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Monsters and men : the life and works of Sascha Schneider

Alice Wolfe

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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MONSTERS AND MEN:
THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SASCHA SCHNEIDER

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts

in

The Department of Art History

by
Alice C. Wolfe
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ABSTRACT

Sascha Schneider was an artist that was incredibly popular, but only for a short time during his life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth- century. This thesis will discuss the life and work of Schneider, with special attention on the significance of the interpersonal relationships he developed, and the importance of these relationships to his artistic career. By tracing his early life in St. Petersburg, Russia and his transition to an established life in Dresden, Germany, one can obtain a sense of his early influences. In Dresden he received an Education from the Dresden Art Academy, and it was there that he made on of his most important friendships with artist Max Klinger. Klinger helped Schneider establish himself as a Symbolist painter, and introduced him to other artists who proved to be paramount to his success later in life. Schneider eventually teamed up with novelist Karl May, and was commissioned to created the covers for over twenty-five of May's adventure stories. Through his work is May, Schneider's art was placed in the hands of many young Germans. Later in life, Schneider created a school for boys, *Kraft-Kunst*, with friends Richard Müller and Hans Unger. This school focused on physical fitness and the creation of the perfect male form, while fostering the artistic talents of the young students.

INTRODUCTION

*There is no surer way of evading the world than by Art;
and no surer way of uniting with it than by Art.*
– Goethe

Sascha Schneider was one of the most interesting artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet few have heard of him. During his life millions were exposed to his work, though it is doubtful few recognized his name. He interacted with most of the major art circles in Germany, had several influential friends, and was best friends with one of the most (in)famous writers of time, not to mention the fact that Schneider was one of the few openly homosexual artists at a time when it was illegal to be so in Germany.

One of the most crucial facets of Schneider's life and art was the relationships he made with others. Through talent he obtained a scholarship to the Art Academy in Dresden, honing his skills through his lessons, though the mentorship he formed under Leonhard Gey was what he considered his greatest benefit from school. Shortly after finishing his formal education he met with the man who would become one of the most influential people in his life, Max Klinger. Their friendship proved to be life-long, and Klinger not only helped Schneider solidify his place in the art world through his connections, but he also aided Schneider by sharpening what defined him as an artist. Klinger also introduced him to the men who became his greatest friends, Richard Müller and Hans Unger. One relationship that put Schneider's art in the hands of so many was Karl May. Although originally a business relationship, Schneider and May formed a friendship that transcended their work. Overall, his natural proclivities were greatly enhanced by the relationships he made. One aspect of this thesis is examining the

importance of such relationships, something usually omitted in biographical sketches of artists.

Schneider's role as a Symbolist is also of great importance. Symbolism as a movement was seen more as a frame of mind than a defined artistic style. Themes of religion, fantasy, mysticism, and ideals pervade the canvases of the Symbolist painters and writers. Religious imagery in particular plays a significant role in Schneider's art, as his early years in the Russian Orthodox Church had a profound effect on him. For Schneider, as well as the other Symbolist artists, the viewer's imagination was just as important as the physical depictions.

Another important aspect of Schneider's art was the changing social and economic atmosphere in Germany. Germany unified only a year after Schneider's birth, and the whole of central Europe was bustling with activity. Issues of emigration, rapid industrial growth, and international tension planted seeds of discontent. The generally positive attitude during the fin-de-siècle was crushed by the havoc of World War One. In the wake of unfathomable human suffering and destruction, economic recovery was slow, skepticism set in for some, and eventually the Great Depression occurred. Schneider also witnessed the rise of Fascism right before his death in 1927.

In addition to the challenges he faced as an artist trying to become successful at a difficult time, Schneider was also homosexual. He made no effort to hide his sexuality, and his brazen lack of inhibition – though he was not flamboyant by any means – is one of the attributes that makes him popular with those interested in the work of homosexual artists. His sexuality also explains, in part, his obsession with the ideal male form, which later led to the creation of a school for those wanting to achieve bodily perfection. This

unabashed characteristic would, however, cause him many problems. Gender norms were based on procreation purposes in a monogamous relationship; these social constructs were intended not only to ensure a boost in population but also part of a moral purity movement based on the writings of psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing.¹ Because of these writings, everything that was not hetero-monogamous was considered immoral, illicit, perverse, unhealthy, and therefore tended to be illegal.²

Chapter One outlines Schneider's troubled early life and transition from his home in Russia to establishing himself in Germany. After his move to Germany he enrolled in an art school in Dresden, and it is there that he honed his artistic skills. Later in Leipzig he met fellow artists Richard Müller, Hans Unger, and Max Klinger (strong bonds that lasted a lifetime). Klinger proved to be an important person in the growth and development of Schneider's art, especially his establishment as a Symbolist. Symbolism was a burgeoning German art movement, and Schneider's style of art fit in the context of the movement. In 1894, he presented an independent show that presented his dark visions to the public. It is through this popularity and the overall success of his independent show that he met the writer Karl May.

The relationship between Karl May and Sascha Schneider is presented in Chapter Two. A short background on May is given, as well as a note on his mischievous past. Further information is given about the social climate of Germany at the fin-de-siècle, and how this period led to May's success. May managed to create a German superhero, and place this superhero in far-away locals at a time of German expansion. Schneider and

¹ In regards to artists in particular, Krafft-Ebing states that, "They (homosexuals) often pursued "artistic" interests; and they were prone to periodic insanity."

² John C. Fout, "Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Male Crisis, Moral Purity, and Homophobia." in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, no. 3, (Jan 1992), 388-421.

May met at the beginning of Schneider's career which coincided with the plateau of May's. The two became immediate friends after beginning to work together. May valued Schneider's travel experience and artistic style, and Schneider appreciated May's quirky personality and appreciation of art. The two kept in close correspondence, and Schneider even continued a relationship with May's wife Klara after Karl's death.

Chapter Three details Schneider's later life and work. During his involvement with May, Schneider took a job as the professor of nude drawing in Weimar at the behest of Klinger. Shortly after he took on a professorship, he was coerced to leave Germany and moved to Italy. While in Italy he discovered color in the form of oil paints and watercolor. He also began experimenting with sculpture, making many new self-discoveries in Italy. Unfortunately for Schneider, World War One forced him to return to Germany in the midst of chaos. He was involved in the military for a short while, but a past injury prevented him from joining combat. This chapter also touches upon the school he created with friends and fellow artists Richard Müller and Hans Unger. This institute would be modeled after the Greek *palaestra*, and became a place for young men to become physically fit while learning to mimic the perfect human form in art. It is in this chapter that one also reads of the end of his life.

Overall, Sascha Schneider's work saw a brief period of popularity that was cut short due to changing social climates and his untimely death. His art appealed to the symbolic nature of German aesthetics, which garnered him a short burst of success in a time of economic and political upheaval. Sadly his popularity died with him, and his name faded from people's memories. By reviving his story and examining his art, one can obtain a better sense of the life and works of Sascha Schneider.

CHAPTER ONE- SASCHA SCHNEIDER: EARLY LIFE, WORK, AND TIES TO SYMBOLISM

Sascha (Alexander) Schneider was born on September 21, 1870 in St. Petersburg, Russia to a German father named Rudolf and a Danish-French mother named Pauline Katinka Schneider, whose family had lived in Russia for several generations. His family was well off, his mother coming from a wealthy family and his father a print shop owner and editor. Schneider was born a healthy child whose physical resolve was damaged later by a freak injury. At eleven years old, he and his sister were jumping on their beds when young Sascha fell off and onto an upturned footstool. He tried to hide his injuries from his strict father for fear of punishment, but was eventually taken to the hospital. Doctors equipped him with an ill-fitting cast of sorts that he wore for two years. When the device was removed, Schneider was permanently crippled and suffered from chronic pain the rest of his life.³ The back pain associated with this accident impacted his life physically, but deeper than that it created within him a fascination with bodily health and fitness as will be demonstrated in later endeavors. Despite the injury, Schneider remained active and was interested in learning much about the world around him.

Schneider's early life in Russia proved to be profoundly inspiring. His family employed a Russian nanny, who told Russian folklore stories to Sascha and his two sisters. These stories had a lasting effect on Schneider, especially the monsters her stories detailed.⁴ These early influences may explain the nightmarish qualities of many of Schneider's later works.

³ Annelotte Range, *Zwischen Max Klinger und Karl May: Studien zum zeichnerischen und malerischen Werk von Sascha Schneider (1870-1927)* (Bamberg: Karl-May-Verlag, 1999), 25.

⁴ Rolf Günter, *Sascha Schneider und Karl May: eine Künstlerfreundschaft* (Bamberg: Karl-May-Verlag, 1989), 4.

Russia's socio-cultural context also had an effect on Schneider. He states that he witnessed "strong impressions arising from the separation of rich and poor, between the church and tsarist rule, and the first visual attacks [from within the arts] against it."⁵ He lived in Russia during the rise of much popular unrest and the beginnings of anarchist groups who tried to topple Alexander II – eventually doing so in 1881, ushering in a reactionary regime under Alexander III. He would later create an etching titled *Die Anarchist* (1894) that depicts a nude male with his back to the viewer; he raises a bomb with a lit fuse above his head, prepared to throw it at bearded Assyrian reliefs which symbolized authoritarian rule [Fig. 1]. The sentiment of the painting stems from an event from Schneider's childhood, when he was only ten years old. Sascha, his sister Lilly, and his nanny were taking a walk in St. Petersburg and witnessed, at close range, the eleventh bombing attempt of Tsar Alexander Nikolayevich. The aftermath of the bombing created mass chaos, fear, celebration by some, prayers from others, and hurried fleeing by the Schneider's and their nanny. The bombing proved effective, as the Tsar succumbed to his injuries days later.

The Russian Orthodox Church was also provoking for Schneider, as well as the "cult" that accompanied it. He would often visit Saint Isaac's Cathedral to gaze upon the "pomp and liturgy" of the gilded icons and ornate buildings, thus creating within him a taste for the religious and mystical – something not necessarily found further west in Europe.⁶ Schneider found interest, not in the religious text or teachings, but in the iconography and spiritualism of the Church. As will be shown, much of his work dealt with religious figures, but in different contexts than most viewers were accustomed. The

⁵ Hans-Gerd Röder, *Sascha Schneider: ein Maler für Karl May* (Bamberg: Karl-May-Verlag, 1994), 3.

⁶ Günter, *Schneider und May*, 5.

