

TISZA



RUDOLF HERRMANN

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CURATOR

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AUSTRIAN CARICATURIST 1912-1924



Rudolf Herrmann, Austrian artist and caricaturist, created the drawings shown in this exhibition for use in the popular press during the first quarter of the 20th century, when social unrest was spreading throughout Europe. The economic and political power concentrated in the Austrian royal court was under attack; nationalism and imperialistic militarism were moving the entire world toward the apocalyptic upheaval of the Great War and the ensuing breakdown of traditional political structures.

The turn of the century also saw an explosive growth of the Austrian press that incorporated both critical editorials and biting, sardonic caricatures. Editors and artists combined their skills to a satiric end. As freedom of the press was in jeopardy in Vienna, the caricaturist, utilizing an extensive repertoire of satirical conventions, was able to camouflage risky editorial positions from the watchful eye of the censor.

At the outset of World War I, the radical Austrian journals, which had been founded in order to agitate for political change, transformed themselves overnight into nationalistic vehicles for patriotic propaganda. Artists such as Herrmann, who had previously labored against any involvement in the war, now found themselves instrumental in the pictorial promotion of militarism.

Herrmann, grounded in a leftist ideology, found a haven in Austrian socialist publications as a featured caricaturist. In the years 1914-1917, 98 of his satirical drawings appeared in the Viennese weekly *Die Musketee*, many as covers and full back pages. His caricatures also appeared in the Viennese daily *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the Viennese weekly *Neuen Glühlichter*, and the Munich publication *Simplicissimus*.

Vienna, the jewel of the Austro-Hungarian empire, proved to be a socio-political microcosm of the era. From within that setting, Herrmann drew the inspiration for his scathing caricatures.

The satirical drawings in the exhibition are arranged in five theme groupings, disparate in subject and style, but linked by Herrmann's unique insights and humanistic sensibility.



PORTRAIT CARICATURE

The portraitist is fascinated by the human face, by the infinite variety of facial expressions that conceal the private inner life. He seeks the likeness closest to the truth. The portrait caricaturist, on the other hand, goes beyond the literal expression to choose salient facial traits that lend themselves to exaggeration. It is through the device of calculated distortion that the caricaturist creates the most potent satire.

Herrmann brutally portrayed Count Istvan Tisza, during Tisza's second term in office as Prime Minister of Hungary from 1913 to 1917. Tisza was ruthless in his suppression of ethnic minorities under Magyar rule. He was assassinated in 1918 by revolutionary soldiers.

Herrmann evoked Tisza's character with the image of a predatory bird: the nose is a hooked beak; small piercing eyes dart out from under upswept feathered eyebrows; the downward sweep of a dark mustache ends in pointed wings, hiding the mouth. Every line is significant in this unsettling likeness.



HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The single most provocative political event that led to the outbreak of World War I was the "Ultimatum" of impossible demands served upon Serbia by Austria, following a critical assassination. Central to this act and its catastrophic results was the role of the Austrian foreign minister, Count Leopold Berchtold. It was generally known that the minister was a weak man, unreliable in a crisis. Herrmann created a multilayered narrative with symbolic references in order to encapsulate the history-in-the-making event with a shrewd character study.

He utilized three recognizable features that act as a familiar shorthand description of Berchtold: three hairs standing upright from the smooth-domed, bald pate, the dark "toothbrush" mustache, and the diplomat's formal black attire.

The ridiculing satire continues in the depiction of Berchtold as a pacifier-sucking child, sitting on the ground in a puddle of urine — all signifying a lack of control.

The caption reads "*Berchtold, der kleine Bismarck*" (Berchtold, the Young Bismarck), an outrageous contrast of the indecisive Berchtold with the strong-willed Bismarck, whose character all German-speaking people would remember.

On yet another level, the narrative continues allegorically. Herrmann, distorting the myth of Ariadne, transforms the classically figured, beautiful maiden into

an old, crotchety Austria, stomping her way through the labyrinth, leading Theseus (Berchtold) with the cord away from danger (war). In fact, Berchtold's "Ultimatum" (the scissors) will cut off any possibility of avoiding war.

Thus Herrmann moved his audience from reality to metaphor to expose an inept leader and a momentous historical event, all within the context of a witty caricature.

PROPAGANDA

The artist who plays the role of war propagandist aims to diminish the enemy while glorifying his own nation. To that end, Herrmann employed the allegorical language of Greek mythology. His Viennese audience of the early 20th century, educated in the classics, fully comprehended these mythological allusions.

In this exhibition, examples of his references to Greek mythology include Ariadne, Danae, Icarus, and Prometheus. The latter legend was the metaphor chosen by Herrmann for the propaganda piece "*Der russische Prometheus*" (The Russian Prometheus). The long-limbed Nikolay Nikolayevich, Russian Supreme Commander, was cast in the role of Prometheus, bound and shackled to the mountain. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was portrayed as the crowned, dual-headed eagle of the monarchy, attacking and devouring the liver of Prometheus. The symbols are unambiguous and easily assimilated. Russia, the adversary, is made impotent, unable to "fire" against the overwhelming strength of the triumphant eagle.



SOCIAL CRITICISM

Herrmann, as a social critic, portrayed a disquieting postwar Vienna. As a result of losing the war, Austria's financial markets collapsed, leading to a prolonged economic depression. Additionally, the fall of the Hapsburg empire severed Austria from Hungary, its former breadbasket, causing widespread food shortages and starvation. The destitution was shared by proletarians and intellectuals alike, while the wealthy bourgeois, many of whom were war profiteers, appeared immune from the ravages of the war.

