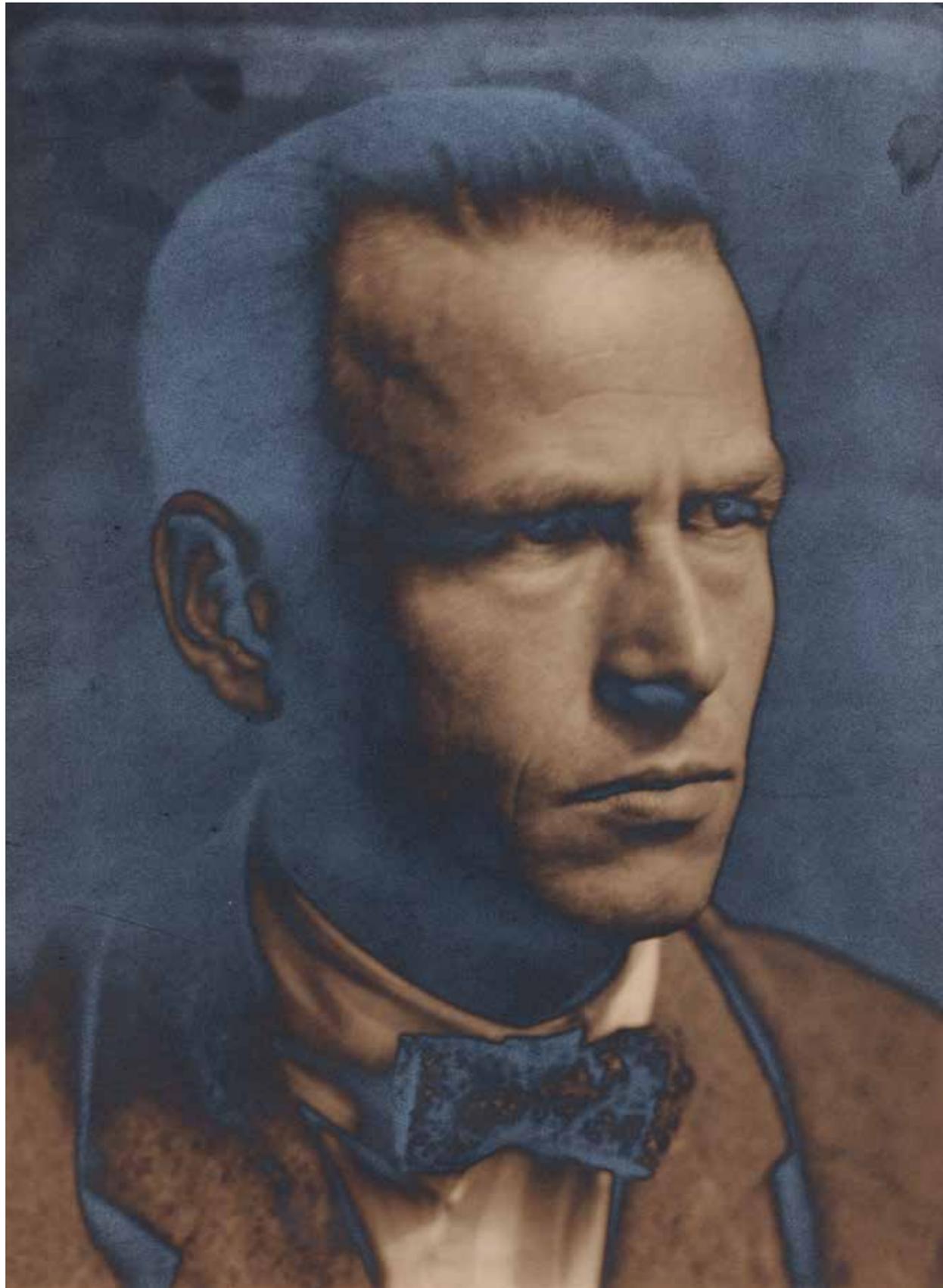


Martin Schmidt **Vaudeville, Circuses, and Burlesque Amusements – Otto Dix' Dadaistic Perspective on the Early 1920s**



Germany in 1923. The German defeat in World War I had left the government of the Weimar Republic saddled with immense reparation payments from 1919 onwards, the settlement of which imposed a heavy burden on the young republic from its very inception. Attempts were made to meet these obligations by printing money with abandon. From June 1923 onward, the ever-widening discrepancy between nominal assets and the real economy unleashed hyperinflation, thereby shattering all hopes of stability, security, and confidence. As the carousel of money devaluation spun ever faster, citizens frantically pushed wheelbarrows full of cash to the nearest baker, butcher, or other providers of daily necessities. These were scenes of Dadaesque street theater such as an overwrought imagination might dream up.

