

The background of the cover is a white, textured surface that appears to be torn paper. Large, irregular shapes in blue, yellow, and teal are layered on top of the white paper, creating a collage effect. The shapes are somewhat organic and painterly in style.

Brigitte Pedde

WILLI BAUMEISTER

1889–1955

Translated by Michael Hariton

PUBLISHED BY THE
WILLI BAUMEISTER STIFTUNG

epubli eBook

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WILLI BAUMEISTER

1889–1955

**CREATOR FROM THE
UNKNOWN**

Translated by Michael Hariton

PUBLISHED BY THE WILLI BAUMEISTER STIFTUNG

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Felicitas Baumeister, Jörg Dörnemann, Jochen Gutbrod, Hadwig Goetz and Cristjane Schuessler,
Archiv Baumeister im Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (Baumeister Archive in the Stuttgart Art Museum)

THANKS

PAGE 13 Margrit Baumeister **PAGE 15** Hermann Brandseph, Stuttgart
PAGE 21 Claire Beck Loos **PAGE 39 BELOW** Gustav Schleicher **PAGE 40** André Kertész
PAGE 83 Johannes Schubert **PAGE 84** Johannes Schubert, © DER SPIEGEL
PAGE 90 Bon Foto Stuttgart; Willy Maywald, © Association Willy Maywald/
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014 **PAGE 100** Johannes Schubert

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WILLI BAUMEISTER DIGITAL

/ AN ART BOOK IN OPEN ACCESS

In this current volume, the Willi Baumeister Stiftung is striking out in a new direction. For the first time ever, an introduction to the work of a seminal modern artist is freely available on the Internet as a high-quality [open access art book](#). We consider this a logical step for the mission of a foundation, but it is also of significant importance in terms of Willi Baumeister himself. The present translation is another step toward gaining comprehensive access to the life and work of the artist.

The Open Access movement correctly points out that creativity and innovation are not created in a vacuum, but are always inspired by other content. Numerous indications of such progressiveness can be found in Willi Baumeister's life and work. As a painter and art professor, he campaigned for open artistic exchange.

In Germany during the Nazi dictatorship, modern art was viewed as undesirable and degenerate. Despite a ban on painting and exhibiting, Baumeister was able to continue his work through internal emigration, i.e. he withdrew from current political and public life in order to express his opposition. At great personal risk, he managed to stay in contact with the international art world.

The difficulties and dangers of those times cannot be compared with today's possibilities. More and more young artists are presenting their work on the Internet, but free access to information is not yet a given, even among cultural foundations. With his [Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto](#), the Internet activist Aaron Swartz brought the problem to light that many past works were only accessible to a select few, if not lost forever.

Therefore, together with the self-publishing platform [epubli.de](#), we offer the work of Willi Baumeister for free, non-commercial use with a *Creative Commons license*. With an additional *print-on-demand* and *eBook version*, the book is also available for readers who prefer other forms of presentation. In cases in which we own the image rights, this is indicated with a link to our website in the title line of the images. There the pictures are available in high resolution, so that Baumeister's work can continue to offer stimulus for debate and discussion in schools and universities.

**"CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION
ALWAYS BUILDS ON THE PAST"** ∞

Lawrence Lessig, Keynote to the
Open Source Convention 2002

**GUERRILLA OPEN ACCESS
MANIFESTO** ∞

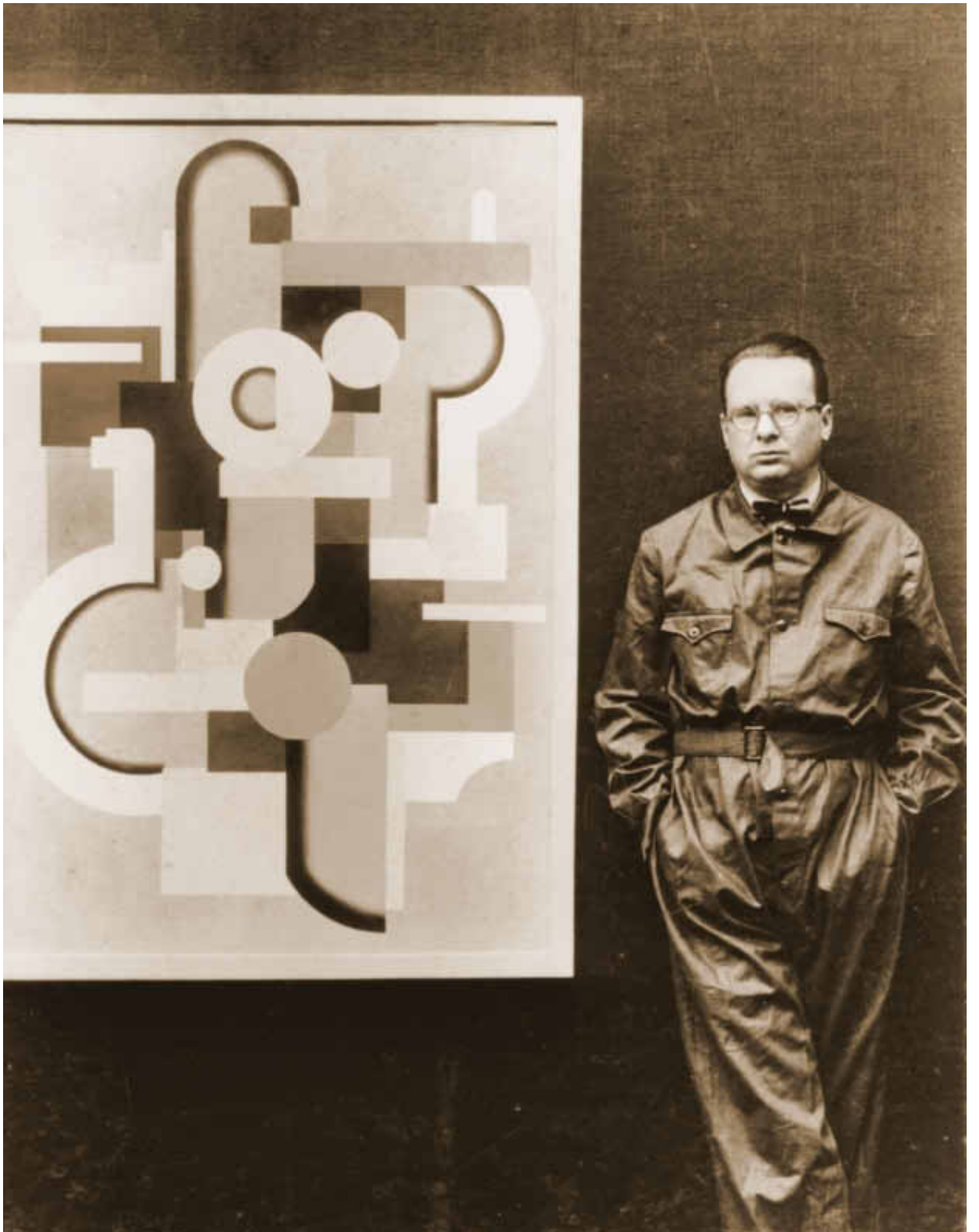
Aaron Swartz, 2008

EPUBLI.DE ∞

We would like to express our sincere thanks to, in particular, the author Brigitte Pedde, Jörg Dörnemann and Markus Neuschäfer from epubli, Henrike Noetzold for the design, Reinhard Truckenmüller for the photos and Cristjane Schuessler for project coordination and image editing. The Baumeister Archive and Willi Baumeister Stiftung are eternally grateful to Felicitas Baumeister for all she has done for her father's work. This publication was inspired by her idea and realized due to her initiative.

We hope that the work of Willi Baumeister shall remain a part of our cultural memory and be available to all interested parties.

Jochen Gutbrod, Willi Baumeister Stiftung



WILLI BAUMEISTER ∞
Berlin, 1927

/ PREFACE

Willi Baumeister (1889–1955) is one of the most important artists of the 20th Century in the German-speaking world and one of the most eminent artists of the modern age.

He created about 2,000 paintings, 2,200 drawings and 240 prints. In addition to his work as an independent artist, he designed the sets and costumes for theatrical productions and worked in commercial art and graphic design, as well as on exhibition design. In numerous articles, he stated his positions on issues of non-representational art and wrote a comprehensive theoretical work entitled [Das Unbekannte in der Kunst](#).

THE UNKNOWN IN ART
published in 1947

In this work, the guiding principle was the question of the universal intellectual source upon which the human race has drawn in its artistic work from its very origins until today. The knowledge he acquired through persistent reflection and extensive experience was something he also passed on to his students. Baumeister was “possessed” by art, in the most positive sense of the word. When he was not in his studio, he always had a sketchbook with him, in which he drew or wrote down ideas. For Willi Baumeister, creating art was a never-ending process of discovery.

From the beginning of his artistic career, Baumeister was oriented towards the West, towards France. He painted his first works in Impressionist and post-Impressionist styles. He considered Paul Cézanne to be the great innovator of modern art. German Expressionism always remained alien to him. His distinct sense of clarity and craftsman-like perfection¹ drove him to seek other means of expression. In the 1920s, his painting style was closely aligned with that of the French Purists.

Even during the Nazi dictatorship, Baumeister maintained his artistic contacts and friendships in France. He participated in an exhibition in Paris only a few weeks before the outbreak of World War II.

In 1949, he was also the first German artist to have a solo show in Paris after the war.

During the Nazi dictatorship, due to a ban on exhibiting and producing art-work imposed on him, he continued to work, but hidden from the public eye. In the artistic isolation that increased even more during World War II, he discovered new creative expressions and formulations.

After the end of the war, Willi Baumeister became the most important, widely acclaimed artist in West Germany and one of the most important representatives and defenders of non-representational art. By exerting the influence of his personality, he played an important role in restoring international relations, particularly with France.

**“THE PANORAMA OF
POSSIBILITIES SHOULD
REMAIN VISIBLE FOR AS
LONG AS POSSIBLE.”**

Baumeister in: *Die Neue Zeitung*, Munich 1950²



WITH OSKAR SCHLEMMER ∞
1929 in Frankfurt am Main

“IN A DIRECT SENSE, I AM NOT INDEBTED TO HÖLZEL FOR ANYTHING, NOT A SINGLE CORRECTION, EXCEPT FOR SHELTER AND THE PROFOUND COUNSEL TO GO TO PARIS, PAINT AND EXHIBIT. I OWE HIM A GREAT DEBT OF GRATITUDE, FOR HE STRENGTHENED MY RESOLVE NOT TO LET ANYTHING LEAD ME ASTRAY.”

Willi Baumeister on his professor Adolf Hölzel

1889–1919

ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Willi Baumeister was born in Stuttgart on January 22, 1889. His parents Wilhelm and Anna Baumeister already had a daughter Klara and a son Hans. The father managed the family-owned business as a master chimney sweep for the royal court. Anna Baumeister, née Schuler, came from a long-established family of decorative painters that had practiced this craft for five generations. This maternal influence would be decisive in his life. As Baumeister later noted: "I was inspired and steered into the path of painting by the tradition of my mother's family. My grandfather, who died before I was born, had held the position of designer in his father-in-law's decorative painting business. We often heard about this grandfather, about his diligence and the fortune of his existence."³

Baumeister attended the Königliche Friedrich-Eugen-Realschule (Royal Friedrich Eugens Secondary School) in Stuttgart from 1898 to 1905. During his school years, his favorite writers were Friedrich Schiller, Karl May and Jules Verne. Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe remained his lifelong favorite poets. After graduating from secondary school, he served as a decorative painter apprentice in his uncle's business. The basic handicraft techniques Baumeister learned through his apprenticeship were of great importance for his artistic work. He was famous for his excellent knowledge of materials. Many of his later paintings are the result of ideas grounded in handicraft techniques.⁴ Coming from this artisan family background, he held handicraft in high esteem throughout his life.

Even at the very start of his apprenticeship, he also attended courses at the Königlich Württembergische Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart. He took Robert Poetzelberger's classes in drawing and landscape painting. He also took private lessons with the animal painter Josef Kerscheneiner, although this was forbidden by the Academy. During this time, he primarily painted naturalistic landscapes. In 1907, Baumeister and Oskar Schlemmer met at the Stuttgart Academy and became friends. Despite their later divergent artistic approaches, they formed an intense, lifelong friendship.

Due to his special aptitude, Baumeister was able to complete his apprenticeship in two years. Immediately thereafter, he traveled to Munich with his sister Klara, who had already been studying art history for several semesters.



THE BAUMEISTER SIBLINGS ∞

Willi with Klara and Hans,
ca. 1893

MEETING WITH OSKAR SCHLEMMER

Royal Württemberg Academy
of Fine Arts, 1907

There they visited an exhibition of French art⁵, most likely the **Kunstaussstellung der Sezession**, where the works of French Impressionists were shown. In the Schleissheim Palace near Munich, they saw paintings by the as yet little-known Hans von Marée for the first time. His work made a strong impression on Baumeister⁶.

In 1908, after his year of military service, he continued his studies at the Stuttgart Art Academy. The usual curriculum dictated the sequence of a drawing class, followed by a painting class and finally a composition class. However, problems quickly arose in the painting class. At this time, Baumeister was influenced by French Impressionism and post-Impressionism, especially in his landscape paintings. This led to a conflict with his professor, Gustav Igler, who threatened to expel him from the Academy. However, at a students' exhibition at the Academy, his work caught the attention of another professor, Adolf Hölzel. He immediately admitted Baumeister to his class. Hölzel enjoyed a special position at the Stuttgart Academy and in the artistic life of the city. He was one of the first abstract painters of all time. At nearly the same time as Wassily Kandinsky, he began to paint non-representational images that communicated only through forms and colors. As early as 1903, a lecture by Hölzel caused a stir because in it he spoke about the intrinsic power of color and form and stated that the picture was a world unto itself.⁷ For many artists his color theory was groundbreaking. Through Hölzel's student, Johannes Itten, who later taught the preliminary course at the Bauhaus in Weimar from 1919 to 1922, his color theory was ultimately adopted at the Bauhaus.⁸

In Stuttgart, a group of artists formed around Adolf Hölzel, which in addition to Willi Baumeister, also included his friend Oskar Schlemmer, Hermann Stenner, Johannes Itten, Ida Kerkovius, Otto Meyer-Amden and Alfred Heinrich Pellegrini. This group, although never formally organized, shaped modern art in a way comparable to the artists' associations **Die Brücke** in Dresden or **Der Blaue Reiter** in Munich. Despite the significant role his teacher Hölzel played in the art of the 20th century, Baumeister later saw himself as "essentially autodidactic."⁹ Yet he prized the liberal and supportive environment Hölzel offered his students: "In a direct sense, I am not indebted to Hölzel for anything, not a single correction, except for shelter and the profound counsel to go to Paris, paint and exhibit. I owe him a great debt of gratitude, for he strengthened my resolve not to let anything lead me astray."¹⁰

Baumeister began exhibiting in 1919. Thus, in September of that same year, he participated as a guest in the Stuttgart exhibition of contemporary French artists, the **Paris Indépendents**.¹¹ Baumeister had gravitated to French art from very early on; he found in it something like an intellectual, spiritual kinship. However, his attitude toward German Expressionism, with few exceptions, was always negative.

SECESSION ART EXHIBITION

Schleissheim Palace

ART STUDIES

1908

ADOLF HÖLZEL

Professor and mentor, Stuttgart, 1908



IN THE STUDIO ∞

Willi Baumeister (right) with friends in his studio, 1921

“TO MODULATE, NOT MODEL”

Baumeisters principle, after Cézanne, 1911

Hölzel induced Baumeister to travel to Paris for the first time in 1911, in order to study for three months at the private art academy **Cercle International des Beaux-Arts**¹². During this first stay in Paris, he became acquainted with modern French art in all its breadth. In particular, he had the opportunity to see the original works of Paul Cézanne and these left a lasting impression on him. Throughout his life, Cézanne was the artist Willi Baumeister most admired. He described him later as the “founder of modern painting style”. Cézanne’s motto, “to modulate, not model”, was the most important, programmatic guiding principle for Baumeister.

During this time, Baumeister also read Wassily Kandinsky’s just-published book **On the Spiritual in Art**¹³. Here, Kandinsky theoretically explained his rationale for taking this step toward abstract painting. Kandinsky also found the spiritual foundations for this step, inter alia, in Goethe and Schiller, whose work Baumeister knew very well and had admired since his school-days.

From October to November 1912, he exhibited 73 of his works at Galerie Neupert in Zurich. In the works Baumeister exhibited, a columnist at the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* pointed out the influence of the French Impressionists, as well as of Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin.¹⁴ This exhibition was his first great success: He sold all of his paintings. Financially secure, at least for a while, he and the Swiss painter Hermann Huber decided to move to Amden in the canton of St. Gallen in Switzerland, where they each rented a farmhouse. The painter Albert Pfister was already living there and they also invited Otto Meyer to join them. Baumeister had been a friend of Meyer’s (who later called himself Meyer-Amden) since his studies at the Stuttgart Art Academy. Baumeister spent September 1912 to December 1913 in this quickly formed little colony of artists, together with his childhood girlfriend, Paula Falschnebner; she called herself Mirjam and was also his model. In Amden, works were created based on the themes **PAINTER AND MODEL**, but also **THE BATHERS** and his paintings with nudes. These themes were germane, because at this time, the unconstrained life in the great outdoors was a progressive approach to social reform.

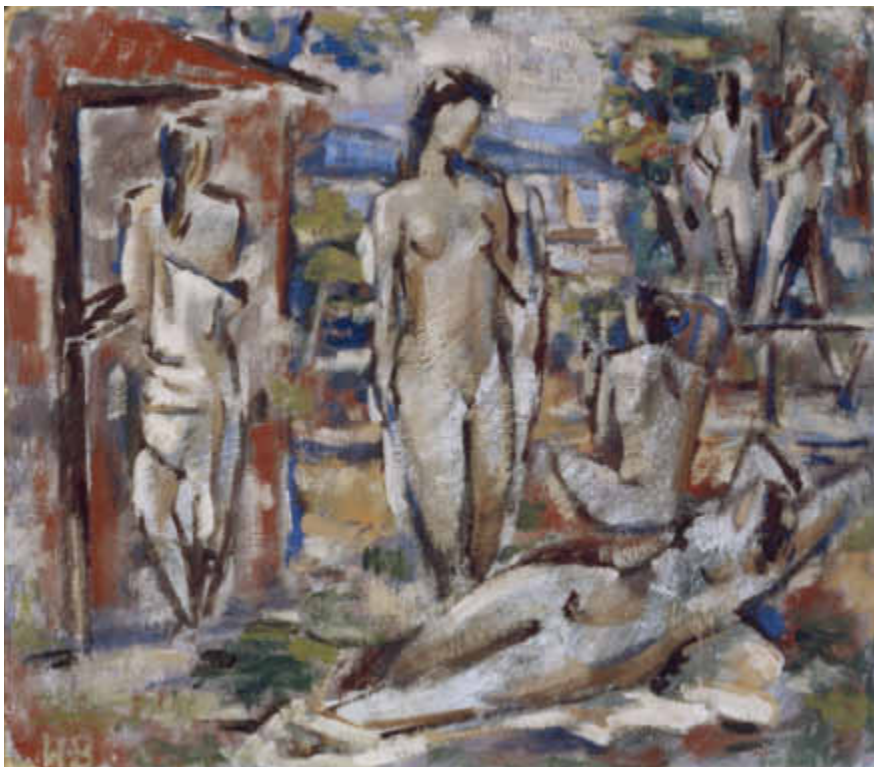
WASSILY KANDINSKY
“On the Spiritual in Art”

GALERIE NEUPERT
1912

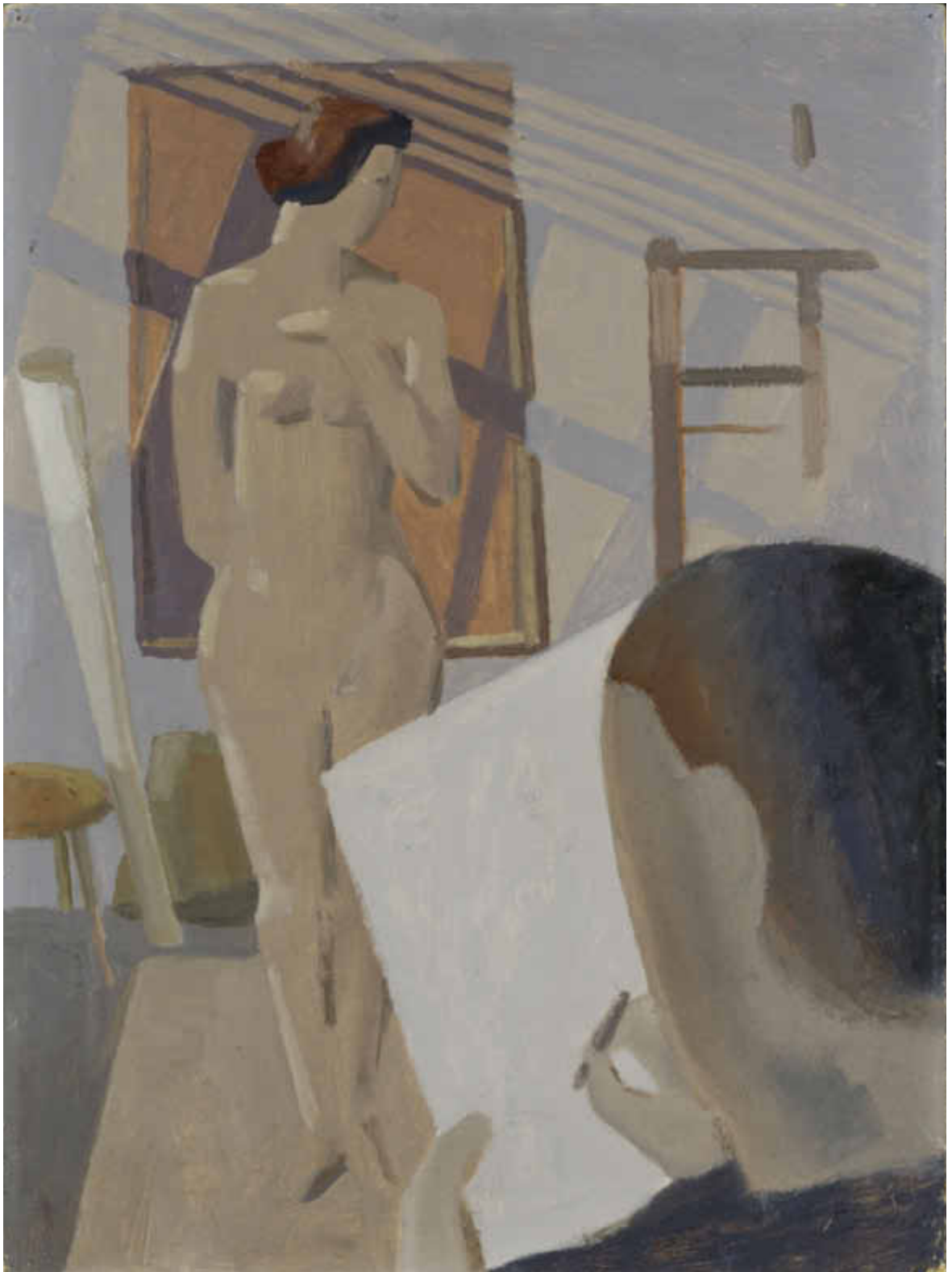
AMDEN ARTIST COLONY
Life in the great outdoors, 1912–1913
→ Bathers, p. 18
→ Painter and Model, p. 19



