Shingle Factory, fig. 1.1), for which she had made sketches in Upper Bavaria’s Oberau in 1910. The relatively large painting stuck in my memory during the years that followed not just because the artist had dealt with an iconographical feature that had previously been unknown to me—an unusual type of confrontation between a person depicted in the image and the viewer, namely, a worker sticking his tongue out at the person opposite him. This, as well as other things, kept me from forgetting Werefkin entirely during the following years. Werefkin’s way of painting struck me as equally remarkable: She combined elements as diverse as those from Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Edvard Munch. At the same time, however, her painting astonishingly also displayed cold characteristics, which seemed to establish links to the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity). I had never seen painting like that before.

Weiler was still living in Wiesbaden in retirement when, in 1973, his successor Ulrich Schmidt offered me a position as curator at the picture gallery of the Museum Wiesbaden, for which the state of Hessen had since assumed responsibility. When Weiler heard that I had once again ended up at the Museum Wiesbaden, after working as a prehistorian at the Celtic excavation


site in Manching, Bavaria, he came to visit me at the museum and reminded me about Werefkin. It was only then that I was able to develop a genuine interest in this artist, and Weiler then offered me his support. In this context, a 1975 trip with Weiler to Villingen-Schwenningen for the opening of the exhibition *Der Blaue Reiter und sein Kreis* (The Blue Rider and its circle) became important:
There, he introduced me to collectors, gallerists, and various museum people. The Ascona gallerist Trudi Neuburg-Coray (1907–1986) was very pleased when she learned that I would now be writing and doing research on Werefkin. She immediately assured me of her assistance, as did Felix Klee (1907–1990). My meeting with Andreas Jawlensky (1902–1984) went very differently. When Weiler introduced me to him and revealed that I was developing a publication on Werefkin, he looked at us angrily. He agitatedly tried to convince me that Werefkin was not worth writing about. She had occasionally shown up in his father’s studio and had him teach her the basics of painting. The sudden emergence of this antagonistic atmosphere informed me that this descendant of Jawlensky bore a feeling of exceptional antipathy towards Werefkin. Down to the present day, his heirs have continued in this vein by repeatedly trying to obscure Werefkin’s achievements and her significance for Jawlensky and for the history of art and downplaying her importance through inaccurate assertions.

The most recent example of this is the statement that, when Jawlensky left the military at the age of 31/32, his pension was so large that it would have been sufficient to support himself, his lover Helene, and their son Andreas. This portrayal is intended to suggest that Jawlensky was not financially dependent upon Werefkin, as though the “financial means necessary for the untroubled life of an artist” had been available to him. In fact, however, Jawlensky’s pension was “simply miserable.” Letters written by Wassily Kandinsky to Herwarth Walden in January and February of 1914 already provide information about the situation, namely, that while Werefkin was away from Munich, Jawlensky got into precarious financial problems.

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7 Brigitte Roßbeck, Marianne von Werefkin. Die Russin aus dem Kreis des Blauen Reiters (Marianne Werefkin: A Russian woman in the circle of the Blue Rider) (Munich: Siedler, 2010), 45.

8 Elisabeth Erdmann-Macke, Erinnerungen an August Macke (Memories of August Macke) (Frankfurt Main: Fischer, 1987), 240.


10 Roßbeck, Marianne von Werefkin, 49.

11 Bernd Fäthke, “Marianne Werefkin—‘des blauen Reiterreiterin’” (Marianne Werefkin—the Amazon of the Blue Rider), in Marianne Werefkin. Vom Blauen Reiter zum Großen
After meeting people in Villingen-Schwenningen, Weiler organized a research project for me with the Fondazione Marianne Werefkin in Ascona. At that time, I was not yet able to recognize that this represented a deliberate affront against Andreas Jawlensky and, particularly, against Weiler’s successor in office. When his successor, who was my boss at that time, heard about the research project and received the official documentation from the Fondazione Marianne Werefkin, he literally declared: “Research is forbidden at Hessian museums!” At that point, however, that was no longer enough to bother me: For me, in the meantime, Werefkin had become such a sufficiently fascinating figure of avant-garde modern art that I did not want to give her up. In administrative terms, the research project in question was one “without approval required,” but through a ministerial decree, with “notification required.” Thus, it was totally inadequate that only after months of opposition by the head of the institution it would be officially filed by the administrative officer of the Museum Wiesbaden.

