

# ART OF DISSENT



## Context and Case Studies

The stories of the persecution of artists associated with Cologne, Germany are microcosms of what happened throughout Germany and occupied Europe before and during WWII.



The Nazis started with restrictions upon ideas—book burnings, the removal of art works from art museums, the firing of academics and then the degenerate art exhibi-

tions. They graduated to the Nuremberg Laws and restrictions upon people. They ended with the murder of millions of human beings—a progression of evil that took only one score of years to unfold.

### Context to Cologne Arts

The Great War set the scene for World War II. The Treaty of Versailles and the Depression figure prominently as causes. Less known, yet featured in a work such as *All's Quiet on the Western Front*, is the disaffection and rage that took hold among a generation of artists during and after WWI— a rage that played out as the dada movement in art and with a political sweep towards left-wing socialism and communism. The Cologne artists of the 1920s and 30s sought to use art and politics to rebuild pre-WWI society into one providing relief for the working class.

The Cologne artists' sympathy for the proletariat was not just in the air as a result of the horrors of WWI. It had brewed in the Rhineland from the time young Karl Marx progressed from editor on the radically democratic *Rheinische Zeitung* (banned in 1843) to chief editor of the *Neuen Rheinischen Zeitung* in Cologne in the late 1840s.

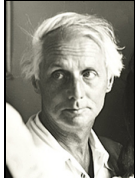
When industrialization led to the layoff of five thousand weavers in Krefeld and rebellions broke out in Europe between 1846 to 1848, Marx's New Rhineland newspaper

sympathized with the working person. The life of workers in the heavily industrialized Rhineland, however, did not improve. Until the defeat of Napoleon and the emergence of the German state in the 1870s, socialist parties were forbidden.

Almost 50 years later, by the time the Russian Revolution of 1917 was in full swing and German soldiers and sailors returning from war in Nov 1918 set up various communes, Cologne artists were primed to put their talents towards the service of the proletariat. Communism as a political system was held by many artists as the true hope for a better future. One of the most vocal artists in Cologne, Franz Seiwert wrote, "The only law of the world is to change the world".

During 1920s as the Cologne artists worked in different ways to advance art in the service of a better world, the Nazi party laid the groundwork for its own agenda. As that party's power grew more pervasive in the 1930s, Hitler strove to silence dissidents and communists. He saw the post-WWI artists as both; they and their art were instruments of Bolshevism. The first 10,000 people interned by the Nazis were communists.

The Nazi creation of an atmosphere of apprehension started early with book burnings and the dismissal of Jewish and communist academics. By the time of the 1936 daylight stabbing of photographer Hannes Maria Flach by an S.S. Officer on Cologne's Stolkasse, apprehension had risen to fear and flight.



Max Ernst

Max Ernst, who had produced politically oriented graphics in *Die Sozialistische Republik*, denounced his political past and fled to the USA. Willy Fick, first painted in metaphors, then changed his name and went underground. For artists trapped in Europe, persecution, uncertainty and death dogged their every move.

## Case Study: Ilse Salberg and Anton Raederscheidt



Anton Raederscheidt

Cologne artist Anton Raederscheidt's teacher-father was a *Koelsch* dialect poet who inspired Johannes Kuhlemann, a younger generation dialect poet. Kuhlemann and Raederscheidt were friends and members of the *Gesellschaft der Kuenste* and other groups associated with

the Cologne dada scene. He was well acquainted with Willy Fick, the Hoerles and Max Ernst.

In 1933 Raederscheidt started a dangerous affair. In spite of being married to artist Marta Hegemann with whom he had two children, he fell in love with the Jewish photographer Ilse Metzger Salberg.

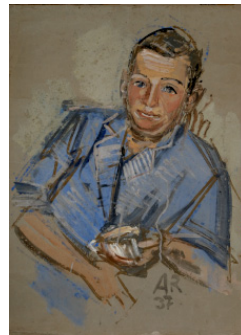
The Nuremberg Laws would not ban marriages between Jews and non-Jews until 1935. However, the Aryanization process the Nazis started in 1933 with the expulsion of Jewish civil servants and the Nazi concept of race defilement cast huge shadows over sexual relations between people deemed Aryans and Jews—terms for which the Nuremberg Laws would create definitions. Ilse and Anton mixed couples who sought to flee Germany.