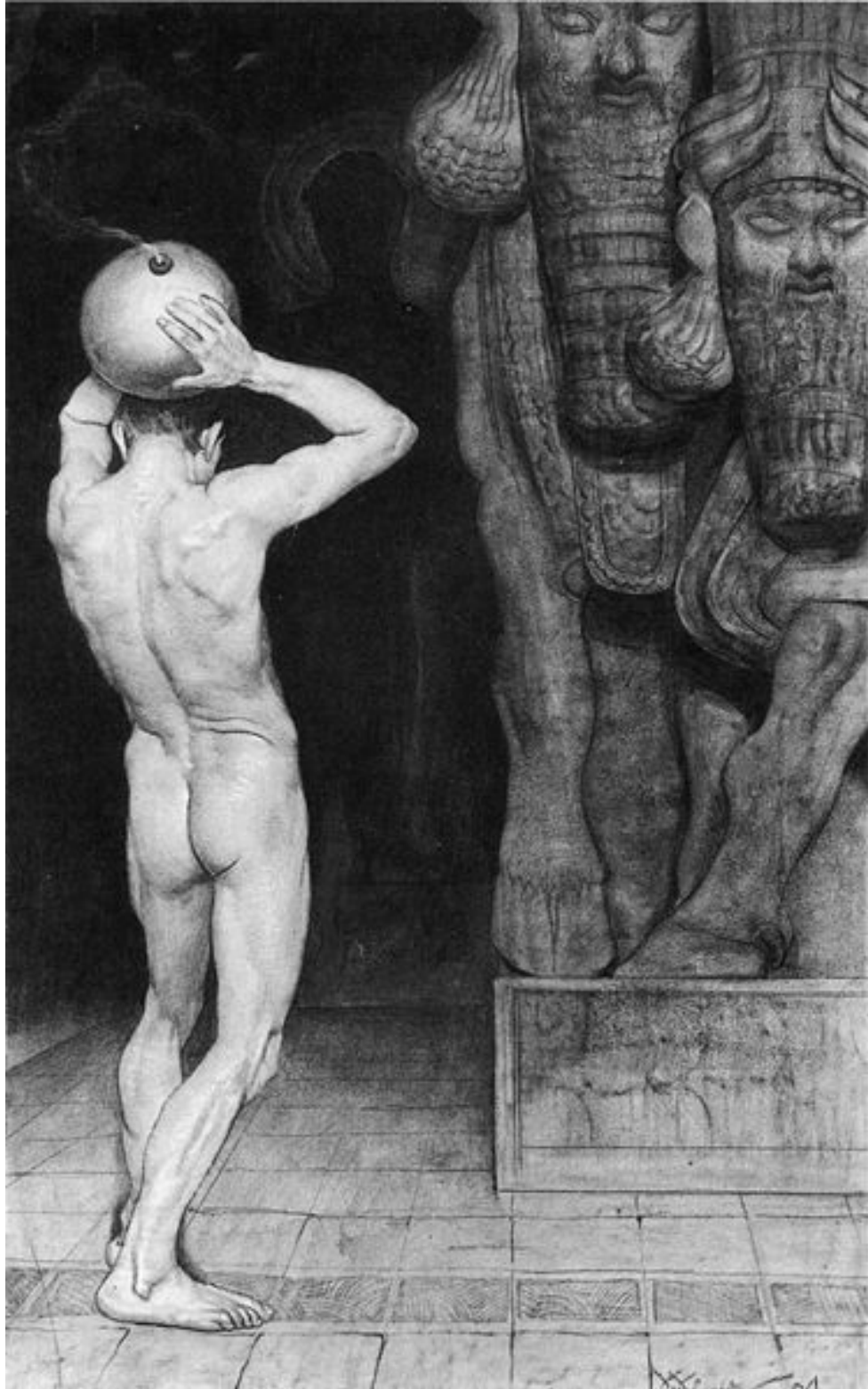


Figure 1, Sascha Schneider, *Der Anarchist*, Charcoal on Cardboard, 1894, 42 x 70 cm., Private Collection.

intellectual and visual stimulation instilled in Schneider would not last long though, as another medical tragedy visited his household, forcing them to relocate.

Like so many others in the nineteenth century, Schneider's father contracted tuberculosis. Treatments were ineffective in part to the harsh, cold climate of Russia, so to cure his father properly the family moved to Switzerland for warmer weather in 1882. Unfortunately, the medical efforts were ineffective and his father passed away in 1884, only two years after moving from Russia. The young Schneider was left fatherless at the age of fourteen. Having no real ties to Switzerland, and wanting to leave painful memories behind, his mother and two sisters once again packed up and moved closer to his father's relatives, this time to Dresden.

Through tragedy and loss, it was as if the fates were pulling him into Germany, for it is here where Schneider began his professional art career. Schneider's father did not approve of the arts as a potential profession, and attempted to focus his child's attentions on matters of religion and the Church. His mother, however, fostered his creativity, and coupled with the loss of the direct influence of her husband, suggested a visit to the Dresden Academy of Art. Because he showed an aptitude for drawing, he was admitted immediately after graduating from high school. The school emphasized solid craft, drawing, and composition, all of which Schneider excelled. While there Schneider received instruction from one of his aunt's good friends Leonhard Gey also and Heinrich Hofmann, two artists and professors who would have a profound affect on him.⁷ His time at the Academy was invaluable, though he did eventually cut ties with Gey and Hofmann's training to forge his own way. In 1893, Schneider became an independent artist.

⁷ Röder, *Sascha Schneider*, 3.

When Schneider severed his connection to his professors and the academy, his subject matter also changed drastically. Typically, students of the academy honed their artistic skills on old German subjects and scenes from Norse mythology, but when Schneider left the academy these topics dropped from his repertoire, and he focused his attention instead on the darker aspects of biblical subjects.⁸ Although he moved away from the school in Dresden, he still grew and was influenced by the larger art community there. Schneider quickly developed a reputation for painting murals and received several commissions for buildings in Dresden. Many of his works featured religious figures, but they were not always presented in traditional fashion. By this time in his life, Schneider was not overtly religious, but was still interested in religious figures and allegories based on an intellectual fascination.⁹

While most of the European art scene was focused on Impressionism, Schneider found himself more aligned with Symbolist thinking. The idea behind Symbolism, which existed in the visual and literary world as an attitude rather than a set style, was that reality is only a portion of what defines human existence. However, these metaphysical and mystical aspects of life cannot be conveyed directly, thus the need for allusions or symbols. Symbolist artists suggested that seemingly impossible things could be experienced through dream, trance, and ecstasy. This conviction came about partially as a reaction to the Enlightenment, which effectively shunned all superstitions and influenced a rational aesthetic. One of the key impulses of the movement hailed from France in the form of a manifesto by the writer Jean Moréas, published in 1886 in *Le Figaro Littéraire*. In it he explained that:

⁸ Röder, *Sascha Schneider*, 5.

⁹ Günter, *Schneider and May*, 4.

[t]he essential trait of Symbolist art consists in never conceptually fixing or directly expressing an idea. And that is why the aspects of nature, the acts of men, actual appearances' of whatever kind, do not themselves become visible in this art, but instead are symbolized through subtly perceptible traces, through covert affinities with the original ideas... We have suggested the term "Symbolism" as the only one which is capable of aptly describing the current stream of the creative art in mind. We intend to hold this by designation.¹⁰

Seen in this light, Symbolist paintings and drawings are comprised and defined by mystery. They are not, however, limited to a particular style or approach. Instead, the artist adopted and manipulated a variety of styles to convey the transcendent nature of their art.¹¹ Art, for the Symbolist, should not try to imitate nature, but discover the hidden meanings of things that are signs and symbols of a deeper reality.¹²

German-speaking artists were particularly attracted to Symbolism's emphasis on spiritual, intellectual, or emotional states. Many artists used academic styles, but utilized subject matter that hinted at the more mystical and emotional elements imbedded in the visible world.¹³ This mimetic, mystical style is what gave a sense of cohesiveness to the movement. The spiritual legacy of Romanticism in Germany gave moral superiority to German Symbolism over that of other European nations.¹⁴ A number of traditional subjects such as Christ and angels were transformed to convey new notions of anxiety and discontent, particularly in the context of religious art. It is these religious overtones that originally drew in Schneider, for early on he created traditional biblical scenes that were transformed into supernatural wastelands [Fig. 2]. His paintings illustrated familiar

¹⁰ Eugen Weber, *Movements, Currents, Trends: Aspects of European Thought in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Lexington: D. C. Heath & Co., 1960), 225.

¹¹ Hans H. Hofstätter, "Symbolism in Germany and Europe," in *Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany, 1870-1920*, ed. Ingrid Ehhardt and Simon Reynolds (New York: Prestel, 2000), 17-18.

¹² Weber, *Movements, Currents, Trends*, 219.

¹³ Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 60-61.

¹⁴ West, *Visual Arts in Germany*, 78

ideas in new ways, using Christian iconography and figures in mystical and definitively “unchristian” way. For example, he conceived a scene in which Christ was depicted as being defeated by some exotic figure, while others he championed Judas’ struggles.



Figure 2, Sascha Schneider, *Der Fürst der Verdammten (Prince of the Damned)*, charcoal, 1895, 47.4 x 35.8 cm, Private Collection.

In the winter of 1894 Schneider was given the opportunity for an independent exhibition at the Lichtenberg Art Salon in Dresden. It is here that the artist’s signature style and themes strongly emerged, since he was no longer under the tutelage of his academy professors. His most popular paintings from the show included *Mammon und Sklave* (1894), *Eins ist Not* (1894), *Gefühl der Abhängigkeit* (1893), and *Judas Ischarioth* (1894) [Figures 3-6]. Each of the paintings exhibited the mixture of religious despair and

mysticism for which Schneider's work would become known. This show was also the first time viewers got a sense of his Eastern style, as is described in the journal *The Artist*,

Mammon und Sklave, transfers us into Egypt, for, by representing the powerful hawk-headed Egyptian god, with a whip in his left hand a gold coins hanging to the lashes, which he is holding over the slave laying at his feet.¹⁵

Viewers also commented on Schneider's depiction of the "ideal of powerful masculinity" and his outstanding examples of fantastic realism.¹⁶ For *Eins ist Not* large letters on the cross spell out "LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY", which harkens back to the ideals of the French Revolution that were still fresh in people's minds. Christ opens his arms to the desolate crowd at his feet, while Satan lurks behind the cross in the shadows. The title of the drawing comes from Luke 10:41 of the Bible, in which Christ informs Martha that she need not worry about so many things, but that few things are needed, or in fact only one – following his Word. For Schneider, this one thing was the lack of realization of the ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity in modern society. *Gefühl der Abhängigkeit* depicts a nude male with his head lowered, wrists shackled to chains, with a black monster in the foreground. It is a nightmarish scene from the artist's imagination, and one that he described to friends by saying:

It is difficult for me to constantly battle with the demons, and to be exposed. I owe my survival to my strong constitution and physical strength. Though, I can only stand it for so long. Only by saying that it is in my imagination is how is keep myself from going insane.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Sascha Schneider The Count De Soissons." *The Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts, and Industries (American Edition)*, Vol. 31, No. 261 (Oct., 1901), pp. 16-26. 26. It is interesting to note that the "white" figure is the slave, while the darker figure is the dominant entity.

