

WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE NEUE SACHLICHKEIT:

GRETHE JÜRGENS AND GERTA OVERBECK

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by

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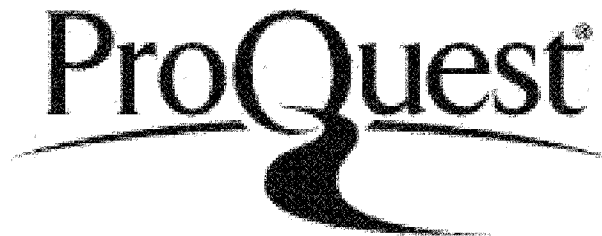
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WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE NEUE SACHLICHKEIT:

GRETHE JÜRGENS AND GERTA OVERBECK

by Marsha Meskimmon

This work examines the complex relationship between gender and the work of women artists associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit. The critical 'realism' of the Weimar Republic has become best-known through the work of artists such as Otto Dix, George Grosz and Christian Schad, but a number of women artists also engaged with the aesthetic, including Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck. Jürgens and Overbeck were part of the Hanoverian regional variation of the Neue Sachlichkeit which flourished between 1925 and 1938.

In this thesis, the works of Jürgens and Overbeck are examined with particular reference to the gender politics of the Weimar Republic. Rather than rely upon masculine-normative practices which privilege individual artists and biographical techniques, this thesis explores four themes in the representations of the artists within the wider context of gendered cultural ideology. The first chapter takes as its theme the asymmetrical situation of men and women with respect to the concept of the 'artist' and evaluates the ways in which women realists of the period produced strong, artistic identities through their art. Chapter Two explores the pervasive association of domesticity with women in terms of the representations produced by Jürgens and Overbeck. The third and fourth chapters turn toward the public sphere and examine the ways in which gender conditioned the responses of the artists to the subjects of other women and politics.

This work is vital for three reasons. First, it provides information about the work of a number of artists hitherto under-researched and under-valued. Second, the work attests to the active role of gender in the Neue Sachlichkeit and exposes the male-centredness of the movement. Third, it combines theoretical ideas and practice meaningfully; it is an example of feminist praxis in the study of women artists.

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PREFACE

The works of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck are the single most important piece of evidence in this thesis, yet this work is not a catalogue. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate upon both the details given in the list of illustrations and the very process by which research into the works of these artists was conducted. By explaining the research process, which was complicated by the fact that the main holdings of the works of both artists are in private hands, the discussion of the art in the body of the text is explicated. It is justifiable to refer to the oeuvres of both Jürgens and Overbeck as though they are complete. A list of illustrations accompanies the text of this thesis (in a second volume) but does not attempt to provide a full catalogue of the works of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck. For the sake of simplicity, all the cited works of Jürgens and Overbeck appear in the list before those of any other artists. Wherever possible, the entries are comprised of the artist's name, the English title of the work and its date, medium and size. These facts are followed by the present location of the work. Occasionally, this information was unobtainable. In the case of the works of Jürgens and Overbeck, a few points of clarification are necessary. At times it was impossible to measure works (ie. if they were hanging out of reach in a private home); I have omitted

the sizes in this case, rather than estimating them. When the works were undated, I have also chosen not to propose a date for them in the list, preferring to cite only confirmed information. In my own notes, I have estimates of sizes and dates which can be made available if necessary. Also, many of the works of both Jürgens and Overbeck are in private hands and are listed herein as 'private collection'. This was done to please the owners of these works who do not wish the details of their collections to be made public. Again, I can provide information about the locations of these works if required.

In addition to the points raised above regarding the listing of the works of Jürgens and Overbeck, the following comments about the nature of this research into their oeuvres more generally should be noted. Though the oeuvres of both artists are discussed in this work as though they are complete, it is recognized that the nature of the acquisition of these works by local patrons renders cataloguing inexact. It is certainly possible that a few works may have been given or sold to friends who have escaped my attention. However, the process of research into the oeuvres, as described below, attests to the fact that the vast majority of the works have been located and catalogued in the course of this study.

Neither Jürgens nor Overbeck sold many works during their lives and there are no official sales records to use. The Sprengel Museum in Hanover is the only major

public museum in Germany which collects the works of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit; replies to over a hundred circular letters which I sent to German museums requesting information attest to this. The Sprengel began as a small collection within the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover, which has subsequently splintered off to form a museum of twentieth-century art. They own a dozen oil paintings by Jürgens and Overbeck, as well as a large number of sketches and watercolours. Officials at the Sprengel assisted me in locating the other two major holders of the works of Jürgens and Overbeck, namely the inheritors of the artists' estates. The collections of works by both artists passed mainly intact to their heirs and remain so to this day. Neither heir has sold or given works away in large numbers; both heirs have many paintings as well as vast numbers of sketches in their possession.

Through these three sources and the occasional reference in the literature, I personally contacted six further friends and relatives of the artists who each owned a few works. These contacts led to another eight, including the following private galleries: Galerie Krokodil, Hamburg; Galleria del Levante, Munich and Milan; Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne and Galerie Michael Hasenclever, Munich. The tide of names of friends and family then ended, and the result of contact with the private galleries was mixed. Galleria del Levante and Rudolf Zwirner were impossible to locate, even through the central museums organisation in Germany; Michael Hasenclever was helpful

and the Galerie Krokodil refused to permit me any access to their works. This event was caused by the fact that one of their staff wished to pursue research on the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group. However, as galleries, they have each published catalogues containing listings and reproductions of their works which has meant that I have had partial access to their collection of Jürgens and Overbeck despite the difficulties.

This circumstantial evidence for the acceptance of the oeuvres of Jürgens and Overbeck as complete is supported by three further points which suggest the competence of the survey. First, Dr. Hildegard Reinhardt, who produced the only existing 'monographs' of the artists could suggest no further locations for works. She also sent some photographs and materials to me which are included here. Second, the heir to the works of Jürgens also inherited Jürgens' own catalogue of her works. This is a three volume album of photographs, dates, sizes and locations which Jürgens kept during her own lifetime. Though few watercolour works or sketches are included, the source is invaluable as a cataloguing tool and as an indication of Jürgens' own opinions of her work. In consulting this, there were no works which I had not also catalogued. Finally, in the process of researching other women artists from the Weimar Republic, I have found a distinct pattern in the collection of these women's works. Except in unusual cases such as that of Lea Grundig or Kaethe Kollwitz who were well-known in their day, the oeuvres of women artists of the period remained all but

intact upon the artists' deaths. At this point, the majority of the works either passed to a surviving heir or into the hands of a local public collection. Only a few of the artist's works would have been sold or given to private collectors or friends. This suggests that finding the majority of the works of Jürgens and Overbeck in the hands of the Sprengel Collection and their heirs is not unusual and that it would be surprising to find any large, alternative holding.

A number of people assisted in the preparation of this thesis and I would like to thank them all. Particular thanks must go to Frauke Schenk-Slemensek and her family, Heide Jürgens-Hitz and her husband Rolf, and Jutta Eggert and her late husband, Karl. All of these people welcomed me into their homes on numerous occasions, allowed me complete access to their collections and aided me with my work in many other ways. I would also like to thank Hans Scöning, Sigrid von Borcke and Katarina Brunsmann along with all of the other surviving friends of both artists who kindly answered my enquiries, however foolish some of these must have seemed. Staff at the Sprengel Museum were always helpful, but special mention must be made of Martina Behnert, the Librarian, for her kindness. All of the many public and private galleries who made details of their collections available to me must be thanked, though these are too numerous to list individually. I also need to thank the staff of the Landesbibliothek (Hanover) and the Goethe Institut (London) for useful information on a variety of subjects.

I would like to give thanks to Dr Hildegard Reinhardt for her help; she never made me feel sophomoric despite her considerable scholarly status. Financial assistance for research trips to Germany came from the research board at Leicester University and the private charity, The Gilchrist Foundation, and I am obliged to them. Finally, I would like to thank especially my principal supervisor, Dr Alison Yarrington (History of Art, University of Leicester) for both her guidance at the start of this project and her careful proofreading of the final version, which was invaluable. Martin Davies (Department of German, University of Leicester) acted as my co-supervisor and I am very grateful to him for his assistance with German translations and conventions, consistent support throughout the course of the preparation of the thesis and innumerable ideas about the topic which added a much needed breadth to the whole work. The scope of his knowledge has been of immeasurable help to me.

INTRODUCTION

Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck were artists who, during the 1920s and 1930s in Germany, self-consciously affiliated themselves with the Neue Sachlichkeit. A number of other women artists, such as Tina Bauer-Pezellen (1897-), Kate Diehn-Bitt (1900-), Lea Grundig (1906-1977), Kate Hoch (1873-1933) and Hanna Nagel (1907-1975) also practised within this movement. Like most of the women artists associated with the trend, Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck have been the object of little critical attention. The fact that Jürgens and Overbeck were an important part of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group and yet are so little researched makes almost any work about them valuable; there exist only a handful of brief essays and articles about the artists in German and no such sources in English. Whilst a monograph documenting the lives and works of Jürgens and Overbeck might be useful, it would nevertheless obscure the larger and more significant questions inherent in their artistic practice. Namely, of what significance is gender for the Neue Sachlichkeit? It is the purpose of this work to explore gender politics and the Neue Sachlichkeit in the art of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck rather than to produce biographies of two lesser-known artists within an unquestioned context.

The Neue Sachlichkeit is not easy to define, but the predominance of male artists and their viewpoints within the movement has created a masculine-normative precedent in theoretical and practical terms. Scholarly work, critical discussion and even exhibition practices in reference to the Neue Sachlichkeit have concentrated upon particular male artists and issues which affected men. Women artists could and did work successfully within the Neue Sachlichkeit and their participation challenges the conventions of the movement as a whole. Jürgens and Overbeck, as women living in the Weimar Republic, were situated differently than their male counterparts with respect to art, politics and society. When women chose to practise the critical brand of realism termed 'Neue Sachlichkeit' they brought with them a gendered world-view which subverted the norms and conventions of the movement in particular ways.

Examining the art of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck in terms of gender issues, shows that here the imperatives of the Neue Sachlichkeit have converged with the role of the woman as producer of art. This alliance was not always simple or easy; in many respects, women artists within the Neue Sachlichkeit were forced to manipulate the aesthetic in order to produce art which adequately related to their experience as women. In particular, there is a constant tension in the works between the public and the private spheres. Not only were women artists challenging the gendered divisions of public and private through their

professional practice, but also confronting these boundaries within the Neue Sachlichkeit itself. As a movement linked to timeliness and social observation, the Neue Sachlichkeit was inherently public in its outlook. Though increasing numbers of women were entering the public realm during the Weimar Republic, their roles in the private sphere were still the defining ones. The public/private dynamics of women in Weimar society, therefore, were paralleled by the dynamics in the art of women realists in the period. The works of Jürgens and Overbeck not only provide hitherto unexplored insights into the Neue Sachlichkeit, but relate critically to the role of women in the Weimar Republic.

Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck: In Hanover and the Neue Sachlichkeit

Gerta Overbeck was born on 16 January 1898 in Dortmund.¹ As the eldest of seven children, she grew up in Cappenberg (near Lünen). The Overbecks were a large and important Hanseatic family and, during the course of her long life, Gerta was able to draw on their support when necessary. At the age of 19, Overbeck went to Dusseldorf to study for the qualification of Zeichenlehrerin [drawing teacher] and in 1918, passed this exam. In order to continue her art studies, Overbeck moved to Hanover in 1919 and entered the Hannover Handwerker- und Kunstgewerbeschule where she remained until 1922 in the graphics class of Fritz Burger-Mühlfeld (1882-1969). Grethe Jürgens, the eldest of three children, was born on 15 February 1899 in

Holzhausen (near Osnabrück) and raised in Wilhelmshaven. In 1918, Jürgens spent one semester studying interior design at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin until the November Revolution forced its closure and her return to Wilhelmshaven. Like Overbeck, Jürgens went to the Kunstgewerbeschule in Hanover in 1919 to study with Burger-Mühlfeld and continued until 1922, when the economic pressures of the early republic became too great. After 1919, Grethe Jürgens remained in Hanover until her death on 8 May 1981. From 1922 to 1928, Jürgens worked as an advertising artist for the Hackethal Draht- und Kabelwerk company. Save for visits to her family and the northern coastal town of Pelworm after the war, Jürgens' travels were restricted to one trip to Italy which she made in 1933 with the writer Gustav Schenk. Gerta Overbeck moved more frequently within Germany, but did not travel abroad. From 1922 until 1931, Overbeck lived in Dortmund as a Zeichenlehrerin, but as she said: 'In Dortmund wohnte ich, in Hannover war ich beheimatet, das heißt, ich verbrachte die Schulferien hier, kam manchmal sogar zu Festtagen und an Wochenenden.'² From 1931 until 1938, Overbeck lived in Hanover, at times sharing a studio with Grethe Jürgens. During 1937 and 1938, Overbeck was briefly married to Gustav Schenk, travelled to Mannheim and Worpswede and gave birth to her only child, a daughter named Frauke. In 1938, the artist returned to her family home in Cappenberg where she remained until her death on 2 March 1977.

At the Kunstgewerbeschule, Jürgens and Overbeck first

made friends with the other students with whom they would become known as Hanover's Neue Sachlichkeit group: Ernst Thoms (1896-), Erich Wegner (1899-1980) and Hans Mertens (1906-1944). Friedrich Busack (1899-1933) and Karl Rüter (1902-) also practised within the aesthetic, but were more peripheral to the group. Of these artists, Thoms was certainly the best-known, having shown and sold work in Berlin during the 1920s as well as having had a one-man show in Hanover's Kestner-Gesellschaft as early as 1926. The involvement of this group with the particular term 'Neue Sachlichkeit' was self-conscious; they showed their works under this banner, discussed aspects of the aesthetic and knew that critics perceived them as the Hanoverian regional variation of the movement. Dating this self-conscious affiliation exactly is more problematic. The term was applied specifically to painting in 1923 when Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub wrote his circular to elicit interest in an exhibition he was planning and the term only gained wider usage as a description of contemporary painting trends after 1925 when the exhibition took place.³ The phrase, as discussed below, was used in other spheres earlier and was intended to describe a tendency in art which Hartlaub thought to be developed fully by 1923. Thus, one can argue that works from the first half of the 1920s could be called 'sachlich'. The Hanoverians (without Overbeck) were shown together first under this title in the 1928 exhibition *Die Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover* at the Kunstverein in Nordhausen. An exhibition with the same title was held in 1932 in the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig in

which Jürgens and Overbeck both took part; significantly, Overbeck showed works from as early as 1925 here.⁴

Helmut Leppien, writing about the Neue Sachlichkeit in Hanover in 1974, felt confident enough to write: 'So schildern Grethe Jürgens, Erich Wegner, Ernst Thoms die Jahre um 1926, als die ersten Bilder der Neuen Sachlichkeit in Hannover entstanden...'.⁵ This dating concurs with Overbeck's inclusion of works from 1925 and Thoms' one-man show in 1926. The mid-1920s as a starting point is sensible also with regard to Hartlaub's definitions and the facts of the Hanoverians' lives; up until 1922, the artists were all students with no fixed artistic goals. After leaving the Kunstgewerbeschule, their experimentation led to their involvement with the Neue Sachlichkeit. Stylistically, the works produced around 1925 differ from the earlier works in ways which suggest that the artists were more certain of their artistic aims. The earlier works are usually small-scale sketches, done in a variety of media and styles, while after 1925, the artists began to produce more finished oil paintings which adhered to a unified stylistic imperative. These works exemplify broad definitions of 'sachlich' art, as described below, with their detailed rendering of objects, non-painterly brushwork and sober approach to subject-matter. Dating the artists' involvement with the Neue Sachlichkeit to c.1925 does not mean that the works produced in the early 1920s are without significance to the debate. Frequently, the development of themes in the 'sachlich' art of Jürgens and Overbeck are understood best

with reference to these earlier works.

The bourgeois, mercantile city of Hanover was dominated during the Weimar Republic by art institutions more favourably disposed toward expressionism and abstraction than the realism practised by Jürgens, Overbeck and their contemporaries. Three main exhibition venues existed in the period: the Kestner-Gesellschaft, the short-lived Galerie von Garvens and the Hannover Kunstverein. The Kestner-Gesellschaft and the Galerie von Garvens were privately sponsored and predominantly showed the works of expressionists and modern abstract artists from all over Europe. Thoms' own show and the shows of the *Neue Deutsche Romantik*, Otto Dix (1891-1969) and George Grosz (1893-1959) were notable exceptions to this trend.⁶ The Hannover Sezession were also shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft; this group was formed at first in opposition to the policies of the Kunstverein which, it was felt, did not show enough works by non-local artists. This opposition had dissipated by the middle of the 1920s, but the Sezession continued to show at the Kestner-Gesellschaft. The differences between the Kunstverein, with its partial public sponsorship and support of local artists, and the other, more 'modern' exhibition institutions, is significant in the case of Jürgens and Overbeck. The Kunstverein held two major shows annually during the period, the *Große Kunstausstellung* (Spring) and the *Herbstausstellung hannoverscher Künstler* (Autumn). Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck showed regularly in these between 1929 and 1937.⁷ In addition, as a member of

the GEDOK (Gemeinschaft Deutscher und Österreichischer Künstlerinnenvereine aller Kunstgattungen), Jürgens took part in all of their shows from 1929.⁸ In terms of the types of works which Jürgens and Overbeck showed in these exhibitions, preference was given to oil paintings and large watercolours; sketches and drawings were not included in these public expositions.

A pattern thus emerges in the display and reception of the artists' works. They were neither affiliated with the bourgeois patrons of the city, nor the favoured modernism of such Hanoverians as Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) but the more local, public exhibition venues, and places particularly associated with women artists, such as the GEDOK. This pattern is repeated in the treatment of the artists by contemporary critics. Outside Hanover, Jürgens and Overbeck were all but unknown. Locally, the situation was not much better with the most significant mention made of either artist being the one-page article written on each by Werner Miro for the *Hannoversches Tagesblatt* in 1934. The other local papers to discuss the group were the *Hannoverschen Anzeiger* and, significantly, *Volkswille, Organ für die Interessen der arbeitenden Bevölkerung der Provinz Hannover*.⁹ Only after interest was renewed in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* during the 1960s did Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck begin to receive more than such local attention, and even this was sparse. Their impact on the public sphere of the art world was, therefore, limited. While they regularly showed their works, Jürgens and Overbeck rarely sold their paintings. The

Provinzialmuseum and the Historisches Museum each acquired one work by Jürgens; with those two exceptions, the artists only 'sold' (often gave) works to personal friends during the course of the Weimar Republic.

If the beginning of the artists' association with the Neue Sachlichkeit is difficult to determine exactly, the end is more definite. By 1937, the cultural policies of the Nazis reached Hanover and works were being removed from the Provinzialmuseum. The Kestner-Gesellschaft was closed as were many publishing houses in the city. During the next few years, Jürgens and Overbeck were forbidden to exhibit, Overbeck returned to Cappenberg, Mertens died in the war and Hanover was reduced to ruins in Allied bombing. Not surprisingly, the artists lost their desire to continue in the same 'sachlich' manner. Jürgens began to produce abstract works in the 1950s while Overbeck became interested in glass painting and religious themes. Jürgens and Overbeck were associated definitively with the Neue Sachlichkeit in Hanover from the mid-1920s until the late 1930s. Their context was local and not particularly elite. They were part of a cohesive circle of artists and, unusually in the case of women artists, were not romantically linked to other members of the group. Having demonstrated these links, it remains to define the Neue Sachlichkeit.

Definitions of the Neue Sachlichkeit

By assessing the way in which women artists engaged with the Neue Sachlichkeit, this work actually redefines aspects of the existing applications of the term. However, a broad sense of the phrase must be determined first. Disagreements about the term 'Neue Sachlichkeit' abound in the literature. The implications of the use of 'Sachlichkeit' as opposed to 'Gegenständlichkeit' to mean 'objectivity' has been discussed by such authors as Fritz Schmalenbach and John Willett.¹⁰ The sources of the term and the movement have been debated.¹¹ Politicized authors have refuted the commitment of the artists to the revolutionary cause.¹² Internal inconsistencies in the terminology have been cited.¹³ The significance of these debates resides in the depth of meaning they offer to the term rather than in any attempt to overthrow its usage. The phrase was used widely during the period, not just in the visual arts; its common currency is not disputed. This clearly suggests that the phrase was understood and carried a meaning (or range of meanings) at the time. The definitional debates imply that there is no single, unified or exact definition of the Neue Sachlichkeit, but do not indicate that there are not broad lines of agreement to be found. If the Neue Sachlichkeit admits of no technical definition, it certainly displays a 'family resemblance' in its applications. The broad lines of agreement, or the 'family resemblance' are the necessary starting point for the discussion of gender politics in the Neue Sachlichkeit. Throughout this work, the Neue

Sachlichkeit is defined as both a 'movement' and an 'aesthetic'. This differentiation mirrors a concern in the literature exemplified by Ursula Horn's article, "'Neue Sachlichkeit': Richtung oder Sammelbegriff" [Neue Sachlichkeit: Movement or Collective Definition].¹⁴

The Neue Sachlichkeit Movement

The idea of the Neue Sachlichkeit as a movement, as opposed to an aesthetic, is not difficult to understand. 'Movement' applies to all of the artists in the various regional centres who were associated with the phrase during the inter-war years. This association was usually in the form of self-conscious identification with the term by artists and their inclusion in exhibitions and critical literature under the banner of the Neue Sachlichkeit. The issue is complicated by artists, such as Max Beckmann (1884-1950), who did not like the term but were frequently subsumed under it and by a distinct regionalism.¹⁵ Just as Jürgens, Overbeck, Mertens, Thoms and Wegner were associated with the Hanoverian tendency in the Neue Sachlichkeit, other artists connected with the Neue Sachlichkeit were often discussed and shown in groups based upon location.¹⁶ The regional centres most commonly associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit are Berlin, Dresden, Karlsruhe, Munich and Cologne, though the case of the so-called Cologne Progressives is unique and problematic. Neither Beckmann nor the Cologne Progressives will be considered in the subsequent pages of this work as they were themselves troubled by their association with the

term. Other cities are sometimes brought into the fold, such as Weimar and Hamburg and there were some artists affiliated with the movement who worked in isolated conditions such as Franz Radziwill (1895-). Each of the well-known regions has come to be particularly associated with one or more artists; George Grosz, Rudolf Schlichter (1890-1955) and Christian Schad (1894-1982) in Berlin, Otto Dix in Dresden and Georg Scholz (1890-1945), Georg Schrimpf (1889-1938) and Alexander Kanoldt (1881-1939) in Munich are examples of this.¹⁷

These regional variations on the Neue Sachlichkeit make the notion of a movement complex but not intractable. Exhibitions during the period in which artists were represented as the Neue Sachlichkeit and yet arranged by regional association, suggest that this unity in diversity was intelligible to contemporaries. Though Berlin was arguably the most significant art centre of the Weimar Republic, Germany's art scene was not dominated by a single city in the way that those of France or England were; the federal structure of Germany emphasized the relative independence of the regions. Many artists chose to remain in more provincial German cities and practised successfully. The regional variations of the Neue Sachlichkeit sometimes differed slightly in their politics, theories and even formal concerns, but were similar enough to adopt the 'sachlich' slogan.¹⁸ The Neue Sachlichkeit 'movement' then, refers to the many regional groups of artists who understood themselves to be part of a broad trend, rather than a single centre or group.

Thus, there was no central authority within the movement as there was, for example with the Italian Futurists or the early Surrealist group. Perfectly formulated statements of intent or planned action are also absent from the Neue Sachlichkeit. Commonalities of theme and purpose linked the centres and created the broad aesthetic.

The Neue Sachlichkeit Aesthetic

The terms 'Sachlichkeit' and 'Neue Sachlichkeit' had currency during the Weimar Republic in spheres beyond the visual arts.¹⁹ In fact, the use of the phrase to describe trends in painting occurred later than its application to architecture, for example. In architecture, 'Sachlichkeit' referred to a type of functionalism typified by the work of Behrens and the Werkbund. Their approach to architecture and the style of their buildings was perceived to mirror the actual function of the building rather than attempt to disguise it with useless ornamentation.²⁰ The 'sachlich' terminology was also current in literature and philosophy where it was used to describe a similar sense of 'realism'. In literature, 'Sachlichkeit' was linked to reportage; ordinary events were detailed clearly and without embellishment. Links to journalism were made explicitly by Willett, while the contemporary critic Peter Thoene, called the Neue Sachlichkeit 'journalistic'.²¹ Philosophically, the term was related to the widest contemporary use of the word to indicate an attitude toward the world devoid of idealism.

This attitude (there was even a popular song about it entitled *Es liegt in der Luft eine Sachlichkeit* ['Sachlichkeit' is in the Air]) was materialistic; its focus was upon the material reality of the Weimar Republic. From its inception, the term was seen to be in keeping with the period. After the horror of the First World War, which had devastated Europe, 'Sachlichkeit' dispensed with apocalyptic visions and concentrated on the stability of the objects around us.²² When Gustav Hartlaub applied the term to painting, these meanings, what Ute Eskildsen has called an 'ideology', were already in place.²³ In this application of the term, the meanings were not undermined but adapted and developed with specific reference to the visual arts. By so doing, the idea of a 'sachlich' aesthetic was born.

One persistent feature in early considerations of the Neue Sachlichkeit is the negative definition of the trend. Hartlaub began by contrasting the artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit with those artists who were 'impressionistically relaxed' or 'expressionistically abstract'.²⁴ Franz Roh continued this approach by actually producing two contrasting lists of the features of expressionist and 'post-expressionist' art in his book of 1925, *Nach-Expressionismus. Magischer Realismus. Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei*.²⁵ Emil Utitz entitled his work about the movement *Die Überwindung des Expressionismus* [The Conquest of Expressionism], which fact again points to a definition in opposition to expressionist tendencies.²⁶ As can be demonstrated,

the brand of realism practised by the artists associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit did not supersede expressionist and abstract art in the period. Throughout the course of the Weimar Republic, abstract art, expressionist tendencies and the Neue Sachlichkeit flourished simultaneously. Though the 'facts' of art practice in the period seem at variance with these negative definitions, the perceptions which lay behind these pronouncements are highly significant.

The literal contrast between these various movements was one of form. Obviously, the Neue Sachlichkeit was the formal antithesis of abstraction because of its primary insistence upon the representation of objects, or 'material reality'. The contrast with expressionistic form was not always as obvious, but a few items from Roh's aforementioned list will explicate the matter. Roh characterized expressionism as a 'dynamic', 'loud' and 'warm' art which used 'expressive deformation of the object' [Dynamisch, Laut, Warm, Expressive Deformierung der Objekte] as a means to produce emotive work. The contrast with 'sachlich' art or 'post-expressionist' art was distinct; it was a 'static', 'quiet', 'cool' art which provided a 'harmonic purification of the object' [Statisch, Still, Kühl, Harmonische Reinigung der Gegenstände].²⁷ As a cool, detached, sober and non-painterly brand of realism, the Neue Sachlichkeit was unlike abstraction and expressionism. As these were concurrent trends in the visual art of the period, their contrasting definitions emphasize the fact that meaning

was carried in form. The choice of an aesthetic in which to work during the period was not random, but significant. In her review of the Arts Council Neue Sachlichkeit show of 1978, Fenella Crichton put the issue succinctly and proved its still current usage: 'The artists concerned reacted not only against what they felt to be the self-indulgence of expressionism but also against the elitist aspects of pure abstraction.'²⁸

To work within the bounds of the Neue Sachlichkeit indicated both ideas about the nature of the artist and about the relationship of art to the modern world. These are interrelated issues but can be separated for the sake of clarity. The insistence on non-painterly work produced with a sense of reportage or detachment corresponded with the notion, current among artists of the movement, of the artist as a worker. This notion defied the more romantic conception of the artist as an individual creator whose works bore the mark of this individuality and creative expression. As Jost Hermand wrote:

Even the painters and poets suddenly wanted to become factual reporters, newspaper correspondents or editors, each seeking merely to express the 'pulse of the times' beyond all notions of art as something having an aura.²⁹

The Neue Sachlichkeit artist was a more anonymous figure who recorded the world. Inherent in this notion of the artist is the sense of viewing audience; since the artist is not a special or 'higher' interpreter of expressive nuance, the works should be understood by even the most ordinary people. There is no sense in which the Neue

Sachlichkeit was intended for the initiated. The critical relationship of art to the world is also a principle feature in the definitions of the Neue Sachlichkeit. The Neue Sachlichkeit was a public aesthetic; it was concerned with the outward facts rather than the inward truths. Though commentators vary on the interpretation of the message of the Neue Sachlichkeit with respect to society, no one suggests that it was not an art of its time.³⁰

'Reality', timeliness, contemporaneity and social relevance constitute the primary significance of the aesthetic. This is where the contrast with abstraction and expressionism was most determined. These other trends, rightly or wrongly, were associated with the lionized personality of the artist and the expression of universal, personal and inward states of mind. They were outside the ordinary concerns of the masses and the daily life of the society. They were not 'sachlich'.

These broad lines of the aesthetic were understood by Jürgens and Overbeck in Hanover. For example, Jürgens said this about the importance of form:

Wir müssen heute mehr mit der Wirklichkeit rechnen, wir können nicht mehr abseits stehen, wir geben das Ästhetische und das Intellektuelle auf. Klarheit und Einfachheit unseres Stils mußten wir aus dem Leben gewinnen. Mit dem Zufall einer Farbe und einer Form konnten wir uns nicht mehr begnügen. Wir mußten uns dieser malerischen Mittel bewußt werden, die Formel für die Landschaft, das menschliche Gesicht, für die banalen Dinge finden.³¹

Implicit in this passage are the interrelated facets of the aesthetic which bound form to a notion of the artists' role and to the contemporaneity of the artworks

themselves. This vital timeliness was expressed by Jürgens in 1932 in her condemnation of artists who looked only toward 'eternity': "Dafür scheint es mir wichtig, daß sie zunächst etwas weniger an die 'Ewigkeitswerte' denken und mehr an die Beziehungen der Zeit zur Kunst."³² Jürgens and Overbeck also intended their art for the widest possible audience. This was connected to the other ideas of timeliness and 'realism' as Overbeck's comments from 1976 suggest:

Die Forderung an die Kunst zu stellen, daß sie Sinn und Zweck haben muß, ist dahingehend richtig, daß die Kunst die Verbindung mit dem Leben nicht verlieren darf und auch für den einfachen Menschen verständlich und zugänglich bleiben muß.³³

Hence, both artists conceived of their practice within the broad lines of the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic as described above. The fact that Jürgens and Overbeck were women artists makes their association with this aesthetic all the more unusual and compelling.

Women as Producers of Art

Over the course of the last two decades, much scholarly work has been produced which examines the relationship between women and art. This body of scholarship is vital to the discussion of the work of Jürgens and Overbeck which follows; the methodology developed in this thesis is derived from the recent feminist interventions into art history. Therefore, it is necessary here to provide a context of the issues pertaining to women as producers of art as developed in

the literature. The theme of women artists has been approached from a variety of viewpoints corresponding to those of the historians/critics. These approaches privilege different aspects of the gender debate and provide a range of more or less viable analytical methods for the study of the work of women artists.

Much of the earliest literature concerning women artists (sometimes referred to as 'first generation' feminist art history) was produced with the aim of finding and documenting the lives and works of women who produced art throughout history.³⁴ This was a necessary first stage; without this information, there could be no further, more critical discussions of the issues. A number of 'lexicons' of women artists, such as Clara Clement's book, *Women in the Fine Arts, from the Seventh Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.* and the well-known exhibition catalogue by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, responded to the challenge raised by Linda Nochlin's article 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', by providing a long list of women to fill the gaps.³⁵ Monographs of individual women artists also began to appear as part of this first stage of the reconstruction of women's art history. Criticism of the inadequacies of this approach signalled the rise of the 'second generation' of feminist art history.

In the lexicon format, a sort of biological determinism is implied, as the principal unifying factor in this format is the sex of the artist. Despite texts to the

contrary, the variety of social situations of these women artists is overrun by the connections made between them based on biology.³⁶ In other words, the text in a book about women artists working during a period of five centuries may suggest that their situation varied in these different periods, but their inclusion in a single, separate 'canon' created by the book as a whole, indicates that they are more similar to one another than to any male artists from their own historical periods. Thus, because they are women, their art can be linked regardless of their social circumstances. Many art historians dissociated themselves quickly from this position, but a few continued on these lines to produce work which defines a feminine aesthetic. Lucy Lippard, for example, claimed that all women produced art which shared certain formal structures such as overall patterning and rounded forms.³⁷ Such biological or essentialist claims provide little in the way of any valuable analytic approach to the variety of art produced through the ages by women and are not adopted here.

The production of a separate 'canon' of great women artists was another, more ambivalent feature of the early work about women artists which was challenged in later feminist critiques.³⁸ In the process of finding unknown women artists and adding them to existing art historical periods and styles, the tacit suggestion was made that these periods, styles and value judgements about the quality of artworks were correct. Women artists had been overlooked, but once found, could be seen to be just as

good as the men and deserving of a position in the hierarchy. This equated women with 'minor masters' and never questioned the masculine-normative structures of the discipline itself. It is a self-defeating proposition for the study of women artists; one is perpetually examining their work from a masculine standard of value and 'accepting' them as and when they approach the quality of men. Furthermore, it enhances the idea that art history is perfectly objective rather than questioning the ideologies which have informed art historical practice. Clearly, the canon of great white male artists was produced within an historical framework in which white males were privileged. The results of works which unquestioningly adopt the canon as a methodology are unsatisfactory. For example, Hugo Munsterberg suggested that the lack of 'great' women artists has had nothing to do with education or exhibition opportunities just as the lack of a male Joan of Arc cannot have been caused by an absence of 'saintly opportunities'. Innate genius is the key, and the numbers of women Munsterberg can list in various arts leads him to say that women have great verbal facility, reasonable painting skill, minor fluency with musical instruments and little or no ability to compose music.³⁹

Refuting the concepts of innate 'genius' and biological determinism, feminist art history considered the social situation of women artists. Though the perspectives of the socio-historical methods are less obviously faulty than those described above, there are difficulties in some

of the work produced from this vantage point. Principally, by discussing the significance of the legal, educational and professional disadvantages suffered by women artists as 'obstacles' to be overcome, a linear version of women's history has been constructed which is inconsistent with the facts of their artistic participation.⁴⁰ If women artists merely require the opportunity to enter schools and practice art professionally, then there should be far more successful women artists now than in any other period. However, the success of women artists has not become greater as time passed; in the court of Marie Antoinette and in revolutionary Russia, women artists attained more recognition than in the periods immediately following.⁴¹ Gender politics are far more complex than a series of social 'obstacles' and this shallow concept of social history cannot suffice to explain the conditions of women artists. Also, by merely considering the social history of women in a given period, the temptation exists to ignore their artistic production. For example, one could easily discuss Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck exclusively in terms of their lives as independent, professional women in the Weimar Republic. They can be seen to have been part of that much-discussed group of 'new women' and are interesting as an historical phenomenon. However, to understand the bearing of their social position on the art they produced requires a more inclusive analytical method.

The critical methods which transcend the difficulties

outlined above and inform this work about women artists and the Neue Sachlichkeit, take as their core the construction of the concept of 'woman' and the nature of artistic and art historical practice as cultural discourse. As Griselda Pollock explained:

So long as we discuss women, the family, crafts or whatever else we have done as feminists we endorse the social givenness of woman, the family, the separate sphere. Once we insist that sexual difference is *produced* through an interconnecting series of social practices and institutions of which families, education, art studies, galleries and magazines are part, then the hierarchies which sustain masculine dominance come under scrutiny and stress, then what we are studying in analysing the visual arts is one instance of this production of difference which must of necessity be considered in a double frame: (a) the specificity of its effects as a particular practice with its own materials, resources, conditions, constituencies, modes of training, competence, expertise, forms of consumption and related discourses, as well as its own codes and rhetorics; (b) the interdependence for its intelligibility and meaning with a range of other discourses and social practices. [Pollock's italics]⁴²

Women are situated in society differently from men, but this difference is not the same from time to time or place to place; it cannot be reduced to biological facts. Gender is a complex construction determined by the interaction of such social forces as politics, economics and ideology upon individuals. By viewing the notion of gender definition in this way, one can transcend the simplistic biological unification of women without losing sight of the critical differences between women and men. Women artists do need to be considered as a particular case but not a universal one. Social history is very significant to this discussion, but not as a set of 'obstacles'. Law, education, work and family act as

conductors of gendered ideology. A woman's relationship to these social factors is determined by contemporary ideas of femininity and in turn, these ideas are reinforced or challenged by changes in women's social status. Society and gender do not exist as separate spheres, but are interdependent.

Nor does art stand outside of society and gender concerns, reflecting their existence.⁴³ The production of 'gendered' representation is a feature of art and one which has a heightened significance in the case of women artists. The works of women artists are produced from a position unlike that of their male counterparts and, usually, a position of powerlessness. This fact means that the lives and work of women artists subvert the 'canon' of art history by their very existence. It is through a recognition of the significance of art in the cultural production of meaning (including, of course, gender definitions), that women's activity as artists and not simply as workers can be emphasized. In addressing the work, therefore, it is necessary to question the masculine-normative value judgements of the discipline of art history itself and to break with the traditional methods which uphold these. It is necessary to discuss the work as a part of a gendered social discourse rather than to attempt to judge it against a masculine standard. Clearly, the traditional idea which divorces art from ideology and perceives the artist as an a-historical genius must be lost. A break with the traditional forms of art historical practice is justified in this work and

the conclusions reached by it challenge the conventional work on the Neue Sachlichkeit.

Feminist Theory and Women Artists in the Neue Sachlichkeit: Praxis

As stated above, this work does not seek to be an additive monograph of the lives and works of two lesser-known women artists. Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck provide exceptionally useful material with which to test ideas about gender and the Neue Sachlichkeit because of their integral involvement with the aesthetic and their close ties to one specific region. However, there were other women artists who could have been studied at greater length and there is no sense in which this present study is meant to exalt the 'greatness' of any one artist over that of another. Issues of gender definition and politics critically challenge prevailing assumptions about the Neue Sachlichkeit and require, for their explication, different methods than those traditionally used. Thus, the works of Jürgens and Overbeck are not discussed within strict genre divisions, nor does this work attempt to unfold their lives and work in a chronological pattern of 'periods' and influences. This 'schedule' of study, maturation, mannerism, decline (interspersed with fallow periods) does not relate significantly to the issues at hand but forces the works of women to be judged against male standards presumed

correct. Essentialist claims of a biologically determined aesthetic are also of little use to the present work. It is clear that during the course of the Weimar Republic, women artists chose to practice in as wide a variety of styles and media as male artists and that these choices had little to do with their biology but much to do with their production of meaning. Women producing abstract textile designs at the Bauhaus cannot be linked uncritically to women realists of the period without obscuring the significance of such formal differences at the time.

As argued above, the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic carried a set of meanings in the Weimar Republic. In order to address the role of gender in the works of women artists in the movement, attention must be paid to the specifics of their socio-historical situations as well as the specifics of their aesthetic context. The positioning of their art within cultural discourse as a public, timely, materialistic 'realism' produced a set of artistic imperatives for the artists. Their gendered position as women in the period had to converge with these imperatives in order for them to practice successfully. That convergence is the subject of this work. Because male artists and their viewpoints dominated the Neue Sachlichkeit, masculine-normative standards dominate discussions of the movement. For example, the much-heralded 'realism' of the movement is the representation of the reality of urban men. The viewpoint of the ordinary man, in cafes, brothels and on the

vicious streets of 1920s Germany, are the cliches of the art. Strikes and party-political action in which all of the participants are represented as male are common in the works and generally remain unquestioned. The 'public' nature of the aesthetic has been assumed to have excluded women who are 'private' by definition.

The fact that so many women utilized the conventions of the Neue Sachlichkeit confounds these expectations. The imperatives of the aesthetic did not have to be masculine; the dynamic relationship between the public and private spheres was actually a key note for women in the Weimar Republic. Gender politics focussed upon women's increasing presence in the public sphere. Assumptions about the gender of private and public space began to disintegrate and women artists, as professional women, were implicated in this. Further, as producers of representations, they engaged in gendered discourse. Their art was the site of an accommodation between the public and the private, gender and the Neue Sachlichkeit. Their participation in the public sphere challenged social norms and their manipulations of the Neue Sachlichkeit challenged artistic ones. The viewpoints of women and their particular social, political and economic situation is revealed in their representations.

Thus far, three particular areas of interest have been discussed and intertwined here: the lives and works of Jürgens and Overbeck, the social history of the Weimar Republic and the feminist critical framework of the

present. In a simple sense, the first two are primary source material which is being interpreted through the third. However, there is an implicit link between the 'post-modern' critical theory employed here and its 'modern' subject in the work of social theorists from the Weimar Republic. The work of theorists like Georg Simmel and those associated with The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, founded in 1923, paved the way for the subsequent development of Critical Theory.⁴⁴ Simmel, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer all worked toward producing theories of 'the modern'; these theoretical interventions addressed issues of both modernity in social life and modernism in aesthetics. Their work provided the foundations upon which theorists like Jürgen Habermas could consider the 'post-modern'.

As suggested above, these social theorists were not limited by any academic disciplinary boundaries and their 'sociological' studies of modernity were tied to aesthetics.⁴⁵ Simmel, for example, wrote about Rodin; Benjamin's interest in Baudelaire, Brecht and Surrealism is well-known and Adorno was both a musician himself and part of the Viennese school who developed the twelve-tone system. Kracauer wrote widely on the subject of film and even published an article about the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (19 October 1930 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*) in which he distanced himself from its 'reportage'.⁴⁶ Their work on contemporary society is thus pertinent to an art historical consideration of the period. More directly relevant to this work on gender and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*

are the theories of modernity as transitory and fragmented which Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin develop in their work. A sense of shifting roles and identities is critical to the arguments about gender proposed here, as women artists engaged in a continual process of securing their positions as independent, professional practitioners. The sense of the present in the Weimar Republic as fluctuating is in keeping with the artists' experience of their place within it. Further, these contemporary theories of modernity were based upon ideas about the sociology of urban existence which used space as a metaphor. The development of the idea of spheres gendered as 'public' and 'private' in post-modern critical theory had its origins in the Weimar Republic. The use of such critical theory to assess women's work in the Neue Sachlichkeit is not without justification.

In the pages which follow, the relationship between the public and private spheres in the lives and art of Jürgens and Overbeck provides a broad, unifying framework and a general reference point. More specifically, however, the work is divided into four chapters, each of which takes a particular theme as its subject. These are themes which cross genre and disciplinary boundaries; each theme is a set of interrelated concepts which helped to define gender in the period. These themes, such as that of chapter two, 'domesticity', are examined as constructed by contemporary ideology, social history and representation. The role of the Neue Sachlichkeit, and women who worked within the movement, as producing or defying these themes is examined

in each instance. The first chapter critically assesses the idea of the artist and the nature of gender within that idea. Chapters One and Two each come under the heading of the 'private' sphere as their concerns are directed toward the self. The last two chapters direct their attentions outward, toward society ('others') and are thus placed under the heading of 'public'. This distinction should not be applied too rigidly, as each individual chapter relates the self to others and deals with the shifting nature of the boundaries between the public and the private spheres at the time. Chapter Three questions the representations of women in Weimar and in the Neue Sachlichkeit specifically. The final chapter critically describes the masculine-normative paradigm which has been applied to the politics of the period and the movement and suggests ways in which gender concerns subvert this. Both of these chapters question the use of women as a social icon and what might replace this. In a sense, the ordering of the chapters was arbitrary; the thematic approach to the topic, unlike a chronological one for example, means that the material is interdependent and interrelated. I chose to begin with the artists' sense of themselves as women and artists and to expand from this centre toward the 'public' sphere. One could argue that it would be equally effective to begin in the wider social context and then develop ideas related to the 'private' sphere. The very form of this thesis as well as its content is an attempt to see the way in which gendered meanings were produced in the Weimar Republic; the works of women artists and the role of gender in the Neue

Sachlichkeit make this possible.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. See Appendix A for a chronology of the main biographic and artistic events of the life of Grethe Jürgens, and Appendix B for the same information about Gerta Overbeck. The biographies of Jürgens and Overbeck were developed with the help of surviving friends and family members. In terms of published sources, see the various articles by Hildegard Reinhardt (detailed in the bibliography under the heading of 'monographs'). Her research is exemplary; all of the details in her biographical sections matched the information I received, and her work has been used in many lexicon sources.

2. 'I lived in Dortmund, but was at home in Hanover, that is to say I spent my school holidays in Hanover and even came also on holidays and weekends.' Gerta Overbeck, 'Es Liegt in der Luft mit der Sachlichkeit' in *Hannover Catalogue*, pp.89-90 (p.90).

3. Fritz Schmalenbach, "The Term 'Neue Sachlichkeit'" *The Art Bulletin* XXII, no.3 (September 1940), pp.161-65 (p.161).

4. Details of the works shown in these exhibitions can be found in the *Hannover Catalogue*, pp.12-13.

5. The pictures by Grethe Jürgens, Erich Wegner, Ernst Thoms demonstrated what was happening around 1926, when the first works of the Neue Sachlichkeit in Hanover were being produced...' Helmut R. Leppien, 'Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover: Versuch einer Skizze' in *Hannover Catalogue*, p.5.

6. Complete lists of the events held at the Kestner-Gesellschaft were published in Wieland Schmied, *Wegbereiter zur modernen Kunst. 50 Jahre Kestner-Gesellschaft* (Hanover: Fackelträger Verlag, 1967).

7. Jürgens took part in the Spring show in 1929, 1931 and from 1933 to 1936. Overbeck participated annually in that show from 1933 until 1937. The Autumn show saw Jürgens participate annually from 1930 to 1937; from 1931 to 1937, Overbeck took part every year except 1935. See *Bonn Catalogue*, pp.106-109.

8. For more detailed discussion of the GEDOK, see Chapter One.
9. Copies of contemporary reviews were made available to me by friends of the artists and the library of the Sprengel Museum. Parts of most of these reviews have been published in the *Bonn Catalogue*, the *Hannover Catalogue* and in Henning Rischbieter, ed., *Die Zwanziger Jahre in Hannover* [exhibition catalogue] (Hanover, 1962).
10. Schmalenbach, op.cit., p.162; John Willett, *The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period, 1917-1933* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p.112.
11. The pamphlet, *Der Realismus der Zwanziger Jahre*, series *Im Blickpunkt* 4 (Hanover: Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, no date), pp.77-8 describes the medieval origins of the style; *Schmied* 1969, pp.15-24 refers to more contemporary precedents; Justus Bier, *Neue Deutsche Romantik* [exhibition catalogue] (Hanover, Kestner-Gesellschaft, 1933) suggested influences from the German romantics of the nineteenth century.
12. Helmut Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit. 1924-1932. Studien zur Literatur des 'Weißen Sozialismus'* (Stuttgart, 1970); Roland März, *Realismus und Sachlichkeit. Aspekte deutscher Kunst 1919-1933* [exhibition catalogue] (Berlin [DDR]: Staatliche Museen, 1974).
13. Peter Selz, 'The Artist as Social Critic' in *German Realism of the 20s: The Artist as Social Critic* [exhibition catalogue] edited by Louise Lincoln (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1980), pp.29-40 (p.32); Ulrich Finke, 'Review of Arts Council Exhibition Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties' *Kunstchronik* XXXII, no.3 (March 1979), pp.108-110, 115-119 (p.110).
14. Horn, "'Neue Sachlichkeit': Richtung oder Sammelbegriff" *Bildende Kunst* 9 (1972), pp.429-33.
15. About Beckmann's difference, see: Willett, op.cit., p.112 and Norbert Lynton, 'Just Part of the German Month' [exhibition review] *Art Monthly* 22 (December-January 1978-79), pp.11-13 (p.12).
16. The first important exhibition of the movement outside Germany, Kaspar Niehaus' show 'Neue Sachlichkeit' held in the Stedelijk-Museum, Amsterdam (1929) showed the artists under the headings of the following centres: Berlin, Breslau, Dresden, Hanover, Karlsruhe, Cologne, Oldenburg and Paris. Kaspar Niehaus, *Neue Sachlichkeit: Gruppe der Unabhängigen* [exhibition catalogue] (Amsterdam, 1929).
17. See Schmied's work for the most common division of the movement by region.

18. From the time of Hartlaub, the movement was perceived to be divided into left and right wings; the right wing was associated with the Munich group who took their lead from the Italian metaphysical painters and were often called 'Magic Realists'. This group was considered more conservative than the left wing. On the difficulties of these disparities, see Norbert Lynton, *op.cit.*, p.11. Another article which comments on the notion of difference within the trend was by Jost Hermand, "Unity within diversity? The history of the concept 'Neue Sachlichkeit'", trans. Peter and Margaret Lincoln, in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Keith Bullivant (Manchester University Press, 1977), pp.166-182 (p.172).

19. A number of authors refer to these different spheres of application including, Ursula Horn, *op.cit.*, p.431 and John Willett, *op.cit.*, pp.111-113.

20. Finke, *op.cit.*, p.109; Schmalenbach, *op.cit.*, p.161; Karin Hirdina, *Pathos der Sachlichkeit: Tendenzen materialischer Ästhetik in den zwanziger Jahren* (East Berlin: Verlag das europäische Buch, 1981), p.6.

21. Willett, *op.cit.*, p.111; Peter Thoene, *Modern German Art* (London: Penguin Books, 1938), p.87.

22. Selz, *op.cit.*, p.29.

23. Ute Eskildsen, 'Photography and the Neue Sachlichkeit Movement' in *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-33*, ed. David Mellor (London: The Arts Council, 1978), pp.101-112 (p.101).

24. Hartlaub translated and quoted in Schmalenbach, *op.cit.*, p.161.

25. Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1925).

26. Utitz, *Die Überwindung des Expressionismus* (Stuttgart: Fenke-Verlag, 1927).

27. Roh, *op.cit.*

28. Crichton, 'Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties' [exhibition review] *Pantheon* 37, no.3 (July-September 1979), pp.227-28 (p.227).

29. Hermand, *op.cit.*, p.168. Others concur with this artist-type, including Willett, *op.cit.*, p.114 and Schmied, *Schmied 1978*, p.12-13.

30. Two sources which typify the critics' insistence that the Neue Sachlichkeit is an art of its time are: *Großstadt und Großstadtleben um 1926* [exhibition catalogue] (Hamburg: BAT-Haus, 1976) and Uwe Schneede, et.al., ed., *Realismus zwischen Revolution und Machtergreifung, 1919-1933* [exhibition catalogue]

(Stuttgart: Württembergischer Kunstverein, 1971).

31. 'We must reckon more today with reality, we cannot stand on the side-lines, we have given up the aesthetic and the intellectual. We must capture the clarity and simplicity of our style from life. We can no longer be content with accidents of colour and form. We must become conscious of our painterly medium and find forms for the landscape, the human face and everyday things.' Grethe Jürgens, 'Eine Stimme der Maler' in *Der Wachsbogen* 1 (1931), p.5.

32. "Instead, they should first consider 'eternity' less and concentrate more on the connection between the times and art." Grethe Jürgens, 'Rezepte zum Ersprießlichen Besuch einer Kunstausstellung' in *Der Wachsbogen* 5/6 (1932), pp.8-10 (p.8).

33. 'To make the demand that art must have purpose and meaning is right to the extent that it be not permitted to lose its connection with life and must also remain understandable and approachable by ordinary people.' Gerta Overbeck quoted by Hildegard Reinhardt in 'Gerta Overbeck 1898-1977. Eine Westfälische Malerin der Neuen Sachlichkeit in Hannover', *Niederdeutsche Beiträge für Kunstgeschichte* 18 (1979), pp.225-248 (p.247).

34. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, 'The Feminist Critique of Art History' *The Art Bulletin* LXIX, no.3 (September 1987), pp.326-357. The 'first generation' are named on page 329 and the 'second generation' on p.346. This survey of the feminist interventions into the discipline is commendable for its inclusiveness, perceptive discussion and recognition of the differences between American and British perspectives.

35. Clara Clement, *Women in the Fine Arts, from the Seventh Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.* (New York: Hacken Art Books, 1974); Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950* [exhibition catalogue] (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Art, 1976); Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' *Art News* 69, no.9 (September 1971), reprinted in *Art And Sexual Politics*, eds., Thomas Hess et.al. (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp.1-43.

36. See: Elsa Honig Fine, *Women and Art: A History of Women Painters and Sculptors from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century* (Montclair New Jersey: Schram, 1978) and Karen Petersen and J.J. Wilson, *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (London: The Women's Press, 1978).

37. Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1976), p.49.

38. Griselda Pollock, 'Feminist interventions in the histories of art: an introduction' in *Vision and*

Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.1-17 (p.1).

39. Hugo Munsterberg, *A History of Women Artists* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1975), p.145.

40. The idea of 'obstacles' is derived from Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (New York, 1979). The notion of a linear women's history is found in Wendy Slatkin, *Women Artists in History: From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985). Slatkin first suggests that the women artists she discusses conform to the criteria of greatness expected of men (p.4) and then talks of the 'slow but constant progression toward equality between the sexes' (p.92).

41. The refutation of linear history and the insistence upon time and place specificity in scholarship about women artists is put by Natalie B. Kampen, 'Women's Art: Beginnings of a Methodology' *Feminist Art Journal* 1, pt.2 (Fall 1972), pp.10,19.

42. Pollock, op.cit., p.9

43. Annette Kuhn, in discussing film from a feminist viewpoint, described "representation as mediated, as a social and ideological construct, an autonomous or relatively autonomous process of meaning production which does not necessarily relate immediately to or reflect unproblematically a 'real' social world." *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p.71.

44. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd, 1977), p.ix. (Buck-Morss capitalizes 'Critical Theory')

45. Simmel and aesthetics are discussed in David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p.47; for Adorno and Benjamin see Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, op.cit., p.124.

46. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947); reference to the article on the Neue Sachlichkeit can be found in Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, op.cit., p.135.

47. Simmel wrote in 'Soziologie des Raumes', *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft* 27 (1903), pp. 27-71 that the city is 'not a spatial entity with sociological consequences, but a sociological entity that is formed spatially'. Simmel cited in Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, op.cit., p.77.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WOMAN ARTIST

Introduction

Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck thought of themselves first and foremost as artists. They lived in their studios, amidst their work, and their closest companions were other artists who shared their interests aesthetically as well as socially. They spent their spare time discussing painting with their friends and sketching their surroundings. When they were desperately short of money, they worked as art teachers and as commercial artists. During those periods when the financial pressures were too great to permit their full-time, professional practice of art, they still distinguished themselves pointedly from so-called 'Sunday painters' [Sonntags Malerinnen] who painted as a hobby. By choosing to become artists, Jürgens and Overbeck sacrificed far more secure domestic roles and subverted conventional notions about femininity. The concept of the artist, despite being inexact, was the key-note in each woman's identity. This 'artist concept' consisted of the ideas about the nature of the artist, socially, psychologically and even professionally. The stress Jürgens and Overbeck placed on the role of art in their lives does not diminish the underlying tension between the frequently disharmonious categories 'woman' and 'artist'. Both women

felt this in their ordinary experience. During the courses of their lives, they responded to the challenge of uniting the concepts of 'woman' and 'artist' personally in a number of more or less self-conscious ways. At times, the artists directly addressed the question of the role of the woman artist in their writings, actions and works, but even when they did not explicitly refer to the gender issues facing them, these issues affected their lives and art.