AFTERNOON IN THE CASTLE PARK ∞
NACHMITTAG IM SCHLOSSGARTEN
1910, Oil on canvas, 41.2 × 53.8 cm,
Kunstmuseum Stuttgart



BATHERS ∞
BADENDE
1912, Tempera on cardboard,
50.1 × 58.1 cm, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart



ARTIST AND MODEL ∞
ZEICHNER UND MODELL
1913, Tempera on primed fine gauge card-
board, 50 × 36.8 cm, Private collection



READERS UNDER THE LAMP ∞
LESENDE UNTER DER LAMPE
1914, Oil on cardboard,
50.5 × 59 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

At the same time, they also offered Baumeister the chance to express in his own work the innovations of Cézanne’s art, whose structure and color modulation he admired so much. For Baumeister, as for many other artists of his generation, Cézanne was the one painter who had succeeded in taking a decisive turn towards modernity. During the time in Amden, he also exhibited two paintings at the **Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon** in Herwarth Walden’s *Der Sturm* gallery in Berlin, together with international avant-garde artists, including Fernand Léger, who would later become a friend.¹⁵ There, standing in front of a painting by Léger, he met Franz Marc.¹⁶

After his Impressionistic, Pointillist works, in the period around 1913, he turned his attention to new challenges. His **HEADS** series marked a new beginning, leading to a geometric, constructivist formal language. The 1914 painting **READERS UNDER THE LAMP** signals a stylistic beginning, which led to the **WALL** and **MACHINE PICTURES** of the 1920’s. The representational is reduced to clear forms and pictorial elements. His friend Oskar Schlemmer wrote to Baumeister about this picture: “Your ‘Readers’ have pretty much become the benchmark for me, perhaps the finest.”¹⁷ In February of that year, Baumeister had his first solo exhibition. It was held in the *Neuer Kunstsalon at Neckartor* in Stuttgart.

With the support of Adolf Hölzel, Baumeister, Oskar Schlemmer and Herman Stenner received the commission for a frieze in the main hall of the **Werkbund Exhibition** held in Cologne in 1914. They each painted four pictures on ebonite plates depicting legends from Cologne’s history. After completing their works, the friends traveled to Antwerp, Amsterdam, London and Paris.

During World War I, Willi Baumeister was conscripted into military service in the Balkans, Ukraine and the Caucasus. Baumeister spent his leaves from the front in 1915 and 1916 in Vienna. There he met the writers Karl Kraus and Peter Altenburg, the painter Oskar Kokoschka and the architect Adolf Loos.¹⁸ Many years later, in 1931, Baumeister and Loos had a joint exhibition in Frankfurt am Main. He also stayed in contact with Kokoschka until the 1920’s. Kokoschka recommended some of his former students to Baumeister.¹⁹

Very few exhibitions were held during World War I. In 1916, the exhibition **Hölzel und sein Kreis [Hölzel and his circle]** was shown in the Freiburg Kunstverein (Freiburg art association). The works shown in this catalog—in addition to those by Hölzel and Baumeister—were created by Itten, Kerkovius, Schlemmer and Stenner. In June 1918, Baumeister participated in the **Expressionist exhibition** at the Kunsthaus Schaller in Stuttgart, which provoked a scandal in conservative circles due to the modernity of the works. Schlemmer, who organized the show with his brother Carl, wrote to Baumeister: “There was apparently an uproar in Stuttgart. My brother writes that Inspector Schmid, the spokesperson for the Academy professors, was in a rage: the police had to step in. Now we’ve made our mark in Stuttgart and people will have to reckon with us...”²⁰

FIRST GERMAN AUTUMN SALON

Berlin, 1913

HEADS (SERIES)

1913/14–1919/20

- Head II, p. 26
- Readers under the Lamp, p. 20
- Wall Picture with Metals, p. 28
- Machine Picture, p. 35

FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION

New Art Salon at Neckartor, Stuttgart, 1913



WITH ADOLF LOOS ∞

Willi Baumeister (right) mit Adolf Loos (left, front), 1931

LETTER FROM SCHLEMMER

“people will have to reckon with us”, 1918

“YOUR *READERS* HAVE (...) BECOME THE BENCHMARK FOR ME, PERHAPS THE FINEST.”

Oskar Schlemmer to Baumeister

However, there were also good reviews, such as the one by Karl Konrad Düssel, a Stuttgart features journalist, who repeatedly strove to promote Baumeister and Schlemmer with his articles.

Due to his wartime duties, Baumeister was not able to engage much in artistic pursuits. However, during his mission on the front, he used every free minute and drew under the most difficult circumstances, even in his tent. Two paintings are known from the year 1918, which today are thought to be missing. The titles alone, **BALKAN REMEMBRANCE** and **THE TORMENTED ONE**, show that Baumeister was confronting the war in his art. In December 1918, Baumeister was discharged from the military and returned to Stuttgart.

On his journey home he wrote to his parents: “On the train near Kiev, traveling towards Kovel. I’m trying to give you a sign of life from me. On the road for a month, hope to be with you at Christmas and that I find you both in good health. How glorious is the certainty that I will finally be free of all the torments of soldiering, and all the sinister circumstances of war are gone, even the master sorcerer Wilhelm II.”²¹



AS A SOLDIER IN THE CAUCASUS ∞
Near Tbilisi, 1918

**“EVERYTHING REAL HAS ROOTS
IN THE NATURE OF ITS TIME.
THE TRENDS OF OUR TIMES ARE:
THE AFFIRMATION OF EXISTENCE,
THE EXACT, THE TYPICAL,
THE ORGANIC, THE FUNCTIONAL,
THE INCREASING MOVEMENT:
WE GIVE EVERYTHING TO THE
ELEMENTAL.”**

on the human/machine pictures, 1926²²

1919–1933 INTERNATIONAL AVANT-GARDE / VISUAL ARTS

The year 1919 marks the beginning of a new period in Baumeister's life. Although he got together with Oskar Schlemmer and Ida Kerkovius again when he returned to Stuttgart, much had changed. Hermann Stenner had been killed in the war, Johannes Itten was in Vienna and shortly thereafter went to the newly established Hochschule für Gestaltung Bauhaus (Bauhaus College of Design) in Weimar, and Otto Meyer had remained in Amden.

In the winter semester of 1918/19, Baumeister again joined Adolf Hölzel's composition class. He and Schlemmer each occupied a master student studio belonging to the Academy. As conservative currents at the Academy had made life difficult for him, Hölzel retired a short time later. From the summer semester of 1919 through the summer semester of 1922, Baumeister was still nominally a student in Heinrich Altherr's composition class.

Baumeister and Schlemmer campaigned to bring Paul Klee to the Academy as Adolf Hölzel's successor. Klee would have very much liked to come to Stuttgart at this time. However, the conservative forces at the Academy prevented him from coming there.²³ In a defamatory press campaign, which foreshadowed the ideals of National Socialism, Klee was accused of having a "lack of morality in his art" and for having relationships to Zionism and Theosophy. Baumeister and Schlemmer wrote a public letter in his defence.²⁴ In October 1920, Klee received an offer from Walter Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus, to teach there as form master for the bookbinding class.²⁵ Schlemmer also taught at the Bauhaus from 1920 to 1925, first as form master of the workshop for wall sculpture and later for wood and stone sculpture. During this time, Baumeister visited the Bauhaus in Weimar from time to time, where he also got to know Klee and Kandinsky personally.

In 1919, Baumeister joined the Berlin artists' association **Novembergruppe**. Founded in 1918 by Max Pechstein, it was one of the most important alliances of avant-garde artists in Germany until 1933. Also in 1919, together with Oskar Schlemmer and Otto Meyer-Amden, Baumeister founded the **Üecht Group**. This newly established artists' association succeeded in bringing an exhibition of the Berlin gallery *Der Sturm* to Stuttgart that very same year.

HÖLZEL'S COMPOSITION CLASS
Master students' studio with
Oskar Schlemmer, Stuttgart, 1918–19

VISITS TO THE BAUHAUS WEIMAR
1920–1925

NOVEMBER GROUP, ÜECHT GROUP
1919
→ Poster, p. 51

Together with this gallery, they presented their own works under the title **Herbstschau Neuer Kunst. Der Sturm Berlin und Üecht-Gruppe Stuttgart [Autumn Show of New Art. The Storm Berlin and Üecht-Group Stuttgart]**. The exhibition presented the international avant-garde, including the artists Alexander Archipenko, Umberto Boccioni, Georges Braque, Carlo Carrà, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Albert Gleizes, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Oskar Kokoschka, Franz Marc and Kurt Schwitters. Fifteen works by Baumeister were shown.²⁶ Some of these were among his few political images, all created in 1919. The painting **APRIL 3RD**, now lost, demonstrated his solidarity with a strike movement against reactionary politics.²⁷ During the course of this exhibition, the **Üecht group** was severely attacked by the conservative press. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* a polemical article was written about it entitled **Art and Bolshevism**.²⁸ In the 1920's, Baumeister had several exhibitions in Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm* gallery in Berlin.

In his artistic work, Baumeister could finally develop the creative energy that had been pent-up over the past four years. This manifested itself in a new stylistic beginning and the start of several bodies of work. From this time on, his oeuvre consists mainly of series. The year 1919 is the beginning of his **HEADS** series, on which Baumeister worked until 1922, and the **WALL PICTURES**, on which he worked until 1923. In 1920, he began **STAGGERED FIGURES** and **APOLLO**, both of which he continued until 1924. The **HEADS** series builds on the **HEADS** of 1914. However, the former seem almost classical compared with the later constructed **HEADS**, which appear as clear forms on a geometrically divided surface.²⁹

Baumeister enjoyed his first major international success with the **WALL PICTURES**. They are the decisive step in his work towards his own personal style and artistic expression. Baumeister constructed the pictorial area using clear basic structures, reducing the figurative to geometric forms in a minimalistic way. A tension was created between the constructive and the figural, the straight line and the curve. At the same time, he emphasized the contrasts of color and non-color and of smooth and rough. Baumeister had developed this design concept from French Cubism. He shared the approach of the French Purists, who were represented in Paris, in particular by Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant. Their pictures, however, remained on the two-dimensional and smooth surface.

By contrast, Baumeister developed a special feature in his **WALL PICTURES**. On the pictorial plane, individual sections were worked into raised relief with admixtures of sand, cement or even papier-mâché and wooden slats so that, in addition to color and surface, the pictures were also given a spatial dimension. This technique soon spread in avant-garde art of the 20th century. Since 1926/27, André Masson also used sand in his paintings with biomorphic forms. In the 1940's and 1950's, artists such as Jean Fautier, Jean Dubuffet and Antoni Tàpies likewise adopted this technique. In the **WALL PICTURES**, Baumeister was able to call upon his mastery of handicraft and knowledge of materials acquired through his apprenticeship as a decorative painter.



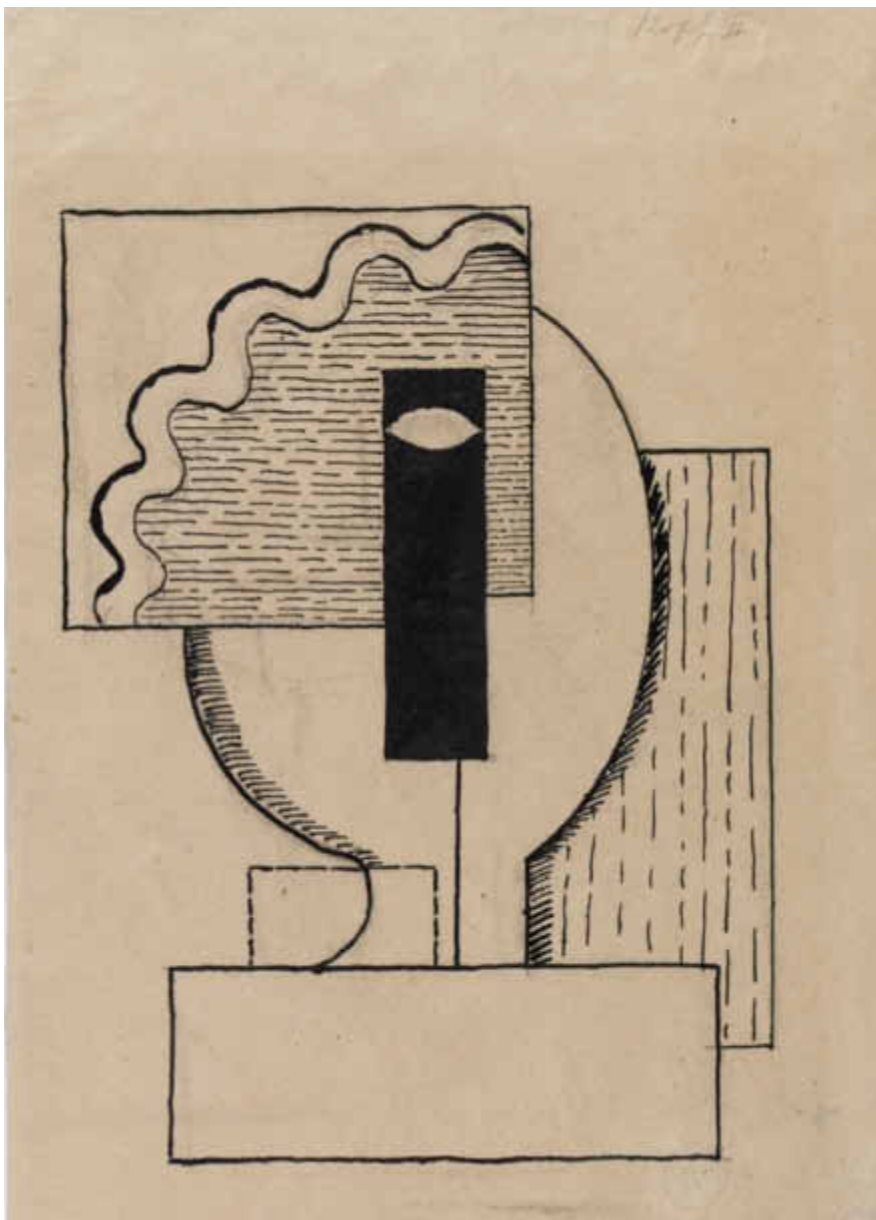
APRIL 3RD ∞
1919, Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, missing

WORK IN SERIES AS OF 1919

- Head II, p.26
- Figure in an absolute Position, p.27
- Figure with Stripes on Pink III, p.28
- Wall Picture with Metals, p.28
- Figure with Stripes II, p.29
- Apollo, p.31



WALL PICTURE ∞
Relief, plaster, temporary exhibition in the First Werkbund exhibition in Stuttgart 1922



HEAD II ③
KOPF II

1920, Ink, charcoal and pencil on Japan
paper, 24 × 16.6 cm, Baumeister Archive



FIGURE IN AN ABSOLUTE POSITION ∞
FIGUR IN ABSOLUTER STELLUNG

1919, Tempera, pencil and papier-mâché on cardboard,
35 × 24.5 cm, Franz Marc Museum, Kochel am See,
Sammlung Stiftung Etta und Otto Stangl



FIGURE WITH STRIPES ON PINK III ∞
FIGUR MIT STREIFEN AUF ROSA III
1920, Oil, tempera, cardboard, pieces of
plywood and sand on plywood, 66×39,2 cm,
Private collection



WALL PICTURE WITH METALS ∞
MAUERBILD MIT METALLEN
1923, Oil, gold leaf, and cardboard pieces on canvas,
89×61 cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Düsseldorf, photo: Walter Klein, Düsseldorf



FIGURE WITH STRIPES II ∞
FIGUR MIT STREIFEN II
1920, Oil and paper-mâché on canvas,
73.5 × 52 cm, Private collection

From this point forward, the handicraft experiment was to be a feature in Baumeister's development of his own style, and the wall served as an ideal pictorial medium. The **WALL PICTURES**, however, were not firmly embedded into the wall and could be detached and reattached. The fact that they are not an integral part of a wall is offset by the wall-like structure.

Baumeister's intention was to move away from illusionism, that mere imitation of nature, revoking the image's isolation from its surroundings. The picture should be integrated into the architecture as a component. Baumeister wrote: "Man makes a wall. The wall gives him a surface. The surface is the primordial, the first elementary medium of painting. After the war, I made simple pictures, starting from the wall. Some parts were raised in relief, other parts were flat. I called these pictures 'wall pictures'. In addition to the elementary mediums of colored surface and line, I discovered yet another elementary medium: I drew a circle in black on white, outwardly precise, but inside I let the color run: I had created an illusion of depth. In this way I was able to represent illusory elevations. I envisioned a new architecture that was not yet available as the carrier of these wall pictures formed from elementary mediums."³⁰ In 1929, he remarked on the series of **WALL PICTURES**: "These pictures were created with real-sculptural surfacing, which hesitantly grew out from the wall, without destroying the wall's laws—on the contrary, enhancing and then dominating them. I called these pictures 'wall pictures' in contrast to the 'easel pictures'. Some Parisian painters later incorporated this term into their work."³¹

The union of art and architecture was also a feature of the Bauhaus, founded by the architect Walter Gropius.

In the first **Werkbund exhibition** in spring of 1922 in Stuttgart, three **WALL PICTURES** were integrated into the exhibition architecture of the Stuttgart architect Richard Döcker. For the Stuttgart architectural exhibition **Die Form**, which took place in 1924 in the Alter Bahnhof, Baumeister conceived the exhibition lettering, interior design and typography of printed materials.³² Beneath an inscription designed by Baumeister, a **WALL PICTURE** was again set into a wall in the room, which was designed by Döcker.

In 1920, Baumeister also began with the bodies of work **STAGGERED FIGURES** and **APOLLO**, on which he worked until 1924, and **PLANAR FORCES**, on which he worked until 1929. The series of **STAGGERED FIGURES** is a thematic variant of the **WALL PICTURES**, with overlapping minimalist forms that suggest human figures. The defining characteristic of the **APOLLO GROUP** is a figure with a circular, frontally depicted head, often with a face. In the **PLANAR FORCES** series, primarily rectangular areas of different sizes overlap and create the illusion of floating, due to their different colors, different levels of brightness and varying surface textures. In the painting **SURFACE FUGUE (VARIANT)** of 1923, a large segment of a circle and a small ring shape lend additional tension to the image.

WALL PICTURES

"Illusionary depth"

→ Wall Picture with Metal, p. 28



BUILDING EXHIBITION THE FORM

Typography and interior design,
Old Railway Station, Stuttgart, 1924



BUILDING EXHIBITION THE FORM

Typography, Stuttgart, 1924

→ Apollo, p. 31

→ Surface Fugue (variant), p. 32



APOLLO ∞
APOLL
1922, Lithograph, 37.3 × 23 cm



CIRCLE IMAGE I ∞
KREISBILD I
1921, Oil and pencil on canvas,
57.5 × 74.5 cm, Private collection



SURFACE FUGUE (VARIANT) ∞
FLÄCHENFUGE (VARIANTE)
1923, Oil on canvas, 81.5 × 65.2 cm,
Private collection

This series is related to the stereometric paintings of El Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy. Here and in his **WALL PICTURES**, Baumeister most closely approached Constructivism.

From 1922 onward, Baumeister worked on the **MACHINE PICTURES**. The essential design elements are mostly geometric forms pushed into each other, with the mechanical/technical in the foreground. As of 1926, the series becomes **HUMAN AND THE MACHINE**. The spectrum of forms of the **MACHINE PICTURES** is now expanded to include human figures. There is a fusion of human and machine. These were the themes of his work until about 1930. Both bodies of work are similar in structure to the **WALL PICTURES**. The geometric-technical design of the images served as a metaphor for the construction of a modern world that consists of simple and clear primary forms. Often, as in the wall pictures, his human figures consist of geometric forms or they anticipate the later **LINE FIGURES**. Here, we also now see human figures stylized in a naturalistic manner, comparable to those in the series **SPORT PICTURES I**.