¹⁶ Beth Irwin Lewis, *Art For All: The Collision of Modern Art and the Public in Late-Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 284.

¹⁷ Range, *Zwischen*, 32.

Judas *Ischarioth* was particularly popular at the show, and Schneider went on to describe it as such, “Judas, could be me. These are situations that go beyond the strength of a person...so I forgive him.”¹⁸ It depicts Judas in the nude with his body bound with thorn-covered vines. He is trudging over the thirty silver pieces that are red-hot and sear his feet. A vision of the cross appears before him and the angel of justice presides in the background, judging Judas for his deed. Many who have analyzed this painting, along with Schneider’s comments, believe it to be a self-portrait.¹⁹



Figure 3, Sascha Schneider, *Mammon und Sklave* (*The Mammon and Its Slave*), Wood Engraving, 1894, 18 x 24.2 cm., Published by JJ Weber in Leipzig.

¹⁸ Günter, *Schneider and May*, 8.

¹⁹ Hofstätter, *Kingdom of the Soul*, 224.



Figure 4, Sascha Schneider, *Eins Ist Not (One is Not)*, wood engraving, 1894.

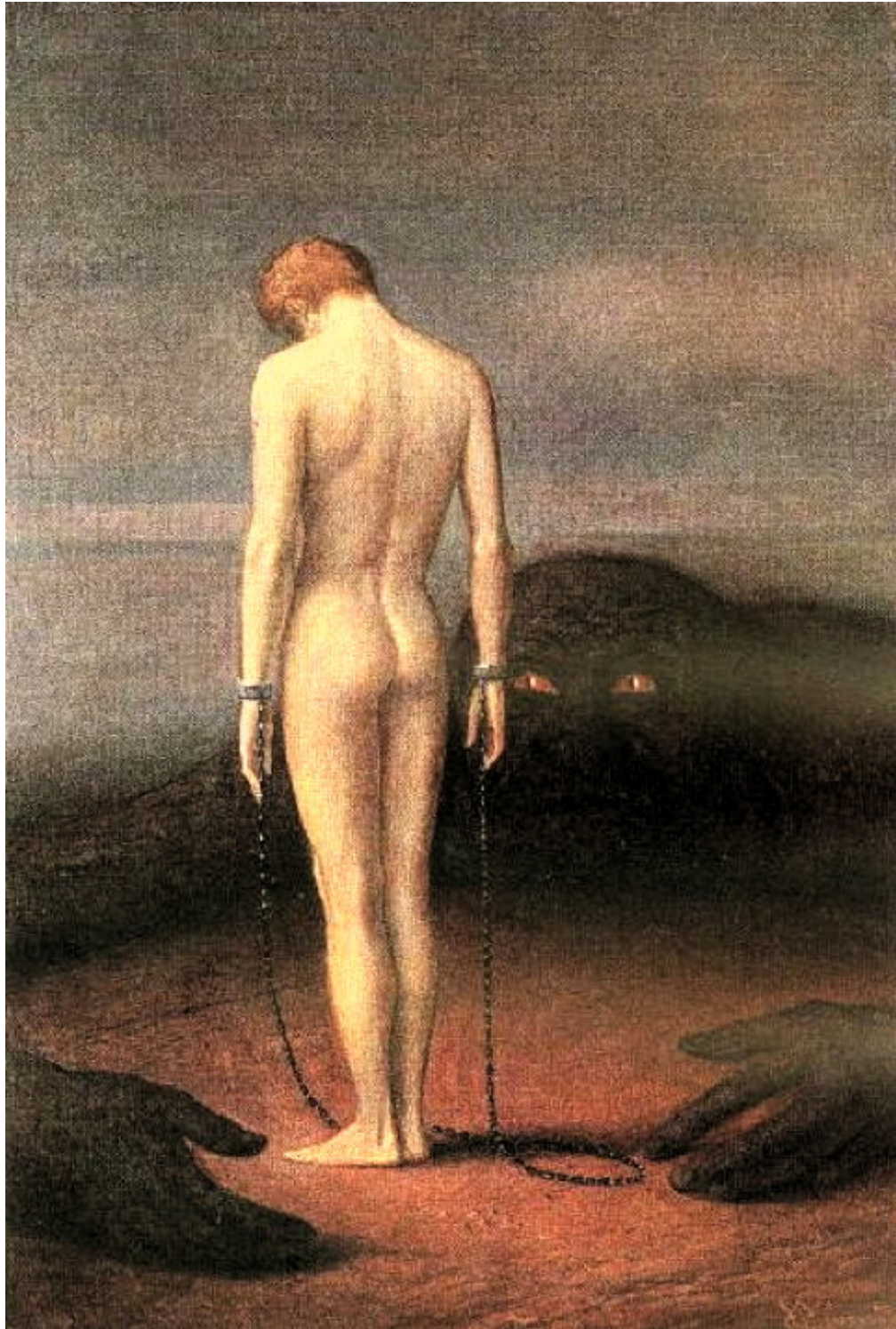


Figure 5, Sascha Schneider, *Gefühl der Abhängigkeit* (*Feeling of Dependence*), Charcoal Drawing - 1893, Oil Overlay – 1921, 250 x 165 cm., Private Collection.



Figure 6, Sascha Schneider, *Judas Ischarioth*, Original Charcoal Drawing - 1894, oil overlay- 1922, 131 x 84 cm, Dresden State Art Collections.

Shortly after his exhibition, several life-changing events occurred. Schneider was saddened to learn that his friend and mentor Leonhard Gey passed away. He was so moved by this even that he created an etching titled “Grief” as homage to both his friend and his emotion. Gey was one of the first positive male role models for Schneider after the loss of his father to tuberculosis. It was painful to lose such an important and supportive figure in his life.

Soon after learning of the death of his former professor, he was introduced to fellow artist Max Klinger in 1895. Among the Leipzig artists, Klinger was one of the best known and most influential. Though not a professional teacher, Klinger was known for aiding and educating those in the art community. Schneider suffered from some harsh criticism after his exhibition from those who thought that his work should mimic Impressionism. Encouraging his new protégé, Klinger convinced Schneider to continue his art in a decidedly more Symbolist direction, rather than adhere to the Impressionist style that was popular. The two would form a close friendship that paid off for Schneider several times throughout his life.

For Germans, Klinger was the quintessential Symbolist. His works were unsettling, but not entirely pessimistic, and were couched in the German emphasis on imagination and spirituality. Many extolled his work as that of a “pure German” whose work carried on the traditions of German Romanticism and Idealism with a whim of fancy. For Schneider, he instilled a sense of German idealist heritage through the usage of traditional spiritualism, relying on the mystical tendencies of Romantic tradition rather than an observational naturalism. Klinger was concerned with worldly relationships and

human emotions, and in this way became an important force in the growth of Sascha Schneider and his art.²⁰

Max Klinger's work offered a good deal to demonstrate the role of Symbolism in the arts. Works such as *Neue Träume von Glück* (1887), *Entführung des Prometheus* (1894), and *Christus im Olymp* (1897) show a progression in Klinger's work as he develops as a Symbolist. *Neue Träume von Glück* portrays optimism, as a nude couple floats through the night air on length of fabric pulled by Cupid, who shines a mirror's reflection on the lovers [Fig. 7]. While the image is certainly more light-hearted than some of Klinger's other works, the mirror predicts the downfall of vanity. *Entführung des Prometheus* shows the Greek story of Prometheus, at the moment when Hermes and the eagle of Zeus carry him away [Fig. 8]. The dark tonalities of the background are contrasted with the tense striations of the muscular figures in a way that highlights the anxiety of the scene. *Christus im Olymp* makes the full jump of juxtaposing Christian religious symbolism in a classical setting [Fig. 9]. This particular work is one known to have interested Schneider specifically and as such, traces of Klinger's influence can be found in Schneider's work starting in the end of the nineteenth century.

Klinger also introduced Schneider to fellow artists Hans Unger and Oskar Zwinger, who all became long-term friends. This collective of artists proved to be an avenue to strengthen their talents and inspire one another. The group of artist friends began to garner more notoriety, and Schneider became a recognized name in the international art world. One particular literary great became smitten with the work of Schneider. Hermann Hesse, author of *Siddhartha* (1922) and *Steppenwolf* (1927), wrote to one of his friends after seeing *Mammon und Sklave*: "The other day I looked at my

²⁰ West, *Visual Arts in Germany*, 61-62.



Figure 7, Max Klinger, *Eine Liebe: Neue Träume von Glück* (*A Love: New Dreams of Happiness*), Etching, 1894, 45.3 x 35 cm., Found in Hans Wolfgang Singer's Catalog "Mix Klingers Radierungen Stiche und Stein Drucke"



Figure 8, Max Klinger, *Brahmsphantasie: Entführung des Prometheus* (*Brahms Fantasy: Abduction of Prometheus*), 1894, 24.1 x 36.4 cm., Aquatint, Hans Wolfgang Singer's Catalog "Mix Klinger's Radierungen Stiche und Stein Drucke"



Figure 9, Max Klinger, *Christus im Olymp* (*Christ on Olympus*), 1897, Oil on Canvas, 24.1 x 36.4 cm., Leipzig Museum of Fine Arts.

friend Finckh's folder that contained the illustrations of Sascha Schneider. There has never been a piece of visual art that has taken me so suddenly and strongly."²¹

By the turn of the century, Schneider's notoriety had moved beyond German-speaking lands. The international version of the journal *The Artist* published a cautious, yet approving article on the young painter in 1901. The critic argues that one must celebrate new and different art, though it may be alarming at first, indicating that upon a terse glance at the work of Schneider one may be turned off and consider it "rough around the edges."²² The article then goes on to defend the young Schneider, stating:

[He] does not clothe his conceptions in pre-Raphaelite forms, and although there is no realistic tendency in his coloured cartoons, although there is no style in the lines of his drawings, yet it is not reduced to artificial naïveté and medieval simplicity ... he draws according to nature, with an effort to make good copy.²³

Though the author of the article alludes to the greatness and classical nature of his figures, a tertiary glance at his early paintings and etchings clearly do not display the polished and naturalistic styles of classical art. The critics noted the existence of an exotic tone in Schneider's work stating, "...and while his artistic fancy makes us think of the Orient, the way in which he draws the human figure reminds us of Italy."²⁴ The article continues this analysis by drawing from elements of *Herr der Welt* (1895) [Fig. 10]. From the painting, the author gathers that Schneider is fond of Assyrian motifs since he chose to depict the figure standing on Jesus with a markedly Assyrian beard. He continued his

²¹ Günter, *Schneider and May*, 37.