It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate the blunt and subtle levels at which the artists' gender influenced their ideas about artists, specifically themselves, during the period in which they were associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit. Having used the words 'woman' and 'artist' above to denote categories of meanings to which Jürgens and Overbeck were responding in their work, it is necessary to explain these further. It is now a commonplace in feminist critiques of art history to recognize the fact that the word 'artist' has for centuries assumed masculine gender. It is redundant to say 'male artist' (or, more correctly correspondent, 'man artist') but appropriate to use the term 'woman artist' for those unusual cases where women practise art professionally. It has been assumed in many conventional histories of art, that the qualities indispensable to the artist's personality, including creative imagination or 'genius', are not found in women. Probably the best discussions of the ideological dissonance between the concepts of the 'woman' and the 'artist' have been written

by Griselda Pollock. In her essay, 'Vision, voice and power: feminist art histories and Marxism', Pollock wrote:

In the light of my joint research with Roszika Parker, I would reply that it is because the evolving concepts of the artist and the social definitions of woman have historically followed different and, recently, contradictory paths. Creativity has been appropriated as an ideological component of masculinity while femininity has been constructed as man's and, therefore, the artist's negative.¹

In Germany, a number of apologetic works about women and art were written at the turn of the century and contain traces of this bias. For example, describing the works of two particular women artists (Jeanna Bauck and Bertha Wegmann) in 1898, Luise Hagen said '[in their works] I recognise specific feminine qualities'. She added: 'Consequently, in truly womanly manner they developed in their portraits a great minuteness and accuracy of detail'. Hans Hildebrandt's book, *Die Frau als Künstlerin*, published in 1928, contains a wide range of examples of the works of women artists. Despite its late date, this pivotal source from the Weimar Republic still maintains essentialist claims by asserting that women are good artists because they have a natural affinity for colour and a biological capacity for creation. These are evidenced by women's 'taste' in matters of fashion and their ability to bear children.²

There have been various dominant meanings and associations for the two categories, 'woman' and 'artist' at different times and places in history; neither concept

is an immutable element. Women artists have always had to grapple with the dichotomy between their gender and their profession. Within the profession itself, women generally found themselves practising in media and genres which were low in the art hierarchy, and thus carried less professional status, such as textile work or flower-painting. Theirs was a minority position, both numerically and in terms of status, but certainly not an untenable one. The fact that they did not adopt, unquestioningly, all of the traditional styles and subject-matter used by male artists often is what makes their works fascinating. In order to examine the specific ways in which Jürgens and Overbeck dealt with their roles as women artists, the context in which this occurred must be delineated clearly. During the Weimar Republic, particular social, political and economic factors affected the ways in which artists established themselves. Being an independent female worker as well as an artist was meaningful in a socio-economic context. The particularity of the concept of the artist, which gave professional practitioners a sense of cultural authority, further relied upon an aesthetic context for its significance. The wealth of artistic tradition and the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic formed boundaries within which artists negotiated for their identities.

This chapter demonstrates that Jürgens and Overbeck, like many accomplished women artists before and since, linked the categories of 'woman' and 'artist' meaningfully in their lives and works. By establishing these concepts

within the social and aesthetic contexts of the time in the first two sections, the chapter prepares the way for the resolution of the conflict between the categories in the third section. The site of this resolution was the self-portraiture of Jürgens and Overbeck.

Socio-Economic Sphere: 'freie Malerin'

Definition of Terms

To indicate a woman's professional art practice, three special terms are invoked in German. These 'titles' are significant as much for their positive meaning as for the implied assumption of a contrasting, negative position in which women artists frequently found themselves in the period. The terms 'freie Malerin', 'freie Künstlerin' and 'freischaffende Künstlerin' translate roughly as 'free woman painter', 'free woman artist' and 'creatively free woman artist'. Probably the closest parallel in English would be 'free-lance', but this phrase has little of the significance carried by the German terms. The three specific terms are generally interchangeable, so for the sake of simplicity, the shortest phrase, 'freie Malerin', will be used in this section of the chapter to denote the concept.³ Both male and female artists can be described as 'freischaffend', or working solely as a professional artist. What gives the phrase its particular significance in the gender debate is its frequency of application, places in which it is found and the titular insistence when applied to women artists.⁴ For example, the women

artists Edith Dettmann (1898-1987), Ella Bergmann-Michel (1896-1972) and Elisabeth Voigt (1898-), all contemporaries of Jürgens and Overbeck, have been described as working professionally in these terms: 'Freischaffend in Düsseldorf', '...leben sie freischaffend in Weimar', and 'freischaffend in Leipzig tätig'.⁵ Similar phrasing can be found occasionally for the practice of male artists of the period. For example, Adolf Dietrich (1877-) was described by the terms 'freischaffend als Maler' and Oskar Nerlinger (1893-1969), 'freischaffend in Berlin'.⁶

Significantly, a number of sources exist where the phrase 'freischaffend' or the title 'freie Malerin' are used to describe professional women artists and no similar terms are used for their male contemporaries despite the fact that they too practised 'freely'. For example, in the section devoted to artist biographies in the catalogue *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*, the phrase was used to describe three women, including the description of Marianne Brandt (1893-) as a 'freie Malerin' specifically. Of nearly 600 artists included in the biography section (a mere 21 were women), the only use of the term is for women artists.⁷ A similar instance can be found in the literature directly related to Jürgens and Overbeck. In the Hannover Kunstverein exhibition catalogue of 1974, *Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover*, Jürgens is said to have worked 'freely' as a painter ['freien Beruf als Malerin'] and Overbeck was actually referred to as a 'freie Malerin'.⁸ Neither as a title nor as a description was the

phrase used for any of the male members of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group. The discrepancy in application of this phrase indicates an uneven relationship to the concept of the artist between the sexes.

The 'freie Malerin' concept is charged with meaning. By prefacing the simple occupational title 'Malerin', a whole host of associations can be made. In the most obvious sense, it becomes apparent that women artists were not expected occurrences; rather, they required a different critical framework when they did appear in the public realm. It was not always sufficient to merely feminise the noun and allow its connotations to apply to women. The use of the specific term 'freie Malerin' was intended to combine the realms of 'woman' and 'artist' meaningfully. The meaning of the term 'artist' had developed as exclusive male territory and could not describe easily the cases of professional women artists. The effects of this were numerous and provide the basis of this chapter. At this point it suffices to recall the arguments invoked in the earlier passage regarding the difficulty of even the most facile woman painter to be considered an 'artist'.

The Professional Status of Women Artists

What, exactly, is invoked by the use of the phrase 'freie Malerin'? Most importantly, the phrase refers to a woman who earns her living as a painter. Frequently, as in both Jürgens' and Overbeck's cases, a woman is a 'freie

Malerin' while she receives some state support or familial assistance to get by.⁹ A woman is not classified, however, as a 'freie Malerin' if she is in full-time employment and finds herself painting in her so-called 'spare' time. Furthermore, the 'freie Malerin' label does not apply to a woman earning her living as a commercial artist. Grethe Jürgens worked from 1922 until 1928 at the Hackethal Draht-und Kabelwerk in Hanover as a technical and advertisement draughtsman. Throughout those six years, she not only used her art to earn her living, but was actively involved with the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group outside of work. She painted some of her best-known 'sachlich' paintings in this period, including *The Sick Girl* (1926) [figure 1]. Gerta Overbeck, suffering from the same dire economic circumstances as Jürgens during the twenties, went to Dortmund to teach drawing at a school between 1922 and 1931. She too practised art at work and kept in close contact with the Hanoverian group on week-ends and school holidays. Neither woman, however, is described as a 'freie Malerin' during those periods; the phrase is reserved in the literature for the post-1928 period for Jürgens and the years after 1931 for Overbeck.¹⁰

Though that distinction may seem harsh and superficial, the underlying reinforcement of the word 'freischaffende', with its emphasis on creative freedom, is clearly the key to understanding the definition. Presumably, teaching art or painting/drawing for commercial purposes, is seen to rob an artist of her

freedom to choose subjects, media and styles. Thus, the outside enforcement of conditions on the product undermined the components in an artist's personality deemed essential to their work. During the early years of the twentieth century, these were commonly held feelings about the nature of human creativity and the necessity, for it to flourish, of unbridled imagination.¹¹ The primitive psychoanalytic resonances are clear in these attitudes, coexistent with implied preconceptions about the position of artists, generally, and women artists particularly. As the psychological and social prerequisites for an artist were in dispute in the case of women, ready terminology for them did not exist. To use the 'freie Malerin' slogan was to grant a woman artist the implicit creative status which her male counterparts enjoyed without argument.

The phrase acted in this way not only because it reinforced the idea of unchained creativity in the woman artist, but also because there was an implied feminine stereotype which gave a negative balance to the term. During the course of the nineteenth century, popular thinking on the issue of women's education stressed the need for women to learn 'artistic' skills. Obviously, these educational ideals were class-specific and relatively 'well-off' bourgeois daughters received most of the training. That fact, however, does not belie the general belief in the system and the values it inculcated. It was quite appropriate for well-educated women to sing, play instruments, sew and of course, paint. There

was no shortage of men and women available to teach drawing and basic painting skills to women and the enterprise was neither socially controversial nor confined to Germany.¹² Any hint of controversy was dissipated by the fact that these 'ladies' art classes' were sharply distinguished from the pursuit of 'art'. The women who painted at home, as amateurs, were acquiring a skill which would help them better to fulfill their domestic 'profession', not challenge the male sphere of public, fine art.

While the early years of the twentieth century were witness to the reduction in emphasis on these amateur artistic endeavours for women and the development of more serious women's art schools, the idea of the 'lady art student' was still prominent. Many art schools specifically for the training of women [Malerinnenschulen] flourished during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. These were not merely places in which wealthy girls could while away their days. For example, both Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) and Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907) attended the Berlin School for Women Artists.¹³ Furthermore, the 'Kunstgewerbeschulen' [Arts and Crafts Schools] posed a very serious threat to the hegemony of the art academies in Germany and accepted women students much earlier during the period. Jürgens and Overbeck attended this type of official art school; in Hanover, and a number of other cities, there was no academy.¹⁴ These wide-ranging institutions were often full of women students. When queried as to whether she and

Gerta Overbeck were the only female students at the Kunstgewerbeschule, Jürgens answered: 'Nein, es gab viele, meisten blieben allerdings nur kurze Zeit.'¹⁵ It is not, therefore, the lack of students which indicates the difficulties of professional art practice for women during the Weimar Republic, but the small number of these students who finished their schooling and continued as artists. By far the most common experience of the woman art student was to marry and relinquish her outside career. Plainly, the demands made upon women as housewives, both practically and in terms of social expectations, were very difficult to combine with any professional occupation. In addition, vestigial notions about the amateurish nature of 'lady art students' also made an art career seem incomprehensible for many qualified women.

Certainly, married middle-class women had far more recognized social status than their independent, working counterparts and a measure of financial security unknown to Jürgens and Overbeck in their long lives. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz have pointed out in their illuminating article about the Nazi use of 'marriage' propaganda that working women in Weimar often longed for the security of marriage and domestic life rather than finding it constricting.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, many of the women training for careers in art who married and did not practise their skills felt they had chosen a better alternative. In this respect, Jürgens and Overbeck consciously subverted the bourgeois order; they refused

the domestic roles available to them (as respectable middle-class women) precisely because they wished to practise art professionally. Jürgens alluded to the self-consciousness of this decision when she responded to a question about other women at the Kunstgewerbeschule in an interview of 1981. She explained that she and Overbeck (members of the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group to whom she referred as 'the Clique') were not like their female colleagues, but 'Wir waren alle so an der Kunst interessiert, daß wir uns gar nicht vorstellen konnten, etwas anderes zu machen'.¹⁷

Financially, the survival of an artist was tenuous; only a minority of artists in this period were successful enough to be considered secure economically, most lived from hand to mouth.¹⁸ Jürgens and Overbeck were unexceptional in this aspect of their experience as artists. As mentioned above, there were long periods in their careers during which they could not practise full-time, and when they did manage to attain 'freie Malerin' status, they frequently pursued other part-time means of support. Overbeck relied financially upon her family in the late 1930s while Jürgens maintained her financial independence (though she shared her studio for many years with her brother Hans), but undertook some commissioned portraiture in the 1930s to do so. The self-consciousness of the connection between Jürgens' artistic practice and her gender is emphasized by the fact that she was an active member of the Hanover branch of the GEDOK (Gemeinschaft Deutscher und Österreichischer

Künstlerinnenvereine aller Kunstgattungen) from 1929 until her death. This group, established in Berlin in 1926 by Ida Dehmel and Käthe Kollwitz, promoted the specific interests of women working in all areas of the arts.¹⁹ No artist joined this without the tacit recognition that women artists faced particular difficulties in the practice of their profession; Jürgens must have realized that the standards of contemporary art practice were masculine-normative to have been an active member of this group. Interestingly, Overbeck was never a member of any branch of the GEDOK and it can only be assumed that her insistently solitary practice of art accounts for this in the main. Also, she was not consistently involved with the economic experiences which faced Jürgens as an independent woman artist since she returned to her family seat or taught art in times of financial desperation.

The Social Status of Women Artists

Jürgens and Overbeck were made aware of their unique situation as women artists by more than just the particular financial considerations forced upon them through their choice. By affirming their desire to practise art professionally, they flew in the face of ordinary social convention. Artists, in the early years of the twentieth century, maintained a certain, sometimes fictional, distance from the heart of the bourgeoisie. A middle-class woman, in her most common role as wife and mother, was at the centre of the fundamental bourgeois

domestic unit, the family. Thus again, in terms of lifestyle and social status, a tension between the role of a woman and that of an artist was present in the period.²⁰ The 'housewife' and the 'bohemian' were, naturally, stereotypes which illustrated extremes of social behaviour, but a woman artist did have to balance the conflicting demands of domesticity and creativity quite carefully in order to be successful in either. As has been demonstrated in the case of the 'Sunday painter', the demands of housewifery could often be so dominant in a woman's life as to preclude her art from being taken seriously. By contrast, as will be seen forthwith, too deep a submersion in the 'bohemian' lifestyle might simultaneously alienate a woman artist from her social group while providing no more certainty of a fair judgement on her art.

This precarious balance between housewife and bohemian developed from the intense, nineteenth-century debates about the nature of artistic creativity and the rise of the so-called avant-garde. These debates were typical of a sense of 'romanticism', though that term is open to question along with its associations of 'genius' and 'revolution'.²¹ The decline of the power of the academic tradition in European art at the turn of the century was accompanied by the ascendancy of avant-garde artists. The avant-garde distinguished themselves from academic artists as a prerequisite to their attempts to define a place for themselves and their art. The most fruitful line of argument pitted the intrinsic 'genius' of a true

artist against the stale, learned artistic skill of an academic artist. This, in turn, led to the exultation of the artist's unbridled imagination and the refutation of the notion that art can be taught; succinctly, artists were born and not made. The avant-garde rejected the social constraints which paralleled academic art with the same vehemence and the bohemian stereotype became a reality. As Edmund Feldman pointed out in his book, *The Artist*, by the twentieth century, the bohemian stereotype had as much to do with lifestyle as art.²²

The symbolic rejection of the bourgeois order was enacted through unconventional lifestyle patterns, including everything from spectacular dressing to radical political action. Bourgeois occupations and family life generally, did not feature in the life of a bohemian because such social, and therefore external, constraints were thought to inhibit the internal creativity of the artist. Sexual libertinism was also associated with the early twentieth century avant-garde. The true bohemian engaged in numerous, casual sexual relationships. As Maurice Vlaminck (1876-1958) stated (and which was later echoed by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Amadeo Modigliani (1884-1920), to name but two), the avant-garde artist required this virility, this potency, to work; he said: 'I try to paint with... my loins'.²³ The demonstrable virility of the artist gave the art its vitality; *his* sexual prowess was the source of *his* artistic creativity. This potent, even promiscuous, sexuality was the prerogative of men; women's sexuality was necessarily

defined in opposition to it and passive, procreative sexuality is obviously at odds with the bohemian ideal. The concept of the 'normal' woman, sexually, reinforced domestic values along with gendered social divisions and restricted the scope of a woman's perceived creativity. In the strictest psychoanalytic terms, because of her sexual maturity, an adult woman was procreative rather than creative.²⁴

The unstable place of women artists within this bohemian ideal is nowhere more clearly elucidated than in Nina Hamnett's (1889-) autobiography, *The Laughing Torso*.²⁵ In this book, the artist described the Paris community of avant-garde artists which existed before the First World War forced so many into involuntary emigration. Included among these were Picasso, Modigliani, Henri Gaudier-Breszka (1891-1915); indeed, most of the better-remembered names of early twentieth-century art movements. The book is fascinating, however, not for the rather obvious name-dropping but in the way that the artist unwittingly revealed her own role within the group. At every opportunity, Hamnett linked herself with the more famous artists and their wild parties and behaviour. She declared herself a bohemian throughout the text in her unconventional activities (to which she paid more attention than her artworks). In spite of her almost embarrassingly pointed descriptions, it is clear that the male artists rarely took any notice of her art and primarily used her as a model. Her own book attests to the fact that she was not a member of the bohemian set by

virtue of shared artistic interests, but because she was thought to be an amusing woman with a nice body who went naked (by request) at almost every soiree. It was not her fault that she simply could not be the bohemian ideal; the extremes of the stereotype are not applicable to the lives and behaviour of women in the period. Bohemianism represented an intelligible counterpoint to bourgeois life as expressed in the public arena. The bohemian artists were the shadow of the conventional male populace; the corresponding reversals for women make no sense. Women artists faced a dilemma in the period. Any overt refusal to participate in family life was brave and risky. The only role in which a middle-class woman could be certain of her respectability was that of wife and mother, yet this was the antithesis of the masculine construct, 'bohemian genius'.

In art, alternative notions of the artist's role arose from women's professional practice in the field. Käthe Kollwitz, for example, achieved a high level of critical recognition by the public and the institutions of art in the period but never adopted the 'bohemian' lifestyle. Rather, she drew upon her experience as a mother to represent love, pain and suffering in her politicized work, thus combining the private, domestic sphere with the public, political sphere in a distinctly emotive way. Kollwitz's success as an artist influenced many young women artists in the Weimar Republic, including Jürgens and Overbeck. Additionally, the aesthetic within which Jürgens and Overbeck worked during the 1920s and 1930s

helped them to construct a framework for their social behaviour as artists. The 'sachlich' artist was not a bohemian in the mould of many of the Parisian avant-garde. Instead, German artists who adhered to the aesthetic tended to view themselves as a modified proletariat; they perceived their art as a product in a way analogous to the products made by any factory worker. Their art was meant to be consumed by the masses, which were also its subject. The political implications of this attitude are discussed at length in Chapter Four, but here, the lifestyle choices it conditioned are interesting as they provided one particular alternative to the bohemian stereotype (dominant among the avant-garde) which women artists could exploit successfully.

There were, obviously, contradictions in the theory of artists as the proletariat. They were not alienated from their products in the way that Marx characterized the real proletarian producer; they were rather more like craftsmen from an earlier, less urban, period.²⁶ Further, artists were constantly in a position which required them to privilege their products over purely functional ones, lest they find their work without social justification. Unless there are cultural values which justify artistic production, art is a useless ornament. Hence, 'sachlich' artists had to stress the importance of their product as relevant to society rather than as some form of elitist pleasure or upper-class propaganda. The Hanoverians often concerned themselves with these issues in their sparse writings, and their writings were developed through their

lives. From the time the artists met as students at the Kunstgewerbeschule, they self-consciously attempted to shed their bourgeois behaviour and to live with and as the working-class. They maintained studios in working-class districts and frequented the same cafes, bars and fairs to which the workers in Hanover went. The lifestyle change was intended to insure the authenticity of their art and also its relevance.

For Jürgens and Overbeck, the removal of bourgeois standards of feminine behaviour permitted them more freedom in the public realm of work. Working-class women usually had outside jobs when they were young and unmarried and often worked after marriage too. There was not the social stigma attached to women's labour amongst members of this class that there was in the middle-class. Thus, the adoption of a different class by 'sachlich' artists worked to the advantage of Jürgens and Overbeck in other ways. The women knew that they were subverting convention, but it gave them freedom to pursue professional art careers - Overbeck, for example, was aware of the fact that she lived in an area of Dortmund of which her parents disapproved. The freedom to pursue their professional goals drove both of the artists away from their inherited social class. Still, as Georg Reinhardt said, 'Der Entschluß, als freie Künstlerin zu arbeiten, mag für eine 21jährige Frau im Jahre 1919 eine äußerst mutige Tat gewesen sein.'²⁷ By so choosing, the artists could not have ignored the gender issues; it was a socially and economically unusual role for women in Weimar

as well as a position within the art world rarely held by women. Financially, both artists experienced gender-related difficulties during the 1920s and 1930s which threatened their pursuit of the *freie Malerin* ideal, but did not deter them from their choice. In terms of lived identity, they both had to negotiate a place between the bohemian and the domestic roles most commonly associated with artists and women, respectively, during the period. In this, the aesthetic within which they worked helped the artists to find a comfortable working identity which accommodated both their gender and their occupation.

Aesthetic Sphere: 'Woman' and 'Artist' in Representation

Context

Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck expressed their identities as artists in both an aesthetic and a social context and, in both, the concept of the 'artist' and the 'woman' had to coincide. An 'aesthetic context' refers to all of the artistic precedent and contemporary art debate as a field within which Jürgens and Overbeck produced meanings in their art. The concept of the artist, unlike other areas addressed in this dissertation, particularly affects one site in art, namely, the genre of self-portraiture. Here, the theoretical evolution of the concept was the primary source of the genre's definition and development. Self-portraiture is linked to current ideas about artists as well as their own attempts, at any given historical moment, to alter those ideas. The

works are expressive statements about the varying significance of the artist concept within society. By the time of the Weimar Republic, the genre had acquired a host of particular meanings as well as a formal language with which to express these. The meanings were based upon masculine-normative constructs and the iconographies bear witness to the high level of gender exclusivity in the representation of the 'artist'. Self-portraits by women artists are usually of interest for this very reason; they cannot be anything but subversive, as they must undermine the dominant representation of the artist with some form which adequately combines their gender and the artist concept. This can certainly be achieved, but requires more than the mere assimilation of traditional self-portrait forms. For Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck, self-portraiture created a context in which they explored their own notions of themselves as artists.

Self-Portraiture: The Genre and Its Implications in the Weimar Republic

During the Weimar Republic, there was much interest in self-portraiture. Important exhibitions took the genre as a theme, such as the 1930 show in the Karlsruher Kunsthalle and the 1931 show of the Berliner Sezession. A number of publications about self-portraiture also stem from the period, some of which remain standard sources about the genre even today. For example, Ernst Benkhard published *Das Selbstbildnis vom 15. bis zum Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* in 1927, Fritz Ried followed in 1931 with *Das*

Selbstbildnis and, in 1936, Ludwig Goldscheider produced *Fünfhundert Selbstporträts von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*. Leo Bruhns published a text in 1936 which specifically dealt with the self-portraiture of German artists entitled, *Deutsche Künstler in Selbstdarstellung*.²⁸ The interest in the genre was characterized by an interest in the nature of the artists' creative self, which, it was thought, was revealed in more or less obvious ways by his or her self-representation. It was not merely to the reproduction of the likeness of the artist that Bruhns referred when he spoke of 'der schaffende Mann'... 'seine Augen und durch diese hindurch in die schöpferische Seele zu sehen'.²⁹ Ried's work was premised upon a more objective, historical examination of the genre, but suggested much the same idea. Though he acknowledged the changing nature of the theme in different historical periods, Ried began the work with a telling passage. In the introductory section, 'Selbstbildnis', the author wrote:

Das Ich? Wir sind so ungewohnt, das Ich außerhalb unser selbst zu denken, daß, je länger wir uns in die Augen sehen, dieses Wesen uns immer fremder erscheint. ... Wie der Maler das Ich-Du im Spiegel sah und im Selbstbildnis festhielt, bis zu welchen Tiefen der Selbsterforschung er hinabstieg und mit welchem Urteil über sich er den Pinsel aus der Hand legte, soll jetzt eine Folge von Selbstbildnissen³⁰ aus sechs Jahrhunderten vor Augen führen.

The notion of genius, as discussed before, is the idea behind such interpretations of self-portraiture. This idea had currency in modernism generally, not only in Germany. Thus, the self-portraiture of modern artists,

despite national and stylistic variations, had much in common. A number of particular themes developed in response to the need to assert an artist concept which privileged an outsider position in society and innate perception over social status. Irit Rogoff discussed this necessity in the case of German artists in the essay 'The anxious artist - ideological mobilisations of the self in German Modernism'. Rogoff stressed the importance (and possible difficulties) faced by artists simultaneously eschewing social forms and emphasizing their 'cultural authority':

...cultural authority is not necessarily determined by the direct subjugation or the domination of the other, as in the case of authoritarian mastery, but rather by the attainment of privileged insights and the aura of uniqueness supposedly conferred on the male artist by the creative process. This form of cultural authority can therefore encompass cultural personas which we would rarely associate with any form of civil authority - such as that of the 'mad genius', the 'transgressive bohemian' and the 'marginal' outcast.

During the first decades of the twentieth century in Germany, artists used a number of techniques in their quest to produce such images of the self. One of the most frequently invoked modes was the representation of the artist with a nude female model. In the painting of 1924 by Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait with Muse* [figure 73], the symbolic resonances of this iconography are made explicit; the nude female body is the source of inspiration for the virile male artist. The sexuality of these images is also to the fore in this work, where we know that the model was Hilde Stein and that her artist boyfriend attended the

sessions in which Dix painted her in order to ensure that these remained platonic.³² Carol Duncan, in her oft-cited essay 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting' explored the tendency of male artists in this period to stake a claim to bohemianism through the represented dominance over sexually available female nudes.³³ The cultural authority of these avant-garde artists was expressed by their heterosexual prowess. In a similar vein, as a variation on the theme, male artists of the period often represented themselves in cafes and brothels. Looking again to Dix as an example, one can cite the self-portrait *To Beauty* of 1922 [figure 74]. In this work, the artist is shown as the powerful outsider, placed inside a site which represented the antithesis of respectable, bourgeois life.

Women artists in Germany lived in the same artistic climate as male artists, but experienced it differently. Iconographically, though, they had to tread a precarious path in order to produce intelligible self-portraits. Just as the lifestyle of the bohemian was inaccessible in many respects to women, so representations of the artist as such, with the attendant features of the cafe, brothel and sexually available nude female model, excluded women artists. These representations play to masculine-normative concepts of the artist; they are gender-specific in their symbolism. In the self-portraiture of women artists in the period, therefore, these symbols are excluded; particularly the use of the female nude. To represent a nude woman

redoubled the difficulties faced by women artists in attempting to make their image the subject, rather than the object, of their self-portraits. Women artists had to approach the self-portrait differently if they were to make sense of it. There was always the risk of the artist herself being confused with a model or 'muse'. In her article 'Das Selbstporträt als Selbstschutz', Erika Billeter made the case that women artists of the period often produced self-portraits as a show of strength against the prevailing negative opinions about women artists.³⁴ The works were meant to reassert their role as artists both publicly and in aid of their own self-confidence.

Billeter's article, therefore, posits one aspect of the use of the genre by women artists. Women artists were undoubtedly reacting to this sense of opposition in their self-portraits, as well as trying to produce positive representations of themselves as artists. The numerous self-portraits produced by women in the period attest to the fact that positive representations were available to them and that they frequently made successful forays into the genre. Some of their techniques became standard. For example, many women artists represented themselves close-up and without added details. The unremitting scrutiny of the artist's face characterises these works and the self-portraits of Käthe Kollwitz exemplify this type of image; for one example, see her *Self-Portrait* of 1921 [figure 75]. This sort of representation, in conjunction with the numerous representations of women

artists as young, 'androgynous', modern women (such as *Self-Portrait with an Apple Core* from 1930/31 [figure 76] by Kate Diehn-Bitt) or swaggering, 'masculine' figures (see the *Self-Portrait* of 1929 [figure 77] by Eva Schulze-Knabe (1906-1976)) suggest that too 'feminine' a representation was indeed a danger for women artists in the period. Conventionally flattering images of women artists could have been interpreted as vain or have connoted intellectual vapidness in the artist. Thus women artists in the Weimar Republic made use of the genre through skillful manipulations of its conventions and meanings.

The 'Artist Concept' in the Works of Jürgens and Overbeck

In the self-portraiture of Jürgens and Overbeck the resolution of the 'woman' and 'artist' conflict finds a physical site. It is in these works that the women meaningfully combined their life experiences as women artists with their aesthetic aims. When they represented themselves, they confronted the 'artist concept' directly and gave it personal meaning. There was no way that either artist could do this without also confronting gender issues. Both of the artists found viable methods in their painting to express themselves and their relationship to their profession, yet these methods were not the same. Jürgens and Overbeck had different careers and correspondingly different relationships to the profession. Jürgens achieved earlier and greater public

success than Overbeck and was always more directly associated with the other members of the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group. Overbeck, by contrast, had long periods of living away from the group and eventually chose to remain in Cappenberg, away from her former circle. Interestingly, their self-portraits illuminate both the public and private ways in which women artists in the Weimar Republic could define themselves in representation. Grethe Jürgens used her works to determine her public face while Gerta Overbeck also produced self-portrait sketches, not necessarily meant for public view. This section will consider each of the artists' self-portraits separately as two specific means by which they achieved the same goal: to unify the frequently disparate terms 'woman' and 'artist'.

The Self-Portraits of Gerta Overbeck

Three self-portraits exist by Gerta Overbeck and they all come from the years during which she was associated with the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group. The earliest is a small pencil drawing from 1925 entitled *Reclining* [Liegende] (16.2 x 20.5 cm) [figure 37]. The second work, entitled *Self-Portrait with Cigarette* [figure 38], was produced in 1934 and is a pencil sketch of the artist of middling size (54cm x 46cm). The last known self-portrait by Overbeck is a larger oil painting from 1936, showing the artist pregnant before her easel (*Self-Portrait at an Easel*, 70.5 x 58 cm [figure 39]). The works all remained in the artist's possession until her death. Each of the

works in some way referred to the artist's profession and the first and last works, by dealing with nudes and pregnancy respectively, quite openly addressed gender issues inherent in the representations of women. The scale and media of the two earlier works tend to rule out the possibility of their public intention and the 1925 date of *Reclining*, further isolates it from the other two works. This first self-representation is unlike the others as its theme is the parody of the classic nude subject. The two later works represented Overbeck working as a contemporary artist, and are thus discussed separately from *Reclining*.

In 1925, Overbeck was working in Dortmund as a drawing mistress and visiting Hanover when she could. The other artists of her circle, such as Ernst Thoms, Erich Wegner and Grethe Jürgens had remained in Hanover after leaving the Kunstgewerbeschule, and were just beginning to practise in the sober style which they connected to the idea of 'sachlich' art. Thus, at the time of Overbeck's *Reclining*, none of the artists had established their mature aesthetic aims but were involved in experimentation. During this period, Overbeck's oeuvre shows the influence of Fauvism, Expressionism and Constructivism, with which she would have been familiar through the exhibitions at the Kestner-Gesellschaft. However, like the other young Hanoverian artists of her circle, she was beginning to produce works in the realistic style which would become the group's dominant stylistic affinity. This jumble of styles and precedents

makes the appearance of *Reclining* slightly less unexpected than it would be a few years later. The work stands outside Overbeck's oeuvre in terms of her mature, 'sachlich' work both by its style and theme. However, as an experiment and parody of the art of the past, it fits well. Overbeck, in this ironic statement, challenged and undermined the masculine standards of representations of women in art; in many other works, despite differences in style and subject-matter, she did the same.

The drawing shows Overbeck, nude to the waist, reclining on a drapery-laden sofa in her studio. The studio is defined in the middle-ground by such objects as Overbeck's own portrait of Ernst Thoms, some tables and art paraphernalia scattered around. The distant background is only seen through the window, but as Hildegard Reinhardt has said, the view is over 'eine hügelige deutsche Mittelsgebirglandschaft'.³⁵ The three parts of the picture are, therefore, disharmonious; the landscape suits neither the nude nor the studio and vice versa. There is a distinct undercurrent of irony running through the image which manifests itself in just this sort of discontinuity and parodies art precedents while refusing to allow the work to be legible in either a timeless or timely manner. Were the picture a realistic representation of the artist in her studio, the pastoral landscape would not have been invoked, nor would she be shown as a reclining nude. If those two elements had been primary, the ordinary aspects of the 'real' studio would have been avoided. The tenuous linear quality and small

size of the work further substantiate the claim that the work was not meant to rival the classic genres on their terms.

Certainly the most significant single aspect of this drawing is the foregrounded nude study of the artist herself. In her oeuvre, including sketches, Overbeck rarely produced female or male nude studies. Thus, the image is unusual in its context and more so when seen as a self-portrait. Overbeck is hardly recognizable as a contemporary painter in the work; indeed, she is drawn as the courtesan. Lines on her face indicate heavy make-up and she is shown wearing a decorative head-piece. The pose is akin to many classic odalisques (such as the contemporary works of Henri Matisse), with her arms above and cradling her head. Again, the artist did not merely repeat a type unconsciously or bow to precedent in this work, but ironically subverted the image. Overbeck confronted the issue of the female nude and altered its conventions to create an unsettling representation of a woman artist. Here, Overbeck did not make the assumption that female figures lend themselves, naturally, to nude studies. The artist is represented uncomfortably as the model. Her 'real' face had to be painted, her 'natural' movements constricted and her clothes removed. The work contains a superb comment on conventions and enough irony to carry it off, but it is not a 'sachlich', or timely, work on the theme of the contemporary woman artist. The other two self-portraits which Overbeck produced in the 1930s take this theme as their main motive.

In 1934, when Overbeck drew her *Self-Portrait with Cigarette*, she had been living in Hanover as a 'freie Malerin' for two years. She had been included in exhibitions with the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group by 1931, when she took part in her first exhibition at the Hannover Kunstverein, but was still the last of the major participants in the group to have been shown.³⁶ Her years away in Dortmund during the twenties had partially isolated her from her friends and she can be seen to have put less emphasis on her contacts than Jürgens. Still, in this period, Overbeck was practicing professionally and within the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic and her two self-portraits bear the mark of her monumental realist style. Both of these later self-portraits are intelligible in the larger context of her 'sachlich' works and each of them relates to the concept of the artist without the irony of the work from 1925.

Self-Portrait with Cigarette falls directly into the self-portrait mode employed by Kollwitz and other women artists of the day in their self-portraits, as discussed before. It was especially common to find women photographers using these techniques, such as Marianne Breslauer (1909-lives Zurich) in her *Self-Portrait* of 1929 [figure 79]. These women represented themselves with minimal background detail and 'props' to distract attention from their faces. Rarely do the artists show themselves full-length; the concentration in these works is definitely on the artist's countenance. The artists do

not smile or look coy. Neither do they wear elaborate clothes or make-up in any particular attempt to 'prettify' the representation. Overbeck showed herself with a pencil and a cigarette, both of which were popular in this style of representation, as was the pose of holding one's head in one's hands. All of the iconographic elements in these self-portraits conspired to remove any trace of flippancy from the representation of a contemporary woman and replace it with a suitable level of seriousness. This must have posed special difficulties for women photographers when the medium was so closely allied with fashion and advertisement and it is interesting to note that Overbeck used such deliberately stark iconographic means in her drawn representation.

The medium and the style in which the work is made also act to make the work be taken in earnest, unlike the self-portrait of 1925. The *Self-Portrait with Cigarette* is much larger (compare 16.2cm x 20.5cm with 54cm x 46cm) and drawn in a topographically realistic manner. The figure is foregrounded and monumental, forming a solid, pyramidal shape through the position of the arms and head. The structure of the composition and the medium are akin to the tradition of the 'Old Master' sketch with detailed pencil technique and monumental figural style. Overbeck would have been aware of the association of this type of sketch with artistic precedents through her years in art school and also that the final destination of sketches was not the exhibition hall, but the artist's own studio. As a pencil drawing, the work stands in the realm of personal

art; the Hanoverians did not show sketches and watercolours as they did oil paintings in these years. There is no definite evidence to suggest that Overbeck knew the *Self-Portrait* of Max Slevogt (1868-1932) from 1921 [figure 78], though an exhibition of his works took place in Hanover in March 1932, but the similarities between Overbeck's self-portrait sketch and Slevogt's etching are striking. If Overbeck did not use the work as a model, its existence further suggests that her composition had contemporary currency among well-established male artists.

Overbeck's work represents the artist as neither the bohemian ideal nor a defiant genius type, but a determined practitioner of art. The artist is not the object of the work so much as the subject, with her straightforward gaze. Her pencil links the work to the occupational portraits [Berufsporträt] which were popular at the time and which the 1936 self-portrait is, but is used here more subtly than in most of these works. The presence of the cigarette requires mention as women's smoking could be seen as 'willful' and thus the smoker was asserting herself pointedly at the expense of feminine ideals. In addition to the refusal to represent herself as a 'pretty' woman, Overbeck showed herself to be 'unladylike'. When Grethe Jürgens painted her self-portrait of 1944, she too had a cigarette in her hand and was criticized by the Nazis for being unlike the ideal German woman.³⁷ The work thus exemplifies a struggling young woman artist; serious and self-consciously 'un-feminine'.

In her *Self-Portrait with Cigarette*, Overbeck first represented herself as an artist in a work. She avoided the possible difficulties facing a woman representing herself by adopting the simplest iconography and style. The work did not assign her to any particular aesthetic or movement, nor did it give any public information about her life. *Self-Portrait with Cigarette* was drawn as a personal affirmation of the artist's earnest involvement with her profession, as challenging as it was. Two years later, Overbeck produced a large oil painting entitled *Self-Portrait at an Easel*. Being in oils and adhering closely to the style of her mature Neue Sachlichkeit years, the work is the only self-portrait by the artist which was likely to have had a public viewing in mind. It dealt with the artist concept and the gender issues with which the first two works were concerned, but elaborated these. Chronologically, the work was produced just before Overbeck entered semi-retirement in Cappenberg with the birth of her daughter and thus, may be interpreted as a final self-conscious attempt to define herself as an independent professional artist before the intervention of motherhood and domesticity. There exist no other known self-portraits by Overbeck and she altered many of her artistic goals after the Second World War, so such an interpretation also has much circumstantial evidence to support it.

Self-Portrait at an Easel of 1936, represents the artist in the strictest manner of an occupational

portrait: she is actually in the act of painting. The work is in the sober, 'sachlich' style and the artist's own face conforms to the standard with its emotionless expression. In these details, the work is akin to self-portraits by other realist painters of the period, like Lotte Laserstein (1898-) (*Self-Portrait*, 1929 [figure 80]). It was a 'safe' way for a woman artist to represent herself as there could be no mistaking her for a model/muse and the very style lent itself to the seriousness of the figure. Further, the work pictured Overbeck in Mannheim (seen through the window) which was actually her home for the few months during which she painted the work. The striking fact of the work, however, is that Overbeck confounded all of these safety measures by representing herself heavily pregnant. The only obvious precedent for the pregnant self-portrait iconography would be the work by Paula Modersohn-Becker of 1906, *Self-Portrait of the Artist on Her Sixth Wedding Day* [figure 81], though this work represented the artist pregnant when in actuality she was not. In effect, two contrasting images of the woman artist were combined by Overbeck in the last self-portrait and the resonances of this must be examined and understood.

In the self-portrait by Modersohn-Becker, pregnancy is shown to be a natural fact of female existence; a paradigmatic statement about being an actual woman and being 'woman', in an archetypal way. The naive style and the way in which the figure is portrayed semi-nude in a timeless swathe of drapery, both serve to stress the

symbolic quality of the work. The relationship of the figure to her profession is not explicit and there is little in the work to even make the figure individual, rather than stereotypical. It thus combines (possibly confuses) the notions of 'creativity' and 'procreativity' in the case of the woman artist. Overbeck's use of the pregnancy motif was not done in this spirit. The representation is utterly contemporary, factual (she was pregnant at the time, living in Mannheim and painting) and realistic in style. There is no way to confuse this woman artist with either a 'woman' or 'artist' type. Thus, the representation challenged contemporary ideology which reduced women to their biological functions and women artists to their procreativity. The work dealt with a fact; women artists sometimes practised art professionally and had children without those two events becoming archetypal or symbolic.

Gerta Overbeck produced three self-portraits and on each occasion, the artist amalgamated her gender with her chosen profession in a meaningful way. Overbeck treated the troublesome areas of female nude and pregnancy representations without losing sight of the elusive artist concept. Grethe Jürgens also had to confront gender definition in her self-portraiture, though her relationship to the genre and profession was different than that of Overbeck. These differences meant that Jürgens' self-portraits were not simply copies of Overbeck's, but employed other strategies to link the 'woman' and 'artist' categories.

The Self-Portraits of Grethe Jürgens

Seven self-portraits are known in Jürgens' oeuvre; all of these are oil paintings and all were produced between the years of 1926 and 1944. The works come from the following years: 1926 [figure 2]; 1927 (two self-portraits) [figure 3 and figure 4]; 1928 [figure 5]; 1932 (*Self-Portrait in a Hat*) [figure 6]; 1938 [figure 7]; 1944 (sometimes called *Self-Portrait with Ruins*) [figure 8]. The dates of the first and last self-portraits indicate a definite relationship between the specific events of the artist's life and her self-portraiture which is reinforced when the works are examined more fully in context. There are no self-portraits which stem from before the period of Jürgens' involvement with the Neue Sachlichkeit movement and none after the war years during which time the artist became disillusioned with her earlier artistic aims. Being a part of the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group gave Jürgens the impetus to produce self-representations and these were intelligible in terms of her involvement with the aesthetic and the corresponding artistic circle and city. It can be argued that without the external support of the movement, the artist was no longer compelled to paint in the same style or produce any more self-portraits.

The earliest three self-portraits, from 1926 and 1927, can be viewed together as Jürgens' initial quest to find

an adequate form of self-representation and the 1928 self-portrait as the achievement of this goal. Two of the 1926 and 1927 self-portraits are exceptionally similar in style, size and iconography and arguably precede the second self-portrait from 1927 which was painted after the artist had cut her hair as it was shown in the work from 1928. In the two earlier works, the artist represented her head and shoulders only against a blank background. Her hair was long (although tied up) in the style she had had since girlhood. Both works are 'painterly' with the thick paint revealing the marks of the brush, unusual in Jürgens' oeuvre at the time. The third work, as has been suggested, showed the artist with her more modern hairstyle, but the figure was, like the earlier two works, shown against a blank background and in a painterly style. The 'sachlich' aesthetic Jürgens had adopted by 1926 did not allow for such painterly distortion nor were the subjects generally composed without a range of realistic background details. The distinction between these three paintings and the rest of the artist's oeuvre signals her discomfort with the representation of herself as a subject; the fact that four self-portraits were produced in three years also suggests that the artist was dissatisfied with her results and experimenting with the genre. The very differences between the 1926 and 1927 paintings and her well-known *Self-Portrait* of 1928 [figure 5] (after the completion of which, Jürgens did not paint another self-portrait until 1932) indicate the goal of the artist at this time in her self representations.

Unlike the works from the two preceding years, the 1928 self-portrait typifies the 'sachlich' aesthetic with its non-painterly style, well-structured composition and wealth of background detail. It is an oil painting on wood, in contrast to the media of the earlier works which were painted on cardboard. By painting a self-portrait like this, Jürgens associated herself with a very particular artistic realm. Only in the final self-portrait of 1944, would the artist even slightly deviate from this sober style in her self-representations; indeed, their meaning was inextricably linked to her self-conscious affiliation with the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group. 1928 was the year in which the artist achieved her first public successes; she took part in the exhibition *Die Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover* held in December at the Kunstverein in Nordhausen. In the same year, Jürgens found herself able, with the help of some state assistance, to leave her job at the Hackethal company and to practise art full-time. Thus, the self-portrait portrayed a 'freie Malerin' who was achieving her goals with and through the 'sachlich' aesthetic.

The painting has two primary areas of visual interest: the figure of the artist and the crisply delineated surroundings. In realist paintings from the Weimar Republic, the objects which accompany figures are meant to inform, rather than purely amuse, the spectator. While they may be highly personal symbols which defy simplistic 'translations', they are not random. In Jürgens'

self-portrait, there are tulips, a form which appeared frequently in the artist's oeuvre later, particularly when she represented her own studio.³⁸ Compositionally, the tulips act in the *Self-Portrait* as echoes of the shape of the artist's own face. The other background details are more 'factual'. The room shown was the attic studio in which Jürgens lived at the time, and the skylight allows a glimpse over the rooftops of the 'Liststadt', the working-class quarter of Hanover in which all of the artists associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit group lived during the period. Views of the studio and from the windows of the studio were both important features of Jürgens' work and ones she shared with the other Hanoverian realists.³⁹ Thus, the objects Jürgens chose to accompany her self-portrait linked her to her profession, city and artistic circle and, as will be demonstrated, were developed in later self-portraits.

The spur which Jürgens received from her successes with the Hanover group obviously coloured her public identity (the work was shown in group exhibitions in which the artist took part) as revealed in the 1928 self-portrait. The work less ably confronted the gender questions in the representation of the artist's own figure. The figure of Jürgens is unlike any of her other self-portraits, earlier or later, in its emphasis upon the androgynous quality of the artist. Her hairstyle, which was known as a *Herrenschnitt* or man's cut, obviously contributed to the fact that the artist did not look stereotypically feminine, but she exaggerated the 'boyishness' of her own

features too; the cheeks, eyes, shoulders and neck in this work are unlike the more delicate representations in other self-portraits. Even in her *Self-Portrait* from 1927 [figure 4] (in which she sported the Herrenschnitt) her face and clothes immediately identified her gender. With the exaggerated blurring of gender distinctions, the 1928 work begs the gender question. Hairstyles and clothes make public statements and Jürgens was obviously identifying herself with the most 'modern' young women of the day, but equally, adopting a masculine role with respect to her profession. In so doing, she avoided a number of the difficulties which faced women artists in their self-representations, but implied that women artists were assuming male roles in their public lives. This assumed masculinity is undermined by the brittle, almost fragile look of the work generally. If the artist considered this to be an adequate public statement of herself as a daring, independent, practising artist she also suggested here that those things were masculine characteristics which the woman artist wore uneasily. As we have seen, other women artists also produced androgynous self-portraits which problematized the role of gender in artistic practice. In the three self-portraits Jürgens painted after this one, she developed the link to the Hanoverian landscape and 'sachlich' style but, significantly, altered her own portrait image away from androgyny and towards gender and time specificity. Possibly, as time wore on, Jürgens, the 'freie Malerin', could afford to incorporate her more feminine visage without sacrificing the representation of her own

independence.

The next self-portrait Jürgens produced was the *Self-Portrait in a Hat* from 1932. Again, the artist portrayed herself full frontally and brought her figure so close to the front of the picture plane that her head and part of her shoulders completely dominate the canvas. The small surrounding areas of background detail situate the artist in a Hanoverian townscape, but controlled perspective has been eradicated by the monumentality of the figure and it is impossible to determine whether or not the artist's figure is rationally linked to these details. The size of the buildings and the angle from which we view them suggest that the artist is positioned on a high balcony or rooftop and her clothing further indicates that she is outside. More probably, the background was meant to locate the figure theoretically rather than physically in the Liststadt section of the city of Hanover. This sober representation of the artist is in perfect accord with her developed sensibilities as a 'sachlich' painter and, as described below, the Hanover group was never more united than at the time this self-portrait was painted.

During 1931 and 1932, the Hanoverian artists who associated themselves with the Neue Sachlichkeit (including Gerta Overbeck who had returned to Hanover in 1931 as a 'freie Malerin') published a journal entitled *Der Wachsbogen* [The Waxpaper, named after the cheapest paper they could find and on which it was printed]. The

'political' implications of the articles published by the group in *Der Wachsbogen* will be considered in chapter 4; it is sufficient here to recognize the significance for the group to have produced such a periodical at all. From their inception, the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group were a loose affiliation of friends who happened to have similar opinions about art. They did not begin with any form of manifesto which defined their aims. In the middle years of the 1920s, the artists involved with the movement were struggling to earn enough money to survive, experimenting with styles and certainly not actively theorizing. Hence, the publication of *Der Wachsbogen* was untenable until the early 1930s when the group was sufficiently developed to have a relatively unified artistic voice.⁴⁰

If Jürgens' *Self-Portrait* from 1928 was painted at a critical time in her career and, inevitably, for the fortunes of the group, then *Self-Portrait in a Hat* was produced in an equally crucial, if very different, moment. The group had consolidated and identified themselves publicly with a body of artistic theory and the members were enjoying a modicum of security. The self-portrait connected the artist with her city, aesthetic and self-confidence. Jürgens would never again represent herself as such a monumental or stylish figure. The hat and fur coat in which she was portrayed are both items which signify relative prosperity and determine the artist's gender at once. While the work did not represent Jürgens in the act of painting, it indicated her status

and thus, success. In the final two self-portraits the artist produced, from 1938 and 1944, the actual figure of Jürgens displayed the tension and eventual collapse of her earlier, stable situation in the aesthetic which coloured the *Self-Portrait in a Hat*.

Jürgens' *Self-Portrait* from 1938 [figure 7] prefigured the turmoil of the artist's last self-portrait from 1944 in the face of the figure. As opposed to the earlier self-portraits in which all vestiges of expression were removed from the facial features of the figure, the work from 1938 showed the artist with a wrinkled brow and downward-turning mouth. The figure is still full frontal (thus, static) and the background pastoral, making the overall message not so consciously distressing as in the final work, but the shift from the forthright self-confidence apparent in the two earlier 'sachlich' portraits had come. As usual, Jürgens produced her self-portrait at a time of great significance in her artistic and social life; Hitler had assumed complete power in Germany, the war was beginning and in Hanover, Goebbels' policies for purifying German art had finally taken effect. Provincial towns and, thus, regional groups of artists, felt the imposition of Nazi artistic policies less quickly than larger centres such as Berlin and Munich. Only in late 1937 was the Kestner-Gesellschaft forced to close and the Provinzialmuseum asked to surrender its 'degenerate' works of art. One of Jürgens' own paintings (*The Labour Exchange*, 1929 [figure 9]) was returned to her by a sympathetic museum official in this

purge. For all the young Hanoverians, the years 1937 and 1938 began a caesura in their lives and artistic practice with the suppression of the avant-garde galleries and publishing houses in Hanover, the male artists' entries into the war and a disillusionment with their proletarian aesthetic which had not prevailed against the rise of fascism.

The final self-portrait by Jürgens demonstrates the complex interdependence which existed between Jürgens' identity as an artist, the 'sachlich' aesthetic and the Weimar Republic and early years of the Third Reich. Just as in her earliest self-portraits Jürgens achieved a meaningful representation of herself, and thus the adequate union of the 'woman' and 'artist' categories, through her association with the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group, the dissolution of the movement in the violence of the war destroyed the artist's certain public identity. In the *Self-Portrait* of 1944 [figure 8] the smouldering ruins of bombed Hanover symbolically accent the destruction of the artist's sensibilities; her own figure is a moving representation of a deeply distressed person attempting to stoically overcome disaster. The theme of bomb-blasted Hanover was recurrent in the artist's oeuvre during the early 1940s, and after that period, Jürgens suffered a deep depression. Subsequently, she completely changed her artistic style towards abstraction and explained in an interview of 1981 that the 'sachlich' aesthetic had lost its meaning for her after the war. Jürgens said: 'Diese Zeit war sehr schwierig für mich,

denn ich habe nicht mehr sachlich malen wollen. ...
Außerdem hatte ich immer Angst, die Neue Sachlichkeit
könne mit der Nazi-Kunst verwechselt werden.'⁴¹ With the
disintegration of her aesthetic idealism and the community
of artists in Hanover (Overbeck went to Cappenberg in 1938
and Mertens was killed in the war), Jürgens lost the
context for her self-portraiture.

Conclusions

Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck lived their lives as
women artists. Since the two categories, 'woman' and
'artist', were constructed as opponents within both social
and aesthetic contexts, the artists had to make positive
efforts to combine their profession and gender
successfully. The typically masculine-normative artistic
concepts applied to their lives and art did not adequately
describe their experience nor did they provide totally
useful models from which Jürgens and Overbeck could form
the meanings in their works. Socially, the avant-garde
ideal of the artist was virile, anti-bourgeois and male.
The expectations for women of the period were in complete
contrast to this; female 'Bohemians' committed social
suicide and still never attained the elusive goal of
genius-status among their artistic contemporaries. To
form an identity as an artist, a woman had to be both
brave and original. Jürgens and Overbeck were both. They
combined artistic integrity with their social status in
such a way as to make the two concepts harmonize; they
lived successfully within their artistic circle and the

wider social realm without compromising their careers or independence.

In an artistic context, the role of the artist was attached firmly to the genre of self-portraiture and the assumption of an artist's male gender effectively removed many of the classic styles and iconographies from women artists' reach. Hence, the self-portraits by women artists in the early twentieth century are carefully constructed visual realms which side-step much traditional iconography and institute new artist types, sensible in the lives of women artists. Both Jürgens and Overbeck produced self-portraits during their years of involvement with the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group which stressed positive aspects of the relationship between their gender and their profession. While Gerta Overbeck painted most of her self-portraits in a private vein, Grethe Jürgens exploited the genre's unique ability to publicly display the artist's artistic affiliations. The women experienced in their personal lives the concept of the 'artist' in different ways and the public/private dichotomy in their self-portraits demonstrates this clearly. The artists' relationships with the Hanover group obviously inspired the self-portraits they produced in those years by providing a useful framework within which to combine their own personal experiences of gender and the artist concept. The very close links between the works and the artists' aesthetic aims and careers meant that the end of their involvement with the 'sachlich' concept spelt the end of their self-portraiture.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Griselda Pollock's essay was recently reprinted in her book *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.18-49 (p.21).
2. Luise Hagen, 'Lady Artists in Germany' *International Studio* 4 (1898), pp.91-99 (p.92); Hans Hildebrandt, *Die Frau als Künstlerin* (Berlin: Rudolf Mosse, 1928), p.5.
3. To see these three terms in use in the specific instances of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck: *Hannover Catalogue*, p.89 (freie Malerin); *Neue Sachlichkeit- Zwölf Maler Zwischen den Kriegen* [exhibition catalogue] (Cologne: Galerie von Abercron, 1975), p.42 (freischaffende Malerin); *Bonn Catalogue*, p.103 (freischaffende Künstlerin).
4. Only in the instance of *Schmied 1969* have I come across the phrase used consistently as a title for male artists: see for example *Schmied 1969*, p.294. Otto Nagel is here called 'freier Künstler'.
5. *Edith Dettmann. Zum 85.Geburtstag 1983, Malerei* [exhibition catalogue] (Stralsund: Kulturhistorisches Museum, 1983), see 'Biographie'; for Ella Bergmann-Michel, *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre* [exhibition catalogue] (Berlin, 1977), p. B/7; for Elisabeth Voigt, *Zeichnungen und Aquarelle von Künstlern der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* [Bestandskatalog Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig] (Leipzig, no date available), p.104.
6. For Dietrich see: Roland März and Friedegund Weidemann, eds., *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin National-Galerie Gemälde des 20.Jahrhunderts* [Bestandskatalog] (Berlin, 1976), p.20; for Oskar Nerlinger: *Alice Lex-Nerlinger, Oskar Nerlinger* [exhibition catalogue] (Berlin, 1975), p.13.
7. *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*, op.cit., p.B/9.
8. *Hannover Catalogue*, pp. 65, 89.
9. See the use of the term by Ulrika Evers, in *Deutsche Künstlerinnen des 20.Jahrhunderts: Malerei - Bildhauerei - Tapisserie* (Hamburg, 1983), Jürgens, p.159; Overbeck, p.258.
10. For Jürgens, see *Bonn Catalogue*, p.103; for Overbeck, see *Hannover Catalogue*, p.89.