The reference point for Baumeister's art had now become the modern world and its mechanisms,³³ similar to the work of Fernand Léger, whose pictures he had been familiar with since the **Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon** of 1913.³⁴

From 1927 to 1933, Baumeister worked on the series **SPORT PICTURES I**. Here he took a step from constructive to more lively compositions. In this body of work, the human being in motion is at the center. Baumeister developed the theme in a stylized realistic design, but accentuated the objective. He later called these pictures his contribution to the **New Objectivity [Neue Sachlichkeit]**.³⁵

In the 1920's, machine and sports were themes that fascinated avant-garde artists. Both embodied the spirit of modernity, which looked towards the future with optimism and seemed to have left the confinement and repression of the period before World War I behind it.

In several articles, Baumeister spoke of this conception of art: "Everything real has roots in the nature of its time. The trends of our time are: The affirmation of existence, the exact, the typical, the organic, the functional, the increasing movement: we give everything to the elemental."³⁶

Or similarly: "We also want to be honest. We use the machines of our time as the main theme of our images to understand the realities of today and to master them."³⁷

By the early 1920's, the Paris art scene had become aware of Baumeister. The impetus was provided by an article about Willi Baumeister that was published in 1921 in the journal *Das Kunstblatt* with reproductions of **WALL PICTURES**.³⁸ This article was written by Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, the director at that time of the municipal collections in Dresden and a determined promoter of avant-garde art. He emphasized the "monumental" and the "stability of the pictorial form" in Baumeister's work and interpreted this as a "reaction to the unfettered nature of Expressionism."

MACHINE PICTURES

Beginning in 1922

- Construction Red-Olive II, p. 34
- Machine Picture, p. 35
- Abstraction
(construction red-olive I), p. 37

→ Woman, p. 45

→ Line Figure on Brown, p. 62

SPORTS PICTURES I

Beginning in 1927

- Tennis Player Reclining, p. 38
- Gymnast, p. 38
- Handstand, p. 47

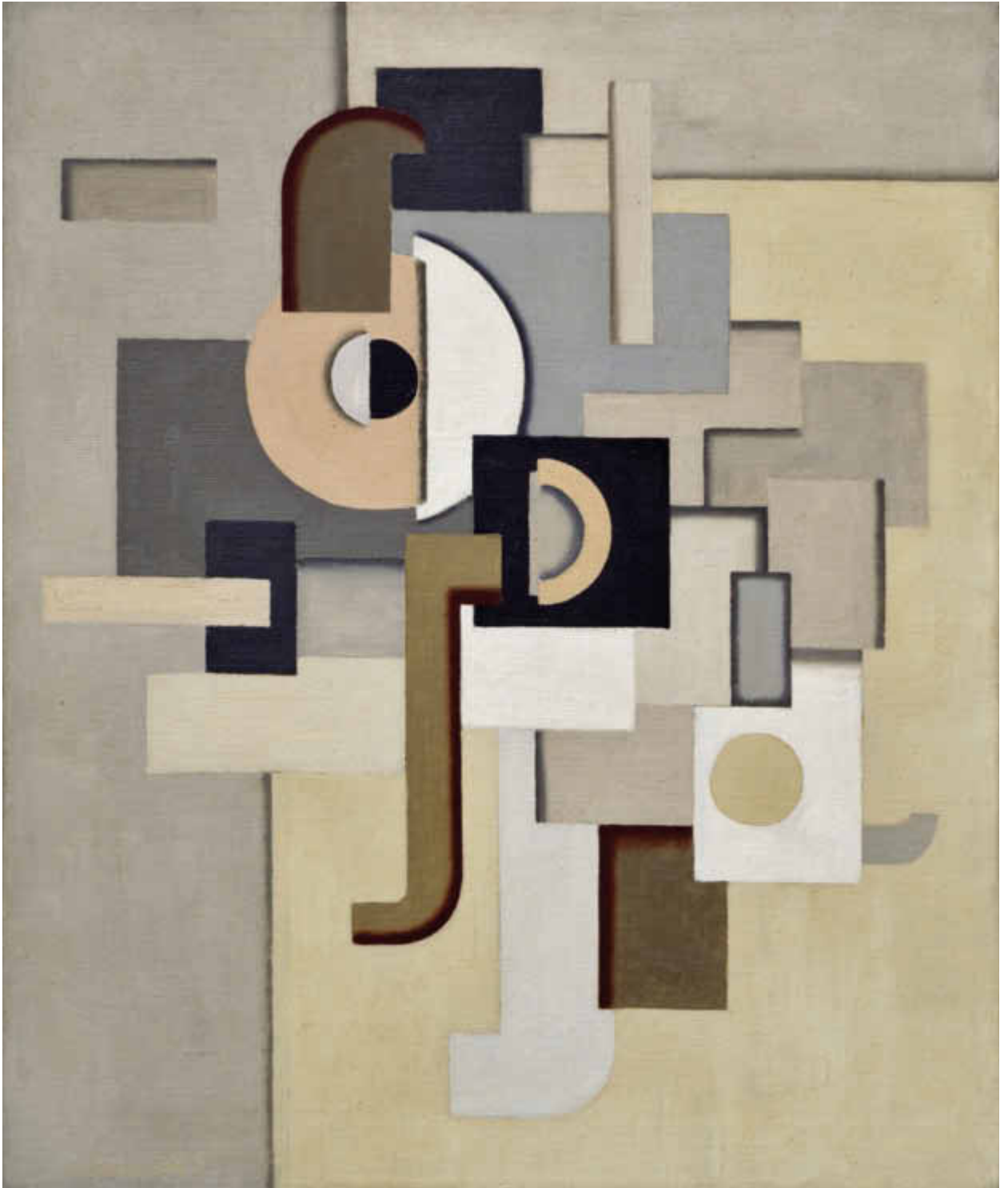
ON THE CONCEPTION OF ART AT THAT TIME

"We also want to be honest. We use the machines of our time as the main theme of our images, in order to acknowledge the current reality and to master it."

→ Wall Picture with Metals, p. 28



CONSTRUCTION RED-OLIVE II ∞
KONSTRUKTION ROT-OLIV II
1924, Oil on canvas, 100.5 × 81.3 cm,
Private collection



MACHINE PICTURE ∞
MASCHINENBILD
1924, Oil on canvas, 65×54 cm,
Private collection

A year earlier, Schmidt had organized a joint exhibition of Baumeister and Schlemmer in the Dresden gallery Arnold.³⁹ Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant learned of Baumeister's work by way of his article. They asked him for photographs of his paintings and invited him to Paris.⁴⁰ The Parisian art critic Waldemar George wrote about Baumeister a year later in the art journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*.⁴¹ George emphasized the "clarity" of Baumeister's pictures, noting that there "was no hint of sentimentality in his panel and wall pictures." The article was illustrated with three pictures of paintings from the years 1920 and 1921. The journal *L'Esprit Nouveau* was published from 1920 to 1925 and was founded by Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant. Their goal was to spread their Purist-influenced ideas on painting and architecture to the public. George's article gave Baumeister a name in the Parisian art world in one stroke. His **WALL PICTURES** were met with great interest and appreciation. Shortly thereafter, more articles on Baumeister by the art critics Michel Seuphor and Christian Zervos were published in Paris.⁴²

Two years later, again in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, Baumeister's gouache **ABSTRACTION (CONSTRUCTION RED-OLIVE I)** from the **MACHINE PICTURES** series was given special prominence as a full-page, color reproduction; as a rule, only black and white illustrations were printed. It was placed before the article *Vers le cristal*, written by Ozenfant and Le Corbusier.⁴³ In 1924, Baumeister was able to accept their invitation and went to Paris. He now became acquainted with the two artists and also got to know Léger personally,⁴⁴ with whom he maintained a friendly relationship from then on. In March 1922, Baumeister had a joint exhibition with Léger, **Gemälde und Aquarelle [Paintings and Watercolors]** in the Berlin gallery *Der Sturm*,⁴⁵ but neither would become personally acquainted with the other until later. Moreover, he then met other avant-garde artists and art critics living in Paris. Among them were Michel Seuphor, Albert Gleizes, Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay-Terk, Piet Mondrian and Jacques Lipchitz.⁴⁶ Baumeister would travel frequently to Paris from then on, where he exhibited regularly and met artists and art critics who represented the milieu of Post-Cubism and Purism.

In Paris and in Germany he was esteemed by artists and art critics because of his distance from Expressionism and his devotion to precise design.⁴⁷ His deviation from "Expressionism's emotional field of articulation" was stressed. He was regarded as a "radically modern young painter, who had found a pictorial form beyond all subjectivity, one that was distinguished by clarity, logic and concision and which found timeless tranquility in its formal insularity."⁴⁸

In the summer of 1924, El Lissitzky invited Baumeister to collaborate on his book **Kunstismen**, which he wanted to publish with Hans Arp. In this book, the avant-garde currents in the visual arts were to be defined by the artists themselves and illustrated with photographs of their work.

IN PARIS

With Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant, 1924

→ Machine Picture, p. 35

→ Abstraction

(Construction Red-Olive I), p. 37

THE ISMS OF ART

1924, El Lissitzky



ABSTRACTION (CONSTRUCTION RED-OLIVE I) ∞
ABSTRAKTION (KONSTRUKTION ROT-OLIV I)
1923, Opaque paint in red, olive, brown, pink, black, pencil on drawing cardboard, 34.9 × 25 cm, Private collection



TENNIS PLAYERS RECLINING ∞
TENNISPIELER LIEGEND
1929, Oil on canvas, 60.5 × 88.8 cm,
Private collection

GYMNAST
GYMNASTE
1928, Oil on canvas, 54.3 × 44 cm,
Kunstmuseum Stuttgart



The publication appeared in 1925 in German, French and English. Baumeister and Schlemmer were classified together under the term **Kompressionismus**, which was not defined. Baumeister and Schlemmer each had one painting depicted; Baumeister's contribution was one of his **WALL PICTURES**.

From November 1925 to February 1926, he participated in an exhibition in Paris for the first time: it was the **L'Art d'aujourd'hui**. The aim of this exhibition was to represent post-Cubist and Constructivist art on an international level. The artists represented included Arp, Brancusi, Delaunay, Gris, Le Corbusier, Léger, Lipchitz, Miró, Mondrian, Ozenfant and Picasso.⁴⁹ Besides Baumeister, Klee, Moholy-Nagy and van Doesburg were the exhibited artists also living in Germany. In particular, the works by Baumeister and van Doesburg were widely acclaimed.⁵⁰ Photographs of Baumeister's works appeared in several French art journals.⁵¹

The year 1926 had special significance for Willi Baumeister in his personal life. In November he married the Stuttgart-based artist Margarete Oehm. His wife, whom he called Margrit, was his main critic until his death; when he left his studio in the evenings, he would discuss his daily work with her. Baumeister met Margrit in 1923 through a friend, with whom she was taking painting and drawing classes. She asked Baumeister to correct her work. The following year, she exhibited her works at the Stuttgart Secession, and a year later in the *Kunstkabinett* (Art Cabinet) at Friedrichsplatz, also in Stuttgart.⁵² However, after she married she gave up her own artistic work. Baumeister and his wife had two daughters; Krista was born in December 1928 and Felicitas in April 1933.

In July 1926, Baumeister had already traveled to Paris with his future wife and her artist friend Gertrud Stemmler. There they saw Baumeister's Parisian colleagues. In the *Café du Dôme* in the Boulevard Montparnasse, a popular meeting place for bohemians and intellectuals, a reunion of artists took place.⁵³ They went to see Piet Mondrian in his studio; Michel Seuphor was also among the guests there. They also visited the artist couple Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay-Terk. On this occasion, Margrit and Gertrud Stemmler purchased clothes designed by Sonia Delaunay.⁵⁴ Sonia Delaunay was famous at that time for her textile and fashion designs. She created her textile patterns according to the aesthetic principles of her painting.

Shortly after their marriage, Willi and Margrit again spent time in Paris. For two months, beginning in January 1927, they lived in a hotel in the Montparnasse district, which was popular among artists at that time and where many had their studios. There they rented two rooms; one of them served as Baumeister's studio, where he created 25 finely-colored tempera pictures.⁵⁵ Thanks to the success Baumeister enjoyed at the exhibition **L'Art d'aujourd'hui**, he was given his first solo show in Paris at the *Galerie d'Art Contemporain* on Boulevard Raspail.

COMPRESSIONISM

1925

→ Wall Picture with Metals, p.28

ART TODAY

1925/26, Paris



WILLI BAUMEISTER AND HIS WIFE ∞

Margarete Baumeister, née Oehm, 1926



IN PARIS

Willi Baumeister (seventh from left), Adolf Loos (third from right), Piet Mondrian (second from right), 1926

FIRST SOLO SHOW IN PARIS

1927

The opening was on January 18, 1927. In the catalog, which included an introduction by Waldemar George, fourteen of more than forty works were reproduced. Baumeister handled the typographic design of the catalog himself. The exhibition was extremely well received by critics, French fellow artists and by the audience. In his diary he wrote: “Over 40 pictures, many temperas, no sales, much interest and recognition by the French painters, Léger, Le Corbusier, Lipchitz, W. George, Christian Zervos. I hear that I am currently the best painter among the Germans. I made about 25 temperas, very finely colored, like never before. The impression remains: in order to get ahead it’s not enough to produce good things, but one must (unfortunately) produce a lot of them. Corbusier and Léger very friendly.”⁵⁶ On this occasion, he also met Hans Arp and Piet Mondrian.⁵⁷ He and Arp formed a lifelong friendship. The following statement was printed in the *Berliner Tageblatt* of January 28, 1927: “Willi Baumeister, closely aligned with the Bauhaus, has exhibited his works in the in the *gallery of contemporary art*. After a smaller exhibition of Paul Klee in the past year, this is the second manifestation of the ideas at work in the Bauhaus on French soil.”⁵⁸ Since a success in Paris had twice as much cachet, in addition to the German and French press, the American and British press also wrote about the exhibition; some included illustrations of his works.⁵⁹ In addition, the exhibition opened doors to the possibility of further exhibitions in major galleries for Baumeister.

At this time, Baumeister was toying with the idea of moving to Paris. “Léger opposes my desire to become a resident of Paris: You must live in Berlin, form a group with others there,”⁶⁰ he wrote in his diary at the time.

When Baumeister was commissioned to take over the entire typographical and interior designs for the **Werkbund exhibition, “Die Wohnung”**, held in Stuttgart that same year, he and his wife broke off their stay in Paris.⁶¹ Due to the success of his work for this exhibition in Stuttgart, which became world-famous as an example of modern building design through the establishment of the Weißenhof-Siedlung (Weißenhof Estate), he received the offer of a professorship at the Städel Art School in Frankfurt am Main. He taught there from April 1928 until his dismissal due to the Nazi takeover in early 1933. At the same time, he had refused an offer of a position as professor of painting from the Academy of Art in Breslau. In the 1920’s, Baumeister had tried unsuccessfully to get a position at the Stuttgart Academy of Fine Arts. It was ruled by an increasingly conservative and conventional mindset after Adolf Hölzel’s retirement.

Baumeister also became known outside of Germany and France in the 1920’s. In 1924/25, he participated in the contemporary art exhibition, the **First General German Art Exhibition**, which was shown in Moscow and Saratov, as well as in Leningrad. At the same time, his work was reproduced in avant-garde journals such as the Hungarian *Má* and the Polish *Blok*, published in Warsaw. The Brno artists’ journal *Pásmo*⁶² published drawings from his mechanically moving pictures from 1921, which he called **MECHANO**, together with an explanatory text by Baumeister.⁶³ Works by Léger were published in the same issue.



IN PIET MONDRIAN'S STUDIO ∞

Paris 1926, from left: Gertrud Stemmler, Willi Baumeister, Julius Herburger, Piet Mondrian, Michel Seuphor, Margarete Baumeister

WERKBUND EXHIBITION “THE DWELLING”

Stuttgart, 1928

PROFESSORSHIP

Städelsche Kunstschule (Städel Art Institute), Frankfurt am Main, 1928–1933

SPECIALIST PRESS

Reproductions of Baumeister’s works in Hungarian, Polish and Czech art publications

Between late 1926 and early 1927, Baumeister took part in an exhibition in the U.S. for the first time: **The International Exhibition of Modern Art** arranged by The Société Anonyme at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. Katherine S. Dreier, an American painter and dedicated art collector, and Marcel Duchamp organized the exhibition. The exhibition was a manifestation of European avant-garde art and, at the same time, a tribute to Kandinsky on the occasion of his 60th birthday. Works by Willi Baumeister, Paul Klee, Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters and Franz Marc represented the German avant-garde.

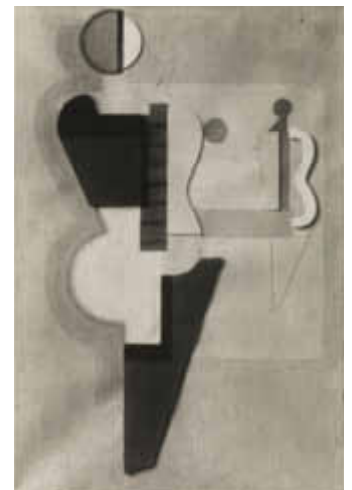
Katherine S. Dreier, who presumably became aware of Baumeister through Fernand Léger and Helma and Kurt Schwitters and was enthusiastic about his **WALL PICTURES**, gave him a prominent place in the exhibition, which included more than 300 works by 106 artists.⁶⁴ Thereafter, the exhibition travelled to Anderson (South Carolina), Buffalo (New York) and Toronto (Canada). Due to Katherine S. Dreier's dedication, Baumeister continued to have a presence in the United States. Thus, he was represented in the **Exhibition of Modern European Art** at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie (New York) in April 1927, together with others, including Arp, de Chirico, Ernst, Gris, Kandinsky, Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy.⁶⁵ In 1931, Baumeister was again exhibited in New York, this time at the Museum of Modern Art in the exhibition **German Painting and Sculpture**.

At the **Große Berliner Kunstausstellung** [Great Berlin Art Exhibition] in 1927, Willi Baumeister became acquainted with Kasimir Malevich. In this exhibition, only these two artists were each given a separate room for a special show of their work. They both expressed their mutual appreciation of each other by exchanging artworks. Baumeister's gift was **TWO FIGURES WITH CIRCLE** from the **WALL PICTURES** series. Malevich gave Baumeister the collage **Suprematistische Zeichnungen** [Suprematist Drawings]; it is dedicated to him and is currently on permanent loan to the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart.

In early 1928, Baumeister met Léger in Berlin. There, Léger exhibited his work at the *Galerie Alfred Flechtheim*.⁶⁶ About a year later, on February 9, 1929, a solo exhibition of Baumeister's work opened in the same gallery. It was subsequently shown in Flechtheim's gallery in Düsseldorf; Baumeister primarily exhibited his **SPORT PICTURES I** there. Flechtheim's enthusiasm for sports was famous; it was also a zeitgeist phenomenon. Flechtheim considered Max Schmeling to be the greatest artist of all, who was the most successful boxer of the times. An exhibition in Flechtheim's gallery was considered a great honor for an artist. In the previous year, Flechtheim's publishing house had published the print portfolio **Sports and Machine**. It contained 20 reproductions of Baumeister's drawings produced as costly, high-quality colotype prints.⁶⁷ During this period, Baumeister's picture sales were on the rise.⁶⁸

FIRST EXHIBITION IN THE USA

Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1926–1927
Anderson, South Carolina; Buffalo, New York; and Toronto, Canada



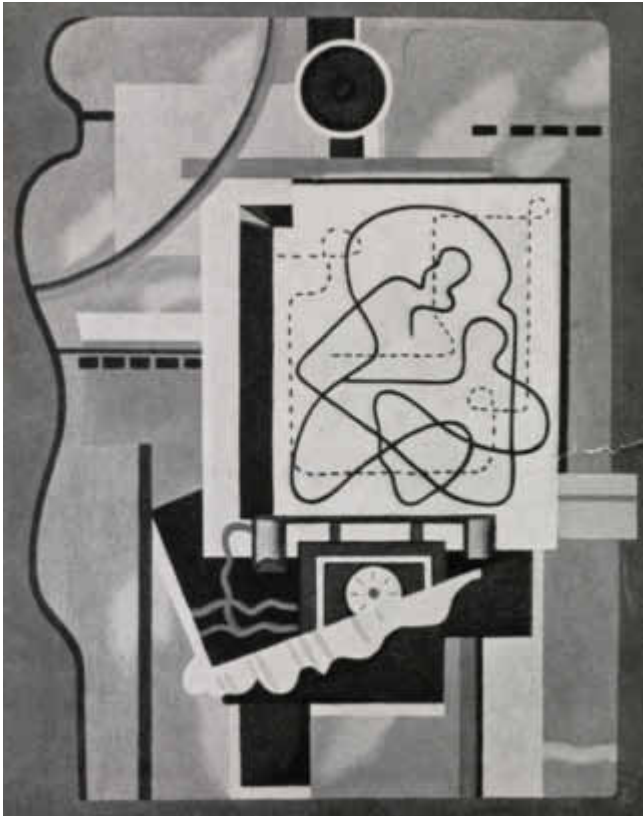
TWO FIGURES WITH CIRCLE ∞

1923, Oil and pieces of cardboard on canvas, 73 × 52 cm, Location unknown, Provenance: Kasimir Malevich

GALERIE ALFRED FLECHTHEIM

Berlin/Düsseldorf, 1928–1929

- Tennis Player Reclining, p. 38
- Gymnast, p. 38
- Handstand, p. 47



STUDIO PICTURE ∞
ATELIERBILD

1929, Oil on canvas, 81.3 × 65 cm,
formerly Städtische Galerie Städel,
Frankfurt am Main, confiscated in 1937
as “degenerate” and missing ever since



THREE ASSEMBLY WORKERS ∞
DREI MONTEURE

1929, Oil on canvas, 129 × 99 cm,
formerly in the Nationalgalerie Berlin,
Confiscated in 1937 as “degenerate”
and missing ever since



FLAMELET FIGURE ∞
FLÄMMCHENFIGUR
1931, Oil on canvas, 37×25 cm,
Private collection

During this time, the situation for avant-garde art was becoming increasingly problematic. In 1929 in Frankfurt, a press campaign was launched against the purchase of his painting **STUDIO PICTURE** for the Municipal Gallery by the Director General of the Frankfurt museums, Georg Swarzenski. The divide between the voices of the traditional and avant-garde approaches to art was becoming increasingly vehement. The conservative *Frankfurter Zeitung* was now using a vocabulary that would become part of everyday language with the rise of the Nazis in 1933.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Ludwig Justi, Director of the National Gallery in Berlin, still purchased the painting **THREE ASSEMBLY WORKERS** during this time. Both paintings have gone missing since the “cleansing” of the museums by the Nazis.