²² "Sascha Schneider: The Count de Soissons," *The Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts, and Industries* (American Edition), vol 31, no 261 (October 1901), 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

analysis of the painting by evoking associations with, “tyranny, license, orgies, and luxury.”²⁵



Figure 10, Sascha Schneider, *Herr der Welt (Lord of the World)*, Charcoal, 1895, Found in the Arts and Crafts at the Glasgow Exhibition Catalog 1901.

Schneider’s ability to depict the “other” was potentially a product of his worldly travels. It seems that he never stayed in one place for long before moving on to another. In a few short years between 1896-1901 he traveled to Finland and Italy, went on an excursion to the Caucasus with his student Robert Spieß, and ventured to Egypt with his

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

friend Hans Unger.²⁶ He also traveled to Paris, where it is likely that he found the inspiration for his *Wanderer and Sphinx* from the femme fatales found in the French Symbolist art that pervaded the Parisian art world [Fig. 11].²⁷ Thanks to all of these travels he had acquired a mental repertoire of exotic places to explore when creating his future works.

His education provided him with the technical skills necessary for honing one's talents, and his friendship with Max Klinger secured his reputation as a Symbolist artist. His next venture would prove to be a decisive factor that propelled his art into the hands of a mass audience. His collaboration with famous author Karl May proved to be one of the greatest happenings to Sascha Schneider's career.

²⁶ In the early part of the twentieth century, Germany sent military excursions to the Caucasus. This local soon became an area of exploration for many Germans outside of the military.

²⁷ Günter, *Schneider and May*, 11.



Figure 11, Sascha Schneider, *Der Wanderer und die Sphinx* (*The Wonderer and the Sphinx*), 1897, Pen Drawing, Location Unknown.

CHAPTER TWO – GERMAN LITERATURE AND ILLUSTRATIONS: SASCHA SCHNEIDER AND KARL MAY

One of the most important social connections in Sascha Schneider's life was that which he made with the fiction writer Karl May. May was considerably older than Schneider, being born on February 25, 1842, the fifth of seven children. He came from a humble background, his father a weaver and his mother a professional midwife. For the entirety of his childhood until age ten he was a sickly child, nearly blind until undergoing an operation to correct his vision. His medical anomalies likened him to Schneider who suffered from spinal issues. Due to his weakened state, May found himself lost in the *penny-dreadfuls* stories such as *Himlo Hinlini*.²⁸ These folktales sparked an interest in storytelling that would affect May for the rest of his life. They were reinforced by the tall-tells his grandmother told him as a child of her own "adventure-filled" life. Through the short fables and his grandmother's stories, May learned how to create tales of his own which often landed him in trouble.

From his early teenage years until his twenties May found himself in mishaps frequently, even seeing jail time for theft, insurance fraud, and impersonating a police detective.²⁹ Whilst in jail, he read adventure novels and travelogues voraciously. Luckily for May, he was given the task of prison librarian, allowing him to become familiar with much of the literature of day. He found the collection stocked with books by James Fennimore Cooper, a well-known adventure writer. He was also able to find literature on Apache lore, and gleaned other stories of Native Americans from encyclopedias. Some scholars, such as Jeffery Sammons, even suggested that May read

²⁸ *Himlo Hinlini* translates to "The Noble Robber Chief".

²⁹ Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westers: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981), 103-121.

John Heckwelder's *Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations*, which was an enormous source of inspiration for Fennimore Cooper. These chronicles stirred a creative desire within May, and he began to write his own short stories. As he wrote, May would send out his novellas of Native American (Indian) folklore and Arabian travel tales to small publishers, known to produce the pulp fiction he was so fond of as a child. He had no trouble finding publishers for his stories once he was released from prison at the age of thirty-four.

The popularity of May's work confuses and even irritates some specialists of German literature.³⁰ Most literary scholars dismiss May's writing because of his erroneous depictions of the culture and people of the American West or the Middle East. What many scholars fail to examine, however, are the reasons for the popularity of May's work. Since 1892, more than one hundred million of May's novels have been published in Germany alone. If not for the "silly and tedious" style of writing, one must ask why Karl May's work was so overwhelmingly popular.³¹ Even if his writing had absolutely no truth or scholarship behind it, one has to look at his novel's popularity in the context of the German nation.³² One reason for the popularity of May's novels can be attributed to his dedicated reliance on accounts found in the materials he used for inspiration. It is common knowledge that May read as many travel stories, travelogues, and ethnographies

³⁰ Jeffery L. Sammons is one such scholar that writes extensively on his attitude towards the success of what he deems a "psychopathological writer" who was "monotonous... with a vocabulary of about 3,000 words." Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstäcker, Karl May, and Other German Novelists of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 229-295.

³¹ Sammons, *Ideology*, x.

³² Nina Berman, "Orientalism, Imperialism, and Nationalism: Karl May's *Orientzyklus*" in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy* ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 51.

as possible. Some of these examples include Austen Henry Layard's accounts of his archeological expeditions to the Middle East, the autobiography of Prussian soldier Johann Gottlieb Krüger and his exploration of North Africa, and Alfred Edmund Brehm's travel sketches of Northeast Africa.³³ For each of his stories, May extrapolated his latest tale with information taken from real life accounts he had recently read. This method of writing is why his earlier depictions of Native Americans were not nearly as positive as those that were written after May was introduced to the ethnographic writings of George Catlin, who reported extensively on Native Americans in the Western United States. The image of a "noble savage" in May's writing was a culmination of his previous work and his newfound knowledge gained through anthropological scholarship.³⁴ Above all May wanted a broad base of readership. He once pondered, "For whom should my books be written?" to which he replied "Totally for the people, for the whole nation, not just for individual parts of it, or individuals, or specific age groups. Above all, not just for the youth! ..."³⁵ His method of story telling thus brought tales of exotic places and people to the landlocked-adventure seeker in a context that was simple and pleasurable to read.

May was also able to create a situation where the reader could place him or herself within the context of the story, simply by emphasizing the wave of German emigrants that were making their way to North America. From 1816 to 1914, about 5.5 million Germans emigrated to the United States, with the majority making the move

³³ Nina Berman, "The Appeal of Karl May in the Wilhelmine Empire: Emigration, Modernization, and the Need for Heroes", in *A Companion to German Realism, 1848-1900*, ed. Todd Kontje (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), 285.

³⁴ May's shift from "Wild Savage" to "Noble Savage" occurs within his writing when he read of the atrocities that Americans committed in the removal of Native Americans from their land. In his stories, the Indians were noble because they were closer to Germans in their moral code than Americans.

³⁵ As quoted in Günther, 7.

between the years 1880 and 1893.³⁶ With such a large percentage of the population leaving for the United States, it would not be a stretch to assume that most Germans knew someone who had emigrated. Given this context, many of May's protagonists were Germans who found themselves in the Wild West. This narrative allowed the reader to place themselves in familiar shoes of friends and relatives who had made the excursion to the United States. Emigration was a large part of life for every German citizen, at home or abroad, and May was able to grasp the attention of those citizens through a relatable narrative.

May's work also made its *début* at a time when Germany was expanding economically and politically. German political powers began to branch out across the globe, the interest of German citizens followed suit. Because of this global presence, Germans could see themselves in these distant (uncivilized) lands. Literary scholar Nina Berman states:

The preindustrial scenario serves as a backdrop for staging the encounter between the civilized and the savage, the modern and the traditional. But the world of adventure is less a world in contrast to reality than a reflection of the same reality from which the heroes seem to escape. However indirectly, the novels explore questions related to emigration and mobility, and the fictional travel to a different world contemplates behavior that is necessary to master the challenges of home.

...

The popularity of May's writing is unparalleled among the German people. ... This popularity makes the study of May's works especially compelling, since their influence on the creation of a colonial, orientalist, and national consciousness is unsurpassed by that of any other German-speaking writer of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁷

Berman's argument shows that May was able to espouse a particular need experienced by Germans dealing with anxiety.

³⁶ Berman, *German Realism*, 287.

³⁷ Berman, *German Realism*, 300-301.

Perhaps the most critical explanation for the near cult following of Karl May's novels is the consistency of the hero. Near the end of the nineteenth century a sense of restlessness permeated the nation, and the sentiment of the average German citizen was one of unease. Mimicking reality in his stories, May's characters are also caught in various states of instability and upheaval. These situations are where the hero thrives. May's leading role is not only physically strong and adept for most situations, he is also brilliant and a keen judge of character. While the literary critic might find the unwavering strength and aptitude of the protagonist of these stories too predictable to be interesting, the average German citizen looking for stability found comfort in the consistency. These heroes were able to resolve conflicts and return order to mayhem, often times abandoning strength and brutality in favor of wit and logic.³⁸

May acted as an "armchair traveler," describing what others had seen despite never having gone to the places he wrote about. However, this lack of travel experience did not deter him from attempting to imbue his writing with a sense of legitimacy. Although he wrote purely fictional works for his audience, many of his narratives were based loosely on facts.³⁹ This approach cultivated a writing style supported his second-hand claim to authenticity. May even included footnotes in his travel narratives, to give

³⁸ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 112-113, 138-139. Mosse states: "they are singularly peaceful, the hero, Old Shatterhand, is strong and manly, but he avoids a fight if at all possible. Old Shatterhand conquers the prairie not by Fire and sword but with due regard for law and order. When he has defeated an evildoer, he does not kill him but brings him before a judge. May believed in the survival of the fittest and that the weak must be subordinate to the strong. ... May's novels are marked by Pietistic traditions that serves to soften the cruelty that at times informs his triumphant heroes."

³⁹ One of the most scandalous aspects of Karl May's life was his purchased PhD. He obtained a doctorate degree from a "degree mill" in called "The Chicago University in Germany." He began illegally attaching PhD to his name in 1903, regardless of the fact that he did not earn this title.

them a scholarly appearance.⁴⁰ May sought a way to add further credence to his work by surrounding himself with those who had, in fact, traveled to these lands about which May wrote. It was fortuitous for May to meet the promising young artist Sascha Schneider in 1903.

Evidence suggests that May was exposed to Schneider's work as far back as 1894 through his magazine illustrations in the publication *Illustrierte Zeitung* as well as various gallery exhibitions, where literary and art circles often mingled.⁴¹ They met formally in 1903 at a solo exhibition of Schneider's work in Dresden. A mutual friend, Hans Hatzig, introduced the two men. Later, Schneider recapped their meeting to Hatzig as follows:

A good-looking man came to my studio and introduced himself as Karl May. I had not heard of him, and looked at him questioningly, to which he replied "Old Shatterhand." I asked for an explanation, whereupon he described the phrase as beating an opponent with one blow, So I grabbed my one hundred pound weightlifting weight and told him, 'This, I practice everyday.'⁴²

Apparently, the exchange made an impression on May, though he must have been taken aback slightly that the artist was unaware of his notoriety, but then again, maybe it was refreshing [Fig. 12].