11. For a fuller discussion of this see: Eckhard Neumann, *Künstlermythen: eine Psycho-historische Studie über Kreativität*, (New York, 1986), particularly section II, 'Irrationalismus und Künstlermythologien im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert'.
12. For a discussion of the amateur artistic studies pursued by bourgeois women in nineteenth century Germany, see: Ulrike Grammbitter, "Die 'Malweiber' oder: Wer küßt den Künstler, wenn die Muse sich selbst küßt?" in *Kunst in Karlsruhe, 1900-1950* [exhibition catalogue] (Karlsruhe: Verlag C.F. Müller, 1981), pp.27-28.
13. Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950* [exhibition catalogue] (Los Angeles Museum of Art, 1976), p.273.
14. The differences between the centres with academies and those with 'arts and crafts' schools were brought out by Brigitte Lohkamp in 'Zu einer Kunstgeografie der zwanziger Jahre in Deutschland' in *Die Zwanziger Jahre im Porträt* [exhibition catalogue] (Bonn: Rheinisches Landesmuseum, 1976), pp.111-35. The specific section devoted to Hanover is on page 120.
15. 'No, there were many, but most only stayed a short time.' in: H. and G. Reinhardt, 'Grethe Jürgens, Künstlerin der neuen Sachlichkeit' *Artis* 2 (February 1981), pp.12-13 (p.13).
16. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond 'Kinder Küche Kirche': Weimar Women in Politics and Work" in *Biology and Destiny*, pp.33-65 (p.56).
17. 'We were so interested in art that we could not even consider doing anything else.' 'Grethe Jürgens, Künstlerin der Neuen Sachlichkeit', op.cit. p.13.
18. In an interview of 1974, Gerta Overbeck said: '...[wir] arbeiteten als Bühnenarbeiter, als Kunstgewerbler, Reklamezeichner, für einen Stundenlohn von 120 Reichsmark, der gerade ausreichte für Brot und Margarine...' [we worked as set painters, applied artists, advertising artists, for an hourly rate of 120 Reichsmark which was just enough for bread and margarine...] in 'Es Liegt in der Luft mit der Sachlichkeit', *Hannover Catalogue*, pp.89-90 (p.89).
19. See *60 Jahre GEDOK Hannover: 1927-1987* [festschrift] (Hanover, 1987).
20. For a fuller discussion of the relationship between domesticity and the artists, see chapter 2.
21. Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984). All of the essays have the polarisation of the 'avant-garde' and the 'official' art at their core, but see, particularly, the preface which

outlines the general arena of debate.

22. Edmund B. Feldman, *The Artist* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1982), p.121.

23. Maurice Vlaminck quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p.144.

24. For a lengthy discussion of just this area of Freudian thought see Stevi Jackson, 'Constructing Female Sexuality' in Mary Evans, ed., *The Woman Question: Readings on the Subordination of Women* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1982), p.157-8.

25. Nina Hamnett, *The Laughing Torso* (New York: Richard Long and Richard R. Smith, 1932).

26. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, trans. from the third German edition by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling and edited by Frederick Engels, vol.1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), pp.336-39.

27. "The conscious decision to become a 'freie Künstlerin' was very brave for a 21 year old woman in 1919." G. Reinhardt in *Bonn Catalogue*, p.35.

28. Ernst Benckhard, *Das Selbstbildnis vom 15. bis zum Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1927); Fritz Ried, *Das Selbstbildnis* (Berlin, 1931); Ludwig Goldscheider, *Fünfhundert Selbstporträts von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Vienna, 1936); Leo Bruhns, *Deutsche Künstler in Selbstdarstellung* (Königstein in Taunus und Leipzig, 1936).

29. '...the creative man...his eyes through which we see the creative soul within...' Bruhns, op.cit., pp. 6, 10.

30. 'The I? We are so unaccustomed to think of the I as outside of ourselves that the more we look ourselves in the eye, the stranger this being appears. ... How painters saw the 'I-You' in the mirror and recorded in self-portraits, into what depths of introspection they descended and with what judgement of themselves they put fown their brush, will now be presented to us through a series of self-portraits from six centuries.' Ried, op. cit., pp. 7,9.

31. In Irit Rogoff, ed., *The Divided Heritage*, (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 116-47 (p.118).

32. *Otto Dix: 1891-1969* [exhibition catalogue] (London: Tate Gallery, 1992), p.126.

33. Carol Duncan in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp.293-314.

34. The essay is contained in Erika Billeter ed., *Das Selbstporträt im Zeitalter der Photographie: Maler und Photographer im Dialog mit Sich Selbst* [exhibition catalogue] (Bern: Benteli, 1985), pp. 46-58.
35. 'An undulating, middle-German landscape', *Bonn Catalogue*, p.12.
36. The first exhibition in which Overbeck took part was the annual *Herbstausstellung hannoverscher Künstler* (11 October- 22 November 1931). Details of both Jürgens' and Overbeck's inclusion in exhibitions can be found in *Bonn Catalogue*, p.106-9. The male members of the Hanover group (Mertens, Thoms and Wegner) were all shown in the famous *Gruppe der Unabhängigen* show in Amsterdam in 1929, if not before, thus preceding Overbeck.
37. This was told to me by a surviving relative of the artist in interview. Obviously, the use of oral sources so long after the fact is recognized as imperfect. Further indication of the nature of smoking in the period was described by Stephen Lamb in a paper given at a colloquium on women and the visual arts in Germany held 11-12 June 1992 at Leicester University entitled: "'Das ist, was soll ich machen, meine Natur/Ich kann Liebe halt nur, und sonst gar nichts': Images of Women in Some Late Weimar Films" (publication forthcoming).
38. See chapter two for notes about the vase containing red tulips in Jürgens' book about her studio *Das Atelier* (Berlin: Verlag der Heimbücherei John Jahr, 1943).
39. See, for an example of the typically Hanoverian rooftops, *Houses in Linden* (1927) [figure 82] by Hans Mertens and for a representation of one of the artists' attic studios, *Attic* (1926) [figure 83] by Ernst Thoms.
40. Notwithstanding the example of the Italian Futurists who had a manifesto before any definitive artworks, it was common during the period to have developed some theories before publishing your thoughts.
41. "This time was very hard for me, and I no longer wanted to paint in a 'sachlich' way. ... I was always afraid that the Neue Sachlichkeit could be confused with Nazi art." from 'Grethe Jürgens, Künstlerin der neuen Sachlichkeit' op.cit. p.12.

CHAPTER TWO

DOMESTICITY

Introduction

It has been argued in the preceding chapter that the primary nexus of identity for both Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck was in the intersection of the concepts of 'woman' and 'artist'.¹ Both women defined themselves principally in terms of their professional position as artists. Despite the 'facts' of their professional careers, as women in the Weimar Republic, Jürgens and Overbeck were affected by ideas which linked domesticity with women. Often this link was (and is) an assumed one; simply, it is implied in prevailing discourses of the Weimar Republic that women had 'domestic' roles to fulfil. Gertrud Bäumer wrote:

...daß die Frau heute mehr als zu anderen Zeiten der geistige Mittelpunkt der Familie sein muß, daß die eigentlichen Aufgaben der Familie in bezug auf die allgemeine Kultur unseres Volkes von ihr geleistet werden müssen und ohne sie unerfüllt bleiben...²

Women's traditional roles within the boundaries of 'domesticity' reinforced gender divisions of space, work and interpersonal relationships in the period. Although more women were entering the public sector in terms of careers during these years, most women still attained

their social status and position through their roles as housewives and mothers.³ Their social contacts were mediated through a domestic screen. 'Domestic', defined as 'of the home, the household or the family', suggests two very different realms: one of space and one of social interaction.⁴ Each of these contributes to limiting and defining women in gender terms through the places they go and their immediate circle of social contacts. In their most limiting form, notions of 'domesticity' confine women to the home, areas to do with childcare and house-keeping activities, and occasionally, to 'acceptable' public places, accompanied by a man. Their primary social circle is the family.⁵ Obviously, these narrow boundaries are but a stereotypical representation of the nature of the domestic sphere, but the issues raised for professional women and artists by these boundaries are clear. Gender-defined limitations of access in the Weimar Republic meant that women artists lived and worked within spheres different from their male counterparts. It also meant that the very nature of these domestic boundaries were at the heart of the practice of women whose lives challenged these definitions of 'femininity'.

Jürgens and Overbeck were just such women. As independent professional women, they defied the traditional boundaries of 'femininity' and as artists working within the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, they negotiated the borders between public and private space. They had wider contacts through their professional lives than they would have had as housewives and mothers, but nevertheless

experienced the Weimar Republic as women. Their gender still separated them from many male artists through domestic imperatives and their works indicate these differences. The relationship between domesticity and the works of Jürgens and Overbeck follows the dual nature of the concept itself. The nature of space in the works of both artists refers to their experience of 'the spaces of femininity' and representations of family and friends, to a domesticated pattern of social intercourse.⁶ The works of both artists deal with the 'home' and the places in which women in the Weimar Republic lived and worked while challenging the idea of the studio as a man's realm. Significantly, their works omit or distance many areas of masculine space (such as brothels, mines and other sites of heavy industry). Further, the artists represented the 'family' (their own or others') in ways which problematized the 'naturalness' of the woman's role as its centre. The artists led unconventional lives with respect to the domestic sphere and yet were affected by the gendered social space it defined. Their works both document aspects of this realm and challenge it by examining its boundaries.

Domesticity and the Definition of Women's Space

The Studio as Home

The home is the sacred ground of domesticity; it represents the seat of the family, as well as a source of physical and emotional security. However, this notion of the home as a 'safe-haven' where women tend the hearth away from the pressures of work and society, is derived from the experience of men from the period of industrialism onwards. From this time, the places of labour and the home separated; in the main, men went out to work and women remained at home.⁷ With the exception of some women from the highest social classes, however, this fact did not mean that women ceased to work. Domestic labour was certainly taxing, despite the fact that it was generally unpaid and performed within the bounds of the home. Thus, this notion of a home and labour divide is gender-specific and experienced almost exclusively by men.⁸

This gendered idea of work space influenced the representations of studios in the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit. Male artists rarely conceived of their studios as 'homes' in any traditional way; their studios were clearly working spaces. Indeed, married male artists could live quite bourgeois lives in terms of their domestic arrangements by working 'outside' in their studios while their wives tended the home fires. There is little sense of any of the trappings of home and hearth

finding their way into this separate sphere.⁹ Any number of examples of the self-portraits of male artists in their studios from the period could be used to demonstrate how separate was the usual conception of the studio from that of the home and family, not least the *Self-Portrait* [figure 84] by Heinrich Ehmsen (1886-1964) from 1929/30. Ehmsen represented himself, brushes and palette in hand, as an active, controlling figure. Through the use of a mirror image, Ehmsen reveals his subject (who would otherwise be beyond the frame) to be a nude woman with her arms behind her head and her legs spread toward the artist. With his dramatic pose, unbuttoned shirt, spartan surroundings and nude model, there can be little doubt that this studio space bears no resemblance to a family home.

There were occasional instances, throughout the period, when male artists included representations of their family members in their studios. As Irit Rogoff has suggested with specific reference to the work of Lovis Corinth (1858-1925), these representations of 'the family' were not used to indicate that the artist's studio was a domestic space.¹⁰ The introduction of the family was such that it reinforced the distance between the masculine artist/creator and his wife, the model/mother. This distance is enhanced in the case of the works by Corinth because his wife, Charlotte Berend-Corinth (1880-1967), was also a practising artist, yet never represented as such in his works. The representations of studios in the work of Conrad Felixmüller (1897-1977) were more subtle

integrations of domestic and studio space, but still acted to differentiate between the roles of artist and caretaker of the home. However, it is not being suggested here that the erosion of sharp boundaries between public and private space during the Weimar Republic only affected women. Clearly, this had repercussions for men at the time and it is to be expected that indications of these changing gender relationships will be found in the works of male artists too.

In the works of women artists in the Weimar Republic, and Jürgens and Overbeck specifically, a very different sort of studio is visible. For example, in Grethe Jürgens' *Self-Portrait* of 1928 [figure 5], the background details correspond with descriptions of her attic home and studio of the same year. Besides being a representation of a home/studio which did exist (indeed, the other artists of Jürgens' Hanover circle had similar attic studios), Jürgens added the detail of the languid tulips. These have some significance when compared with the small book of poems and prints which Jürgens published in 1943, *Das Atelier*.¹¹ This work was a highly personal view of the artist's life based on a series of mini-vignettes and representations of every facet of Jürgens' studio/home (even the toilet). Any vestige of separation between the domestic space and the artistic one is destroyed; with this are dissolved any distinctions between Jürgens' work as an artist and her daily life. The volume produces a domesticated studio setting, utterly unlike that of Ehmsen, for example. In relation to the work of 1928, it

is significant to note that one of the main domestic touches in Jürgens' studio (as shown no less than four times in the book) are vases containing tulips. Jürgens' studio in the 1928 self-portrait also contrasts with the image of an attic painted by Ernst Thoms in 1926. Thoms too had his studio in this space, but in *The Attic* [figure 83], the setting is anything but domestic.

Gerta Overbeck, along with some other women realists in the Weimar Republic such as Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn and Kate Diehn-Bitt, integrated notions of domesticity with the representations of their working environments even more thoroughly by introducing children. Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn's (1898-) work of 1922, *Self-Portrait with Little Son [Söhnchen] in Studio* [figure 85] shows the artist, babe in arms, in her studio. In her *Self-Portrait at an Easel* of 1936 [figure 39], Overbeck represented herself pregnant and at work. The home, as the heart of the family, thus merges with the studio, the site of the artist's production. As discussed in Chapter One, this image problematizes the supposed 'naturalness' of women's roles as mothers by insisting on the representation of a social context. It also makes less distinct the boundaries between the work and the domestic sphere or the public and private nature of women's space in the period. Utilizing the similar motif of the artist-mother and her child (though not within the walls of a studio) Kate Diehn-Bitt enacted another 'domestication' of the portrait of the artist in her work *Self-Portrait with Son* (c.1930) [figure 86]. Again, the

idea of a clear distinction between artistic work and home was not the easy prerogative of most women artists, who were involved, simultaneously, with both.

In the works of Grethe Jürgens, the studio has yet another function which affirms its centrality in the life of the artist: it is taken as the site of the artist's vision. For example, Jürgens painted *A View from the Studio Window* [figure 10] in 1930, and used this view as the background in the work from 1931, *The Flower Seller* [figure 11]. Other women artists, such as Aenne Biermann (1898-1933) in her photograph *A View from My Studio Window* (before 1930) [figure 87], also used this technique. It is not necessary that an artist painting such a view be a woman, but it is a strong image for women artists as it simultaneously invokes interior and exterior space and examines their perimeters. These perimeters meet at the studio/home for the woman artist. The domesticated studio provides a matrix from which it is possible to venture into more public spaces visually, if not bodily.

It is telling to examine briefly the representations made by Jürgens and Overbeck of two of their artist colleagues from Hanover in light of the ideas discussed above. In 1926, Overbeck painted the *Portrait of Ernst Thoms* [figure 40] and in 1929, Jürgens painted the *Portrait of Erich Wegner* [figure 12]. Neither of these figures of male artists is situated within a studio boundary; Thoms is seen against the distinctive roof-top architectural features of Hanover and Wegner, at a harbour

with a huge ship docked in the background. Wegner's setting recalls his years spent at sea before he came to Hanover to study at the Kunstgewerbeschule.¹² Though one would not expect to find representations of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group akin to the eroticized self-portrait of Heinrich Ehmsen, it is significant that both of these male artists are pictured out-of-doors, in a wider social context.

Representations of the studio in the works of Jürgens and Overbeck blurred the distinctions between the public and private spaces of 'femininity', thereby challenging assumptions about women's roles in the period. They also served to call into question the 'masculinity' of the space of the studio so prevalent in the representations of Weimar's realists. This myth of masculine space was premised upon the gendered division of labour which, during the course of the Weimar Republic, was beginning to break down. Women did not experience the arena of their work as distinct from the home and thus, in the art produced by women in the period, it is natural to find a 'domestication' of the studio.¹³ However, the situations of women artists in the period were not always the same, particularly with regard to their relationship to the domestic sphere. Many married and had children, but some consciously chose to eschew this traditional route which, they felt, would limit their professional art practice.¹⁴ Indeed, Jürgens and Overbeck differed in this way; Jürgens' home was always her Hanover studio, while Overbeck more often formed her studio in the midst of more

traditional domestic circumstances. Thus, the idea of the 'home', so important to the notion of domesticity, was more connected to the studio space for Jürgens and, as shall be demonstrated later in this chapter, to the sites of heavy industry in the Ruhr for Overbeck.

Women and Public Space in the Weimar Republic

The spaces of femininity are not confined to the home, but extend into the public sphere. They nonetheless retain their domestic emphasis, with women's typical public activity taking place within the constructs of domestic duties to home and family. Obviously, spaces relating to children such as playgrounds and schools are within these definitions, but, as children will be discussed in the second half of this chapter more specifically, those areas can be left to one side here. Other gendered spaces existed for women during the Weimar Republic, including shops, hairdresser's, and, more controversially, the places outside the home in which women worked. In the art of Jürgens and Overbeck, these areas all make an appearance, as does the careful construction of local space and the juxtaposition of interiors and exteriors. The notion of local space is not simply linked to the regionalism of the Neue Sachlichkeit, but also to the way in which the artists actually experienced the landscape as pedestrians and bike-riders. This view of the landscape differs from that experienced in a car or train, for example. Just as there is no one landscape in transportation terms, so gendered orientation

colours the perception of space. This is what Jos Boys described when she wrote "... women tend to lead a more 'local' existence, not just because of domestic roles and responsibilities but also because of an inequality between the genders in access to resources."¹⁵ Women's relationship to the local environment is frequently more limited than that of men.

Almost every work by Jürgens and Overbeck in which there is an outdoor setting demonstrates the particular relationship that each artist had with her surroundings. The scenes are local and, often, domestic, despite being urban. The places are populated, rather than lonely, and are represented in daylight. All of these features emphasize the gender of the artists in that they are views had typically by women. They represent the parts of the city available to women in the sense that brothel districts or the interiors of steel mills are not. Of course, these areas of the city do not exclude men in the same way that certain (often dangerous) areas exclude women, and thus, their inclusion in the art of women artists does not prove gender. In conjunction with a number of other features of space, both shown and omitted in the art, however, a whole sense of the gendered access to places in Weimar emerges. Any number of male artists associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* produced works similar to Jürgens' *Houses in Wilhelmshaven* (1931) [figure 13] and Overbeck's *View of Schapen* (undated) [figure 41], with their distinct regionalism, but they were not in the same relationship with those landscapes as women were.

Domestic labour is represented, or indicated in representations by Jürgens and Overbeck, in both interior and exterior space. In the more traditional sense, *A Woman Sewing* [figure 14] from 1928 by Jürgens shows a woman engrossed by her chore in a comfortable, if claustrophobic, domestic interior. Sometimes, domestic duties were performed outside, in the backyards of the urban areas of Hanover. Jürgens' work of 1929, *Building Site* [figure 15], shows one of these places foregrounded with a tree and some chickens against the backdrop of the city. Overbeck's *Backyard* of 1931 [figure 42], also represents this space with chickens, barrels and laundry on the line. These small patches of domestic space within an urban environment not only existed, but were very important to the life of the community. These places were the foundation of the neighbourhood, where the working-classes formed their social and political identities.¹⁶

Also, it was common to find women shopping for the household, as in Overbeck's *Market-Stall* of 1932 [figure 43] or in those very female environments, beauty parlours, as in Overbeck's *Mother with Child at the Hairdressers* (1924) [figure 44]. These were areas gendered female in fact and ideology; women were found in these places and it was deemed appropriate for them to be there. Jürgens and Overbeck also were interested in the situation of women at work in the Weimar Republic which was certainly a factual occurrence, but not as ideologically untainted. There was

much controversy surrounding women's labour in the Weimar Republic, though it remained on the increase throughout the period. This fact, in terms of its wider socio-political significance, is discussed at length in later chapters.¹⁷ In the case of feminine space, it suffices to say that Jürgens and Overbeck defied, in their representations of women at work, many assumptions about the sexual division of labour and the traditional roles of women. In their own lives as professional, independent artists, they challenged these assumptions too.

The work by Jürgens of 1932, *The Country Road across Dangastermoor* [figure 16], is a case in point of the subversive potential of the representations of gendered space. During the course of the Weimar Republic, agriculture became the most recessive aspect of the German economy while, simultaneously, the single largest employer of women.¹⁸ Generally during the period, women were filtered to the lower end of the economic scale in their employment, rather than enjoying vast benefits from the opportunities of work outside the home. The painting by Jürgens, with its representations of the working landscape, attests to women's hard manual labour on the land. This work is not an idyllic landscape view but a labour environment; just as the home and women's work were inseparable, the land and women's labour were linked.¹⁹ The representation of a woman selling fruit at a market stall by Overbeck, entitled *Pigeons and Grapes* (1931) [figure 45], also undermines traditional gender-defined notions of space. In this work, the woman is not shopping

for her family, but earning her living outside the home. Being behind the counter rather than in front of it alters her orientation in social terms as well as spatial ones. *The Rug-Beaters* (1926) [figure 46] by Overbeck further confounds the traditional limits of domestic space by representing the paid domestic labour practised by many working-class women outside their own homes. These women perform a very traditional domestic chore, but in the public realm. The public nature is emphasized by the outside setting, the grandeur of the house, the uniforms on the servants and the view over the village.

The works of Jürgens and Overbeck 'document', with their variety, the many public spaces in Weimar which were accessible to women in the period. Some of these places were unproblematic as they tallied with the traditional ideas of women's domestic space. Others, by contrast, suggested the rapid changes taking place throughout the period with respect to the roles, and therefore spaces, assigned to women. Women had begun to encroach upon the public sphere and the places which had so long been 'masculine' territory. Seemingly solid boundaries, built from the gendered divisions of labour and discourses about the domestic sphere, began to fragment in the Weimar Republic. The dissolving borders of distinct gendered space are inherent in the works by Jürgens and Overbeck thus far examined. The studio was one site of challenge for the women personally, the public sphere was another, more generally. Both artists examined these boundaries in their subjects and pictorial methods during their

association with the Neue Sachlichkeit and left their own record of the Weimar Republic's spaces of femininity.

Examining the Borders of Women's Space

If the male artist's studio was perceived and represented as a 'masculine' space, areas of heavy industry were equally so. Gerta Overbeck lived from 1922 until 1931 with a mining family in the Ruhr. As a mining community, the area of North Dortmund in which the artist lived would have been understood in highly gender-specific terms. Mining and construction were the industries during the period with the lowest percentage of women employees. Thus, the outside work environment and the spaces associated with domesticity (particularly childcare) are divided quite rigidly by gender in mining areas. The same can be said of the gender divide in all areas of heavy industry during the period, as those were least affected by women's increasing entry into the labour market.²⁰ However, accelerating urbanization of the landscape as a whole during the course of the Weimar Republic meant that both men and women were subject to the effects of industry- social, visual and otherwise. These aspects of the public sphere, despite being distant from the work of women, were part of their daily experience. In this way, the traditionally defined, gendered boundaries in Weimar were blurred by economic developments. Still, women's relationship to this industrial landscape was fundamentally different from that of men because of their qualified access to these spaces. It was a relationship

of interest, but not experience.

In this light, Gerta Overbeck's development of the theme of industrial landscape in her work becomes a study of the boundaries of gendered space. It is hardly coincidental that Overbeck began to take the industrial landscape as a theme during the time when she lived in the Ruhrgebiet. What is particularly significant is the way in which she treated the subject, which was simultaneously her home and an alien environment. In Overbeck's industrial landscapes, the domestic aspects are privileged over the unwelcoming scenes of machinery and smoke. For example, in her works *Industrial Landscape* [figure 47] from 1927 and *North Dortmund* (c.1928) [figure 48], the foregrounds are reserved for the representation of houses, gardens and trees. These sections of the works contrast sharply with the backgrounds which are dominated by mountains, smoking chimneys and the pit-head. In the later work, the contrast is made stronger by the exceptional detail of the home, with its paving stones and kitchen garden. Both works are dominated by the spectre of industry, but the arrangement of space in the pictures invites the spectator to engage with the domestic areas while merely noting the industrial ones. The 'domestication' of heavy industry is even more striking in Overbeck's work *The White House on the Slag-heap* (undated) [figure 49]. In this work, the industrial landscape is suggested by anonymous chimneys and pipes in the background, but attention is drawn to the house in the foreground by the uncompromising introduction of a vast slag-heap in the middle-distance. This

slag-heap obscures the view of the industrial setting and makes the house even more central, but, simultaneously, implies that the weight of the industrial sphere is bearing down upon the domestic sphere.

This simple pattern of 'background-industry' and 'foreground-domesticity' was not Overbeck's only approach to the subject. In the *Building Site* of 1929 [figure 50], the work area is in the front of the picture. However, this area is surrounded by the domestic sphere; tidy homes arise in the back, each with sets of perfect white curtains in the windows. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Overbeck clearly experienced the realms of heavy industry as both compelling and alien; the pictorial space 'domesticated' this different sphere. In her own article 'Industriebilder', published in *Der Wachsbogen* in 1932, her ambiguous relationship to industrial landscapes is revealed.²¹ She refers to these places in the worst possible terms:

Die Empfindung, die man als lebendes Wesen zwischen dieser verstümmelten Natur hat, ist die einer grausamen, kulturlosen Lieblosigkeit. ... Der Abfall wird auf Schlackenbergen angehäuft, die sich un-natürlich plötzlich aus der Gegend erheben, wie primitive Berge auf Kinderzeichnungen. ... Die Luft ist eine dicke Masse von Qualm, Staub und Eisen-teilchen. Sie lagert über Feldern und Häusern und gibt nach kurzer Zeit allen Dingen eine gleichmäßige graue Färbung.²²

Still, Overbeck was interested in the way in which artists could transform this subject, without valourizing it; how to respond in a 'sachlich' manner to the theme. She discussed the work of the artist Marianne Nieten-Overbeck which used 'feminine feeling' [weiblichen Empfinden] in

its treatment and chastized artists who only looked at industry for lighting effects.

In another part of the article 'Industriebilder'

Overbeck wrote:

Der Mensch ist zwischen Eisenbahndämmen, Zechengebäuden, Abflußkanälen und Schlackenbergen eingekellt. Die Wege, die er einschlägt, um ins Freie zu gelangen, hören meist nach kurzer Zeit wieder auf, entweder vor einer Zechenmauer oder vor einem Schild: Durchgang verboten. Sie sind nicht zum Spazierengehen gedacht. Der Mensch ist nur ein ganz unbedeutendes Etwas, auf das keine Rücksicht genommen zu werden braucht.²³

Overbeck's suggestion that human beings do not belong in these places is highly significant in gender terms. The places of heavy industry in her works are usually either mining or construction sites. Both of those industries, as the statistics show, were nearly exclusive employers of men. Thus, these sites were not forbidding to all human beings as Overbeck suggests, but rather, were out of bounds to women. The artist's interest in the subject, combined with her harsh descriptions of it, indicates a simultaneous attraction and repulsion on her part. There is a sense in which Overbeck wishes to control this alien space in her works; that sense reveals the implicit threat of crossing gender-defined boundaries.

Always a feature of descriptions of the nature of gendered public places, is the inherent danger posed to women who stray outside their appropriate boundaries. The parameters of these public spaces are marked by

exclusivity and danger and Overbeck's industrial landscapes examine this. Naturally, then, there are aspects of this subject which appear ugly, dangerous or threatening. However, the inference of threat resides not in industry per se, but in masculine space. Women who transgress the boundaries of masculine space risk rape or murder. As Shirley Ardener said: 'The vulnerability to rape and other deprivations is a basic asymmetry (from which, perhaps, many others may spring or upon which others are built) which has a bearing on how women use space.'²⁴ These boundaries make themselves felt in the art of Jürgens and Overbeck more by omission than inclusion; the big city at night was, so to speak, no place for a lady. It was rarely the theme of the works of Jürgens, Overbeck or other women artists associated with realist art in the Weimar Republic. It was, however, often the place from which male artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit chose their subjects. The threats to women in this environment were more than tacit, even in the art; many rape and murder [Lustmord] scenes were produced by the male artist contemporaries of Jürgens and Overbeck. These works, such as Karl Hubbuch's (1891-1979) *Crime of Passion [Liebestod] in Jägerstraße* (1922) [figure 88], are akin to a warning to women who would be alone in the city at night. The films of the period also use the threat of physical violence as a punitive measure against those women who were crossing the boundaries of masculine space in the public sphere of the city. Thus, Lulu, the archetypal Neue Frau, is murdered by Jack the Ripper in *Pandora's Box* and the transgressive Maria from *Metropolis*

must be destroyed.²⁵ Even as the boundaries were being dissolved by the entrance of women into the public sphere, the borders were policed more definitively.

For Jürgens and Overbeck, these boundaries were understood, if implicitly. The subjects of their works are taken principally from 'safe' space; they are usually daylight activities and banal genre scenes, rather than representations of bars, brothels and nightlife. Merely invoking the night was a substantial symbolic statement about appropriate gender behaviour, as Franz Maria Jansen's (1885-1958) work *On the Street at Night* (c.1920) [figure 89] proves. When the scenes are in bars [Overbeck called these places *Spelunken*], they are crowded and unthreatening. This can be seen by comparing *Two Couples in a Bar* [figure 51] by Overbeck and *In the Heinrich II* [figure 17] by Jürgens with the work *In the Bar* (1926) [figure 90] by Wilhelm Ohm (1905-1965). Ohm's work signifies that the bar is a potentially dangerous place for women by representing a female figure dismembered in the foreground. By contrast, the bars in the representations by Jürgens and Overbeck correspond to the descriptions of their student days in Hanover:

Häufig besuchten wir die Fruchtweinschänke draußen vor der Stadt, einmal gingen wir zu Damenringkämpfen. ... In der Kreuzschanz, einer Verbrecherkneipe, in Spelunken, wo Straßenmädchen verkehrten, in kleinen Lokalen mit sentimentalen Kabarettvorführungen fanden wir das Milieu, welches uns den Stoff zu vielen Bildern und Zeichnungen lieferte. Man suchte den Kitsch, den es heute nicht mehr gibt...²⁶

These are the places to which the artists went with their

friends; in mixed groups there was not the perceived danger to the artists.

If certain scenes were less accessible to Jürgens and Overbeck because of their gendered relationship to space in Weimar, it does not mean that they could not and did not explore the nature of gender boundaries in their works. As 'new women', their daily lives challenged domestic norms for women in the period and they were part of that generation which rewrote women's relationship to the public sphere in the twentieth century. One of the facets of space problematized by women in the period was the interaction between interior and exterior space. The nature of domesticity implies a closer association of women with interior than exterior space; outside, they are prey to moral or physical harm.²⁷ This explains why the daily appearance of the 'new woman' outside on the streets was met with suspicion by Weimar society. Two portraits by Carlo Mense (1886-1965) of the Munich group of Neue Sachlichkeit painters demonstrates the association of women with interiors and men with exteriors particularly well. As discussed further in Chapter Four, the Munich group was the most conservative of all regions; thus their use of uncontroversial, gendered imagery is hardly surprising. Mense, in his *Portrait of the Painter Davringhausen* (1922) [figure 91], represented the artist as a fashionable public figure, on the street at night. By contrast, the *Portrait of a Young Woman (Gina Falkenberg)* [*Mädchenbildnis (Gina Falkenberg)*] [figure 92] posits a standard type for the representation of women

in this group: timeless dress and interior space.

Gerta Overbeck considered the balance between interior and exterior space in the lives of contemporary women in her works *Entrance* (1924) [figure 52] and *Servant Girl* (1929) [figure 53]. In *Entrance*, there is a tenuous relationship between the outdoor space implied as the viewer's and the indoor space of the woman at the door; the female figure is protected from the outside by the steep stairs, solid gate and only partially opened door. The invisible interior space is her space and the outside is approached cautiously. By contrast, the young woman portrayed in the *Servant Girl* is unabashedly out-of-doors. The glimpse of a window behind her, with its elaborate curtain, indicates her place of outside work rather than her own home. This is a representation of a young working woman who has made her appearance in the public sphere, despite doing the same sort of labour she would have done as a housewife. Her pose and dress, as well as her situation outside, contrast sharply with the image of the woman in Rudolf Schlichter's *Servant Girl* [figure 93] also of 1929, who wears a uniform and folds her hands deferentially while sitting inside her employers home. Overbeck's sitter is defined in terms which go beyond the domestic nature of her labour and into the realm of the public sector.

Jürgens also contrasted interior and exterior space in the representation of a young working woman in the Weimar Republic with her two versions of the *Flower Seller* (1930

and 1931) [figures 18 and 11]. The earlier work posed the woman in an interior, while the later painting represented the flower seller before an outdoor view of the Bahlsen gardens in Hanover. That contrast, combined with the contrast in size and media (the earlier work is a smaller one and in watercolour as opposed to oil paint), conspires to make the first picture more personal or private than the second version. When Jürgens produced the second work, she shifted the emphasis toward a representation of a young working woman, who existed within a set of public parameters. She is defined by her occupation and, with the gardens and greenhouses behind her, located in a specific economic hierarchy; she is the retailer of the flowers grown here. The contrasting spatial relationships within the works subtly change the whole meaning.

The same is true of the slight difference in the relationship of the figure to the window in the two works by Jürgens, *A Woman at a Window* (undated) [figure 19] and *The Sick Girl* (1926) [figure 1]. These works also confront the position of women in interior and exterior space with the subtle introduction of windows which problematize viewing in the works. The figure in the *Sick Girl* blankly gazes toward the window, through which we, as the viewers, are able to look. Clearly, as a sick woman, she would be confined to this interior, and the pictorial boundaries reiterate this. She is a passive figure, being looked at rather than looking, and the view into the exterior space through the window is controlled by the viewer. In complete contrast is the space of the female

figure in *A Woman at a Window*. The dress of the figure and the cup and curtains indicate that this is not a woman who must make a living outside the home, and she dominates the interior space in the work. However, she does more than that. She returns the gaze of the spectator which, pictorially, means that she controls exterior space as well. Despite the fact that we have an image of a woman whose principal social status would have been derived through her position in the house, as Rühle-Gerstel's book suggested, the representation challenges that limited view of the domestic women of the Weimar Republic.²⁸ The whole idea of stable, static boundaries here begins to collapse.

There is one last feature of the concept of public/private boundaries in the works of women artists which is so obvious that it may be overlooked, yet is quite significant. It is a commonplace to state that women artists, as professional women in the period, challenged traditional gender roles and broke with simplistic definitions of public and private space. However, the specific nature of their work as artists (as opposed to shop assistants or factory workers, for example) was tied intimately to the production of public images. As women associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Jürgens and Overbeck were concerned with the representation of their own experience of their times. This meant the production of artworks about the experience of women in the Weimar Republic which in itself was an unusual subject for public representation. Thus, they

were involved continually with negotiating between the areas of the personal and the political, or the public and the private. When Jürgens and Overbeck (and all the other women associated with realist tendencies in the period) publicly showed their works, they were examining gendered boundaries.

Domesticity and Women's Social Relationships

Just as notions of feminine space were derived from ideas about the home, women's roles within the family conditioned their social relationships. Domestic patterns of social interaction created public norms for women.²⁹ Women's primary social role as the centre of the family was paralleled by a set of social relationships, characterized by informal, personal interaction. Scholars interested in campaigns for women's rights in the early years of this century have been quick to point out the correspondence between women's domestic occupations as caretakers and raisers of children and their entry into the public sphere in such roles as social workers, nurses and schoolteachers.³⁰ More conservative commentators in the period stressed that these were extensions of women's natural familial roles; at the very least, they mirrored the norms of private sphere female behaviour.³¹ These domestic patterns of interaction created paradigms for women in the public sphere which were not overcome easily. There are, for example, many instances of women artists

from the first decades of the twentieth century who, within avant-garde groups of male artist contemporaries, fulfilled the role of domestic servants, bringing coffee and sandwiches without interrupting the men.³² Women's relationship to the formal realm of the public sphere was frequently mediated through men. Legally, male family members controlled the property of women and traditionally, the public expression of their opinions.³³ Family members, and children particularly, were the primary 'society' of women as defined by their domestic position.

Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck were not confined by the more stringent definitions of domesticity, but still could not help being affected by prevailing, gendered notions of social relationships. This period in Germany produced opportunities for women to venture further from their traditional roles (often within the domestic sphere) but practice frequently fell short of theory. The lives of Jürgens and Overbeck, like those of many modern young women in the Weimar Republic, played variations on the theme of the traditional family, but did not dispense with it altogether. Their relationships to their friends, family and children demonstrate a fusion of their own public roles and more general domestic expectations in the period. Interestingly, it is in the relationship of these artists to domesticity that the most significant differences between them become apparent. Here their lives were led most disparately; Jürgens never married, had children or returned to live with her family while

Overbeck's familial ties were always a key-note in her life. This is not meant to suggest that Jürgens was without close personal contacts (indeed her brother was her life-long living companion) or that Overbeck was not an independent woman. Both women led unconventional domestic lives, but the specific differences in their relationships to families and children are critical to an understanding of the sometimes distinct ways in which they responded to domesticity in their artworks.

Friends and Family in the Work of Jürgens and Overbeck

Both Jürgens and Overbeck had social circles typical of women in that they were small groups of personal associates with whom the artists had affective, informal relationships. They did not have large networks of business contacts (ie. those with whom one has purely formal contact) or even many official 'organizational' ties, such as memberships in political parties and art organizations. Overbeck joined the KPD (German Communist Party) for a short time and Jürgens was a long-term member of the GEDOK, but these were their only affiliations. Generally, their artworks were neither produced for a dealer nor a patron, but in the few instances in which patronage did occur, the patrons knew the artists personally. Relationships within the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group were also characterized by this informal, friendly nature. They were not an official artists' organization with members, meetings and manifestoes, but a group of close friends who shared

artistic interests. Relatives, friends and lovers of the artists, such as Hans Jürgens, Toni Overbeck and Gustav Schenk, became part of the larger circle and even contributed to *Der Wachsbogen*. The production of this journal, and the role of Jürgens and Overbeck in this, are again typical of the nature of their social contacts. The Hanoverian circle of friends wrote the articles (often assuming funny pseudonyms to make the list of contributors appear larger), Jürgens printed the journal in her studio and she and Overbeck distributed it by bicycle through Hanover.³⁴ Thus, Jürgens and Overbeck not only wrote articles, but acted as 'caretakers' of the proceedings.

The works of Jürgens and Overbeck attest to the significance of this circle in their lives. Jürgens produced seven named portraits of adults between the years 1922 and 1935, all of her Hanoverian circle. The one commissioned work of this period, entitled *Woman with Jewelry* (1935) is known to be a portrait only because Jürgens spoke of it later with displeasure.³⁵ From 1938 to 1942, the artist undertook four commissions for portraits of adults through personal friends. During the 1920s and 1930s, Overbeck produced just three named portraits of adults and these were also of members of the Hanoverian circle. Thus, in the period of their affiliation with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, both artists concentrated their portraits of adults upon this select group. Erich Wegner, Gerta Overbeck, Karl Eggert (a life-long friend of Jürgens and brother-in-law of Overbeck), Gustav Schenk and Hans Jürgens were Jürgens' sitters, while Overbeck painted Hans

Jürgens, Ernst Thoms and her sister Toni Overbeck (who married Eggert). Both of Jürgens' portraits of her brother Hans (from 1926 and 1929) were destroyed in the bombing of Hanover. Gustav Schenk was also painted twice by Jürgens (in 1931 and 1935), but only the earlier is extant.³⁶

Excepting the two earliest works, *The Musician (Hans Jürgens)* [figure 54] by Overbeck and *Man's Head with Pipe (Erich Wegner)* [figure 20] by Jürgens, both from 1922, the portraits all conform to the artists' mature 'sachlich' style. The *Portrait of Karl Eggert* (Jürgens, 1927) [figure 21] and the *Portrait of Toni Overbeck* (Overbeck, 1926) [figure 55] for example, show the sitters half-length, foregrounded against detailed cafe interiors. The figures are monumental, with sober expressions and the works are non-painterly. This pair of portraits are interesting when viewed together, as the sitters were, of course, a couple and their representations (in terms of pose and background) are similar. As was common in Neue Sachlichkeit portraiture, the backgrounds were not simply random; this couple were very popular with the group because of their sociability and they were considered very stylish. Hence, their fashionable clothing and the cafe setting were appropriate.

Both Jürgens and Overbeck produced portraits of their circle in Hanover, but the numerical dominance of these works in the oeuvre of Grethe Jürgens is singular among the Neue Sachlichkeit artists in the city. One of three

portraits by Overbeck is of her sister; in numerical terms, Overbeck's portraiture of named sitters generally is dominated by familial representations, most often the children in the family. Toni Overbeck was Gerta's younger sister. Gerta, as the eldest child in her family, and as a female, had helped to rear her younger siblings, whom she drew and painted.³⁷ Of a total of some fourteen named portraits produced throughout Overbeck's life (some lie outside the Neue Sachlichkeit period), only the portraits of Ernst Thoms and Hans Jürgens were not representations of her own relatives. By contrast, of Jürgens' family members, only her brother Hans and (outside the Neue Sachlichkeit period) her niece Heide make an appearance in her oeuvre. This is consistent with the facts of Jürgens' unconventional domestic life. Jürgens left her family home for Hanover in 1919, never married or had children but shared her studio with her brother and had a number of very close, long-standing, personal friends. She neither led a reclusive, nor traditionally domestic existence, but clearly created an alternative family through her circle. In this, Jürgens not only differed significantly from Overbeck, but also from the male artists of the group who rarely represented this circle. Only for Jürgens was the representation of friends such a key note in the artist's oeuvre. The production of so many such works demonstrates the gendered relationship of Jürgens to her social circle. As opposed to a role in more traditional family circumstances, Jürgens chose the more unusual path of becoming an artist; these contacts therefore became both a 'family' and the social context of her artistic life.

The Representation of Children

Women and children have long been thought a natural complement to each other; this derives not only from the fact that women bear children but also from assumptions about women's own nature.³⁸ Often women have been characterized as 'child-like', or closer to 'primitive', pre-civilized humanity. As irrational and passive rather than logical and active, it has been deemed natural for women to respond to children, who have yet to develop their social side.³⁹ These associations between women and children are crucial to the concept of domesticity and, traditionally, have limited the social sphere of women. Even today, women who choose not to have children are perceived to be unusual at best, and errant at worst. For centuries, women artists have also been linked to domesticity through media, genre and theme. They have practised more frequently within the bounds of the 'applied' arts such as textiles and ceramics, which parallel domestic crafts. In painting, their most prominent subjects have been domestic: still-life, flower-painting and, significantly, the representation of children.⁴⁰ Within this context, the representation of children in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* is particularly revealing about the role of women artists in the movement.

There exist many representations of children in the

realist art of the Weimar Republic by both male and female artists. A conservative representation of children exists in Carlo Mense's *Family Portrait* [figure 94], where a mother, two children and a dog present a suitably harmonious domestic scene. By contrast, the left-wing artist Otto Nagel (1894-1967) used the representation of children to make pointed social criticisms. In *Wedding Children* (1928) [figure 95], the reference to the particular working-class district of Berlin from which these children come, combined with their starved appearance, produces an image of class oppression. From Hanover, Erich Wegner's *Young Girl with Doll Carriage* (1924) [figure 96] presents yet another viewpoint. This is a matter-of-fact look at a child with a toy; the figure stares out of the canvas with that disconcerting lack of self-consciousness typical of children.

Although many male artists represented children in their works, they did not become associated critically with such representations in the way that women artists from the period did. The representation of children was seen to be but one aspect of their oeuvres and one to which there was not a single, unified response. By contrast, perceived maternal qualities in the art of many women artists coloured their reception and associated them principally with their representations of children. Tina Bauer-Pezellen and Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn are cases in point. Both of these women were best-known as painters of children despite producing works with many other themes, including, in the case of Haensgen-Dingkuhn, scenes of the

St. Pauli district of Hamburg.⁴¹ Women realists certainly did represent children in their art, but they did so in as many different ways as their male counterparts. Despite ostensible 'natural' associations between women and children, the works themselves undermine any notion of an essential feminine response to the theme. For example, Aenne Biermann's first photographs were of her children, but only because they were easily accessible models. Hanna Nagel, in her *Early Self-Portrait* (1930) [figure 97] used the images of children as symbols of a woman artist's entrapment by domestic duty, while Käthe Kollwitz used the theme of children in yet another way, in works such as *Germany's Children are Starving* (1924) [figure 98]. Here, these pathetic children act as a universal cipher for suffering and produce a powerful anti-war statement.

Given that Jürgens and Overbeck were women artists who worked within the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, it should be expected that they produced representations of children. Indeed, such representations form a part of each woman's oeuvre, and their works reiterate that a variety of responses were available to women who worked with this theme. In the child-portraits of Jürgens and Overbeck, the question of the relationship of the artist to the sitter emphasizes the gendered situation of the artists to this theme. There is a distinction between the artists in this area which relates to the facts of their biography but does not justify a crude explanation based upon determinist modes. Throughout the period, Grethe Jürgens' relationship to the children she painted tended to be professional, whereas

Gerta Overbeck's was personal. Of a total of fifteen commissioned portraits Jürgens undertook between the years 1929 and 1946, ten were of children. Only three other named portraits of children exist in the artist's oeuvre; the aforementioned paintings of her brother Hans and her niece Heide. Jürgens also produced a number of children's books, which fact reaffirms her largely professional relationship to the subject of children.⁴² By contrast, as stated before, the vast majority of Overbeck's portraiture consisted of representations of the children in her family. Both artists also occasionally represented unnamed children or mothers and children in their works, though this was far more usual in the oeuvre of Overbeck.

The discrepancy between the professional and personal links of the sitters with the artists is explained best by their lives; Jürgens had no children herself and did not assume responsibility for those in her family while Overbeck was concerned personally with the care of a number of children. This cannot be expanded, however, to create an argument of biology in which Overbeck, the mother, is 'naturally' drawn to these themes while Jürgens, the childless, can only relate to children in formal terms. This is best understood with reference to the works. Jürgens' *Child-Portrait [Kinderbild] of Gunther Assmann* [figure 22] from 1930 and Overbeck's *Child Portrait* [figure 56] from 1926, are both typical of the artists' 'sachlich' portraiture: monumental figures with sober expressions, non-painterly brushwork and an airless atmosphere. The fact that Jürgens had been commissioned

to paint this child and that Overbeck's sitter was her nephew does not serve to produce significantly different attitudes toward the subjects on the part of the artists. In fact, commissioned portraits by Jürgens such as *Child-Portrait of Etta Koch* (1935) [figure 23], are even more traditionally sweet than Overbeck's portrait of her nephew. The artists' access to these sitters was typical of gendered social relationships between adults and children in the period, rather than an essential feminine nature. Women artists frequently used the children in their families as readily available models. Jürgens, who was not in the position to do this, still found herself able to exploit gender assumptions and receive many commissions for children's portraits and books.

In common with other aspects of the domestic sphere, during the Weimar Republic, questions were raised about motherhood. Commentators frequently stressed that the mother-child relationship was endangered by the difficult social circumstances in the period.⁴³ In this light, the representations of children produced by Jürgens and Overbeck are significant; their emphasis was on the social, rather than eternal, nature of children and motherhood. For example, in *The Labour Exchange* [figure 9], Jürgens represented an unemployed mother standing in the dole queue with a perambulator. Martha Schrag (1870-1957), another woman realist, made a similar point about the socio-economic experience of motherhood in her work of 1927, *Home Worker* [figure 99], where the mother/child relationship is framed by the woman's

economic exploitation. Overbeck, too, concerned herself with the specific social experiences of children in works such as *Youth in front of Advertisements* (1923) [figure 57] and *Children with a Wagon* (1924) [figure 58]. These children live and play amidst the proletarian poverty of the early years of the republic. Like the figures of the children in Tina Bauer-Pezellen's work of 1933, *Children's Playground* [figure 100], the children represented by Overbeck are first and foremost social beings. There is no idealized childhood to be found in these images; their representations are produced with the cool detachment typical of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Conclusions

Domesticity, or the realm of the home, household and family, was intertwined with notions of gender during the Weimar Republic. Women were characterized in fact and ideology by their relationship to this concept. In theory, the domesticity of women referred them to the private sphere, typified by household and local space, as well as small circles of informal social contacts. In practice, however, this period saw the dissolution of stark boundaries between the public and the private sphere, particularly in the case of women. Their roles were changing and thus, these simple divisions between the public and the private were in flux.

In their art and lives, Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck challenged the assumptions which tied women to

the domestic sphere exclusively. They were professional women, led unconventional family lives and produced artworks which unremittingly examined the public life of the Weimar Republic. Still, feminine paradigms of space and society, based upon notions of domesticity, coloured the works of both artists. They explored the boundaries of women's space in the period through their representations of studios and women's work environments. The threats posed to women who transgressed their spatial borders were also implied in the works of Jürgens and Overbeck. Their relationship to their social circles reveal gender-based roles. Characteristically, the representations of children by the artists suggest the social aspects of gender definition and behaviour; their relationship to the domestic sphere was neither unconditional nor unquestioned.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. See Chapter One.

2. '... women today more than at any other time must be the spiritual centre of the family, the actual tasks of the family with reference to the culture of our people must be accomplished by her and, without her, remain unfulfilled...' Bäumer cited in Dr. Else Wex, *Staatsbürgerliche Arbeit deutscher Frauen 1865-1928* (Berlin: F.A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, G.m.b.H., 1929), p.58. Many other contemporary sources, not part of the women's movement per se, also associated women with the domestic sphere such as August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, translated from the 33rd German edition by Daniel de Leon (New York: New York Labor News Press, 1904); Emma Oekinghaus, *Die gesellschaftliche und rechtliche Stellung der deutschen Frau* (Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer, 1925); Dr. Alice Rühle-Gerstel, *Das Frauenproblem der Gegenwart: eine psychologische Bilanz* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1932). Bebel's text, it

should be noted, was probably the most popular socialist text of the early twentieth century in Germany, going through no less than fifty editions between 1883 and 1914.

3. Helen L. Boak, "Women in Weimar Germany: the 'Frauenfrage' and the Female Vote" in *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, eds. Richard Bessel and E.J. Feuchtwanger (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1981), pp.155-173 (p.166).

4. *The Random House Dictionary*, Jess Stein, editor in chief (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), p.260.

5. Oekinghaus, op.cit., actually structured her sections about the role of married women thus: 'Das Haus', 'Der Haushalt', 'Die Mutterschaft' [the home, the household, motherhood] thereby stressing these particular realms.

6. The phrase 'spaces of femininity' is taken from Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the spaces of femininity' in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.50-90.

7. Bebel, op.cit., pp.115-16.

8. Juliet Blair, 'Private Parts in Public Places: The Case of Actresses' in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. Shirley Ardener (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1981), pp.205-228 (p.212).

9. A similar situation in studio space can be found in Jill Lloyd's book *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), Chapter 3 'The Brücke Studios: A Testing Ground for Primitivism'. In this chapter, Lloyd described the way in which the studio space of these male artists exemplified their bohemianism; hence, was in direct opposition to domestic space.

10. Irit Rogoff, 'The anxious artist - ideological mobilisations of the self in German Modernism' in *The Divided Heritage: Themes and Problems in German Modernism*, ed. Irit Rogoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.116-147 (pp.134-36).

11. Grethe Jürgens, *Das Atelier* (Berlin: Verlag die Heimbücherei John Jahr, 1943).

12. Georg Reinhardt, 'Zwischen Atelier und Straße: Zur Geschichte und Malerei der Neuen Sachlichkeit in Hannover' in *Bonn Catalogue*, pp.34-42 (p.38).

13. 'Modern cities have been planned to segregate different aspects of life; homes, shops, factories and offices are all in separate areas. This segregation has affected women more than men, because our lives have never been so neatly partitioned between the different areas of work, leisure and home in the way that men's have.' Jos

Boys, Frances Bradshaw, et.al., 'Introduction' in *Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment*, ed. MATRIX (a women's architectural collective) (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp.1-10 (p.4).

14. Lotte Laserstein is a case in point. She could even remember when she made the decision not to marry for the sake of her career. See Caroline Stroude, *Lotte Laserstein: Paintings and Drawings from Germany and Sweden, 1920-1970* [exhibition catalogue] (London: Agnew and Belgrave Galleries, 1987), p.3.

15. Jos Boys, 'Women and Public Space' in *Making Space*, op.cit., pp. 37-54 (p.40).

16. Eve Rosenhaft, 'Working-class Life and Working-class Politics: Communists, Nazis and the State in the Battle for the Streets, Berlin 1928-1932' in Bessel and Feuchtwanger, op.cit., pp.207-240 (p.210).

17. See Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

18. As of 1925, women outnumbered men in agriculture. Only in the service sector were there similar absolute numbers. See *Mitchell*, p.164.

19. T.W. Mason, 'Women in Germany 1925-40: Family Welfare and Work' *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976), pp.74-113 and 2 (1976), pp.5-32 (p.78).

20. In construction, mining and the utilities, the period saw less than two percent female participation as employees or workers. See *Flora*, p.515.

21. Gerta Overbeck, 'Industriebilder', *Der Wachsbogen* 7/8 (1932) no page numbers.

22. 'The feeling one gets as a living being in this mutilated landscape is one of dreadful, cultureless lovelessness. ... The waste is piled up in slag heaps which rise unnaturally, suddenly, in the area like primitive mountains from children's drawings. ... The air is a thick mass of smoke, dust and iron particles. it hovers over fields and houses, soon giving everything the same grayish colouring.'

23. 'Human beings are wedged between railway tracks, mine buildings, sewers and slag heaps. The ways which they effect in order to get out into the open soon come to an end in either a pit wall or a sign saying: No Trespassing. The place is not meant for walks. Human beings are completely insignificant things, not to be taken into consideration.'

24. Shirley Ardener, 'Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women: An Introduction' in *Women's Space*, op.cit., pp.11-34 (p.29).

25. These observations are drawn from two papers

delivered at a colloquium held 11-12 June 1992 at Leicester University about women and the arts in the Weimar Republic: Carol Diethe, 'Beauty and the Beast: Images of Women in German Expressionist Film' and Stephen Lamb, "'Das ist, was soll ich machen, meine Natur/Ich kann Liebe halt nur, und sonst gar nichts': Images of Women in Some Late Weimar Films" (publication forthcoming).

26. 'Frequently we went to the fruit-wine bars which were in the outskirts of the city, once we went to ladies' wrestling. ... We found our milieu in the Kreuzschanz, in a low-life bar and in dives where prostitutes worked and in small pubs, with sentimental cabaret shows, which became the subjects of many paintings and drawings. We looked for the Kitsch which just does not exist anymore...' Gerta Overbeck, 'Es Liegt in der Luft mit der Sachlichkeit' (1974) in *Hannover Catalogue*, pp.89-90.

27. Bebel, op.cit., pp.186-7, discussed the 'fanatics' who wished to force women back into the areas of domesticity in order to keep them safe.

28. Rühle-Gerstel, op.cit., p.179 wrote: '...eine verheiratete Frau...genießt mehr Ansehen, wird respektvoller behandelt,... einem eigenen Haushalt vorstehen,... kurz, sie hat allerhand Vorteile.' ['... a married woman enjoys more reputation, is treated more respectfully,... is the head of her own household,... in short, has all the advantages.' <over an unmarried woman>.

29. 'Die Entwicklung der gesellschaftlichen und rechtlichen Stellung der deutschen Frau ist somit eng verknüpft mit der Entwicklung der Familienform und des Familienrechts.' ['The development of the social and legal position of German women is connected with the development of the structure of the family and family rights.'] Oekinghaus, op.cit., p.1.

30. Richard J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1933* (London: SAGE Publications, 1976), pp.22-23.

31. Rühle-Gerstel, op.cit., pp.241-70.

32. In his memoirs about the Berlin Dada group, Hans Richter consistently referred to Hannah Höch (1889-1978) as a 'little girl' or a 'good girl' and noted that she took over the role of coffee and sandwich maker for the group; Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p.132. Other examples of this were drawn from a paper delivered by Erika Esau at a colloquium on women and the visual arts in the Weimar Republic held 11-12 June 1992 at Leicester University, entitled: 'The Künstler Ehepaar: Ideal and Reality' (publication forthcoming).