In February of 1978, having taken note of Werefkin on account of my lectures and tours at the museum, the city of Wiesbaden resolved, with the support of all parties, to present an exhibition of the artist’s work, which was to be curated by me. It was seen as a “fortunate circumstance” that I, “as curator of the Wiesbaden picture gallery,” was engaged in the “surveying and scholarly evaluation of the painter’s estate on behalf of the Werefkin foundation.” At that time, one could still read: “The museum itself, according to reliable sources, has affirmed its support for this project.” However, things turned out differently, as was rightly reported in the press in May of 1978: “Suspicions have increased that the museum’s director Dr. Schmidt is doing his best to boycott a Werefkin exhibition, although it would surely have to be in the interest of his museum.” After an unproductive back and forth, the press was finally able to report that, in November of 1978, a joint venture had been established in

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13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

Ascona between the head of Wiesbaden’s office of cultural affairs, the director of the Museum Wiesbaden, and the Wiesbaden city-council member Hella Wiethoff with the “Werefkin-Gesellschaft.” The exhibition was to take place in the spring of 1980.\(^{17}\) However, its opening was delayed until the fall of 1980—as was inevitable on account of the director’s refusing to approve my business trip to Ascona, which was necessary in order to be able to present a sensible selection of the paintings, gouaches, and drawings.\(^{18}\) Because time was becoming scarce, I wanted to privately finance my trip and applied for vacation in order to do so. However, this was also rejected by Schmidt. It was only through the intervention of one of his superiors that I was finally able to travel to Switzerland in order to take care of the final preparations for the exhibition.

When it had then been realized, DIE WELT aptly reported about an “incredibly strange speech given by museum director Ulrich Schmidt at the opening of the large Werefkin exhibition in Wiesbaden.” He spoke of “not insubstantial doubts’ that he had against the exhibition, of unresolved problems, e.g., difficulties of dating\(^{19}\) ... and—causing not inconsiderable consternation among his listeners—he did not say a single word about the museum’s staff member Bernd Fäthke, who had assembled the exhibition and introduced it with a catalogue essay containing a wealth of new findings. Thus, things seem to have been similarly stormy in the museum on the occasion of the Werefkin exhibition as they were in Werefkin’s Munich household.\(^{20}\)

This analogy is unlikely to have pleased Ulrich Schmidt or Andreas Jawlensky. The two were surely even less enthusiastic about the commentary of the Wiesbadener Kurier, which stated:

> By now, as Bernd Fäthke has convincingly proven in the catalogue, art historiographers are giving serious thought to whether she [Werefkin] may thus have helped not only herself but also others in her circle, such as Jawlensky, Gabriele Münter, and Franz Marc, to achieve their breakthrough into a new world of painting. ... Her outstanding draftsmanship—and thus, simply also how highly gifted she was in terms

\(^{17}\) “Werefkin-Ausstellung”, 9.
\(^{19}\) These were obviously Ulrich Schmidt’s difficulties and not my own.
of craftsmanship—is displayed not least by the sketchbooks that it was possible to incorporate into this exhibition. ... And it is with an absolutely astounding confidence that, in a space the size of her palm, she arranges and chromatically conceives, grasps entirely and is valid in every sense: This can repeatedly be observed with amazement in the large, completed works alongside them.21