The two became close friends at a time when May needed encouragement. He had recently come under attack by journalists and critics for giving the false impression that his stories were first-hand accounts of his travels. Even though May did not blatantly claim to have lived out each story first hand, he did nothing to downplay others' refusal to see the fictitious nature of his stories. Tabloids also uncovered May's troubled past and jail time, so all attempts at clearing his name were wrought with his less than pristine record. May proclaimed: "... since Sascha Schneider became acquainted with me, from

⁴⁰ Berman, *Imperialist Imagination*, 57.

⁴¹ Röder, *Sascha Schneider*, 5.

⁴² Annelotte Range, *Zwischen Max Klinger und Karl May*, 54.

that moment he helped me start fresh again. He did not say as such, but I felt it. His drawings are like literary confessions...”⁴³ With the chance to add authenticity to his works and counteract the bad press, May commissioned Schneider to create the visual images that could legitimize the exoticness of his stories.⁴⁴



Figure 12, Artist Unknown, *Karl May and Sascha Schneider*, Gelatin Silver Print, 1904, Location Unknown.

⁴³ Günther, 7.

⁴⁴ May eventually did travel, but it was not the experience he had hoped to achieve. May visited Egypt and Eastern America, but was so disillusioned and depressed by both that he returned to Germany a vehement opponent of colonialism.

Schneider's history of traveling was not the only aspect of his repertoire that May found desirable. May wanted to create a spark in the literary world that would combine the artistic elements of writing and the plastic arts to establish a holistic aesthetic experience. By commissioning Schneider to design the covers of his books, May would be able to further instill in his readers a sense of mysticism that would come from the images on the books. Their relationship grew closer after May commissioned Schneider to paint a mural in his Shatterhand Ranch named *Chodem* depicting the character "Old Shatterhand" from some of the most popular of May's books. After this large work, he asked Schneider to design a sample book cover for him. The writer was so impressed with Schneider's sketch for *Winnetous Himmelfahrt* (1904) that he insisted that all future books that he wrote be graced with Schneider's work on the cover [Fig. 13].

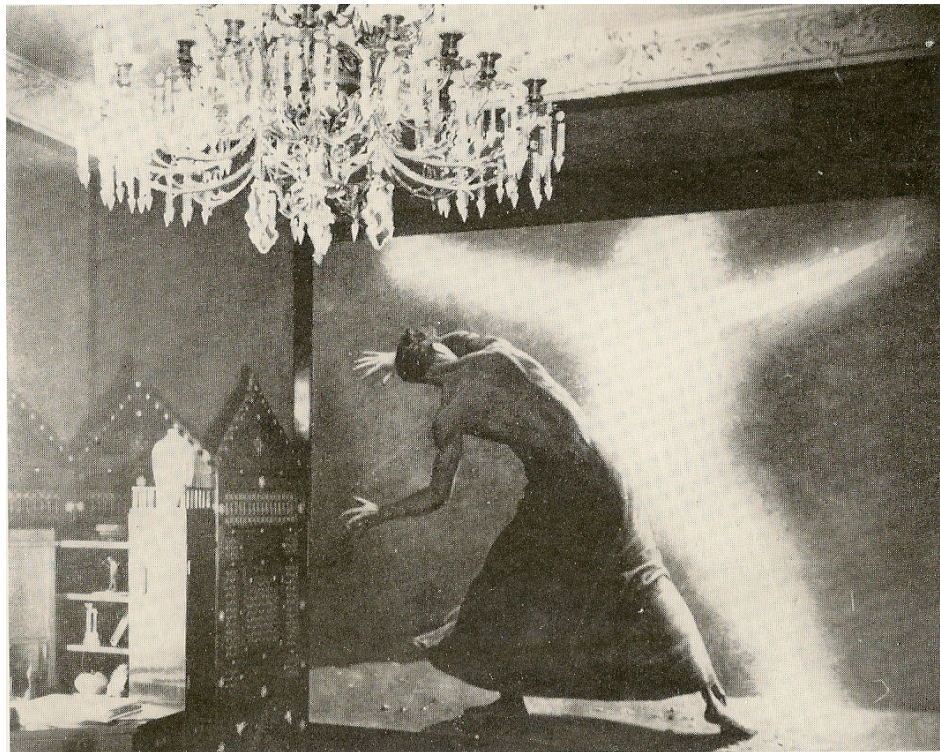


Figure 13, Sascha Schneider, *Chodem*, 1903, Oil on Wall (Mural), 237 x 210 cm., The Villa "Shatterhand" in Radebeul.

Schneider began his work with May by creating images to fit with May's Middle Eastern odysseys. By reading travelogues, Schneider felt he was better able to obtain a sense of the places he was to depict. In a letter to May he wrote, "I have now read very interesting journeys through the desert, Kurdistan, Baghdad, Istambul, and the Balkan gorges. My head is crammed with stuff, and there is a fabulous delight in the works."⁴⁵ One of the more popular works depicting the Orient was *Durchs wilde Kurdistan* (1892) [Fig. 14]; a novel detailing the religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Kurdistan. The figure on the cover is nude, typical of Schneider's work, with his back turned to the viewer. The figure is pulling back a curtain of thorny vines to step foot into the forested land. In the foreground of the greenery is a cross with radiating light. Schneider depicts the male figure as he most always does, in the classical sense, and incorporates familiar and symbolic Christian overtones since they fit with May's story.

In 1892, May wrote another Middle Eastern fantasy novel titled *Vom Bagdad nach Stambul*. For this novel May touches upon the issue of death, as he details a pilgrimage of those who are carrying the remains of their loved ones to the Shiite shrine. A hollow-eyed nude figure stands with his hands clasped in prayer while the other nude male buries his hands in his face. Above the two men are skull-faced crows, birds that symbolize death. The novel touches upon the issues of illness and plague that were fresh in the minds of many Europeans, and Schneider's images play off of the fear and grotesque nature that is inherent in diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid, and others to which so many lost their lives [Fig. 15].

⁴⁵ Range, *Zwischen*, 68.



Figure 14, Sascha Schneider, *Durchs Wilde Kurdistan (Through Wild Kurdistan)*, 1905, Lithograph of Charcoal, 65.5 x 38.7 cm, Book Cover.



Figure 15, Sascha Schneider, *Von Bagdad Nach Stambul (From Baghdad to Istanbul)*, 1905, Lithograph of Charcoal, 65.5 x 38.8 cm., Book Cover.

May's most popular works would also become a platform for Schneider to gain recognition for his artwork. The *Winnetou* series was, and still is, the most famous series that May wrote. Schneider filled the covers with feelings of unease, especially with respect to the native's demeanor. *Winnetou I* [Fig. 16] depicts a scene reminiscent of the biblical Cain and Able story, with muted cool colors and sacrificial fire – the fratricide occurring in the scene is equated with the destruction of the native peoples by their white “brothers.” A second installment of *Winnetou* is even grimmer [Fig. 17]. High cliffs and inescapable valleys make up the backdrop of a massacre scene, with a tattered morose angel looking on with a palm branch in hand, which is a symbol of the Christian resurrection. For the third book, Schneider continued with biblical themes. A longhaired Native American chief is floating chest up into the air. A feather in his hair denotes his status, and the body language mimics that of the Christian ascension into heaven [Fig. 18].⁴⁶ Because of these designs, Schneider's work was given a wide audience due to the exposure through May's best-selling novels.

In 1904, Schneider took a job as an art professor at the Weimar School of Fine Arts. During his time as a professor, he worked closely with Karl May on his book designs and painted several state-commissioned murals in Dresden. He and May decided to work together diligently, despite some physical distance. Though still close friends, the tension from teaching obligations and the lack of face-to-face communication strained their working relationship and slowed artistic output for the books. By 1905, May became upset over the decline of their relationship, and there was a brief break between the two, but the friends resolved their differences and continued their personal and

⁴⁶ Range, *Zwischen*, 70-76.



Figure 16, Sascha Schneider, *Winnetou I*, 1904, Lithograph of Charcoal, 65.5 x 38.8 cm., Book Cover.

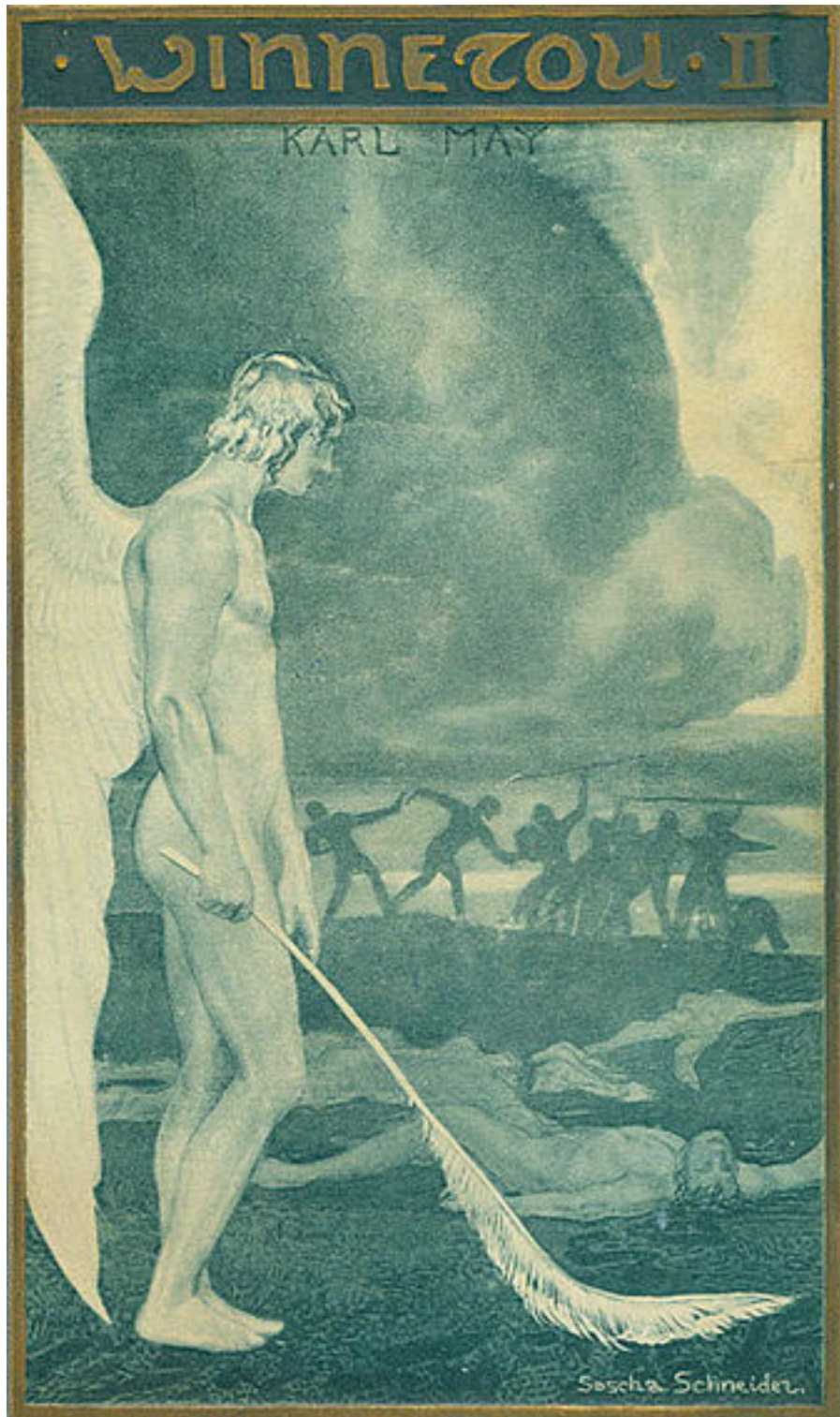


Figure 17, Sascha Schneider, *Winnetou II*, 1905, Lithograph of Charcoal, 65.5 x 38.8 cm., Book Cover.



