

# OTTO KARL WERCKMEISTER – DIE POLITISCHE KONFRONTATION DER KÜNSTE ZWISCHEN KOMMUNISMUS, ›FASCHISMUS‹ UND DEMOKRATIE 1929–1939

WOLFGANG F. KERSTEN

Abb. 1  
Umschlag zu Otto Karl Werckmeister: »The Political Confrontation of the Arts in Europe from the Great Depression to the Second World War« (Zurich Studies in the History of Art. Georges Bloch Annual, University of Zurich, Institute of Art History, 2019/20, vol. 24/25, ed. Wolfgang F. Kersten, Verlag: arthistoricum.net, Heidelberg, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.649>, 25,5 x 19,5 cm, 488 Seiten, englisch.  
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## SUMMARY

In diesem Sommer 2020 erscheint von dem seit Jahrzehnten bekannten Klee-Experten Otto Karl Werckmeister eine fundamental neue Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert. Darin wird erstmals die politische Konfrontation der Künste zwischen Kommunismus, 'Faschismus' und Demokratie minutiös rekonstruiert. Anlässlich der Veröffentlichung des Buches, das in der Schriftenreihe »Zurich Studies in the History of Art« von Wolfgang F. Kersten für das Kunsthistorische Institut der Universität Zürich ediert worden ist, hat der Herausgeber den Autor darum gebeten, vier Statements zu seinem Werk zu formulieren, siehe <https://bit.ly/2Bdgghyl>.

Im Folgenden seien diese Ausführungen exklusiv ergänzt um zwei Auszüge aus dem Buch, in denen das Thema »Revolution« behandelt wird, – angesichts von Werken, die Paul Klee beziehungsweise Gerd Arntz geschaffen haben. Eine vorangestellte kurze Übersicht zum gesamten Inhalt des Buches dient der Orientierung. Die Bebilderung findet sich nur hier und nicht in der Publikation.

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## »Part 2 IDEOLOGIES

### 2.2/ Revolutionary Art

#### / 3.3 The End of Revolutionary Art

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[...] In 1937 Paul Klee—an artist who throughout his career had tried hard to keep his art aloof from politics—painted what amounts to be an epitaph of revolutionary art. In his *Revolution of the Viaduct*, the viaduct has broken apart into arched segments that are marching forward, at a right angle to the pre-ordained pathway, like in a workers' demonstration, but without lining up with each other, each one at its own pace. The painting recalls, perhaps deliberately, Mario Sironi's architectural arrangement of the plaza at the 5<sup>th</sup> Triennial held in 1933 in Milan, ominously titled *Six Free Arches*.

Abb. 2

Paul Klee, *Revolution des Viaductes*, 1937, 153 (R 13), Ölfarben auf Ölgrundierung auf Baumwolle auf Keilrahmen, 60 x 50 cm, Hamburger Kunsthalle.  
© Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Archiv

Abb. 3

Mario Sironi, *Sechs freie Arkaden*, Mailand, Piazzale d'onore, V. Triennale, 1933.



Here a spaced-out row of six solitary arches is interspersed with the letters DUCE, centered upon sculptured Fasces. A photograph shows throngs of women in uniform standing

at a right angle to the arched pathway. In *Revolution of the Viaduct*, Klee has carefully distinguished each one of the moving arches in size, proportion, perspective, and position, dissolving the underlying totalitarian scheme. He has thus restored the destructive, liberating significance of the term revolution against its ubiquitous conversion into a slogan of conformity.«

## »Part 2 IDEOLOGIES

### 2.3/ Ideologies and Policies

#### / 2.2 Gert Arntz

##### / 2.2.1 Schemes of Deception

*Circus Europe*, a linocut by German graphic artist Gert Arntz, a committed leftist exile in the Netherlands since 1934, illustrates the ideological opacity of the international public



sphere in May 1936, at the high point of political uncertainty. In caricaturing international politics as a circus performance, Arntz discredits any political manifestation of the day as a deceptive sham. The linocut personifies each one of the four regimes interacting in European politics, lined up on the platform of a circus entrance to advertise their illusory acts. A French Popular Front worker is bearing a fat-cat capitalist on his shoulders. Mussolini, arm in arm with a female dancer labeled 'democracy,' is crushing skulls under his boots. Hitler is juggling a peace palm, ammunition pieces, and a dollar sign. The most scathing caricature is aimed at the Soviet Union. Stalin, in uniform, is didactically pointing to a life-size picture of Lenin turned upside down. As a result, Lenin's trademark raised arm is pointing to the bottom, a poignant reversal at a time when this stereotypical posture was to be monumentalized in the giant statue crowning the Palace of Sovi-

Abb. 4  
 Gert Arntz, *Cirkus Europa Mei 1936*,  
 Linolschnitt  
 © International Institute of Social  
 History, Amsterdam.



ets, publicized all over Europe. Already in his woodcut Election Dial of 1932, Arntz had positioned representatives of the principal parties in the two decisive German elections of July and November of that year, making their public appearance within the sectors of a circular percentage graph materialized into a spinning turntable. Other figures personifying covert interests stand half-concealed behind their backs, steering them at variance with their postures. Remarkably, the sizes of the sectors allocated to the main parties on the dial do not match the vote tallies of either one of the two 1932 elections, nor of the previous one of 1930. Instead, Arntz has symmetrically applied the commonplace pictorial scheme of a front figure and a steering figure, with big industry behind the Social Democrat as well as the Nazi, but with a Soviet soldier manipulating the Communist. The print denounces parliamentary democracy as a sham performance, where casting the ballot is supervised, and presumably coerced, by the police. Below, by contrast, a group of workers is turning away from the election and assembling in 'Councils,' the elected bodies of the November 1918 revolution, abolished less than a year later by the parliamentary democ-

racy of the Weimar Constitution. These two images of political deception spanning the first five years of the Depression were created by an activist artist of strong leftist convictions, but without party affiliation. During the earlier part of the twenties Arntz had used his pictographs, a blend of social statistics and constructivist abstraction, as agitational images of capitalist injustice and social revolution. Still in 1928, he had made the woodcut titled Crisis, an ideologically unequivocal, partisan broadsheet for the class struggle. Even before the onset of the Depression, the print presents his stereotypical polarization between the rich on top, flush with merchandise and money, and the poor at the bottom, forcibly prevented from looting a store that is empty anyway. Several others woodcuts of that year dwell on themes of revolutionary violence harking back to the years 1919–1922, complete with stand-offs between workers and capitalists, workers' sabotage, armed factory takeovers, Nazi crimes, and debauchery of the rich. Here Arntz still professed his long-held belief in revolution, years before the workers' uprisings of 1934 in Asturias and Vienna had been quashed.«