Weiler’s third successor, Volker Rattemeyer, developed a decidedly individual style in dealing with sympathies and antipathies for and against particular directions in art, certain artists, and other people. The fact that Rattemeyer had no qualms about spreading inaccurate claims soon became apparent. A particularly drastic case became public when he accused Alo Altripp (1906–1991), Jawlensky’s friend and fellow painter in Wiesbaden, of being “one of the artists or the artist who certainly played an enormously important role in the Nazi Party.”22 This led to irreparable damage.23 Neither did he spare his predecessor in office. In his characteristically pithy idiom, “Rattemeyer raised,” for example, in connection with the Jawlensky painting Stilleben mit grüner Flasche (Still Life with Green Bottle, 1909, fig. 1.2)24 “serious accusations ... against his predecessor, who was responsible. ... The behavior of those responsible during his tenure is in keeping with the tradition of this institution, whose art collection [has been defined] more by problems than by solid work during the last twenty years.”25 At the same time he servilely announced: “The office of the

22 Volker Rattemeyer (Director, Museum Wiesbaden) in an interview with Martina Conrad, “Wiesbaden läßt sich eine Jawlensky-Sammlung entgehen” (Wiesbaden passes up a Jawlensky collection), Süd-Westdeutscher Rundfunk (swr 2, Hörfunk) (South-West-German Radio), Friday, January 6, 2006, 18:40.
24 Bernd Fäthke, “Wer erwarb was warum, Museen aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz begründen ihren wichtigsten Ankauf” (Who acquire what for which reasons? Museums of the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland justify their most important acquisitions), Kunstmagazin (Art Magazine), NF 7–8, 22 (1983) 97–98: 112–113.
director will take special care to deal with all relevant questions in accord with the Jawlensky family.26

With this turning over of his own professional expertise to the Jawlensky family, the die had thus also been cast against Werefkin. This was unequivocally revealed when two Werefkin paintings from Switzerland were donated to the Museum Wiesbaden as gifts. The works in question are Mann im Pelz (Man in Fur; c. 1890; fig. 1.3)27 and Badehaus (Spa Building; 1911; fig. 1.4).28

26 Ibid.
Figure 1.3  Marianne Werefkin, Man in Fur, c. 1890, oil on canvas, 58 × 49 cm
Museum Wiesbaden

Figure 1.4  Marianne Werefkin, Spa Building, 1911, tempera on cardboard, 46 × 70 cm
Museum Wiesbaden
Rattemeyer initially saw to it that the gifts disappeared silently and unremarked in the cellar. When this became known, “friends of the arts in Wiesbaden expressed emphatic criticism of Volker Rattemeyer, who had neither informed the public about the two new paintings nor planned to include these or any work at all by Marianne Werefkin in the [coming] project on female artists.” Rattemeyer reacted to the protest: “Artistically, Marianne Werefkin is not significant enough” to fit into the concept.

And that was not all, for the exhibition *Künstlerinnen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Female Artists of the 20th Century), which opened on September 1, 1990, he also had the museum’s own two works acquired under Weiler—the *Schindel-fabrik* (1910; fig. 1.1) and *Am Kamin* (Next to the Fireplace; 1909–10; fig. 1.5)—banished to the cellar. Rattemeyer’s assessment was countered in a commentary: “the link” could have been drawn “without effort” between Werefkin and her female colleagues Sonia Delaunay-Terk and Gabriele Münter. The conclusion was drawn: “At the museum, they have squandered the chance presented precisely at this moment to compellingly present themselves with their own works from their own collection in the exhibition and in the catalogue.”

Rattemeyer had received his position as director at precisely the same moment that my Werefkin book was being prepared for its printing at the Prestel-Verlag to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the painter’s death. It was meant to simultaneously serve as the exhibition catalogue for a traveling exhibition initiated by the Werefkin foundation. The plan was to initially present the exhibition in Ascona, so that it could subsequently be sent on to Germany. Rattemeyer left no stone unturned in his efforts to hinder the book and the exhibition. He called the Prestel-Verlag to vent his dissatisfaction. He contacted the Fondazione Marianne Werefkin in Ascona in a similar manner, resulting in the foundation fearing that their project might fail. Rattemeyer was not successful, but the Jawlensky heirs filed a copyright lawsuit against the