Peggy Guggenheim

Ilse, a talented photographer and a prominent art patron, counted Peggy Guggenheim as a friend. She had two children—Ernst Meyer born in 1923 and Brigitte Metzger born in 1931. The couple left Cologne in 1934 with Ilse's children and moved to Berlin to try to get papers to escape the Reich. They were able to settle in France in 1935.

Between 1935 and 1939 Ilse and Anton and the children had a fairly stable existence considering that he was a degenerate artist. According to Raederscheidt's friend Alfred Kantorowicz, the Nazis had declared Anton un-German and removed his works from art museums in Cologne, Duesseldorf, Essen, Krefeld, Nurnberg and Berlin.



Portrait of Ilse Salberg by Anton Raederscheidt

While France remained free Anton worked productively in a studio in Paris and thanks to Ilse's positive economic situation they built a summer home in Sanary sur mer which they called *Le Patio*. In Sanary sur mer they were part of a Jewish émigré arts community that met in local coffee houses at the harbour.

The author Hermann Kesten described the times in his book *Coffee House Poet*, "When you live in exile, the coffee house is simultaneously your home, your country, your church, your government, a desert and a haven—the cradle of your illusions and your cemetery.... In exile, the coffee house is the only place where life goes on.... It was in the coffee houses that Bertold Brecht played the guitar and sang poems and songs against Goebbels and Hitler." Ilse and Anton entertained Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger and their close friend Heinrich Maria Davringhausen at *Le Patio*.



Les Milles

Things turned for the worse in 1940 when Anton and his step-son Ernst Meyer, who had returned from studies in London when war broke out, were interned in Les Milles a former brickworks near Toulon. Although he was among family and friends, Anton was affected by the sense of doom fostered by the advances of the Nazis further into French territory. Kantorowicz wrote in his book *Exile in France* that no day passed at Les Milles when the discussion did not turn to talk about depression, madness and suicide. Anton's camp neighbour, the poet and dramatist Walter Hasenclever poisoned himself out of fear of the advancing Nazis.

While Raederscheidt and Meyer were in Les Milles, Ilse was in Gurs and Brigitte with a series of families arranged by Anton and Ilse. The situation turned bleak for Anton and his young step-son when he and 2000 others from Les Milles were taken to Bayonne by train to be shipped to North Africa and almost certain death. A series of misunderstandings led to the internees being chaotically marched 20 km towards a camp at Saint-Nicolas.

Franz Schonberger, the editor of *Simplicismus* in his later book *Inside Views from an Outsider* wrote, "Every few feet the older men set down their suitcases and bundles. Several men had especially noticeable large rectangular packages held tightly under their arms. These were the artists Raederscheidt, Isenburget, Max Ernst—who did not wish to be separated from the drawings and paintings they'd made in the camp." During the confusion of the hastily improvised march, Raederscheidt, Meyer, Kantorowicz, Max Ernst and Davringhausen escaped.

Anton and Ernst Meyer went into hiding in Barjols where they were soon joined by Ilse and Brigitte. During this brief interlude the family lived in a small house and Brigitte went to school. The young Ernst wrote a collection of poems titled *Ernst Meyer Gedichte aus Barjol, 1942*. Unfortunately a roundup by French police caught the family in its net. Ernst, who spoke flawless French, held the gendarmes in conversation while Anton, Ilse and Brigitte fled out a window. The gendarmes took Ernst away to be deported via Drancy to Auschwitz.



Anton Raederscheidt  
*La belle et la bête*  
Oil on canvas c1944

A butcher from Barjols hid Anton, Ilse and eleven year old Brigitte among his wares and took them to the Swiss border. As they entered Switzerland illegally on foot, from 1943 to the end of the war they were held as "foreign nationals". All three were briefly interned in Eriswil before they were separated: Anton to Magliaso, Ilse to Hinwil and Brigitte into foster care and eventually an orphans' home.



Anton Raederscheidt 1943  
*le prisonnier*

Although they were separated and Ilse's son was in Auschwitz, matters had not fallen to their lowest point. In 1944 Ilse had a breast removed as a result of cancer. Anton's 1943 painting *Le prisonnier*, completed in Magliaso shows Ilse with only one breast and Anton's head looking through bars as Ilse is seemingly carved open. Ilse's son was murdered in Auschwitz in 1945, a fact of which she might have been blessedly ignorant as she faced the removal of her second breast in 1946. Ilse died in Bern in 1947. Anton sold all the works he had to purchase his and Brigitte's return to Paris where he found that all his Paris paintings had been plundered from his studio. Brigitte is living in the United States.