33. Helen L. Boak, op.cit., p.158 and Evans, op.cit., p.11.

34. In 1974, Grethe Jürgens reflected on the history

of the *Wachsbogen* thus: 'Der Dichter Gustav Schenk, der die meiste Erfahrung im Schreiben hatte und auch technisch sehr erfindungsreich war, wurde zum Herausgeber ernannt. Die ersten Mitarbeiter waren Otto Dellemann, damals noch Student an der Technischen Hochschule, Gerta Overbeck, Hans Mertens und ich als Maler, Hans Jürgens als Komponist. ... Die Umschläge hatte ich in Linoleum geschnitten und sie mit der hand abgezogen. Redaktion und Druckraum war mein Atelier. ... Um Porto zu sparen, trugen Gerta Overbeck und ich die Exemplare für die Stadt mit dem Rad aus. Wir waren sehr stolz auf unsere ersten Exemplare, die wir ohne fremde Hilfe fertiggebracht hatten.' ['The poet Gustav Schenk, who had the most experience with writing and who was also very technically inventive, became the editor. The first contributors were Otto Dellemann, still a student at the Technische Hochschule at the time, Gerta Overbeck, Hans Mertens and I as painters, Hans Jürgens as composer. ... I cut the cover in Linoleum and printed it by hand. Production and printing were done in my studio. ... To save postage, Gerta Overbeck and I delivered the copies in the city by bicycle. We were very proud of our first edition, which we made without anyone's help.'] from 'Geschichte des *Wachsbogen*' in *Hannover Catalogue*, pp.21-22 (p.21).

35. 'Die Dame hat die Arbeit nicht genommen, weil sie sich nicht schön genug fand.' ['The lady did not take the work because she did not find she had been painted beautifully enough.'] Grethe Jürgens in an interview with Hildegard and Georg Reinhardt, 'Künstlerin der neuen Sachlichkeit', *Artis* 2 (February 1981), pp.12-13 (p.12).

36. These works were catalogued as destroyed by Jürgens herself; I have seen her own photos of them. For more details about the oeuvres, see the Preface.

37. The earliest known drawing by Overbeck (made when she was 16 years old) is of her infant brother Julius. This still survives in the collection of Julius' widow.

38. In a very interesting section of *Woman under Socialism*, op.cit., pp.124-26, Bebel refuted common ideas about the nature of women such as that women are 'infant-like, and an infant for life'.

39. This is frequently described. For one reference, see Juliet Blair, op.cit., p.206.

40. A number of general sources about women artists discuss this. For one example, see: Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, 'Introduction: Feminism and Art History' in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* eds. Broude and Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982). pp.1-18 (pp.2, 13-14).

41. See the artist biographies of Bauer-Pezellen and Haensgen-Dingkuhn in *Domesticity and Dissent: The Role of Women Artists in Germany, 1918-1938* [exhibition catalogue] (Leicester: Leicestershire Museum Arts and Records

Service, 1992) by Marsha Meskimmon pp.46, 68.

42. Some of these books are: *Die Kippenhymne* (1944), *Der Wechselbalg* (1947), *Die Sammlerin* (1954).

43. Bebel, op.cit.; Evans, op.cit., pp. 20-1,120,154;
Dr. Else Kienle, *Frauen: Aus dem Tagebuch einer Ärztin*
(Berlin: Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1932).

CHAPTER THREE

THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Introduction

The representation of women during the Weimar Republic, whether in art, literature or the mass media, was a highly contentious issue. It was in the period immediately following the First World War that the so-called 'new woman' [neue Frau] emerged in Germany and her presence in the public life of the country was fraught.¹ Economic and social changes meant that just under half of the total number of women in Weimar Germany worked outside the home, and half of all industrial working women were married.² Women's suffrage was granted in the constitution of the Weimar Republic and many women at the time chose careers rather than traditional domestic roles. The 'new woman' was born in an era of widespread political and social turbulence and became linked inextricably to it. As the editors of *When Biology Became Destiny* so aptly pointed out, women's actual political influence in society remained negligible in the period, but their alleged dominance was a significant feature of contemporary discourse.³ This alleged presence made itself felt most conclusively in stereotypes: flappers, fashionable salesgirls, decadent cafe patrons and prostitutes. These negative images were counterbalanced by the persistent

representation of the dutiful wife and mother. Hence, the difficulties inherent in the changing position of women and the upheaval of social order in the inter-war years were met with a particular symbolic language of 'womanhood'; women were represented as one of two polar opposites, either the long-suffering mothers of the nation or the decadent source of its demise. In the words of Bridenthal, Grossmann and Kaplan: "In this culture, women stood at the nexus of the 'morality question'. They were simultaneously seen as guardians of morality and as the chief agents of a 'culture of decadence'."⁴

Inherent in such simplistic symbolism is both the anxiety of its producers and the falsification of the experience of women in the Weimar Republic. Generally, 'symbolic' or 'iconic' representations of women were produced by the establishment who felt threatened by 'new women'.⁵ The extent to which 'women's issues' (marriage, women's careers and education, abortion, contraception and prostitution) occupied political attention underlines the uncertainty felt by the predominantly male institutions of the Weimar Republic in the face of changing ideas of femininity. As this chapter will demonstrate, the vast majority of representations of women in the realist art of the period similarly attest to male artists' concern for and misunderstanding of this subject; these misunderstandings served a number of different purposes - personal, social and aesthetic. Of course, it is not being argued here that some artistic representations are 'symbolic' while others are 'real'; art by its very nature

cannot reproduce 'reality' and instead produces images or symbols. In this chapter, however, the crucial distinction between representations of women which referred them to actual experience and those which manipulated the representation to produce allegories of non-visual ideals (charity, decadence, etc) will be explored. In so doing, the critical differences between allegorical icons of womanhood and representations of women will be explicated.

The issue of art's relationship to reality was very important to artists practising within the aesthetic of the Neue Sachlichkeit.⁶ Associated as it was in other fields with functionalism, reportage and documentation, the 'sachlich' concept in the visual arts stood for a sober rendering of ordinary themes from contemporary life.⁷ It was contrasted with expressionistic distortion and abstract purification; theoretically, there was little room in the aesthetic for allegorical 'symbols'. However, mainstream Neue Sachlichkeit painting overflows with representations of women used to symbolize the strength of the working-class or the decay of contemporary Germany. In this one specific area, it would appear that masculine-normative concerns overrode the aesthetic theory. An interesting political parallel suggests that sensitive gender issues often divided opinion along gender lines. In the controversy which surrounded the anti-abortion legislation (Paragraph 218) in 1931 and the associated calls for better access to birth-control by feminists, it has been shown that the male leadership of

widely disparate political parties viewed the issue in roughly similar terms and utterly unlike feminist organizations run by women.⁸ Grethe Jürgens, Gerta Overbeck and other women artists in the period saw the issue of the 'new woman', and in turn the representation of women in art, from the perspective of insiders. They were 'new women'; subversive by definition, they had no vested interest in maintaining social stasis. Their representations of women bear this out, as they rejected conventional feminine icons preferring, consistently, to represent a wide range of female subjects which were based on actual women's roles at the time. However, Jürgens and Overbeck were working within a context of stereotyped female representations which required them to contend with difficulties peculiar to women as subjects and objects.

In the discussion of the self-portraiture of Jürgens and Overbeck the issue of the control of a woman's representation emerged as one of the difficulties facing a woman artist in producing a self-portrait.⁹ Self-portraits of the period aimed to posit an artist-subject (cultural authority), but women's faces and bodies are traditionally objects. Therefore, a compositional and iconographic dilemma is produced for the woman artist. This dilemma becomes even more complex when the female producer is representing another female; it is this difficulty which has led a number of contemporary feminist artists to refuse to 'display' women's figures in their work at all.¹⁰ The viewing audience is another area in which Jürgens and Overbeck were faced with an unusual problem

when they approached the theme of women's representation in their works. Unlike the political realm, for example, the assumed audience for Weimar stereotypes of women was female as well as male.¹¹ The images were introduced by the establishment as much to guide women as to reinforce the existing hierarchies for men. Women were bombarded with ideal representations of women from a wide variety of sources, not least the new and booming advertisement industry. Thus, when Jürgens and Overbeck produced representations of women they were not defining a new audience so much as a new approach to the existing one. As usual, the artists were forced to manipulate the conventions of the masculine-normative context in which they worked in order to produce 'sachlich' works satisfactory to their own experiences. In the representation of women, this meant determining a path between the symbolic extremes of the mother and the whore, with all of their accompanying social symbolism, by means of humour, irony and not least, sobriety, that quintessential characteristic of the Neue Sachlichkeit.

Positive and Negative Stereotypes of Women in Weimar

If the ideal images produced by political parties, churches and advertisers are to be believed, the dutiful German woman of the Weimar Republic would have sought a life of personal service as a wife and mother. Although the wife and the mother are two different roles, there was an insoluble bond between them in the language of women's issues in Weimar; provided a woman was considered healthy

(with the eugenic overtones of the Nazis becoming ever more prevalent), it was her duty to marry and bear children.¹² It is only to be expected that vigorous campaigners for the return of pre-war stability looked to the revitalization of the family, and the mother as its centrepiece, during the course of the Republic. In a number of ways, the First World War had caused (or, at least accelerated) what commonly was seen as the disintegration of German life in the new republic.¹³ In the specific case of women, the war made many widows and childless mothers, as well as furthering women's roles in politics and labour outside the home. The new roles which women (not always voluntarily) assumed in the period contributed to the breakdown of traditional family units and generally were seen as important factors in the destruction of the moral fibre of the nation as a whole. Now, the idea of a working mother as a personification of moral decay might seem overrated if not ludicrous, but perceived threats are often greeted with as much vigilance as actual ones. Thus it was that the Weimar establishment produced exceptionally strong women's 'propaganda' to combat the 'new woman'.

Probably the most familiar arguments about the role of women in the period came from the Nazis. These statements are not only familiar because the Nazi party gained power and put their ideas into practice, but because they epitomized and amplified the voices of numerous, contemporary right-wing political and religious groups.¹⁴ It is useful here to sketch briefly the

stereotypical female ideal formed by the right, although most 'sachlich' art was produced in opposition to it, because anyone dealing with women's issues in the Weimar Republic had to contend with this image. First, a woman's status was derived from her marriage. Marriage propaganda and economic incentives meant that the first years of Nazi control saw a considerable leap in the number of marriages performed.¹⁵ It was perceived to be 'un-German' to remain an unmarried, professional woman. Even more striking, and frightening with hindsight, was the emphasis upon the importance of motherhood. The creation of Mother's Day in the early 1920s and the Nazi 'medals' for motherhood in the 1930s, had 'Volkisch' eugenic theories as an underpinning.¹⁶ Therefore, provided that a woman was racially pure, it was her duty to bear and rear the Aryan nation. Motherhood became, ideologically, a woman's finest public service. D. W. Koeppen (no dates available, D.W. Koeppen may be a pseudonym for Maragrete Koeppen), in the painting *A Woman of 1934* (1934) [figure 101], parodied this smug ideal by producing a caricature of the well-heeled, Nazi mother out for a walk in a lovely village. Such images clearly indicate the features of contemporary stereotypes by their distinct irony.

As expected, the political left and feminist groups (save for the bourgeois feminist groups and those spearheaded by cunning Nazi party members) reacted against these blatantly fascist female stereotypes. However, both retained a strong emphasis in their own arguments upon biologicistic theories of women's roles and the duty/service

nexus.¹⁷ In so doing, the parties on the left revealed their masculine bias on women's issues and the feminist groups proved that too much compromise leads to defeat. Further, both groups merely modified the wife/mother stereotype as their ideal, rather than challenging it. The left's 'ideal woman' was still a married mother, but she was the powerful, enlightened mother of the new, socialist working-class.¹⁸ Feminist groups stressed the roles within the family and in society as a whole which only women (as the natural nurturers) could perform and sought recognition for them. Because of the unusually rigid biologicistic theory and service orientation of German feminist groups, they were unwittingly led into the service of the Nazis, and toward their own disintegration, very easily.¹⁹ In the Weimar period, the only truly divergent feminist ideals came from the isolated voices of individual women and, occasionally, the Communist Party (KPD); the wife and mother, in various manifestations, was really the monolithic positive stereotype and represented the stability of society.

Negative symbols for the 'new woman' were more diverse, ranging from the young, racy widow to the stylish shop-girl and the seemingly ubiquitous prostitute. All of these stereotypes had their realistic underpinning, but their power came from their exaggeration, and their use, from providing an antithesis to the 'German Mother'. Young war widows, for example, were as painful and visible a reminder of the tragedy of the First World War as the many crippled beggars on the streets of the Republic. In

his work from 1922, *Young Widow (The New Me)* [figure 102] Richard Ziegler (1891-) epitomized the strength of this symbol. The distasteful, yet compelling, juxtaposition of sex and death conspires to make this figure frightening rather than pathetic; almost like a contemporary vampire, she turns the domestic ideal on its head. She has a new-found sexual power which has no 'legitimate' outlet; she is threatening because she is the 'other' to the dutiful wife.²⁰ Young women in the Weimar Republic were also just beginning to wield independent financial power as their numbers in the service-sector of the economy boomed. As T. W. Mason pointed out:

The most striking feature of this picture of women's employment in the 1920s is its diversity. ...there were large numbers of fashion-conscious young typists and clerks, some women doctors, civil servants and head-mistresses, to say nothing of the film stars, actresses, dancers, politicians and writers, on whom so much public attention was focussed.²¹

Rather than address the needs of a changing female populace, the fears of the 'new woman' were exploited by the media.²² The recognition of women's growing financial independence was met with simultaneous consternation and exploitation as the infamous propaganda about the 'Doppelverdiener' [Double Earner] points out.²³

The female figure which combined the sexual and economic realms most significantly was, of course, the prostitute. The issue of prostitution was an extremely volatile one during the course of the Weimar Republic.²⁴ Feminist groups, political parties, the police, the medical profession, artists and writers all made statements about

prostitution in the period, but there was little consensus in their attitudes except in the most general condemnation of the situation. Feminists most often concentrated on the personal tragedy of women forced into such activities and blamed double-standards in sexual morality and the institutionalization of prostitution by the police. The police responded in kind by stressing that the regulation of prostitution averted many worse social ills like widespread venereal disease. Politically, the issue was brought to the fore by a number of embarrassing scandals, not least of which was the so-called Bremen Morality Scandal. Arguably, there was little significant difference in the numbers of prostitutes in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, but certainly, their presence was more contentious, if only as a symbol of social decay, in the Republic. Differences of opinion about prostitution were divided roughly by class and political concerns with public debates on the issue pitting the political left against the right. The right saw prostitution and 'immoral' sexual behaviour generally, as one more ill caused by the break-down of traditional values under the new (and implied, liberal) republic, while the left diagnosed the problem as yet another symptom of the unfair power relationships of capitalism.²⁵ Inequalities in gender relationships rarely were addressed coherently and prostitutes (as opposed to the issue of prostitution) remained objects of pity and scorn while providing a useful social scapegoat.²⁶ Thus, prostitutes were viewed as both victims of social decay and villains in this drama; little attention was paid to them as individuals

and, as the next section describes, lurid representations of prostitutes were of far greater interest to the male artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit than more objective ones despite their ostensible political affiliations.

The Representation of Women in The Neue Sachlichkeit

The art of the Neue Sachlichkeit, like other branches of male-dominated discourse during the Weimar Republic, generally accepted the trend toward the symbolic representation of women. There were important exceptions to this tendency in Weimar realism, but the context in which Jürgens and Overbeck produced their representations of women, both nationally and regionally, was dominated by the mother/whore symbolic dichotomy. It is important to bear in mind that the overall climate of the Neue Sachlichkeit was anti-bourgeois while the wife/mother stereotype was primarily used to uphold social values and institutions; the aesthetic and the representation were opposed fundamentally to one another.²⁷ As this chapter will demonstrate, artists associated with the 'sachlich' aesthetic found the representation of decadent cafe society and prostitution far more frequently suited their aims than the representation of domestic scenes. In explanation, one must return to the fact that representations of wives and mothers were, for the most part, unchallenging and uncontroversial. They are particularly rare in the prints and drawings of the period, those media most frequently used to produce instantaneous unrest, often the goal of this art.²⁸

While, numerically, representations of decadent womanhood outweighed those of domestic order, both of these themes in the New Objectivity can be contrasted with the representations of known women to help define the idea of the 'iconic' use of the female figure. Exceptions to the iconic rule were, generally, representations of known and/or named female figures whose use as symbols was precluded by this familiarity. For example, Hans Grundig (1901-1958) painted a portrait of his artist wife Lea in 1929 (*Portrait of Lea Grundig*) [figure 103] which presented her to the viewer as young, modern and in no way either domestic or debauched. Her clothes and hairstyle mark her as a 'new woman', but the sobriety of the style denies a didactic reading. Thus, the work was a sensitive portrait rather than an allegorical commentary on the state of Weimar. Even Otto Dix, whose representations of named prostitutes frequently fell to gross distortion (note *Elsa the Countess* of 1922 [figure 104]), represented his mother in a way befitting his familiarity with her as an actual person rather than as a type in the work, *The Parents of the Artist* (1924) [figure 105]. The reason that these exceptional works are important in the context of the representations of women by Jürgens and Overbeck is that they emphasize the difficulty inherent in using the image of a familiar person as a symbol. In order to represent *The Mother* or *The Prostitute* (as opposed to my mother or my friend who is a prostitute) some emotional distance from the subject is required. Male artists have traditionally used female subjects as icons, and could

continue to do so in the Weimar Republic, because this distance was easily accommodated by the gender relationships of the day. Jürgens and Overbeck, however, were 'new women' and did not lapse so simply into the symbolic vocabulary of their male artist contemporaries.

The prevailing icons of the female figure in the Neue Sachlichkeit contrasted with the representation of known women by shifting the primary emphasis in the representation away from any individual significance and toward a collective meaning or statement. Unlike the portraits of familiar women, or 'documentary' representations, the artists were not concerned with understanding the particular significance of one woman, but with the ability to read in women generally, a wider social message. Women were not simply recorded in this type of representation, but had their bodies represented as symbols of the times. As in other fields, female stereotypes were used to signify ideas about the state of society and the way it should be. In a positive sense, representations of women signified the stability of the world and the nobility of the working-class. In a more negative way, the degradation and disintegration of Weimar society could be expressed in no more potent language than the representation of women.

The representation of an ordered, idyllic world was rare in the art of the New Objectivity, except in Munich, often considered the most conservative region of the movement.²⁹ This group, of which Georg Schrimpf and Carlo

Mense are well-known, had during its short life, a distinct style and content related to the so-called Metaphysical painting of Italy. The representations of women by the Munich artists are idealized; the women occupy a domestic rural idyll utterly unlike their contemporaries in the art of the other regional centres of the Neue Sachlichkeit. Mense's *Family Portrait* (1928/9) [figure 94] and Schrimpf's *Sleeping* (1929) [figure 106] characterize the Munich works. Mense's work displays the mother as the pinnacle of a stable family, both compositionally and symbolically. The fact that the father is absent from the family portrait serves to emphasize the 'natural' or even biological role of the woman. She is not so much a specific wife and mother, but an eternal mother-type who is in the appropriate female position. Further, because it is entitled *Family Portrait*, the absent patriarch is, in some senses supplied by the artist himself and the presumed (even constructed) male viewer. *Sleeping* represents the female figures not simply reclining in a lovely landscape but becoming a part of the natural scene.³⁰ In these works, the figures are monumental and the compositions are static; the form of the works corresponds to their meaning as icons of harmony and stability. The atmosphere and timelessness of the representations enhances their symbolic quality at the expense of their link with 'reality'. Women are in their rightful place, naturally, and thus all is right with the world. Though the Munich group was short-lived as a cohesive unit, and was rather distinct from most other 'sachlich' trends in terms of iconography, there was a

stylistic link with Hanover because Fritz Burger-Mühlfeld studied in Munich.³¹

The conservative representations of the Munich group were limited in their influence, but the theme of wives and mothers was used to effect by many artists who had far more left-leaning concerns. August Dreßler (1886-1970) and Conrad Felixmüller, for example, worked in different regional centres, but had in common their determined left-wing orientation.³² Another important feature which linked them was their representation of domestic women as symbols of the strength and determination of the working-classes in the face of frequently harsh and unfair capitalist exploitation. Felixmüller, in his work *Working Woman with Child* (1921) [figure 107], produced an emotionally gripping (hence, incendiary) scene of poverty by contrasting the distressing environment with the domestic harmony. By producing prints, the artist can be understood to have addressed this imagery to the proletariat; the symbolic reliance on the wife and mother as the centre of the working-class's sense of community reiterated the positive female stereotype. Dreßler painted a similar work in 1926 entitled *The Beggar* [figure 108]. Beggars were a common theme in 'sachlich' art, but usually as a pathetic foil to an anti-bourgeois sentiment (see Grosz's *Making a Living*, 1928 [figure 109]). In Dreßler's work, the beggar is met at the door of a working-class house by the wife/mother and given alms. A world of difference exists between the works by Dreßler and Grosz; the grotesque selfishness of the wealthy is

contrasted with the charity of the proletariat by contrasting the women's responses. The domestic figure nurtures the weak, the fashionably dressed woman on the street denies her 'womanly' duty. She can be seen as an aberration in gender terms because of this.

Representations of prostitutes occurred frequently in Weimar painting. Indeed, some of the most shocking, yet memorable, of Neue Sachlichkeit works concern the blatant exploitation of women in the Republic. In such works, representations of prostitutes were used as effectively as metaphors for social decadence as the representations of wives and mothers were symbols of stability and harmony. The figures in these paintings were often distorted to emphasize the decay and elicit a stronger response from the spectator. They were not true or objective statements of fact, but highly charged accusations against society. The artists who produced such works were manipulating the social outrage felt in Germany at the idea of the degradation of 'womanhood' in the republic. They were producing symbols understandable only within the wider context of Weimar society. The representation of prostitutes, however, sometimes surreptitiously reinforces the exploitation of women, rather than providing effective means by which their exploitation may be recognized and subverted. Indeed, it is arguable whether many artists, despite self-confessed socialist affiliations, even recognized women's issues as being on the agenda. Left-wing artists in the Weimar Republic trod a very fine line in this area; occasionally they transgressed the

boundary and produced titillating images.³³ The representation of prostitutes, as sexually available (and, presumably, sometimes sexually alluring) figures presented male artists with a dilemma. A recent critical comment about Schlichter's painting *Meeting of Fetishists and Flagellators* (1921) [figure 110], pointed out that there is an inherent ambivalence in the attitude of an artist who simultaneously enjoys painting these images and wishes to condemn the participants in the scene.³⁴

In some instances, the personal responses of the male artist toward the representation of female nudes intervened in such a way as to make the representations highly subjective records of male arousal rather than 'objective' metaphors of social decay. Referring back to Schlichter, his leather boot fetish was well-known to contemporaries (Grosz painted his portrait surrounded by them) and thus, their inclusion in his scenes of debauchery cannot be read only as a detached metaphor.³⁵ George Grosz himself was prone to this inconsistency. In terms of his representations of women, it is clear that they derived more from his own sexual development than from any later desire to admonish a decadent humanity. In his autobiography, he used a plethora of visual detail to describe his first, pubescent sexual encounter. The experience consisted of him spying on his friend's aunt as she undressed. He later wrote, that while he had had more substantial encounters: "Often, when I paint, I can still see that lamp-lit bedroom."³⁶ It is unnecessary here to trace all of the many links between the description of

that experience and the artist's representations of women. It is sufficient to say that the primary characteristics of Grosz's portrayals are the act of undressing and the voyeuristic ability to see beneath a woman's garments, the essence of his description of his own pubescent voyeurism. Again, in the works of Otto Dix, the representations of women bear the flaws of utter subjectivity. His strong personal associations with prostitutes resulted in some unhappy inconsistencies in his art. As Brigid Barton noted in her work on Dix, he was comfortable in the company of local prostitutes and often spent his evenings in brothels. In small studies, his attitude toward these women was friendly; often, their names appear on the sketches.³⁷ In major works, by contrast, the prostitute is, as Keith Roberts said: "...no longer Lautrec's shop-soiled, basically harmless drab but something feverish, bright-eyed and predatory, a painted rat feeding on the trench dead."³⁸ It is confusing, to vacillate, as Dix did, from representing prostitutes as oppressed workers (*Prostitute and Disabled Veteran*, 1923 [figure 111]), to exciting vamps (*Elsa the Countess*, 1922 [figure 104]) and finally, to conspirators in social decay (*Three Prostitutes on the Street*, 1925 [figure 112]). This vacillation was undoubtedly caused by the artist's own confusion between excitement, pity and disgust for prostitutes.

The ability to associate, in the works of particular artists, the representations of women and the artists' sexual fantasies demonstrates the difficulties which

artists faced in dealing with potent symbols. It is clear that the representations of 'debauched' women in the art of the period were complex icons because they confused the objective symbolism of the figures with the subjective responses of the artists to them. It is unnecessary to have the detailed accounts of Georg Grosz to understand that men and women generally had different relationships to prostitution. The male artist and male spectator, regardless of class or political affiliation, were positioned as the prostitute's potential client. Therefore, the clarity with which the artist may well have conceived his image of the prostitute as a victim of exploitation or as a symbol of social decline frequently became confused with his sexual fantasies. Political consistency in the use of the representation fails completely, as it did in the case of Dix. For example, Franz Maria Jansen's work *Wretchedness on the Street* (1920) [figure 113] defines with its title the social criticism inherent in the image. The role of the prostitute in this wretchedness, however, is unclear; unlike the figure of the starving mother with her infant, the prostitute is strong, healthy and unashamedly displaying herself. This complicity with debauchery characterizes many works of the period which represent brothel or cafe scenes. Richard Ziegler associated women's own vanity with corruption in his significantly titled work of 1928, *The Judgement of Paris (Brothel Scene)* [figure 114]. This shifted emphasis from the woman as victim to accomplice is typical of the representations of prostitutes by male artists during the Weimar Republic,

and had wide popular currency as evinced by the poster for the public health film *Prostitution* of 1919 [figure 115].

Gender relationships help to explain the representation of women in the art of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* generally because this art was produced within a framework which fundamentally privileged the viewpoint of the male artist (male, heterosexual artist, even). The differences between the use of male figures as symbols and their female equivalents further strengthen this point. In the preceding discussion, the various uses to which women's representations were put, metaphorically, in the period have been detailed, but it is also true to say that male figures were used frequently as stereotypes to make visual statements. Members of the bourgeoisie, the General Staff, the clergy and legal profession were caricatured and denounced in a wide range of images. These representations, however, stressed the features of a class or social group rather than a gender. It was not suggested that males were biologically disposed toward certain roles (good or bad), but that social circumstances defined their difference. The 'good guys' and the 'bad guys' were clearly delineated through their class/political affiliations; the shift in meaning from public to private, so common in representations of prostitutes, does not occur. Neither did the male artists resort to archaic, gender-defined stereotypes (Madonna and Magdalen) when producing these caricatures. Most significant was the sense in which female figures were not even the subjects of the works which used their forms, but

rather attributes.³⁹ It was immaterial whether the object of decadence in a scene was a prostitute or a whisky jug, the symbol of stability a mother or a pastoral landscape. The real subjects were the men who, politically, economically and socially, produced the condition shown. In other words, the representation of a prostitute is 'debauchery', not a reference to a specific prostitute; by contrast, the non-specific 'capitalist' figure is not 'debauchery' but the perpetrator of the decadence. Male figures, symbolic or not, create meanings through actions while female figures contain meanings in their very form. A perfect example of the use of female figures as attributes in a scene about male figures is the work by Otto Lais (no dates available) from 1929, *The Arrival* (*The Parvenu*) [figure 116]. In this work, the 'arrival' (the connotation of the word is to have arrived, socially) is the huge, fat caricature of the capitalist and he is watched (greeted) by other males at the sides of the picture. The female figures in the work demonstrate his evil; he is pulled in his carriage by yoked, starving mothers with infants and he is accompanied by a naked whore. Yet again, the two limits of female representation act as symbols of society (controlled by men) in ruin.

The Representation of Women in the Art of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck

In contrast to the main-stream representation of women in the period, the art of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck relied very little on the development of

allegorical roles for female figures. Their art was characterized rather by the production of female representations; female figures referred to contemporary women and not immaterial concepts such as harmony or decadence. The routine of women's lives was transformed into art by Jürgens and Overbeck as the most accessible ordinary subjects were introduced into their works without didacticism. Neither artist had the inclination to depict iconic female characters, yet the scope of Jürgens' and Overbeck's representations of women is broad and varied.⁴⁰ The frequency of representations of women in both artist's oeuvres, combined with the fact that the representations were distinctly different from the 'symbolic' works produced mainly by their male contemporaries, demonstrates their significant position in the gender-determined 'weltanschauung' of the artists.⁴¹ The symbolic use of the female figure in the Neue Sachlichkeit was strengthened by the masculine-normative bias of the movement, just as the meaning and use of female symbols in the wider context of the Weimar Republic was determined by the male establishment. Gender difference, heightened by the social and emotional distance maintained between the sexes, meant that these representations flourished. Jürgens and Overbeck, by contrast, could not maintain this necessary 'distance' from women in the Weimar Republic (especially 'new women') without enacting a schizophrenic charade. They were 'new women'; their outlook on modern women's roles was dominated by their own personal understanding of these roles.

No evidence exists to suggest that either woman was a member of any formal feminist group, but their lifestyles and viewpoints were decidedly modern.⁴² Given the practical evidence of the artists' lives, including Grethe Jürgens long-standing membership of the GEDOK, it is clear that they identified themselves with independent, career-oriented women in the Weimar Republic; they belonged to the very group of 'new women' about which so much contemporary controversy existed.⁴³ Because Jürgens and Overbeck did not lead traditional domestic lives but were part of the growing number of modern working women, their works presented a functional alternative to that of the mother/whore stereotype. These types simply did not adequately describe the artists' own experience. The treatment of women in the art of Jürgens and Overbeck is necessarily subversive; in order to maintain the critical relationship to their own times (an important feature of their idea of the 'sachlich' aesthetic) their representations of women defied the 'symbolic/iconic' conventions of their male contemporaries. In some cases, the artists avoided particular iconographies, in others, they altered or parodied convention to produce meaningful images of women. The single most important feature of the works by Jürgens and Overbeck is their inversion of the subject/object roles assigned to female figures which, in turn, destroys the traditional, allegorical use of women's representation.

'Ordinary' Women: Alternatives to the Object

Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck, in their representations of women, mainly subverted the symbolic conventions of their contemporaries by providing alternative views of the ordinary daily lives of women in the Weimar Republic. It is not being argued here that the artists self-consciously placed their works in opposition to dominant representations, but rather, that the combination of their artistic aims and own, gender-determined position vis-à-vis society at large, significantly affected the subjects of their art and their manner of representation. In terms of iconography, being true to their own experience meant that the artists frequently represented women in ways which reflected the wide variety of roles they played during the course of the Weimar Republic, despite the fact that the representation of these roles was not pleasing to the more conservative Germans of the day. The opposition between traditional and non-traditional roles which was so much a part of the experience of young women in the period, yet highly controversial, was expressed in the art of Jürgens and Overbeck. Furthermore, the artists offered representations of women as subjects rather than objects. Many of the women represented act; they are seen but not displayed. In many instances, the manner of representation itself (as well as the iconography) refuses us the opportunity to objectify the representation; the figures dominate the spaces of the works and the artists were interested enough in female subjects to devote

'portrait' works to them. The cumulative effect of the works is to present representations of individual women rather than to create symbols by use of women's bodies.

Women's everyday lives during the years of the Weimar Republic were varied according to their status. Jürgens and Overbeck concentrated their attention upon the working-classes in their art; the actions of the female figures in their paintings reveal many aspects of the ordinary occupations of proletarian women. In work, Jürgens and Overbeck had a fruitful area of working-class women's lives to draw upon, but not in contemporary 'symbolic' terms. Weimar women who worked outside the home were numerous, and by definition, visible. According to the 1925 census, there were 24.28 million women over the age of 15 in Germany, of whom 11.48 million earned their living (but were not all 'wage-earners').⁴⁴ While the majority of German women remained at home during the period, most of these women would have been middle- or upper-class; the daughters, wives and widows of men financially able to support their economic inactivity. The concept of 'wage-earners' used above also bears further definition. Beginning with the 1925 census, the German authorities attempted to calculate everyone involved in economic activities in the country. That being the premise, the labour situations of many people necessitated the use of very broad-based economic categories. 'Wage-earning' is merely a minor category for women's labour in the period. Of nearly 12 million 'economically active' women in the period, only some four

million were wage-earners; that is, eligible for insurance and unemployment benefits. The rest were domestic servants, 'family assistants'(women who worked, often for little or no remuneration, in family concerns such as small farms and shops), or outworkers. None of these workers were eligible for state aid and their work was monitored very poorly by the government. Hence, many women were subject to unfair labour practices and, of course, suffered huge gender-determined pay differentials. Women of the urban, industrial working-classes often combined marriage, motherhood and work outside the home. In absolute figures, 800,000 working-class mothers worked in 1925. Between 1907 and 1933, the rise in working mothers was 129 percent.⁴⁵ This figure does not take into account the vast numbers of women with children who took in piece-work, or otherwise performed domestic outwork in order to subsidise the family finances.⁴⁶ The women Jürgens and Overbeck used as subjects would rarely have ceased their labour, particularly in the economically turbulent years of the Weimar Republic. As detailed in a later chapter, Jürgens and Overbeck were more familiar with the outside labour activities of women than those of men and their works bear the mark of such familiarity.⁴⁷ The very production of works which took as their subjects the variety of women's labour in the Weimar Republic defied the norms of women's representation.

It has been demonstrated that Jürgens and Overbeck differed from the majority of their male counterparts by representing women with objects and in attitudes referring

to their status outside the domestic sphere, while male artists most often represented working women as engaged in private, domestic chores.⁴⁸ When the artists did depict women in the roles of wife and mother, these representations frequently betrayed nuances of meaning unusual in mainstream works of similar subjects. One early work by Jürgens, *Woman in an Apron in front of Houses* (1922) [figure 24], for example, does show a woman in the position of a housewife. The figure is insistent by its foregrounding and the returned gaze, but the woman is tired. Given the difficult conditions of working-class women's lives in the period, it is a credible representation. The figure is neither an obvious symbol of the strength of the proletariat (note the urban setting) nor a tender icon of maternal feeling. In their representations of mothers and children, Jürgens and Overbeck also opposed the dominant conventions. Jürgens' 1922 work, *A Group with a Perambulator* [figure 25] and Overbeck's *On the Steep Embankment* [figure 59] of 1923, show remarkably like compositional devices and subjects. The technique is painterly and expressive, and the artists both explored more detailed urban backdrops in these works. As Hildegard Reinhardt mentioned, the figural groups in each work form a block on the left-hand side with figures of small children creating movement to the right.⁴⁹ The subject would not merely have been an artistic contrivance as groups of working-class women who stayed at home often looked after the children of their neighbours who worked outside the home. This was only one facet of the neighbourhood as a social unit which existed

so determinedly in proletarian areas during the Weimar Republic, but one which did not sit easily with ideology about the German family. The communal aspect of child-care is emphasized in these works. Also, the movement of which Reinhardt speaks is in opposition to the usual stasis (stability) of works representing women and children. In fact, in Overbeck's work, the child falls down the steep embankment while the distraught woman moves to save her. The action of the female figure is unusual and determines her status as the subject in the work. This action takes place in an uncompromising urban landscape, yet another aspect of these works which fixed their meanings against the symbolic importance of the woman as keeper of the hearth.

Similarly, in terms of the importance of the 'action' of a figure, Grethe Jürgens' painting *A Woman Sewing* [figure 14], begins with a representation of a woman in a domestic role, but shifts the emphasis just enough to challenge the figure's objectification. The aged woman with her lines, wrinkles, grey hair and clothing, was carefully detailed by the artist, and the monumentality of the figure cannot be denied. However, the focal point of the painting is the activity of the figure; her hands and lace-work are highlighted and given the central portion of the canvas. Furthermore, the gaze of the figure is concentrated upon the work. The woman has not been displayed to us, the action (and its product) takes precedence in such a way as to render the female figure the subject, rather than the object, in the work. The representations of women at work

by both artists tend to fulfill similar functions. Not only did the artists depict women carrying on outside economic activities, they monumentalized the figures and individualized the sitters. Jürgens' *Flower Seller* (1931) [figure 11] and Overbeck's *Pigeons and Grapes* (1931) [figure 45] reaffirm the fact that both artists were concerned with the many activities of the particular women around them; concerned enough to devote whole works to individual subjects who were particularized in their representation.

Jürgens and Overbeck not only represented women in unconventional roles and as 'actors' in their works, they challenged the subject/object status of women in representation through compositional dominance. The special place of women in the artists' oeuvres is indicated by the existence of a number of canvases devoted to the representation of a single female figure. There is no equivalent treatment of male figures in either artist's oeuvre; the only comparable area of production for Jürgens and Overbeck is portraiture. One facet of this preponderance of female subjects is discussed in a later chapter, namely, the familiarity with women workers. However, not all of the 'portrait-like' works detail women at work, and their wider significance is as evidence of the artists' concern for the place of women in Weimar society generally. The representations treat the female subjects as important in and of themselves; they are not viewed symbolically as objects or accompaniments to scenes in which male figures are the real subjects. Overbeck's

Portrait of an Old Farmer's Wife (1937) [figure 60] and *Servant Girl* (1929) [figure 53] clearly demonstrate the 'portrait' attitude of the works. The face of this aged farm woman, with its deep furrows and slack, suntanned skin contrasts sharply with the taut, young face of the servant. The 'portraits' did not flatter the sitters, but represented them as particular individuals. Jürgens' *Woman at a Window* [figure 19] less clearly follows the pattern of a 'Brustbild', but does echo the style of portrait with a ledge made famous by Titian (c.1487/90-1576) in, for example, *Gentleman in Blue* (1512) [figure 117]. In all three works, the female figures dominate the pictorial space and, significantly, control the gaze. The issue of the gaze and the power contained therein, is hotly debated by feminist scholars. Without engaging in the subtleties of this debate, it can be stated that the spectator is frequently given voyeuristic power over figures in representation by an unrequited gaze.⁵⁰ One of the most disturbing features of a representation of a female figure, because disruptive of ordinary power-relationships, is a straight-forward returned look.⁵¹ Also, though two of the representations use windows, these devices do not enhance our voyeurism. The point can be clarified with reference to a work by Hans Theodor Schütt (1908-), *Young Woman in front of a Window* (1929) [figure 118], in which a female figure is shown undressing in front of a window. The figure is simultaneously 'unaware' of our view and the possible onlookers from outside the window; her whole appearance is constructed within the controlling gaze of various

voyeurs. By contrast, all of these representations by Jürgens and Overbeck control the gaze; this fact in conjunction with their compositional status and individualized representation, conspires to resist the objectification of women.

The works discussed up to this point generally have shown the ways in which Jürgens and Overbeck provided alternative representations of women in their works. Two final works (one by each artist) can be used as a summary of this section by virtue of the fact that they combine unconventional iconographies, figural action and compositional techniques in a subversion of the norm in the representation of women in the Weimar Republic. In an interesting work of 1929 by Gerta Overbeck, entitled *Card-Players* [figure 61], the artist revealed a more pleasurable side of working-class life. The theme of card-players had a long history and contemporaries of Overbeck such as Hans Mertens, painted the subject.⁵² What, perhaps, distinguishes this work is that the central figure at the table is a woman. The room appears to contain a billiard table and the figures are obviously engaged in petty gambling, so the presence of the female figure is rather remarkable in artistic, if not realistic, terms. More importantly than the fact that the female figure is located in the games room is that she is engaged in the card game; she is not an accoutrement of declining values, but a player. Further, the scene has been recorded by the artist in such a way as to belie its reading as a scene of great decadence and enhance its

ordinary character. Jürgens' watercolour of 1929, *The Suicide* [figure 26], is in complete emotional contrast to Overbeck's work with its sorry view of the end of a woman's life. Similarly, though, it represented an individual woman in a highly contentious role while making the figure an active subject. The grim determination needed to shoot oneself in the head with a revolver is not the customary 'natural' frame of mind attributed to women. Jürgens' character may be pitied, but she cannot be ignored.

The Representation of Prostitutes: Avoidance of the Object

It is clear from the discussion above that the theme of prostitution figured strongly in the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit. Because of the preponderance of the theme and its critical response to the subject of 'womanhood', the relationship of Jürgens and Overbeck to it becomes particularly significant. Within the Hanoverian context, the 'debauched woman' icon had less currency than amongst the male artists in other regions, but particular masculine-normative tendencies in the representation of women, linked to this iconography, did exist in Hanover. The representation of women in the works of Jürgens and Overbeck differed from the mainstream because of more than just their regional aesthetic associations. Gender differentials in their social relationships as a whole were emphasized by the artists' avoidance of certain types of 'debauched women' iconography despite the dominant context. Jürgens and Overbeck produced very few

representations of prostitutes (or assumed prostitutes) and when they did, they were represented as 'real' women, rather than symbols. More frequently, the artists concentrated on far more subtle aspects of contemporary male/female relationships than the bluntly decadent representations of prostitutes could afford.

The influence of mainstream representations of decadent womanhood made itself felt most clearly in Hanover through the works of Ernst Thoms and Eric Wegner. It was Thoms, the best-known member of the group in his day with works shown throughout Germany, who most insistently drew upon the conventions of the Berliners in his representations of women.⁵³ A striking parallel can be drawn between Grosz's work *Beauty, Let Me Praise Thee* (1922/3, sheet III, *Ecce Homo*) [figure 119] and Thoms' *In the Cafe* (1925) [figure 120]. Both paintings reveal the genitals of the primary female figure in similar, voyeuristic ways; we are party to a style of x-ray vision which allows us to undress unwitting female victims. Our sight does not have this power for male figures, who remain modestly attired. This device was used by a number of artists during the period and reiterates the use of female figures as symbols and 'objects'.⁵⁴ Two works by Bruno Voigt (1912-1988) clearly link this 'unrealistic' nudity with the symbolic representation of women. In *Solicitation* (1933) [figure 121], the artist portrayed a simple scene of a man being approached by a prostitute; 'simple' except for the fact that the woman is represented in the 'x-ray' view of the man and thus, not as a

realistic representation of a prostitute, but as the symbol of solicitation. The represented 'nude' female as an attribute of the male subject is further enacted in Voigt's work of 1931, entitled *The Boss: Thoughts of a Man Watching an Attractive Woman in a Cafe* [figure 122]. While various views of a dismembered, fetishized woman's body are displayed in this work, they are not even given the status of objects; they are representations of a man's thoughts.

In the works of Eric Wegner, this unrealistic nudity is uncommon, but a heavy reliance upon the theme of the sailor had similar effects on the artist's representations of women. Wegner, who had spent a number of years at sea, was fascinated by the lives of sailors. The theme of sailors was, in the art of the Weimar Republic, both linked to the idea of freedom and strictly a male preserve.⁵⁵ Wegner's works, which took the lives of sailors as their theme, frequently adopted the characteristic chauvinism of such ideas. Women were merely one of the sailor's vices and there were 'available' women in every port. Wegner's work, *Sailor in Port* (1923) [figure 123] exemplifies this attitude. Even when Wegner did not specifically represent sailors, his works showing prostitutes clearly indicate the male viewer. The work *Little Mary* (c.1920) [figure 124] depicted a prostitute in a state of realistic nudity and was, thus, not symbolic in the usual sense. However, the viewpoint is that of a client, and the client dominates the figure. The dominance is achieved by the use of a

high viewpoint (the spectator looms over the figure) and the actual pose of the female figure (supine, with her legs spread). Wegner's *Mangling Done Here* (c.1923) [figure 125] also assumes a male viewer and enjoys a coarse 'joke' at the expense of the figure of a prostitute.⁵⁶

When Jürgens and Overbeck took the theme of the prostitute in their works, they did so primarily as commentators on the realistic life-situation of women in the Weimar Republic. The works do not share the characteristic features of symbolic nudity or male viewpoint common in the works of the male Hanoverians and many male artist contemporaries outside Hanover. Rather, when Jürgens and Overbeck represented prostitutes at all, they did so as the subjects in their works, and from the position of other women (ie. not as clients). Works in which prostitutes are represented come mainly from the early period of the artists' oeuvres. This accurately reflects the leisure pursuits of their student days; their time was spent in cafes, dives [Spelunken], bars, shooting galleries and at circuses and festivals.⁵⁷ Being early works, they were produced in various styles and media. These works most often depict couples in bar or cafe settings; the setting relates to the frequent contemporary use of such scenes as backdrops to representations of prostitutes. However, if we see these works existing on a continuum at one end of which are 'cafe' paintings by Grosz or Dix, the works of Jürgens and Overbeck must lie on the opposite end. They consistently maintained contact

with reality in their works. They did not reinterpret the figures so as to cause offence or, seemingly, glean excitement from symbolic depravity.

Jürgens' work of 1922, *In the Heinrich II* [figure 17], represents a scene of 'decadence', in the same sense as that conjured up by other Weimar realists in their scenes of bars. The bar is represented as a rather unsavoury location with its dark recesses, lurid lighting and old furniture. There is a spilt glass of beer on the floor. If the woman in the foreground is not actually a prostitute, she is certainly not a respectable middle-class German mother. However, she is the subject of the work, rather than a symbolic evocation of debauchery. The figure is fully clothed and posed frontally; she stares directly at us without smiling. This is the representation of an ordinary woman doing a job rather than an 'Eve' tempting men to their vices. The same lack of complicity in degradation is true of the female figure in Overbeck's *Lovers in a Dive* [Kaschemme] (1922) [figure 62]. Again, the figure is clothed and foregrounded. She has not been posed so as to titillate the spectator with any glimpses of her genitals. Furthermore, despite the groping of the male figure, there is no sense in which the female figure is enjoying this charade. She is not a temptress, but a worker. That concept of the prostitute as a worker was brought to fruition by Overbeck in 1923, when she painted the small watercolour *Prostitute* [figure 63]. In this work, the represented woman is not actually plying her trade, but

purchasing the contraceptive devices needed in her occupation. The frank treatment of the subject would have been very unusual, given the attitude of the authorities to the display and sale of contraceptives, but it also speaks of another woman's view of the occupation and its hazards.⁵⁸ Again, the artists were not enticed by the sexuality of prostitutes, but intrigued by their actual lives.

Generally, Jürgens and Overbeck were interested in far more differentiated levels of male/female interplay than the iconic representations of prostitutes could permit. Grethe Jürgens, for example, painted a scene of flirtatious couples in a cafe in 1931. The work's title, *Harbour Cafe* [figure 27], sets the cafe's location and links the work with the sailor theme. Unlike the usual representations of virile, freedom-loving sailors and their women (accompaniments to this lifestyle), Jürgens' work depicts a love triangle of sorts. A man, who does not appear to be a sailor, shares a booth with one woman but flirts with another. Each of the three characters is locked into an individual set of emotions, expressed by their positions and faces. The gaze of the fair-haired woman is fixed on the male figure, while her arms surround his head and block out the other woman. The male figure concentrates on the fair-haired female figure by turning his body toward her and his back to the other woman, but his eyes face out of the picture altogether, as if to preserve some vestige of distance from both women. The dark-haired woman is smaller than the other two figures

and made to fade into the background. She looks away from the other two rather than engaging with the situation. Jürgens carefully observed the detailed emotional interplay between people in this work in a way which is beyond the scope of symbolic representations of women.

Both Jürgens and Overbeck painted scenes of lovers, simply entitled *Liebepaar* [lovers]; these 'Liebepaar' paintings were common in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a whole. The *Liebepaar* scenes produced by Jürgens and Overbeck out-number the scenes from bars and cafes; they also appear later in their oeuvres as larger, more significant works. The style is more clearly that of the New Objectivity: strict realism, solid forms and well-defined detail. The scene lent itself to this style as it contained two, primary figures best shown in the immediate foreground. Ursula Horn paid particular attention to this iconography in her work about proletarian revolutionary art in the Weimar Republic.⁵⁹ These themes became popular in the later stages of the Republic, when the more incendiary left-wing art was exhausted and artists sought ways of presenting the working-class with reality and tenderness. There were a number of *Liebepaar*, including Wegner's *Lovers on the Beach* (1930) [figure 126], which sensitively portrayed proletarian courting couples. Some of the *Liebepaar* works more crudely represented couples, such as that by Werner Hofmann (1897-), *Under a Bridge* (1931) [figure 127]. Grethe Jürgens' *Liebepaar* of 1930 [figure 28], was cited by Horn as one of the better proletarian works, as its image is positive, yet not

didactic or sentimental.⁶⁰ Certainly, it satisfies the viewer compositionally; juxtaposing these two large figures with the sturdy stone window-frame and delicate vine. The vine, of course, also fulfills its usual symbolic purpose here by indicating that the lovers will cling together. Unlike some of the other works on this theme, Jürgens' did not portray the couple entangled sexually. Similarly, Gerta Overbeck painted a couple set in a circus camp which also removed overt sexual connotations by representing them speaking, outdoors. *The Circus Couple* [figure 64] reiterates the interest which the young Hanoverian artists had with the circus and gypsies, while realistically portraying them.⁶¹ Usually, these social outcasts were intriguing as freaks or libertines (see Schad's *Agoston, the Pigeon-chested Man and Rasha the Black Dove*, 1929 [figure 128]) but Overbeck here depicted them as an ordinary young couple and developed the dynamic of their relationship in her work.

Jürgens took up the theme of contemporary male/female relationships with a married couple on one occasion in 1927. The work, *Wife and Husband* [figure 29], predates the artist's *Liebespaar* by three years. The style and bolder compositional techniques demonstrate this even more than the dates written on the works. The *Wife and Husband* again places a monumental figure into the foreground, but the second figure (the husband) is uncomfortably squashed between a fence and a brick wall in the middle-ground. The wife figure is full-frontal while the husband figure is in profile. Contrasting those two views is

characteristic of Jürgens' work in the twenties, whereas in the thirties, she often used the more subtle three-quarter view. The figures are distinctly unemotional and alienated from one another; the man's hand merely serving to emphasize that fact. In addition to the obvious difference in emotional tone from the *Liebepaar*, the couple represented in *Wife and Husband* are middle-class. Jürgens made a statement about marriage and class with the juxtaposition of these two works as they are similar in style and structure, but utterly different in content.

The latest known work on the *Liebepaar* theme came from Gerta Overbeck.⁶² The *Liebepärchen* [figure 65] is also the one in which the composition most closely echoes the emotional content. We have explored the way in which the figures in Jürgens' *Wife and Husband* physically represent alienation; in Overbeck's *Liebepärchen*, the figures demonstrate harmony. With sparse detail, Overbeck depicted the closeness of this couple whose faces we cannot even see. At once, the viewer knows (probably remembers) the position in which the couple sit and the associated feelings. Despite the differences in emotional timbre of the various *Liebepaar* works by the artists, they remained faithful to the very real nature of the characters whom they used as subjects. This marks a major departure, in terms of iconography, from even other members of the Hanover group of the New Objectivity. Weimar painters most frequently represented sexualized images of women for symbolic purposes, despite their

claims of objectivity.

The Representation of Women in the Mass Media: Parodying the Object

Because of their relationship to other contemporaneous iconographies and social trends, three works by Jürgens and Overbeck are particularly relevant to the discussion of the objectification of women's bodies. These works concern Weimar women's fashion and, ultimately, the representation of women in contemporary advertising. Overbeck's *Mother with Child at the Hairdresser's* from 1924 [figure 44] is the earliest of the works; both of Jürgens' paintings, *Hairdresser's Mannequins* [figure 30] and *Mannequins* [figure 31] were produced in 1927. The link between all of these paintings is the figure of the fashion mannequin. At the time, mannequins were significant to both mass media and the fine arts. In advertising, they related to the commodification of the female form and in German Dada and the Neue Sachlichkeit the figure of the mannequin alluded to mindless pedants. In their concern for the relationship between real women and these idealized feminine objects, Jürgens and Overbeck drew on a subject of interest to a number of other contemporary women artists, such as Jeanne Mammen (1890-1976), Kate Steinitz (1889-1875), Hannah Höch, Lea Grundig, Ellen Auerbach (1906-) and Grete Stern (1904-). Obviously, these mass-produced representations of women were a treacherous obstacle to women artists in the period

who frequently relied upon parody in tackling them. By so doing, Jürgens, Overbeck and other women artists simultaneously recognized the objectification of women and subverted the convention.

Modernization, having reached the realms of distribution and services, made women's appearance and feminine wiles important to the market-place. We are used to the symbolic importance of fashionable secretaries and saleswomen, but it was new and rather shocking at the time. As Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz put it:

- . . . hordes of salesgirls streamed into the small shops and department stores, where an integral part of their job was to sell a product by seduction, symbolically, that is, through the use of feminine wiles.⁶³

The whole issue of the new, young and glamorous secretaries and clerks was very important to Weimar commentators. Berlin, for example, which had the highest numbers of fashionable, young, employed women, came to be seen as a symbol of the decadence of Germany under the Republic by right-wingers. This is easy to understand, knowing that the city also had the lowest birth-rate in the world.⁶⁴ In this climate, fashion generally, and cosmetics and beauty parlours specifically, became vital to the new, white-collar working woman. The advertising industry exploited this fact quickly and effectively by addressing the anxieties of 'new women'.⁶⁵ While women were the primary audience of advertising images, they were frequently represented as "idealized, machine-made commodities, at times portrayed literally as mannikins."⁶⁶

Positive images of women in German advertising during the Weimar Republic are hard to find and the intense objectification implied by the persistent use of mannequin (or mannequin-like) representations in the mass media created a difficult iconographic field within which to produce such images.

In contemporary German art, the mannequin was used to signify the ignorant docility of the bourgeoisie who allowed themselves to be cowed into unwinnable wars and economic disasters. George Grosz, infamous for chastizing the middle-classes for these faults, painted *Republican Automatons* in 1920 [figure 129]. This work defines the characteristic meaning of mannequins for artists in the Weimar Republic. Along similar lines, the Hanoverian, Erich Wegner painted the *Puppeteer* in 1928 [figure 130]. This work shows the establishment as puppets in the hands of a child. Peter Gay, in an article entitled 'The Weimar Resemblance', noted the popularity during the Weimar Republic of the puppet-metaphor. Citing Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician* amongst other books and screenplays, Gay suggested that Weimar's social critics were preoccupied with the near-hypnotic control which could be exercised over the masses:

But then, they [the masses] do not have their reason about them; it is the main purpose of all great modern political hypnotists to keep men from using their reason.

Thus, although the mannequin image in the fine arts generally referred to men (mere automatons or puppets), the docility and mindlessness explicit in the

characterization has no little significance in the case of the common use of the female fashion mannequin.