Figure 18, Sascha Schneider, *Winnetou III*, 1903, Lithograph of Charcoal, 65.5 x 38.8 cm., Book Cover.

working relationships. Karl May writes:

So I am always with you, my friend, and it gives me true and noblest pleasure to be able to see your tree grow, which unfortunately does not see itself grow, but only feel that it grows. Far above ground in the light are rich branches, and much farther down there in the darkness are the roots of life and creative concerns.⁴⁷

The two would remain in close contact up until the final years before May's death, and even after his death Schneider continued his friendship with Karl's wife Klara.

⁴⁷ Röder, *Sascha Schneider*, 37.

CHAPTER THREE – SCHNEIDER’S LATER LIFE AND WORK

Sascha Schneider’s friendship with both Max Klinger and Karl May had a profound effect on the successes in the second half of his life – each able to open doors for Schneider in different ways. Klinger helped him by recommending the young artists for jobs and also nurturing the Symbolist philosophy behind much of his work. May helped Schneider by offering a genuine friendship and also exposing his artwork to much wider audiences via the cover art found on the front of his many books. While the two men founded the beginning of his career, Sascha Schneider came into his own near the end of his life.

Schneider was appointed to the position of Professor of Nude and Life Drawings at the Dresden School of Fine Arts in 1904 at the recommendation of Max Klinger. Teaching understandably slowed the pace of Schneider’s creative output, though he was able to produce two large commissioned murals during this period – one for the Weimar State Theater and the other for the Auditorium of the University of Jena. Each depicted scenes of youth and beauty on a grand scale, again showing the influence of Klinger who wrote in his *Malerei und Zeichnung* (1891):

It is neither a minor nor ridiculous claim, the claim of the nude. But it is a concession to false sensitivity when the audience is actually forced to think upon the naked body – the most beautiful of things which we can imagine at all – at all times and in any place.⁴⁸

Here, Klinger calls for artists to push the image of man forward, a calling that Schneider adheres to in most of his works. He states that the nude human body is the measure of all artistic creations, and Schneider’s rendering of the human form was a task at which he excelled. Famous critic, art historian and archaeologist, Johann Joachim Winckelmann

⁴⁸ Max Klinger, *Malerei und Zeichnung* (Leipzig: Author Georgi, 1891), 20.

believed that the human figure was “capable by itself, in the absence of all attributes, of conveying a symbolic meaning solely through its intrinsic expressive value.”⁴⁹ Klinger and Schneider were also inspired by the idea of the Greek *palaestra*, where the image of the male nude was celebrated and studied.⁵⁰ His time as a professor strengthened his artistic skills regarding nudes, but it also fueled his interest in the male form.

Schneider’s time as a professor in Weimar also brought on temporary problems with his relationship with May. Due to his increased workload in the classroom and the few murals the artist was working on, Schneider had less time to devote to cover art for May. Their fallout was short lived, and they reconciled by the end of 1905, continuing correspondence and visits up until May’s death in 1912. By 1906, Schneider resumed cover design for May.

While in Weimar, Schneider found himself in a hostile environment – much different from that which he had known in Dresden and elsewhere. He was in a city where the artistic circles favored Impressionism and Expressionism over other works, especially eschewing the Symbolism so closely associated with most of Schneider’s work. One of his harshest critics was Harry Kessler, an important patron of the arts in Weimar and director of the *Museum für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe* in the city.⁵¹ Schneider once remarked on his experience in a letter to Klara May:

I have had my troubles here [in Weimar] with the Artists Union [a group founded by Kessler]. People here don’t know what to do with me any more so than I with them. I have encountered goodwill nowhere, only dreary meanness. If I did not feel the distinct artistic mission and conviction within myself, then I might well

⁴⁹ Hans Hofstätter, “Symbolism in Germany and Europe,” *Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany, 1870-1920*, eds. Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds (New York: Prestel, 2000), 19.

⁵⁰ Günter, 17.

⁵¹ Röder, 10.

fall into despair. The German fine arts have generally taken on a mundane appearance and will probably keep one for a while.⁵²

Kessler's dislike of Schneider influenced many others in the Weimar art circle, playing a part in encouraging the young artist to eventually move away from the hostile environment.

This development proved to be unfortunate for Schneider. He was openly gay and had no desire to hide his homosexuality, which was illegal in Weimar under Paragraph 175 of the penal code.⁵³ While most of his friends knew that Schneider had no issues with his sexual orientation, his flat-mate Hellmuth Jahn argued with him frequently and eventually threatened to expose his sexuality to the police. The apartment Schneider shared with Jahn provided the impetus for explosiveness as he noted "we are sitting on a powder keg" due to the fact that a prosecutor lived on the floor below them.⁵⁴ Schneider was clearly somewhat nervous about being arrested and the proximity to a legal authority figure did not help matters much. His relationship with Jahn was not always contentious though. Schneider wrote to Klara May on November 24, 1905 and discussed his loneliness in Weimar, noting that: "My only company is the young man [Jahn], who is sweet, nice, and reasonable to me, he's also very clever. Is that not strange?"⁵⁵ By a year later though, things changed and Schneider's friendship with Jahn soured, whom he now saw as a "monster" seeking "revenge."⁵⁶ When he finally left

⁵² Karl Friedrich May, *Briefwechsel mit Sascha Schneider: mit Briefen Schneiders an Klara May u. a.* (Bramberg: Karl-May-Verlag, 2009), 222.

⁵³ Fout, 404.

⁵⁴ May, *Briefwechsel*, 117.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 187.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 200.

Weimar, Schneider wrote to Karl May and explained his revulsion to being blackmailed over his “natural disposition.”⁵⁷

The stress from teaching coupled with blackmail became too much for Schneider, and in 1908 he decided to move to Florence where homosexuality was not illegal, vowing to never return to Germany. Despite this promise, he returned to the country almost a year later incognito, staying as a guest of Max Klinger as he worked on a mural for the Gutenberg Museum. This phase of his life proved to be one of the most productive stages of his artistic career. Not only did he isolate himself from the German art world, but he also immersed himself in the scenery and lifestyle of Italy that inspired him.⁵⁸ He began experimenting with new painting techniques, and also began to use color heavily. Wilhelm Ostwald, a chemist and Nobel Laureate, took an interest in Schneider and began sending him the fixed oil pastels that he created.⁵⁹ Schneider was fascinated with these new materials and began creating colorful paintings. In addition to new works, he also recast some of his earlier etchings with the new supplies at the behest of Klara May. His time in Italy proved to be one of great discovery and renewal.

During his time in Italy, Schneider worked more with three-dimensional art mediums, sculpting several works and submitting them for various prizes. Sculpture afforded him the ability to create what he considered the perfect male form in a nearer-to-life dimension, allowing him to build the form from all angles. His attention to detail,

⁵⁷ Ibid., 276-77.

⁵⁸ His friends Unger and Zwintscher visited him, but he refused to acknowledge the German art world past the company of guests.

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that Schneider was good friends with Ostwald and his wife. He picked up the permanent pastels while visiting them on vacation in Naples. There was even the chance that they would be related by marriage when there was talk of betrothing Schneider to Ostwald's eldest daughter Greta in 1910. This “lavender marriage” never came to fruition, mostly on concerns by Schneider that Greta would be unhappy. May, *Briefweschel*, 300.

however, later caused a scandal. In 1911, he created *Der Gürtelbinder* and presented it to the Leipzig Museum [Fig. 19]. The 85cm bronze stands, nude, with a belt around his waist and his hips tilted forward in a suggestive manner. The museum rejected the sculpture outright, stating that it was an “incentive to sodomy.”⁶⁰ Soon after this lack of appreciation in this avenue of artistic expression, Schneider gave up sculpting, with only a few exceptions later in the form of funerary headstones and monuments, such as the gravestone for his friend Robert Spieß, who died in the trenches during the war.

Schneider’s time in Italy was cut short by the onslaught of World War One. In the fall of 1914 he reluctantly returned to Germany, settling in Helleneau, right outside of Dresden. During the first part of the war he served as a Russian interpreter for the military, but was dismissed due to the back problems that had plagued him from childhood. At first he was enthusiastic about the war and the opportunity to view the physical prowess of the soldiers, but his interest waned as he observed the nature of war, and grappled with the immense destruction of human life. After his dismissal he made a series of twenty-four black and white drawings that represented the soldiers he interacted with, juxtaposed with feelings of chaos, death, anxiety, and suffering.⁶¹

The drawings were published in a collection called *Kriegergestalten und Todesgewalten* (1915). His illustrations were a way for him to express his unease with the war, calling them “warrior figures and forces of death.”⁶² From this point of view he can be compared to Otto Dix, though Schneider’s war art never reached the level of Dix’s notoriety. The two artists reacted to the war in different ways; Schneider’s images retain Symbolist notions of dream-like fear and anxiety coupled with his trademark nude figures,

⁶⁰ Günter, 20.

⁶¹ Röder, 31.

⁶² Günter, 24.