29 M. Hildebrand, “Ein Bildergeschenk wandert in den Keller” (A picture present is moved to the basement), *Wiesbadener Leben* (Wiesbaden Life), 8/1990, 34.
31 Ibid.
33 Hildebrand, “Ein Bildergeschenk wandert in den Keller”, 34.
34 Ibid.
publishing house. The publisher had been too generous in its use of reproductions of Jawlensky’s works for comparisons with those of Werefkin—with the result that the catalogue version for the Villa Stuck in Munich already had to be reprinted without images of Jawlensky’s work.35 During the stations that followed in Hanover, Berlin, Bad Homburg, and Hamburg, a variation was then also used in which the Jawlensky reproductions were blacked out, very rare copies that are now in demand among collectors.36

The working environment at the Museum Wiesbaden had become intolerable for me, resulting in my requesting that the Hessian ministry of science and art transfer me to a different office. A position with the Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten Hessen (VSGH; Administration of the state-owned

35 “Jawlensky Erbinnen mit Copyright-Sperre gegen Werefkin-Buch” (Jawlensky heirs with copyright restrictions against Werefkin book), DER SPIEGEL (The Mirror), 46 (1988), 237.
palaces and gardens of Hessen), based in Bad Homburg vor der Höhe, then opened up in 1990; there, I was soon entrusted with the position of department head of the palace museums, which involved a stimulating variety of tasks. In this role, I was responsible for a number of external offices of the VSgh. In Steinau an der Straße, where the Brothers Grimm grew up, I organized various exhibition for the knight’s hall of the palace. The show in which I was able to present Japanese woodcuts formerly owned by Jawlensky to the public for the first time aroused particular attention.\(^{37}\) The exhibition subsequently traveled to the Leopold Hoesch Museum in Düren, where schematic drawings of Jawlensky’s paintings once more had to be blacked out in the catalogue.\(^{38}\)

One day, in my office in Bad Homburg, I was sent a copy of a letter characteristic of the situation surrounding Werefkin and Jawlensky. Nicole Bröckmann had written it to Jörn Merkert, at the Berlinische Galerie, on May 16, 1995. Among other things, she wrote to him: “Dear Jörn … You are surely familiar with the story surrounding the Wiesbaden Museum. Fäthke was dismissed there. I spoke with Dr. Rattemeyer about it, and he confirmed that, in Hessen, Fäthke is no longer allowed to publish anything about Jawlensky. He then asked the relevant division head at the ministry of art and science whether this clause had also been stipulated for Werefkin back then. Dr. Rattemeyer said to tell you that you are welcome to call him to learn more about the matter.”

It remains to be mentioned that the machinations surrounding the accepting of benefits related to Werefkin and Jawlensky still continue. It is thus to be hoped that the present publication can contribute to establishing a more objective perspective on the legacy of Clemens Weiler. “Perhaps you have heard that Baroness Werefkin died in February. It was a great blow to me. Yes, indeed, sooner or later we have to pay for our mistakes once made. And often so severely.”\(^{39}\) (Alexey Jawlensky to Willbrors Verkade, June 12, 1938)

\(^{38}\) mar, “Erben lieben Schwarz” (Heirs love black), DIE WELT (The World), January 9, 1993.
\(^{39}\) Alexei Jawlensky, letter to P. Willibrord Verkade, Das Kunstwerk (The Art Work), 2 (1948): 49–50. These sentences, which were published only in the first edition, provide evidence of Jawlenky’s lifelong, deep attachment to Werefkin and are essential for understanding his biography.Remarkably, they were deleted in later publications of this letter from Jawlensky to Verkade, one of the most important sources for research into the life and work of Jawlensky. See Clemens Weiler, Alexej Jawlensky. Köpfe-Gesichte-Meditationen (Alexei Jawlensky: Heads-Faces-Meditations) (Hanau: Peters, 1970), 126; M. Jawlensky/Pieroni-Jawlensky/A. Jawlensky, Alexej von Jawlensky. Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings, vol. 1, 34.