Around 1930 Baumeister’s painting style changed. He broke away from constructivist, clearly-defined and mostly geometric design patterns, began working with more organic and amorphous forms and incorporated these in his **HUMAN AND MACHINE, THE PAINTER** and **SPORT IMAGES** series.

In the early 1930s, he created the bodies of work **LINE PICTURES** and **FLAMELET PICTURES**. Here, Baumeister used a symbolic, abstracted pictorial language. In the **FLAMELET PICTURES**, the image was dissolved in loose, colored forms, in islands circumscribed by lines and in cloudy formations. This eventually led to the **EIDOS PICTURES** of 1938/39.

During this Frankfurt period, in 1930, Baumeister also created the painting **LINE FIGURE (WOMAN)**, also called **FEMME**. It resembles a drawing transformed into an oil painting. Baumeister himself greatly valued this picture and repeatedly sent it to exhibitions, even to Paris. He also transposed this motif into a sculpture. The **LINE DRAWINGS** had already begun appearing sporadically in 1928/29, but it was only in 1930 that the unadulterated outline drawing became an independent and defining pictorial theme.

Baumeister participated in the **Venice Biennale** for the first time in 1930⁷⁰. Only after World War II was it possible for him to exhibit there again.

In early 1931, Baumeister and the Viennese architect Adolf Loos had a joint exhibition at the Frankfurter Kunstverein: **Adolf Loos, Buildings: Photographs, Plans, Text. — Willi Baumeister, Paintings, Wall Pictures, Graphic Works.**

In the same year, the major exhibition **Vom Abbild zum Sinnbild** was held in the Städel Art Institute, also in Frankfurt. Works by Picasso, Braque, Léger and Juan Gris were represented here. “2 pictures of mine. Wichert (Director of the Municipal School of Applied Arts) can’t show more of my works for fear of the opinion of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.”⁷¹ Baumeister’s diary entry contains an allusion to the scandal that had occurred in Frankfurt due to Georg Swarzenski’s purchase of **STUDIO PICTURE**. During this exhibition, Baumeister was again violently attacked in the press.

During Baumeister’s professorship in Frankfurt (1928–1933) he still maintained close ties with fellow artists in Paris. Baumeister became a member of the **Cercle et Carré** group in Paris.

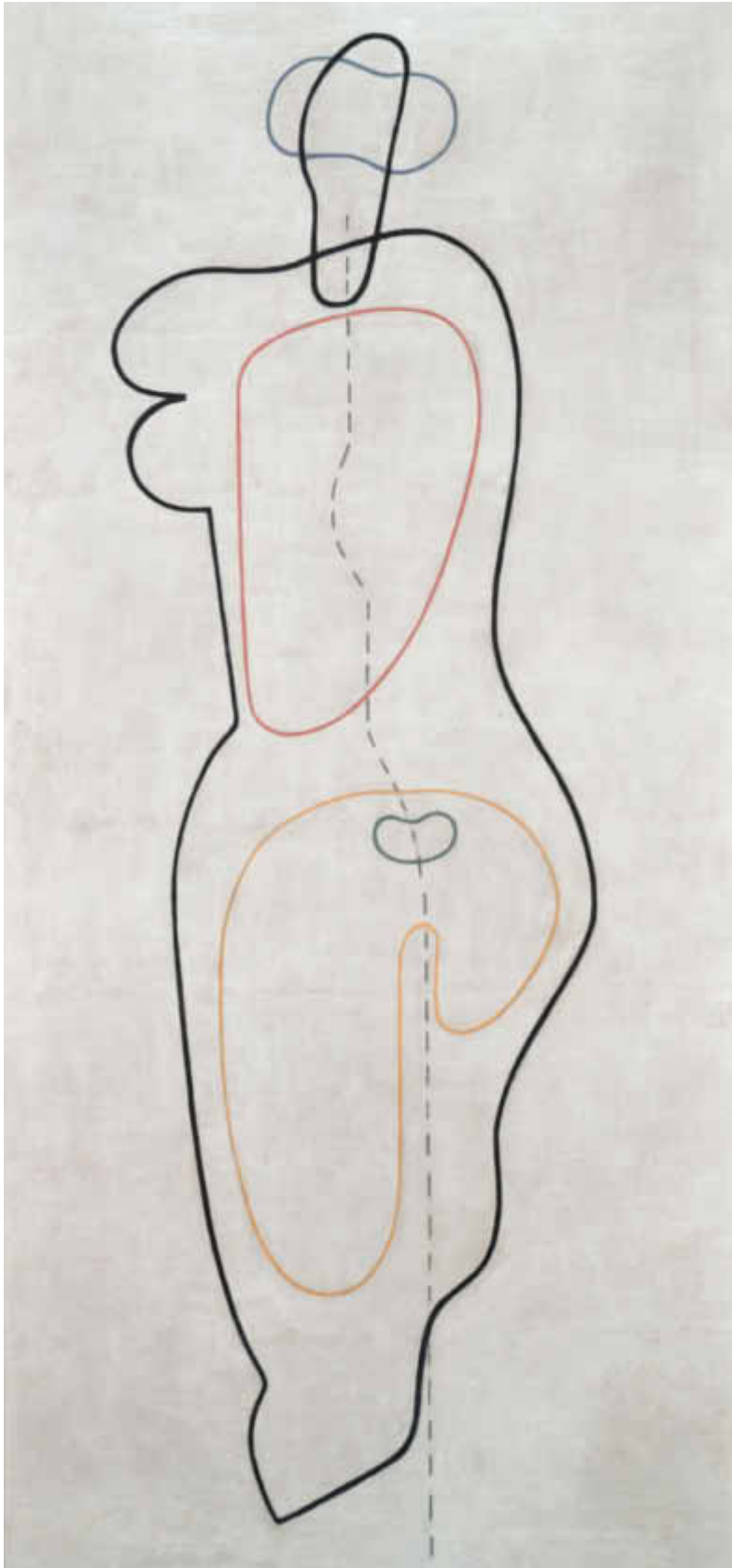
→ Studio Picture III , p. 42
→ Three Assembly Workers, p. 42



WOMAN ∞
1929, Original in plaster,
58 × 23 × 15 cm, Private collection
→ Woman, p. 45

FROM COPY TO SYMBOL
Städel Art Institute, 1931

CIRCLE AND SQUARE GROUP
Paris



WOMAN
FEMME
1930, Oil on canvas, 120 × 58 cm,
Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin

Michel Seuphor and the native Uruguayan painter, Joaquín Torres García founded this group in 1929, as a reaction by abstract artists to the well-organized Surrealists. It existed only until 1931. In 1930, however, it had put on the much acclaimed exhibition **Première Exposition Internationale du Groupe, Cercle et Carré** in the Paris *Galerie 23* in rue La Boétie. The exhibition is considered to be the first group exhibition of abstract art. In addition to Willi Baumeister, the other participating artists included Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Fernand Léger, Le Corbusier, Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Kurt Schwitters, Walter Gropius and Michel Seuphor. At this time, Baumeister began to correspond with Kandinsky.⁷²

At the same time, in April 1930,⁷³ he had his second solo exhibition in Paris at the *Galerie Editions Bonaparte*. Baumeister and his wife went there on the occasion of the two exhibitions. They met Mirjam Falschebner, who had married the painter Hans Stocker and lived with him in Paris. Stocker left his work studio at Baumeister's disposal during his stays. They also saw Le Corbusier, Léger, Vantongerloo, Lipchitz and the art historian Carl Einstein. Einstein had published a book about African sculpture⁷⁴. The *Art of Black Africa*, also inspired by his book published in 1915, had a great aesthetic influence on contemporary art. Baumeister owned a copy of the 1921 edition. During his time in Frankfurt, Baumeister began to engage more with pre-historic and non-European cultures, which was greatly significant for his future work. His interest was also driven by his core concern with timeless archetypal forms in art.

One year later, in 1931, the **Cercle et Carré** merged into the artist group **Abstraction—Création** founded by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner. The aim of the group, to which Baumeister also belonged, was to provide a forum for non-representational art. On this occasion, a few articles about Willi Baumeister, Josef Albers, László Moholy-Nagy and Kurt Schwitters were published in *Cahiers d'Art*.⁷⁵ Upon the request of Christian Zervos, Baumeister published an article on abstract painting in this journal the same year entitled: **Enquête sur l'art abstrait. Réponse de Willi Baumeister**. [Survey of abstract art. Reply by Willi Baumeister].⁷⁶

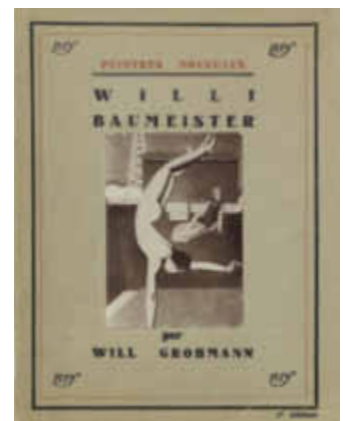
At this time, a monograph on Willi Baumeister by Will Grohmann appeared in the **Peintres Nouveaux** series from the Paris publisher Gallimard.⁷⁷ The front cover featured a reproduction of the **HANDSTAND** from the **SPORT PICTURES I** series. Besides Paul Klee, Baumeister was the only non-resident foreigner in Paris included in this series.⁷⁸ A volume about Baumeister in the *Sélection* series⁷⁹ was also published in French the same year in Antwerp.⁸⁰ It contained, amongst other things, contributions by Grohmann, Arp, Léger, Le Corbusier, Seuphor and Zervos. On the occasion of this publication, Le Corbusier expressed his esteem in a letter to Baumeister: "Dear Baumeister, I am happy to see the successful presentation of your work, which is put together here. Everything is extraordinarily expressive. Your drawings are very beautiful. The path you've chosen since 1920 is proper and interesting. The future surely belongs to you."⁸¹

GALERIE 23

First group exhibition for Abstract Art, Paris, 1930

GALERIE EDITIONS BONAPARTE

Second solo show, Paris, 1930

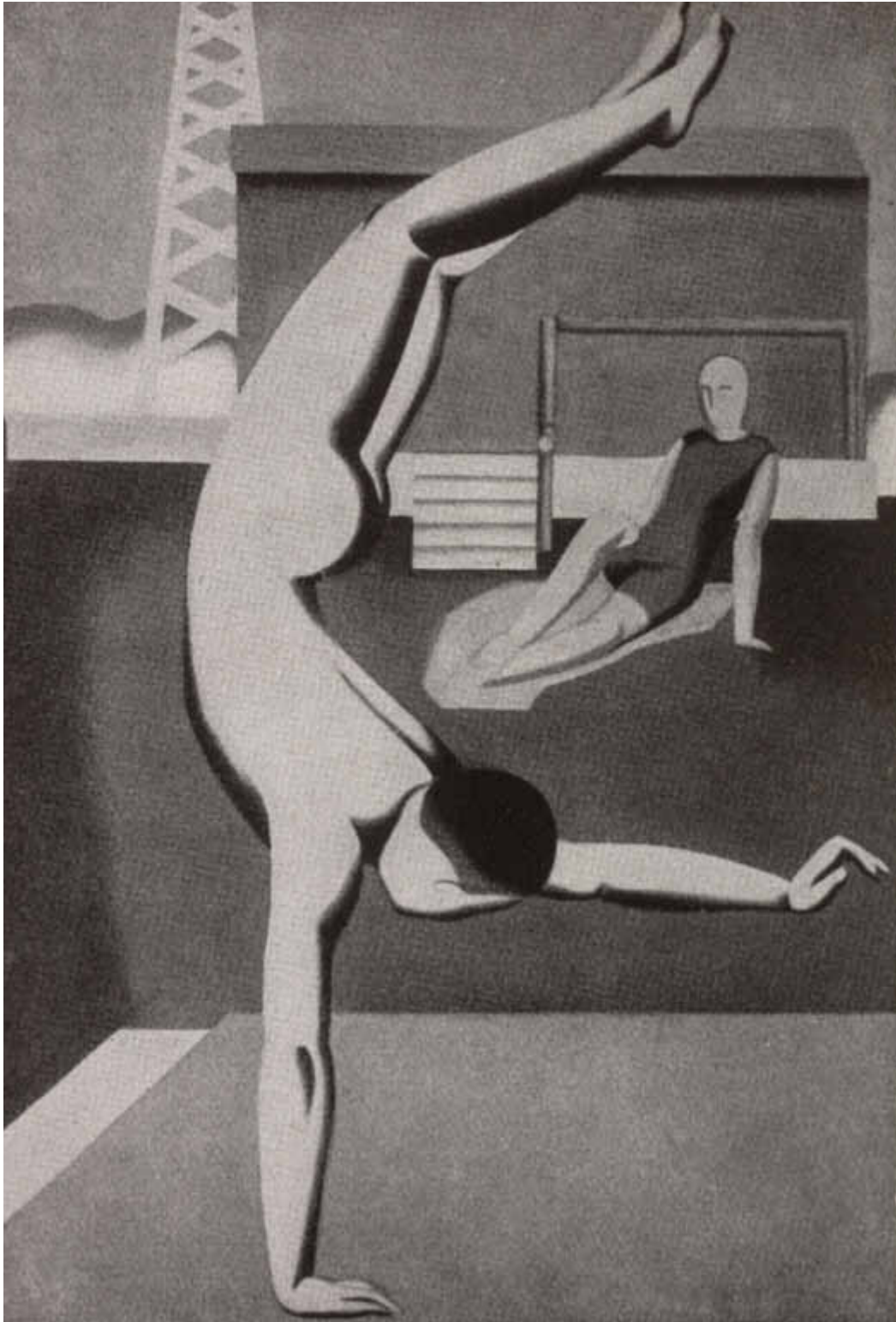


MONOGRAPH "NEW PAINTERS"

Gallimard, Paris, 1931
→ Handstand, p. 47

LE CORBUSIER TO BAUMEISTER

"extraordinarily expressive", 1931



HANDSTAND ∞

1925, Oil on canvas, 117 × 79 cm, formerly at the Folkwang Museum Essen, confiscated in 1937 as “degenerate” and missing ever since



TENNIS PLAYER WITH CIRCLE ∞
TENNISPIELER MIT KREIS
1934, Oil and sand on canvas,
65.4 × 54 cm, Private collection

Kandinsky thanked Baumeister for sending the volume from *Sélection* and wrote: “About a year ago, I was in Paris for a while and noticed there as well, that the French are very interested in you. And there are few German artists who are taken seriously there...”⁸²

In 1932 he accepted an invitation from Hélène de Mandrot, a wealthy patron of modern art and architecture, to come to the Château La Sarraz near Lausanne, Switzerland. In 1922, she had founded the *Maison des Artistes* and every summer gave artists and architects the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas. Among her guests were Michel Seuphor, László Moholy-Nagy, Max Ernst, Le Corbusier and many others.⁸³ In the summer of 1932, Baumeister met Moholy-Nagy and Seuphor there.

In 1932, he began the **SPORT PICTURES II** series, on which he continued to work until 1938. Here, the figures are more abstract and more emblematically designed than the **SPORT PICTURES I**.

From December 1932 through January 1933, the last avant-garde art exhibition to be held in Germany until 1945 took place. In *Galerie Paul Cassirer* in Berlin, in collaboration with the art dealer Alfred Flechtheim, an exhibition titled *Lebendige Deutsche Kunst* included works by Baumeister, Dix, Feininger, Grosz, Kandinsky, Kirchner, Klee, Schlemmer and others.

In March 1933, Karl Berthold, the new Director of the Städel Art School, summarily dismissed Baumeister from his teaching position. The press, sympathizing with the Nazis, had already printed slanderous articles about him.⁸⁴ Thus, in February 1933, he was declared a “November criminal in applied art” in a defamatory headline in the *Frankfurter Volksblatt* newspaper.⁸⁵ Other colleagues of his, such as former Academy Director Fritz Wichert and Max Beckmann, were also dismissed. Baumeister had to clear out of his workplace within a week.

A few years later, around 1946, Baumeister wrote: “Mysterious characters and foul language were written on the door to my office. They stole my key so I could no longer lock up. The perpetrators were not students, but a high-level executive mob. I received the dismissal notice on March 31, 1933. I was immediately forbidden to perform any official acts. The dismissal was not the result of a shortcoming, but instead the shortcoming—the defamation—was the result of the dismissal. I was given a seven-day deadline to remove everything from my office. Due to my economic circumstances (with no pension), I was forced to return to Stuttgart.”⁸⁶

SPORT PICTURES II

Beginning in 1932

→ Tennis Player with Circle, p. 48

→ Tennis, Reddish, p. 61

LIVING GERMAN ART

Last exhibition of the avant-garde in Germany, Berlin, 1932–1933

DISMISSAL FROM TEACHING POSITION

1933

/ APPLIED ARTS

When Baumeister returned from military service to Stuttgart in 1919, he also began working as a commercial artist and stage designer. Both fine and applied art were always equally important to Baumeister. He saw no hierarchy between the two fields. Artistic ability and creativity should also be applied in commercial art, thus enriching it. At the same time, he saw his work as a graphic designer, typographer and stage designer as a way to earn a living, and thereby to be independent of art movements and the art market.⁸⁷ He also wrote theoretical treatises on the development of typography and advertising graphics.

For the exhibition of the **Erste Herbstschau Neuer Kunst: Sturm, Berlin, Üecht Group, Stuttgart, Paul Klee**, which took place in the Kunstgebäude in Stuttgart in 1919, he designed the poster and the cover of the accompanying volume for the **Üecht Group**, which was published separately for the exhibition. It represented a radical break with the traditional font style and advertising culture in terms of interweaving of text and image.⁸⁸ From the mid-1920's onwards, in the field of poster design, Baumeister preferred simplification and more functional typography in order to improve readability. Baumeister executed a large number of typographical commissions that set the trends through their logical and effective arrangement of the typesetting. He received important assignments from industry, such as designs for the company Bosch and those for Deutsche Linoleum-Werke.⁸⁹

At the **Werkbund exhibition »Die Wohnung« [The Dwelling]** held in Stuttgart in 1927—the most important architectural show of the 1920's—the Weißenhof Estate was built under the direction of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe by internationally renowned architects, including Peter Behrens, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Hans Poelzig, Hans Scharoun, Mart Stam, and Bruno and Max Taut. In some of these houses, especially those of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, paintings by Baumeister complemented the architectural character as congenial accents. This exhibition was especially important for Baumeister, as he had designed all the printed matter such as the letterhead, adhesive stamps and envelopes, the layout of advertisements and the brochures. He was also responsible for the signage of the exhibition stands and the color schemes.

COMMERCIAL ART

FIRST AUTUMN SHOW OF NEW ART
Art Building, Stuttgart, 1919
→ Poster, p.51



ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE FIRM DEUTSCHE LINOLEUM-WERKE ∞
1927



EXHIBITION THE DWELLING ∞
5 pfennig stamp, Stuttgart, 1927



POSTER FOR THE FIRST AUTUMN SHOW OF NEW ART: STURM, BERLIN, ÜECHT GROUP STUTTGART, PAUL KLEE ∞

"1. HERBSTSCHAU NEUER KUNST: STURM, BERLIN, ÜECHT-GRUPPE, STUTTGART, PAUL KLEE"

Stuttgart, Kunstgebäude, October 26 to November 19, 1919, Lithograph, 49.8 × 79.7 cm

**GROSSER PREIS
VON DEUTSCHLAND**

**SIEGER
MIT
BOSCH
MAGNET**

Von den **8** Wagen der
Gesamtbewertung fahren
7 mit Bosch-Zündung

ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE FIRM
ROBERT BOSCH AG ∞
Stuttgart, 1926

3 GRADE DER AUTO-RÜSTUNG

GUT

BESSER

BOSCH



ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE
FIRM ROBERT BOSCH AG ∞
Stuttgart, 1926

Because of the success of his work for this Werkbund exhibition, he received a professorship at the Städelsche Kunstschule in Frankfurt am Main. From April 1928 until early 1933, he taught there as a professor, first of commercial art, typography and textile printing, later also teaching weaving and photography.⁹⁰ One of his students became a famous photographer, Marta Hoepffner.

In addition, Baumeister wrote articles and gave lectures on redefining aesthetic standards, such as the 1926 paper *New Typography* in the journal *Die Form*, as well as *Space and Color*, *Modern Architecture* and *Stage Design*.⁹¹ In December 1927, Baumeister became a founding member of an association of advertising professionals, the *ring neue werbegestalter*, of which Kurt Schwitters was the chairman.⁹² Its other members included Cesar Domela, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, Jan Tschichold and László Moholy-Nagy.⁹³

In Frankfurt, in addition to his teaching career, he continued to work in the field of commercial art and typography. He designed the cover and typeface for the journal *Das Neue Frankfurt*, founded by Ernst May⁹⁴; later it was renamed *die neue stadt (the new city)* and banned in 1933. Here, Willi Baumeister used a combination of photographs, text and colored areas, which he partially constructed like a collage. The individual elements contrasted with each other in color and style. In 1932, he designed the poster for the Werkbund exhibition “Wohnbedarf” in Stuttgart.