The unequal distribution of food was reflected in Herrmann's satirical piece, "*Der Dank des Vaterlands*" (The Gratitude of the Fatherland). The hungry amputee and war veteran, then a familiar sight on the streets of Vienna, is contrasted with the well-fed patrons dining at the Viennese cafe. The veteran is cast out from the restaurant as an undesirable. This vignette, with the use of commonly known stereotypes, works to evoke moral outrage in the viewer. Herrmann then underscores the emotional distance and cynicism of the bourgeois patron in the sardonic, black-humored caption: "I know that guy, he is a faker: his false leg is not real."



ENTERTAINMENT

Cartooning may have been a means by which Rudolf Herrmann earned his livelihood during the lean years following World War I. These minor cartoons can be differentiated from his caricatures in their use of other conventions. The humor is slapstick entertainment, the drawing style is direct and simple, and the subject matter is less political and, for the most part, directly illustrates the text.

The angry male pedestrian, enlisting the aid of an aging male onlooker, accosts a startled matron in the street, shouting "Halt, grab him — he is a Russian spy carrying bombs." In addition to presenting the visual humor of the hidden "bombs," Herrmann, the socialist, depicted with ridicule the widespread fear in Europe of Communist terrorism, then rampant in Russia.



The boundaries of time dissolve in a shock of recognition when encountering Rudolf Herrmann's satirical drawings executed three-quarters of a century ago. Whatever cultural and temporal differences separate Herrman from viewers today, his drawings are no less effective in demonstrating the power of caricature as a political and social weapon. Through the manipulation of symbols leavened with humor, the artist communicates a deadly accurate analysis. As Aldous Huxley wrote in *Point Counter Point* (chapter 13), "Parodies and caricatures are the most penetrating of criticism."

—Claire C. Grinberg

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WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

(All works are undated unless noted)

Untitled, pen and ink, 10" x 12"

Richard Reti, pen and ink, 11" x 14"

K.K. Oberbaurat. . .Baumann, zusammengestellt nach seinen eigenen entworfen von Rudolf Herrmann (His Excellency Baumann, Constructed According to His Own Sketches by Rudolf Herrmann), pen and ink, 10" x 12"

Der Botanikprofessor auf Urlaub, (The Professor of Botany on Vacation), pen and ink, 8 1/2" x 14"

Circulus Vitiosus, (Vicious Circle), pencil, 8 1/2" x 12"

Entfettungskur, (Reducing Diet), pencil, 12" x 18"

Untitled, pen and pencil, 21" x 14"

Untitled, pen and ink, 12" x 16"

Unterseebrötchen (Bread from the Sea), pen and ink, 14" x 20"

Untitled, pen and ink, 22" x 14"

Zu vermieten! Bestens geeignet für Warenhausunternehmungen (For Rent! Best Suited for Department Store), pen and ink, 11 1/2" x 14"

Fliegen—der Traum der Menschheit (To Fly Is the Dream of Humanity), 1914-17, pen and ink, 16" x 12"

Bobunfall—der Klügere gibt nach (Bobsled Accident—The Wiser One Gives In), pen and ink, 11 1/2" x 10"

Crown Prince Ernst August Herzog von Cumberland, 1913, pen and ink, 10" x 14 1/2"

Mein schönes Fräulein. . .gelobt sei Jesus Christ!!! (My Pretty Lady. . .Praise Jesus!), pen and ink, 7 1/2" x 10"

Der ordinäre Rausch, der feine Rausch (Common Drunkenness, Upperclass Drunkenness), pen and ink, 20" x 14 1/2"

Untitled, pen and ink, 19 1/2" x 13"

Fruchtlose Mühe (Fruitless Effort), pen and ink, 12 1/2" x 19"

Signora Danae und ihr Zuhälter (Senora Danae and Her Pimp), 1915, pen and ink, 14 1/2" x 18 1/2"

Wehrpflicht (Conscripted for the Draft), 1914, pen and ink, 6 3/4" x 8 1/2"

König Peter von Serbien (King Peter of Serbia), 1914, pen and ink, 10" x 14"

Untitled, pen and ink, 11 1/2" x 15 1/2"

Untitled, pen and ink, 9 1/2" x 15 1/2"

Bethmann trägt das Berchtold Kindlein über das grosse Wasser (Bethmann Carries the Child Berchtold Across the Big Water), pen and ink, 10" x 14"

Poincaré's pleite Gesang (Poincaré's Bankrupt Song), 1914, pen and ink, 12 1/2" x 14 1/2"

Untitled, pen and ink, 16" x 14"

Untitled, pencil, 11" x 16"

Vor bösen Hunden wird gewarnt (Beware of Vicious Dogs), pen and ink, 11" x 16"

Untitled, pen and ink, 11" x 16"

Untitled, pen and ink, 11 1/2" x 14 3/4"

Hofrat Ramsauer und der Embryo (His Excellency Ramsauer and the Embryo), pen and ink, 12" x 13"

Untitled, pen and ink, 19" x 14"

Untitled, pen and ink, 17" x 12"

Spionenfurcht (Fear of Spies), pen and ink, 10" x 7 1/4"

Tisza, pen and ink, 10" x 7 1/2"

Ultimatum—Berchtold, der kleine Bismarck (Berchtold, the Young Bismarck), 1914, pen and ink, 14" x 10"

Der Dank des Vaterlands (The Gratitude of the Fatherland), pen and ink, 11" x 15"

Modell Nikita (Nikita the Model), 1916, pen and ink, 11" x 14"

Der russische Prometheus (The Russian Prometheus), pen and ink, 14 1/2" x 19"