Representations of women in the mass media clearly were of interest to women artists in the Weimar Republic. The most direct intervention in this area came from Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern, two photographers known professionally as Ringl and Pit, who actually took advertising commissions. In one of their most famous advertisements, the artists parodied the young, fashionable mannequin image of women in no uncertain terms. The mannequin is displayed as such and the joke is continued by having an old-fashioned mannequin (dressed in one of the artists' Grandmother's clothes) advertising the product. The very point of the advertisement is to notice the falsity of the representation and its association with the commodification of women via advertisement. Another photographer who contended with fashion and advertising images of ideal women was Kate Steinitz. In her work, *Shopwindow Display* (1936-42) [figure 131], the near 'surreality' of the multiple, competing, representations of women found on an ordinary city street is in marked contrast to the conventional 'realistic' representations of store displays. The artist in no way tried to link actual women with these stylized female representations as Kurt Weinhold (1896-1965) did in his work from 1929/30, *New Window Display* [figure 132]. In his work, Weinhold normalized the objectification of women by associating 'real' women with the mannequins, adding a dominant, male viewer and, most significantly, representing one of the

'real' women looking at herself and putting on make-up. Lea Grundig's work of 1936 *Shop Window* (part of the *Woman's Life* series) [figure 133] also juxtaposes the figures of women and mannequins, but her work criticizes the capitalist system which entices poor women with goods unavailable to them. Hannah Höch, in her photomontage, made the connection between the representation of women in advertising and 'fine art' by actually using photographs from popular magazines to produce her works. In her works, such as *Made for a Party* (1936) [figure 134], the artist suggested that the media were distorting and controlling the image of woman; a woman was seen to be no more than the sum of her commodified representations. In painting, Jeanne Mammen ironically alluded to the increasing objectification of young, fashionable women in her work *Boring Dollies* (c.1927-30) [figure 135]. The 'dollies' of the title are two mannequin-like figures of young women and a representation of a china doll; the collapse of the distinction between human beings and mannequins in the work is sarcastically noticed in the title.

In *Mannequins*, Grethe Jürgens depicted five headless, female mannequins in a shop whose window reads 'Modes', thus setting the tone. There are no representations of real people against which to balance the mannequin figures; they exist in their own framework of meaning, coded by the word 'Modes'. The other work, *Hairdresser's Mannequins*, gives the viewer more visual food for thought. One model stares blankly in a full-frontal position while

the other is seen in profile. They sport modern hair styles and quite a lot of make-up, which is an unusual accompaniment to Jürgens' live female figures. The background, which is always significant in the artist's oeuvre, is unreal: disembodied hands merge with fans, curtains and some lurid light source. Both of Grethe Jürgens' paintings suggest an unpleasant, fantasy world. Seen in conjunction with the rest of her female representations, it is obvious that the mannequin works demonstrate a different attitude on the part of the artist. Jürgens generally represented the lives of the working-class women with whom she lived in a realistic and unemotional light. However, these works speak falsity; such representations of women have no part in the actual experience of being a woman in the Weimar Republic. Jürgens set the representations apart from ordinary experience and thus belied their influence on women which came (and comes) from the confusion of such images with attainable ideals. This confusion is typified by a work by Herbert Marxen (1900-1954), entitled *The Seamstress* (1927) [figure 136]. In this work, the figure of the mannequin is played against the figure of a nude woman in the background (presumably, the seamstress of the title); hence there exists a sense in which the woman and the mannequin are equally objectified and neither of them acts as a 'human' subject. It begs the question of why the seamstress would be nude if this were not a work meant to equate the body of a woman (in the nude seamstress) with the inanimate form of woman (the mannequin).

The painting by Gerta Overbeck brings the symbolic intention of these idealized female images into their real-life context. Gerta Overbeck's work, *Mother with Child at the Hairdresser's*, is not as sinister as Jürgens' works. There are living figures represented in the composition, including a child. Overbeck still made the comment on modish representations of women by using the contrast between the foreground group and the two figures at the back. The mother and the child are thick-set and plain. The two female figures in the background, of which one is a mannequin and the other, a glamorous saleswoman portrayed in such a way as to make her more akin to the mannequin than the woman in the foreground, are lithe and affected. The similarity between the mannequin and saleswoman makes the alienation of the 'real' woman in the scene more apparent and telling. Again, the fashionable image of women current in the period is parodied by contrast with known (and understood) female experience. The artists would undoubtedly have encountered these representations of women along with the emphasis on modern, fashion products. That they represented such things in less realistic, more symbolic, ways than ordinary scenes of proletarian life, indicates their perceptive reading of the images and their comment.

Conclusions

The context in which Jürgens and Overbeck produced their representations of women, in the wider sense, was one dominated by symbolic responses to the perceived threat of

the emergent 'new woman'. It is clear, with hindsight, that the 'new woman' was not the terrifying monster of social destruction which her detractors during the Weimar Republic would have had people believe; on the contrary, she was a scapegoat and a convenient target for collective fears during a traumatic period in German history. The reality of women's 'emancipation' at this time lay in increasing influence in the public life of the community, but Weimar women frequently found themselves in unpleasant situations when they entered this public arena. Not only were they economically disadvantaged relative to male workers, but treading this new ground meant uncertain status and direct confrontation with the stereotypical images of Weimar womanhood. These symbols were epitomized by two extremes: the dutiful German wife and mother and the decadent prostitute. Mainstream representations of women in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* followed these symbolic poles despite the artists' supposed aversion to the establishment. As a male-dominated contemporary discourse, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* hardly could have hoped not to respond to these resonant chords. The climate of women's representation in the movement relied on the use of female figures as symbols of social value or degradation and a generally negative view of women.

When Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck and other women artists approached the subject of women, they were in a singular position. They adhered to the aesthetic of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and in no way could divorce themselves from their own situation as 'new women'. Thus, their use

of the aesthetic was modified necessarily by gender concerns. The artists subverted convention by producing positive representations of women in the Weimar Republic. The key to this 'subversion' was in the idea of representation rather than allegory or icon. Jürgens and Overbeck painted female figures which referred to the experiences of actual women instead of the experiences of men. They were not merely symbols of social decay. Iconographically, the artists looked to alternative roles for female figures in their works while addressing both the common representations of prostitutes and mannequins. The combination of iconographic alterations with subtle shifts in emphasis by compositional techniques made the representations of women by Jürgens and Overbeck significantly different than those of their male contemporaries. The conventional subject/object positions are frequently overturned as the women represented by Jürgens and Overbeck act, dominate the pictures and control the gaze. The issue of gender necessitated these differences in representation by the artists.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. A contemporary source which discussed the 'neue Frau' is Dr. Alice Rühle-Gerstel, *Das Frauenproblem der Gegenwart: Eine Psychologische Bilanz* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1932). See particularly 'Formenwandel weiblicher Leitlinien', pp.81-123.

2. The census statistics are from *Flora and Mitchell*. Two articles made use of those statistics and within this chapter are cited frequently: Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche': Weimar Women in Politics and Work" in *Biology and Destiny*, pp. 33-65 and T. W. Mason, 'Women in Germany 1925-40: Family Welfare and Work' *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976) pp.74-113 and 2 (1976) pp. 5-32.

3. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, Marion Kaplan, *Biology and Destiny*, 'Introduction', pp.1-32 (p.8).

4. *ibid.*, p.13.

5. Ute Frevert suggests that the 'new woman' was a "projection" of men's fears and sense of progress in *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (Oxford: Berg Publishing Co., 1988), p. 179. Reiterating the idea of men's fears is Eric Hobsbawm, 'Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography' *History Workshop Journal* 6 (1978), pp.121-38 (p. 132).

6. Wieland Schmied, in discussing the discontinuity between the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and the realism which flourished under the Nazis said: "The painting that came to dominance in the years that followed [ie. Nazi realism] was neither new nor 'sachlich': it paid homage to false ideals, and its commitment was to illusion rather than reality." [my underline] from 'Neue Sachlichkeit - German Realism of the Twenties' in *Prints and Drawings*, pp.21-42 (p.21).

7. At the very least, the idea of 'Sachlichkeit' had this basic association. See the discussion of the aesthetic in the Introduction.

8. Atina Grossmann, 'Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign Against Paragraph 218' in *Biology and Destiny*, pp.66-86 (p.69) and Mary Kinnear, *Daughters of Time: Women in the Western Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), pp. 162-3. Naturally, it is not being argued here that all feminist groups in the Weimar Republic were agreed; class differences were particularly acute in these groups.

9. See Chapter One.

10. Lisa Tickner, 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970' reprinted in Rosemary Betterton, ed., *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media* (London: Pandora, 1987), pp. 235-53 (p. 239). Hereafter, *Looking On*.

11. Helen L. Boak, '"Women in Weimar Germany: The 'Frauenfrage' and the Female Vote' in *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, eds., Richard Bessel and E.J. Feuchtwanger (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1981) pp.155-173 (p.166); Maud Lavin, 'Ringl and Pit: the representation of women in German advertising, 1929-33' *Print Collector's Newsletter* XVI, no.3 (July/August 1985), pp.89-93. An interesting case of addressing such stereotypes to women can be seen in the advertisement of the 'Frau in Not' exhibition in *Weg der Frau*, no.4 (September 1931), p.7, where roles for women are not only 'working' and 'unemployed' [Arbeitende, Arbeitslose] but 'mother' and 'victim of obsolete moral values'[Mutter, Opfer überlebter Moralbegriffe].

12. Gisela Bock, 'Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization and the State' in *Biology and Destiny*, pp.271-296 (p.287). This article details the usual negative pressure on women seen as unfit to bear children, but also refers to the positive pressures brought to bear on women who were expected to have children whether they wished to or not.

13. Frevert, op. cit., p.157.

14. *ibid.*, pp.208-9.

15. See *Mitchell*, p.102 for the marked increase in the number of marriages in Germany during the years 1933, 1934 and 1935 and Emma Oekinghaus, *Die Gesellschaftliche und Rechtliche Stellung der Deutschen Frau* (Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer, 1925), p.44 about the position of married women being derived through the status of their husbands.

16. For a full discussion of the ramifications of motherhood in the period see: Karin Hausen, 'Mother's Day in the Weimar Republic' in *Biology and Destiny*, pp.131-152.

17. Renate Pore, *A Conflict of Interest: Women in German Social Democracy 1919-1933* (London: Greenwood Press, 1981), p.xi. and Jean H. Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917* (Princeton University Press, 1979), p.9. For a contemporary source which asserts the fact that German women deserve social and legal rights because of their service to the nation, see Dr. Else Wex, *Staatsbürgerliche Arbeit deutscher Frauen 1865-1928* (Berlin: F.A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, G.m.b.H., 1929), p.9.

18. August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, trans. from the 33rd German edition by Daniel de Leon (New York: New York Labor News Press, 1904), pp.85-86. Bebel here asserts that with socialism, women would be able to enjoy 'marriage based upon love, which alone corresponds with the natural purpose,'.

19. Renate Bridenthal, "'Professional' Housewives: Stepsisters of the Women's Movement" in *Biology and Destiny*, pp.153-173 (pp.153-4).

20. Frevert, op.cit., p.132 discussed the common fear of unbridled sexuality in women during the period. There was the notion that women set free would turn the whole world into "a brothel".

21. Mason, op.cit., p.81. Note that Mason goes on to say (pp.82-3) that women, despite their increasing numbers in a wide range of employment sectors, achieved very little real social or economic emancipation.

22. Lavin, op.cit., p.89.

23. The notion of women as double earners was

frequently called upon to return women to the domestic sphere in times of economic stress. It was, of course, untrue that most married women in Weimar who worked were doing so for 'extra' money or that their wages were even comparable to those expected by the men whose jobs they were accused of taking. See Frevert, op.cit., p.197.

24. There are many instances of discussions about prostitution in the period. For example, Rühle-Gerstel, op.cit., pp.266-69, discussed prostitution as one aspect of the working lives of women. These discussions have been widely used in secondary sources; some of the better are: Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* (London: Sage Publications Inc., 1976); Richard Evans, 'Prostitution, State and Society in Imperial Germany' *Past and Present* 70 (February, 1976), pp. 106-29; Mason, op.cit.; and Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, 'The Bremen Morality Scandal' in *Biology and Destiny*, pp.87-108. The 'Bremen Morality Scandal' refers to the popular outrage engendered by the horrific treatment of a young girl at the hands of the Bremen police when she was deemed a 'prostitute'.

25. Grossmann, op.cit., pp.73-4.

26. Mason, op.cit., p.89.

27. For a discussion of the political affiliations within the regional centres of the movement, see the Introduction. Suffice to say, the Neue Sachlichkeit was generally left-leaning (at least) and the 'mother' symbolism maintained the status quo.

28. For a discussion of the political significance of prints in the Weimar Republic see: Eberhard Roters, 'Line As Weapon', in *Prints and Drawings*, pp.14-18. p.16.

29. Obviously, Munich itself was, politically, a very conservative city, but the group was also specifically perceived as such. Note Schmied 1969, p.63 (he describes the work as 'arkadisch' and cites it as the most conservative trend in the movement). Two contemporaries are: Justus Bier who significantly included works by members of the Munich group in his exhibition *Neue Deutsche Romantik* held at the Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover in 1933, and Max Sauerlandt, who refers to the group as classical in his book *Die Kunst der Letzten Dreißig Jahre* (Berlin, 1934), pp.168-70.

30. One cannot forget the numerous instances of linking women with nature (and men with culture). For one specific reference, see the article by Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting' in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 293-314. Also, Hobsbawn, op.cit., p.133, states that, even in socialist iconography, women's figures are most often "utopian" or "natural".

31. *Schmied 1969*, p.270.
32. *ibid.*, p.273 and p.274.
33. Mention must be made of the fact that any sense of political radicalism necessarily corresponding to radical views of gender relationships is in some senses anachronistic. As stated earlier, most political parties were oblivious to gender issues. However, the KPD did have actual platforms on women's emancipation during the period; artists involved with this party, therefore, may be thought to have been familiar with feminist issues, if not in agreement with them.
34. The comment comes from an unnamed source in Louise Lincoln ed., *German Realism of the Twenties: The Artist as Social Critic*, [exhibition catalogue] (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1980), p.136.
35. Details of the boot fetish come from Schmied in *Prints and Drawings*, op.cit., p.31.
36. *A Small Yes and a Big No: The Autobiography of George Grosz*, translated by Arnold J. Pomerans (London, 1982), p.23.
37. Brigid S. Barton, *Otto Dix and Die Neue Sachlichkeit: 1918-1925* (Michigan, 1981), pp.42-3.
38. Keith Roberts, review of Arts Council exhibition 'German Realism of the Twenties', *Burlington Magazine* CXXI, no.910 (January 1979), p.52.
39. This subject/object difficulty is frequently expressed, but usually in general terms; Rosemary Betterton stated: "Women have always been visible as objects within culture, but only rarely have they been acknowledged as subjects of cultural production in their own right." in *Looking On*, op.cit., p.203.
40. After the Second World War, Gerta Overbeck did a number of linoleum prints and glass paintings of religious subjects, such as the Garden of Gethsemane.
41. See Chapter Four for details of this 'frequency'.
42. In interviews with family and friends of the artists, the fact that neither artist belonged to formal feminist groups arose. Those interviewed said that such groups were irrelevant as the artists 'were feminists'. This verbal evidence endorses my own argument, namely, that Jürgens and Overbeck were part of the commonly identified group of 'new women'.
43. See Chapter One and S. Niester, 'Die GEDOK: Interessenverband der Künstlerinnen 1926-1976', *Tendenzen* 17, no.107 (May-June 1976), pp. 28-30.

44. Mason, op.cit., p.71.
45. ibid., p.84.
46. Bridenthal and Koonz, 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche', p.49.
47. See Chapter Four.
48. ibid.
49. *Bonn Catalogue*, p.13.
50. There are a number of feminist art historians interested in the power of the gaze and the repercussions for gender issues, including Mary Ann Doane (see: 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' *Screen* (Fall 1982), pp.76-82), Anette Kuhn (see: *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982)) and Griselda Pollock (see: *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988)). In the context in which I argue here, the complexities of the psychoanalytic debate (centred on the works of Lacan and Irigaray) about the origins of a specifically gendered gaze do not need to be deciphered. Suffice to say that, if they are correct and gender relationships are consistently enacted in looking, it only strengthens my argument. If, however, the highly inexact science of psychoanalysis is refuted on this specific point, the use to which I put 'the gaze' above, is unharmed. That is to say that there are far less highly charged versions of the 'gaze issue' which simply point out that spectators, because of their position vis-a-vis the represented objects, are often given a "masterful" gaze or power over the object (Pollock actually used this less theoretical discussion in 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity' in *Vision and Difference*, pp.50-90 (p.87)). The more theoretical discussion can be found in the essay entitled 'Screening the Seventies: sexuality and representation in feminist practice- a Brechtian perspective' in *Vision and Difference*, pp.155-99.
51. This disruption (in class and/or gender terms) has been recognized by T.J. Clark and Pollock in their discussions of Manet's *Olympia* (1863). Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity' in *Vision and Difference*, p.54. The reason 'straight-forward' must be specified in terms of the look, centres on the so-called "'Come-on' look" which is so often used in soft pornography. See Anette Kuhn, 'Lawless Seeing' in *The Power of the Image, Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp.19-47 (pp.41-2).
52. *Schmied 1969*, p.27.
53. Thoms and Wegner were the two best-known members of the Hanover group, as evidenced by the frequency with which they were exhibited and written about. Details of

this are in the Introduction.

54. See Eric Hobsbawn, *op.cit.*, p.124, who stressed the link between representational nudity, allegorical roles (not "acting" but "inspiring") and female figures.

55. Brigid S. Barton, *op.cit.*, pp. 36-7 and Reinhold Heller, *Art in Germany 1909-1936: From Expressionism to Resistance* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1990), p.239.

56. The 'joke' is a coarse pun on the idea of 'rolling'; the prostitute professionally 'rolls' and the sentimental lovers in the picture are but another instance of foolish hearts and flowers (note the heart-shaped sign for the 'House of Love'). This is elaborated by Corinne D. Granoff in Heller, *op.cit.*, p.239.

57. See Chapter Two for a description of the friendly nature of the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group.

58. While contraceptives were available, article 184, section 3, prohibited the advertisement, display or publicizing of them as "articles of indecent use". Hence, there was much outcry against this article by feminists who were concerned with women's right to choose to have children. See Atina Grossmann, 'Abortion and Economic Crisis' in *Biology and Destiny*, p.68.

59. Ursula Horn, 'Zur Ikonographie der deutschen proletarisch-revolutionären Kunst zwischen 1917 und 1933' in *Revolution und Realismus: Revolutionäre Kunst in Deutschland 1917 bis 1933* [exhibition catalogue] (Berlin: Altes Museum, 1979), pp.53-69.

60. See Chapter Four for the political interpretation given of this work by Horn.

61. The owner believes the work to date from the late 1920s which opinion is confirmed by the style and the signature (merely 'Overbeck' rather than 'Overbeck-Schenk').

62. The signature includes 'Schenk' therefore the work can be no earlier than 1937, which makes it the latest-known Liebespaar.

63. Bridenthal and Koonz, 'Kinder, Küche Kirche', p.51.

64. Mason, *op.cit.*, p.82.

65. Maud Lavin, (*op.cit.*) is the primary source for specific information about the representation of women in the German advertising industry used here with the emphasis on the artists Auerbach and Stern.

66. *ibid.*, p.89.

67. Peter Gay, 'The Weimar Resemblance' *Horizon* 12, no.1 (Winter, 1970), pp.4-15 (p.12).

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICS

Introduction

Politics and the Neue Sachlichkeit were linked first by contemporary critics in the Weimar Republic and they have remained, to this day, a standard topic of art historical debate.¹ In such literature, however, definitions of 'politics' are not always forthcoming. The use of the word varies from the nebulous to the implied, in which cases it is assumed 'politics' is universally understood. Despite the variety found in the applications of the term 'politics' to the Neue Sachlichkeit, close attention reveals that certain conventions have dominated the discussion of the relationship between the political sphere and the realist art of the Weimar Republic. In the received definition, political content in the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit is determined by particular features, such as the political affiliation of the artist and the party-political message in the works. The examples of a few particular male artists in certain regional centres have conventionally represented the 'politics' of the Neue Sachlichkeit. Thus, a dominant paradigm has been constructed with reference to the 'political' nature of the art of this movement and other regions and artists are judged against it.

These dominant political paradigms have made it especially difficult to understand the work of women artists as they are premised upon masculine-normative conceptions of political action. It has been usual to assess women artists' 'political' work in masculine terms; here women are categorized as political as and when they approximate the political behaviour of men. In the discipline of political science, scholars have begun to reassess ideas about what constitutes the 'political sphere' for women for exactly these reasons. Traditional concepts of politics, derived from masculine party-political action, do not suffice to explain the many alternative ways in which women act as political entities. There is a need to transcend definitions of 'politics' which rely exclusively upon party politics and the sharp division of public and private space.

These ideas have powerful implications for any study of women artists associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In a movement so characteristically defined by its political content, the works of women artists have yet to be addressed adequately in this sense. Judged by traditional standards, the works seem to lack definitive 'political' motifs or are 'apolitical'. However, women artists in the period often acted 'politically' in their art and lives. Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck produced works which evaluated the changing roles of women in the Weimar Republic, criticized bourgeois ideals and self-consciously linked them to the proletariat. Yet, as

women and artists from a regional centre not typically considered 'political', the politics of their art has been neglected or under-valued. The politics of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group and the gender politics of the Weimar Republic form the dual context in which Jürgens and Overbeck produced their political work, and their meaning can be determined only within this framework.

Traditional Definitions of Politics in the Neue Sachlichkeit: The Case of Hanover

Definitions and Criticism

When Gustav Hartlaub first coined the term 'Neue Sachlichkeit', he identified two wings within the tendency: "der 'rechte' Flügel (Neu-Klassizisten, wenn man so sagen will)" and "der linke 'veristische' Flügel".² The right wing (later usually known as 'Magic Realism'), consisted mainly of the artists of the Munich group and quickly lost any openly political associations in the literature. Notions of politics and the Neue Sachlichkeit centred upon the artists and regions identified in this early stage as the left wing or Verism. The Hartlaubian left wing included artists such as Max Beckmann, George Grosz, Otto Dix and Georg Scholz. Hartlaub furthered the political ties of the Neue Sachlichkeit (as opposed to Magic Realism) in 1929, by clarifying his position thus: 'The expression [Neue Sachlichkeit] ought really to apply as a label to the new

realism bearing a socialistic flavour.³ Associations between the Neue Sachlichkeit and socialist artists were enhanced by the foundation of various politicized artist-groups such as the ARBKD [Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künstler Deutschland], the Novembergruppe and the Rote Gruppe, whose membership included many of the best-known realists of the day such as Georg Grosz, Conrad Felixmüller, Rudolf Schlichter and Hans Grundig. Frequently, the artists of the left wing of the Neue Sachlichkeit were also official members of the Communist Party (KPD). These factors, in conjunction with the fate of many of these artists and their works at the hands of the Nazis, contributed toward the contemporaneous definition of 'politics' with respect to the Neue Sachlichkeit.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Neue Sachlichkeit was the subject of little scholarly work. When Wieland Schmied published his book, *Neue Sachlichkeit und Magischer Realismus in Deutschland, 1918-1933* in 1969, it became the principal source on the theme. It is not surprising to find that Schmied's views about the politics of the movement are the orthodoxy even today. His opinions thus deserve some elaboration.⁴ Schmied reiterated Hartlaub's left and right wings and assigned the term 'Magic Realism' to the right wing. He then stated:

... where I apply the term 'Neue Sachlichkeit' to the multiplicity of realistic tendencies which come under discussion here, I do so in the original, Hartlaubian sense. The term 'Verism' - which seems the most unambiguous and least controversial - will

be used to refer to the 'left wing' of this tendency.

In Schmied's view, this veristic left-wing was decidedly political and centred in three particular cities: Berlin, Dresden and Karlsruhe. Those cities brought Schmied together with Hartlaub yet again, as the artists whom Hartlaub classed as verists were affiliated with these centres. Despite referring to Berlin's 'politically engaged artists', Dresden's 'artists passionately committed to radical political ideas' and to Karlsruhe itself as 'one of the places where politically committed Realism flourished', Schmied did little to define his use of the term 'political'.⁶ The only definition is as follows:

A politically committed, polemical variety of realism with ironical, sarcastic and cynical traits ranging from biting social criticism to sympathetic descriptions of proletarian life.

This is typical of the ambiguity which surrounds the term 'politics' when applied to the Neue Sachlichkeit. Commentators like Schmied have stated that some of the works, usually called verist, have a political content which is socialist in intent. This content manifests itself in socio-critical works and in works which are sympathetic to the proletariat. These ideas are themselves left undefined. In the early 1970s, East German Marxist scholars began to consider the Neue Sachlichkeit; political intentions and definitions were crucial to their discussions of the movement. Roland März, in his essay 'Realismus und Sachlichkeit: Aspekte deutscher Kunst 1919 bis 1933', argued against the blanket

application of the term 'Neue Sachlichkeit' to all realist trends in the period because of the variety of political motives found in the art.⁸ He defined 'Verism' [Verismus] and 'Proletarian-Revolutionary Art [Proletarisch-revolutionäre Kunst] as the truly left-leaning political tendencies in the art of the period, contrasting them with the Neue Sachlichkeit because of its bourgeois emphasis on capitalist progress. These two political tendencies, however, were defined in ways as conventional as those of Hartlaub and Schmied. Verism was a socio-critical art which juxtaposed the exploited masses with their predatory, capitalist exploiters, while proletarian-revolutionary art presented positive images of the proletariat. This recalls Schmied's 'biting social criticism' and 'sympathetic descriptions of proletarian life'. März also named as examples many of the same artists as former critics, such as Grosz, Dix, Scholz, Grundig and Nagel.

The artists and regions typically cited by Hartlaub, Schmied and März, the idea of social criticism and the sense of proletarian sympathy combine to create a conventional notion of the 'politics' of the Neue Sachlichkeit. This involves, principally, the self-conscious political affiliation of the artist. This is assumed to have had a direct influence on the works produced by the artist as, for example, in the case of Georg Grosz's print from *The Face of the Ruling Class, Prost Noske! The Proletariat is Disarmed!* (1921) [figure 137]. This work, produced in the service of party

politics by a member of the Communist Party and referring to an actual political event, is a typical of what was considered politicized art in the period. The criticism of Gustav Noske, who used the Freikorps to quell workers strikes in the Ruhr, cannot be misread. Similarly, Grosz's work *Infamy* (1922) [figure 138], with its incendiary subtitle (A Poem of a Dutiful Soldier) and controversial image of a mutilated war-cripple, exemplifies the definitions of socio-critical art. *The Party Local* (1920) [figure 139] by Rudolf Schlichter is an example of a proletarian-revolutionary work, again produced by an artist with definite political affiliations. In the work, the proletarian figures are represented so that their individuality is stressed. They are shown to be intelligent, class-conscious members of the Communist Party. Another form of proletarian-revolutionary art was that which emphasized the humanity of the proletariat in their suffering. Otto Nagel's lithograph of 1922, *Unemployed* [figure 140], is this type of work. These standard notions of the constitution of 'political' art are not false, but are limited in scope. As shall be discussed at length later, they are derived from masculine-normative concepts of politics and provide a poor framework for understanding the art produced by women in the period. However, the limitations of these definitions with regard to the regional politics of Hanover requires further discussion.

In 1969, Wieland Schmied characterized the Hanoverians thus:

Zwar herrschen, aufs ganze gesehen, in der hannoverschen Gruppe die sozialen, sozialkritischen, alltäglichen Motive vor, Armenviertel und Arbeitslose, kleine Händler und Trödler... aber es fehlen dabei ätzende Formulierungen und anklägerischer Eifer, überhaupt jede aggressive Haltung, es überwiegt der Wunsch, die Welt, in die man gestellt ist, wenigstens im Bild zu bewältigen und ihre genau registrierten Schwierigkeiten wenn nicht zu überwinden, so doch zu mildern.

This sense that the Hanoverians used the themes of political art, apolitically, is reiterated frequently in the literature about the group. Ursula Bode, in 1976, said the group were not 'Revolutionäre' but 'Berichterstatter des Lebens in einer Stadt mit dunklen Seiten'.¹⁰ Helmut Leppien, also, suggested that a political label would be misapplied to the Hanover brand of the Neue Sachlichkeit:

Hat Reissert recht, wenn er ihre Bilder kämpferisch nennt? Zur engagierten Kunst ist das *Arbeitsamt* bestimmt nicht zu rechnen. ... Sicherlich sind sie nicht aggressiv, aber nüchtern und gegenwartsbezogen.

The Hanoverians tended to paint many calm scenes of everyday life in the working-class quarters of the city in a static, almost naive, style. They were not all committed to party-politics or members of politicized art groups. Their works are not immediately disturbing or confrontational in subject-matter or style as are the majority of politically incendiary works from the period. Thus, they are perceived to be apolitical by certain critics.

By contrast, however, the East German art historian, Ursula Horn, used the Hanover group as an example of the

proletarian-revolutionary trend in German art during the Weimar Republic. She has specifically cited some of the works of Grethe Jürgens to validate her claims that the Hanoverians painted veritable role models for the proletariat:

Hier, wie auch in Grethe Jürgens' schönem *Liebespaar* (Öl, 1930), drückt sich die Hoffnung auf eine Zukunft aus, in der sich der individuelle Glücksanspruch im Einklang mit der gesellschaftlichen Umwelt verwirklichen kann.¹²

Horn was concerned in her work with finding the roots of socialist realism in the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit. The Hanover group exemplified her notions of an art produced from a true fellow-feeling with the proletariat. In keeping with this theme, Paul Reissert distinguished between three aspects of engagement in Neue Sachlichkeit art: proletarian, critical and incendiary [proletarisch, kritisch und kampferisch].¹³ To explicate this idea, he argued that Otto Nagel's work was proletarian but not critical or incendiary, and the work of George Grosz was so critical and incendiary that there was left no room for the proletariat. He assigned all three adjectives to the Hanoverian artists' works. This radical view of the work of the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group is based on the self-same works as the 'apolitical' argument; Jürgens' *Liebespaar* [figure 28] is read simultaneously as a personal moment between a young couple and a public 'anthem' to the strengths of the proletariat.

It should be recognized that there is here a real problem with interpretation which requires another

viewpoint for its solution. Both sides of the Hanoverian political art debate find themselves imprisoned by the language and ideas of a dominant discourse within the realm of the Neue Sachlichkeit. The fame and status of the Berlin, Dresden and Karlsruhe manifestations of the Neue Sachlichkeit have made their particular styles and iconographies the standards against which the provincial groups are judged. It so happens that within these centres harsh brands of party-political criticism and caricature developed and they have come to represent the nature of political art in the Weimar Republic. Hence, scholars assessing the Hanover group either ally the art with these trends (kritisch, kampferisch) or consider the works of the Hanoverian group to have been without political intent. The very terms of the debate falsify the intentions of the Hanover group. It should be obvious by now that the sense in which this chapter uses the term 'political' is not narrowly confined to party politics, but seeks a broader-based definition. The Hanoverians self-consciously identified with the proletariat against bourgeois society and saw themselves as subverting the Hanover art scene and the elitism of the avant-garde. These were political actions, but not party-political.

Neue Sachlichkeit and Political Engagement in Hanover

Members of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group did not see themselves as 'political' in the conventional sense and sometimes distinguished themselves from the politics of other centres and artists. Wegner said: 'Mich

zog es rein gefühlsmäßig nach links, aber ein ausgesprochen politischer Mensch, ein Ideologe, war ich nicht und bin ich auch nicht geworden...'¹⁴ Asked about the proletarian themes of her early works, Grethe Jürgens responded in 1981: 'Ja schon, aber nicht im sozialkritischen Sinne, wie man es heute versteht (Hinweis auf die sozialkritischen Vertreter der Neuen Sachlichkeit wie Grosz und Dix).'¹⁵ This rejection of political dogma was accompanied by a rejection of artistic theory. Gustav Schenk wrote: 'Was so sehr die Maler unseres Landstrichs von den anderen unterscheidet, ist das Fehlen des Programmatischen.'¹⁶ Both Jürgens and Wegner commented that theory was unimportant, especially when one could actually be painting: 'Wir haben gearbeitet, wir haben gemalt. Von Kunsttheorien haben wir nicht viel gehalten.', 'Zum Theoretisieren hatte keiner viel Zeit, das Malen war wichtiger.'¹⁷ Thus, the Hanoverian groups' 'politics' cannot be understood within the boundaries generally applied to the Neue Sachlichkeit and they made this clear through the avoidance of both political and artistic programmes. Distinguishing themselves from this mainstream, however, does not indicate that they were merely apolitical, rather, it points toward alternative notions of politics.

For example, having 'feeling' for the left, but not being an ideologue, as Wegner described, has definite political overtones. Like Grosz, he was no friend of Noske: 'Natürlich standen wir gefühlsmäßig auf Seiten der Leute, die dort lebten und Noskes Polizei war nicht unser

Freund.¹⁸ Gerta Overbeck stated her sympathies even more directly: "Sehr bewußt stellten wir uns in den 1920er Jahren in Gegensatz zu der sogenannten 'bürgerlichen' Gesellschaft."¹⁹ The young artists associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit in Hanover lived with the proletariat of the city. As noted in Chapter Two, the group felt most comfortable within this milieu and drew the subjects of their works from it. This self-conscious identification with Hanover's working-classes was 'politically' significant; their artistic goals were derived from this position.

The politics of the Hanoverian brand of the Neue Sachlichkeit cannot be understood without reference to the art scene of the city in the period. Though Hanover was a middle-class, provincial city, there was support for certain modern trends among its patrons of art.²⁰ Kurt Schwitters and his proponents controlled a considerable amount of Hanoverian exhibition space and public attention during the 1920s and early 1930s. The Kestner-Gesellschaft was the main modern venue in Hanover during the period, showing a variety of modern European and Russian art as well as some Expressionist works. While the Hannoversche Sezession, one primary member of which was Fritz Burger-Mühlfeld, exhibited there, the Gesellschaft generally favoured contemporary abstraction over the realism practised during the period. Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) actually spoke there in 1924 on the subject of abstract art.²¹ The Provinzialmuseum was also more favourably disposed to abstract tendencies in

art. The most famous installation to take place in the 1920s was the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* which the museum director, Alexander Dorner, and El Lissitzky (1890-1947) produced jointly. It was removed as degenerate in 1937. The Kunstverein and the aforementioned Sezession were equally partial to modernism. Critically, 'modernism' in Hanover was defined in opposition to the realism practised by the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group.

The artists associated with the New Objectivity took issue with this situation, which they called the 'art politics' [Kunstpolitik] of Hanover. Gustav Schenk coined the term in his article for *Der Wachsbogen*, 'Die Situation der Jungen Maler', in which he argued that the 'Tallyrands' and 'Metternichen' of the city were inhibiting the work of young artists:

Es gibt wohl kaum eine mittlere deutsche Großstadt, in der in so wenigen Jahren so viel gute Arbeit geleistet worden ist, als in Hanover. Es wird auch zugegeben, daß erfreulicherweise ein oder zwei von den jungen hannoverschen Künstlern nicht mehr so sehr von einer gesellschaftlichen Diktatur tyrannisiert werden.²²

Gerta Overbeck described the situation in even less ambiguous terms thus:

Wir wurden gar nicht ernstgenommen. Uns kannte keiner, die liefen ja lieber zu Schwitters und den anderen in der Kestner-Gesellschaft, wir waren ja nicht modern genug.'²³

Given this context, the actions of the Hanoverians were highly political. These middle-class art institutions and patrons were the embodiment of the establishment in Hanover and the artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit

consciously set out to undermine them. These 'sachlich' artists were subversive of this tradition in every way. They identified with the proletariat and produced their art for the workers.²⁴ They refused to theorize, they distinguished themselves from high art practice and stressed that their art practice was work. As Jürgens said:

Wir saßen in Hannover und fühlten uns nicht als 'Neuerer'. Nur als etwas anderes als die 'Expressionisten', die zu einer 'Höheren Kunstrichtung' gehörten. Wir waren vulgäre²⁵ Maler und malten auch keine eleganten Typen.

This emphasis upon 'realism' stylistically separated them from the modernism popular in Hanover as did the importance they placed upon timeliness in their 'sachlich' art.

The politics of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group are politics in the broad sense; they were presenting a challenge to the hegemony of the middle classes in the cultural life of the city. They sought an accommodation of their interests in the social life of Hanover. Their lives and art were not thought of as separate, but as interdependent. If more traditional political theories cannot accommodate this sort of politics, recent studies of 'personal' politics and the politics of postmodernism can. The phrase 'identity politics' was coined to describe the alternative politics of the gay and feminist movements of the 1960s, but is derived from a whole system of recent theorising about the importance of the private sphere (personal life, identity) to the public sphere

(politics).²⁶ The elements of the gay and feminist movements which produced the theory were as follows: the novelty of political power, a minority social situation and the self-consciousness of the personal identification. These features are resonant with the Hanover group's relationship to politics and the working-classes in the Weimar Republic. Action, for the gay and feminist groups, centred upon defining and disassembling the complex social relationships which surrounded their identities as homosexuals or women. The same sort of action was taken by the Hanoverian group with regard to the lives of the proletariat; by self-consciously identifying with the minority position of the working-classes in Germany they stressed their anti-bourgeois stance. Such self-conscious identity determination is vital to the concept of 'identity politics'. The phrase derives its power from the distinction between unconscious and conscious role assumption. The politics of the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit group was a politics of personal identity. They were subversive of the bourgeois art establishment in Hanover through the production of works which defied cultural norms.

The production of representations is not an innocent activity; artists cannot but engage with society in some way. To produce works integral to a subversive world-view, such as the Hanoverians claimed, is to act politically. These representations do not need to have a party-political impetus or to fit neatly into the schema Hartlaub or Schmied defined as political. When Hans

Mertens produced the painting *Card-Players* [figure 141] in 1929, the style and subject-matter allied the work to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which fact spoke volumes in 1920s Hanover.

Gender and Politics in the *Neue Sachlichkeit*: Jürgens and Overbeck

Traditional definitions of politics have tended to exclude women's participation or limit their activity within male-normative structures. For example, party politics and action within governmental institutions are almost exclusively male territory; if they define 'politics', women are apolitical. More subtly, assigning political behaviour to the public realm alone has invoked a biological determinism of sorts which confines women to the feminine, private sphere and thus to a naturally 'apolitical' stance. Additionally, women's political life has been construed as induced by men or approximating male activity; wives/daughters are thought to act as their husbands/fathers wish them to.²⁷

It should be obvious that the traditional definition of 'politics' in the art of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* is gender-biased. It is based upon notions of party-political involvement and action, a social criticism in which male institutions are attacked for everything but their gender-exclusivity and a 'proletarian' art which assumes the workers all to be male (refer to the works of Nagel and Schlichter above). As

explored in Chapter Three, the representations of women in the Neue Sachlichkeit were most often stereotypical icons of the mother and the whore. For women artists, the standards of 'political' art in the movement offer little room for manoeuvre; the notion of gender politics is absent. This lack was identified in an unfortunately brief passage by Beth Irwin Lewis in the preface to the second edition of her book *George Grosz: Art and Politics in the Weimar Republic*. The book's purpose was to describe the nature of the links between art and politics in the period with respect to the art of Grosz, and thus it is significant to note the author's comments at length:

The significant new perspectives and interpretive frameworks that have accompanied the women's movement since this book was first published have made me reassess my own work. I must admit that my interpretation of Grosz would be fundamentally different if I were writing now. While I still believe that my initial analysis of Grosz's political relationships remains sound, I could not now ignore the misogyny in his work and the political implications of that misogyny. For example, analyzing *Ecce Homo* in 1970, I subordinated Grosz's fascination with eroticism to his political activism, calling the drawings 'eroticism in the service of communist propaganda'. That judgement now seems to me only partially correct. In my focus on the problems of class oppression and militarism, I chose to ignore gender and passed over the existence of the women's movement in Germany and its impact upon the young marginalized artists in the first decades of the century.²⁸

There were a number of ways in which women artists acted politically in the period and defied these masculine-normative standards.²⁹

Within the contexts of gender politics and the Hanoverian Neue Sachlichkeit, Jürgens and Overbeck engaged

with the 'political' realm. Professional women artists enjoyed a special relationship with society unlike that of their male counterparts and, therefore, their engagement with the political sphere was different. The so-called 'woman question', the debate concerning the appropriate roles for contemporary women, was a significant source of controversy in Germany throughout the early years of this century and had distinct political overtones. Just by being independent women workers Jürgens and Overbeck declared themselves as subversive and were thus allied with a female minority. The 'politics' of their lifestyles were clearly not those of the conservative bourgeoisie. As 'sachlich' artists they were even further removed from ordinary, middle-class women. They confronted the boundaries of the public and the private sphere, which were politicized borders at this time. 'Identity politics' were useful to Jürgens and Overbeck, but the ramifications of gender identity meant that their works had political implications beyond those of their male counterparts in the region.

Notions of identity, or 'personal' politics, which do not rely upon parties or specific ideology were resonant with the experience of both artists as women in the period. Women had not been allowed to be members of any political party, or even to gather publicly until 1908.³⁰ Thus, the social concerns of women in the period usually were not expressed through the male-dominated party system, but in more personal ways. Because of the fact that women have frequently voiced their social

concerns outside party lines, their participation has often been assigned to the 'moral' or 'social' realm rather than the 'political'.³¹ Such was the case when women in Germany took issue with the infamous anti-abortion legislation Paragraph 218 in 1931. As discussed before, this 'women's issue' was highly contentious in the period and it would be a mistake to suggest that it had no political currency. Thus, when Hanna Nagel produced *The Paragraph* [figure 142] in 1931 with its image of a pathetic working-class woman overshadowed by a pregnant woman and child, she acted politically. The poster, *Paragraph 218* [figure 143], produced in the same year by Alice Lex-Nerlinger (1893-1975) is yet more direct, showing a group of united women pushing the paragraph away. This 'moral' concern was indubitably political.

Gender concerns affected the relationship of Jürgens and Overbeck to Hanover's Kunstpolitik in many different ways. Just as the art establishment is dominated by bourgeois values, so too is it mainly a male sphere. Women artists who have engaged with the art circles of their day have, by definition, undermined convention. Many avant-garde trends and artists were notoriously chauvinistic and the academic alternative was no more responsive to women artists. Elitism, generally, worked against women in the arts and thus Jürgens and Overbeck wisely dissociated themselves from 'higher' art movements. Their conviction to be faithful to their own reality and use a plain, sober style, functioned as a powerful response to the

male-normative conventions of 'genius' and wild stylistic experimentation current in the period. This 'formal subversion' runs through all of their work. To understand the art of both women, form and content cannot be separated but, rather, must be seen as uniting to produce the meaning in the works.

In light of these gendered political issues, the fact that the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group was the only cohesive group of the period in which women (who were not romantically linked to male members of the group) were an integral part is interesting. It is impossible to determine whether the nature of the group was transformed by the women's involvement or the viewpoint encouraged this engagement, but the fact is that women artists could integrate their own experience particularly well within the context of the Hanoverian politic. The works of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck demonstrate this conclusively. Within the boundaries of political response set by the Hanoverian group as a whole, Jürgens and Overbeck manipulated both form and content to produce viable 'political' works which did not deny the unique position of women artists in the Weimar Republic. Their iconographies relate to their own experiences and those of their female contemporaries and their use of formal convention reiterates their subversion of the norm. By examining works from Jürgens' and Overbeck's oeuvres, the function of gender in the political scheme becomes obvious. The works chosen here to exemplify the nature of the artists' relationship to the 'political' are divided

into two groups: socio-critical images and images of subversive identification. The first section includes themes which were known to be controversial in the period and thus have a negative sense of criticism inherent in them. Representations of unemployed workers and strikes, for example, fit into the traditional definitions of political realism in Weimar and can be found in the oeuvres of both Jürgens and Overbeck. By contrast, many works by the artists could be included under the broad heading of the second section. However, the works discussed here specifically relate to the creation of a subversive, proletarian identity. They illustrate a wide range of workers and their situation and, at the same time, demonstrate that the artists' gender significantly affected their response to the theme. The works in the second section show positive representations of the proletariat, but these are political through their insistent use of representations which de-naturalize the class and gender roles of the period.

Social Criticism

Two themes must begin the discussion of socio-critical representations of working-class life by the artists: the poor and the militant. None of the Hanoverian artists had any illusions about the early years of the Republic. As Ernst Thoms said: 'Die Schwere der goldenen zwanziger Jahre haben gerade die Künstler gespürt.'³² They were difficult years economically, and the profusion of crippled beggars, masses of unemployed workers and strikes

depicted in the painting of the New Objectivity testifies to the visual horror of the situation and its certain ability to shock and offend. There were real political overtones to the distress of the proletariat during the Weimar Republic. Striking industrial workers were frequently politicized toward the radical left and the working-class neighbourhood was a viable political unit.³³ Struggles for control of the new Republic took place on the streets and often coincided with labour struggles. Members of both the Communist and National Socialist parties used the labour exchanges as recruitment halls, filled, as they were, with large numbers of dissatisfied unemployed people. All of these struggles found their way into the art of Jürgens and Overbeck. Gerta Overbeck, for example, painted *A Beggar with a Bowl* [figure 66] in 1922, arguably the worst year of the inflation, and in 1925, *The Accordion Player* [figure 67]. Both of these works show pathetic figures reduced to begging on the streets for a living. The background details of the city are cold and uncomfortable as if to reiterate the plight of the figures. Plainly, these works were critical of Weimar's 'Golden Twenties'.

In 1921 and 1922 Gerta Overbeck produced two other images which are even more conventionally political in content. *The Wounded Revolutionary* (1921) [figure 68] depicts an agonised, striking worker having his arm bandaged by a young girl. The title reference to the figure as a 'revolutionary' means the scene cannot but be a politicized reading of the event. The whole work is

charged emotionally by the figures' twisted poses and expressions and Overbeck's violent pencil technique. By setting the scene outdoors, by a fence or barricade, the artist reinforced the mood of strife. This man is willing to risk his life for his cause but, crucially, he is not an idealized, heroic figure, but an ordinary man. The same can be said of the figures which Overbeck painted in *Worker Revolt* (1922) [figure 69]. There is a complete mood change here from the earlier work with its writhing, emotional figures. In *Worker Revolt*, four men stand in a line and one actually bows his head. The 'revolt' of the title is difficult to find and was, in fact, over by the time these figures are shown to us. The assessment of the outcome is not so problematic. The men are standing together, resigned to their fate. Gerta Overbeck specified the subject of this work as a realistic scene from the famous general strike and occupation of the Ruhrgebiet in 1921-22. In this work, we see the men being driven away after their defeat at the hands of the combined forces of the *Frei Korps* and an Allied occupation army. Significantly, she also stated that it was a scene with which she was personally familiar.³⁴ This familiarity denies the usual association of militancy with masculinity and places women in 'unfeminine' space. Other women artists also produced works which affirmed women's involvement with every aspect of public sphere political engagement, such as *Revolution* (1933-34) [figure 144] by Lea Grundig.

In terms of identity, and therefore, political outlook,

a significant difference between the women's circumstances developed when Gerta Overbeck left Hanover in order to earn a living in Dortmund. Though she returned nearly every weekend and during school holidays, the influences which shaped her self-image differed considerably from those affecting Jürgens. Overbeck herself characterized the differences between Dortmund with its heavy industry and Hanover with its bourgeois cultural life: 'Dortmund war ganz anders: die Industriebevölkerung, die Arbeitslosigkeit, die häßlichen, rußigen Häuser, ernüchternd, ohne vermittelnde Tradition.'³⁵ Thus, Gerta Overbeck evolved her autonomous identity primarily within the confines of the industrial proletariat and Grethe Jürgens within the Hanoverian art circle of their student years. These identity factors were not mutually exclusive, but they do help to account for the fact that Jürgens' art relied more heavily, in thematic terms, upon portraits of her artist friends and herself, while Overbeck represented far more scenes of industrial landscape and workers. The considerations of working-class identity still apply to Jürgens, but her context was Hanover rather than Dortmund. Hence, scenes of violent strikes do not appear in her oeuvre as they do in Overbeck's. Rather, Jürgens' social criticism dealt with a different vision of unemployment, one as characteristic of her own experience as *Worker Revolt* had been of Overbeck's.

In 1929, Jürgens twice took up the theme of the Hanoverian unemployed in her work. *The Unemployed* [figure

32] represents a crowd of figures awaiting welfare money or, more hopefully, a lead on a job, inside a labour exchange. *The Labour Exchange* [figure 9] shows the outside of this building in Hanover with a long queue in front of it. In 1929, Jürgens had first-hand experience of the exchange in Hanover as she was unemployed, but a recipient of benefits. In fact, it is her own figure (with her back to us) shown walking down the street in *The Labour Exchange*. Jürgens' scenes are considerably less emotive than Overbeck's earlier works both in style and subject matter. The later date of Jurgens' works accounts for this in two ways. First, the struggles involved with strike actions during the early years of the Republic were far more violent than those of the later years. Further, the industrial workers shown by Overbeck were not those lucky few who could receive state insurance as shown by Jürgens; when they were out of work, they received nothing. Thus, the times had changed; the unemployment and inflation of the early years of the Weimar Republic were not like the unemployment and depression which characterized the later years. Neither was the situation in Dortmund akin to that in Hanover. Further, the artists' adherence to the full-blown sobriety of the New Objectivity had developed by the time Jürgens painted her works. There was little place in the aesthetic for expressionistic distortions as they would detract from the matter-of-factness of the works.

What is particularly significant about these works, despite their differences in style, is the underlying

similarity in the artists' approaches to the theme which uniquely combined gender-consciousness with political awareness and context. Most obviously, the artists both chose to depict scenes with which they were personally familiar; many more didactic subjects could have been found for the authors of political propaganda in the period. Further, the works touched on contentious themes of the period without being incendiary in a party-political way. Neither artist covered her work with slogans or altered the figures so as to make a specific political statement. The representations of the figures were not distorted to produce either heroic proletarian ideals or degraded objects of sympathy or self-righteous indignation. Stylistically, we are always close to these figures; they are like us. Jürgens self-portrait image is especially indicative of the fact that the artists dealt with these images from within. All of these facts emphasize the non-ideological bias in the political involvement of Jürgens and Overbeck. The artists responded to these themes within the context of their own experience as women in the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group.

Images of Subversive Identity

The works which form the basis of the 'political' argument in this section are not representations of specific strike activities or scenes which were typically politically controversial during the Weimar Republic. The representation of proletarian life was political in the

wider sense; these images subverted bourgeois sensibilities by virtue of their subject-matter and intended viewing audience. The works are neither beautiful by academic standards nor modern in terms of the avant-garde; rather, they celebrated the ordinary, sometimes unappealing, lives of the working-classes. They evolved from the politicized self-consciousness of the Hanover group and demonstrate the visual equivalent of an 'identity politic'. Representations of work, both urban and rural, are the most frequent single theme in the arena of working-class representation by Jürgens and Overbeck. Indeed, during her lifetime, Overbeck was known for these works and actually felt the need to explain their significance in an article for *Der Wachsbogen* entitled 'Industriebilder'.³⁶ Although there is considerable variation in the specific types of labour represented, some consistency in the relationship of the spectator to the figures, and thus, the artists to their theme, can be located. This consistency, when viewed as one aspect of the greater sphere of political identification in the working-class representations by the artists, can be seen to have had a particular gender-based significance.

Jürgens and Overbeck had a different relationship to the world of labour and industry to that of their male colleagues, as women's access to certain sites and types of industry was curtailed while, on the contrary, they were actively encouraged to fill positions denied to men.³⁷ Male artists who determined to use their works to lionize the activities of the industrial working-class

produced works which were biased toward male experiences of labour and a male audience. The art of Jürgens and Overbeck, however, is mediated through their own female experience and has little of this assumed male-dominance. This can be seen clearly by examining issues of distance and identification in the artists' representations of work. Both Jürgens and Overbeck chose to depict scenes of ordinary work, but stylistically and iconographically, they betrayed their close association with some of these activities and their alienation from others. Specific aspects of their representations reveal the way in which gender determined their art; namely, the types and sites of labour and the gender of the labourers.

The representations of male manual labourers by Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck, in terms of the types of labour and the sites of activity, share certain features which indicate the relationship of the artists to this theme. Jürgens and Overbeck would both have seen scenes of particular types of manual labour frequently, just as they were intimately familiar with the locations of this labour. Certainly, they both sketched such actions from life and expressed an interest in them. However, there was no way for either woman to directly associate herself or her own labour activity with the lot of these characters. Hence, there exists in these works a greater distance between the artist/audience and the subjects than in any other type of working-class representation in the artists' oeuvres because of unconscious distinctions made between types of labour activities. This difficult

relationship reiterates the misrepresentation of industry as 'craft' which was so a part of Kunstgewerbeschule theory and the training of women artists in the period. When Jürgens and Overbeck responded to the work of their subjects in particular ways, it was because they were attempting to assimilate alien forms into the working pattern which was sensible to them as women artists. This 'pattern' was the production of art; fundamentally an independent, even solitary activity which had little room for mass-production or the dissatisfaction inherent in tedious routine labour.

A striking similarity in the treatment of the figures of male manual labourers binds together the works of both women. In works dealing with this theme, the labouring figures are always generalized. Quite frequently, they are shown with their backs to us or their faces so deliberately undetailed as to leave no impression of character. The audience maintains a distance from the represented workers through particular compositional and stylistic devices. The stasis of the figures, indeed of the scenes as a whole, operates in an emotionally sobering way; paintings which are meant to exploit human emotions are usually composed with a diagonal, dynamic structure. The calm of these works elicits a corresponding attitude from the spectator. In fact, no figure communicates with us at all. Hence, the figures become aspects of their environments rather than unique statements on particular people. This distance is exemplified by Jürgens' watercolour *Workers* of 1929 [figure 33], and Overbeck's

Building Site (1929) [figure 50] and *Canal Workers* (1931) [figure 70]. In the work by Jürgens, the men who are applying stucco to a wall are both represented in such a way as to make their faces invisible. The composition is full of static horizontals and verticals and the whole work is monochromatic. All of these features conspire to turn the figures into labouring 'types' who are of interest as representatives of a class or activity rather than as individuals. The same stereotyping is in evidence in the works by Overbeck. The work, *Canal Workers*, drew on the impression of conformity inspired by uniforms to rob the figures of their individuality. They appear much like the machines with which they are working; this sense being enhanced by the fact that each of the figures is represented behind an object which constricts our view. In *Building Site*, the workers are so minute as to be overlooked at first inspection while, by contrast, the representation of the site itself is highly detailed. The significance of the treatment of labour sites should not be estimated any less in these works than the type of labour being represented. Both Jürgens and Overbeck represented the empty sites with ease, while their responses to the workers and their actual activities on these sites were those of outsiders. This difference between the places as local scenes and the places as real sites of manual labour defines part of the gender-related difficulties both artists had in representing alien spheres. The gendered relationship between the artists and these sites was discussed in an earlier chapter; suffice to say that the figural treatment parallels the

notion of the 'domestication' of industry.

A similar disparity between the treatment of the labourers and the site of their work occurs in the representations of rural labour by the artists. Rural scenes are far more unusual in the women's oeuvres, but their 'sachlich' approach to the theme, with its determination to explore 'objectively' actual proletarian subjects, remains clearly defined both stylistically and iconographically. Overbeck's *The Ferry by Bodenwerder on the Weser* (1932) [figure 71] (of which there are two remarkably similar versions from the same year) and Jurgen's *Street Workers* (1929) [figure 34], bear this out. Each of the two scenes could easily have been turned into idyllic landscape views by a simple shift of viewpoint. However, they were not intended to be landscapes, but representations of labour. But, like the urban scenes of manual labourers, the figures in these works do not engage the spectator in any way. The quaint river scene by Overbeck is filled with details of the ferry mechanism, the water and the little house on the opposite bank. Jurgen's work shows hills, trees, planted fields and even a little windmill. Within such familiar settings, the figures demand attention only as mobile parts of the scene.