His work in the fine and applied arts, which he considered to be equals of one another, linked him to the ideas of the Bauhaus. In 1929, the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer, who directed the Bauhaus in Dessau as the successor to Walter Gropius, offered him a teaching position there. As seen in Meyer's letters, he also held Baumeister in high esteem as a person. Baumeister also felt warmly disposed toward him, but declined due to his commitments in Frankfurt and because he feared he would have too little time for his own artistic work there.⁹⁵

Willi Baumeister was also interested in the theater. His work as a stage and costume designer is divided into two periods due to political circumstances in the first half of the 20th century; the first was during the Weimar Republic; the second after the end of the Nazi dictatorship.

From 1919 to 1933, Baumeister designed the sets for eight plays and one opera—for two productions, he also designed the costumes. His aim was to create a stage design that only suggested an outline, thereby stimulating the viewers to use their own imaginations. Even the coloring and stage design should be independent and on equal footing with word, gesture and sound. This concept was a radical break from the illusionist theater scenery of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

PROFESSOR OF COMMERCIAL ART, TYPOGRAPHY AND TEXTILE PRINTING

Städel Art Institute, Frankfurt am Main, 1928

ARTICLES AND LECTURES

The Form, 1926–1927

CIRCLE OF NEW ADVERTISING DESIGNERS

1927

WERKBUND EXHIBITION RESIDENTIAL NECESSITIES

1932

→ Poster, p. 54

INVITATION TO TEACH AT THE BAUHAUS IN DESSAU

1929

WORK IN THE THEATER



POSTER FOR THE WERKBUND EXHIBITION
RESIDENTIAL NECESSITIES ∞
WERKBUND-AUSSTELLUNG "WOHNBEDARF"
Offset print, 59.7 × 41.8 cm, 1932

He created his first three stage designs for the privately owned *Deutsches Theater* in Stuttgart.⁹⁶ In 1919, he designed the stage model for the play *Gas* by the writer Georg Kaiser, who shortly thereafter became the most popular playwright of the Weimar Republic. As can still be seen in the existing design, it was built using clear, simple forms.

The following year he created the scenes for Ernst Toller's *Die Wandlung*. The play was written during World War I. The main character was a young, rebellious idealist who, through cathartic experiences, became a harbinger of a new social order. Immediately after World War I, Toller became famous as a representative of Expressionist literature. His plays were performed frequently in the 1920's. Baumeister's stage sets are characterized by minimalism. The background is kept black. In front of this backdrop, different set pieces are placed, each in geometric, flat forms of differing colors. They create the foundation for soberly designed motifs. Here, color is very important as a means of reflecting emotions and triggering associations.⁹⁷ In the same year, he designed sets in a similarly minimalist style for the play *Freiheit* by Herbert Kranz. However, in this case, acutely angled geometric shapes framed the stage.

At the Landestheater in Stuttgart in 1926, he designed the sets and costumes for Georg Friedrich Handel's *Ariodante*. The opera was being performed again for the first time after 191 years.⁹⁸ As before, the stage set consisted of movable pieces of scenery. In particular, a low, rounded staircase and a round arch with white square-shaped capitals suggested the architecture.

In 1927, the play *Das Klagenlied* [The Lament] by the Stuttgart poet Hans Gustav Elsas premiered in the Stuttgart Landestheater. The tragedy is based on ancient myths and was staged as a Greek drama with a chorus.⁹⁹ Baumeister designed both the sets and the costumes for this production. Once again, he worked with movable pieces of scenery, which only suggested the architecture in reduced forms. As costumes, the actors wore long, loose robes in keeping with the piece's ancient associations.

THE TRANSFORMATION

Ernst Toller

FREEDOM

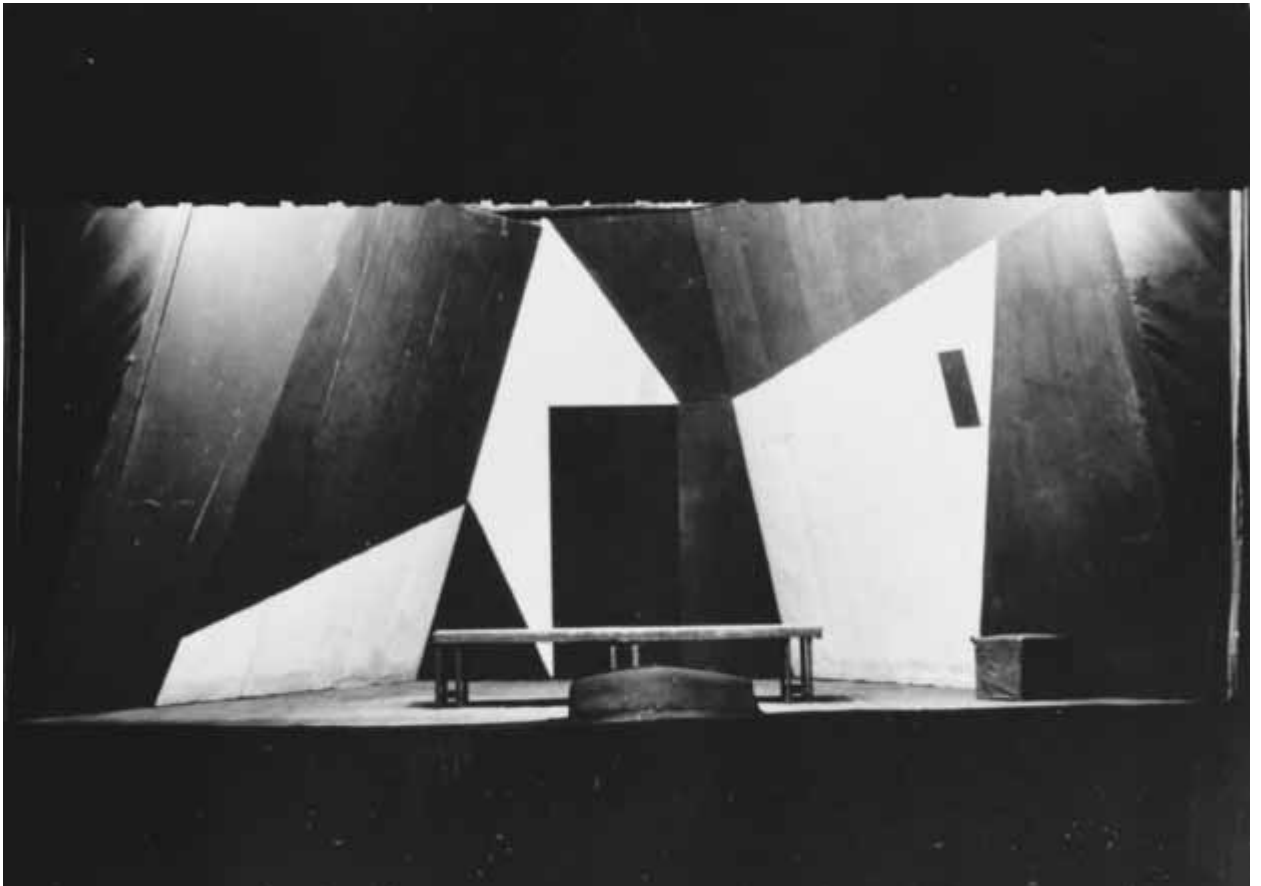
Herbert Kranz

→ Stage scenery photo, p. 56



ARIODANTE ∞

Draft of the stage design, Regional Theater in Stuttgart, 1926, Location unknown



FREEDOM ∞
FREIHEIT

by Herbert Kranz, stage scenery photo,
Deutsches Theater Stuttgart, 1920

**“FROM THIS TIME
FORWARD, MODERN PAINTERS
WERE CONSIDERED ENEMIES
OF THE STATE.”¹⁰⁰**

Baumeister on the period of internal emigration

1933–1945

INTERNAL EMIGRATION

In early April 1933, Willi and Margrit Baumeister returned to Stuttgart from Frankfurt with their four-year-old daughter Krista. In the same month, their second daughter, Felicitas, was born. During the period of the Nazi dictatorship in Germany, Baumeister was banned from exhibiting and working. Officially, the painting and exhibiting prohibition first went into force in 1941 by order of the Third Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, but the de facto repression of avant-garde artists and the arts had been in place since 1933. During this time he could only work on his art in secret and was only able to show his work abroad under difficult conditions. He now had to earn his living from commercial art.

The mood of those years comes through in letters from Baumeister to friends and in those from friends to him. In April 1933, Kandinsky, who at that time did not realize the danger of Nazism in its far-reaching consequences and still believed in the possibility of clearing up “misunderstandings” between politics and modern art, wrote to him from Berlin: “In my opinion, artists should join the *Kampfbund*—especially those who might be able to work there calmly and rationally. A great number of our Bauhaus youth want to do it and it can only be welcomed. ...”¹⁰¹

However, in December of the same year, Kandinsky moved to Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris. In 1935, Schlemmer wrote to Baumeister: “The emigrant who leaves this country in protest is the only consistent one. I can’t resolve to do it, not least because of my family...”¹⁰² Baumeister wrote to him: “It is becoming increasingly difficult to hold one’s head high if one has any ideals. I read Eckermann, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer as an antidote.”¹⁰³

In 1933, upon the initiative of the British artist Edward Wadsworth, Baumeister participated in the opening exhibition of the Mayor Gallery in London. In his diary he wrote: “Wadsworth writes about two pictures for the opening exhibition of his new gallery in London: Mayor Gallery.”¹⁰⁴ The exhibition included works by contemporary English, French and German artists; Baumeister was represented with two of his works. Edward Wadsworth visited him a while later in Stuttgart. That same year, Baumeister wrote a tribute to Wassily Kandinsky, which, along with contributions by Diego Rivera, Michel Seuphor and Christian Zervos, appeared in a publication on Kandinsky, from the *Sélection* series in Antwerp.¹⁰⁵

PAINTING AND EXHIBITION PROHIBITION

By order of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, 1941

MAYOR GALLERY

London, 1933

HOMMAGE TO KANDINSKY

Sélection, 1933

Baumeister continued to work on the **SPORT PICTURES II** series from 1932 until 1938.

He began his body of work **RUNNER, DIVER** and **VALLTORTA SAND PICTURES** in 1933 and continued work on it until 1935. In his diary he wrote: “Increasingly, I’d like to depart from the well-balanced composition of the machine and wall pictures in favor of direct expression through the hieroglyph (human), in the manner of the runner.”¹⁰⁶ The series was inspired by the stone-age rock paintings of the Sahara and the Valltorta Gorge in eastern Spain. These depict humans in motion in more abstract form. As in his **SPORT PICTURES**, the figure is relevant as an expression of movement. The oil paint of the paintings in this series is partly mixed with sand, as in the **WALL PICTURES**, which connects them to the roughness of the rock faces in stone-age paintings. For the first time in his work, black is dominant; he would pick up this style again in his non-representational works of the 1950’s. Baumeister’s interest in archaic and non-European cultures had been evident since his time in Frankfurt. There he attended the lectures of the archaeologist and prehistorian Hans Mühlestein. He quickly acquired an extensive library of archaeological and ethnological literature. He also made repeated excursions to Stone Age sites in the Swabian Alps. Supported by a friend, the architect Heinz Rasch, he built up a collection of small artifacts,¹⁰⁷ which consisted of originals and replicas. He obtained, for example, casts of ancient Egyptian relief panels and archaic and Cycladic statuettes from the Staatliche Museen (National Museums) in Berlin. In addition, he expanded his collection by buying duplicates of African and Oceanic sculptures from the Linden-Museum, an ethnological museum in Stuttgart.

From this time on, the confrontation with the archaic and the exotic was strongly influential for some of his bodies of work and became a fundamental component of his conception of art. Baumeister’s statements, like this one from 1933, “Modern abstract art is archaic,”¹⁰⁸ bear witness to this fact.

In 1933 he began work on the **LINE FIGURES** series, depicting anthropomorphic figures created with thin lines.

→ Runner Valltorta, p.60

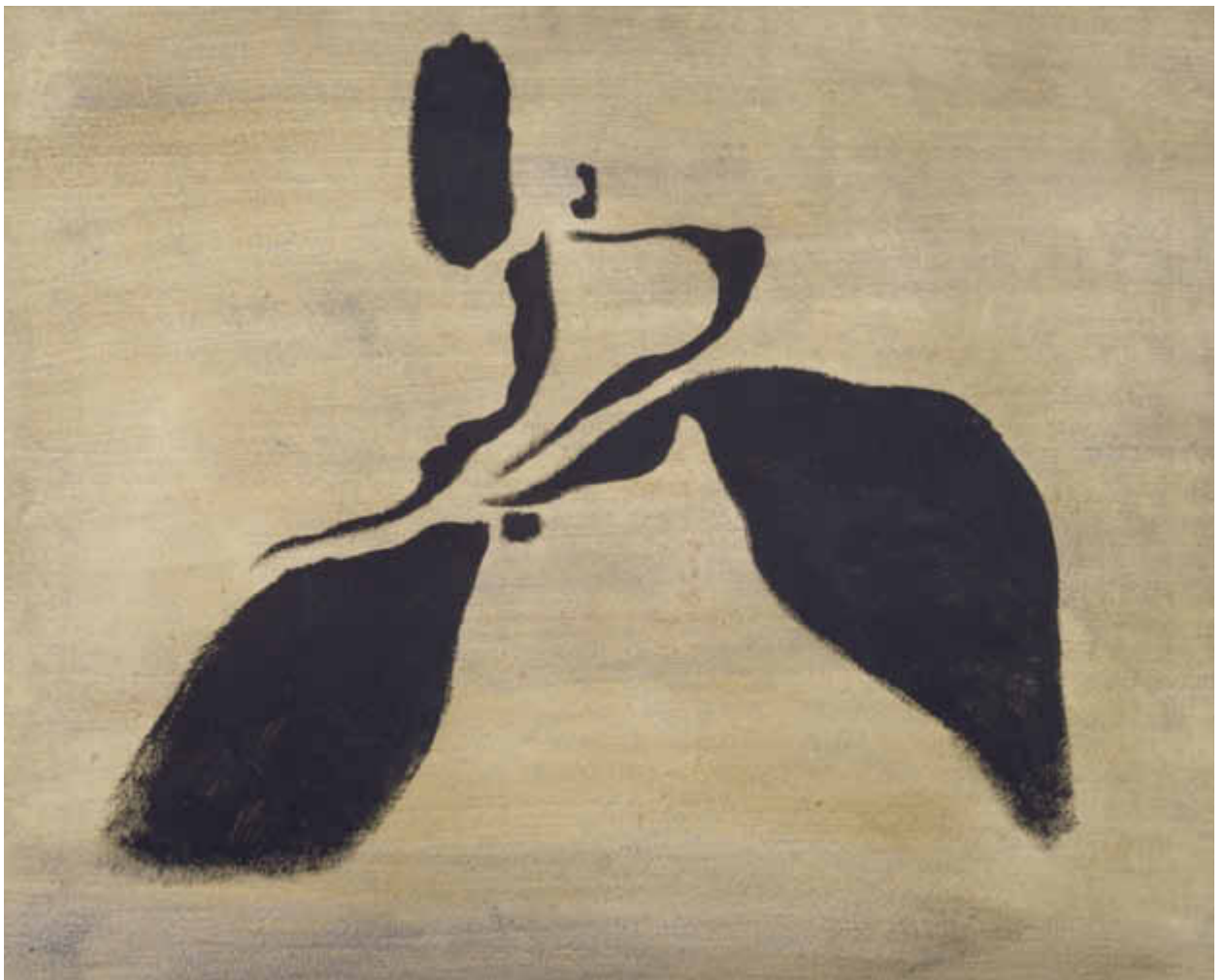
→ Wall Picture with Metals, p.28

“MODERN ABSTRACT ART IS
ARCHAIC”
1933

→ Line Figure on Brown, p.62

“THE EMIGRANT ... IS THE ONLY
CONSISTENT ONE...”

Schlemmer to Baumeister, 1935



RUNNER VALLTORTA ∞
LÄUFER VALLTORTA
1934–35, Oil on canvas, 65 × 81 cm,
Private collection



TENNIS, REDDISH ∞
TENNIS RÖTLICH
1935, Oil and sand on canvas,
100 × 80 cm, Private collection



TORI ∞
1938, Oil on canvas, 65×54 cm,
Private collection



LINE FIGURE ON BROWN ∞
LINIENFIGUR AUF BRAUN
1935, Offset lithograph, 40.5×32.3 cm

Baumeister participated in the 1934 exhibition **Neue deutsche Malerei** [New German Painting] in Zurich, where works by Hölzel, Schlemmer, Jawlensky, Campendonck, Kirchner, Heckel and Marc were also shown.¹⁰⁹

In the same year, he recorded a visit by Hilla Rebay in his diary. She herself was an artist, as well as an advisor to Solomon R. Guggenheim on purchases for his art collection. The English art critic Herbert Read had asked her to visit Baumeister. Later, after the fall of the Nazi regime, she promoted the group of non-representational painters, **ZEN 49**, co-founded by Baumeister. In the fall of 1934, the small monograph *Willi Baumeister*, written by the Spanish painter and art critic Eduardo Westerdahl, was published in the *Gaceta de Arte* Ediciones on Tenerife. Later, he wrote additional essays, for which Baumeister provided information to him by letter.¹¹⁰ Westerdahl also worked with André Breton, Paul Éluard, Le Corbusier, Herbert Read, Gertrude Stein, and Tristan Zara and in 1953, he founded a museum of contemporary art in Puerto de la Cruz on Tenerife.

Other exhibitions abroad offered Baumeister the opportunity to show his work to the public and to maintain contact with artists abroad until the outbreak of World War II. In 1935, he had a solo exhibition at the only important avant-garde gallery at this time in Italy, the *Galleria Il Milione* in Milan. He traveled there with his wife and met the Italian painter Carlo Carrà. The catalog contained, among other things, articles by Le Corbusier, Wassily Kandinsky and Herbert Read.¹¹¹ The show was a remarkable success and was later shown in Rome at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia. For the exhibition in Rome, Carrà wrote the catalog text and an article for the newspaper *L'Ambrosiano*.¹¹²

In 1936 Baumeister began work on the series **MASKS, PICTURESQUE FIGURES** and **FORMS**. These series show amorphous forms consisting of surfaces and thin lines.

From 1937 to 1938 he created the non-representational **IDEOGRAMS AND SIGNS** series, which consist of tectonic, horizontally floating forms. This series is inspired by East Asian art. Some of the works bear the title **TORI**, which is a linguistic nod to the "torij", Japanese entrance gates to gardens and temples.

From January to February 1937, Baumeister took part in the **Constructivist exhibition** in Basel, which included works by Arp, Lissitzky, Van Doesburg and Mondrian, among others. Baumeister, Klee and Kandinsky exhibited three pictures each in a joint space.¹¹³ The Mondrian's works impressed Baumeister the most.¹¹⁴ In July of the same year, he again accepted an invitation by Hélène de Mandrot to the Château La Sarraz near Lausanne. His friend Oskar Schlemmer and Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart were also among the guests.¹¹⁵

MONOGRAPH ON WILLI BAUMEISTER

by Eduardo Westerdahl, Tenerife, 1934

GALLERIA IL MILIONE

Milan, 1935

CASA D'ARTE BRAGAGLIA

Rome, 1935

IDEOGRAMS AND SIGNS

1937–1938

→ *Tori*, p. 62



FIGURES ON YELLOW BACKGROUND ∞
FIGUREN AUF GELBEM GRUND
1937. Oil on canvas, 130.5×97.5 cm,
Private collection

In the same year, the exhibition **Origines et Développement de L'Art International Indépendant** was held in the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris, organized by Zervos and Kandinsky.¹¹⁶

The show was presented to make a programmatic statement opposing to the nationalistic spirit of the concurrent Paris World Exhibition. There, Baumeister exhibited his newly created painting **FIGURES ON YELLOW BACKGROUND**.¹¹⁷ Because of the difficulties expected from the Nazi regime, he only dared to send a single, although larger, picture. The painting was exhibited in a hall together with works by Arp, Delaunay, Max Ernst, Kandinsky, Miró, Mondrian, Ozenfant and Tanguy.¹¹⁸ In this exhibition, almost all the major names in the contemporary avant-garde were represented, hence Braque, Chagall, Gris, Klee, Léger, Matisse and Picasso.¹¹⁹ 5,000 visitors attended the exhibition; far more than any other show of avant-garde art had ever attracted.¹²⁰ His request that the picture should remain in Paris after the exhibition was inadvertently not honored. It was sent back and Baumeister had to declare it as a theater decoration to the German customs authorities to have it returned to him.¹²¹

At this time, 51 works by Willi Baumeister were removed from German museums and partly destroyed as part of the Nazi confiscation of pictures. The Nazi propaganda authorities organized the exhibition **Entartete Kunst** in the Munich Hofgartenarkaden, which opened on July 19, 1937 and was then also shown in Berlin, Leipzig, Düsseldorf and Dortmund. Four paintings and one lithograph by Baumeister were exhibited.¹²² Subsequently, the artworks were either sold abroad for foreign currencies or destroyed. All of the works exhibited there by Baumeister have since been lost. Contrary to the intentions of the organizers, this show offered unwavering enthusiasts of avant-garde art yet another opportunity to see original modern works. Baumeister himself visited the exhibition in Munich twice.

As a response to this exhibition, Herbert Read curated the exhibition **Twentieth Century German Art** in London in 1938; Baumeister was represented with four paintings. Read had already approached Baumeister in a letter in October 1937. The exhibition was held in the *New Burlington Galleries* under the patronage of many international personalities, including the art historian Kenneth Clark, the artists Le Corbusier, James Ensor, Aristide Maillol, Pablo Picasso, the movie director Jean Renoir and the writer Virginia Woolf. Many favorable articles on the exhibition appeared in *The Times* (London). The companion book to the exhibition, **Modern German Art** by Peter Thoene (pseudonym of Oto-Bihalji Merin), was published with an introduction by Herbert Read.

