

July 8, 2021, Munich

New Acquisitions: Two Works on Paper by George Grosz

The Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich, recently had the opportunity to add two works by George Grosz (1893–1959), a drawing and a watercolor, to its collection. Acquired from a private collection, the works ultimately come from the artist's estate. The two pieces were on view in the exhibition *Showing the Unspeakable. Artists as Warners and Witnesses 1914–1945* at the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism in 2015.

The acquisition closes a major gap in the Lenbachhaus's holdings: George Grosz was hitherto missing from the collection. The two works enhance the museum's significant compilation of critical studies of contemporary life by representatives of the New Objectivity (including Anita Rée, Karl Hubbuch, and Josef Scharl).

The drawings are part of a series of political works in which George Grosz harnessed the means of caricature and satire to grapple with National Socialism and its prominent as well as comparatively obscure protagonists. Grosz went into American exile ahead of the Nazis' seizure of power in late January 1933, leaving Germany on January 12; he was promptly stripped of his citizenship on March 8, 1933. During the "Degenerate Art" campaign of 1937, 285 of his works were confiscated from German museums; most of them were subsequently destroyed. In 1938, he became an American citizen.

The pen and ink drawing *Heil Hitler* (1930) offers an analysis of the militaristic personality type that fell into line behind the Nazi leader. The watercolor *Heil Hitler* (1934) depicts the German *Volk*, recast in the image of its new National-Socialist state, reverently saluting a Hitler figure to whom the artist has lent an almost supernatural aura.

George Grosz's art vividly illustrates the demise of the Wilhelmine Empire, the turmoil of the Weimar Republic, and the menace of National Socialism. A versatile and prolific artist, Grosz employed drawing as the medium most suited to astute observations of his contemporaries and explicit social critique. He saw himself as a "warner" and public educator (*Self-Portrait as Warner*, 1927, Berlinische Galerie); his drawings were meant to be ammunition and lodge themselves in the shared visual memory. Many of his works made plain that the Nazi ideology would inevitably result in war and violent death. Later on, however, Grosz harbored doubts that his efforts had borne fruit: "I realized that people simply paid no heed to my drawings. My warning, you might say, had been cast to the wind." (1954)

George Grosz, *Heil Hitler*, 1930

Pen and ink on thin cardboard, 44.8 x 58.1 cm

bottom right, in pencil: GROSZ

Inv. no. G 19321

Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich

Gift of Sebastian Schnitzenbaumer, 2021

George Grosz, *Heil Hitler*, 1934

Watercolors, pen and ink on laid paper, 48 x 63.2 cm

bottom right, in blue ink: GROSZ

Inv. no. G 19320

Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich, acquired in 2021