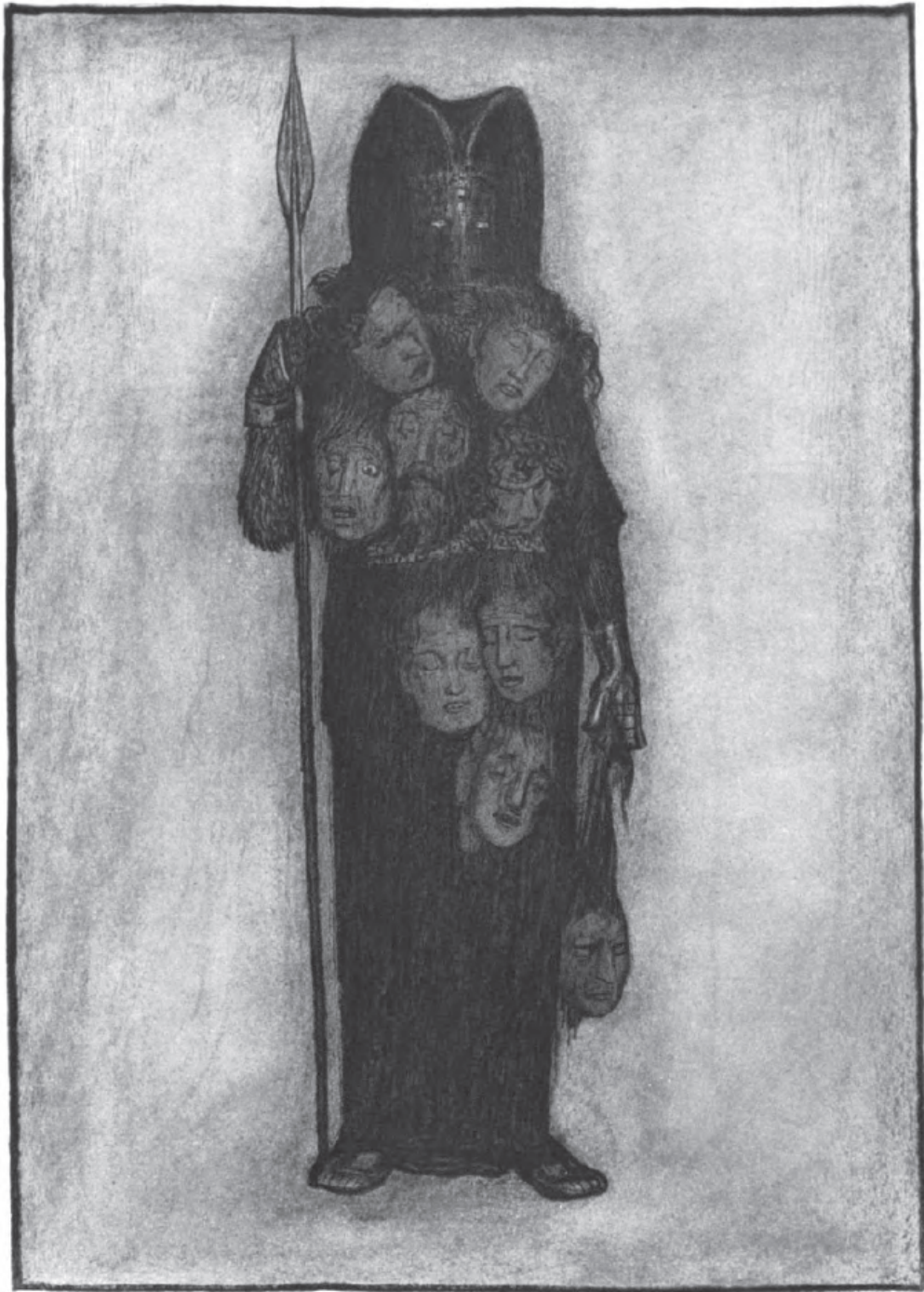
Figure 19, *Gürtelbinder* (*The Belt Tier*), Bronze and Gold, 1911, 85.5 x 37 x 20 cm., Lot 88 Ketterer Kunst auctions (Harry Beyer, current owner)

while Dix's works such as *Sturmtruppe geht unter Gas vor* (1924) from his series *Der Krieg* represent actions of the war with heavily scratched etchings in an aggressively violent way [Figs. 20-25 & 26]. The difference between the two also highlights the shift from Symbolism to Expressionism in light of the war. In regards to Schneider's own works he wrote, "But if one wants to give the whole complete feeling, you have to make a leap into the metaphysical. And so I design these [war sketches] with meaning from the incarnate concepts of my younger works."⁶³ This statement shows that Schneider was still firmly under Symbolist influence despite the trauma of war, and did not abandon his style to create art in the vein of so many like Dix.

After the war, Schneider was commissioned by the Academic Council of the Ministry of the Interior to paint murals for a new Dresden art gallery. He worked on the huge project for three and a half years, but political and economic events quickly prevented its completion. It was slated to be the largest mural in all of Saxony, measuring over 180m wide by 3.5m high, spread over of twelve walls.⁶⁴ Schneider wanted it to be the masterpiece of his life's work – a tribute to the glorification of "outer man." The time and energy invested in the futile venture left him with a deep feeling of sadness. He moved away from Hellenrau in August of 1917 to Loschwitz, now part of Dresden. It was here where he setup his last studio and apartment [Fig. 27].

⁶³ Range, 136.

⁶⁴ Range, 137.



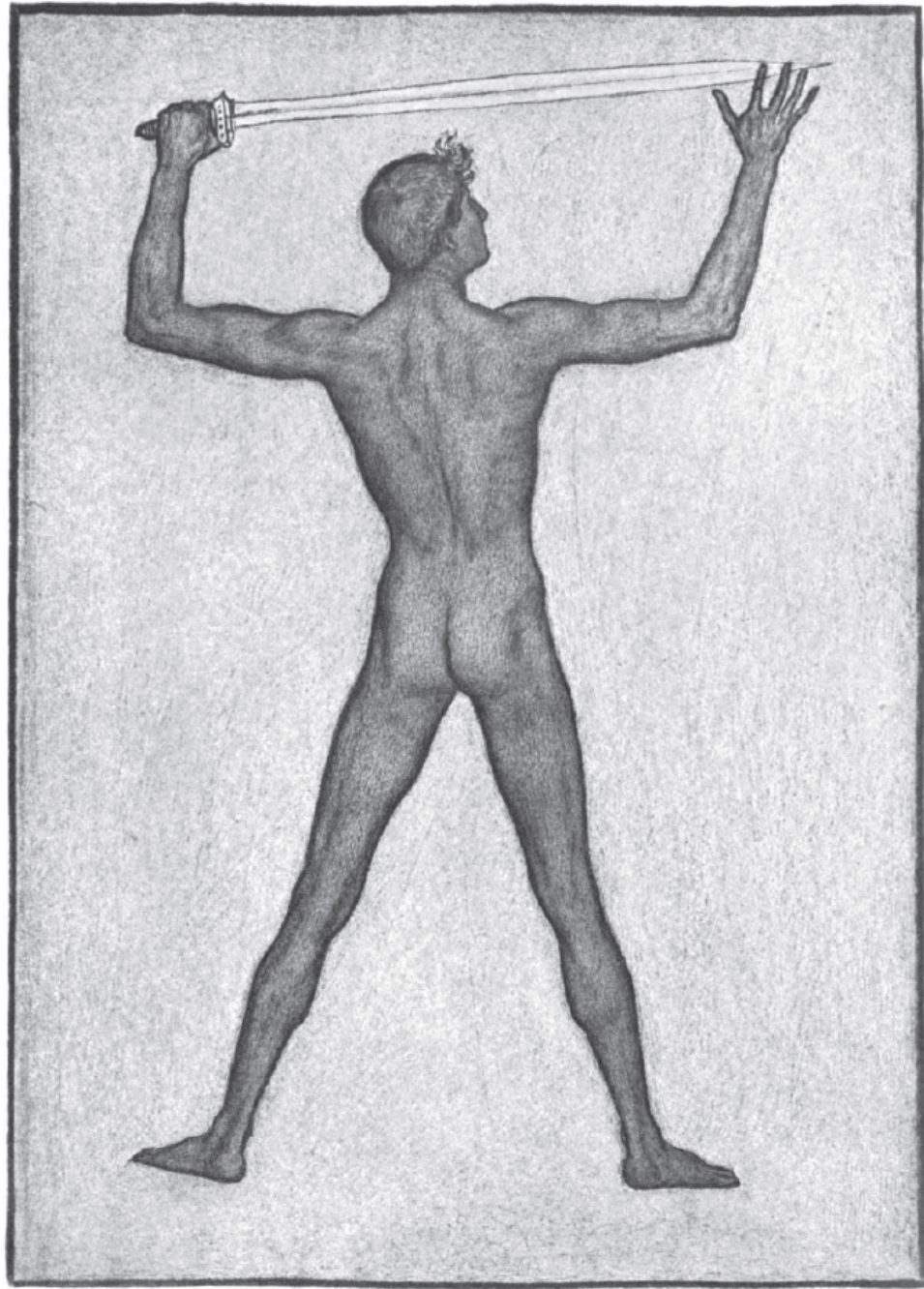
KRIEGSGESPENST

Figure 20, Sascha Schneider, *Kriegsgespens* (*War Spector*), Charcoal, 1915, 39 x 29 cm., published in Sascha Schneider, *Kriegergestalten und Todesgewalten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1915).



BEGEISTERUNG

Figure 21, Sascha Schneider, *Begeisterung (Enthusiasm)*, Charcoal, 1915, 39 x 29 cm., published in Sascha Schneider, *Kriegergestalten und Todesgewalten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1915).



WAFFENPROBE

Figure 22, Sascha Schneider, *Waffenprobe (Weapons Test)*, Charcoal, 1915, 39 x 29 cm., published in Sascha Schneider, *Kriegergestalten und Todesgewalten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1915).



RINGEN

Figure 23, Sascha Schneider, *Ringen (Wrestling)*, Charcoal, 1915, 39 x 29 cm., published in Sascha Schneider, *Kriegergestalten und Todesgewalten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1915).



GEGEN ÜBERMACHT

Figure 24, Sascha Schneider, *Gegen Übermacht* (*Compared to Power*), Charcoal, 1915, 39 x 29 cm., published in Sascha Schneider, *Kriegergestalten und Todesgewalten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1915).



HELD

Figure 25, Sascha Schneider, *Held (Hero)*, Charcoal, 1915, 39 x 29 cm., published in Sascha Schneider, *Kriegergestalten und Todesgewalten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1915).



Figure 26, Otto Dix, *Sturmtruppe geht unter Gas vor* (*Storm Troopers Advance Under Gas*), 1924, Etching and Aquatint, 34.8 x 47.3 cm., published in Otto Dix, *Der Krieg* (Berlin: Karl Nierendorf, 1924).