In August 1937 and June 1938, Baumeister managed to store some of his paintings, gouaches and drawings at the Kunsthalle in Basel to protect them from being seized by the Nazi regime.¹²³ The works could only be brought back to Stuttgart in 1954, after customs issues were cleared up.¹²⁴

Baumeister's library contained numerous editions of Goethe's works. His wife Margrit, a great connoisseur of Goethe's work, was a founding member of the Stuttgart Goethe Society.¹²⁵

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT ART

Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1937
with 5,000 visitors

→ Figures on Yellow Background, p. 64

DEGENERATE ART EXHIBITION

court garden arcades in Munich, Berlin,
Leipzig, Düsseldorf and Dortmund,
1937–1939

NEW BURLINGTON GALLERIES

London, 1938

In 1938, he began his important **EIDOS PICTURES** series, on which he continued to work until 1942. Eidos, Greek for original form, is based on Goethe's notion of primordial plants, their growth and metamorphoses, which are turned here into archetypes. A weightless creature, like an amoeba, floats above organic structures that are quite diverse and colorful and suggest pristine, eternal growth. The painting **DYING SWAN** from 1940 is a final version of the **EIDOS** series. He began working on the body of work **LINES AND GLAZES** in 1938 and continued until 1949. Here the representations are formed of fine lines on a beige background, which are in part optically raised in a relief-like manner. Complementary fields of different colors have also been inserted.

→ Eidos III, p.67
→ Dying Swan, p.68

In January 1939, on his 50th birthday, Baumeister had his last solo exhibition before the end of the Nazi regime, in the *Galerie Jeanne Bucher* in Paris. It was entitled **Toiles et Aquarelles**. Baumeister traveled to Paris on this occasion and celebrated his birthday at the legendary Brasserie Lipp on the Boulevard Saint Germain. Baumeister later wrote: "In January 1939, the Bucher Gallery in Paris organized an exhibition, the dangers of which they were probably not entirely aware. The exhibition opened on my 50th birthday; some of the pictures were on cardboard, brought in a suitcase, and there was previously delivered inventory. ... I could personally answer the questions about the risks of my recklessness, including those posed by Le Corbusier, who has been a close friend of mine for years."¹²⁶ Because repression of the artist was feared, the press was asked not to write about the exhibition.¹²⁷ No catalog was published, likely for the same reason. Nevertheless, the exhibition attracted numerous prominent visitors, especially avant-garde artists. Joan Miró, Le Corbusier, Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp, as well as Wassily and Nina Kandinsky, came to the vernissage.¹²⁸ Max Ernst and Georges Braque spoke favorably about the exhibited works. Peggy Guggenheim, who was living in London at that time, also visited the exhibition, as Baumeister noted in his diary.¹²⁹ Other entries in the visitors book included Hans Bellmer, Serge Polliakoff, Nicolas de Staël, Gertrude Stein and Yves Tanguy. Baumeister also visited Kandinsky at home, whom he then saw for the last time, as Kandinsky died in 1944. He met with Miró again in his studio.¹³⁰

PAINTINGS AND WATERCOLORS
"In January 1939, the Bucher Gallery in Paris held an exhibition, the dangers of which they were probably not entirely aware."

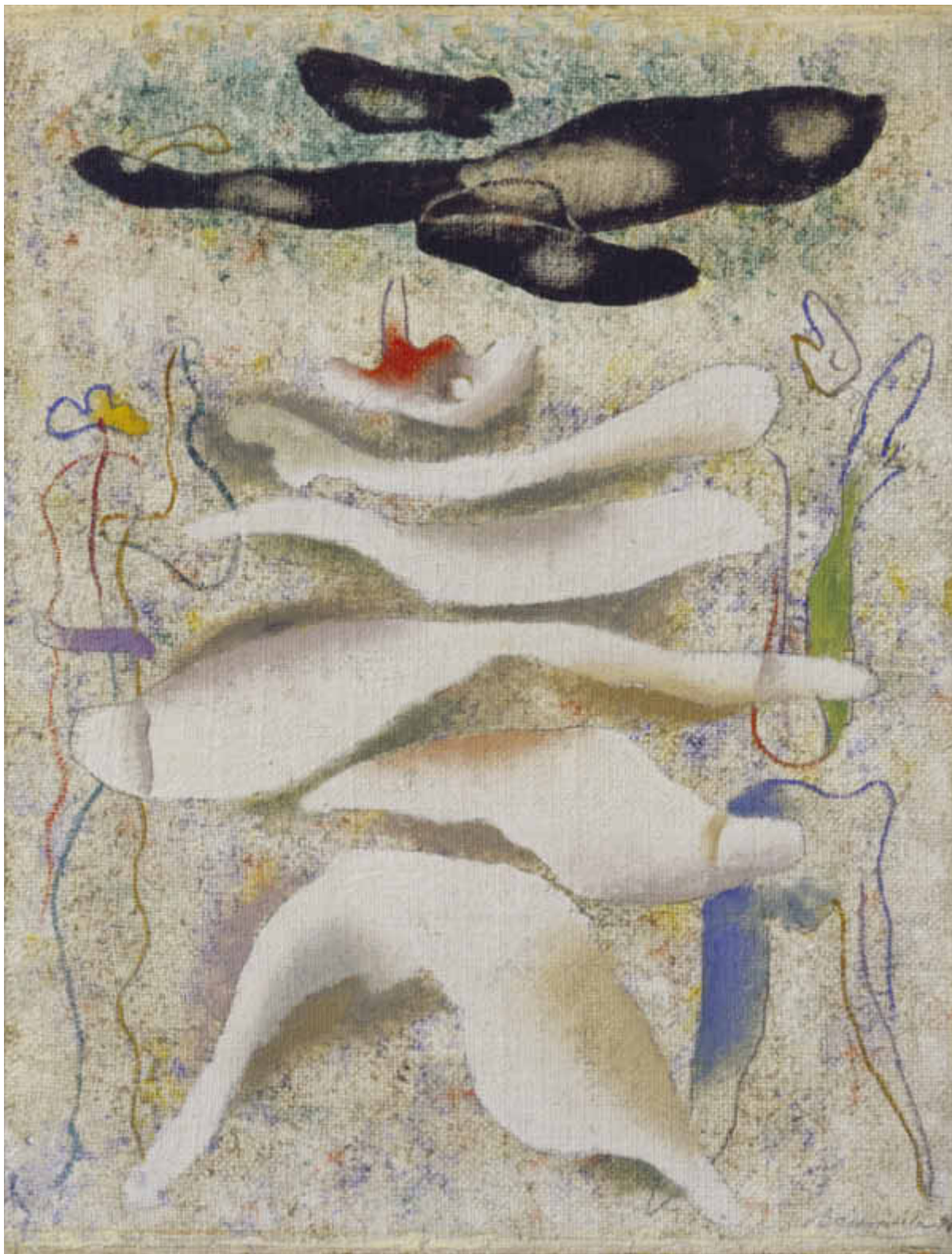
In the same year, 1939, despite the tense political situation, Baumeister nevertheless participated in the **Réalités Nouvelles, 2ème Salon** exhibition of non-representational art in the *Galerie Charpentier* in Paris.¹³¹ The exhibition was held from June through July, a few weeks before the outbreak of World War II.

NEW REALITIES, 2ND SALON
Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1939

Up until the beginning of the war, even under difficult conditions, Baumeister never severed the connection to the Parisian art scene. Even during the occupation of Paris by the German army, Baumeister exchanged signs of life indirectly through friends, in particular with his Parisian art dealer Jeanne Bucher, Le Corbusier, Christian Zervos and others.¹³²



EIDOS III ∞
1939, Oil on canvas, 100 × 81.5 cm,
Stiftung Domnick des Landes Baden-
Württemberg, Nürtingen



DYING SWAN ∞
STERBENDER SCHWAN
1940, Oil on canvas, 43 × 33.5 cm,
Private collection



DEDICATED TO JACQUES CALLOT ∞
JACQUES CALLOT GEWIDMET
1941, Oil and varnish on thin drawing
cardboard, 30 × 42 cm, Private collection



TEMPLE WALL ∞
TEMPELWAND
1941, Oil and varnish on hardboard,
81 × 65 cm, Private collection

Since Baumeister was forced to earn his living solely with commercial art during the Nazi dictatorship, in 1937 his friend, the architect Heinz Rasch, found him a job at the Wuppertal Lackfabrik (varnish factory) of Dr. Kurt Herberts & Co.

Between 1937 and 1944, Herberts, whose company was classified as essential to the war effort, commissioned leading artists who were banished from public life, including Baumeister and Schlemmer, with artistic and creative designs, as well as scientific research on the historical development of color. This work was not only a source of income, but offered him the necessary camouflage of doing essential work during wartime. Baumeister later wrote: "I could prove that I was working for an industry at any time. The travel back and forth made me less likely to be arrested, because I was also politically charged as being an active anti-militarist. ... Moreover, my wife was a member of the Pacifist League for Peace and Freedom."¹³³

Until 1943, when the circumstances of war made it impossible, Baumeister shuttled back and forth between Wuppertal and Stuttgart, and later Urach, a place on the edge of the Swabian Alps. In Kurt Herberts' company, he investigated ancient and modern painting techniques in practical experiments, such as the techniques of the Pompeian and Byzantine frescos, encaustic painting and the problem of using oil paint on plaster.¹³⁴ Baumeister's particular interest, however, was the process used in Paleolithic cave painting. To explore this, he himself experimented with animal blood that he got from a butcher.¹³⁵ In particular, Baumeister's discovery that the Paleolithic cave paintings of Altamira and other places were created without a binder and had been preserved by sintering, was a new scientific discovery. It was only in 1950 that he finally had the opportunity to present these research results at a conference in Spain. Baumeister had already begun to tackle prehistoric art while still in Frankfurt in 1931. His research was published under the name of Kurt Herberts in four volumes.¹³⁶ In addition, he designed panels for exhibitions and lacquer boxes for advertising purposes and designed a series of murals for the staircase of the varnish factory's laboratory building. Willi Baumeister also worked on a picture series of portraits of Goethe, Leonardo da Vinci and Paracelsus.¹³⁷

During World War II, Baumeister worked tirelessly and consistently on his artistic oeuvre, despite the working and exhibition ban. On January 1, 1941, he wrote in his diary: "I do not pursue painting, painting pursues me, and does so ceaselessly, so that I remain in its grasp even through the troubled waves of politics and war. So it is pointless to say that it could not go on." However, it was getting harder and harder to get canvas and oil paint, so he often painted on cardboard. It was during this period that he began his lifelong interest in Zen Buddhism.¹³⁸

WUPPERTAL VARNISH FACTORY DR. KURT HERBERTS & CO.

"I could prove that I was working for an industry at any time."

DIARY ENTRY in January 1941

“I DO NOT PURSUE PAINTING, PAINTING PURSUES ME...”

Baumeister on the period of his exhibition and work ban, 1941

In 1942, Baumeister began the body of work **LINE WALLS, SCRATCH LINES, SCULPTURAL LINES**, on which he worked until 1951. It is characterized by parallel lines, lines encircling fields of color and lines with an optical sculptural character. In the same year, several series emerged in which Baumeister dealt with non-European art. Here, Baumeister often worked with putty and admixtures of sand in addition to oil paint, which again formed relief-like structures.

He worked on the **AFRICAN** series until 1955. In African Art, Baumeister rediscovered the elementary forms of artistic expression. He translated them into his own visual language of pictograms, in which he mostly set black and bright colors against a beige-brown background. His **FIGURE WALLS** were inspired by pre-Columbian art and he continued to work on these until 1950. The **HARP** and **HARP FRIEZES** series was inspired by the harps excavated by the British archaeologist Leonard Woolley in the Royal Cemetery of Ur in southern Iraq in the 1920's, which dated from the 3rd millennium BC. Baumeister had been acquainted with Woolley's publications since the 1930's and had two of his books in his library. The first paintings of the **GILGAMESH SERIES** also date from the year 1942.

He later wrote about one of the leitmotifs of his conception of art, the comprehensive and universal essence of all art: “We know depictions of the human figure in the rock paintings and engravings of the Stone Age and the Bronze Age, the Babylonian cylinder seals, the Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Cycladic idols and archaic totem poles and cult figures of indigenous peoples. However, these archaeological models can only be a key, to descending deeper into a primal, lost ‘Wesensschau’ (vision of intrinsic nature). One has to read the Old Testament, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the wisdom of the East and the large Corroboree of the Australian Aborigines—and Schiller and Goethe, repeatedly. The painter must find the shortest, simplest way of expressing the human essence. Much is already predetermined in fairy tale characters ...”¹³⁹

In 1943 Baumeister moved to Urach due to the air raids on Wuppertal and Stuttgart. There, the family first moved into rooms in an inn, where they lived in very cramped quarters; later they rented private rooms.



HECTOR'S FAREWELL ∞
HEKTORS ABSCHIED

1944, Oil with synthetic resin and putty on hardboard, 54 × 65 cm, Private collection

- Africa I, p. 72
- Uršanabi on Green, p. 72
- Gilgamesh and Enkidu, p. 73
- Gilgamesh and Ishtar, p. 73
- Harps, p. 74

ON THE UNIVERSAL ESSENCE OF ALL ART

“[To] find the shortest, simplest way of expressing the human essence.”



AFRIKA I ∞
AFRIKA I
1942, Oil with synthetic resin
and putty on cardboard, 35.5 × 46 cm,
Private collection



URŠANABI ON GREEN ∞
UR-SCHANABI AUF GRÜN
1944, Oil with synthetic resin, tempera
and putty on hardboard, 65 × 81 cm,
Private collection



GILGAMESH AND ENKIDU ∞
GILGAMESCH UND ENKIDU
1942, Oil with synthetic resin
and putty on hardboard, 46 × 65 cm,
Private collection

GILGAMESH AND ISHTAR ∞
GILGAMESCH UND ISCHTAR
(Relief image) 1947, Oil with
synthetic resin and putty on hardboard,
72 × 100 cm, Private collection, on
loan to the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart





HARPS ∞
HARFEN
1945, Oil with synthetic resin on cardboard, 54×73 cm, Private collection



MAYA WALL ∞
MAYA-MAUER
1946, Oil with synthetic resin and putty on cardboard, 65×80.7 cm, Stiftung
Domnick des Landes Baden-Württemberg,
Nürtingen

Baumeister had to come to terms with even more difficult working conditions. In the course of this year, Oskar Schlemmer died in Baden-Baden. The death of his friend was a great personal loss for Baumeister. In his diary of April 27, 1943, he noted: "Death of Oskar Schlemmer. Cheerful trip to Holland — London — Paris. At the start of World War I we drifted apart and only spoke again briefly in 1916, which was followed by continuous correspondence. My girlfriend Paula Falschebner, later Mirjam Stocker, kept the circle of friends together. She worked in the office of the company *'Hix Waschpulver'* in Kronenstrasse 2 and the offices still had a few connecting rooms and a large kitchen on the same floor, in which she and her colleague Helene Tutein (later called Tut) from Mannheim lived. Oskar returned home from the war sooner than I did. In the immediate period after the war, we and our friends would populate this apartment nightly as a meeting place while Miriam cooked. (Helene Tutein became Oskar's wife) With unbridled exuberance, we would have 'feasts', sometimes in the apartment, sometimes in our two studios in the Unteren Anlagen (Peterailestraße). Primitive costumes and decorations were in constant use. ... Later, in 1920/21, the brothers Oskar and Carl moved to Cannstatt, (Oskar's marriage). There, the costumes for the ballet were made by the brother Carl Schlemmer (called Caska), who played an outstanding part in this work. Shortly thereafter Oskar was appointed to the Bauhaus in Weimar. The friendship was continued by mail."¹⁴⁰

However, new things also marked this year. Due to a lack of material for oil painting, Baumeister now focused on graphic art. Significant works were developed, such as the illustrations for the **EPIC OF GILGAMESH**.¹⁴¹ The previous year, he had already entitled a painting **GILGAMESH AND ENKIDU**.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest myth of mankind preserved in writing, originated in Mesopotamia. The central motif is the fate of the king of the city of Uruk, Gilgamesh, and his friend Enkidu. As a literary model, Baumeister used the translation by Georg E. Burckhardt, published in 1916 by the Insel-Verlag, Leipzig. In addition to Woolley's publications, Baumeister owned other books on the ancient art of the Near East. He also collected artifacts from the ancient Near East, such as statuettes, cuneiform tablets and cylinder seals. Cylinder seals are small, drum-shaped objects, mostly of stone, each of which is individually designed with carvings. On some, in addition to pictorial representations, there are also inscriptions in ancient Near Eastern cuneiform. The seals were rolled onto still moist clay tablets, used as documents at that time. These cylinder seal impressions served Baumeister as inspiration to create his own works relating, in particular, to themes of ancient Near East culture, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Hebrew Bible. The dimly indicated forms and the composition of the seal impressions are recognizable in Baumeister's works. He thereby found inspiration for a new, very personal visual language. He then applied this language to themes not related to the ancient Near East. In the illustrational drawings, he used charcoal or chalk. He gave the forms a lighter edge by rubbing out the contours so that a relief-like character was created by the optical elevation.

DIARY ENTRY ON THE DEATH OF OSKAR SCHLEMMER

1943

TRIADIC BALLET

The famous ballet was created by Oskar Schlemmer in 1922

→ Gilgamesh and Enkidu, p.73

→ Gilgamesh and Ishtar, p.73

Baumeister worked on themes from the **EPIC OF GILGAMESH** until 1953. The art critic Will Grohmann, his biographer and friend, considered the series of **GILGAMESH PICTURES** to be Baumeister's key conception after the **EIDOS PICTURES**.¹⁴² The gloomy mood of the Epic of Gilgamesh was one that Baumeister met "with kindred feelings", since he had been living in a kind of exile in Urach since 1943.¹⁴³ The Epic of Gilgamesh is divided into three parts. Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, who was one-third human and two-thirds divine, meets Enkidu and they quickly become friends. Together they survive adventures and kill the monster Humbaba. Enkidu dies and Gilgamesh, out of great grief for his friend, sets out on a quest for eternal life. He seeks Utnapishtim, the only survivor of the Flood, who can reveal the secret of immortality to him. Enkidu's ghost appears from the realm of dead and gives Gilgamesh information on life in the underworld. Baumeister illustrated the epic with great pictorial vividness and forcefulness. In the drawing **GILGAMESH II/III (VARIANT)** Gilgamesh stands outside the city walls of Uruk.

Baumeister also illustrated texts from the Hebrew Bible, such as **SAUL** and **ESTHER**. In these, he continues using the drawing style that emerged from the cylinder seals and cuneiform images. With regard to the Saul illustrations, he remarks: "My illustrations came close to the old reliefs on the cyclopean walls, they came close to cuneiform script and hieroglyphics, to the symbolic characters, to the rites and consecrations that preserve their secrets, like the distant and exalted God, whose name is never mentioned, but only paraphrased. In some of the juxtapositions between the text passages and the drawings, the connection is hard to see, in others the connection is clearer. I'm trying to make sure the drawing does not compete with the word. I am trying to allow the word to achieve its full effect. Rather, the drawings should stand alone as drawings. If Saul is mocked as he chases David in vain, the drawings mock in their own way."¹⁴⁴ The examination of the Hebrew Bible material, especially of **ESTHER**, who saved the Jews from being murdered by the Persian king Ahasuerus, should be seen as an unambiguously humane statement during the time of the Holocaust. In addition to the ancient Near Eastern materials, in the same year, he also illustrated William Shakespeare's **THE TEMPEST** and **SALOME** based on the play by Oscar Wilde.

The fact that Baumeister succeeded in maintaining contact with his Parisian friends even during the war—albeit sporadically and under difficult circumstances—is shown in his diary entries from this period.¹⁴⁵

In February 1943, he wrote: "Dr. Herrmann reported by way of a letter that he has showed Zervos and friends, I don't know yet who he means, positive slides, projected photographic images and also a photo series. 'I have to salute you from all sides, with great joy and appreciation for this development and, as they say, the liberation of a completely unique style of particular quality. Hence great appreciation.'" In November, he noted: "Dr. Herrmann has to drive back to Paris this evening, where he works as a soldier for a soldier's newspaper. I am handing over the Saul drawing series to him, 44 drawings, according to passages from 1 Samuel. I hope that this important work will not get lost, although there is some risk in sending these to Paris this way.

WILL GROHMANN

Art historian, Baumeister biographer and friend

→ Eidos III, p.67

EPIC OF GILGAMESH

oldest written myth of mankind

→ Gilgamesh II/ III (Variant), p.77

ABOUT HIS SAUL ILLUSTRATIONS

→ Esther illustration XXVIII, p.78

→ Saul illustration XXXIX, p.78

→ Tempest VIII, p.79

→ Salome XII, p.79

DIARY ENTRY

Februar 1943



GILGAMESH II/III (VARIANTE) ∞
GILGAMESCH II/III (VARIANTE)
1943, Charcoal and oil pastel
on laid paper, 49 × 32 cm,
Private collection



ESTHER ILLUSTRATION XXVIII ∞

1943, Charcoal and oil pastel
on Laid paper, 23.9×32.8 cm,
Baumeister Archive

SAUL ILLUSTRATION XXXIX ∞

1944, Charcoal and oil pastel
on Laid paper, 24.1×31.9 cm,
Baumeister Archive





TEMPEST VIII ∞
STURM VIII

1943, Charcoal and oil pastel on Laid paper, 24×28.5 cm, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie, Graphische Sammlung, Leihgabe der Freunde der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart



SALOME XII ∞
1943, Charcoal and oil pastel on Laid paper, 24×31.5 cm, Baumeister Archive

Herrmann wants to show these drawings to some acquaintances there.”¹⁴⁶ In January 1944, he noted: “Dr. Herrmann coming on vacation from Paris. He reports: Georges Braque, who sends me his greetings, greatly approves of the Saul drawings.”¹⁴⁷

During the period from 1943 to 1944, Baumeister wrote the manuscript of *The Unknown in Art* in Urach. In 1945, Baumeister revised it; Curt E. Schwab in Stuttgart finally published it in 1947.

