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

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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

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