While Jürgens and Overbeck knew the local sites well, they were alienated from the men who worked in these places. This alienation was not least caused by the fact that the type of labour in which the figures were engaged

was only understood by the artists in the most peripheral way. Male manual labourers were consistently represented by the artists as distant, generalized figures; by contrast, other workers were painted with tremendous empathy by Jürgens and Overbeck. This significant distinction betrays a corresponding distinction in the artists' relationship to labouring activities akin to their own as artists. Grethe Jürgens, for example, concentrated our attention on the intrigue between the two salesmen in her work of 1932, *The Textile Merchants* [figure 35]. The contrast between the full-frontal and profile views, added to the figures' refusal to look at one another directly, make manifest the tension inherent in the difficult 'rag trade'. The unifying green colour (variations of which tone all aspects of the painting except the flesh of the figures) binds these characters together into a whole, both physically and psychologically. Unlike Jürgens' representations of manual labour, with which she was personally unfamiliar, these characters enacted this drama on the streets of the Liststadt, where the artist lived. Further, their bargaining would have borne a type of relation to her role as an independent artist; with the corresponding understanding and intense human interest being mirrored in her painting. Closer still to the artist's own experience was the figure in Jurgens' work of 1931 *The Flower Seller* [figure 11]. In Jürgens' work, the young female figure again is positioned in a scene indicative of her labour, but the tone is very different. The figure herself dominates the canvas and is not some generalized

'flower-seller' type. The most interesting aspect of the placement of this figure is its impossibility. On what could the figure be standing to rationalize the perspective shift of the background? The logical place for a person to sell cut flowers from a basket is not in front of a greenhouse. Hence, this work is not a simple genre scene but a statement on the work and means of production for this figure. She is unnaturally placed before the objects which construct her social identity; those greenhouses and, ultimately the fields behind them, are the source of the girl's occupation. Two aspects of this theme make it particularly pertinent to the personal experience of the artist; the view is of the Bahlsen Gardens which Jürgens could see from her studio window and the sale of beautiful, 'luxury' items can refer to paintings as well as to flowers. Both flowers and paintings are linked by the fact that they have 'exchange' value but not 'use' value.

The most obvious sign that Jürgens and Overbeck worked within the confines of a gender-defined identity politic when they represented working-class themes was the special emphasis each artist gave to the subject of female labourers. Jürgens and Overbeck not only reserved a unique place within their oeuvres for the representation of individual working women, but represented the variety of women's work with sympathy and accuracy. Contemporary representations of proletarian women concentrated heavily upon housewives or domestic servants and the multifarious representation of the prostitute. Jürgens

and Overbeck shifted the perspective of female working-class representation and in so doing, the artists confounded the typical relationship between the male artist and audience; their works bespoke a female identity.

Jürgens and Overbeck painted a number of works which each took as their subject the representation of a single working-class woman. These works can be distinguished from the representations of male labourers in the art of Jürgens and Overbeck by their monumentality and the specificity of personality in the representations; because of this, they are treated specially in this section. Further, they definitively reiterate the overriding theme of the chapter, identity. The works included here date from the years of the artists' mature involvement with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* aesthetic in the late 1920s and 1930s: *The Sick Girl* (1926, Jürgens) [figure 1], *A Woman Sewing* (1928, Jürgens) [figure 14], *The Flower Seller* (1930 and 1931, Jürgens) [figures 18 and 11], *Pigeons and Grapes* (1931, Overbeck) [figure 45], *A Woman's Head: Old Woman* (1934, Overbeck) [figure 72], *An Old Farmer's Wife* (1937, Overbeck) [figure 60], *A Woman in the Window* (undated, Jürgens) [figure 19] and *The Servant Girl* (undated, Overbeck) [figure 53]. In this period of the artists' oeuvres, there was a greater distinction between sketches and finished works and a shift toward more significant, monumental figural types. Occasionally, in the sketches and watercolours of the pre-1925 period, single figure studies occurred such as *The Garbageman* (1922) [figure 36]

by Jürgens. The figures, however, had little individual importance in these works as they betrayed no distinct personalities and were subsumed, rather than complimented, by their surroundings. In the early works, there were balanced numbers of male and female figures represented this way. Significantly, the known later works which represented lone figures always depicted women.

Contrasting the treatment of the figure in *A Woman in an Apron before Houses* [figure 24] with one of the later works, *The Flower Seller*, the meaning inherent in the stylistic development becomes clear. Both of the represented figures have been defined in their respective titles according to their occupations or activities, but *The Flower Seller* depicts an individual by means of enhanced compositional status. While increased figural emphasis is a common feature of their mature works, Jürgens and Overbeck rarely painted a solitary figure, preferring pairs or larger groups. The only works which date from this period in the artists' oeuvres and correspond stylistically to the single-figure female workers here described are portraits. It was with the increased perception and communication of the artists' portraiture that these works were drawn.

The enhanced communication between the spectator and the subject defines these works outside the boundaries of the working-class themes which were discussed in the last section. These works always clearly delineate the sitters' faces, an element sometimes lacking in the other works. The working-classes were observed closely in the

art of both women and their representations as we have seen, betrayed intelligible levels of identification with the lives and pursuits of their subjects. Thus it is particularly interesting in terms of the theme of identification that the most acutely observed, and most painstakingly depicted single subjects, save only portraits of the artists themselves and their close friends, were women. It is not argued here that Jürgens and Overbeck specifically identified with one or more of the subjects of these works; but rather, that the artists' personal experiences of being independent female workers in the Weimar Republic made these themes more accessible and more interesting to them. The paintings' very existence suggests that Jürgens and Overbeck found inspiration in the subjects, as the production of oil paintings requires an investment of much time, energy and money. The detailed treatment, as shall be seen in the following section, suggests the level of understanding and identification which the artists enjoyed with these subjects.

In all of these works, the female figures contrive to control the picture space and the attention of the audience. They also form individual statements which do not require an attitude of indignation or pity on the part of the viewer, but instead, an empathetic response. They were not produced as blatant propaganda on behalf of the noble working-class types they portrayed but as representations of emotions and experiences the artists could identify as true to their own. Each painting shows

an individual woman; there is no overriding racial type illustrated by these works. The subjects' faces are all different and the compositions reinforce this fact. The figure in *The Flower Seller*, for example, has the creamy complexion of a young and healthy girl while the illness of the figure in *The Sick Girl* is shown by her grey skin. In contrast to both of these young women, healthy or ill, the subject of *A Woman Sewing* has the furrowed, leathery skin which only accompanies age.

As usual in the portraiture and late figural paintings of Jürgens and Overbeck, settings and props play an important role in the symbolic language of the paintings. No figure in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* works of the artists is randomly placed against a background. The information contained in the background elements pertains directly to an interpretation of the figures. The stage is set rather than empty; forcing the subjects into their contextual positions and thus reinforcing the social aspects of the representations. To insist upon a social context in the representation of women was a political and subversive manoeuvre. The variety in the works of Jürgens and Overbeck in conjunction with this insistence upon social context, destabilized the dominant ideologies about women's roles which concentrated upon their natural, 'feminine' sphere. In these, more intimate, representations of working-class women, for example, the contrast between interior and exterior spaces is used by the artists to very subtle effect. The women who were defined by more than their domestic duties were depicted

out of doors. Both the farm women represented by Gerta Overbeck in *Woman's Head*; *Old Woman* and *An Old Farmer's Wife* are seen in front of the barns in which they would have worked. In fact, both of these rural scenes were studied from actual farms in Cappenberg and Worpswede respectively. The earlier work makes the reality of the situation abundantly clear with the representation of the barn, hay and tools. These works are revealing in the context of the conservative preoccupation with the healthy rural life. As will be discussed below in the context of farm labour, the farmer's wife (or any female family workers on farms) had a life full of hard work. These images do not idealize the female figures or link them with an idealized vision of 'nature' as later Nazi art did, but instead offer us ordinary women whose skin has aged through the elements, and who suffer fatigue with hard work.

Jürgens and Overbeck not only betrayed their familiarity with the lot of working women in Weimar in the 'portrait' works described above, but by representing the various working roles they had with a sober style. In Grethe Jurgen's *The Country Road by Dangastermoor* [figure 16] this phenomenon can be seen clearly with respect to agricultural labour; the work provides an accurate visual description of the types of labour female agricultural workers performed unlike the common, contemporary view of rural women being devoted only to the domestic sphere. Between 1925 and 1933, agriculture remained the single largest employer of women in Germany. As T.W. Mason

said:

...their lot was certainly hard: the wives of farmers, agricultural labourers and rural craftsmen had more children than women whose husbands had urban occupations (in Prussia on average twice as many), and their double burden of work and family was thus that much heavier; second, much of the work on the small under-mechanized³⁸ holdings was back-breaking manual labour.

Jürgens' painting reveals just that kind of 'back-breaking' labour but in a static, almost too geometrical composition. The clarity of the compositional structure defuses the potentially emotional or incendiary scene of labourers. The figures do not demand a heated response from us; they merge into the whole almost naturally. The female figure in the painting is the only one whose face is visible and she is, significantly, the one presented nearest the viewer. Since both artists were urban by experience, this work and the representations of farm women by Overbeck could not have been derived from the artists' personal insights into rural labour. The art of Neue Sachlichkeit generally was informed by an urban consciousness and rarely showed agricultural work or workers. Nor were these works designed to elevate the pure country life and its inhabitants; the appearance of these works in the oeuvres corresponds to the statistical preponderance of women in these spheres as observed by sympathetic fellows.

Jürgens and Overbeck were not simply proponents of outside work for women, depicting only scenes of 'new women' as a propagandistic mission. Jürgens' work from

1922, *A Woman in an Apron in front of Houses*, is just one domestic female representation by the artists. Their treatment of the subject of mothers and children is taken up in Chapter Two, but suffice to say here that such works were popular with both artists. However, they treated equally the subject of independent professional women in their art. This fact makes manifest their awareness of the real situation of a variety of women at the time. There was no single activity which applied to all women; some shared household duties with outside labour, others were housewives or independent, unmarried women like the artists. It is this variety in representation which separates Jürgens and Overbeck from most of their male artist contemporaries who tended to portray a very limited range of female labour roles. Contemporary representations of proletarian women generally presented the iconic extremes of femininity: noble housewives and degraded prostitutes. The subject of prostitution in *Neue Sachlichkeit* requires detailed discussion and is treated in Chapter Three at length; the other 'type' is more relevant to this argument. It was rare, despite their interest in social criticism and the representation of the proletariat, for male artists to show female figures engaged in any labour outside of the domestic sphere. Thus, even the representations of women who almost certainly worked outside the home concentrated on their familial, domestic roles.³⁹

The facts support women's increasing visibility in the public sphere during the whole of the Weimar Republic

years, but the art, frequently produced by bourgeois male artists, lagged behind in its depictions of working-class women. Just as Jürgens and Overbeck defied 'sachlich' assumptions in their treatment of female rural subjects, their representations of women from the urban working-classes, by clearly indicating their outside roles, subverted conventions. Their works were positive statements of identification, but not heroic symbols of female emancipation. Thus, these representations clarified the social aspects of the class and gender roles of the figures; by detailing the construction of their roles within society, they de-naturalized the position of working-class women in the period. That process of disassembling dominant ideology is highly political. The figures in the works of Jürgens and Overbeck are never 'natural'; they are always challenging.

Conclusions

Conventional definitions of 'politics' in the Neue Sachlichkeit yield unsatisfactory conclusions about the nature of the political involvement of women realists in the period because of their masculine-normative bias. They describe only one particular aspect of the politics of the movement and create a very limited paradigm. They also curtail political understanding of the art of regions not usually described as 'political', such as Hanover. Hanoverian politics were politics in the broadest sense. They used an 'identity politic' in both their lives and art to challenge the middle-class establishment.

Traditional political definitions have meant that the situation for Jürgens and Overbeck has been doubly inadequate. The politics of gender have been overlooked and the regional politics of Hanover have been under-discussed. As these were the components of the political orientation of both Jürgens and Overbeck, they are critical to the debate.

The politics of the Hanoverian *Neue Sachlichkeit* group were useful to Jürgens and Overbeck with their non-ideological and personal basis. Jürgens and Overbeck shared with their Hanoverian counterparts an identity politic which subverted the bourgeois cultural norms of the city, but as women, they also subverted the masculinist position of the middle-classes and their institutions. The artists identified most closely with working-class women. The gender politics of this position are indubitable; a shift to a women's perspective radically challenged the male hegemony of art and society in the period. Both artists were able to question social norms in their art without producing didactic imagery or party-political propaganda. Their lives and works presented a seamless critical alternative to the prevailing politics of gender in the Weimar Republic.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. A very recent indication of this is Frank Whitford's essay 'The Revolutionary Reactionary' in *Otto Dix: 1891-1969* [exhibition catalogue] (London: Tate Gallery,

1992), pp.11-23.

2. "the 'right' wing (Neo-Classical, if you want to call it that)" and "the left 'veristic' wing"; Hartlaub cited in Fritz Schmalenbach, 'The Term *Neue Sachlichkeit*', *The Art Bulletin* XXII, no.3 (1940), pp.161-65 (p.161).

3. *ibid.*, p.164.

4. In terms of Schmied's line on the politics of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, *Schmied 1978* is preferred here to *Schmied 1969*. The essay in the latter work is almost a verbatim translation of sections of the earlier text except that Schmied had taken into consideration the Marxist line on the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (exemplified by the work of Lethen and März) and Brigitte Lohkamp's work on regionalism in the movement ('On an Artistic Geography of the Twenties in Germany' in *Die Zwanziger Jahre im Porträt* [exhibition catalogue] (Bonn, 1976).). This lends the later work a slight advantage in terms of the sophistication of the argument, though, judging by the paper he delivered at the Manchester International Festival of Expressionism in March 1992, Schmied has changed little in his opinions about the *Neue Sachlichkeit* from 1969 to the present.

5. *Schmied 1978*, p.11.

6. *ibid.*, pp.18-19.

7. *ibid.*, p.19.

8. Roland März, 'Realismus und Sachlichkeit: Aspekte deutscher Kunst 1919-1933' in *Realismus und Sachlichkeit* [exhibition catalogue] (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin [DDR], 1974), pp.10-27.

9. 'Indeed, seen as a whole, in the works of the Hanover group there are social, socio-critical and genre scenes of everyday life, the poor quarters, the unemployed, small shopkeepers and second-hand dealers... but the works lack the caustic formulations and accusatory zeal, generally every aggressive posture, there is predominantly the wish to come to terms with the world in which we live, at least to gain control of the world through painting if not to overcome the precisely recorded difficulties, to soften them.' *Schmied 1969*, pp.66.

10. not 'revolutionary', but 'reporters of life in a city with dark sides.' Ursula Bode, 'Sachlichkeit lag in der Luft. Zwanziger Jahre: Bilder einer Malprovinz' *Westermann's Monatshefte* no.8 (1976), pp.34-43 (p.43).

11. 'Was Reissert correct when he called their works incendiary? Certainly the *Labour Exchange* [by Jürgens] cannot be seen as engaged art. ... Surely they [the group] are not aggressive but sober and true to their times.' Helmut Leppien, 'Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover: Versuch einer Skizze' in *Hannover Catalogue*, pp.5-6.

12. 'Here, as in the beautiful *Liebespaar* by Grethe Jürgens, the hope is expressed for the future in which individual claims for happiness can be in harmony with social realities.' from 'Zur Ikonographie der deutschen proletarisch-revolutionären Kunst zwischen 1917 und 1933' in *Revolution und Realismus. Revolutionäre Kunst in Deutschland 1917 bis 1933* [exhibition catalogue] (Berlin (DDR): Altes Museum, 1979), pp.53-69 (p.66).
13. Paul Reissert, 'Realisten in Hannover' in *Hannover Catalogue*, p.7.
14. 'I had an instinctive leaning toward the left, but I was not an overtly political person, an ideologue, and have never become one.' From Georg Reinhardt, 'Zwischen Atelier und Straße: Zur Geschichte und Malerei der Neuen Sachlichkeit in Hannover' in *Bonn Catalogue*, pp.34-42 (p.40).
15. 'Yes, but they are not socio-critical in the sense that one understands the phrase today (referring to the proponents of socio-critical Neue Sachlichkeit art like Grosz and Dix).' From Hildegard and Georg Reinhardt, 'Grethe Jürgens: Künstlerin der Neuen Sachlichkeit' *Artis* 2 (February 1981), pp.12-13 (p.12).
16. 'What makes the painters of our region so different from all the others is the absence of programmatic statements.' from Hildegard Reinhardt, 'Gerta Overbeck 1898-1977: Eine Westfälische Malerin der Neuen Sachlichkeit in Hannover' *Niederdeutsches Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte* 18 (1979), pp.225-248 (p.232).
17. 'We worked, we painted. We did not have much regard for art theories.' Jürgens cited in Bode, *op.cit.*, p.36. 'I did not have much time for theorising, painting was more important.' Wegner cited in Georg Reinhardt, *op.cit.*, p.41.
18. 'Naturally our feelings were on the side of the people and Noske's police were not our friends.' *ibid.*, p.40.
19. "We consciously placed ourselves in the 1920s in contrast to so-called 'bourgeois' society." Gerta Overbeck, 'Die Hannoversche Neue Sachlichkeit - Ein Rückblick' from Hildegard Reinhardt, 'Gerta Overbeck, 1898-1977', *op.cit.*, p.246.
20. The two most concise sources on the Hanover art scene of the period can be found in *Ernst Thoms* [exhibition catalogue] (Oldenburg, 1982) and Henning Rischbieter, ed., *Die Zwanziger Jahre in Hannover* [exhibition catalogue] (Hanover, 1962).
21. Kandinsky delivered a paper entitled 'Abstrakte Kunst' on 16 December 1924. Full records of the exhibitions and lectures given at the Kestner-Gesellschaft

were published in Wieland Schmied, *Wegbereiter zur modernen Kunst; 50 Jahre Kestner-Gesellschaft* (Hanover: Fackelträger-Verlag, 1967).

22. 'There is hardly a middle German city in which in so short a time so many good works have been produced as in Hanover. It could be added that happily one or two of the artists will not suffer so much from the tyranny of social dictators.' Schenk (writing as Georg Pahl), *Wachsbogen* 2 (1931), p.4.

23. 'We were not taken seriously. We were not known, people preferred Schwitters and the others in the Kestner-Gesellschaft, we were not modern enough.' Overbeck cited in Bode, op.cit., p.36.

24. See the Introduction.

25. "We worked in Hanover and did not think of ourselves as innovators. Only something different from the 'Expressionists' who belonged to a 'higher art movement'. We were vulgar painters and did not paint the smart set." Jürgens cited Bode, op.cit., p.36.

26. All of the ideas discussed here with reference to 'identity politics' in the 1960s are elaborated in Mary Louise Adams, 'There's No Place Like Home: On the Place of Identity in Feminist Politics', *Feminist Review* (1988), pp.22-33. On the amalgamation of the public and private sphere in political analysis, see Janet Siltanen and Michelle Stanworth, 'The politics of private woman and public man' in *Women and the Public Sphere: A Critique of Sociology and Politics*, edited by Siltanen and Stanworth (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd, 1984), pp.185-208.

27. Susan Bourque and Jean Grossholtz, 'Politics an unnatural practice: political science looks at female participation', in Siltanen and Stanworth, op. cit., pp.103-121 (pp.103, 105).

28. Beth Irwin Lewis, *George Grosz: Art and Politics in the Weimar Republic*, second edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. xiv.

29. I developed this theme more fully in a paper delivered at a colloquium on women and the visual arts in Weimar held at Leicester University, 11-12 June 1992, entitled: 'Politics, the Neue Sachlichkeit and Women Artists' (publication forthcoming).

30. The Law of Association (Vereingesezt) operated until these dates with special strictness in Bavaria, Prussia and Saxony. R. J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* (London, 1976), p.11.

31. Bourque and Grossholtz, op.cit.

32. 'The difficulties of the Golden Twenties were felt, above all, by the artists.' Ernst Thoms cited in Bode,

op.cit., p.36.

33. For a discussion of the neighbourhood as a political unit in the Weimar Republic, see Eve Rosenhaft, 'Working-Class Life and Working-Class Politics: Communists, Nazis and the State in the Battle for the Streets, Berlin 1928-1932' in *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, edited by Richard Bessel and E.J. Feuchtwanger (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp.207-240.

34. Gerta Overbeck, 'Die Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover: Ein Rückblick', op.cit.

35. 'Dortmund was completely different [than Hanover]: the industrial population, the unemployment, the ugly sooty houses, down to earth, without a continuing tradition.' Gerta Overbeck, 'Es Liegt in der Luft', op.cit.

36. Gerta Overbeck, 'Industriebilder', *Der Wachsbogen* 7/8 (1932).

37. See Chapter Two.

38. T.W. Mason, 'Women in Germany 1925-40: Family Welfare and Work', *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976) pp.74-113 and 2, pp.5-32 (p.79).

39. In the Hanoverian context, two of Ernst Thoms' paintings point out the general tendency to misrepresent women at work. In *Old Cook* (1927) [figure 145], Thoms represented a domestic servant, but not engaging in any labour; by contrast, his female figure which is shown cooking is entitled *Woman in the Kitchen* (1928) [figure 146] and can thus be viewed as an ordinary domestic scene rather than a representation of women's outside work.

CONCLUSION

This thesis affirms that gender considerations are significant to any discussion of the Neue Sachlichkeit and that a close examination of the lives and works of two women artists who worked within this context, Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck, demonstrates this conclusively. Two sets of ideas are necessarily merged in such a statement: the evidence amassed with regard to the specific case of Jürgens and Overbeck and the wider implications of this material for the study of women artists and the Neue Sachlichkeit. This concluding chapter is divided into sections analogous to these ideas. The first section summarizes the material covered in the four chapters and suggests interrelationships between these. The various themes which are the focuses of individual chapters are shown to be interdependent and parts of a larger, more complex relationship between gender and representation in the Weimar Republic. A second section allows issues to be raised regarding the future possibilities inherent in such a work as this. Having produced a methodology for the study of two particular women, this could be developed to incorporate many other women associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit. Additionally, this study suggests various ways in which the conventional work on the Neue Sachlichkeit requires revision and yields further insights into the difficult area of feminist praxis in art history, at least in the

cases of women as producers of art.

Summary

The point must here be reiterated that this work is neither a biography of 'minor masters' nor an apologetic attempt to add the names of two women to the canon of male artists associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit. Rather, the whole work has sought to problematize the role of women artists within the dual context of their gender-defined position in the Weimar Republic and the aesthetic in which they produced their art. The thematic division of the material into chapters, or the form of the thesis itself, emphasized the critical framework within which it was written. The tendency to adhere to masculine-normative value judgements was subverted by denying more common approaches, such as the arrangement of the works by chronology or genre. The use of themes also allowed the relationship between representation and gendered discourse in the Weimar Republic to be made obvious. Rather than producing tenuous links between the chronological 'development' of an artist's work and the historical 'context' of the period for example, in this thesis, the interdependence of cultural ideology and the production of artworks has been stressed. The art of the Weimar Republic was not simply a mute reflection of 'real' history, but a vital part of the production (and, sometimes, subversion) of contentious ideologies.

The sources used in the production of this work further

demonstrate the nature of the argument. The politics and social history of the Weimar Republic were not merely the background of the text and thus, a number of primary and secondary sources on the period were consulted. The same is true of the position of women and debates about gender in the Weimar Republic. The situation of Jürgens and Overbeck in terms of social expectations and norms for women significantly affected their practice of art. The *Neue Sachlichkeit*, for all the difficulties of definition, was the vehicle through which the artists addressed their work, thus, literature about the movement was vital to this study. Additionally, the quantity of texts concerning feminist theory could be construed as anachronistic if the intentions of this work have been misunderstood. They would be extraneous to standard biographies of Jürgens and Overbeck but are necessary to this thesis as its primary consideration is the nature of gendered artistic production and the explication of the unique role of women as producers of art. Without the theoretical developments of feminism, this would be impossible.

In general, the preceding chapters queried the ways in which women artists successfully exploited the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, despite its masculine-normative bias, by engaging with the gender politics of the Weimar Republic. This, in turn, allowed for the assessment of the movement within the context of gendered meaning and demonstrated that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was in many ways a part of the establishment as well as critical of it. The exhibition

of, and critical responses to, the movement privileged the works and viewpoints of male artists and thus assured that these became the dominant readings of realist art in the Weimar Republic. Each of the chapters of this work examines one particular masculine-normative paradigm and the way in which women artists were able to challenge this; the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and notions of gender in the period form the field within which the works of Jürgens and Overbeck were produced.

The gendered divisions between the 'public' and 'private' spheres were crumbling during the first decades of the twentieth century in Germany, fostered by the increasing visibility of women outside the home throughout the period. This public/private dichotomy is the keystone in the works of women realists during the Weimar Republic for many reasons. First, as professional women, they engaged with the newly accessible realm of the public sphere economically and physically; they were 'new women'. Second, as artists, they produced representations which entered into public space. Third, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was an aesthetic which determinedly addressed itself to the public aspects of society; women artists working within this movement were in the unusual position of being 'private' by gender and 'public' by aesthetic. Not surprisingly, the works of Jürgens and Overbeck frequently dealt with the tension inherent in the shifting position of women vis-à-vis the public and private spheres in the period. This tension was not present for the male realists who were 'public' by both gender and aesthetic;

arguably, it was the dominance of the male realist's viewpoint within the movement which originally caused it to be defined in public terms.

In the first chapter, the concept of the artist was examined as an indication of gendered identity. By the early twentieth century, artists were asserting their cultural authority and artistic persona through actions which were decidedly masculine. As women were defined in opposition to men, they were, by deduction, defined as the artist's opposite also. For women practising art professionally, the development of a strong artistic identity was as difficult to achieve as it was essential. The self-portrait modes employed by male artists in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (and in a number of other modern movements) in order to assert themselves as 'artists' were inaccessible to women artists because of their masculinity; nude female models and brothels presented an iconographic impasse to women artists in their quest to be seen as the subjects rather than the objects of their self-portraits. Yet Jürgens, Overbeck and other women associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* were able to utilize the aesthetic's own imperatives to produce highly effective self-representations. In their self-portraits, they manipulated the 'sachlich' ideas of sobriety and reportage to combine their gender and their profession meaningfully. They parodied female nudes, de-naturalized representations of pregnancy and examined the notion of the female artist as a de-sexed or androgynous figure in these works. Though the central

feature of the first chapter was the establishment of an artistic identity for Jürgens and Overbeck and, thus, their sense of self, this was produced through the interplay of the public and the private spheres. Their artistic identities were determined by wider, public definitions of 'woman' and 'artist' and by their use of a very public aesthetic to subvert conventions which excluded women.

The second chapter maintained the private sphere focus by taking as its theme domesticity. The domestic sphere was argued to be the primary sphere of interest for women throughout the Weimar Republic and still exercises control over women's lives today. A biological determinism which 'naturally' associated women with the home and children was at the centre of the concept of domesticity and created paradigms for women's behaviour in both spatial and social terms. Women's space was domestic (private) and different from that of men; their social relationships were characterized by informal, personal communication. However, at the time that Jürgens and Overbeck were associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit, women increasingly chose not to be exclusively domestic, which fact challenged the gendered boundaries of public and private life. The works of Jürgens and Overbeck examined these parameters by their choice of subject-matter and their actual form. They represented domestic scenes as well as women working out of the home. They showed the way in which women's homes and places of work are not separate (as often they are for men) by representing their

'domesticated' studios. The representation of children in the works of both artists stressed the social aspects of motherhood in the republic rather than an eternal or 'natural' mother/child bond. Furthermore, the women represented by the artists dominated the works spatially; they challenged simple ideas about the nature of women and their feminine realm.

Chapter Three explored the representation of women in the Weimar Republic and the role of the Neue Sachlichkeit in this. The stereotypical representations of women in the period were mainly iconic images of the mother and the whore, used to symbolize stability or decadence. These icons were manipulated by both left and right wing commentators and critics of the republic and bore little resemblance to the actual activities of women in the period. Despite the ostensible sobriety and left-leaning sensibility of the Neue Sachlichkeit, the representations of women in the art of the movement were the same mother/whore icons. As this aspect of the works of male artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit was structured as the norm, the representations of women by such artists as Dix and Grosz rarely have been challenged in light of the gender politics of the period. When such insights are brought to bear on the representations of women in the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit, the movement's gender biases, or even misogyny, become apparent. For women artists working within the aesthetic, the mainstream representations of women could not have provided an adequate description of their own understanding of the

lives of women in the period. In the art of Jürgens and Overbeck, women were represented in ways which subverted these iconic stereotypes. Both artists referred their representations to the experiences of ordinary working women of the time and overturned the subject/object relationships in their works. The women represented by the artists act, control space, and are the subjects of the artworks. The very different situation of Jürgens and Overbeck in society because of their gender informed their representations of other women and challenged the masculine-normative basis of the Neue Sachlichkeit. The representations of women were representations of others or 'public' society, but they were produced through the personal experience of the artists.

The theme of the fourth and final chapter, politics, is undeniably part of the public sphere, yet the gendered responses of the artists to this theme confounded simple divisions of public and private once again. Like the ubiquitous representation of the prostitute, an ambiguous notion of political intent is a cliché in the critical accounts of the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit, and, like the representation of women in this art, 'politics' have been defined and understood in masculine terms. The works of particular male artists from particular regional centres of the movement have produced a paradigm by which all other 'political' intentions in the art of the Neue Sachlichkeit are judged. The politics of the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group generally have suffered from this bias in interpretation and the works of Jürgens and Overbeck

are further misunderstood because of gendered political ideas. Jürgens and Overbeck not only acted politically in terms of a working-class identity politic and a subversion of the bourgeois art tastes of the city as the other Hanoverians did, but subverted the male hegemony in society and art of the period. Identity politics for the artists included an identification with women specifically, which in turn, led to their 'political' position. This was not party politics, but gender politics; a critical questioning of the contemporary position of women in the Weimar Republic.

Each of the four chapters explores one aspect of the relationship between women artists and the Neue Sachlichkeit and could stand alone. However, the chapters are linked by a common purpose and contribute, when joined together, to a much more inclusive examination of the role of gender in the production of realist art in the Weimar Republic. As stated earlier, the material discussed in this thesis has implications for the further study of women artists and the Neue Sachlichkeit which will be described in the next section.

Issues for Further Consideration

Clearly, the primary implication of this work is for the study of women artists, other than Jürgens and Overbeck, who were associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit. The choice of the two Hanoverian artists was arbitrary in certain respects; though they had strong ties to Hanover's

branch of the movement, Jürgens and Overbeck were not the only women artists who worked within the Neue Sachlichkeit. Each of the chapters includes works by other women engaged with the movement as further evidence of the strength of the thematic arguments. Other women artists practised successfully with the aesthetic and demonstrated similar responses to the themes of the 'artist', domesticity, women and politics as Jürgens and Overbeck. In the catalogue to the exhibition *Domesticity and Dissent: The Role of Women Artists in Germany, 1918-1938*, a larger number of women artists associated with Weimar's realist tendencies were considered in light of this work.¹ It was clear that the tension between the public and private spheres, so a part of the experience of women in the period, was significant to the work of these artists. Also, their use and manipulation of the masculine-normative standards of Weimar realism was akin to that described in this thesis for the instances of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck. These women artists were able to produce works which simultaneously described their own experience as women while maintaining that critical relationship to sobriety and 'reportage' imperative to the Neue Sachlichkeit. However, the possibilities raised by the exhibition and this thesis are in no way exhausted. There are still many questions to be asked about, for example, the significance of the regional centres of activity in the case of women artists and which other 'themes' might be examined. Also, the conclusions reached by this work with regard to gender politics in the movement need to be explored further in the work of male

artists of the period.

Applying these ideas to the work of male artists leads, by inference, to the critical reassessment of the Neue Sachlichkeit in terms of gender theory. The fact that women could and did work within the context of the Neue Sachlichkeit challenges the male hegemony of the movement. Many of the dominant readings of this art were developed through distinct masculine biases; the artists and the viewing audience were presupposed to be male and their viewpoints were privileged to the virtual exclusion of those of women. However, just as men's social positions were not the only social positions in the republic, their perspectives in the Neue Sachlichkeit were not the only ones. Women artists who engaged with the aesthetic questioned the assumptions of their male counterparts and the works of women make the male centredness of the movement fall into sharp relief. After understanding the nature of gender debates in the Weimar Republic, how could anyone look at the representations of prostitutes in the Neue Sachlichkeit in the same way again? The role of women artists within the movement not only forces a revision of the Neue Sachlichkeit, it provides one example of the way in which an aesthetic evolves. Jürgens and Overbeck worked within the imperatives of the Neue Sachlichkeit, yet altered many of its conventions. They manipulated, parodied and subverted aspects of the Neue Sachlichkeit which did not suit their purposes, thereby subtly expanding its boundaries and increasing its expressive potential for the case of women.

They did not simply reject the aesthetic, they rewrote it.

This work also invites response as a study of women as producers of art. Feminist interventions into the subject of women artists have provided a number of theoretical perspectives which now must be incorporated into practice. At this level, there is still much work to be done and this thesis participates in that task. For example, the exploration here of the role of women artists in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* refutes biological determinism; there is no evidence to support the notion that Jürgens and Overbeck produced art which was linked to universal feminine norms. By contrast, the unique relationship between these artists and their social and artistic contexts can be seen to have been of primary significance to their work. It is vital to stress the integral interdependence of the production of art and the wider cultural context; representations carried gender-defined meanings because of the definitions of gender current at the time. By connecting the art produced by women with issues of gender politics specific to time and place, the effect is to de-naturalize the contemporaneous representations produced by men; their gendered images become destabilized.

As conventional art historical monographs have participated in this normalizing process, they too must be challenged. Here, biography and chronology are replaced at the centre of the work by the examination of cultural themes with specific reference to gender and the artworks of women realists. This interplay also allows the art to

become the focus of the debate rather than be made peripheral to a discussion of the social history of professional women. The significance of the aesthetic within which women produced their art has been recognized in the work of, for example, Shulamith Behr, Whitney Chadwick and Lynne Pearce concerning women's roles in Expressionism, Surrealism and Pre-Raphaelite art respectively.² The imperatives of these very different movements meant that women artists constructed their meanings, and negotiated the complexities of their gender-defined roles, in a variety of ways. The importance of representation in the production of gender definitions in society should not be forgotten; art is not the mere reflection of socio-historical 'reality', but an active part of social discourse. The works of Jürgens, Overbeck and all of the other women artists who engaged with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, reflected and constructed gendered identities in the Weimar Republic.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. *Domesticity and Dissent: The Role of Women Artists in Germany, 1918-1938* [exhibition catalogue] (Leicester: Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service, 1992).

2. See: Shulamith Behr, *Women Expressionists* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988); Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985); Lynne Pearce, *Woman, Image, Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

Appendix A
ABBREVIATIONS OF FREQUENTLY CITED SOURCES

Statistical Information:

Flora = Flora, Peter. *State, Economy and Society in Western Europe, 1815-1975*, volume II. London, 1987.

Mitchell = Mitchell, B.R. *European Historical Statistics, 1750-1975*, second revised edition. London, 1980.

Newspapers, Periodicals, Journals:

Wachsbogen = *Der Wachsbogen*, 12 numbers, 1931-2. This was the journal produced by Jürgens, Overbeck and their circle in Hanover; the numbering and dating of the hand-typed editions is sometimes curious and sometimes absent. A bound set of these can be found in the library of the Sprengel Museum, Hanover.

Books, Exhibition Catalogues:

Biology and Destiny = Bridenthal, Renate and Atina Grossmann, Marion Kaplan, eds. *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984.

Hannover Catalogue = *Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover* [exhibition catalogue]. Hannover: Hannover Kunstverein, 1974.

Prints and Drawings = *Prints and Drawings of the Weimar Republic* [exhibition catalogue]. shown Oxford Museum of Modern Art. Stuttgart, 1985.

Bonn Catalogue = Reinhardt, Hildegard, Georg Reinhardt and Margarete Jochimsen, eds. *Grethe Jürgens, Gerta Overbeck: Bilder der Zwanziger Jahre* [exhibition catalogue]. Bonn: Bonner Kunstverein, 1982.

Schmied 1969 = Schmied, Wieland. *Neue Sachlichkeit und Magischer Realismus in Deutschland, 1918-1933*. Hannover: Fackelträger Verlag, 1969.

Schmied 1978 = *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties* [exhibition catalogue]. London: Hayward Gallery, 1978.

Appendix B: CHRONOLOGY

This chronology of selected events in the lives of Grethe Jürgens and Gerta Overbeck is organized separately for each artist, though many dates/events overlap. In addition to biographical details, the chronology contains references to some of the works produced by each artist, exhibitions in which they took part and exhibitions which they may have seen. The works of Jürgens and Overbeck listed here are not inclusive; the purpose is to help the reader to get a sense of the development of the women's work. Generally, it was not possible to determine exactly which works the artists showed in exhibitions in the period, but where this information was available, it has been included. Finally, the choice of other artists' exhibitions was not random; those listed here were either part of the Neue Sachlichkeit or mentioned by the artists.

GRETHE JÜRGENS

- 1899 born Margarete Jürgens in Holzhausen near
 Osnabrück; raised in Wilhelmshaven
- 1918 spent one semester studying interior design
 at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin;
 returned to Wilhelmshaven when the events of
 the November Revolution forced the school to
 close
- 1919-
1922 studied graphics in the class of Fritz Burger-
 Mühlfeld at the Hannover Handwerker- und Kunst-
 gewerbeschule; here Jürgens met the students who
 would form the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group:
 Gerta Overbeck, Ernst Thoms, Hans Mertens,
 Erich Wegner
- 1921-
1922 George Grosz, Conrad Felixmüller, Paula
 Modersohn-Becker and Giorgio de Chirico shown at
 the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1922-
1928 technical draughtsman and advertising artist for
 Hackethal Draht- und Kabelwerk, Hanover
- 1926-
1927 works include *The Sick Girl*, 1926; *Portrait of*
 Karl Eggert, 1927; *Hairdressers' Mannequins*,
 1927
- 1927 Otto Dix shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1928 worked as a 'freie Malerin' (received state
 support); took part in the exhibition 'Die Neue
 Sachlichkeit in Hannover' (Nordhausen) [showed
 four works, including *A Woman Sewing*, 1928]

- 1929 moved to the studio (Podbielskistraße 116) in which she would remain until her death; took part in the '97. Große Kunstausstellung' at the Kunstverein in Hanover (this was the annual Spring show at the Kunstverein); joined the Gemeinschaft Deutscher und Österreichischer Künstlerinnenvereine aller Kunstgattungen (GEDOK) and took part in all of their shows until her death; works include *The Unemployed* and *The Labour Exchange*; Käthe Kollwitz shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1930 took part in the 'Herbstausstellung hannoverscher Künstler' at the Kunstverein in Hanover (this was the annual Autumn show at the Kunstverein); works produced include the *Liebepaar*
- 1931 took part in both the Spring and Autumn shows at the Kunstverein
- 1931-1932 production of *Der Wachsbogen* in Jürgens' studio; by March 1932 replaced Gustav Schenk as editor
- 1932 took part in three exhibitions: 'Die Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover' (Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig) [showed 15 works, including *Self-Portrait*, 1928 and *Flower Seller*, 1931]; 'Herbstausstellung westfälische Künstler' (Dortmund); the Autumn show at the Kunstverein, Hanover; works produced include *The Textile Merchants*
- 1933 first one-woman show held in the Galerie Abels, Cologne; went to Capri and Positano with Schenk to illustrate his article for a Cologne magazine; Alexander Kanoldt, Franz Radziwill, Georg Schrimpf shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1933-1937 took part in both the Spring and Autumn shows at the Kunstverein in Hanover
- 1934 monographic review by Werner Miro appeared in the *Hannoverschen Tageblatt*
- 1935 one-woman show, 'Landschaften und Porträts', GEDOK Hanover
- 1937-1938 Kestner-Gesellschaft closed, Landesmuseum purged by Nazis; works include *Self-Portrait*, 1938
- 1937-1942 illustrated a number of books by Schenk, including: *Aron oder das tropische Feuer* (1937), *Das wunderbare Leben* (1942)

- 1943 produced the illustrated book of poetry, *Das Atelier* (Berlin: Verlag Die Heimbücherei John Jahr)
- 1944 Podbielskistraße bombed by Allies; painted *Self-Portrait with Ruins*
- 1940-1954 produced a number of illustrated children's books, including: *Die Kippenhymne* (1944) and *Die Sammlerin* (1954)
- c.1950 moved toward abstraction in her work
- 1951 one-woman show, Wilhelm-Busch-Museum, Hanover
- 1961 took part in the exhibition, 'Neue Sachlichkeit' (Haus am Waldsee, [West] Berlin); from this period was included in most major retrospective exhibitions about the Neue Sachlichkeit
- 1974 took part in the East German exhibition, 'Realismus und Sachlichkeit. Aspekte deutscher Kunst 1919-1933' (Nationalgalerie, Berlin)
- 1981 died 8 May in Hanover

GERTA OVERBECK

- 1898 born Margarete Overbeck in Dortmund; raised in Cappenberg near Lünen
- 1915-1918 studied in Düsseldorf to become a drawing teacher (Zeichenlehrerin); passed exam, 1918
- 1919-1922 studied in the graphics class of Fritz Burger-Mühlfeld at the Hannover Handwerker- und Kunstgewerbeschule; met the students who would form the Hanover Neue Sachlichkeit group: Grethe Jürgens, Ernst Thoms, Erich Wegner, Hans Mertens
- 1921-1923 works include *The Wounded Revolutionary*, 1921; *Worker Revolt*, 1922; *Prostitute*, 1923; George Grosz, Conrad Felixmüller, Paula Modersohn-Becker and Giorgio de Chirico shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1922-1931 worked in various schools in Dortmund teaching drawing; maintained contact with the Hanover group at week-ends and holidays
- 1924-1929 works include *Mother with Child at the Hairdressers*, 1924; *Reclining*, 1925; *The Rug-Beaters*, 1926; *Industrial Landscape*, 1927; *Building Site*, 1929; *Servant Girl*, 1929
- 1931 worked as a 'freie Malerin' in Hanover; took part in the exhibition, '5. Großen Westfälischen Kunstausstellung', Dortmund
- 1931-1932 cooperated in the production of *Der Wachsbogen*, writing articles and distributing the paper
- 1932 took part in three exhibitions: 'Die Neue Sachlichkeit in Hannover' (Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig) [showed 17 works, including *Canal Workers*, 1931; *White House on the Slag-Heap*, 1927; *Portrait of Toni Overbeck*, 1926]; 'Herbstausstellung westfälische Künstler' (Dortmund); 'Herbstausstellung hannoverscher Künstler' (this was the annual Autumn show at the Kunstverein in Hanover); *Max Slevogt* shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1933 Alexander Kanoldt, Franz Radziwill and Georg Schrimpf shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1933-1937 took part in both the Spring and Autumn shows at the Kunstverein in Hanover

- 1934 monographic review by Werner Miro appeared in the *Hannoverschen Tageblatt*; works include *Self-Portrait with Cigarette*; Paula Modersohn-Becker shown at the Kestner-Gesellschaft
- 1936-1938 married Gustav Schenk; travelled to Worpswede and Mannheim; works include *Self-Portrait at an Easel, 1936*
- 1937 birth of her only child, Frauke; works include *Portrait of an Old Farmer's Wife*
- 1938 returned to family home in Cappenberg near Lünen where she would remain until her death
- 1958-1961 attended the glass painting classes of Prof. Ehrentraut at the Werkkunstschule Braunschweig
- 1962 took part in the exhibition 'Die Zwanziger Jahre in Hannover' at the Kunstverein in Hanover; from this period was included in a number of major retrospective exhibitions about the Neue Sachlichkeit
- 1976 first one-woman show in the Galerie Krokodil, Hamburg
- 1977 died 2 March in Cappenberg

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WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE NEUE SACHLICHKEIT:

GRETHE JÜRGENS AND GERTA OVERBECK

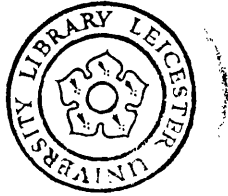
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- figure 131. Kate Steinitz, *Shopwindow Display*, c.1936-42, photograph, 36.4 x 27.3 cm, Los Angeles, private collection
- figure 132. Kurt Weinhold, *New Window Display*, c.1929/30, pen and ink, 46 x 59.2 cm, Grafenau, Galerie Schlichtermaier
- figure 133. Lea Grundig, *Shopwindow*, etching from the *Woman's Life* series, 1936, 24.7 x 33.2 cm, Berlin, Ladengalerie
- figure 134. Hannah Höch, *Made for a Party*, 1936, photomontage, 36 x 19.8 cm
- figure 135. Jeanne Mammen, *Boring Dollies*, c.1927-30, watercolour and pencil, 38.7 x 28.5 cm, Hamburg, Hauswedell und Nolte
- figure 136. Herbert Marxen, *The Seamstress*, 1927, oil on canvas, 51.5 x 47.5 cm, Hamburg, Galerie Brockstedt
- figure 137. George Grosz, *Prost Noske! - The Proletariat is Disarmed!*, etching from *The Face of the Ruling Class*, 1921
- figure 138. George Grosz, *Infamy*, 1922, ink, 63 x 50 cm, The Estate of George Grosz
- figure 139. Rudolf Schlichter, *The Party Local*, 1920, pen and ink
- figure 140. Otto Nagel, *The Unemployed*, 1922, lithograph
- figure 141. Hans Mertens, *Card Players*, 1929, oil on canvas, 70 x 49 cm, private collection
- figure 142. Hanna Nagel, *The Paragraph*, 1931, etching with red colour
- figure 143. Alice Lex-Nerlinger, *Paragraph 218*, 1931
- figure 144. Lea Grundig, *Revolution*, 1933/4, etching, 42.3 x 53.8 cm, Landesmuseum Oldenburg

figure 145. Ernst Thoms, *Old Cook*, 1927, oil on canvas,
95 x 70 cm, private collection

figure 146. Ernst Thoms, *Woman in the Kitchen*, 1928, oil
on canvas, 70 x 50 cm, private collection



figure 1.

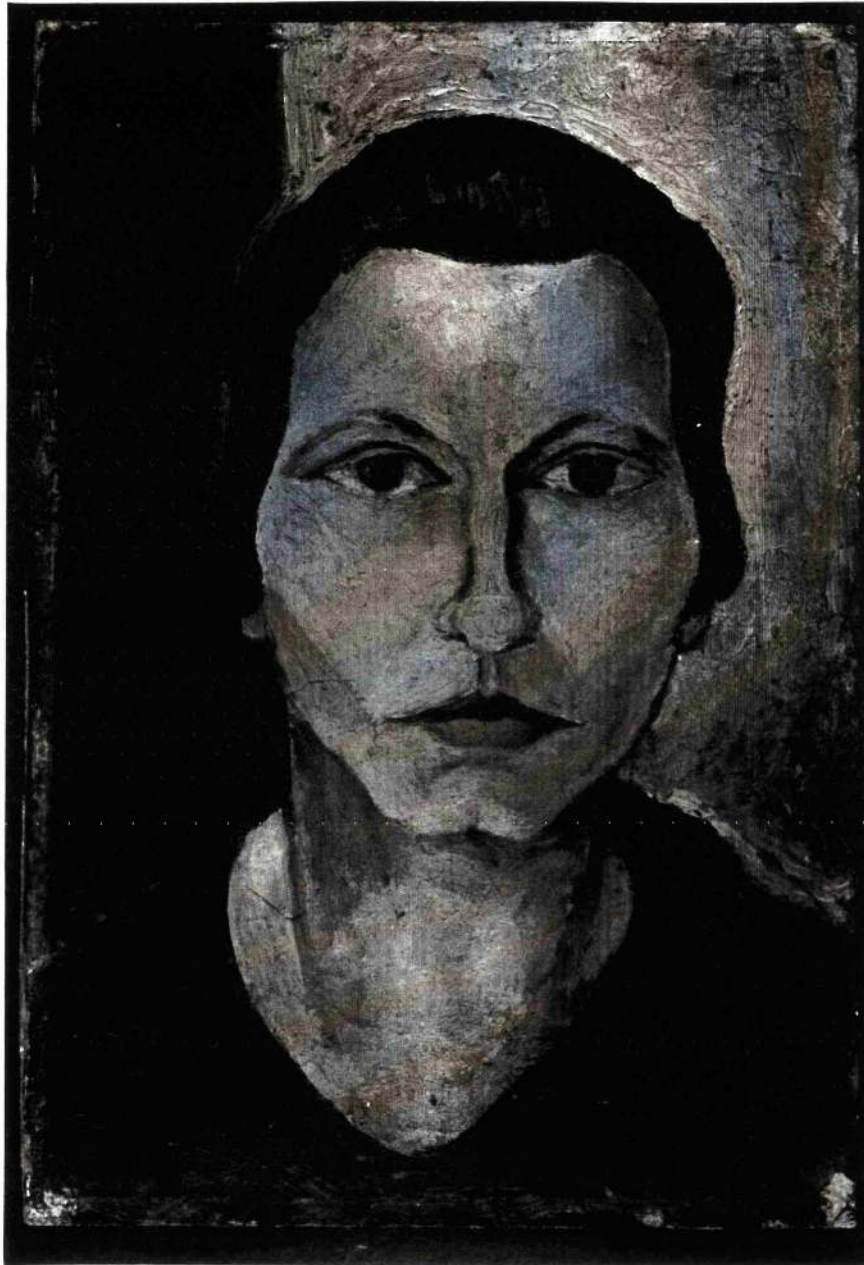


figure 2.

figure 3.

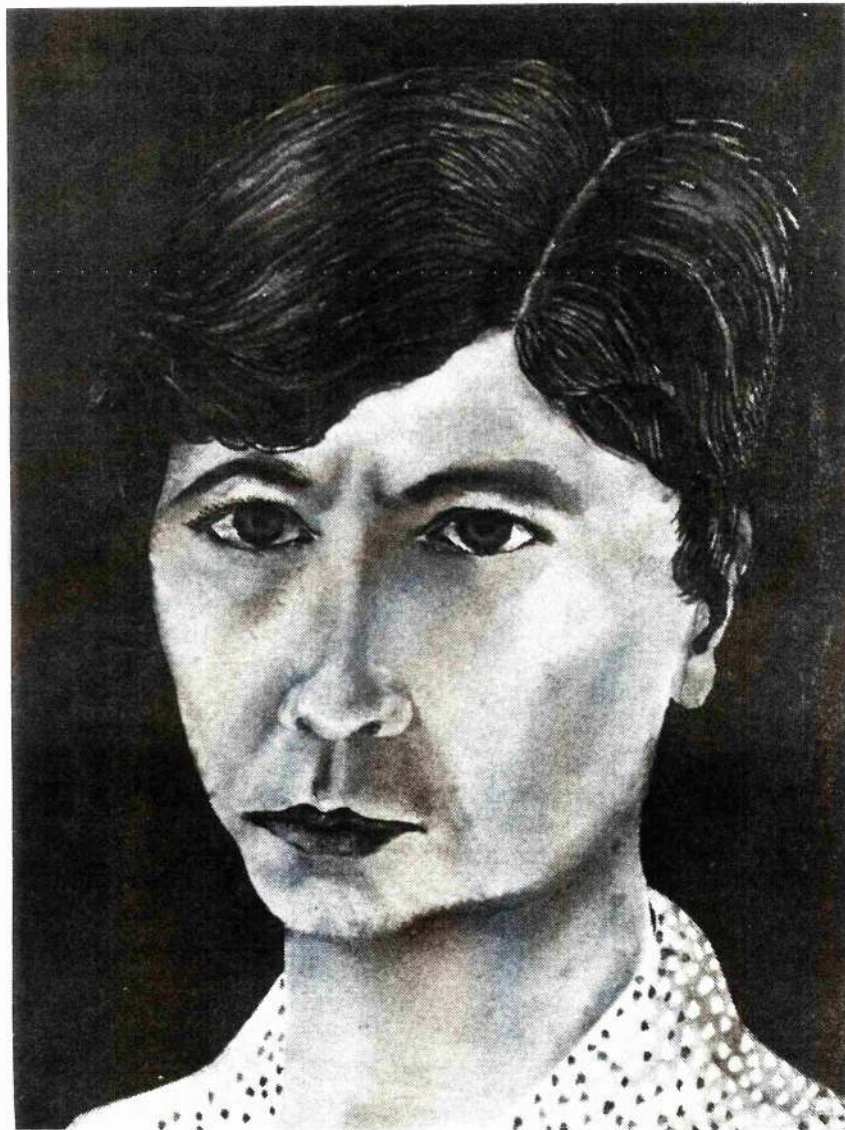


figure 4.

figure 5.

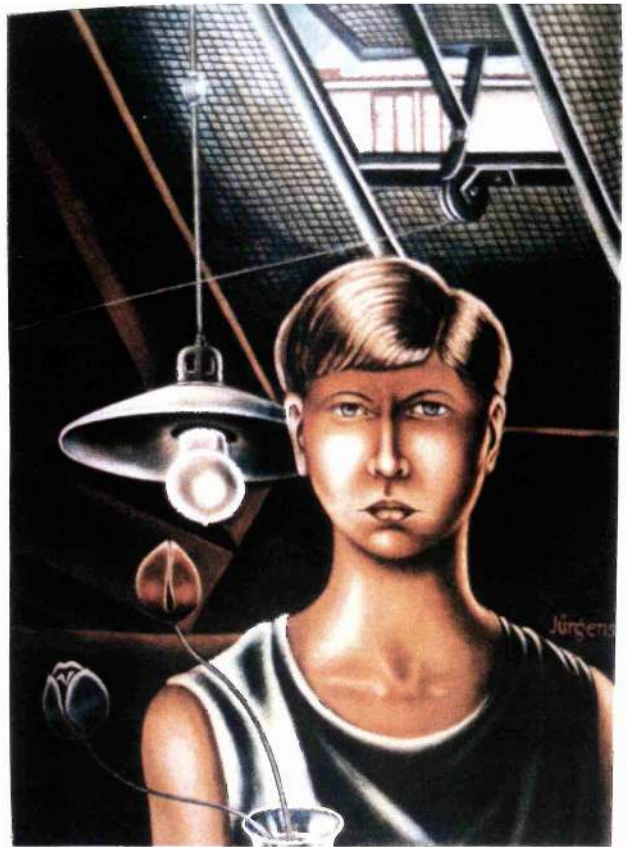


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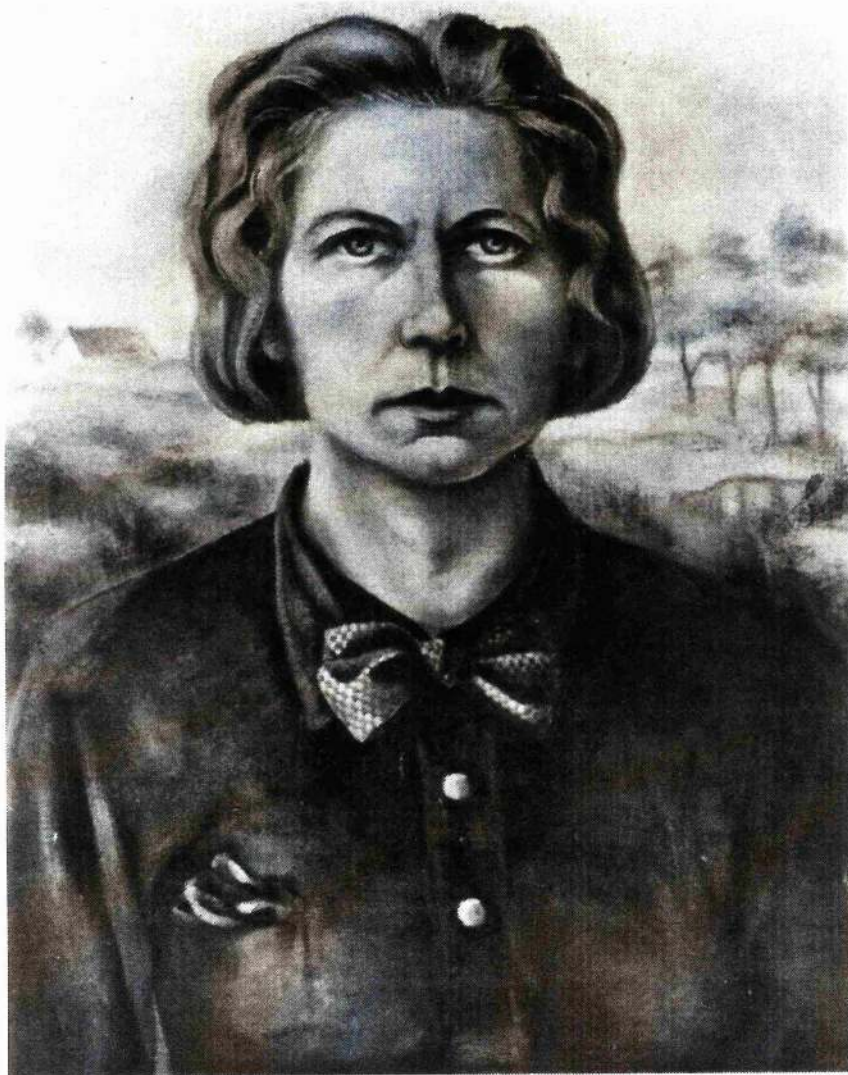


figure 7.



figure 8.



figure 9.



figure 10.