In 1944, he began work on the last of the series that were created during the war. The **SUN FIGURES** and **COMB LINES** are characterized by small fields etched with narrow, parallel grooves made with a combing technique. For this technique, Baumeister used steel combs that he still had from his time as an apprentice. In an article on painting technique written eleven years later: “From my apprentice kit ... I actually still have various equipment to this day. I’ve got brushes and utensils that I’ve used for 50 years ... you almost can’t get the steel comb anymore today, nobody produces it anymore. The steel comb was left among my basic equipment, and so I have used these things again, of course for a different effect, but that really doesn’t change anything—the fact is that this inheritance, this tradition that I received from my apprenticeship is still just as effective.”¹⁴⁸ The colorfulness of these pictures sets them apart from the work of previous years, most of which were worked in dark, earthy tones. Baumeister continued to work on both bodies of work until 1955.

When he was conscripted by the “Volkssturm” (people’s militia) to defend Urach with Panzerfaust in April 1945, the family fled to Lake Constance. The painter Max Ackermann, whom Baumeister had met when they were Adolf Hölzel’s students, offered them his summer house in the village of Horn near Radolfzell as a place to live and gave Baumeister material to paint.¹⁴⁹



THE UNKNOWN IN ART

1947, Publisher Curt E. Schwab, Stuttgart

→ Sun Figures, p. 81



SUN FIGURES ∞
SONNENFIGUREN
1944, Oil with synthetic resin
and putty on cardboard, 65 × 54 cm,
Private collection

**“THUS FOR THE TRUE ARTIST,
THE MOST VALUABLE THING
HE HAS IS HIMSELF; NOT WHAT
OTHERS THINK OF HIM.”¹⁵⁰**

Willi Baumeister, 1952

1945–1955

A NEW DEPARTURE

After the end of World War II, Willi Baumeister became an important personality in West Germany, both as an artist and as a person. This is due in part to his artistic development, which had not qualitatively lost its connection to the international avant-garde, despite the difficult Nazi period. Moreover, his political and personal integrity, as demonstrated during the Nazi dictatorship, made him a moral authority. After 1945, he was able to quickly resume his committed and positive relations with the international, in particular Parisian, art scene that he had maintained up until the outbreak of the war.

As early as October 1945, Baumeister participated in the exhibition **Deutsche Kunst unserer Zeit** in Überlingen. This exhibition showed works by artists who had been denounced as degenerate during the Nazi era, including work by Beckmann, Feininger, Heckel, Jawlensky, Kirchner, Klee, Kokoschka, Macke, Marc, Nolde and Schlemmer. In November 1945, he had his first solo exhibition since the end of the war. It took place in the foyer of the Stuttgart Kammerspiele (chamber theater). From this time on, Baumeister had numerous exhibitions in Germany and abroad every year.

In 1946, he began the **PRIMEVAL FIGURES** series. Here, the painting's surface, which is almost completely filled in, often appears to be the negative of an image. Sometimes the monochrome forms alternate between dark on light and light on dark in the same image—positive becomes negative and vice versa. Baumeister continued work on this series until 1947. In the same year, the picture **MAYA WALL** was created, which is still considered a part of the body of work **FIGURE WALLS** begun in 1942. In this painting, the surface is almost entirely covered by lines and pictograms formed by lines, apart from a horizontal strip along the top edge of the picture. Flecks of color enliven the piece.

In March 1946, he was appointed professor and director of the painting class at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste (State Academy of Fine Arts) in Stuttgart. He was the first teacher at an academy in Germany to teach abstract art after the war. For this reason, the academy attracted many students. Now, it was also possible for Baumeister to present works to the public that were created during the last two years of the war.

GERMAN ART OF OUR TIME Überlingen, 1945

→ Maya Wall, p. 74



"WE DON'T PAINT ANY PICTURES, WE STUDY" ∞

Baumeister as professor and director of the painting class, Stuttgart Academy of Art, 1950

The illustration series **DER STURM** appeared in book form in English entitled **TEMPEST**. The series **SALOME AND THE PROPHET** was transferred to lithographs.

His book, **The Unknown in Art**, written in the winter of 1943/44 in Urach, was published in 1947 by a Stuttgart publishing house. Here, Baumeister explains his conception of art. “The Unknown” is the creative elemental force that acts through the artist. Art is created from the painting process itself. While working, the artist deviates from his original idea, which is an ostensible goal, and creates from “the Unknown”. This deviation is what Baumeister calls the **creative angle**. Non-representational art is the appropriate medium to translate “the Unknown” into a tangible, concrete form. Baumeister’s conviction is: “The work of art has no idea, but is itself an idea,”¹⁵¹ and: “the more naturalistic a work is, the more the intrinsic forces of the medium are killed off...”¹⁵² He also refers here to parallels in natural phenomena or to the art of archaic and non-European cultures. The first edition of the book quickly sold out and the concept of “the Unknown” entered the vocabulary of art discussions. The attention his book received could not hide the fact that abstract art in Germany had a difficult road ahead. The predominant taste of the general public was still influenced by the Nazi aesthetics. Baumeister’s greatest concern now was to expound on non-representational art as the “appropriate artistic design form of the present day”.¹⁵³

Baumeister was now also able to work for the theater, as he did during the period before the Nazi dictatorship. In 1947, he designed the sets and costumes for the flamenco ballet **Liebeszauber** by the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla. It was performed in the Württemberg Staatstheater, the so-called *Grosses Haus* (Large House) in Stuttgart. He explained his conception of the function of a stage set in numerous journal articles. Baumeister had realized his ideas by developing a formally simple stage set, oriented towards the basic forms of architecture and geometry. In contrast to the austere forms of the 1920s, these were now more dynamic and playful. The stage curtain was especially spectacular; it was covered with pictogram-like figures and symbolic characters that referenced the content of the piece and suggested cheerful vitality. The work as a whole was such a success that Baumeister and the stage curtain were featured on the cover of the Hamburg news magazine *Der Spiegel*.¹⁵⁴ Baumeister had found a style, to which he would return in later stage designs.

Baumeister’s artistic and friendly ties to Paris were employed in the second half of the 1940’s to restore Franco-German relations, even at the official level. In 1948, when the Karlsruhe Kunsthalle received ninety French prints as a gift from the Head of the *Division de l’Education Publique* in the French occupation zone, the painting **HAPPY DAY** by Willi Baumeister, created a year before, was given as a gift in return. Baumeister wrote to the art critic Will Grohmann:

ON THE UNKNOWN IN ART

“The work of art has no idea, but is itself an idea”

→ The Creative Angle, p.85

LOVE SPELL

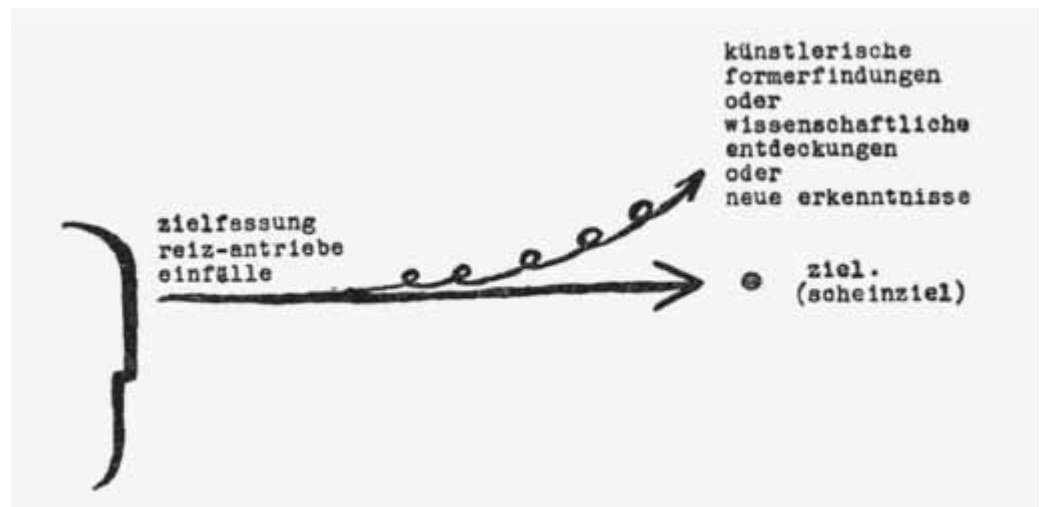
music by Manuel de Falla, Spanish composer, 1876–1946



A GREAT STAGE DESIGNER

Der Spiegel, 1st year, no. 44, November 1, 1947, © Der Spiegel

→ Happy Day, p.85



THE CREATIVE ANGLE ∞
DER SCHÖPFERISCHE WINKEL
From Willi Baumeister:
The Unknown in Art, 1947



HAPPY DAY ∞
JOUR HEUREUX
1947, Oil with synthetic resin and
putty on hardboard, 65 × 81 cm,
Musée National d'Art Moderne,
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



RED COMET ∞
ROTER KOMET

1947, Oil with synthetic resin, putty and sand on hardboard, 65 × 81 cm, Private collection



GROWTH OF THE CRYSTALS II /
WACHSTUM DER KRISTALLE II ∞

1947–52, Oil with resin and putty on hardboard, 81 × 100 cm, Private collection



POINTED FORMS ∞
SPITZE FORMEN
1948, Oil with synthetic resin on cardboard, 65 × 54 cm, Private collection

FORMS (TO THE RIGHT) ∞
FORMEN (NACH RECHTS)
1948, Oil with putty on cardboard, 45.8 × 53.8 cm, Private collection





LOVE SPELL ∞
LIEBESZAUBER

Design of stage curtain, 1947, Gouache,
pencil on thin cardboard, 50.3 × 69.7 cm,
Private collection



AZTEC COUPLE ∞
AZTEKEN-PAAR

1948, Oil with synthetic resin
and putty on cardboard, 81 × 100 cm,
Private collection

“... after the exhibition in Freiburg concludes, my picture will have a place in the Parisian museum. The title of my picture, originally ‘strandbild’ (*beach picture*), was renamed ‘jour heureux’ (*happy day*) by Jardot¹⁵⁵ after some deliberation. ... I think this art exchange is important and also gratifying for German art.”¹⁵⁶ The painting was part of the series **METAPHYSICAL LANDSCAPES** that Baumeister had begun in 1944 and continued working on until 1954. These are abstracted landscapes, often with a high horizon in bright, vivid colors. The main field, which often suggests a beach, is filled with different pictograms.

→ Red Comet, p. 86
→ Growth of Crystal, p. 86

He continued to work on his **GILGAMESH PICTURES** series until 1953. In the **GILGAMESH PICTURES**, Baumeister applies the figurative forms based on those found on Mesopotamian cylinder seals in earthy, porous colors. This reinforces the impression of the archaic from the material itself. In total, there are some 150 works that are inspired by the Epic of Gilgamesh.¹⁵⁷ A portfolio of ten lithographs of the **SUMERIAN LEGENDS**, related both stylistically and contextually, was published in 1947. From 1946 to 1955 he created approximately 90 lithographs, also drawing from other thematic areas.

→ Gilgamesh and Enkidu, p. 73
→ Gilgamesh and Ishtar, p. 73
→ Gilgamesh II/III (Variant), p. 77

The **FORM PLANS** series, on which Baumeister worked from 1947 to 1951, is characterized by its square and kidney-shaped elements that anticipate the aesthetics of the 1950’s; Baumeister decisively influenced these aesthetics.

In the years 1947–1955, several versions of **TWO ERAS** and **AZTECS** were developed. In the **TWO ERAS**, the archaic and the modern world confront each other, the world of archetypes and the world of geometry.¹⁵⁸ The archaic is expressed through dissolved, strong lines, which often appear as negative forms. In the painting **AZTEC COUPLE** of 1948, one can recognize the actual figurines of an Aztec couple from the Baumeister Collection.

→ Aztec Couple, p. 88

His works exhibited together with those of Max Ackermann, Otto Dix, HAP Grieshaber, Ernst Wilhelm Nay and Oskar Schlemmer at the exhibition **Moderne Deutsche Kunst seit 1933**, held at the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland in 1947. In March 1948, he wrote in his diary: “Arts writes, ‘le grand peintre allemand’ (the great German painter), Opera writes, ‘le Picasso allemand’ (the German Picasso)! Since I haven’t had another exhibition in Paris yet, it’s amazing that my good reputation in Paris has been so well sustained through the Nazi period, and even seems to be increasing.”¹⁵⁹

MODERN GERMAN ART SINCE 1933
Kunsthalle Bern, 1947

From May to September 1948, he presented works in the **XXIV Venice Biennial**, the first after the war.¹⁶⁰ In addition to Baumeister, the other German artists who were given prominence by the critics included Pechstein, Dix, Schmidt-Rottluff, Hofer and Heckel.¹⁶¹ At the same time, he participated in the first post-war exhibition of **Réalités Nouvelles, 3ème Salon** in Paris at the Palais des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris from July to August 1948. This was the first exhibition after World War II in which German art was again shown in Paris. He was represented by the four paintings **ROUGE ORANGE, COMPOSITION, DÉPART EN BLEU** and **SOUVENIR À COROT**, which had all been created in the past decade.¹⁶² He was also chosen to curate the works for the German section of this exhibition.¹⁶³

XXIV VENICE BIENNIAL
1948

NEW REALITIES, 3RD SALON
Palais des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris,
1948

Only a month earlier, the French government had issued a decree that allowed German artists to exhibit once again in France.¹⁶⁴ Incidentally, the doors to artist friends, critics, collectors and gallery owners in Paris were reopened to Baumeister before any other German artist.¹⁶⁵ He quickly resumed contact with his old friend Léger. Baumeister wrote the foreword for the catalog that accompanied Léger's exhibition, which was shown in several German cities in 1949. Léger commented on Baumeister's text with the words: "... one of the finest that has ever been written about my work. I am quite pleased with it." Together with the art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Léger even arranged to have the article translated into French for the journal *L'Âge Nouveau*.¹⁶⁶

Baumeister was the very first German artist to have a solo show in France after the war. It was held from November to December 1949, ten years after his last exhibition, in the same Paris gallery. Jeanne Bucher, the former gallery owner, with whom Baumeister had had a friendly relationship, had died shortly beforehand. The gallery operates under the same name to this day. Forty-four of his works were shown, eight of which were sold.¹⁶⁷ The exhibition was a great success and had many prominent visitors. After five weeks, it was extended for another two weeks¹⁶⁸ and was well received by the French press. Baumeister traveled to attend the opening; the art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and the collector André Maeght also came.

Baumeister's stay in Paris allowed him the opportunity to meet with his old friends Fernand Léger and Hans Arp. On this occasion, Fernand Léger wrote: "To my mind, the name Baumeister occupies an extremely important place among modern German artists. In fact, Baumeister represents—when considering his work—German art with international character. His artistic development was always related to the art of all times and peoples—from the Assyrians to Paul Klee, Kandinsky and Miró. Leaving Expressionism aside, he took a decidedly unique and characteristic path ... Today, I am very happy that our friendship has remained alive in spite of national borders and despite different aesthetic conceptions. I am glad that I can say that we have always been able to stay connected in some way. His return to Paris reminds me of the time when we met there, it has been so long. Le Corbusier was there with us. And we embrace him now as we did then — both the artist and the person—as a friend."¹⁶⁹

The American writer Henry Miller, whom Baumeister had met in Paris in the early 1930's, also expressed his appreciation for the exhibition in a letter to him.¹⁷⁰ In his notebook, Baumeister made note of the meetings he had at this time with artists of the younger generation, from the *Jeune École Française*, such as Pierre Soulages and Hans Hartung.¹⁷¹ The exhibition attracted considerable attention in Germany and was considered to be of cultural and political importance.

LÉGER IN 1949 ON BAUMEISTER'S FOREWORD IN HIS EXHIBITION CATALOG

"... one of the finest that has ever been written about my work. I am very pleased with it."



GALERIE JEANNE BUCHER ∞

Willi Baumeister packing works for his exhibition at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher, Paris, 1949



WITH FERNAND LÉGER ∞

Willi Baumeister with Fernand Léger
Photo: Willy Maywald, 1949



WIND ∞

1951, Oil with synthetic resin and tempera on hardboard, 100 × 125.5 cm, Private collection

GROWTH ∞
WACHSTUM

1952, Oil with resin and tempera on hardboard, 129 × 99 cm, Stiftung Domnick des Landes Baden-Württemberg, Nürtingen



In the summer of 1949, the American military government organized the first comprehensive exhibition of contemporary German art after World War II at the Munich Central Art Collecting Point with the title **Kunstschaffen in Deutschland** [Art Production in Germany]. Art historian Werner Haftmann and Baumeister were among the members of the jury that selected works by younger artists.¹⁷² Baumeister himself was represented with six works. Shortly before this exhibition, he had co-founded the **Gruppe der Gegenstandslosen** [Group of Non-representational Artists]. As of January 1950, it was called **ZEN 49** and was the most influential abstract art movement in southern Germany. Hilla Rebay supported the group with funds from the New York-based Guggenheim Foundation, of which she was the director.¹⁷³ The first exhibition of the group **ZEN 49** was held in April 1950, also at the Central Art Collecting Point in Munich. In the same year, Baumeister exhibited in the U.S. for the first time since the war; first in the **International Exhibition of Paintings** at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and the following year in the **16th Biennial** at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York.

In the years 1949 to 1953, the **GROWTH** and **WIND** series was created. Here, dark brown-gray floating forms and lines in motion are depicted against a light, beige background.

In 1950, Baumeister began to work on serigraphs in collaboration with the printer Luitpold Domberger. He was one of the pioneers of this technology in Europe. They created a total of sixty-three serigraphs. Baumeister, Domberger and the publisher Karl Gutbrod still planned to transpose the illustrations for the Epic of Gilgamesh drawn by Baumeister in 1943 into colored serigraphs. However, shortly before Baumeister's death, only seven of them were realized.

The **Darmstädter Gespräch** of 1950 was the highlight of Baumeister's tireless effort to gain acceptance for non-representational art through lectures, journal articles and radio essays. It took place on the occasion of the exhibition **Das Menschenbild unserer Zeit**, organized by the *Neue Darmstädter Sezession* and in which Baumeister also participated. In this discussion, as the most renowned abstract artist in post-war Germany, the task fell to Baumeister to refute the provocative, deprecating theses against non-representational art presented by the art historian Hans Sedlmayr—highly-esteemed in conservative circles—and to give voice to the artistic and spiritual value of abstract art.

In 1949, Baumeister designed the sets and costumes for **Monte Cassino** by Egon Vietta for the Städtische Bühnen in Essen. Vietta and Baumeister had been friends since 1935. At that time, he attempted in his poetry to counter the present with humanity arising from the ancient Mediterranean culture, imagined as timeless and ideal. The 1949 play **Monte Cassino** is "pregnant with symbolism; Vietta's piece deals abstractly with the pointlessness of war. It is one of the few pieces written in the early post-war years in West Germany to discuss the National Socialist past."¹⁷⁴ Baumeister beautifully echoed the gloomy mood of the piece with a minimalist stage set in pre-



JURY AT THE CENTRAL ART COLLECTING POINT ∞

Munich, 1950, from left: Werner Haftmann, Ernst Günter Troche, Ewald Mataré, Hans Konrad Röthel, Willi Baumeister

→ Wind, p.91
→ Growth, p.91

PIONEER OF SERIGRAPHY IN EUROPE with Luitpold Domberger, 1950

THE HUMAN IMAGE IN OUR TIME WITH THE DARMSTADT DIALOGUE by the "New Darmstadt Seession", 1950

MONTE CASSINO

Egon Vietta, Municipal Theater, Essen, 1949



AMENOPHIS ∞
1950, Serigraph, 47 × 54 cm



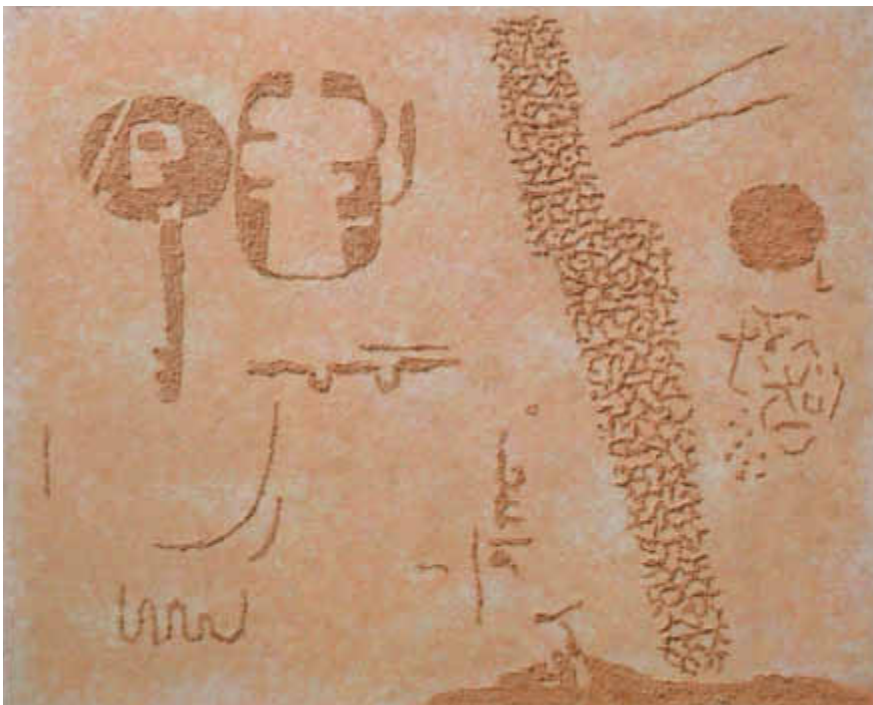
BLACK SIGNS ∞
SCHWARZE ZEICHEN
1951, Serigraph, 39.2 × 54.5 cm



COSMIC GESTURE ∞

KOSMISCHE GESTE

1950–51, Oil with putty on hardboard, 81 × 100.4 cm, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo



RELIEF ANTIQUE PINK ∞

RELIEF ALTROSA

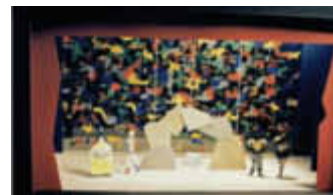
1955, Oil with resin, putty and sand on hardboard, 81 × 100 cm, Private collection

dominantly muted tones. A year later, the set and costumes for the ballet **Inscribo Satanis** followed, which was performed at the Württemberg Staatstheater's "Large House" in Stuttgart. Here, the design was reminiscent of that for the ballet **Liebeszauber** and was again a great success. In the same year, Baumeister created stage sets for the drama **Judith** by Jean Giraudoux, performed at the State Theater in Darmstadt. In contrast to the flat, two-dimensional stage sets of the 1920's, there three-dimensional elements on the stage suggest architecture: both the encampment of the besieging Assyrians and the fortified city of the Israelites. The dominant color of the tents of the aggressors is a vibrant red; that of the houses of the attacked is a deep blue with yellow roofs. Only one year later, in 1953, he designed the stage sets to **Kasperlespiele für große Leute** by Max Kommerell at the State Theater in Darmstadt. The stage sets were designed using pictograms in a colorful, vibrant way. A clear, powerful color palette of red, blue, yellow and green reflected the cheerful mood. Moreover, the stage curtain, with its forms swirling through the air, expressed a friendly dynamic. The designs for this piece were Baumeister's last work for the theater.