It is precisely this subtext that turns Otto Dix's "Zirkusscene" into such a metaphorically charged description of his times. Like many of his contemporaries, the artist had a penchant for variety shows, circuses, and burlesque amusements. Here he shows us an unsettling scene that, for all its dynamism, also seems claustrophobic and constricted. The arena seems to be a round pit with insurmountable walls. There are no spectators to connect the viewer to a different sphere. The artist balancing atop the ball seems to be turning in circles like a caged tiger. The rotund clown figure in the foreground, his upturned face rendered in extreme foreshortening and seemingly turned from wood, looks like one of those weighted "weeble" toys that cannot be tipped over – they neither fall down nor move forward, but just keep swaying absurdly back and forth. The tall ladder standing in the background leads nowhere. The puppet on its upper rung seems to float – or is it plunging straight down, with arms outstretched like a Christ-like figure falling from the cross? And what about the pitiful pale flag at the top of the ladder's righthand? Is it the sign of an emissary who is supposed to negotiate with Fate for better conditions?

"Zirkusscene" is imbued with a metaphysical realism that borrows from Giorgio de Chirico's enigmatic spaces, but without denying Otto Dix's own Dadaist roots. The very next year, the artist would release his famous graphic series "Der Krieg", in which he commented with shocking frankness on the physical and spiritual wounds that World War I had inflicted on human beings.

18 Otto Dix

Gera-Untermhaus 1891 – 1969 Singen

“Zirkusscene”. 1923

Watercolour, coloured chalk, sprayed silver bronze, pencil and collage on paper. 49.4 × 35.3 cm (19 ½ × 13 ⅞ in.). Signed and dated lower left: DIX 23. On the reverse a pencil sketch of a staircase. There inscribed and titled: Privatbesitz Zirkusscene. catalogue raisonné: Pfäffle A 1923/23. [3547] Framed.

Provenance

Estate of the artist / Family of the artist, Hemmenhofen / Otto Dix Stiftung, Vaduz / Private Collection, Berlin

EUR 200,000–300,000

USD 235,000–353,000

- A metaphorically charged commentary on life in the early 1920s
- A prime example of Dix' "metaphysical realism," inspired by de Chirico and Dadaism
- Impressive exhibition track record

Exhibition

Otto Dix. Zürich, Galerie Obere Zäune, 1964, cat. no. 21 / Otto Dix zum 80. Geburtstag. Gemälde, Aquarelle, Gouachen, Zeichnungen und Radierfolge „Der Krieg”. Stuttgart, Galerie der Stadt, 1971, cat. no. 184 / Otto Dix. Gemälde. Bad Säckingen, Trompeterschloß, Kunstverein Hochrhein, 1971, cat. no. 11 / Otto Dix. Kunstausstellung Europäische Wochen. Passau, St. Anna Kapelle, 1983, cat. no. 41 / Otto Dix. XXIXe Salon d'Art Contemporain de Montrouge, 1984, cat. no. 76 / Otto Dix 1891–1969. Munich, Museum Villa Stuck, 1985, Kat.-Nr. 238 / Otto Dix 1891–1969. Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1985, cat. no. 8 / Otto Dix. Genua, Centro per le arti visive e museo d'arte contemporanea di Villa croce, 1986, cat. no. 118, ill. p. 160 / Otto Dix. Berlin, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 1987, cat. no. 129, ill. p. 180 / Otto Dix. Kamakura, Kobe, Sendai, 1988/89, cat. no. 43, ill. p. 104 / Otto Dix. Stuttgart, Galerie der Stadt, 1989, cat. no. 56, ill. p. 181 / Otto Dix zum 100. Geburtstag. Stuttgart, Galerie der Stadt und Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1991, without no., ill. p. 104 / Otto Dix 1891–1991. Arbeiten auf Papier. Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag. Gera, Kunstgalerie, Orangerie und Dix Haus, 1991/92 / Otto Dix 1891–1969. London, Tate Gallery, 1992 / Otto Dix. Metropolis. Saint Paul, Fondation Maeght, 1998 / Geisterbahn und Glanzrevue – Otto Dix. Aquarelle und Gouachen. Hamburg, Bucerius Kunst Forum, 2007, cat. no. 85, ill. p. 144 / Großes Ey wir loben dich. Johanna Ey und ihr Künstlerkreis. Düsseldorf, Galerie Remmert und Barth, 2007, cat. no. 39, ill. p. 103 / Otto Dix. Bilderbuch für Hana und andere Trouvailles. Düsseldorf, Galerie Remmert und Barth, 2016, cat. no. 5, ill. p. 131

Literature and Illustration

Brigid S. Barton: Otto Dix and Die neue Sachlichkeit 1918–1925. Michigan, University Microfilms Inc., 1981, p. 144, VI.B. 18