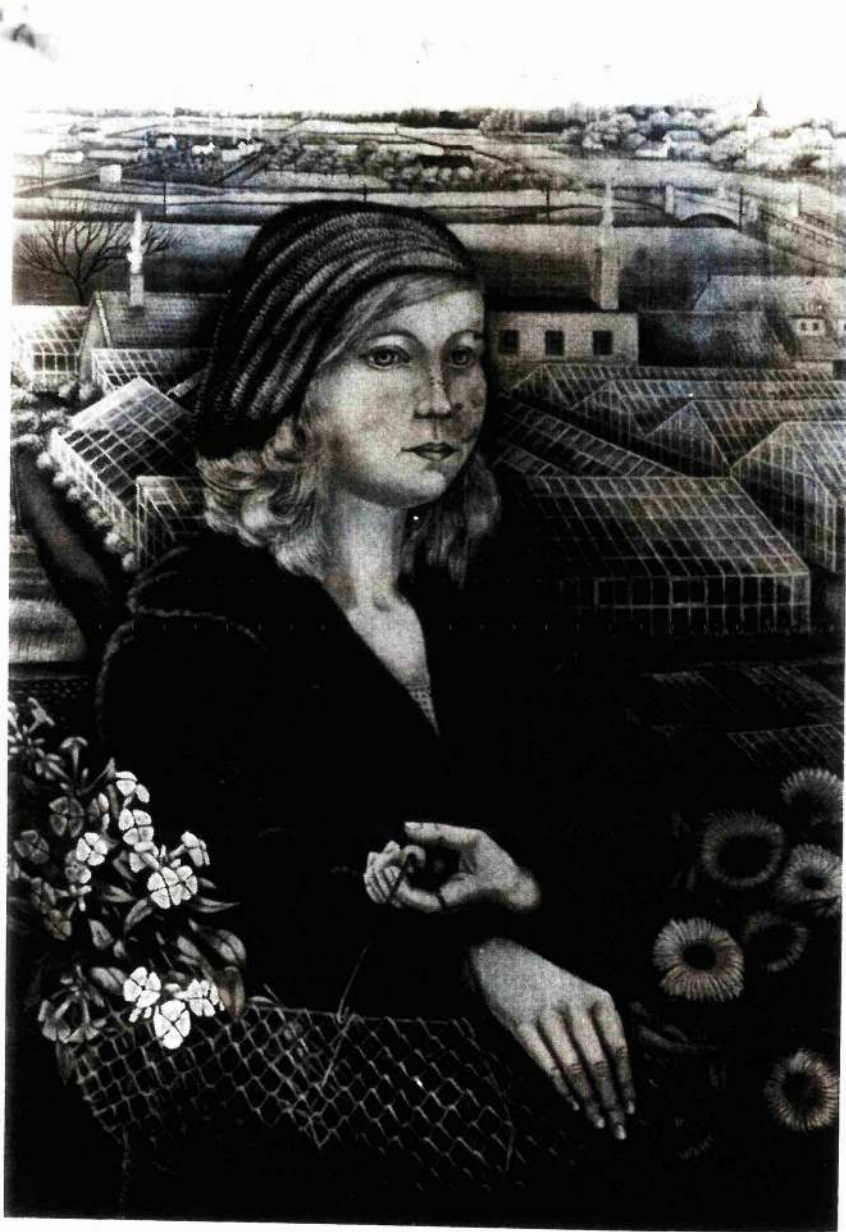


figure 11.



figure 12.

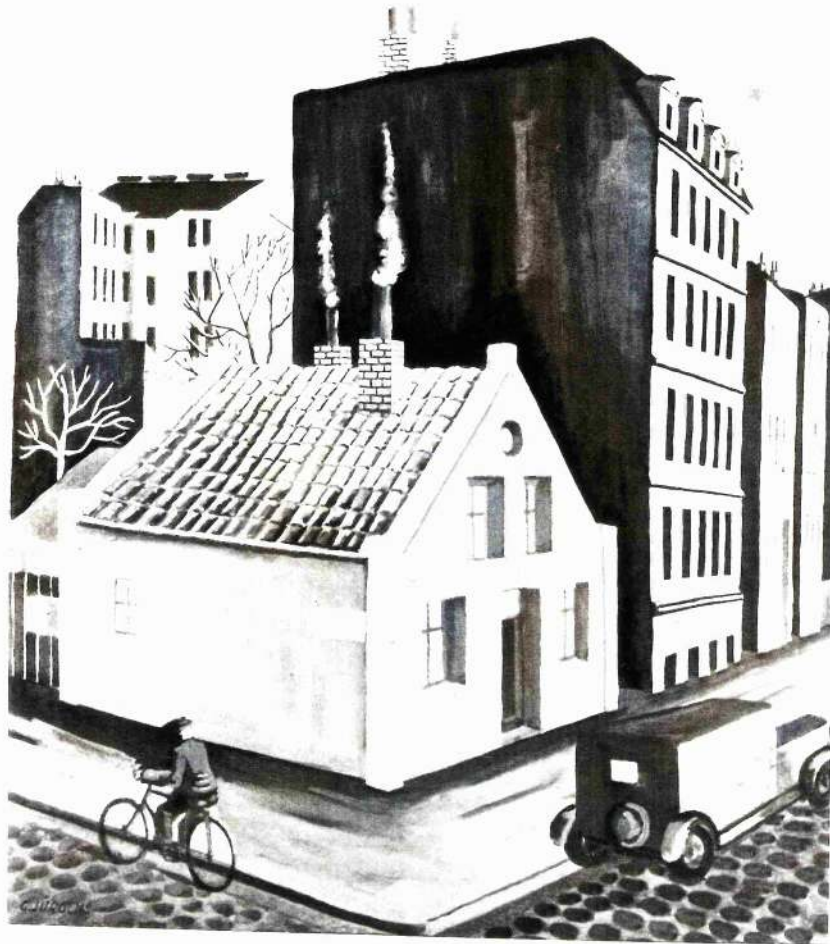


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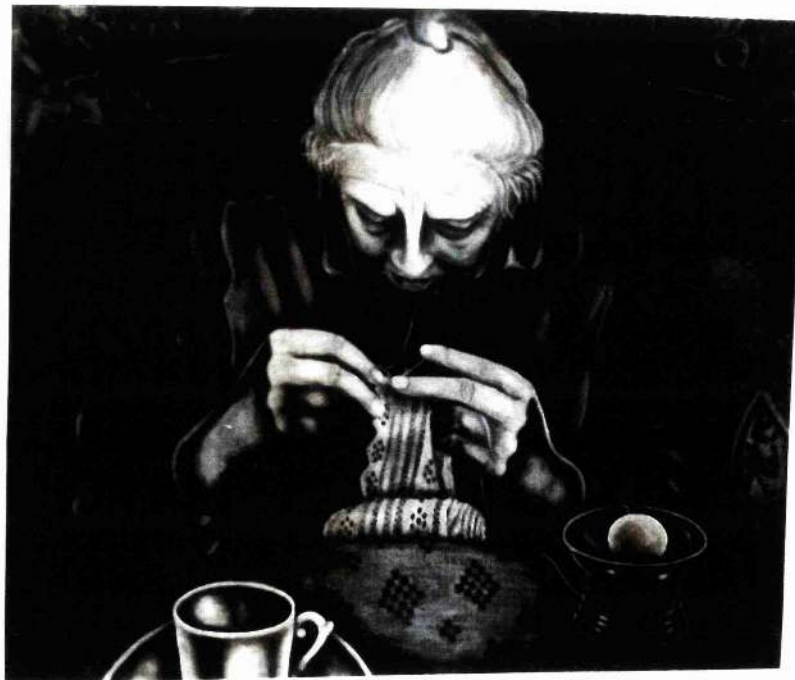


figure 14.

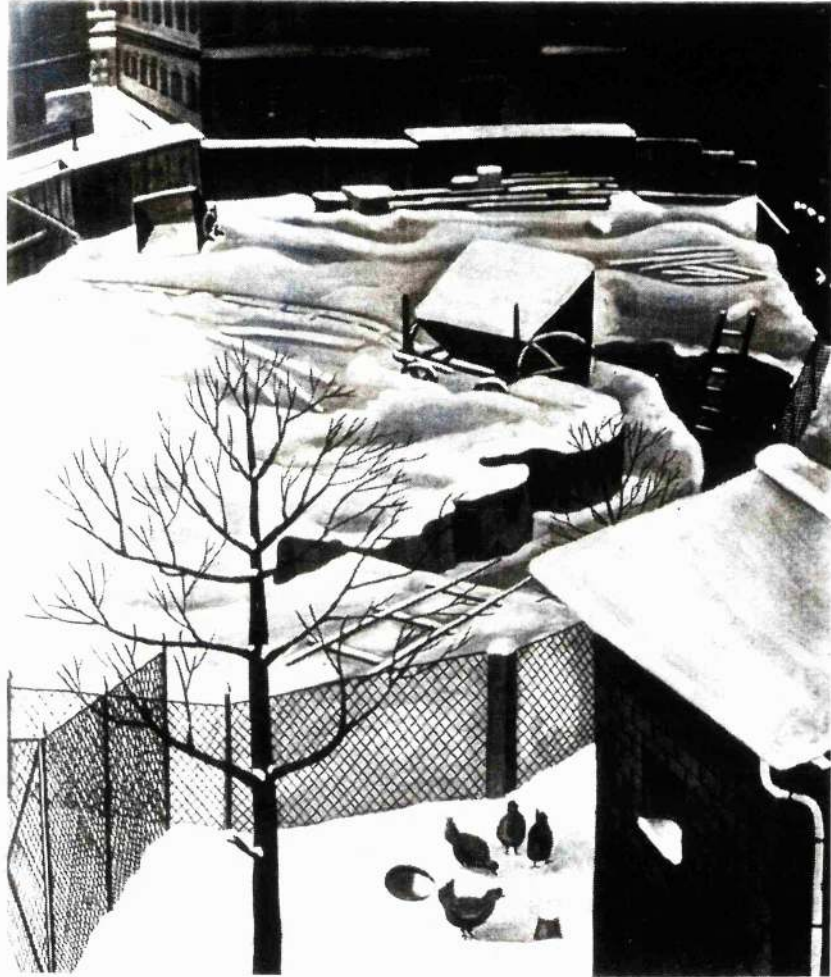


figure 15.



figure 16.



figure 17.



figure 18.



figure 19.



figure 20.

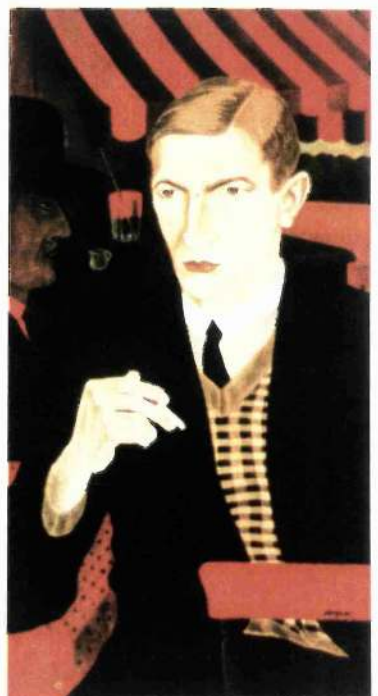


figure 21.



figure 22.



figure 23.



figure 24.

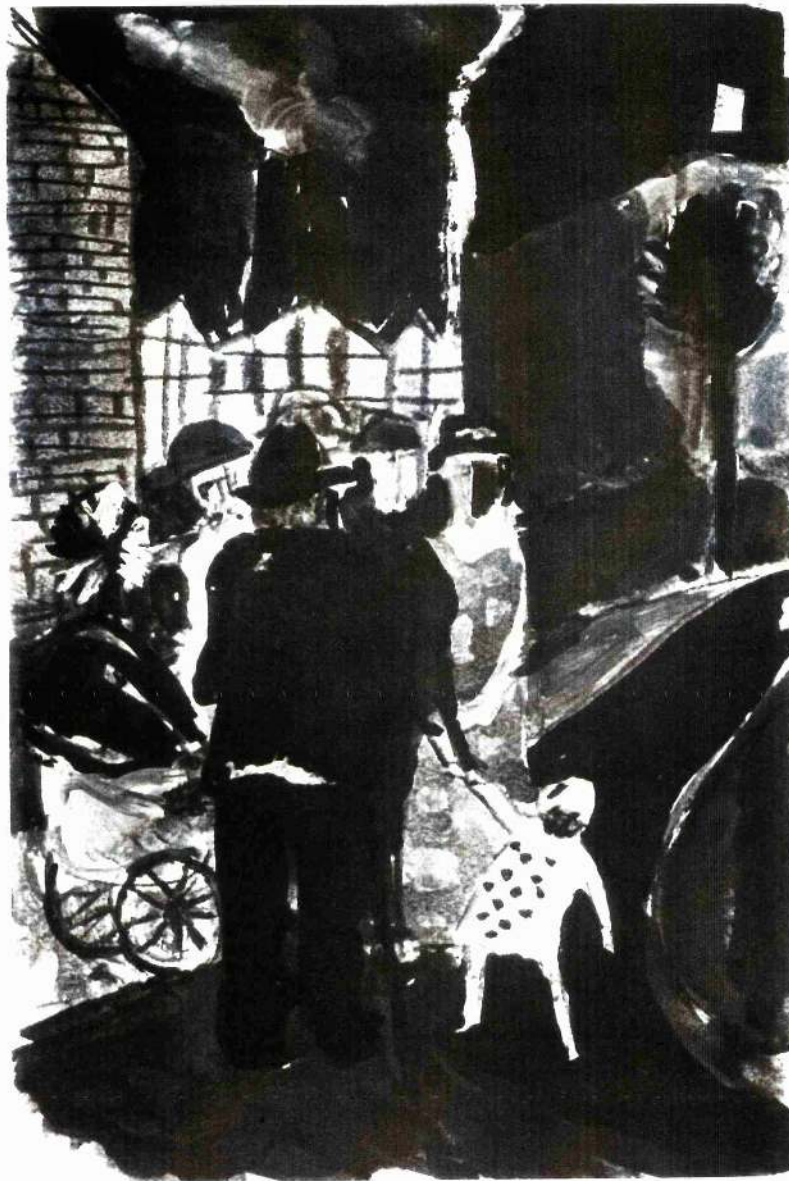


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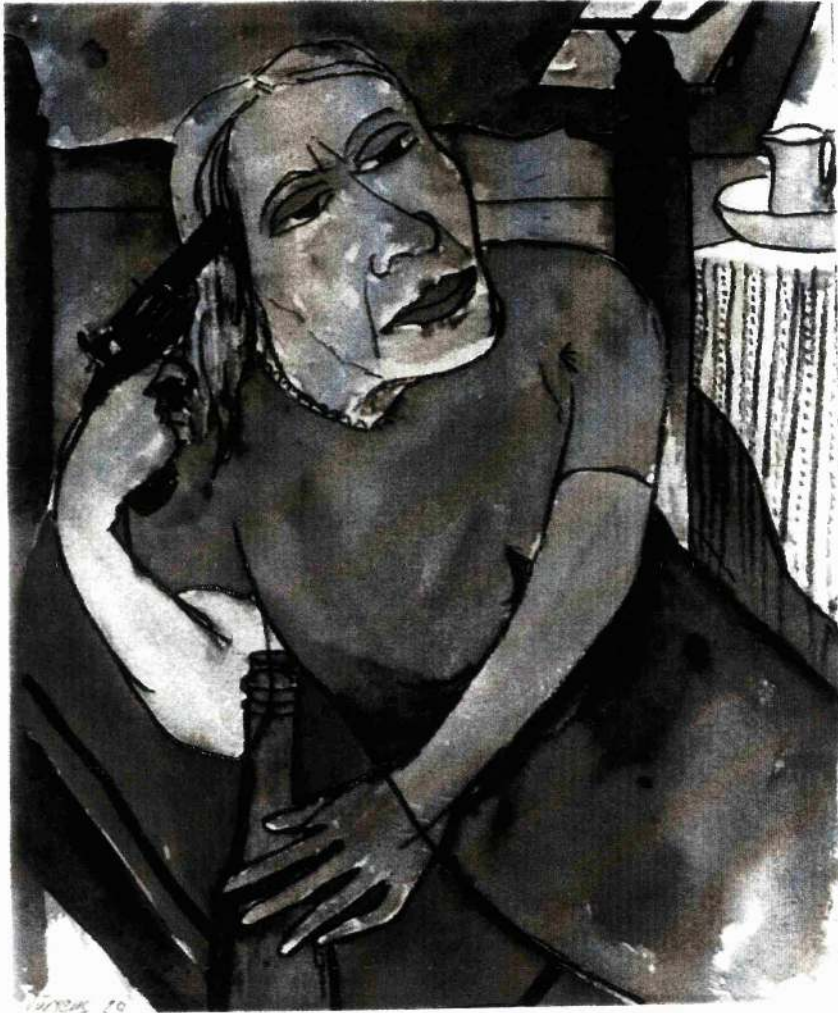


figure 26.



figure 27.



figure 28.

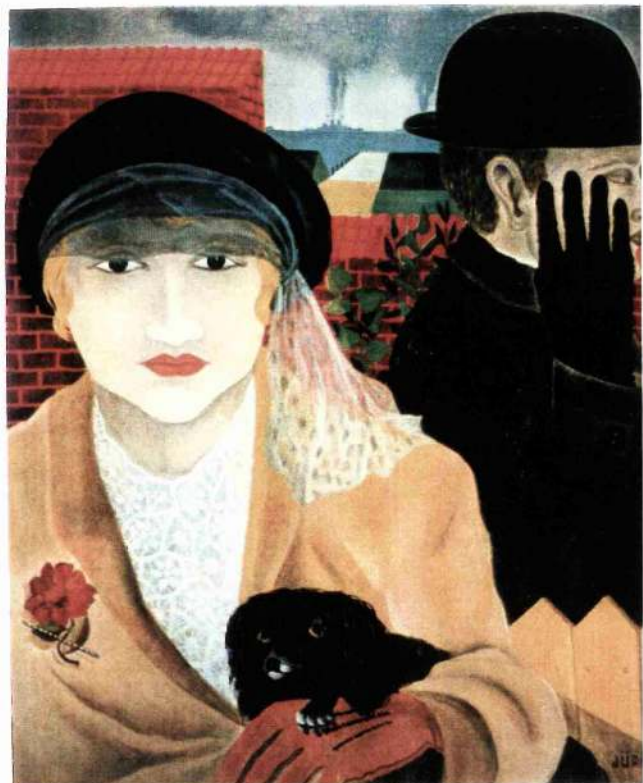


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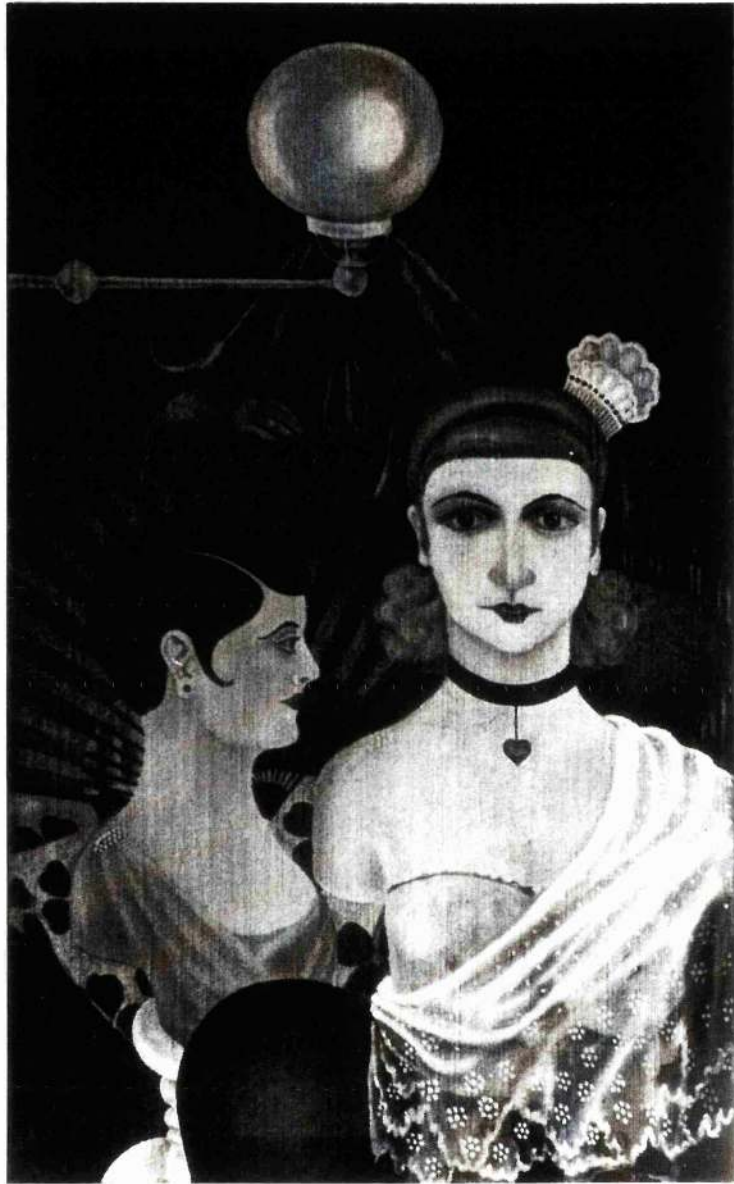


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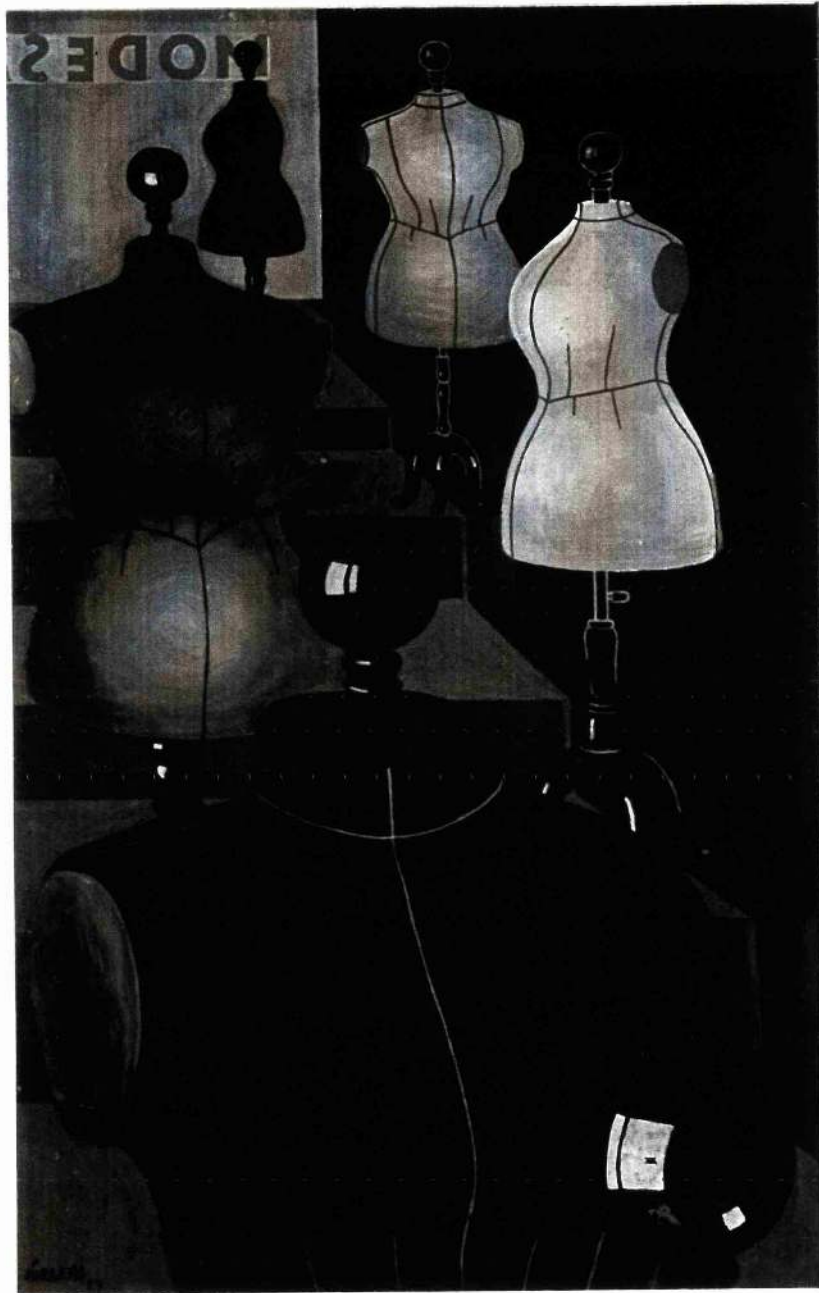


figure 31.



figure 32.

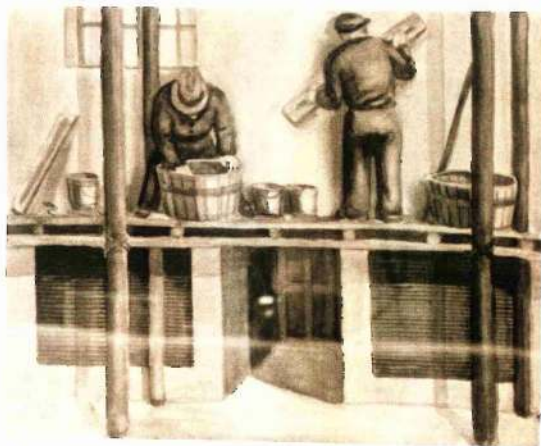


figure 33.



figure 34.



figure 35.



figure 36.



figure 37.



figure 38.



figure 39.

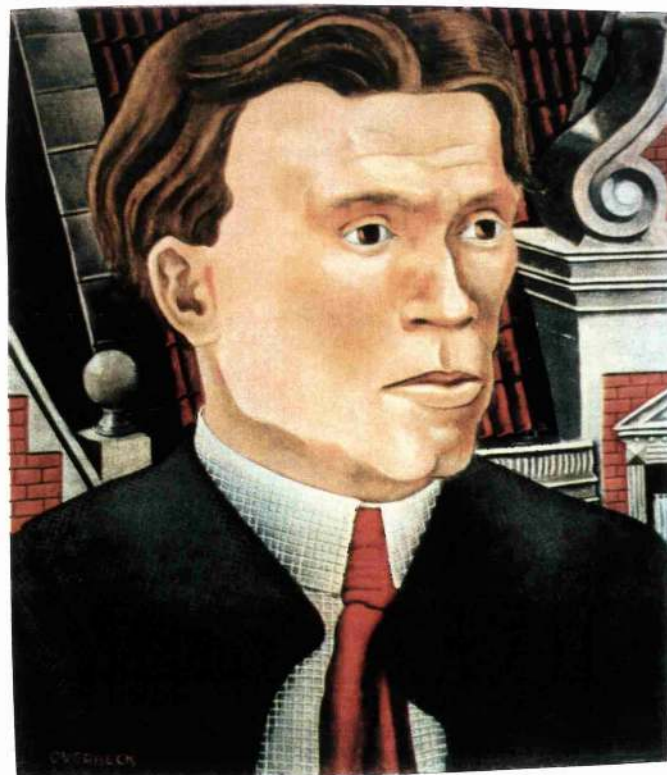


figure 40.



figure 41.

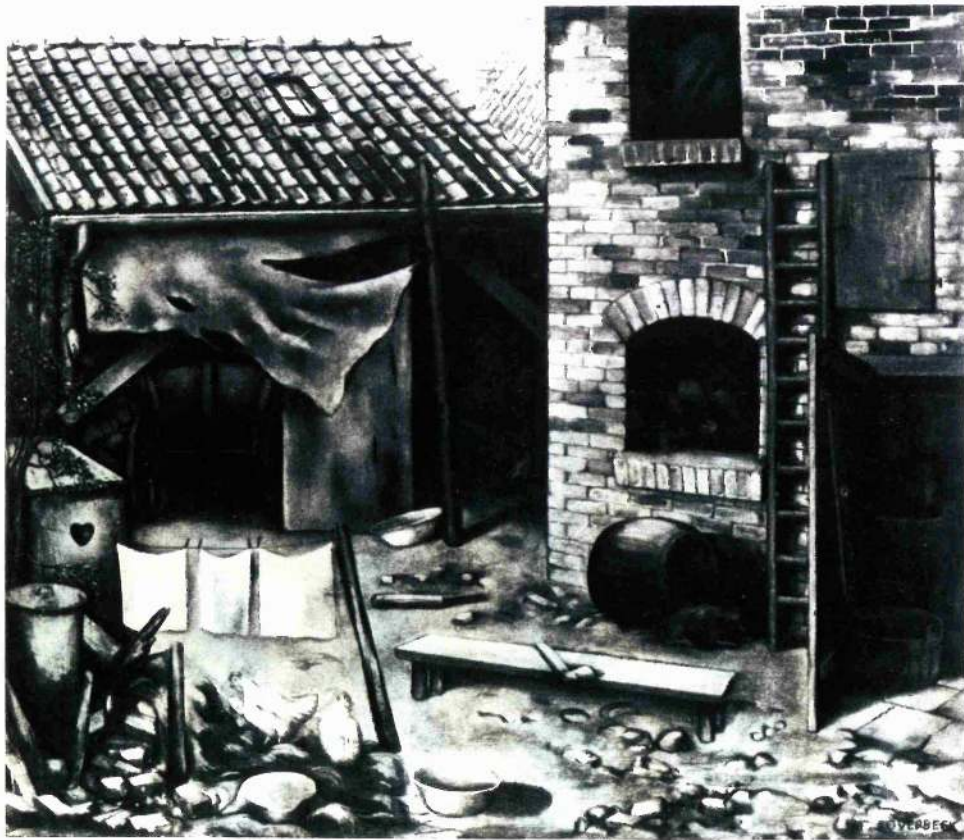


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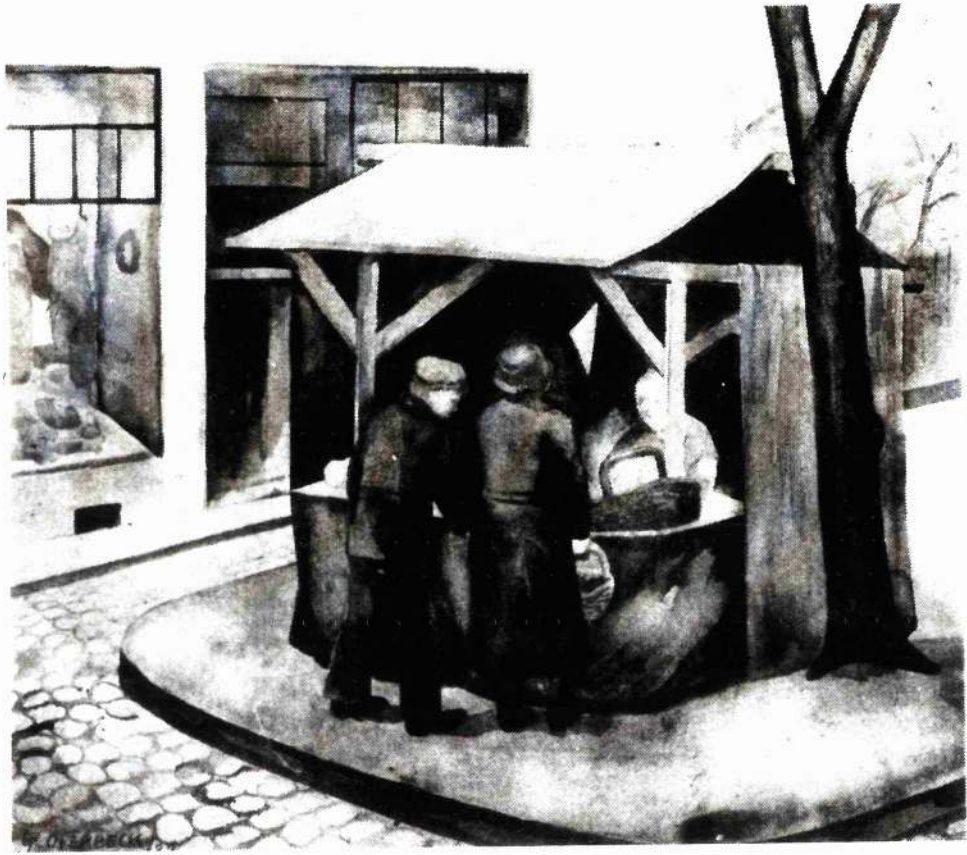


figure 43.



figure 44.



figure 45.

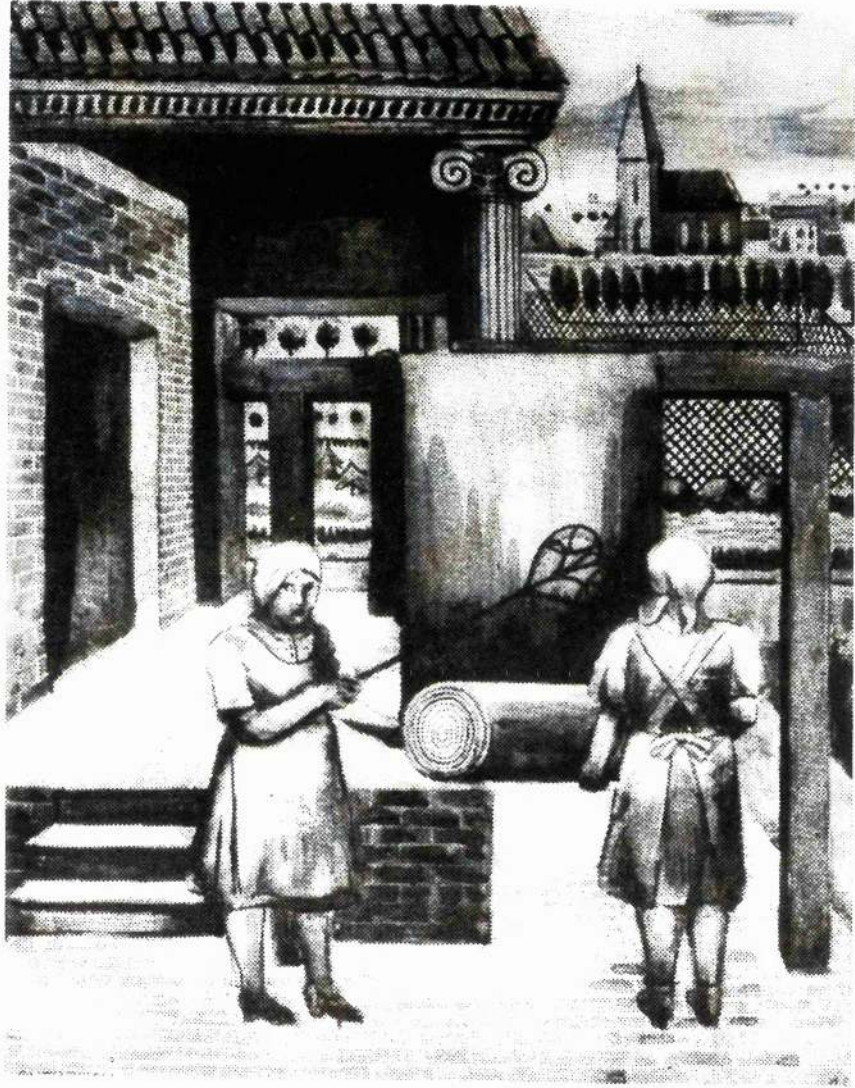


figure 46.



figure 47.



figure 48.

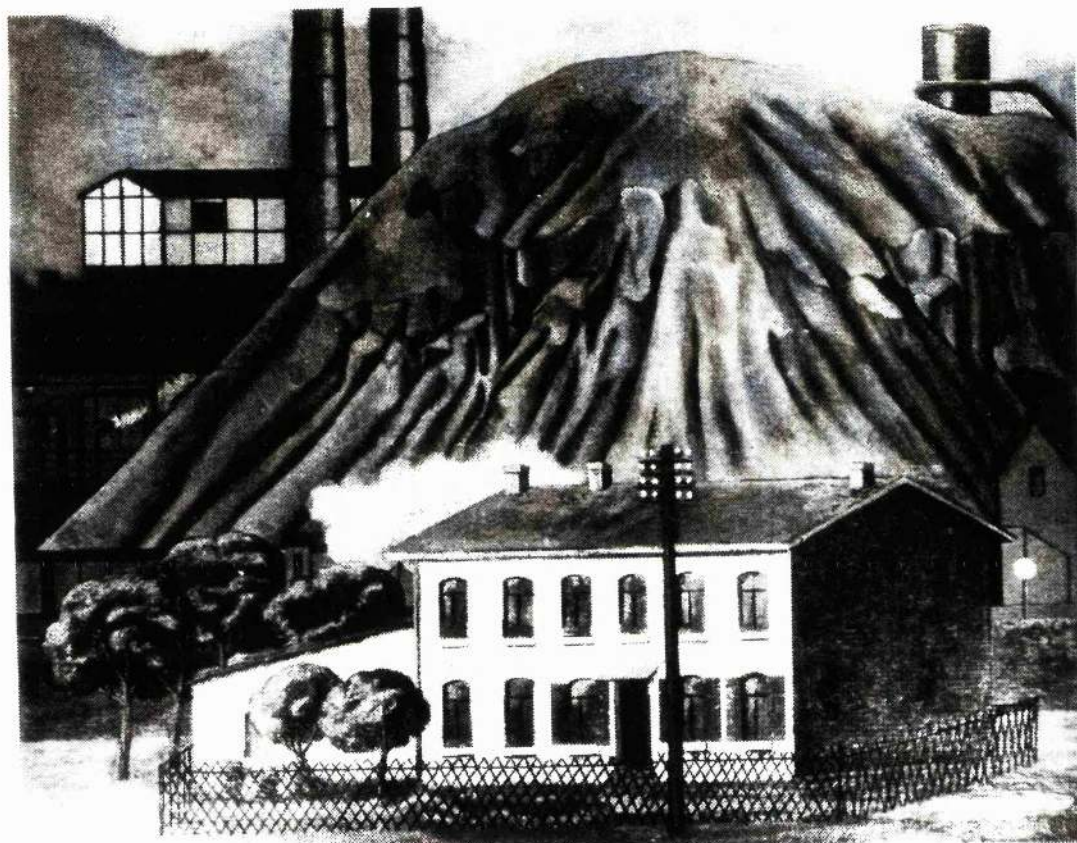


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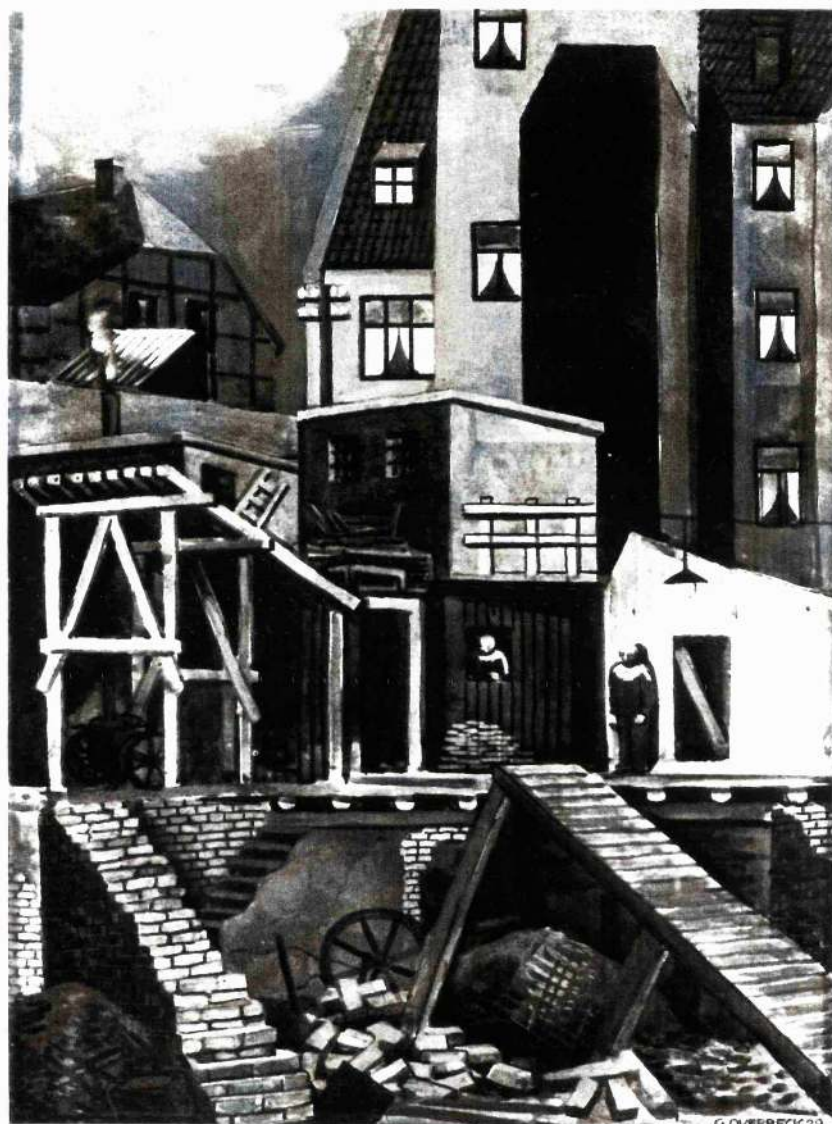


figure 50.



figure 51.



figure 52.

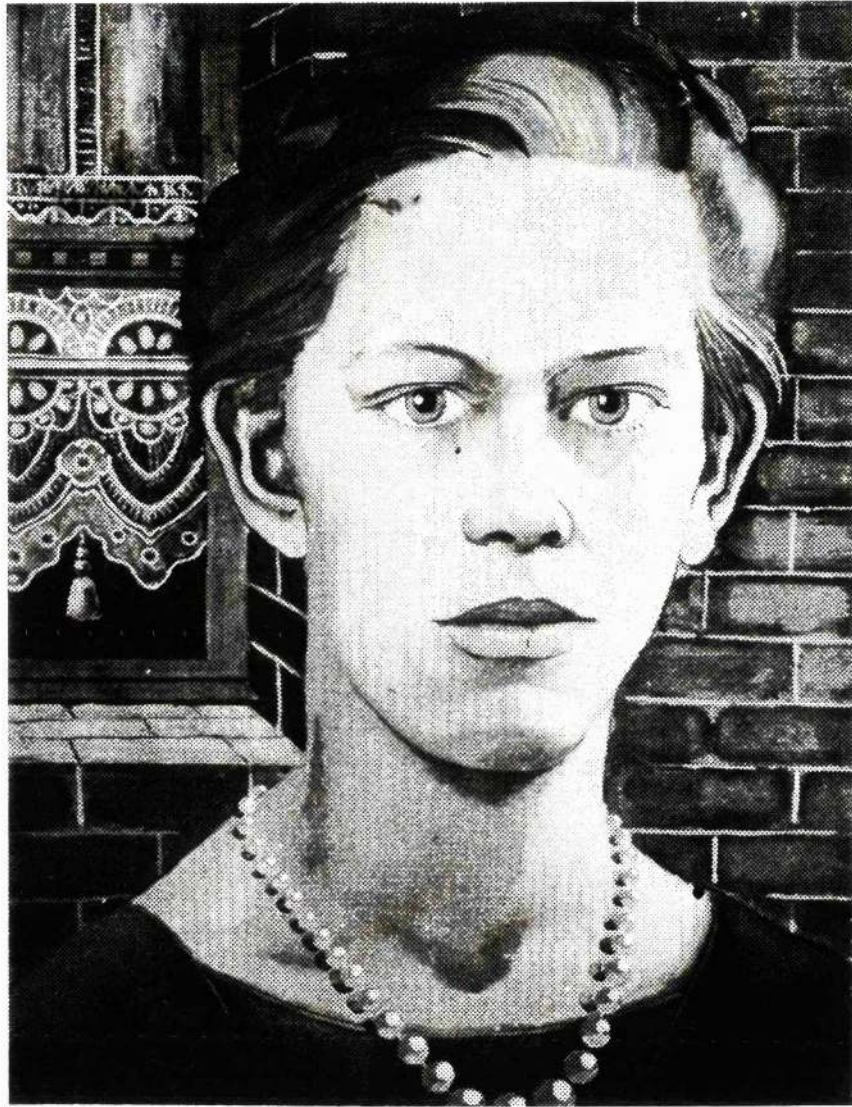


figure 53.



figure 54.

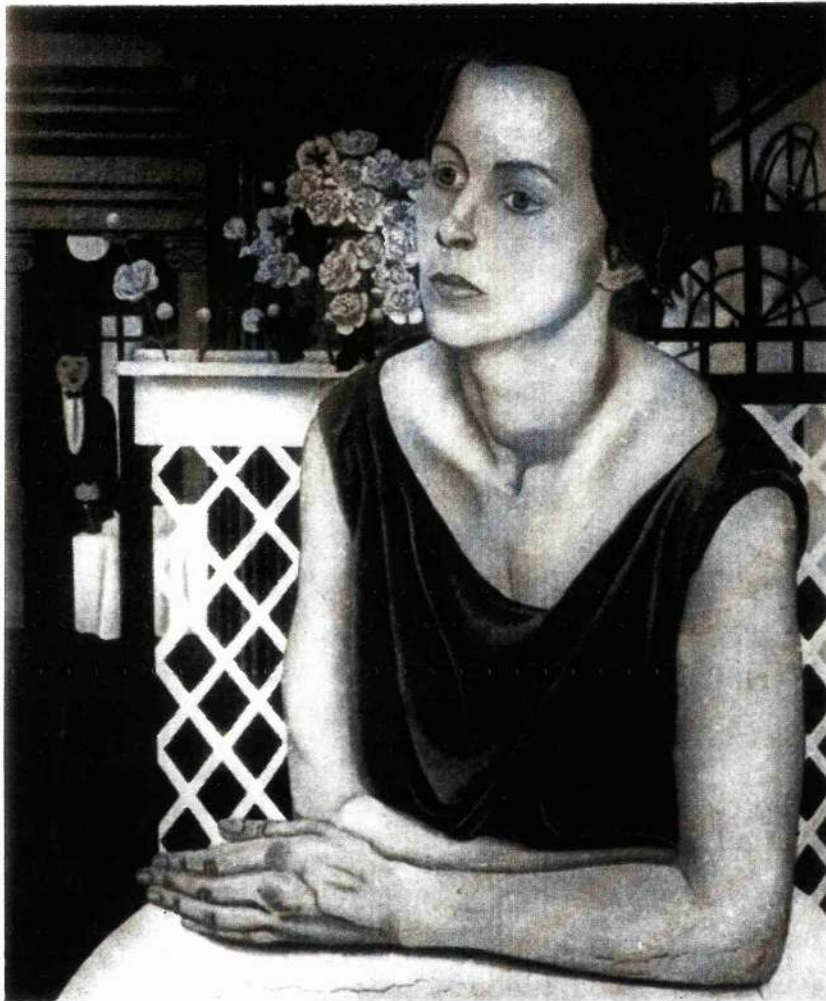


figure 55.

figure 56.

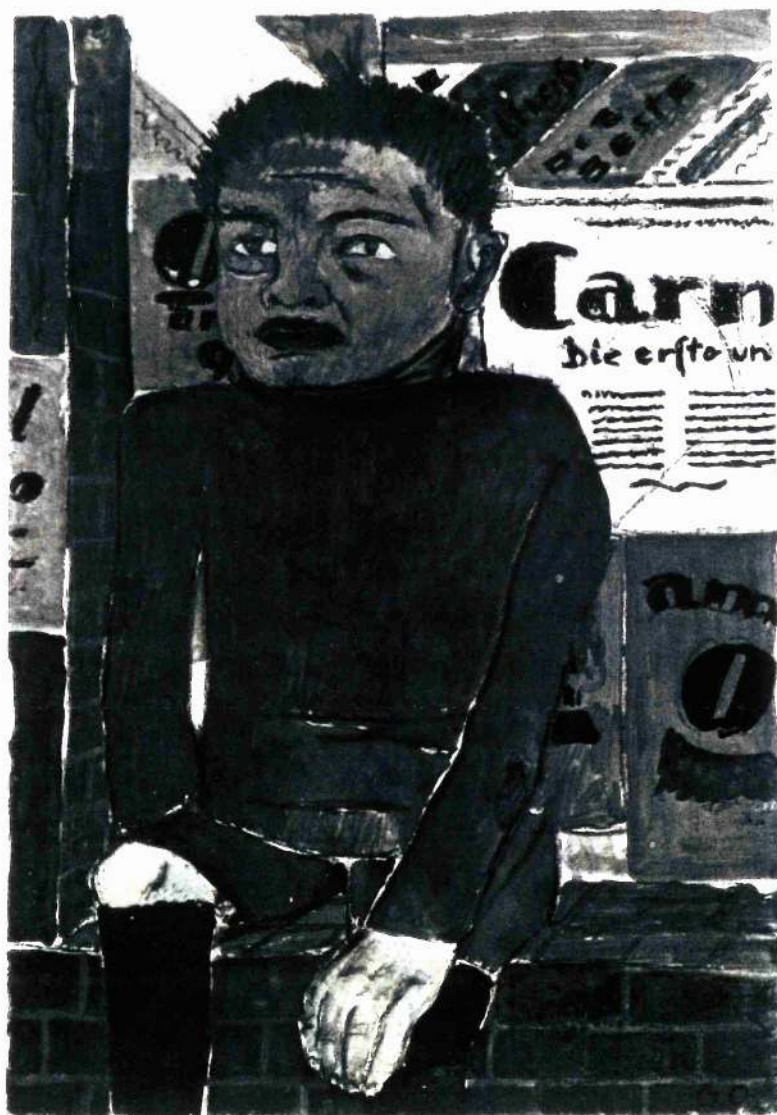


figure 57.



figure 58.



figure 59.

figure 60.

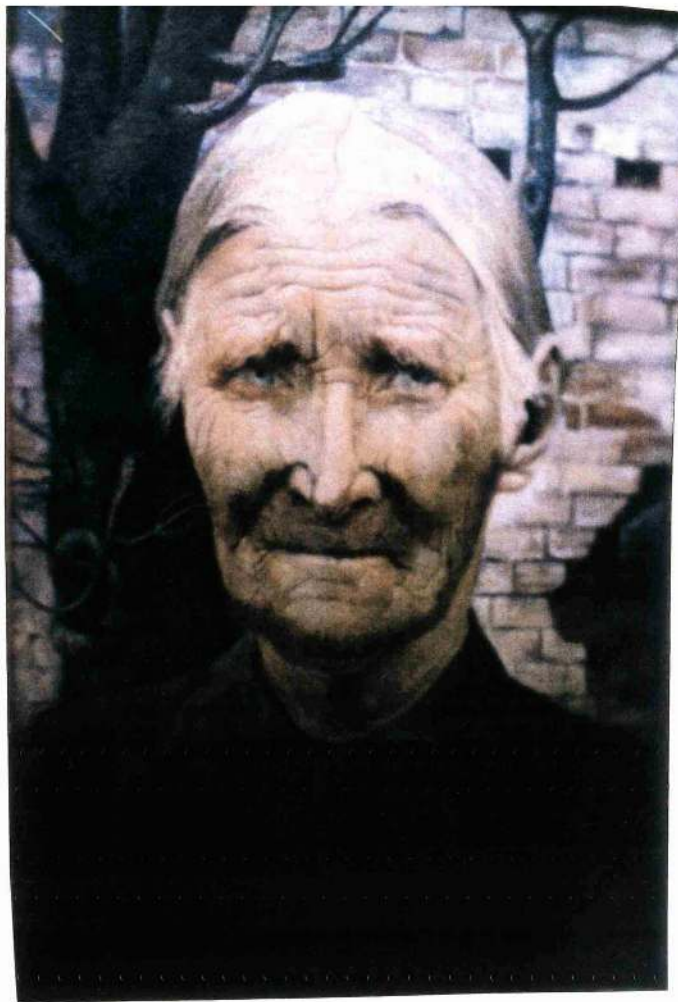


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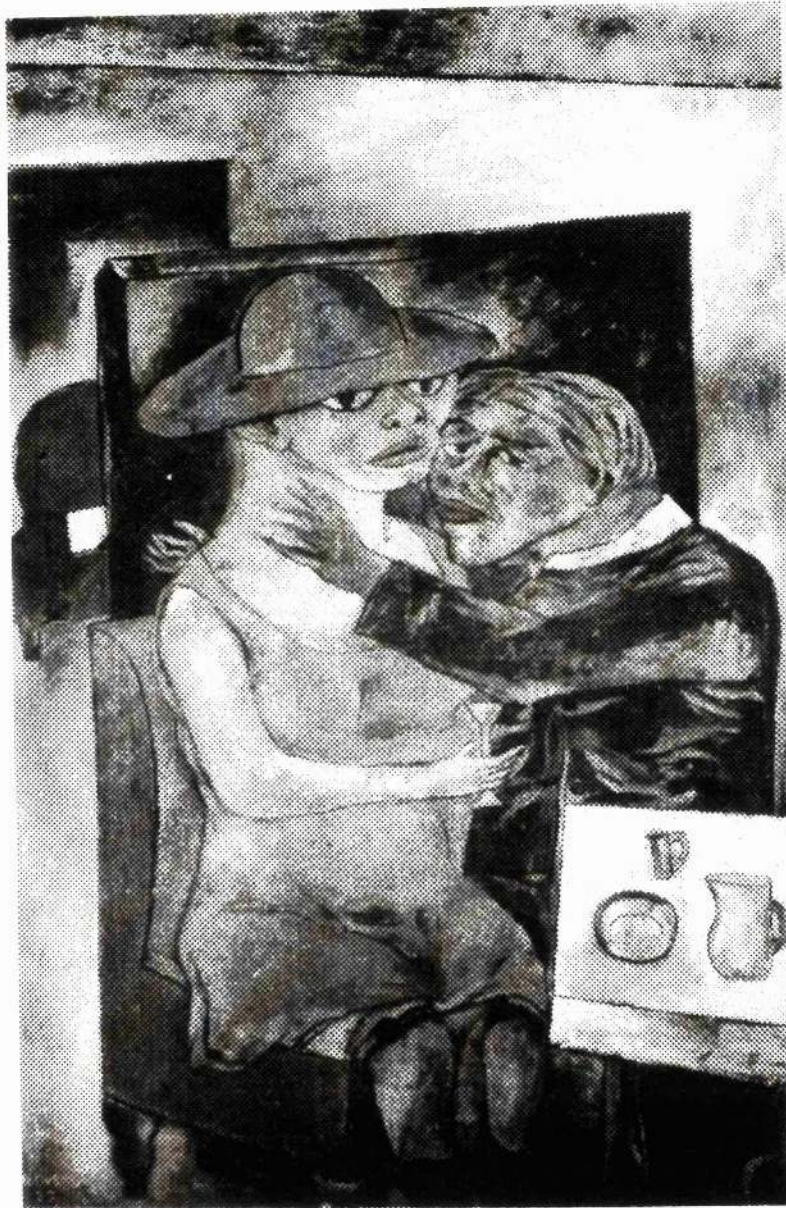


figure 62.

figure 63.



figure 64.

figure 65.