In September 1950, Baumeister traveled to France and Spain. In Santillana del Mar near Santander, he took part in the **Second International Art Congress of the Escuela de Altamira**, an association of intellectuals and artists who wanted to show contemporary art to the public; the association was named after the cave with stone age paintings near Santander. On this occasion, Baumeister gave a talk on the painting techniques and conservation problems of the Stone Age bison pictures in the cave of Altamira, which he had investigated during his time in Wuppertal. At the *Escuela de Altamira congress* he became personally acquainted with Eduardo Westerdahl, who had published a monograph about him in 1934.¹⁷⁵

At the **first Biennial** of the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, Brazil in 1951, his painting **COSMIC GESTURE** won first prize. Baumeister donated this painting, created the previous year, to the museum. In 1963, the painting was given to the Museu de Arte Contemporânea.

In 1952, Baumeister had his first solo show in the United States. In the Hacker Gallery in New York, he exhibited twenty-eight paintings, eight drawings, eight lithographs, and twenty serigraphs.¹⁷⁶ At the end of this year, the **Memorial Exhibition of Katherine S. Dreier, 1877–1952: Her own Collection of Modern Art** opened at the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut. The memorial exhibition, which included works by Baumeister, took place shortly after the death of the American artist and art collector. She had co-organized Baumeister's first show in the U.S. in New York in 1926. The following year, 1953, he participated as the only German artist in the exhibition **Younger European Painters** at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.¹⁷⁷



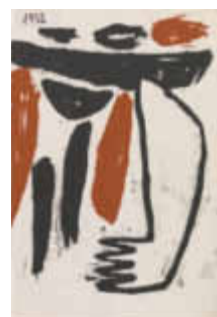
PUPPET SHOW FOR GROWN-UPS ∞

by Max Kommerell, Reconstruction of the stage design model from the 1970's, Baumeister Archive

BAUMEISTER IN SPAIN

On painting techniques and conservation issues of the stone-age bison pictures, 1950

→ Cosmic Gesture, p.94



HACKER GALLERY CATALOG

New York, 1952

In 1953, the second monograph on Baumeister by his friend Will Grohmann was published and he participated in the XXVI edition of the Venice Biennale. During this period, he created the works **PSEUDO RELIEFS**. In these pieces, forms are optically set off in apparent relief from the background, often on a surface of the same color. From 1952 to 1955, Baumeister worked on the **SAFER** series. This refers to the **RUNNERS, FEMALE DANCERS** and **DIVERS** series of the early 1930's. As in these previous series, the forms and fields, mostly in black, are contrasted with beige-yellow backgrounds using an admixture of sand to provide texture. Often, there are also negative-positive variations in the **SAFER** series. There is a sketch of—or rather the idea for—the painting **SAFER WITH DOTS** in one of his sketchbooks. Baumeister always carried a sketchbook with him and used every opportunity to get his thoughts down on paper in the form of drawings. Another drawing from the same sketchbook bears an obvious similarity to his painting **TAB-LEAU ROSE RELIEF SABLE** of 1954, which belongs to the **SAND RELIEFS** series, as does **RELIEF ANTIQUE PINK** of 1954/55. In the **SAND RELIEFS** series, the forms are set off from the background with an admixture of sand.

Baumeister worked on the **FAUST AND PHANTOM** series from 1951 to 1955. It has similar elements to those paintings in the **KESSAUA** and **MONTARU** series, which Baumeister created between 1953 and 1955. However, in the **MONTARU** series, the works are larger in size, and color has a more monumental value. The picture surface in the **MONTARU** series is dominated by a large black shape on a light background, which is in turn surrounded by small, colored, protuberances that sometimes overlap the large black shape. In referring to the **MONTARU** pictures, Baumeister wrote: "The root fibers and other outgrowths indicate lateral movement. Both this and the colored prominences that issue from behind the black prevent the dark form from being seen as a hole, as a depth."¹⁷⁸ The **MONTURI** series was created during almost the same time period, but was completed a year earlier. The design of the picture surface is similar to that of the **MONTARU** series, however this time an almost round, white form dominates the pictures.

Baumeister created his titles intuitively. He remarked to Will Grohmann that for **MONTARU**, he was thinking of mons, mountain, and the Biblical Mount Ararat.¹⁷⁹ For Baumeister, picture titles served more to distinguish and designate the individual works, not as the continuation of the image, as is the case e.g. for Paul Klee. Art should affect the viewer in a direct, unmediated way, with no preconceived interpretation.

The painting **KESSIU** from 1954 is structured in a similar way to the pictures of the **KESSAUA** series. In both, there are dominant black forms that alternate with colored ones. Baumeister worked on the important **ARU** series from 1954 to 1955. The name **ARU** was a reduction of his own neologism **MONTARU**. Again, a black form dominates, but is here deeply torn and jagged and reminiscent of East Asian characters. Smaller colorful forms often appear at the edge of the large forms, thereby creating a visual dynamic.

SECOND MONOGRAPH

by Will Grohmann, 1953



SKETCH OF **TAB-LEAU ROSE RELIEF SABLE** ∞

1952–54, 17 × 12 cm, Pen on paper, Willi Baumeister's sketchbook, Baumeister Archive

INTUITIVE PICTURE TITLES

Montaru: Mons, mountain, and the Biblical Mount Ararat

→ Montaru 2D, p. 102

→ Montaru with Gondola, p. 102

→ Aru 5, p. 104



SKETCH ON SAFER WITH DOTS ∞
SKIZZE ZU SAFER MIT PUNKTEN
1952–54, Pen on cardboard, 17 × 12 cm,
Willi Baumeister's sketchbook,
Baumeister Archive

SAFER WITH DOTS ∞
SAFER MIT PUNKTEN
1954, Oil with synthetic resin and
sand on cardboard, 39.7 × 36.5 cm,
Private collection





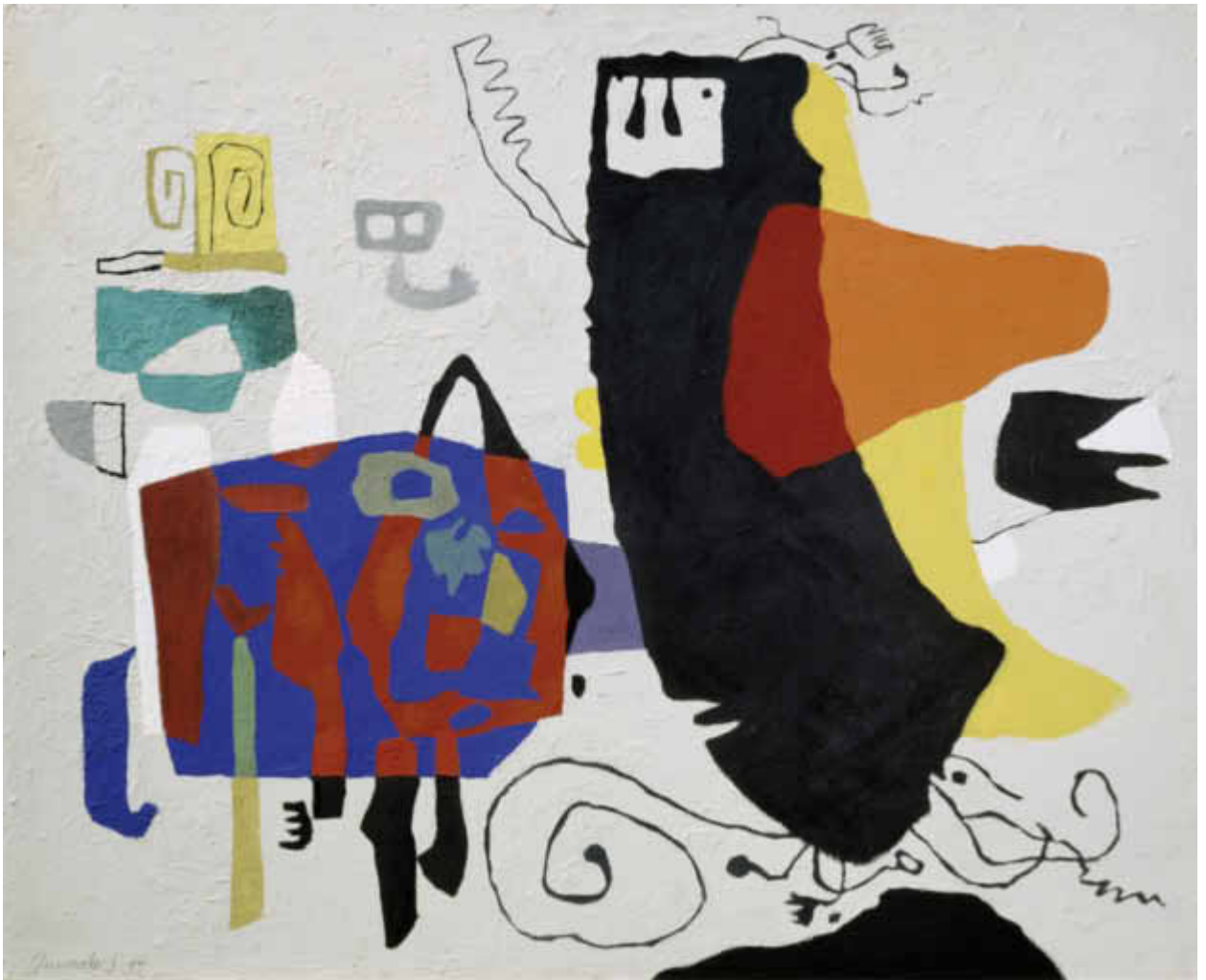
NOCTURNO ∞

1953, Oil with synthetic resin on hard-board, 130 × 100 cm, Private collection

HOMAGE TO JÉRÔME BOSCH ∞
HOMMAGE À JÉRÔME BOSCH

1953, Oil with synthetic resin on hard-board, 109.5 × 150 cm, Private collection





ENCHANTED FAUST ∞
FAUST IM ZAUBER

1952, Oil with synthetic resin on hardboard, 81 × 100 cm, Private collection



KESSIU ∞

1954, Oil with synthetic resin, putty and sand on cardboard, on canvas-covered hardboard, 33.4 × 45 cm, Private collection

In 1954, on his 65th birthday, a major retrospective of Baumeister's works was held at the Württemberg Kunstverein in Stuttgart; this exhibition clearly demonstrated the enormous scope of his work. It became a major event and took on dimensions largely unknown for art exhibitions at that time. The exhibition had to be closed at times due to overcrowding and was extended by two weeks. At this time, Baumeister was the only abstract artist in Germany who was also popular. Similarly, the *Galerie Jeanne Bucher* in Paris gave him another solo exhibition on the occasion of his birthday. The show was titled **Willi Baumeister—œuvres récents**.

Baumeister also had a decisive influence on the aesthetics of the applied arts in the 1950's. In 1949, he designed the mural for a Concert Cafe in Stuttgart using motifs taken from his **METAPHYSICAL LANDSCAPES** series. Shortly thereafter, he designed fabrics for curtains and scarves, whose patterns again resembled the style of his abstract motifs. Such textile design was a striking novelty and other designers adopted his motifs in modified form. Through mass production they became ubiquitous, thus molding the taste of an era.¹⁸⁰

The year 1955 was again a very productive period, with major events and the beginning of new series. He began the body of work **BLUXAO** and **LANTERNS**. **BLUXAO** uses deep blue coloring, in front of which floats a square, dark form made of wide stripes, which contains a dark spiral at its center. Colorful forms surround and overlap the dark shape. The **LANTERNS** also show a dark, dominant form in a triangular shape, which appears to be hovering in front of the background and is surrounded and overlapped by colorful shapes.

From January to February 1955, Baumeister showed his works in New York in the **German Painting Today** show at the Martha Jackson Gallery. In Tokyo, he exhibited at the **Third International Art Exhibition**. The **Vienna Secession** honored him with the **Klimt Award** for his life's work.

In the spring of 1955, just a few months before Baumeister's death, the exhibition **Peintures et Sculptures non figuratives en Allemagne d'Aujourd'hui** was held in Paris at the *Galerie Cercle Volney*, owned by the art dealer René Drouin.

This exhibition, which Baumeister attended with his wife, brought him great recognition once again. Drouin was a great admirer of his work and visited him in Stuttgart right after the end of the exhibition. He was especially impressed with the painting **ARU 5**, which Baumeister had created shortly before the show. A silkscreen print of **ARU 7**, from the same series, was reproduced in ocher on the exhibition poster and catalog cover. On the evenings before and after the opening, the documentary **Willi Baumeister. Bilderwelten voller Rätsel und Geheimnisse**, filmed by the art collector Ottomar Domnick, was shown in the *Cinéma Lux* in the Rue de Rennes. The film was dubbed in French expressly for the exhibition.¹⁸¹

Concurrent with this exhibition, there was a show of Chinese art in Paris; Baumeister was fascinated with the pieces from the Han Dynasty.

BAUMEISTER'S 65TH BIRTHDAY

Exhibitions and retrospectives in Stuttgart and Paris

RECENT WORKS

Galerie Jeanne Bucher, Paris, 1954



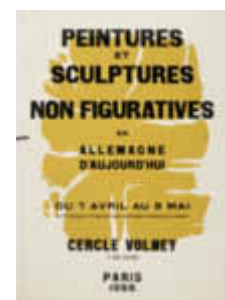
AT WORK ON ARU 5

In his Stuttgart studio, 1955

→ Aru 5, p. 104

→ Two Lanterns, p. 105

→ Bluxao I, p. 106



NON-REPRESENTATIONAL PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES IN TODAY'S GERMANY

Galerie Cercle Volney, Paris, 1955

WILLI BAUMEISTER. VISUAL WORLDS FULL OF SECRETS AND MYSTERIES

Documentary by Ottomar Domnick

He purchased a reproduction of a picture from this exhibition created with the frottage technique. This exhibition would inspire him to the neologism **HAN-i**,¹⁸² his final series of work. The **HAN-i** works each consist of a sign, reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy; it has a minimalist design and the utmost elegance. The printer Luitpold Domberger described the genesis of this form. In his work on his serigraphs in Domberger's workshop, Baumeister would use a pressure roller and playfully rolled it over a sheet of wrapping paper. Fascinated, he observed the unplanned result with the words: "Chance makes the most beautiful things." However, he did not leave the random result unchanged, but rather cut out the outline with scissors, thereby giving a permanent form to chance.¹⁸³ Indeed, through the analogy to a Chinese character, born of chance or rather creative spontaneity, this symbol became the emblem for this series.

- Han-Aru, p. 107
- Han-i on Yellow, p. 108
- Han-i White with Combing, p. 108

On August 31, 1955, Willi Baumeister died while painting in his studio in Stuttgart. At this time, seven pictures from all his creative periods were being shown at the first *documenta* in Kassel. Paintings by his friend Fernand Léger, who had died a few weeks earlier, were also on view there. Laurel wreaths were placed before the works of the two artists. Altogether, Baumeister was exhibited three times at *documenta*.

BAUMEISTER AT DOCUMENTA I
Kassel, 1955

Willi Baumeister is considered the most important visual artist of postwar Germany and renowned in Germany and abroad as a representative of non-representational art. He built long-term artistic, personal and friendly relationships within the international art scene and made Stuttgart an important center of non-representational art in the last ten years of his life, including through his work as a teacher.

A letter from Baumeister to Juliane Roh, dated March 6, 1954, expresses who he was as a man and as an artist: "... I don't need any organization, no 'German artist association', no 'new group', no 'zen'. For 65 years, I didn't need any exhibitor organization. On the other hand, my self-criticism goes hand in hand with a fairly large tolerance of others or what I find good, Roh, Grohmann, Thwaites find mediocre, or what others find poor, I find capable of development. I find the higher level in a lower level. ... Since I stoically continued during the darkness of the Nazi period, without any prospect of ever coming into the light again, without any prospect of so-called success—since then, what one would call 'inner peace' is rather dearer to me than this so-called success."¹⁸⁵



MONTARU WITH GONDOLA ∞
MONTARU MIT GONDEL
1954, Oil with synthetic resin on hardboard, 185 × 130 cm, Baumeister Archive



MONTARU 2D ∞
1954, Oil with synthetic resin and sand on hardboard, 100 × 81 cm, Private collection



MONTURI, WHITE DISCUS ∞
MONTURI, WEISSER DISKUS
1954, Oil with synthetic resin
and sand on hardboard, 150 × 120 cm,
Private collection



ARU 5 ∞
1955, Oil with synthetic resin
on hardboard, 185 × 130 cm,
Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin



TWO LANTERNS ∞
ZWEI LATERNEN
1955, Oil with synthetic resin
and tempera on hardboard, 65 × 54 cm.
Private collection



BLUXAO I ∞
1955, Oil with synthetic resin
and tempera on hardboard, 81 × 100 cm,
Private collection



HAN-ARU ∞

1955, Oil with synthetic resin
on cardboard, on hardboard,
45.5×36 cm, Private collection



HAN-i WHITE WITH COMBING ∞
HAN-i WEISS MIT KAMMZUG
1955, Oil with synthetic resin
and putty on hardboard, 46 x 36.3 cm,
Private collection



HAN-i ON YELLOW ∞
HAN-i AUF GELB
1955, Oil with synthetic resin on hard-
board, 130 x 99.2 cm, Private collection

“SINCE I STOICALLY CONTINUED DURING THE DARKNESS OF THE NAZI PERIOD, WITHOUT ANY PROSPECT OF EVER COMING INTO THE LIGHT AGAIN, WITHOUT ANY PROSPECT OF SO-CALLED SUCCESS—SINCE THEN, WHAT ONE WOULD CALL ‘INNER PEACE’ IS RATHER DEARER TO ME THAN THIS SO-CALLED SUCCESS”

In a letter to Juliane Roh, 1954

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- 8 Grohmann 1963, 26
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- 41 George, Waldemar: *La Peinture en Allemagne*. Willy Baumeister, in: *L'Esprit Nouveau*, No. 15, 1922, 1790–1794
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- 85 Boehm 1995, 207
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- 87 Letter to Eduardo Westerdahl from 1948
- 88 Kermer 1989, 44
- 89 Kermer 1989, 64–66, 86–87
- 90 *Berlin 1989*, 33
- 91 Böhm 1995, 10, Note 2
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- 94** Master mason of the city of Frankfurt/Main
- 95** Willi Baumeister, Letter to his parents, Frankfurt am Main, November 16, 1929, see: Berlin 1989, 35
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- 98** Ermen, Reinhard: Handel's „Ariodante“ in Stuttgart, 1926, in: Stuttgart 2007, 273
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- 135** Friendly note from Felicitas Baumeister
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- 149** Berlin 1989, 54
- 150** Willi Baumeister, in response to a survey by the Süddeutscher Rundfunk SDR December 17, 1952
- 151** Baumeister, Willi: Das Unbekannte in der Kunst (³1974), 52
- 152** Baumeister, Willi: Das Unbekannte in der Kunst (³1974), 121
- 153** Hopfengart, Christine: Baumeister und die Öffentlichkeit, in: Berlin 1989, 120
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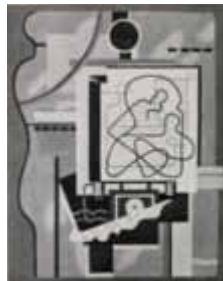
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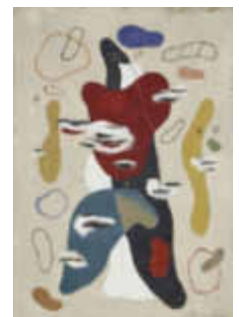
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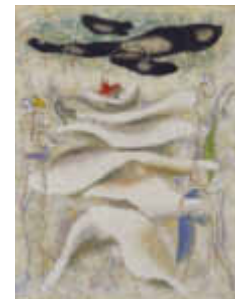
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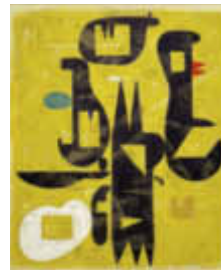
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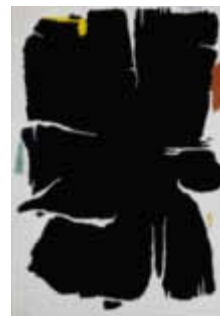
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