Figure 27, Sammlung Röder, *Atelier im Künstlerhaus Dresden* (*Art Studio in Dresden*), Gelatin Silver print, 1924, Location Unknown.

After some travel in Europe, Schneider recovered from his melancholy and invested a lot of his time in a new gymnasium dedicated to fostering ideal physical forms. The *Kraft-Kunst* was an institute that advocated bodybuilding, but also the study of the human form through art. Schneider founded the academy in Dresden in 1919 with his long-time friends Richard Müller and Hans Unger. The location for the institute was provided by Schneider's long-time patron Johannes Mühlberg, who happened to own a department store with a spare floor.⁶⁵ The mission of the academy was to promote the training of one's own body to ensure physical beauty [Fig. 28]. Much of the philosophical background for this school was rooted in the ancient Greek *palaestra*, an establishment where young boys and men practiced gymnastics and other physical exercises in the nude. The activities were coupled with other educational endeavors to ensure a well-rounded student, often including an aspect of drawing, painting, or sculpting. Schneider showed interest in this type of art education as early as 1909 when he wrote, "There is an art to life outside of the existence of four walls. The ideal place for a *palaestra* would be an open gym, where one is surrounded by the inspiration and monumental example of practicing youth."⁶⁶ In 1911, Schneider was further inspired by the school opened by Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, a Swiss music and dance teacher. This school showed much promise, but collapsed due to the outbreak of the First World War. Schneider believed that there should be moral reform regarding nudity and sexuality overall, a process he believed could be advanced through a modern *palaestra*.⁶⁷ The interest in gymnastics in the German lands was not new, dating back to the efforts

⁶⁵ May, *Briefwechsel*, 110.

⁶⁶ Günter, 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in the early nineteenth century. Jahn was a Prussian patriot who advocated physical fitness and fraternity as a means of nationalistic expression.⁶⁸

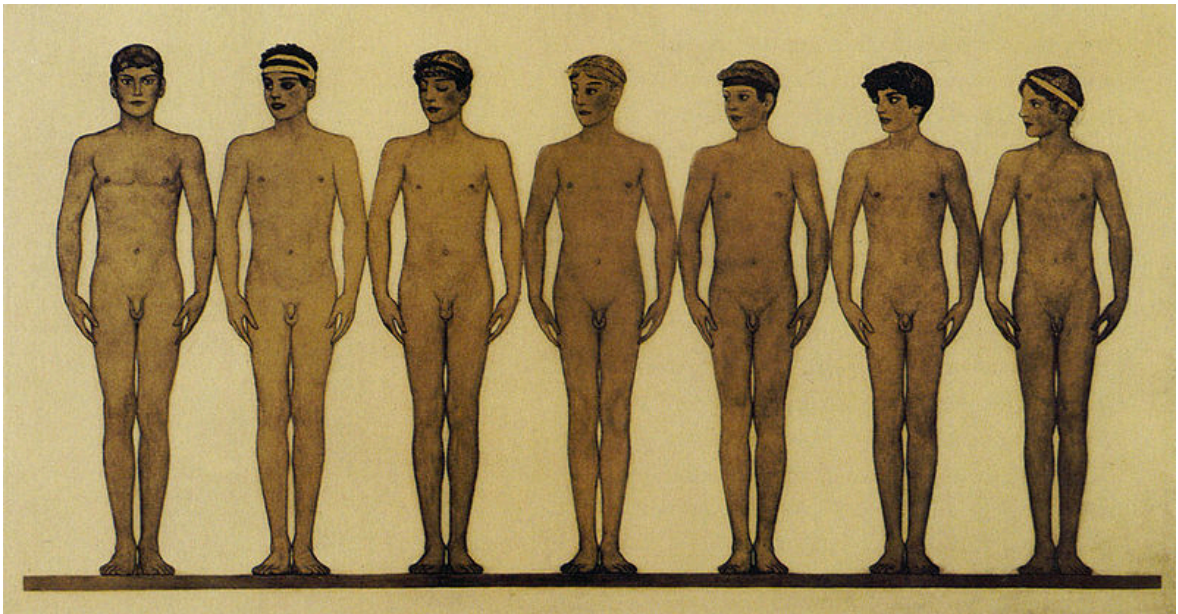


Figure 28, Sascha Schneider, *Gymnasion*, 1912, Colored Lithograph Print (original oil painting lost), Printed by Breitkopf & Hartel, Leipzig- Berlin.

The participants in the gym also served as models for artists, who were then able to better reflect the ideal man due to the physical fitness of their subjects. It is quite possible that Schneider's obsession with health and the ideal form of the male nude stemmed from his spinal injury as a child, something he struggled with all of his life. It is also possible that his obsession with masculinity stemmed from his homosexuality. During this time, the male homosexual was portrayed as sickly, effeminate, perverse, and

⁶⁸ George L. Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 128ff.

outside the realms of normalcy.⁶⁹ It is likely that in addition to his childhood injury, Schneider was combating the stigma of the emasculated homosexual with his obsession with the perfect male form. Michel Foucault explains this process when he states that “nothing that went into his [the artist’s] composition was unaffected by his sexuality” when discussing artists in general.⁷⁰

To appeal to youthful males, Schneider and his partners explicitly advertised the institute as a “modern *palaestra*” in 1921, capable of helping one achieve an ideal body type within the span of a year. This claim drew in several willing participants, which brought about many new models from which to create new works of art. The school had up to 150 paying students at its apex.⁷¹ It even spawned a similar institute for women in the spring of 1921, but the women’s school lasted less than a year due to lack of interest.⁷² While serving as an instructor at *Kraft-Kunst*, Schneider began experimenting seriously with watercolors for the first time. By 1923 he completed a set of sixteen images under the collection “*Calisthenics*.” These images reflect the type of teacher/student relationship that would have been displayed in an ancient Greek *palaestra*.⁷³

The watercolor techniques he developed while working on the *Calisthenics* collection came to fruition when he delved into landscape paintings. He embraced landscape painting in the 1920s after a series of several visits to Italy, which became the

⁶⁹ Fout, *Journal of Sexuality*, 413.

⁷⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality: an Introduction, Volume One* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 43.

⁷¹ Range, 138.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷³ Given the nature of the school, his involvement with *Die Eigene*, and the nature of some of the paintings/drawings, it is not a stretch to say that Schneider might have gleaned some of his inspiration from Greek pederasty [Fig. 30].

focus of the new direction in his art [Figs. 29 & 30]. These images are bright and colorful, as opposed to Schneider's usual works in charcoal that are heavy and dark. The new materials also brought about a new style, as his brushstrokes were looser and not as precise. He also filled the entire canvas with busy images. Perhaps the biggest move away from his typical works was the lack of human figures. Though these works are few, they were for Schneider a nice change from the dark images he had so often created.

A sad coincidence to Schneider's *Kraft-Kunst* project was his diagnosis with diabetes in 1922. He was forced to redouble his efforts at fitness and employ a careful diet, though it proved insufficient to improve his health. To remedy his depression, he decided to once again travel. He spent most of his leisure time travelling by sea to his favorite destinations. During this time he managed to maintain a productive pace with his art, producing the gigantic *Fluch des Jeremias* (1923) and one of his most somber works, his *Selbstbildnis* (1926) as well as fifty-five other works [Fig. 31].⁷⁴ These paintings were shown at the International Art Exhibition in Dresden in 1926. The popularity of this show brought in more job offers for Schneider, notably another large mural project for the gymnasium at Jena University though like his post-war government projects, this job too was never completed. He suffered a diabetic seizure on the boat and was unable to recover while on an excursion was to the ancestral homelands of his father near Danzig (Gdansk).⁷⁵ Schneider passed away in the port off the coast of Świnoujście, Poland in August 1927 at the age of 57.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Range, 140.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁷⁶ Günter, 24.



Figure 29, Sascha Schneider, *Italienische Künstenlandschaft I (Italian Landscape I)*, Watercolor, 1923. Location Unknown



Figure 30 , Sascha Schneider, *Italienische Künstenlandschaft II (Italian Landscape II)*, 1924, Watercolor, Location Unknown



Figure 31, Sascha Schneider, *Selbstbildnis (Self-Portrait)*, Oil on Canvas, 1926, 131 x 84 cm, Dresden State Art Collections.

CONCLUSION

One year after the death of Sascha Schneider, the Saxon Art Association put together a large exhibition to commemorate his life and work, making his final solo exhibition posthumous. This show would not be the last time his art would be exhibited. In 1989, an exhibition titled *Eldorado* featured the art of homosexual men and women from 1850 to 1950. The title of the exhibit came from famous gay bar in Berlin, also called *Eldorado*, which was popular in the 1920s and was a symbol of gay culture for many who frequented it. Even today Schneider's work is popular amongst those who collect homoerotic art and art from those who identified with gay culture. It seems that his frank expression of sexuality still radiates today.

Unfortunately, it is this very sentiment that was the cause of the destruction of much of his work. In 1933, the Nazi party seized the papers of gay magazine founder Adolf Brand, and through Schneider's connection with Brand and *Die Eigene*, they decided that the remainder of Schneider's art that was being stored at the Berlin Institute be burned. Other works of his were destroyed later by Allied bombings, most of these being murals in Dresden. Many of the images of Schneider's work that remain are preserved in magazines and exhibition catalogs. Oddly enough, the Nazi party shared many of the same sentiments as Schneider regarding the human form. It is interesting to note that Nazis tapped into a similar fascination with health and fitness and tried to copy the gymnastic fraternities for their own purposes.⁷⁷ In his letters to May, Schneider references Nietzsche, and his obsession with the perfect man fits with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. May too created a superman in his flawless German cowboy, Old Shatterhand. Together, May and Schneider disseminated German ideals for a wide

⁷⁷ Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, 135-136.

audience, including many young male readers who would go on to join the SA and the Nazi party.

Schneider had been a large part of the Dresden art movement, and owes something of this to the friendships he made along the way. Max Klinger was not only a friend and inspiration, but introduced him to the Dresden art world. This friendship would prove to be paramount to his success, for it is through Klinger that he met fellow artist and later business partners Müller and Unger. Schneider's relationship with May was also important for his career. He not only found companionship, but also a way for his art to find its way into the hands of millions across all social and economic boundaries. This audience gave him and his art an unprecedented social and professional reach. Without question Schneider was one of the important artists of his time, though often forgotten due to the destruction of his work during the Second World War. It is clear that Sascha Schneider's life and work is deserving of better recognition and more scholarship in the present day.

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VITA

Alice Wolfe was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. She attended Lee University where she obtained a Bachelor of Anthropology, with minors in Studio Art and Humanities. After receiving her Bachelors, she decided to combine her previous studies and obtain a Masters of Art History, which she will receive in May 2013.