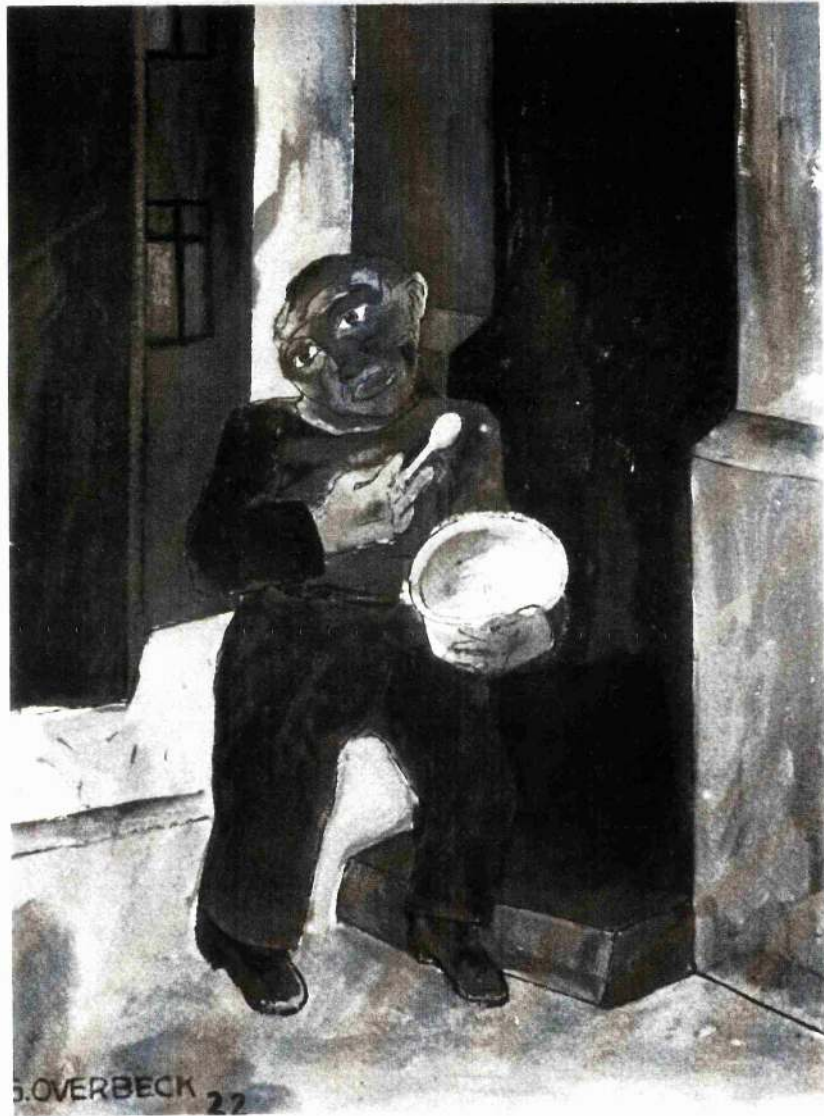


figure 66.



figure 67.



figure 68.



Arbeiteraufstand

1929

figure 69.

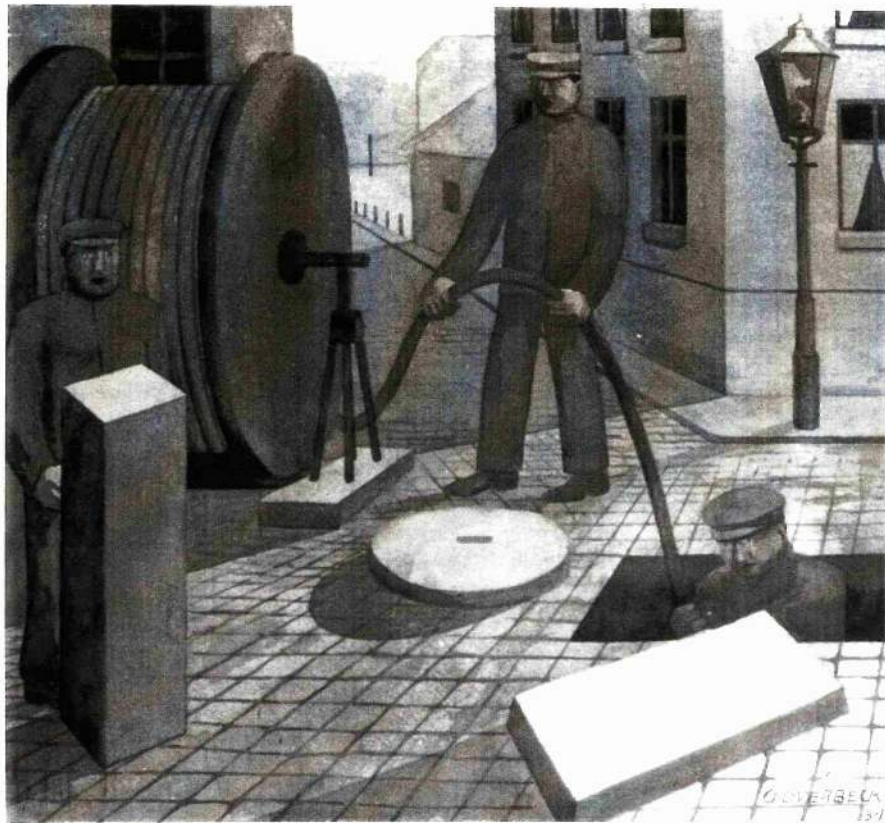


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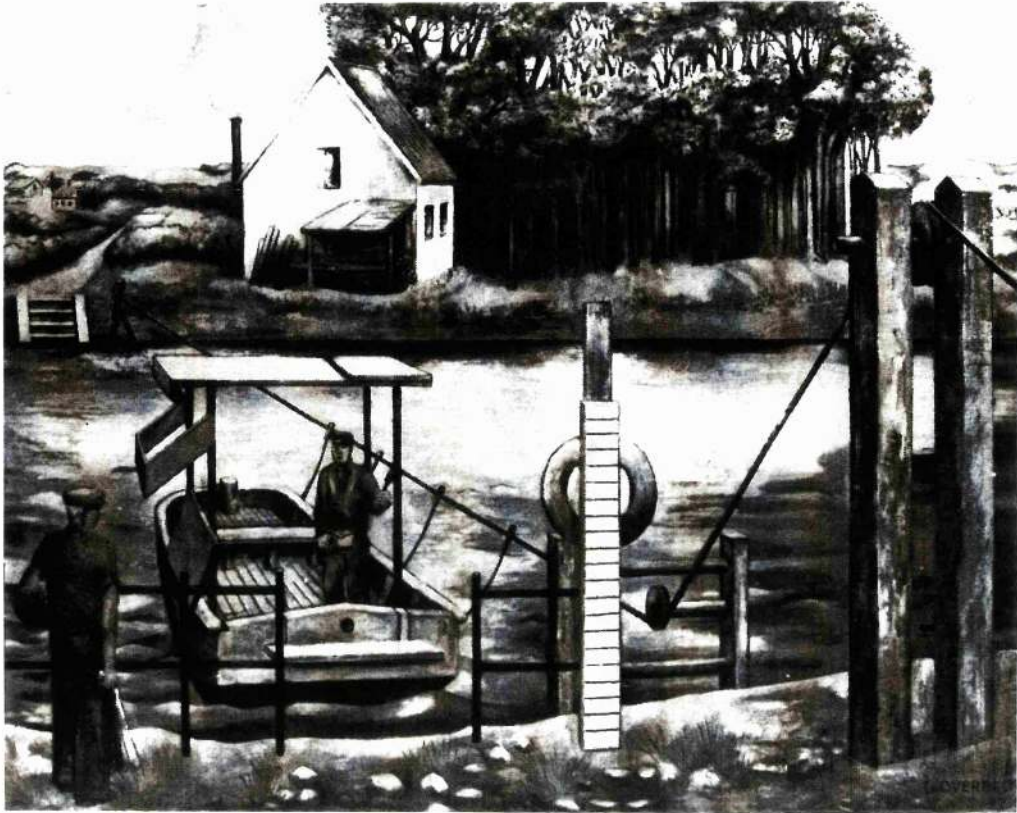


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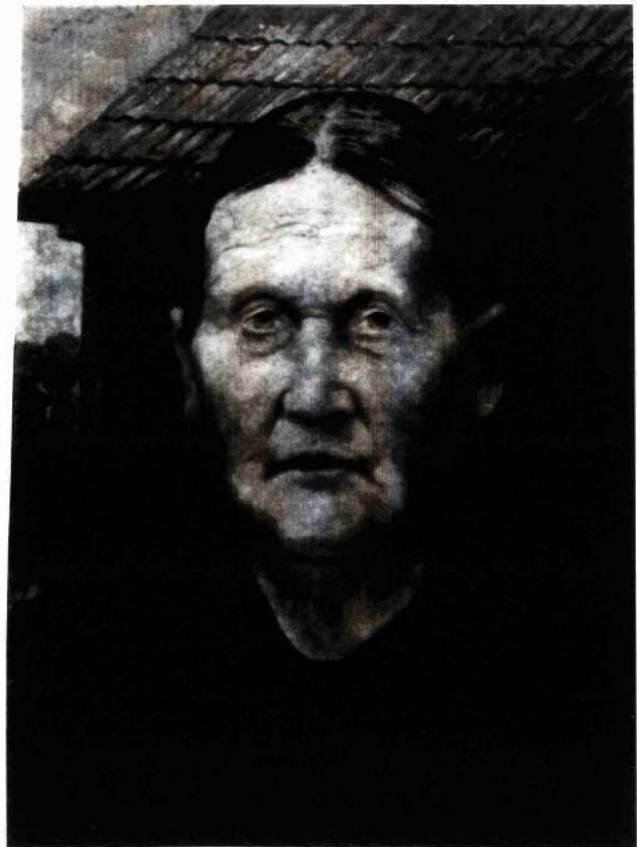


figure 72.



figure 73.



figure 74.



figure 75.

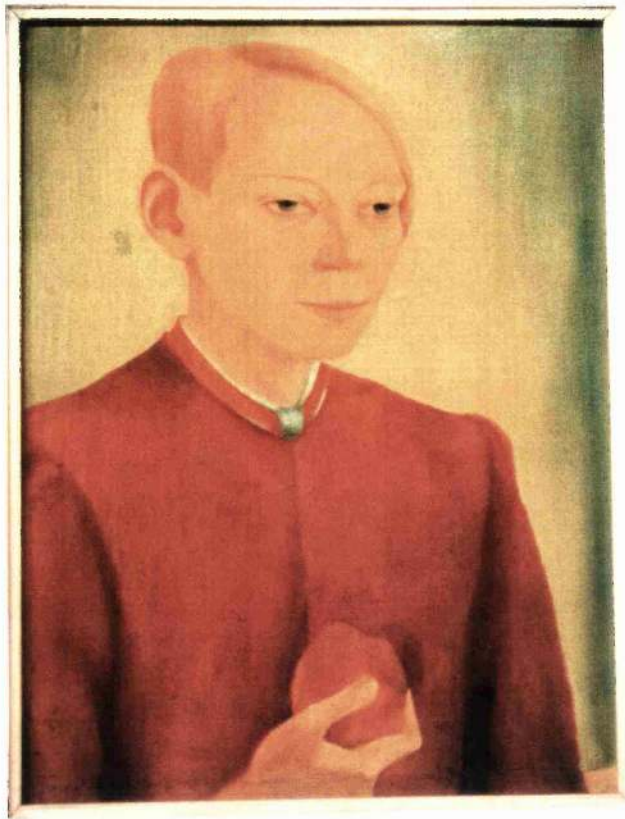


figure 76.



figure 77.



figure 78.



figure 79.

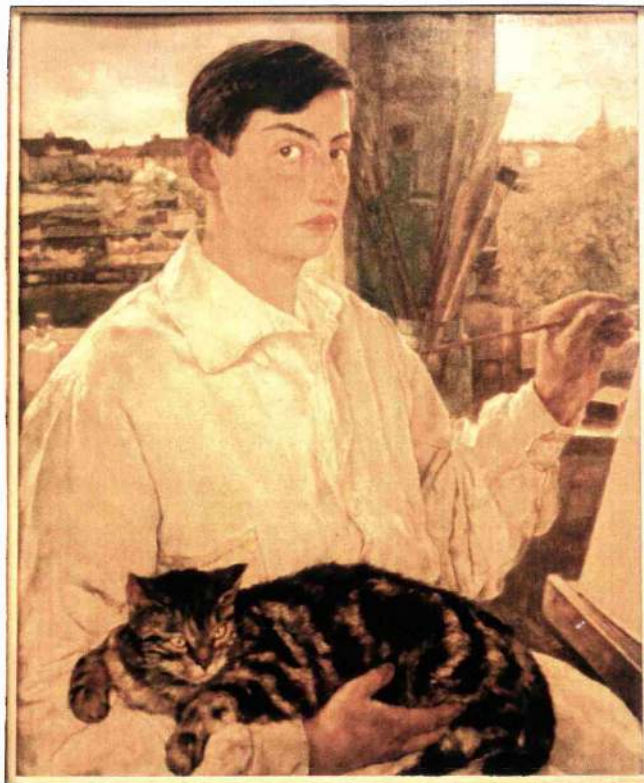


figure 80.

figure 81.

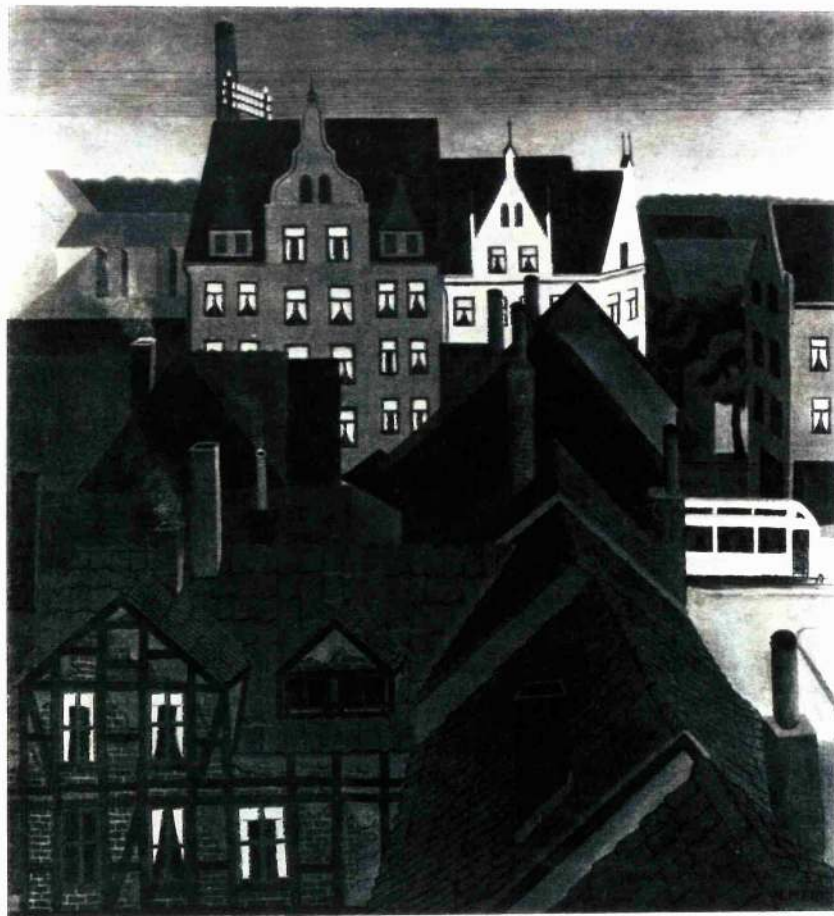
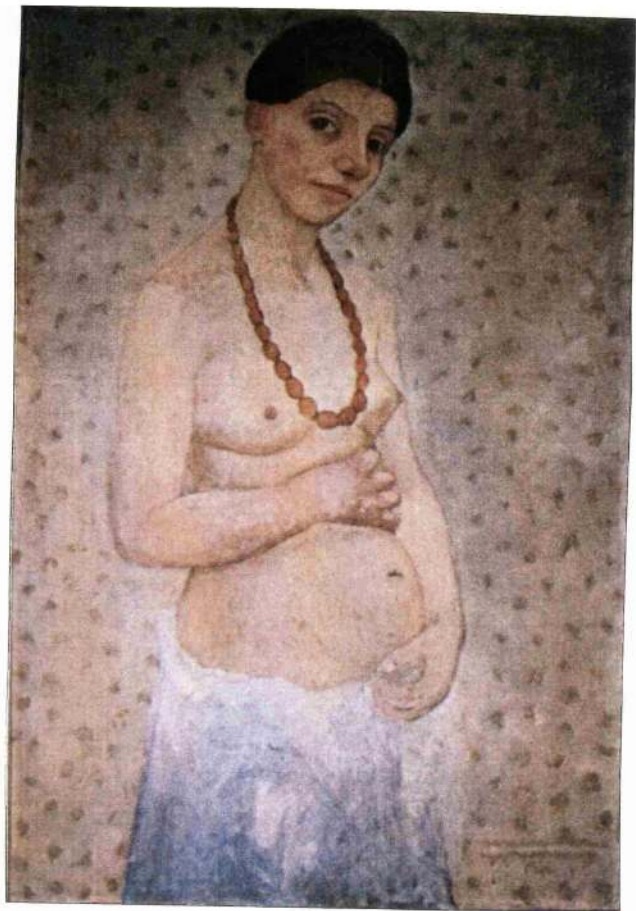


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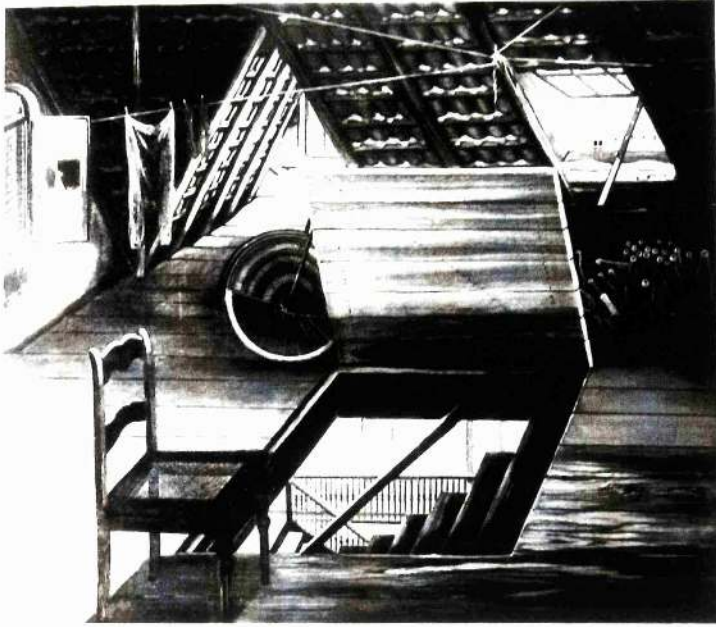


figure 83.



figure 84.

figure 85.

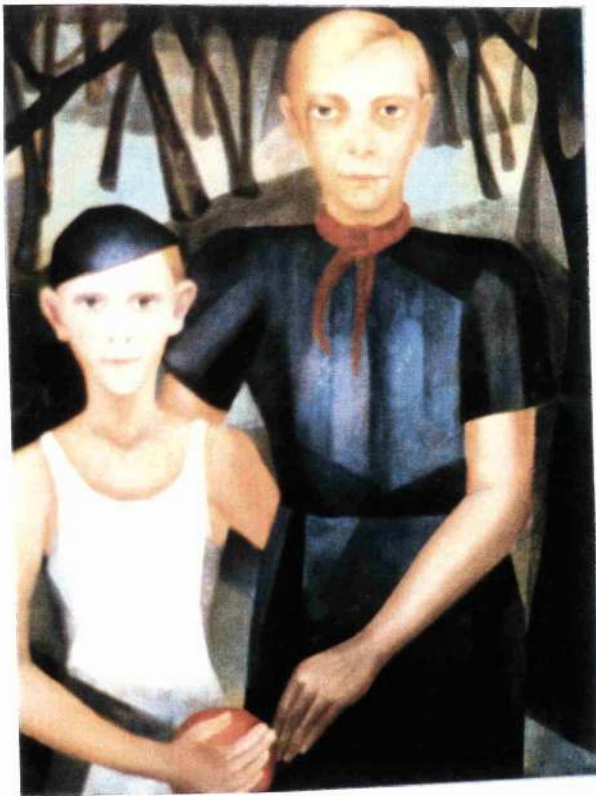


figure 86.

figure 87.

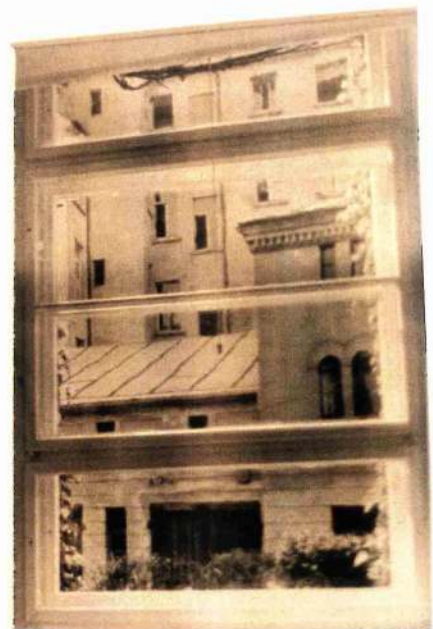


figure 88.



figure 89.

figure 90.





figure 91.



figure 92.



figure 93.

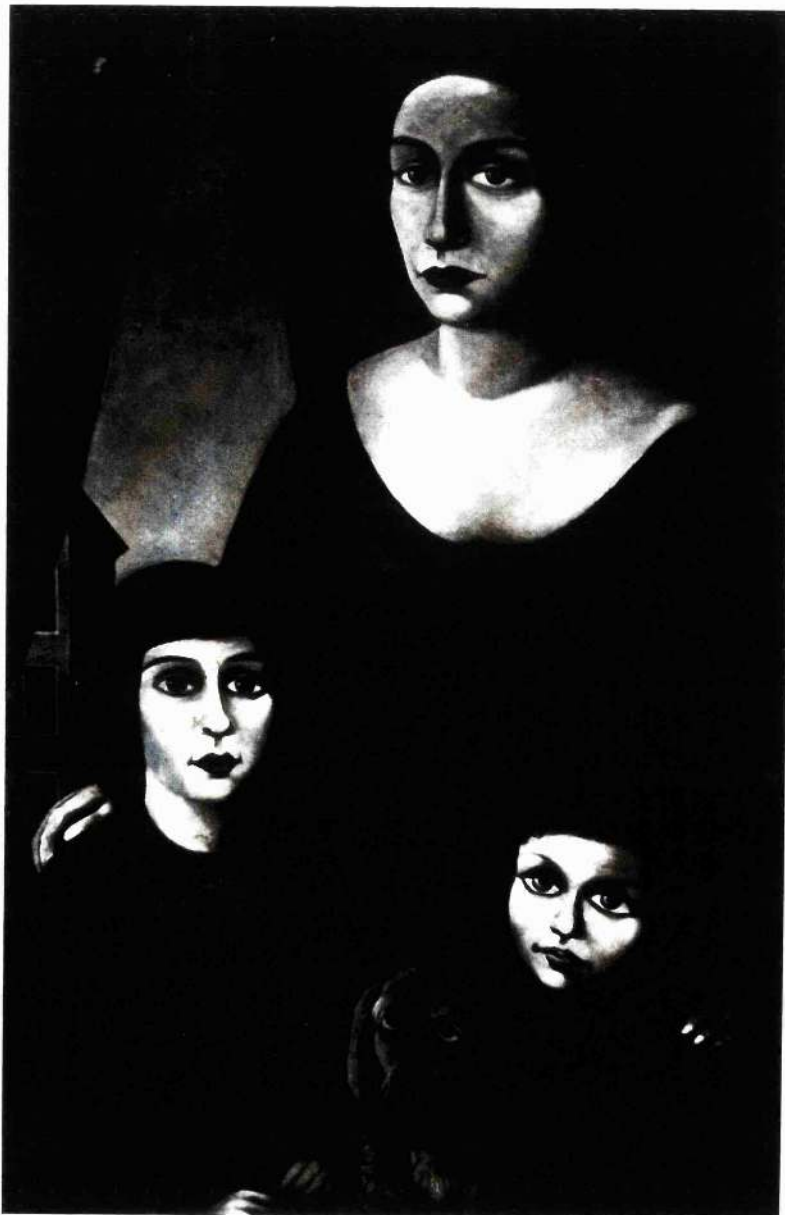


figure 94

figure 95.



figure 96.



figure 97.



figure 98.

figure 99.

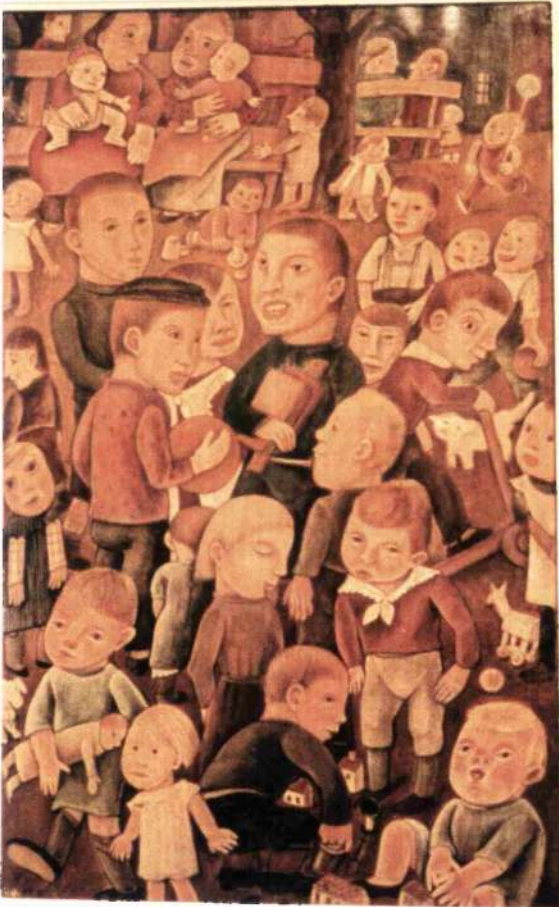


figure 100.

figure 101.



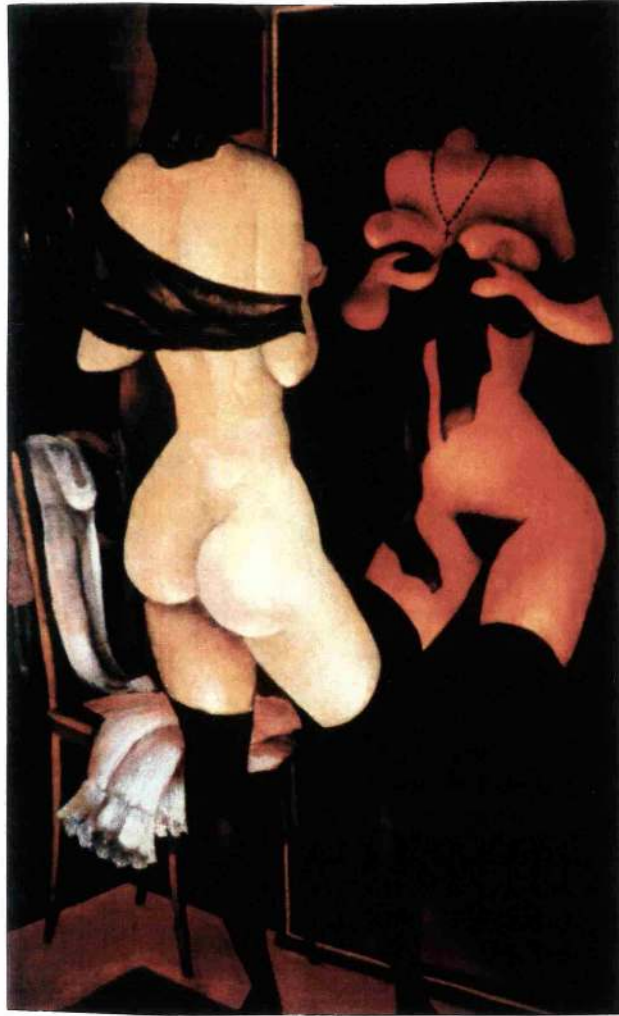


figure 102.



figure 103.

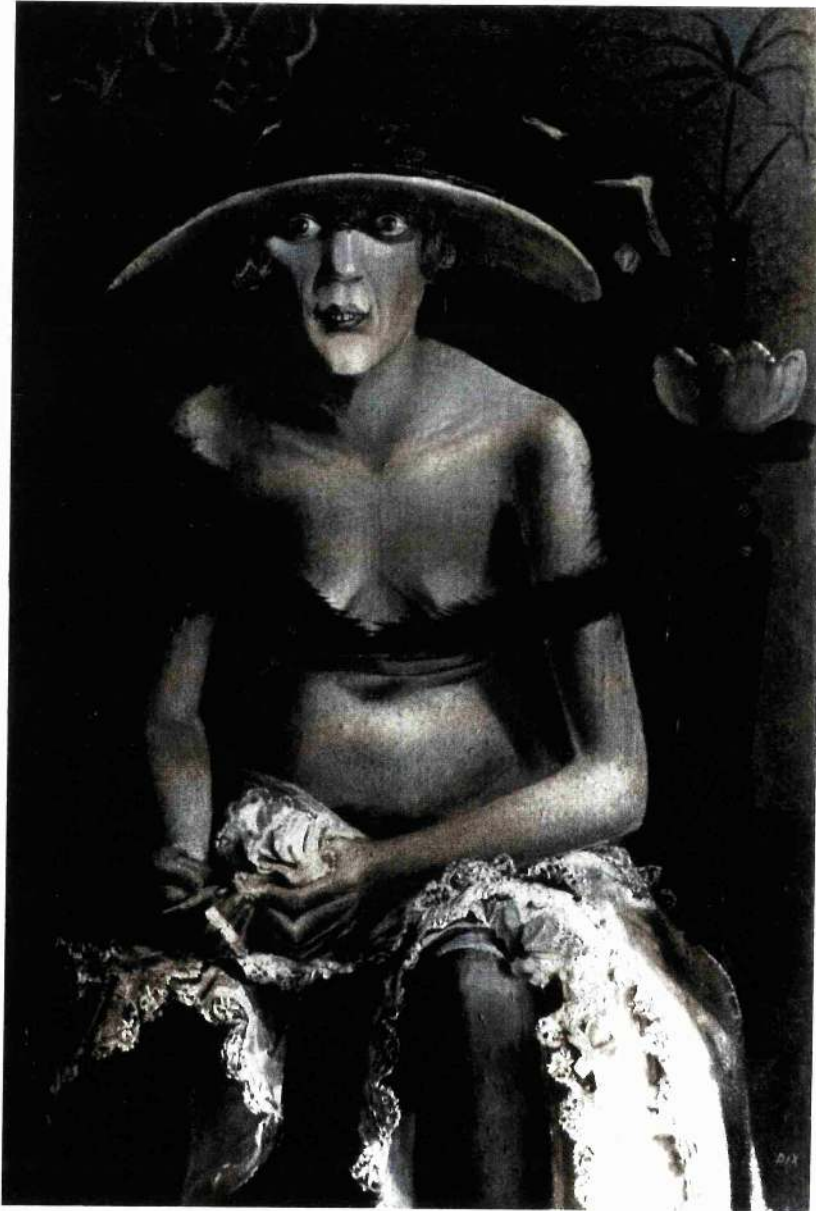


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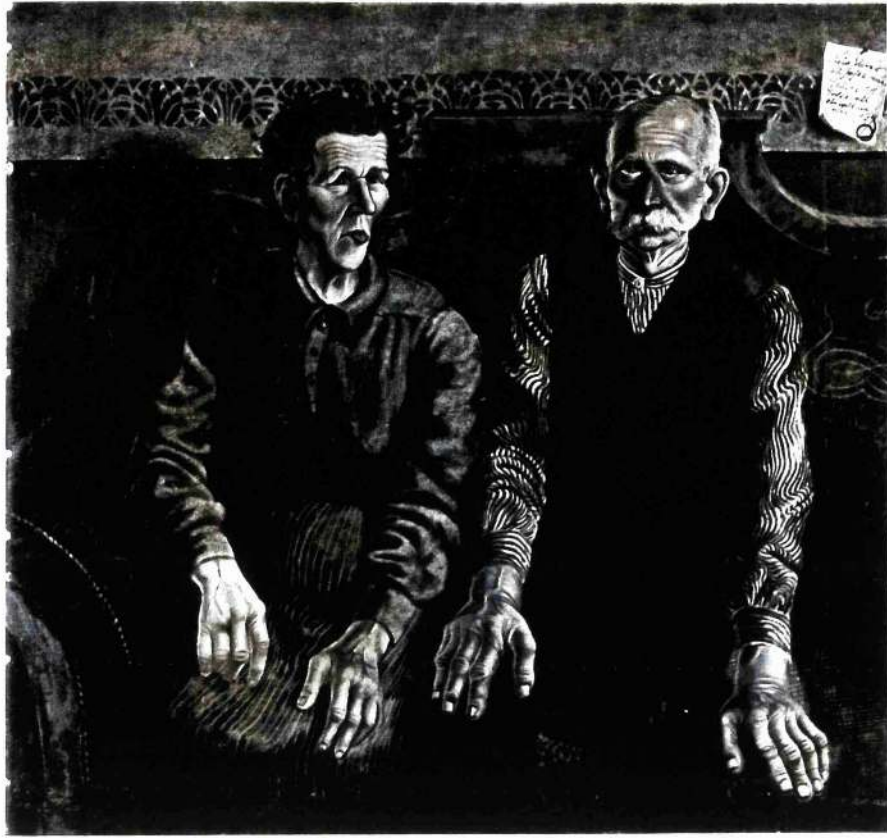


figure 105.



figure 106.



figure 107.



figure 108.



figure 109.

figure 110.



figure 111.



figure 112.



figure 113.



figure 114.

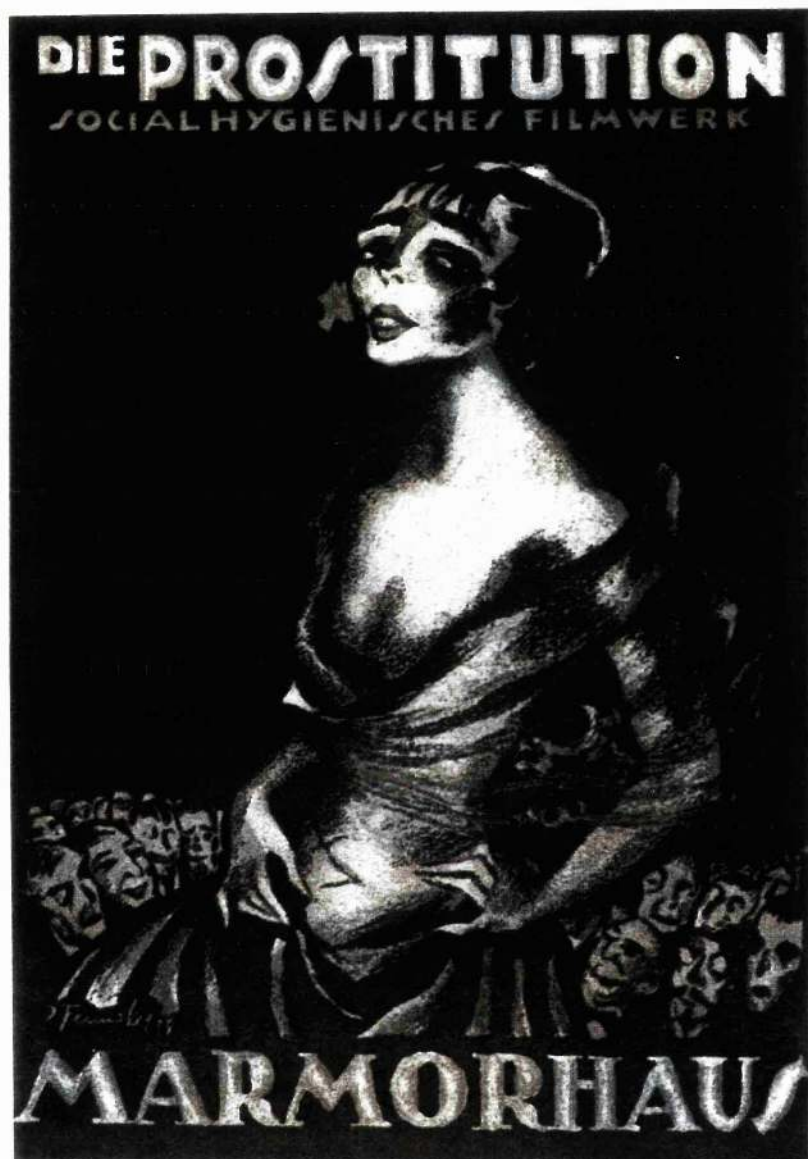


figure 115.



figure 116.



figure 117.



figure 118.



figure .119.

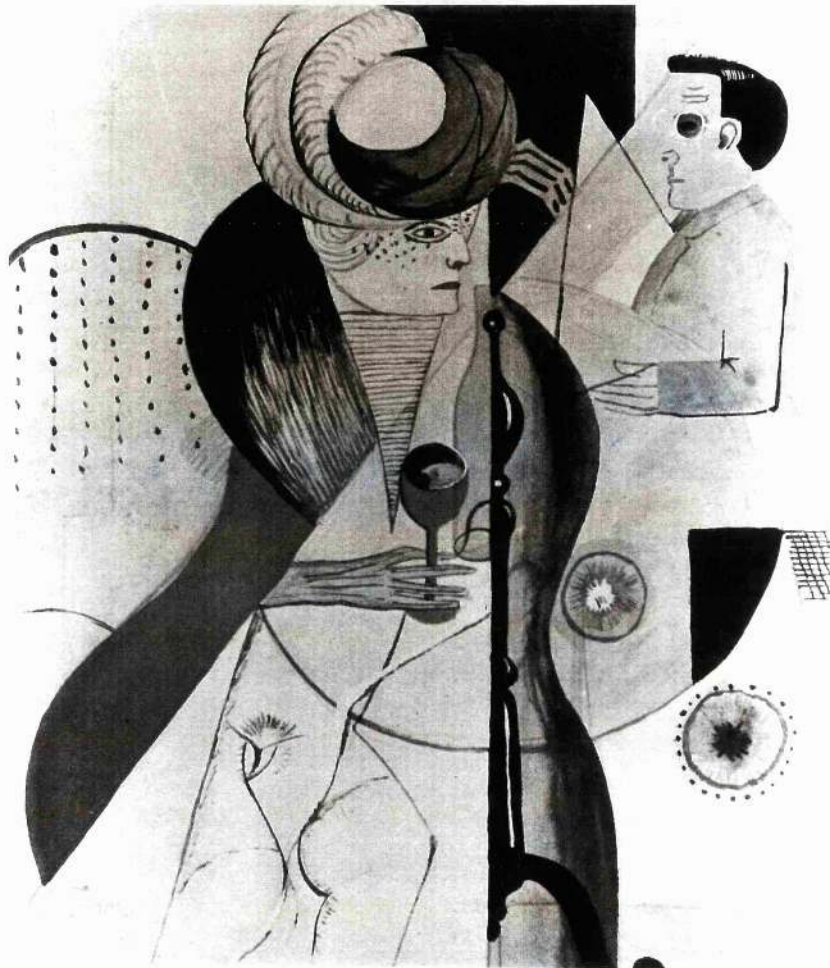


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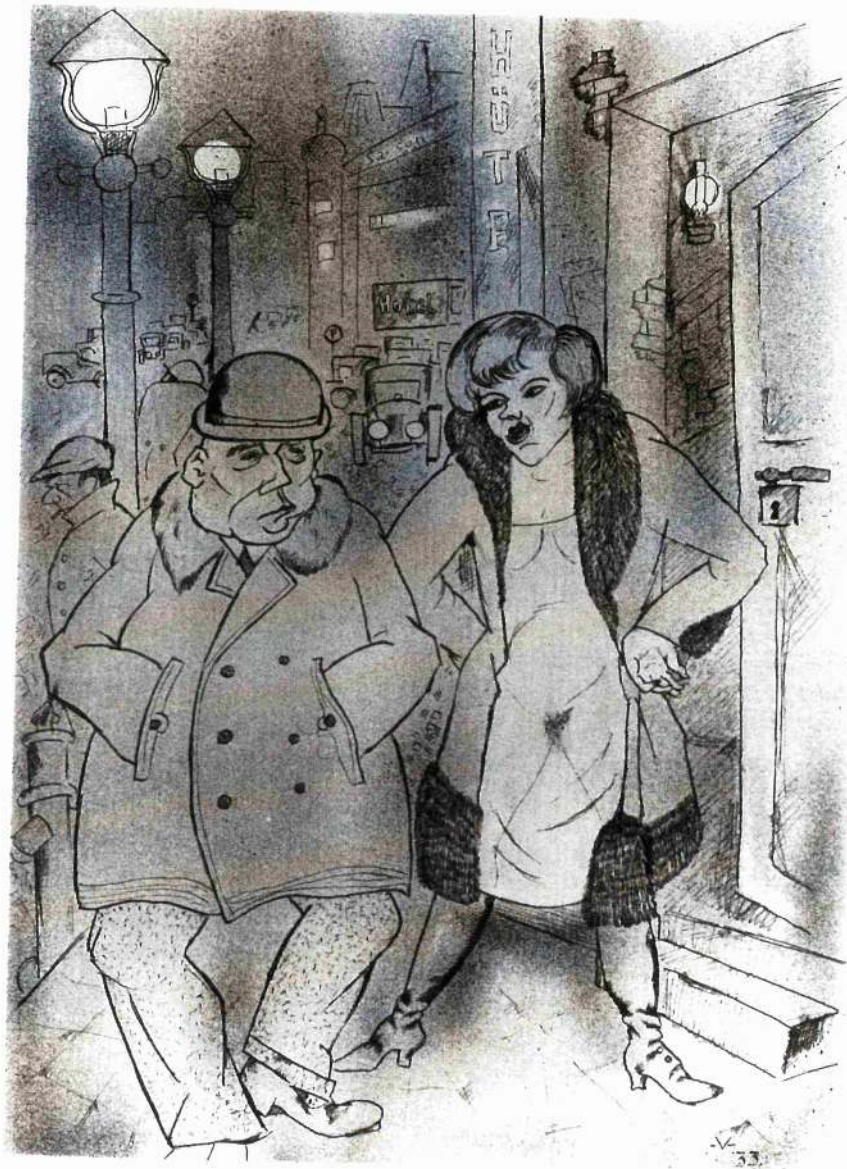


figure 121.



figure 122.



figure 123.



figure 124.



figure 125.



figure 126.



figure 127.



figure 128.



figure 129.



figure 130.



figure 131.



figure 132.



figure 133.

figure 134.



figure 135.

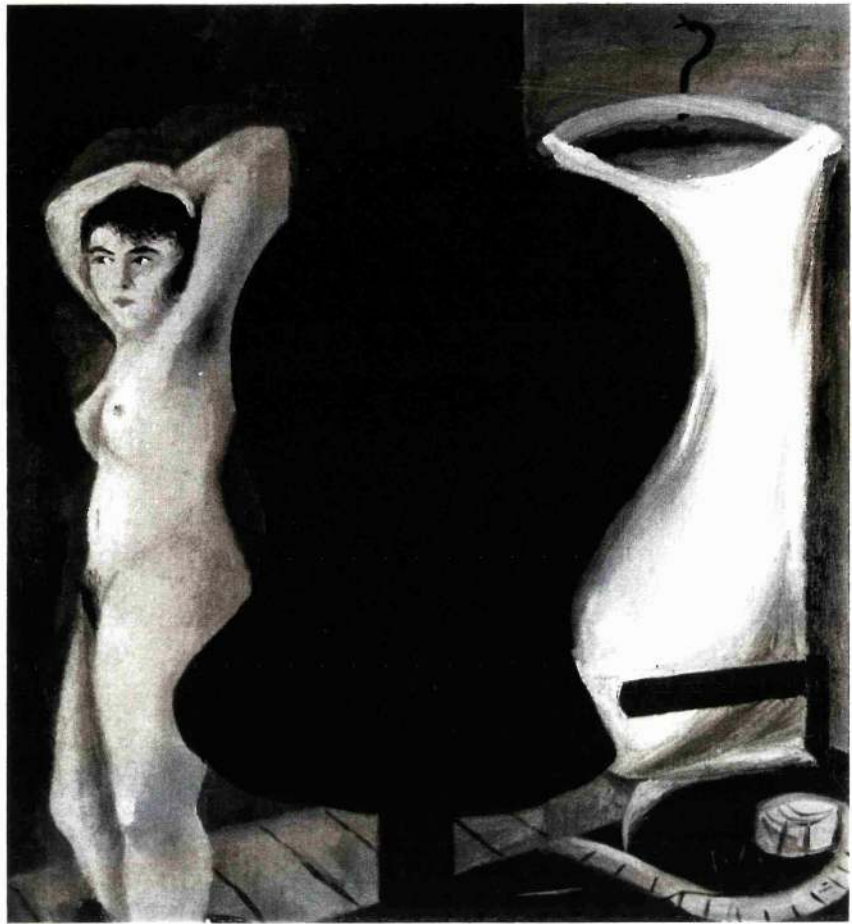


figure 136.



figure 137.



figure 138.

Gedichte eines dienstpflichtigen Soldaten



figure 139.



figure 140.

figure 141.

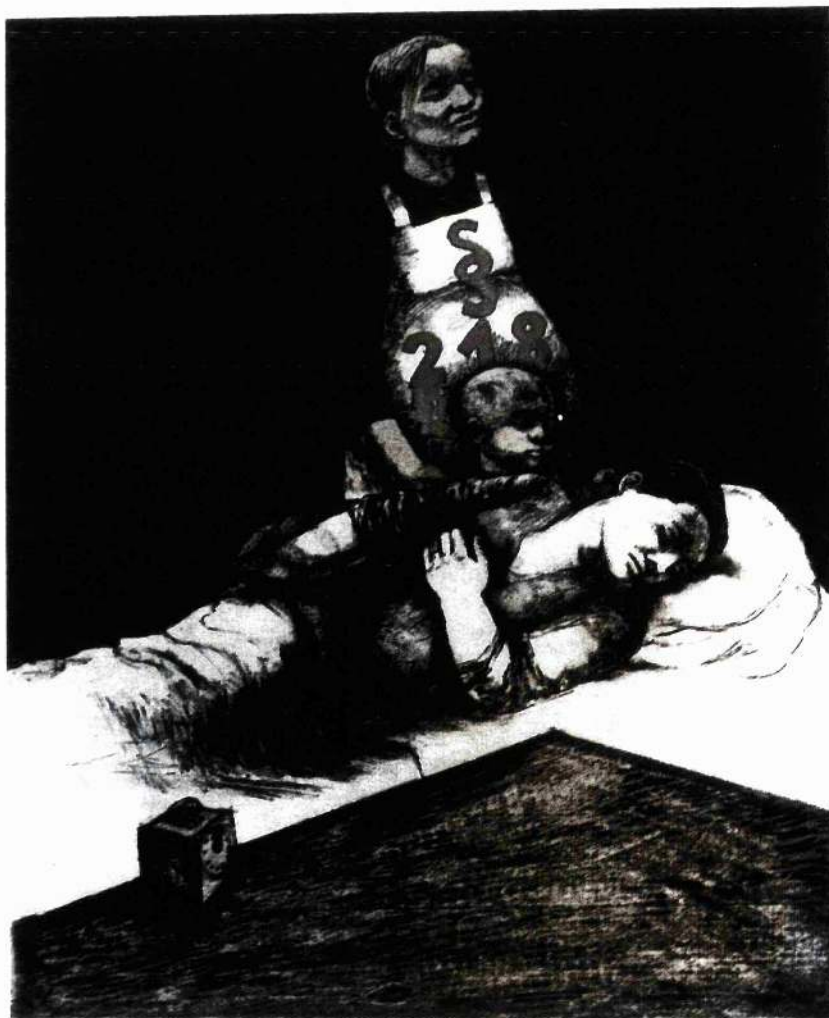
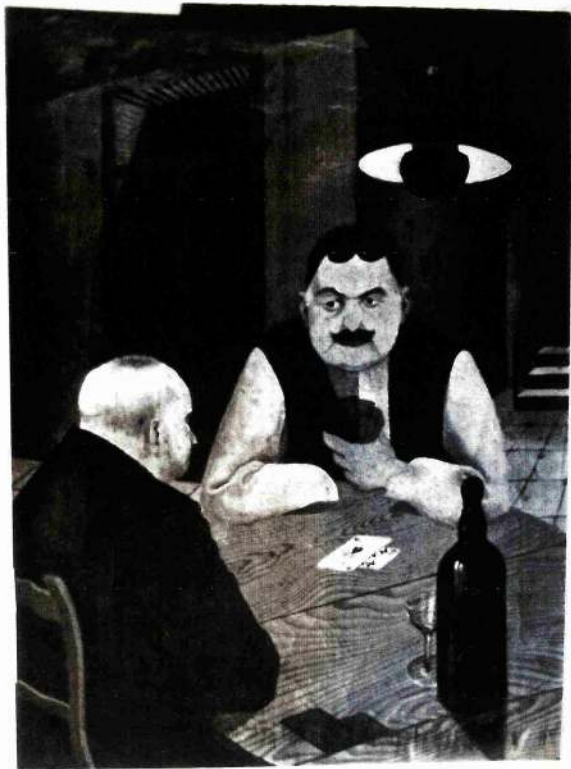


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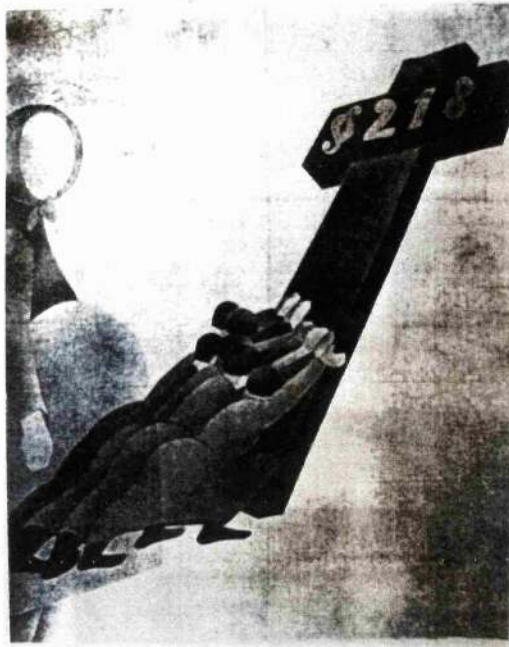


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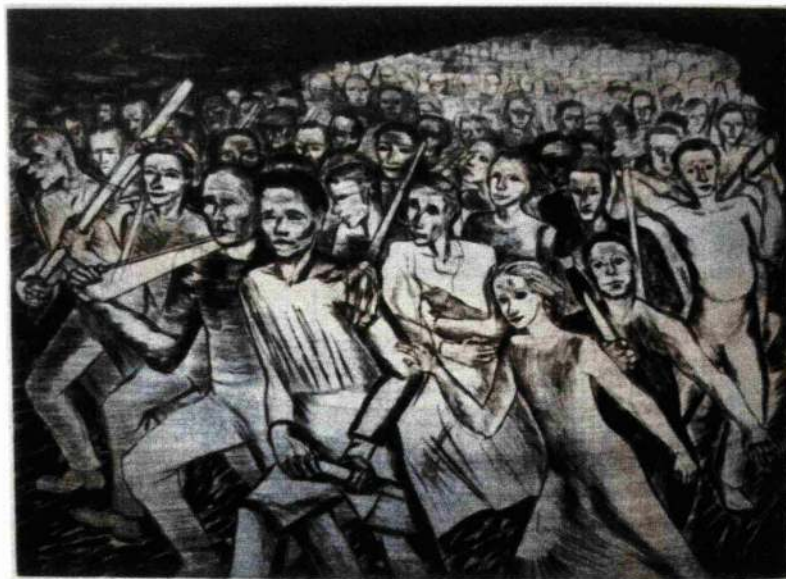


figure 144.



figure 145.

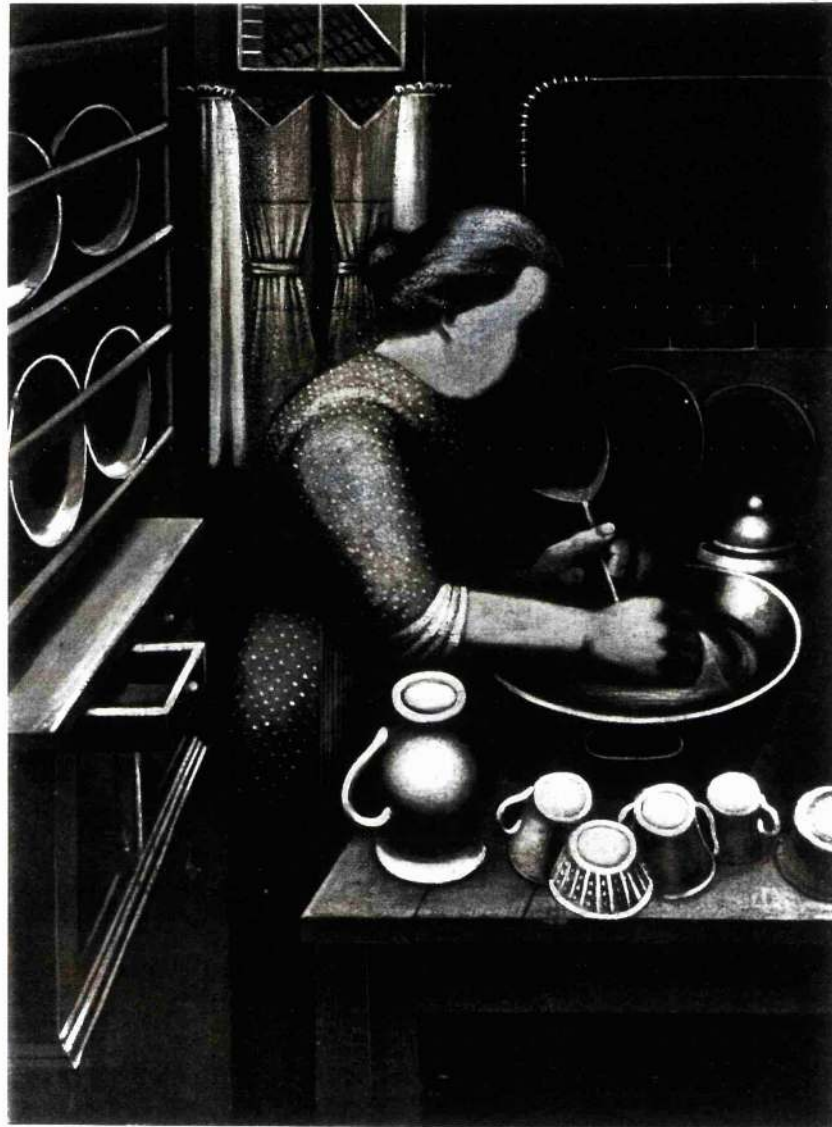


figure 146.